

Spiritual Warfare

Spring 2022

Lesson 3 – The Levels of Spiritual Warfare

The Levels of Spiritual Warfare

There are three levels of spiritual warfare, all of which revolve around Satan's fixation with stamping out the Messiah. He's battling against the Messiah for two reasons: (1) God promised that the Messiah would crush Satan's head (Gen. 3), and (2) the Messiah redeems humanity, who is the subject of his scorn and scourging.

The three levels of spiritual warfare are: (1) cosmic-level conflict, (2) conflict against the redeemed, and (3) conflict against the unredeemed.

Cosmic-Level Conflict

The first level of spiritual warfare is prehistoric and ongoing conflict between the God and faithful angels on the one side, and the rebellious forces under Satan on the other side. The Bible does not say a lot about this battle, but that it does occur. It is likely that the cosmic rebellion against God arose over the creation of humanity since humanity was, and continues to be, the subject of the attack (Gen. 3).

The Origins of the Powers of Darkness

The story of the origins of the powers of darkness are not explicitly detailed in Scripture but implied. Scriptural implication was expanded through extrabiblical tradition and has resulted in the traditional view of the prehistoric conflict between God and his heavenly host. That tradition view is that sometime prior to Genesis 3, Satan was a head angel (Lucifer) who rebelled against God because he wanted to be God (Ezek. 28, Is. 14, and Rev. 12). When Satan fell, he took a third of the angels with him and those angels, along with the disembodied spirits of the giants (mutant offspring of the unholy union between rebellious angels and human women (Gen. 6:1-4)) are demons (Rev. 12).

Bible Verses on Cosmic Conflict

- **Revelation 12:1–6** - And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.
- **Revelation 12:7–9** - Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.
- **Isaiah 14:12–15** - “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.”
- **Ezekiel 28:12–18** - “Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord God: “You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you.
- **Luke 10:18** - And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

The Redeemed

The second level of spiritual warfare is the battle between the demonic realm and the redeemed. Genesis 3:15 provides a foundational understanding of spiritual conflict against the redeemed—that tension would prevail between the sons of men and the seed of the serpent. And yet “He” (the Deliverer who was to come, the Messiah) would deal the serpent a mortal blow, and

Himself receive a wound. Spiritual warfare may thus be understood as the enemy's ongoing attempt to strike out at the **Messiah**. Since New Testament believers are now the living Body of Christ on this earth, we become the object of **Satan's** scorn and scourging.

As we will explore in detail later, there are three types of ground-level spirits and nine basic activities demons promote. The three types of ground-level spirits are: (1) family spirits, (2) occult spirits, and (3) ordinary spirit (spirits with legal right through habitual sin and damaged emotions). The nine activities demons promote are: (1) disruption, (2) temptation, (3) hiddenness, (4) fear, (5) deceit, (6) hindrance, (7) accusation, (8) enablement, and (9) harassment.

Bible Verses on Conflict with the Redeemed

- **Genesis 3:15** - I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.
- **Matthew 6:13** - And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
- **Revelation 12:17** - Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.
- **Ephesians 6:10-12** - Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
- **2 Thessalonians 3:3** - But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.
- **2 Corinthians 10:4-6** - For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.
- **1 Peter 5:8** - Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

The Unredeemed

The third major level of spiritual warfare is the spiritual **deception** foisted on non-Christians. Paul tells us that “the god of this age has **blinded** the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4). Describing the Ephesian believers, Paul points out that they, at one time, were dead in sin and “followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Eph. 2:2). Disobedience to the gospel is promoted by the devil, who holds unbelievers in spiritual darkness and death. Jesus' commission to Paul thus makes sense: “To open

their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 26:18).

This age-old conflict is an ongoing, invisible battle for the souls of men and women. In Jesus’ parable of a farmer sowing seed (a metaphor for the Word of God), “the birds came and ate” some of the seed (Mark 4:4). Jesus interpreted the parable: Satan—through his demonic spirits—comes and snatches away the Word before it can “germinate” and bring the fruit of a changed life. This, I believe, is one reason why Jesus cautioned His disciples against an exuberant zeal concerning their authority over evil spirits. He urged them instead to remember “that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).¹

Bible Verses on Conflict Against the Unredeemed

- **2 Corinthians 4:4** - In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
- **Ephesians 2:2** - in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—
- **Mark 4:14–15** - The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.
- **Acts 26:15–18** - And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

Conclusion

Spiritual warfare is a multilevel conflict between good and evil, initiated on the supernatural plane with the prehistoric rebellion of Lucifer, and transferred onto the natural plane with the fall of man. Satan, man’s adversary, continues to deceive and divert people from finding salvation in Jesus Christ, and to harass and hinder Christians through enticement to sin and exploitation of weaknesses. Because Satan is the author and initiator of original sin, and because

¹ Tom White and Bruce Wilkinson, *The Believer’s Guide to Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2011).

he is the “god of this world,” spiritual warfare involves a constant **multidimensional** battle against the world (a system of ungodly values), the flesh (sin inherent to our humanity), and the devil (supernatural personification of evil). Warfare implies the likelihood of losses: eternal separation from God for the nonbeliever, and diminished effectiveness and suffering for the believer.²

² Tom White and Bruce Wilkinson, *[The Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare](#)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2011).