

Prepare, Fight, Remember

Everyone curses the days of war until they are enslaved in a prison camp. Then they pray that God will rescue them, which, if He does, He usually uses days of war to accomplish it. G. A. Studdert-Kennedy, wrote:

War is kinder than a Godless peace.

The Jews in Persia in Esther's day are going to have to fight to preserve their lives. There were some times in Israel's history, like when they were trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army, when God defended them without the Israelites' even having to lift a finger to protect themselves. But not in every incident. When they first marched into the Land of Promise, they had to fight their way in. Now, in Persia, they're going to have to fight to save their lives. What we see in these last two chapters are some principles of warfare which will work for us in our spiritual wars today. Those principles are encapsulated in three words: Prepare, Fight, Remember. Let's examine them together. First, we must...

I. Prepare with Purpose.

We are given the actual circumstances in verse 1: (Esther 9:1)

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them.

What we see here is that it wasn't just Haman who hated the Jews. A significant number of other people in the Persian Empire hated them as well. Anti-Semitism didn't begin with Hitler or Stalin. It literally can be traced all the way back to the ancestors of Haman, the Amalekites, who attacked the Jews as they left Egypt, heading for the Promised Land. Haman's argument to the king for why the Jews should be wiped out was very informative. He said to King Xerxes:

...There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people... (Esther 3:8 NASB)

Mount Sinai, where God gave His laws to the Jews, literally means, "Mount of Hatred." The Jewish Talmud teaches that Mount Sinai was given that name because "...after the Jews committed themselves to lives of ethical virtue (obeying the Law of God), the enmity of the world's inhabitants - who now stood out as immoral - descended heatedly upon them." ⁱ

Have you received any heat, any criticism for trying to live your life according to God's law? Then you know from first-hand experience what the Jews were experiencing in Persia. And it was because of this that they needed to prepare with a purpose to face this opposition. So, how do you prepare to face a deadly opposition?

In one of his sermons, Pastor John Ortberg reads from a fake manual written to give a laugh to Peace Corps volunteers who were heading for work in South

America. Under the heading “What to Do If Attacked by an Anaconda” (a large type of boa constrictor) you find these instructions:

1. Do not run; the snake is faster than you.
2. Lie flat on the ground with arms tight at your side and legs together.
3. The snake will begin to climb over your body.
4. Do not panic.
5. The snake will begin to swallow you from the feet up.
6. This will take a long time.
7. Slowly and with as little movement as possible, reach down, take your knife, and very gently slide it into the snake’s mouth. Then suddenly sever the snake’s head.
8. Be sure your knife is sharp.
9. Be sure you have your knife.

Pastor Ortberg then makes this serious point, “You never really know what curves life will throw at you, what’s lurking around the corner... But when you are [confronted by evil, and you WILL be confronted] you need to know what to do. If you wait until a crisis hits... you’ve waited too long. You need to be prepared first.”ⁱⁱ

And what are you prepared for? You need to be prepared for a fight. The Jews in Persia could not think that they could negotiate their way out of this predicament. They knew their enemy, so they knew they had to be ready to fight.

Are you ready to fight? Do you know YOUR enemy? Jesus warned Peter that because of who our enemy is, we need to be ready to fight. He said:

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. (Lk. 22:31)

And then Peter warns us:

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

You don’t negotiate unarmed with a lion! If you come prepared to fight, he might back down. If you aren’t prepared, you’re lunch! Prepare with a purpose.

II. Fight with Honor and Skill.

The specifics of Esther and Mordecai’s war were these:

1. The enemy was those who “hated the Jews.”
2. Their weapons were physical.
3. The king’s decree granted them four things (Esther 8:11):
 - a. The right to assemble
 - b. The right to defend themselves (a defensive, not an offensive war)
 - c. The right to use “deadly force” (“*destroy, kill and annihilate...*”)
 - d. The right to take possession of “plunder” (enemy property).

