

Daniel Kolenda: ‘Christians Can’t Ignore Spiritual Warfare Anymore’

As he took the stage at a crusade in Monrovia, Liberia, Daniel Kolenda anticipated an ordinary night of preaching. He didn’t realize a witch doctor intended to kill him in the middle of his message.

The witch doctor, well-known in this region for her powerful spells, had reportedly taken many lives. One pastor told Kolenda he was personally aware of “nearly a dozen people” whom she had killed with her curses. The people living in the area were terrified of her and her power. She came to Kolenda’s meeting not to hear the gospel but to curse him and kill him where he stood.

Kolenda remembers clearly what happened next.

“I was just preaching Jesus as I always do,” Kolenda says. “She stood off to the right side of the stage, out in front of one of the two massive towers that suspend our array of speakers. She had brought some strange charms to conduct her business. While I was preaching, she began to conjure some curse to hurl against me. Suddenly, she let out a bloodcurdling scream and fell to the ground. There she lay, writhing like a snake and foaming at the mouth.

“I ignored her. With a crowd of half a million people or more, I wasn’t about to stop to address one demon. Hundreds of thousands of people were listening to the gospel. I kept preaching. But we have a team trained to address such occurrences. They carried this woman behind the platform to a tent we had set up for deliverance. We call it ‘the snake pit.’ The deliverance team cast the demons out of her, and she came to her right mind and received Jesus as her Savior.”

Following this incredible exorcism, the deliverance team brought the witch doctor on stage to talk with Kolenda. He could see in the attendees' eyes that they were still scared of her, uncomfortable at her presence. But Kolenda says the crowd gasped in amazement at what happened next.

"She told me how she had come to kill me," Kolenda says. "She told me when she went to put the curse on me, she was suddenly struck to the ground. She told me how the demons had been cast out of her, and she was free. Then she told me how she had surrendered her life to Jesus as well, because, in her words, 'Jesus is more powerful than my witchcraft.'"

For Kolenda, a missionary evangelist who succeeded Reinhard Bonnke as president and CEO of Christ for All Nations (CfaN), this was not his first encounter with demonic spirits. The bulk of his evangelistic work is done in regions where CfaN holds large-scale gospel campaigns. Kolenda says animism and witchcraft are often dominant systems of belief in these regions. As a result, confronting witch doctors, occultists and the demonic frequently comes with the territory.

Kolenda recalls that in one city, a witch doctor possessed large stones at his house. Because these stones were believed to have magical powers, people would pay the witch doctor to stand on his stones and hear the voices of their deceased ancestors. Following CfaN's gospel crusade in the region, the witch doctor angrily confronted Kolenda and his team, complaining that his stones were no longer speaking. In other cities, CfaN crusades have dried up business for local occultists and witch doctors.

Through experiences like these, Kolenda has learned the importance of spiritual warfare for all believers—whether they live in remote regions populated by witchcraft and animist beliefs or in the heartland of the United States. In his new book, *Slaying Dragons*, Kolenda shares the wisdom about spiritual warfare he's accumulated over the years. He

explained to *Charisma* what many believers misunderstand about warfare and why today's spiritual battles are so crucial.

Passing the Torch

Kolenda, a fifth-generation pastor's kid on his father's side, says he knew from a young age that he was called to missions. He says at 7 years old, he knew he would be a missionary to Africa. But he never could have dreamed his ministry would go beyond the continent of Africa to the entire world. Since 1987, CfaN has documented nearly 80 million decisions for Christ.

Some of that is the result of Bonnke, who founded CfaN in 1974. Bonnke transitioned public leadership to Kolenda in 2009. Kolenda says he views that transition as a model of what God wants to do in the next generation.

"Historically, the evangelical church has not managed transition well. Often great leaders will build worldwide ministries but fail to pass the baton. When they die, their ministries collapse. God gave Evangelist Bonnke wisdom to do things differently. Many years ago—in the height of his ministry—he invested into my life and brought me alongside him as a co-evangelist. We ministered together in Africa and around the world, and in 2009, he passed the baton of leadership to me publicly."

