

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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THE BATTLE BEGINS: THE ORIGIN OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Genesis 3

By Marlene Nathan

*“A Christian can no more avoid spiritual warfare
than a gardener can avoid dealing with weeds.”*
Arnold Clinton

AIM OF STUDY

- To gain a biblical perspective on the basics of spiritual warfare—who is involved, why it exists, and how it began.

KEY VERSE

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.” Genesis 3:15

PREPARATION

Read over the notes on “**how to teach the Bible in small group**” and “**some practical suggestions for leading a small group discussion**” in Vineyard Church of Columbus’ *Small Group Leadership Training Manual*. Before you read over the Scripture, pray that God would give you direction for leading your group and teach you something relevant. Then read the passage and the Bible study below. **You will need to go over the questions and choose which ones you want to emphasize and which you could eliminate if your time is limited.** Note that the application questions are marked with an asterisk (*). Rather than leaving these to the end of the study, ask one or two as you work through the passage so people are being confronted by Scripture’s truths and applying them to their own lives. If you find you are falling behind schedule and need to move ahead, you could summarize some of the passage and then go to the final questions.

These studies contain more background material and information on the passages than any group will cover in a meeting. The authors are providing this for the leaders’ benefit—to help reduce your study and preparation time; to help resource you for possible questions group members may raise; and to clarify some gray areas of doctrine that may be in your mind as you prepare. Obviously we cannot exhaust any one subject in a document like this, so you may want to do further reading and discuss doctrine with your pastor. We highly recommend *The New Bible Dictionary* or *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* as excellent resources for study.

OPENERS

Few subjects in the Christian life are as confusing or as controversial as spiritual warfare. It is here that we see the widest spectrum of perspectives as well as the greatest extremes. Some Christians relegate the activities of evil spirits to foreign mission fields, while others find a demon “under every rock”. It is no wonder that the average Christian might prefer to ignore spiritual warfare altogether.

Many of us live our Christian lives as though the entire Christian life were simply Bible study, prayer, evangelism and fellowship, and maybe the occasional struggle with the flesh or worldly temptations.

While the topic of spiritual warfare may raise a lot of questions and make some people uncomfortable, it must be addressed. As Christians, we are at war, whether we like it or not! It is essential that we understand this war—whom we are fighting, why we are battling, and how we can help others fight the enemy without becoming victims ourselves.

As with any subject pertaining to the Christian life, the Bible provides the parameters for what we should believe and how we should live. And the Bible has a worldview, which is particularly relevant when it comes to a topic like spiritual warfare. According to James W. Sire's book, *The Universe Next Door*, a worldview is "a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or unconsciously) about the basic make up of our world" (p. 17).

Most Western cultures hold to a **naturalistic and materialistic** worldview, which says that all experiences and events have a natural explanation. "You got sick because you were exposed to a microscopic virus." "The storm was the result of warm Gulf air combining with a cold front from Canada."

Many non-Western cultures have a **spiritualistic** worldview, which says that spirits, both good and evil, can and do influence the natural world. Although the Bible doesn't oppose natural explanations, it often reveals the interaction of the spiritual and natural forces in events.

Having a biblical worldview is the first step to understanding spiritual warfare. As Christians, we've already adjusted our worldview to include the supernatural intervention of God in human history through the person of Jesus Christ and in our daily lives through the work of the Holy Spirit. We also must adjust it to include the activity of evil spirits.

Not only does the Bible speak of things like evil spirits, it is also filled with images of war and battles. In the Old Testament, we read of numerous battles as the Israelites attempt to occupy the land God had promised them. The New Testament writers as well use "warfare" language to describe the Christian life (e.g. "armed" Luke 11:21; "armor" Luke 11:22; "sword" Mt.10: 34; "captives" Luke 4:18; "legion" Mark 5:9,15; "triumphal procession" Col. 2:15; "captives" Eph. 4:8; "struggle" Col. 1:29,2:1; 1 Tim. 4:10, Eph. 6:12; Heb. 12:4; "wage war" 1 Pet. 2:11; "fought the good fight" 2 Tim. 4:7; "soldiers" Phil. 2:25; Phm. 2; 2 Tim. 2:3-4; "warfare" 1 Tim. 1:18, 6:12; 2 Cor. 10:4; Rom. 6:13, 13:12; 3 Cor. 6:7).