The king’s edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them and their women and children; and to plunder the property of their enemies. (Est. 8:11)

Now, our war is a spiritual, not a physical war. The New Testament makes this clear:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph. 6:12)

So, our enemy is different from Esther's and so are our weapons:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. (II Cor. 10:3-4)

So, the details of our fight are different from Esther and Mordecai's:

1. Our enemy is Satan and his demonic forces.
2. Our weapons are "spiritual," ("*...not of this world.*")
3. Jesus' decree grants us three things:
 - a. His authority (over evil)
 - b. His power
 - c. Himself

Okay, let's unpack this because these are the skills we need to fight the enemy. First, Jesus grants us His authority over evil. This is not a skill but a gift, a remarkable privilege. Do you understand this? Satan is desperate for you NOT to know this. But here's what this means, this means that you can command Satan – in the name of Jesus – to step away, to release his grip, to leave you alone. Now, just as the Jews actually had to do combat to exert their kingly granted authority, you will too! But Jesus has offered His authority to you to go to battle spiritually and win! This is what Jesus was talking about when He said:

...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore (meaning: because I have all authority and because I've granted you ACCESS to that authority) **go and make disciples of all nations...** (Matt. 28:18, 19a)

We know from other passages that we don't actually "cause" someone to become a disciple. The Holy Spirit does that. But II Cor. 5:20 says that we are "*...Christ's ambassadors...*" Ambassadors have the authority of the king. You have King Jesus' authority. Never forget that!

Secondly, we have Jesus' power. First of all, we should notice that the Jews in Persia did not exercise all their 'rights.' They had the right by decree to take possession of the property of the Persians who attacked them, but they didn't. Three times it says, "*...they did not lay their hands on the plunder.*" (Esther 9:10, 15, 16) They did not go to war for personal gain.

So, for us, what does it look like to wield the power of Jesus against Satan? Different evangelical churches, depending on their theological traditions, will answer that question differently. Some will define spiritual warfare as:

...an invisible battle in the spiritual realm involving a power confrontation between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. ⁱⁱⁱ

This tradition emphasizes deliverance ministries like exorcisms, prophetic decrees and power encounters.

Another evangelical tradition defines spiritual warfare as:

...you fight the war by assaulting the fortresses of lies that men have built up against the truth... ^{iv}

This tradition emphasizes thinking clearly, knowing the Word and using the Word of God as an offensive weapon to defeat the arguments of non-believers.

Do you want to know what I think? Here's what I think. I think that spiritually fighting with honor and skill is a description of the normal Christian life. The classic

New Testament passage on spiritual warfare is Eph. 6:10-18, the “*put on the full armor of God*” passage. I love what David Powlison says about this passage. He writes:

Spiritual warfare is usually portrayed as defensive, trying to hold our ground against waves of attackers. This gets the major emphasis [of Eph. 6] exactly backwards. Spiritual warfare arises because God is carrying out His invasion, piercing the darkness with light. We who were formerly darkness have been made part of the light he brings – every photon of faith and love illumines and destroys darkness. Ephesians envisions a war in which the fighting is hot but the initiative and conquering power are on our side. The enemy is on the defensive...

Paul has already been doing everything he tells us to do... Paul demonstrates the assault on darkness by wearing the weaponry of light. He wears the belt of truth... He wears the breastplate of righteousness... His feet walk in the readiness of the gospel of peace... He wears the helmet of salvation and... of course, Paul takes up the Word of God in the power of the Spirit...

How does Paul invade the kingdom of darkness? He stands up and walks straight in, clothed in light. We fight the same way. Put on the complete weaponry of God’s goodness and power. Christ did it. Paul did it. You do it. Be strengthened in Christ and pray for others to be strengthened in Christ...

To lose spiritual warfare is to live the darkness, to revert to what comes naturally to every fallen heart. It is to walk “under the influence,” in the image of the powers of evil... At its essential core, to lose this war is to forget God and consciously serve yourself. You serve the devil and are conformed to his image...

To win spiritual warfare is to simply live as light in a dark world. It is to treat others with humility, patience, and thoughtful consideration... It is to seek God’s grace and strength. At its core, to win this war is to know God and consciously serve him. You serve Christ, becoming formed into his image. v

Do you see his point? Fighting with honor and skill isn’t something reserved for the advanced Christian or for those with unusual spiritual gifts. No, it’s for every Christian. Any Christians can and should “*put on the full armor of God.*” And what will be the result if you do so? (Eph. 6:11b)

...so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.

