

Judah and take her citizens captive. In a war situation which of these two accounts would you pray into being? You must know the mind of the Lord.

**CLAIMING THE GROUND.** Christian go around claiming all sorts of things. We cannot claim the ground, a town or a situation for God, if He is not giving it. Joshua could never have taken Ai by claiming it, because of "sin in the camp". Yet we think we can automatically claim territory when sin abounds in our nation.

**THE PLACE OF PRAISE.** It is often stated that praise drives the enemy back, but we need to examine this carefully. The first reference that is usually quoted for this is 2 Chronicles 20:22 where it states that as the people praised God, God set ambushes and the enemy was routed. That is a total distortion of the facts. There had first been a day of prayer and fasting called by the king. It was as a result of this that God gave a word, through a prophet, that the battle was the Lord's and not theirs and that they would see God's deliverance. Praise followed because God had promised victory, so the battle had been won through prayer.

The second verse which is quoted is Psalm 149:6. A closer examination reveals that the Psalmist is advocating that they praise God in the congregation, on their beds and on the battlefield. It may link praise and the sword, but is it praise or the sword which executes God's Judgement? Surely, from Ephesians 6:17 it is the sword which is the weapon! The sword is the Word of God and the Greek for "word" there is "rhema" which means God's sword in that situation! It is God speaking into the situation either through Scripture, or a word of rebuke, or a God-given declaration, but it is God's word on the subject- not ours.

**CONCLUSIONS.** First of all we are powerless to do anything either by our praise, our rebuke of the enemy, or our declarations. Jesus made it very clear that without Him we can do nothing. Yet, we can; on as if the power belongs to us rather than God. Secondly, it is clear in Scripture that it is God who changes things and not us. He says that if we humble ourselves, seek His face, pray and turn from our wicked ways, then He will heal our land. We cannot do it by praise or our declarations. Thirdly, Scripture puts the emphasis on prayer. Ephesians makes no mention of praise neither does 2 Chronicles 7:14. Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Nehemiah all persist in prayer confessing the sin of the nation until they hear from God that He will show mercy. Paul never talks about praise being a weapon or marching around cities making declarations; he talks instead about "labouring in prayer" (Romans 16:30), "persisting in prayer" (Colossians 4:2), "wrestling in prayer" (Colossians 4:12) and talks about "pray at all times in the spirit... with all prayer and perseverance for all the saints." (Ephesians 6:18)

It seems that we have become so used to instant solutions and looking for easy methods that we have forgotten the ways of God. May we move back to a more Biblical understanding of intercession and spiritual warfare.

## **UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

We have become increasingly concerned at the lack of understanding about spiritual warfare and various practices which have grown up that are contrary to a Biblical understanding. It is with this in mind that we have produced this leaflet.

**INTERCESSION - Standing In the Gap.** One aspect of interceding for our nation is that we find ourselves, like Moses, pleading for God's mercy for our country. It is clear from Exodus 32:11-14 that God would have destroyed Israel had not Moses fasted and prayed on behalf of the nation. The amazing thing is that God is actually looking for an intercessor to stand in the gap so that He might not pour out His wrath upon a country, but show His mercy instead. (see Ezekiel 22:30,31)

Although God seeks to act in mercy, He will not constantly strive with man, and there comes a time when He acts in judgement. Israel experienced that many times in spite of being a chosen nation. God desired, however, that Israel would confess its sin rather than experience His judgement. He stated through Jeremiah: "I will enter into judgement with you because you say, 'I have not sinned.'" (2:35) Yet He follows this up by saying, "I will not be angry with you for ever. Only acknowledge your iniquity..." (3:12,13). That is a principle which runs through Scripture. That is what lies behind God's promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14. Solomon had prayed, at the dedication of the temple, that if Israel sinned and experienced disasters as a consequence of its sin, God would show mercy if they prayed to Him. God states that if they are prepared to humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from their sin, then He would hear their prayers, forgive their sin and heal their land.

Ezekiel 22:30,31, however, would seem to suggest that even if a nation does not repent, an intercessor can plead for the nation; he can stand in the gap on its behalf. Certainly Moses did so and we can see from Daniel 9 that Daniel confessed the sin of the nation as He pleaded with God for national restoration.

There are times, however, when God sends His judgement or removes His protection. This may be because there has been no real acknowledgement of sin, or the nation's sin has become so great that judgement can no longer be averted. God said to Jeremiah, "Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them." (11:14)

**"GOD GAVE THEM OVER."** Romans 1:18 makes it clear that as a result of God's wrath and judgement upon ungodliness, He gave them over (i) to lust and impurity (v24); (ii) to homosexuality (v26); (iii) to a depraved mind (v28). It all began with suppressing the truth in unrighteousness and then turning further and further away from God. Three times it says, "God gave them over." That is not a rare statement. In Acts 7:42, it states that God gave them over to

idolatry. We read too that God gave them over to the stubbornness of their hearts and to their own devices (Psalm 81:12); to the Midianites (Judges 6:1); and, in Daniel 8:12, the prophet foretold that, on account of their transgressions, they would be given over to the little horn (which refers to Antiochus Epiphanes - a demonically inspired tyrant).