Before exploring the particulars of spiritual warfare, it will be helpful to understand what the war is all about in the first place. In this study we will be stepping back and considering the big picture: Why is there a conflict, who is involved and how did it get started?

Before we look at the Bible, let's take a few minutes to share some of our ideas about the subject of spiritual warfare. What would you say is your "world view?" do

you believe most things have a natural explanation? Do you believe most things have a spiritual explanation?

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

It's always appropriate to begin at the beginning, so our study of spiritual warfare will begin in Genesis. Correctly interpreting the accounts of creation and the fall has always been a challenge, since these accounts contain material that is less characteristic of history and more characteristic of parables, myths and sagas (e.g. talking animals, mysterious trees). Nonetheless, the spiritual truths communicated through these passages are profound. And it is worth noting that New Testament writers treated Adam and Eve as historical figures (see Luke 3:38; Rom. 5:15; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45; 1 Tim. 2:13-14).

STUDY THE PASSAGE: Genesis 3

1. **Let's briefly summarize Genesis 1 and 2 to set the stage for our study of Genesis 3. What statement did God repeatedly make about His creation (1: 4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)? How did man and woman relate to each other and to God (2:25)?**

The main point that must be made here is that when God was finished creating, everything was "very good" (1:31). It is also important to note that Adam and Eve "felt no shame" (2:25) despite their physical nakedness and intimate way of relating with each other and God. Paradise was still paradise and nothing had yet gone wrong to spoil that. As the old saying goes, "God is on His throne and everything is right with the world."

2. **Read Genesis 3:1-6. Who is introduced in verse 1? What does the author want us to understand about this serpent?**

It is worth noting that "Satan" or "the devil" is never mentioned or even alluded to in this passage. However, the serpent has traditionally been understood by both Jewish and Christian scholars to be Satan. During the time period between the Old and New Testaments, Jewish writings began to identify the serpent as Satan (Page, pp. 14-16). By New Testament times and throughout the early church era, this belief was widely and firmly held.

Verse 1 begins by calling the serpent "crafty" or "shrewd." While this Hebrew word is translated in other passages in a more favorable light (e.g. "wise" or "prudent" throughout the book of Proverbs), here it is clearly meant as a negative, evil characteristic because of the context. We do learn that God created the serpent, which is also true of the devil. An important biblical truth that will be emphasized throughout this series is that **Satan is not an equal** but opposing force to God. He is God's enemy, but he is a finite created being and therefore has limits as all other creatures do. And he is clearly under God's ultimate authority at all times. Nowhere in the Bible is Satan operating without God's knowledge and permission.

A rather disturbing discovery from this passage is how familiar the serpent was with what the Lord had said. The scope of his knowledge is noteworthy, as well as his subtle suggestion that he in fact knew more than the Lord!

3. Who does the serpent approach and what does he ask? What doubt does he sow in his first question? What does the serpent want? How exactly does he go about getting what he wants?

It is clear from the start that the serpent is an enemy opposed to God. We aren't told here why he is God's enemy or how such an enemy can exist in paradise, just that he does exist. (From other Bible passages, scholars have pieced together a scenario that pre-dates the creation of man and provides some explanation for the appearance of this enemy in Genesis 3.) The English word *Satan* comes from the Hebrew word, *satan*, which most often means "adversary" or "opponent." What the serpent wants is for others (specifically Eve) to become God's adversary or opponent along with him—to disobey, not follow and/or refuse to submit to God as Creator and King.

The serpent chose to engage Eve and not Adam—a very shrewd move. She of course was not given direct instructions from the Lord, but got them indirectly from Adam. He began by referring to the LORD God (His rightful, divine title) as merely "God," clueing us in to the fact that the serpent did not recognize the Lord's authority as Creator and King. He then went on to methodically sow doubt in Eve's mind about God's truthfulness, goodness and trustworthiness. "Did God really say...?" "You will not surely die..." "For God knows..." It's interesting that the serpent never had to actually tell Eve to take the fruit, eat and thereby disobey God. She did that all on her own! All he had to do was sow the doubts. (It may be worth exploring with people how doubts have eroded away their resolve to obey God in a certain area, or how allowing doubts to grow has led to sin in their lives.)