How’s that working in your life these days? How goes the battle? Are you seeing some victories or are you just getting the tar knocked out of you? To defend yourself and your family from the powers of darkness is not as complicated as it might seem. All we really need to remember is one thing: Jesus grants us Himself.

Pastor Lee Eclov had an experience that reminded him of this basic truth. While he was sound asleep one night, he heard the phone ringing (or thought he did). In the darkness, he grabbed blindly for the phone but he said he was so groggy he couldn’t really wake up. When he put the phone to his ear, he heard a flat, menacing voice say, “You thought we’d forgotten you.”

Then, there was just silence, but he was still there. Lee said, “My mind was racing to think, ‘Who wanted to hurt me? Who wanted me to live in fear? That homeless guy that got angry when we couldn’t give him everything he wanted?’ I

was getting very scared and I sensed this was something dark and diabolical. I couldn't even speak, but somehow I simply blurted out, 'Jesus!' And suddenly the fear left my heart and my bedroom. I came wide awake and realized I did not have the phone in my hand; it was still across the room. Yet I knew that what had happened was more than just a dream. I had felt the presence of real evil... But now, after calling on Jesus name, I wasn't frightened... I got up, turned on the bathroom light, washed my face and cleared my head. Then I went back to bed."

"As I was falling asleep, I heard a melody in my mind. It was beautiful, like a lullaby. I recognized it but couldn't place it. The next morning it came to me again: it was a tune from *Les Miserables*, and the words, which I didn't know then, [I looked them up] are "You will keep me safe, and you will keep me close; I'll sleep in your embrace at last." I've always felt that my heavenly Father hummed me to sleep that night – that night when the power of Jesus' name conquered the Evil One." ^{vi}

Of all the strategies and Bible verses and theological principles about spiritual warfare, you really only need to remember one thing: Jesus grants us Himself. He "...will never leave us..." **Call His name and the enemy must flee.** Finally, we must take from the story of Esther, the habit of...

III. Remember with Respect

Verse 27a and 28:

...the Jews took it upon themselves... that... These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family...And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants.

Because there isn't a temple today, the Jews cannot celebrate their various feasts in exactly the way they were prescribed. But Purim is a temple-less celebration because it took place in exile. So to this day, the Jews celebrate this holiday exactly as it was prescribed. And what is it celebrating again? It's celebrating the day they were saved.

In Jerusalem today, there is a huge memorial to the Holocaust but none to my knowledge to remember the days of Purim. Six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, 15 million were saved during Purim. The Holocaust remembers a tragedy when Jews were lost. Purim remembers a victory when Jews were saved.

What celebrations does your family observe? Every family has tragedies when things or people we love were lost. And it is right to honor their memory. But if you are a Christian family, then your family also has days of victory when people were saved. Doesn't that seem like a worthwhile thing to celebrate too? What do you want your family identity to be – only your personal Holocausts, or also your personal Days of Deliverance?

What if you celebrated your own Christian Purim? How? Get together and tell the story of how each of you was saved. Who was involved, where did it happen, what were you feeling? Just tell your story... Remember! What an encouragement it would be even to gather with another family or two or three and hear the exciting, wonderful ways each of you was saved. Wouldn't that be fun? Christian Purim!!!

...these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated... nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants. (Esther 9:28)

Let's not be only Holocaust Christians. Let's be Purim Christians as well who remember the Day of our Deliverance. Amen.

ⁱ www.worldnetdaily.com/news/ARTICLE_ID=37551

ⁱⁱ John Ortberg, "The Daniel Project – Part 3," (Nov. 15, 2009)

ⁱⁱⁱ Rebecca Greenwood, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare - Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2012), p. 178

^{iv} John MacArthur, "Winning the Spiritual War, Part 2," March 17, 1996
[gty.org/resources/sermons](http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons)

^v David Powlison, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare – Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2012), p. 96-98

^{vi} Preachingtoday.com, "Calling on Jesus' Name Dispels Evil Presence," June/2011