

Praying Down Powers and Principalities

English poet and hymn-writer William Cowper once wrote, “Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees.” Indeed, the enemy of our souls knows all too well about the power of the praying saints. Even more, he is full aware of what can happen when praying believers engage in spiritual warfare and effect change in the heavenly realm through intercession.

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The problem isn't that the enemy is unaware of this type of prayer, however; it's that so many people—including believers—misunderstand it.

How often have you seen overzealous believers approach spiritual warfare with the idea that they are demon-busters out looking for the next satanic stronghold to bring down? They focus almost entirely on the demonic realm and get excited at the mere mention of binding evil spirits, casting out devils and pulling down strongholds.

There's a problem with this, however. In most cases spiritual warfare is not to be carried out by directly confronting the powers and principalities over cities and nations. The New Testament model for spiritual warfare is to direct our prayers to God, proclaim His name and promises, and do His works as the primary way to wrestle with the disembodied evil spirits in the heavenly places. These evil spirits are called principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age and spiritual hosts of wickedness (Eph. 6:12). Of course, there

are exceptions to this general rule, in which case we address our proclamations directly to the enemy. On specific occasions the Spirit may lead someone to speak directly in intercession to a demonic principality. But this is not the primary prayer model presented by the New Testament apostles.

Jesus and the apostles spoke directly to the demons that dwelt in a demonized person—in other words, to “embodied” demonic spirits—but what they did is not the same as speaking to “disembodied” demonic principalities that dwell in heavenly places. We do wrestle with them (Eph. 6:12), but usually by praying to the Father, not by speaking to them directly. The prophet Daniel dislodged the powerful demonic principality of Persia (Dan. 10:12-13) as he fasted and prayed, focusing on the God of Israel (Dan. 9:4-23), not on the demonic being itself.

Spiritual warfare prayer requires a three-pronged approach. First, we proclaim God’s victory by agreeing with the supremacy of Jesus, His power, promises and will. We pray the prayers of the Bible, remind God of His promises and make prophetic decrees related to the certainty of God’s supremacy and His kingdom purposes. Second, we confess sin and renounce the works of darkness (i.e., we break our agreement with the enemy). In this way, we resist Satan: “Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Third, we do the works of the kingdom, acting in the opposite spirit of the evil characteristics that permeate a specific city or region.

3 Types of Strongholds

Spiritual warfare has often been a key focus for many segments of the body of Christ—including within many charismatic and Pentecostal streams. In those pockets, you’ll often hear of spiritual “strongholds,” as based on 2 Corinthians 10:4-5: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of

God.” But what exactly is a stronghold?

A stronghold is a collection of ideas that are in agreement with Satan’s lies and accusations against the truth of God (v. 5). They are lies about God, who He is and what He says He will do, and when we receive them, they bind our hearts in darkness.

Whole geographic regions can be affected by the same lies and assaulted by the same demonic darkness that is manifest. We are to pull down and dismantle spiritual strongholds by agreeing with God and His Word and by “casting down arguments”—renouncing the lies—that are against the knowledge of God, His Word and His will. In this way we break any agreement with Satan.

There are three types of spiritual strongholds:

1. **Personal strongholds** of the mind that bind people in sinful mindsets and lifestyles.
2. **Cultural strongholds**, or values in our society, that are in agreement with darkness. Cultural strongholds are agreements with Satan’s values in our society at large. There are many ways in which people agree with him and keep those evil values entrenched.
3. **Cosmic strongholds**, which are demonic powers and principalities in the air, are demonic angels or demonic hosts. Paul describes them in his letter to the Ephesians: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

We dismantle these strongholds by *agreeing* with God and *renouncing* Satan's lies through our prayers and actions.

The Principle of Agreeing with God

Engaging in spiritual warfare is essentially agreeing with God and disagreeing with the enemy. It involves reminding God of His character and covenant promises, agreeing with His Word, and declaring the supremacy of Jesus and who we are in Christ—a new creation, the sons of God, the bride of Christ and so on. It also involves renouncing agreement with Satan as we confess sin, reject the works of darkness and act in the opposite spirit by doing the works of the kingdom.