Kolenda confesses that at the time, he was not sure how the transition would work. After all, Bonnke had such a long track record of success in ministry, while Kolenda was young and relatively inexperienced. Yet Kolenda says God's grace covered them "every step of the way."

Kolenda remembers that during "one interview in South Africa, a reporter asked me, 'How do you intend to fill the shoes of a man like Reinhard Bonnke?' I felt the Holy Spirit give me the answer. 'I don't,' I replied. 'I only plan to fill my shoes.' I knew if I would wear the shoes God has given me, in

obedience to His call, there would be grace sufficient for me. And that has been the story of this transition.”

Fighting a War

Though it's easy to imagine what we see is all there is, the Bible is clear: We are combatants in a spiritual war. In Ephesians 6:12, Paul reminds the early church, “For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Kolenda says that verse means spiritual warfare is not optional—and those who fail to comprehend this reality are easy targets for the enemy.

“The spiritual battle we are in as believers is not some incidental side issue in Christianity—it is right at the heart of why we have been saved and why we are in this world,” Kolenda says. “Think about it this way. Why are we still here? Jesus died on the cross 2,000 years ago. Why doesn't He just rapture all of us out of this world?

“I heard a preacher say once that we are here because we are waiting for Jesus to build our mansions in heaven. I thought to myself, *It took Him only six days to create the entire universe. Can your mansion really be that difficult?* There is obviously something else going on here.”

Kolenda believes warfare is not only real, but the reason we are still here.

“God has put us in this world for a purpose,” he says. “We are part of His divine agenda to push back the powers of darkness and bring God's kingdom into the earth. This is what our spiritual battles are all about, and nothing could be more important for Christians to understand and take seriously.”

Yet he says too many believers fail to see results because they are operating according to the spirit of this world.

“The primary mistake most believers make is to think about spiritual warfare primarily as something that happens ‘out there,’” Kolenda says. “This perspective is all too convenient. It allows us to blame our problems on the devil. It also allows us to fight spiritual battles in ways that look impressive outwardly but have very little actual power. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn famously said, ‘The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.’ Most of the important spiritual battles we face are fought between our ears. This is where we need to be victorious first and foremost.”

Kolenda says verses like Romans 8:7 and 2 Corinthians 4:4 demonstrate that Satan’s agenda and primary interest is to influence the way humans think. And he says it was “life-changing” when he learned the reason why.

“This biblical worldview—one many Christians don’t understand—reveals that humanity has been commissioned as the gatekeeper of this world,” Kolenda says. “God works with us to fulfill His purposes in the earth; and likewise, the enemy must also work through human agency. This means the devil needs human cooperation.”

In 1 Corinthians 2:12, Paul says, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God.” Yet his warning was crucial precisely because so many Christians are misled by the “spirit of the world.” Kolenda says it even affected Jesus’ disciples:

“When the Samaritans disrespected Jesus, James and John wanted to call fire down upon them. But Jesus rebuked them, saying, ‘You do not know what kind of spirit you are of’ (Luke 9:55b). Though they didn’t realize it, their carnal response had

actually aligned them with a demonic way of thinking.”

Kolenda says the most powerful example of this behavior comes in Matthew 16, when Jesus rebuked Peter.

“Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He was going to suffer and die and then be raised from the dead,” Kolenda says. “This was the divine plan, but it was very different from what the disciples had envisioned. They thought Jesus would lead a political revolt to overthrow the Roman Empire and restore the kingdom to Israel in their lifetime. Now they were finding out that God’s plan was quite different. So ‘Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!’” [Matt 16:22].

“Peter thought he was doing the right thing—he was encouraging Jesus that such a terrible fate would never come to Him. But Jesus was not encouraged. He was indignant: ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man’ [Matt. 16:23]. Notice that Jesus calls Peter, His close friend and disciple, ‘Satan.’ Why? Because Peter is thinking as man thinks. Jesus then contrasts the human/demonic way of thinking with the way God thinks. So much can be gleaned from this.”