In other places, we see too that as part of God's judgement, He sends evil spirits into the situation. In 1 Samuel 16, we read that the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from God terrorised him. This was part of God's judgement upon Saul's disobedience. In Judges 9:23, it is recorded that God sent an evil spirit between the people of Shechem and Abimelech because he conspired with the inhabitants of Shechem to murder 70 of his brothers that he might be ruler. On one occasion, God even sent a deceiving spirit to the prophets in Ahab's court that the king might be enticed to war and consequently his death! (2 Chronicles 18:20-22)

Scripture makes it plain, therefore, that God may give a people over to sin, to disaster, to their own devices, or even demonic activity. If God allows the enemy to move in as part of His judgement, we cannot bind the enemy in such a situation or else we would be acting against God! Yet it is common practice for Christians to bind the enemy without first enquiring of God, or even repenting of the sin which gave the enemy entrance into the situation.

**CONFESSION OF SIN.** When a nation is under the judgement of God, then repentance or confession of sin is necessary to turn aside the anger of God. We have already quoted the case of Moses and Daniel acknowledging the sin of the nation and praying for God's mercy. Nehemiah also confessed the sin of that nation and identified himself with its sins as he fasted and prayed about Jerusalem's walls still lying in ruin. They understood the divine principle that only by acknowledging sin can God's anger be turned away. Therefore, we cannot rebuke the enemy without first confessing the sin which has allowed the enemy "to invade".

**BINDING THE ENEMY.** Jesus said to His disciples that He gave them authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and all the power of the enemy, and nothing would harm them. (Luke 10:19) It is plain from the passage that this is more than casting out evil spirits, and comes more into the realm of wrestling against principalities and powers (demonic powers who are world rulers). Jesus, however, never did anything except what He saw His Father doing (John 5:30), so we must operate in the same way. Jesus did not rebuke Satan when he requested permission to test Peter, but He did pray that the process would strengthen Peter. Paul did not rebuke the messenger of Satan (an evil spirit) as he suffered the thorn in the flesh. As he sought God, he obtained no such authority, but understood something of the purposes of God in using the attack, and he received the grace to overcome. It would be wrong, in cases like these, to bind the enemy. Equally it would be wrong to do so if God was permitting the activity of the enemy as part

of His judgement in giving people over to the enemy.

**NO AUTOMATIC AUTHORITY.** There are those who would suggest that we can come against the enemy any time we wish. To bind the enemy in Jesus' name means that we do it with His approval and, of course, the Father's as well. If God has sent evil spirits, or handed us over to their control because of a nation's sin, there is no way we can drive back the enemy on our authority. We cannot move against the purposes of God or else we find ourselves in rebellion.

In Matthew 16:19, Jesus states that He is giving to Peter the keys of the kingdom. The context of this verse is that Hell will not triumph over the Church. The reference to keys in Scripture is to demonstrate that situations, or even demonic powers, or Satan himself can be locked up or unlocked. (See Revelation 20: 1) The Greek words for binding and loosing are also used about being locked up or freed. Paul spoke about himself being bound, but that the word of God was not bound (2 Timothy 2:9). Jesus talks about binding the strong man (demonic powers) before you can plunder his house. (Matthew 12:29) The New American Standard Bible translates the second half of Matthew 16:19 as: "Whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; whatever you shall loose on earth, shall have been loosed in Heaven." The words "shall have been" puts heaven's action first before we bind on earth. J B Phillips comments on "the peculiar Greek construction where Jesus tells Peter that 'what he binds on earth' will be 'what has been bound' in Heaven." He says, "There is a world of difference between guaranteeing celestial endorsement of the Apostle's actions and promising that his actions guided by the Holy Spirit will be in accordance with the Heavenly pattern." J B Phillips is making it plain that we do not have automatic authority, but we need to know how heaven is acting. We cannot bind the enemy when Heaven is sending or allowing those powers of darkness to come upon a nation or people as part of His judgement!

**MAKING DECLARATIONS - or proclamations.** It ought to be obvious, therefore, that we have no freedom to declare that Satan is defeated in a certain situation, or that certain obstacles can be removed just when we wish. In 2 Chronicles 18, we read that the prophets all proclaimed victory for King Ahab in the coming battle, but Micaiah proclaimed disaster and the defeat of Israel and the death of the king. He was able to do so because he knew the purposes of God. We cannot make declarations in this way without clear direction from God. We would first have to acknowledge the sin of the nation and plead with God for mercy before we could make such a declaration, and then only when we have the clear witness of Heaven.

There are those who state that we can pray the Word of God into a situation; some call it prophetic praying. Just praying Scripture will not automatically achieve the outcome we desire. There were times when Israel faced invasion by the enemy. In Jehoshaphat's day, God told the king that God would give victory, but in the case of King Zedekiah God stated that the Babylonians would defeat