Corporately we agree with God when we engage in worship and intercession. Some prayer ministries emphasize worship, and others highlight intercession. Sometimes I'm asked which is more important in spiritual warfare: worship or intercession. I encourage people not to concern themselves too much with this question. When we agree with *who God is*, we call it "worship." When we agree with *what God promised to do*, we call it "intercession." In heaven worship and intercession are woven together in the exercise of God's government. They overlap and are deeply related. Both are necessary, so we must value both activities in our approach to God-centered spiritual warfare.

In addition to agreeing with God through worship and intercession, we can agree with Him through holiness and healing. All four forms of agreement play a role in spiritual warfare.

- **Worship is agreement with who God is.** In worship we declare truths about who God is. For example, the saints and angels in heaven declare truths such as "Holy, holy, holy" (Rev. 4:8). They also proclaim, "Holy is the Lord" and "You are worthy." Throughout the Old Testament we find the declaration "The Lord is good, and His mercy

endures forever.” This is the most emphasized declaration about who God is.

- **Intercession is agreement with what God promises to do.** In intercession we declare truths related to what God promises to do. For example, we pray: “Lord, release a greater measure of Your Spirit’s activity to revive the church. Release the power of Your Word, confirmed with signs and wonders.”
- **Holiness is agreement with God’s heart of love.** Holiness involves repentance that breaks any agreement with sin and comes into agreement with God’s standards of purity.
- **Healing is agreement with God’s heart for life.** We proclaim the truth of Jesus as Healer, and we break all agreement with sickness.

What Happens in the Spirit Realm When We Pray?

Daniel 10 gives us a snapshot of what happens in the spirit realm when God’s people pray. This is a favorite chapter for many intercessors because the veil is drawn back, allowing us to see how our prayers affect angels and demonic powers and principalities. It also reveals the intense and ongoing conflict between high-ranking angels and demons that is manifest in earthly spheres of government.

Angelic and demonic authority structures exist over each city and region in the world. There are high-ranking angels that serve God’s purposes, and there are high-ranking demons that fight His purposes. The conflict between these angelic and demonic beings is dynamically related to the prayers and deeds of the people in the city or region the beings preside over. If we could see into the spirit realm, I believe we would be amazed by how much the heavenly host is involved in earthly affairs and how they respond to our prayers.

There is a dynamic correlation between what people do on earth and the measure of demonic activity released in the areas in which they live. For example, as people sin more in a particular city or region, they give greater access to the demonic realm to increase the amount of spiritual darkness in that city or region. The same principle operates in the angelic realm—the righteous deeds and prayers of the saints affect the measure of angelic activity in a specific area.

Political leaders and the governmental infrastructures under them are deeply affected by the activity of angels and demons, though many of these leaders are completely unaware they are wrestling against, and being oppressed and influenced by, demonic powers and principalities (Eph. 6:12). Whether they are kings, presidents or prime ministers, they have high-ranking angels and demons related to their political sphere of authority. The result of the conflict between these forces affects many events and political decisions as well as the spiritual culture of the cities of the earth.

I believe there are demonic assignments focused on deceiving and harassing every governmental leader. When a person steps into office, he is stepping into an increased assault. For this reason we need to stand for him before God's throne—and the only way to prevail in wrestling with demonic principalities is by submitting to Jesus' leadership and exerting His authority over these evil powers in prayer.

When we pray, the Holy Spirit and the angels increase their activity on behalf of all those for whom we pray, and the result ultimately benefits us. Paul understood this truth, so he encouraged the body of Christ to make it a priority to pray for all in authority: "I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Paul also knew from Scripture that the heart of a king or political leader "is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1). God can turn the hearts of those in authority like channels of water, and He can use angels in this process.

Consider an example of how our prayers can affect a political leader. Sometimes when the leader of a nation feels oppressed, it is due to the influence of a demon. For example, when the president of a nation is having a difficult day, he may think he's simply in a bad mood. It may be just that, but in reality it may be that a demonic spirit is attacking him. One purpose of the oppression is to get the leader to establish new laws and decrees while under the negative, oppressive influence of a demonic power. As a result of our prayers, angels drive back demons and hinder their negative influence on political leaders of all stripes.