4. Why was Eve so easily tricked into going along with the serpent? When have you been "easily tricked" and found it most difficult to resist temptation in your own life?

One thing that is immediately apparent is Eve's subtle distortion of God's command. It may seem like a little thing to us (we are not told whether Adam accurately relayed the command to her) that when God's command is compared with her statement of His command, some changes become evident. One is that Eve chose to refer to the Lord with the same title the serpent used—"God." She did not use His divine title, LORD God. Also, she did not call the forbidden tree "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" but rather just "the tree that is in the middle of the garden." She omitted the forbidden tree's true character and placed it instead on the same level with all the other trees in the garden. Finally she added to God's command ("you must

not touch it”) but diminished the penalty (“you will die” rather than “you will surely die”).

To the extent that Eve departed from what God had actually said, she made herself open to being deceived by more serious lies. The serpent was able to convince Eve that she would surely *not* die and that in fact, God was holding out on her. He didn’t want her to experience everything that was in the garden for her enjoyment. He didn’t want her to be like Him.

Obviously, this temptation to be like God has been hooking people since the beginning of time. Everyone wants to be his or her own boss, to call the shots, to determine what is right and wrong, to be independent, autonomous, and answerable to no one. Here is the first hint we have about the “big picture” of spiritual warfare. The seed is a refusal to relate to God as God—Creator and King—but rather to resist and rebel from His rightful rule over us.

There is a classic progression in this passage: “she saw,” “she took,” “she gave.” So much of temptation is linked to our eyes—we look, we stare, we consider the object or action, and we are enticed. Unable to resist, she acts, taking some of the fruit and giving some to Adam. We are rarely satisfied to sin alone—we like to involve others (perhaps to help justify our actions or diminish our guilt). Note that Adam is right there with her, listening to the entire dialogue. Perhaps this is one reason why the New Testament holds Adam responsible. He was there. He had gotten instructions directly from the Lord but he stood by silently while his wife was beguiled.

5. Read Genesis 3:7-24. Note all the consequences of Adam and Eve’s disobedience and everything they lost as a result.

What disillusionment! None of the attractive predictions the serpent had enticed Eve with came to pass. Instead, her paradise was shattered. People today experience this same disillusionment over sin. An illicit affair may promise all kinds of excitement and fulfillment to an unhappily married man. But in the end, he may lose his wife, his children, his friends, and his self-respect. He could ultimately lose his excitement for the current relationship initiated through deception, and find himself all alone, filled with regret and remorse over the lives he destroyed. A single woman may seek comfort and peace after a hard day at work drinking with friends at a bar. A few drinks at a bar, however, can grow into a few bottles at home, and before she knows it, she is addicted, enslaved to what was meant to bring comfort. She could lose her job, her driver’s license, and her will to live. She could wind up with her life falling apart, even more desperate for that illusive sense of peace.

Here is a list of the consequences as they appear in the text:

- **Shame.** In the dictionary, shame is defined as “a strong emotion caused by consciousness of guilt—disgrace and regret.” Adam and Eve were immediately aware of their nakedness, which had now become distasteful

rather than normal. This shame produced a breakdown in intimacy between them and they attempted to cover themselves up and hide from each other.

- **Fear of God.** This is not a reverent, appropriate fear of God's holiness, however. This is fear of punishment due to rebellion against God's laws and a sense of broken fellowship with Him. Again, man and woman begin hiding from someone they had only known to love and accept of them.
- **Loss of truth.** When confronted by the Lord, both Adam and Eve blame someone else and cannot admit to their own wrongdoing.
- **Curse on the serpent.** On one level, this can be referring to actual snakes. Their mode of locomotion was altered, and they now are reduced to slithering on the ground with their faces literally in the dust. There is, of course, great "enmity" between snakes and humans still. In some places in the world, more people are killed by snakes than all other kinds of animals put together (Aalders, p. 106). But on a spiritual level, the Lord is speaking to Satan, the one behind the serpent's temptation. Here is another piece of the "big picture" puzzle of spiritual warfare. There will be an ongoing conflict between Satan and his "seed" and the woman and her "seed." We see this ongoing conflict referred to elsewhere in the Bible as between the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one (see Mt.13: 38; 1 John 3:10). There is also an illusion in this passage to the triumph of Jesus over Satan: "...he [Jesus] will crush your head and you [Satan] will strike his heel."
- **Curse on the man and the woman.** The man and the woman themselves are not cursed in the same way the serpent was. The woman would now experience pain in childbearing. (Note the punishment was not in childbearing itself, which was and still is a blessing, but in the physical agony of it). And her relationship with her husband, which was once a harmonious partnership (Gen. 1:26-28), also became a source of pain. Instead of jointly ruling over creation, competition for control will plague many marriages, not to mention many families and human relationships in general. Craig Keener writes about what God originally intended for men and women, and what they lost.