Kolenda says because Satan has passed his way of thinking on to humanity, our natural way of thinking functions in opposition to God. He says this is the reason Paul gives us a list of spiritual armor in Ephesians 6:10-18.

“[The components of the armor of God] are all directly related to the way we think, believe and see the world,” Kolenda says. “Many Christians are trying to fight spiritual battles while being completely aligned internally with the spirit of the age. It is no wonder they aren’t experiencing victory despite much striving and struggling. This has never been more of a problem than it is today when there seems to be such a famine of sound biblical doctrine. So many believers think in ways

that are completely contrary to God's Word and have made themselves easy targets for the devil."

Reaping a Harvest

Kolenda believes it is possible for ordinary believers to become spiritual dragon slayers, both in the world and in their own lives. He says he explains more fully in *Slaying Dragons*, but passed on to *Charisma* a powerful lesson he learned from Bonnke during his mentoring and transition into leadership.

Kolenda was not the only CfaN leader to be confronted by a witch doctor. During a gospel campaign in Gabon, a group of witch doctors gathered to curse Evangelist Bonnke in his sleep. Under the cover of night, they met at his hotel and cursed him, urging rain to fall so his evangelistic meetings would be canceled.

Not only did Bonnke not die, but when he woke, he was met by a most unusual sight. He looked out the window of his hotel room and saw the witch doctors—all "completely naked," according to Kolenda—marching around his hotel room trying to curse him. Bonnke opened his window and called out to them, "Hello, I feel so sorry for you. You worked so hard all night, and I slept so well!"

The moral of the story, Kolenda learned, is that God must be our focus—not the devil.

"Our focus should be on the greatness of God, not the power of the devil," Kolenda says. "Spiritual warfare that is preoccupied with what the devil is doing soon becomes twisted and unbiblical. Smith Wigglesworth once said, 'If you have a great God, you will have a little devil; and if you have a big devil, you will have a little god.'"

With that in mind, Kolenda says we have reason to rejoice as the church. Our all-powerful God is making His power known

through a harvest of souls around the world.

“Many Christians, particularly in the Western world, don’t seem to realize we are living right now in the greatest season of harvest in history,” Kolenda says. “More people are coming to Christ than ever before. Our little ministry has seen nearly 80 million people come to Christ in just over 30 years. Those are documented decisions from new converts that have been ushered into local churches to be discipled.”

Kolenda says this is why the church must mobilize to war in the spiritual realm.

“As the time grows shorter, God is moving around the world in unprecedented ways,” he says. “These are the greatest days to be alive and to make an impact for the glory of God. This is why understanding spiritual warfare is so important. We need every believer to get off the sidelines and get in the game.”

Some of the best ways to pray for CfaN include protection for mission team members and their families and for God to pour out His Spirit in the form of signs and wonders.

“We covet your prayers,” Kolenda says. “We are on the frontlines of world evangelism. Spiritual warfare is not theoretical to us. It is our daily experience. The enemy does not want to see people coming to Jesus—especially in such massive numbers. Pray for the protection of our team and families. Pray that the Lord would continue to pour out His Spirit as we go to the nations preaching the gospel. Pray that we would see even more signs, wonders and miracles that will bring glory to Jesus and pray that every financial need will be met as we trust the Lord for our daily bread.”

If that happens, Kolenda believes the church will truly see a season of “double harvest,” in which we will see spiritual victories unparalleled by previous generations.

“In the crusades—the most visible part of the ministry—the

results have been overwhelming: millions of salvations, countless miracles, healings, signs and wonders,” he says. “And it continues. We are now entering into what God showed me will be a ‘decade of double harvest,’ where I believe we will see in the next 10 years what took the last 30 years combined—bringing the number of documented decisions to well over 150 million. The best is yet to come!”

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