Just as demons can influence leaders to make poor decisions, angels can influence them to make wise decisions. When an ungodly king or president feels a sudden surge of peace in his heart, often because of the prayers of the saints, he is far more likely to make good decisions for his nation. Therefore, even the tone and attitude in a president's cabinet meetings can be affected by such prayers, which release angelic activity that hinders the oppressive feeling demons can incite.

If the demonic hierarchy is not hindered sufficiently, then the human leader is influenced to make evil decisions. The leader has a free will; but if he has a happy mind-set with peace, even though he is an unbeliever, then his decisions will be different from those he may make when he is angry, fearful, jealous, bitter and oppressed by a demon. The leader still makes his own decisions, but under a very different influence, according to the angel or the demon that may be "putting his hand on their chest," so to speak.

Our prayers for kings, presidents and other leaders really matter, and they can affect the decisions a leader makes. His decisions can then affect our lifestyles, families and economies. This is the reason Paul exhorted us to pray for all who are in authority “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life” (1 Tim. 2:2).

Lessons From Daniel’s Experience

When the prophet Daniel was probably in his mid-80s, he set his heart to pray for the Jews in Jerusalem. He prayed for 21 days, mourning with prayer and fasting because of the resistance of the remnant back in Jerusalem.

“In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled” (Dan. 10:2-3).

In response to Daniel’s prayer a mighty angel came (vv. 10-14). This high-ranking, mighty angel (vv. 5-6) was similar in stature to the angel the apostle John later saw in his vision (Rev. 10:1). The angel said to Daniel: “From the first day that you set your heart to ... humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But the prince [demonic principality] of the kingdom of Persia withstood me 21 days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes [archangel], came to help me” (Dan. 10:12-13).

This is a very important passage for understanding the biblical theology of intercession and spiritual warfare. A mighty angel told Daniel, in essence, “From the very first day, 21 days ago, when you set your heart to humble yourself, I was sent to you.” The mighty angel made a dramatic statement: “I came because of your words.” This statement makes clear that angels respond to the prayers of the saints.

Gabriel had told Daniel the same thing two years earlier: "Because of your words, the Father sent me" (see Dan. 9:22-23).

But if Daniel had not *continued* in prayer with fasting, the angel would not have come. It was important for Daniel to persevere in prayer for the full 21 days to get the necessary breakthrough. His experience proves that there is a dynamic relationship between what we do and how God visits a city or nation. Remember, this is not about "earning" anything but about aligning with Him by coming into *agreement* with His will. Our words are heard because of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The mighty angel pulled back the curtain in the spirit realm to allow Daniel to see a glimpse of the angelic and demonic authorities that are over the natural authority structures of the nations. He told Daniel that the "prince of the kingdom of Persia" withstood him when Daniel first began to pray. This is a reference to the demonic prince—principality or high-ranking demonic power—exerting his influence over the region of ancient Persia (modern-day Iran) and was affecting the human prince, or king, of Persia in a negative way. This demonic prince was warring against Israel by seeking to stir up the human king of Persia against God's people (Dan. 10:13, 20-21).

Daniel fought the demonic prince of Persia by agreeing with God in prayer and fasting. The mighty angel informed him that "Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help" (v. 13). A "chief prince" is an archangel, one who leads angels.

Jesus can easily overpower a demonic principality. However, His authority is exerted or made manifest in the earthly realm through believers who agree with Him and who persevere in obedience and prayer with faith. The reason Jesus releases His power more through prayer is because He wants partnership with His people, and prayer is one of the main ways partnership is strengthened.

The spiritual events of Daniel 10 were recorded in the Scripture to give us a model of what God wants to do in our day to hinder the demonic principalities over Iran, Iraq and every other nation. These principalities can be withstood as the Spirit raises up a “corporate Daniel” to pray for angelic help to overcome the demonic powers assaulting Israel.

Indeed, Daniel 10 is a model of spiritual warfare for the end-time church. Let us take our stand before the throne of God as we follow this prayer model and ask the Lord for angelic intervention in our world today.

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