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve together were to rule all things (Gen 1:27-28). But after the Fall, Adam would rule his wife because, being stronger, he could force her to obey. She would desire to overcome him but be unable, and he would instead overcome and rule her. This is the best way to take the Hebrew of Genesis 3:16, given the parallel constructions in Genesis 4:7: sin's desire was toward Cain, but God told him to rule it, i.e., overcome it. This is a picture of marital strife, and Paul appeals instead to the creation order to establish his point: mutual harmony.... Creation order mandates harmony, but Paul wants no one to misunderstand his appeal to Genesis: the curse has been affected by Christ's triumph and elements of it are passing away (Keener, p.120).

This curse struck at the deepest root of Eve's being, as wife and mother, as companion, co-laborer, and co-heir. Similarly, the curse struck the man at the center of his being—his work and livelihood. No longer will food be richly provided for them in the Garden. Just eating and surviving will require painful, difficult toil all of his life. This is quite a contrast from Adam's former responsibility to simply "tend the Garden" as well as his calling to be a co-ruler and co-heir with the woman.

APPLYING THE TEXT

***This passage presents us with a basic view of reality. In your own words, what is that view?**

Paradise has been lost. What was once "very good" has become very bad. Pain has entered human experience. Adam and Eve are banished from their Garden. No one would disagree that there is something wrong with the world today. It is painfully obvious from newspaper headlines to news reports on TV to experiences in our own homes—things are definitely not "very good." In fact, something is desperately wrong. And we all have sense that this is wrong—that the world and life should work better than it does. That is because God designed us for paradise, but paradise has been lost.

Here is another piece of the "big picture"—a new regime has been ushered in. By emancipating themselves from God's rule, Adam and Eve have brought themselves (and all of creation with them) under a new and harsher rule—the rule of Satan. Paradise has now become the kingdom of this world, with the devil as its ruler (see John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

***In your own words, what is this great spiritual war all about? Share some of the ways in which you've seen and/or experienced the effects of this new regime.**

Satan usurped God's rightful (and good) rule over men and women by enticing Eve (and Adam) to sin. This gave him the authority to exercise his illegitimate (and evil) rule over men and women, establishing a counterfeit kingdom that operates in complete and total rebellion to God—the kingdom of this world. The result is a complete loss of paradise and the spread of worldwide misery, suffering, disease, hatred, war, strife, etc.

***In what ways has Satan not changed his "M.O." (*modus operandi*, "method of operation")? How is he using on you today some of the same strategies he used on Eve in the Garden?**

Satan is still methodically sowing doubts in our minds about God, His character, His faithfulness, the truth of His Word, etc. We still struggle today with the absolute commands found in scripture (Is it always wrong to lie, cheat, fornicate, etc.? Everyone else is doing it and they seem to be getting away with it, why can't I?). And there are innumerable ways we are "hooked"

with temptation through our eyes just like Eve (“She saw...”). Consider the temptations we face with the Internet, cable TV, continual advertising, worldly media images, etc.

WRAPPING IT UP

This, of course, is not the end of the story. This is but the roots of the conflict here on earth—how it is we got involved in this cosmic conflict in the first place. So whether we want to be or not, we are at war and there are no demilitarized zones. John Wimber, founder and former president of the Association of Vineyard Churches, used to say that as Christians, we have not boarded a cruise ship but a **battleship**. We should not be surprised when we encounter struggles and conflicts. We are engaged in a great spiritual war. In this series, we will look further at what spiritual warfare is, where it takes place, and how the Lord helps us find victory in it.

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