
Not By the Sword of Man!

By David Wilkerson

August 11, 1997 God's New Covenant with us can be summed up in one powerful statement: It is his irrevocable promise to deliver his people from the dominion of sin - through the power of the Holy Ghost!

This New Covenant does away with all of our puny efforts to please God through our flesh. It is the end of all our striving to overcome sin, whether through determination, strength, reasoning or any other works of the flesh. In short, God's New Covenant takes the pressure off of us - and places it all on him!

Through this covenant, the Lord says, "I will no longer ask you to bring me a godly heart. Instead, I will remove your heart of stone - and I'll put in you a new heart, one that has a desire for me. I will cause you both to will and to do my good pleasure, through the power of my Spirit!"

In simple terms, the New Covenant is the end of the "can do" man. This is the man in us who says, "I can do it all, in my own power and strength. If I can just spend enough time in prayer and Bible study - if I can just think through my problems - I'll be able to make changes in my life."

God's New Covenant says goodbye to this old, "can do" man - and it introduces the "new man," who says, "I can't do anything in my own strength. I don't have the power to effect any kind of godly change in my life. But I can do everything through the power of the Holy Spirit!"

One of the most important things I've learned from my study of the New Covenant is that it is the secret to having an overcoming life in the last days. As the time of Christ's return draws near, the devil is going to open up the floodgates of hell against God's people. He will let loose wild, demonic powers such as the world has never seen.

We see this happening already within the walls of the church. Satan has infiltrated God's house with subtle lies, false doctrines, demonic teachings - and undiscerning Christians are swallowing it all. At this moment, multitudes of deceptions and heresies are swirling through the church. I ask you - how will believers be able to stand in such times?

The Lord answers us by promising to take on the problem himself. He assures us, "Don't be afraid. I'm going to take this matter into my own hands. I will empower you against every onslaught of the enemy. And I will do it through my New Covenant with you!"

As soon as I began studying the New Covenant, I saw its glorious truths leaping out of God's Old Testament dealings with Israel. Paul states, "All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). I sensed the Lord asking me, "David, do you want the keys to victory? Do you want to know how to overcome sin, flesh and the devil? Do you want to know how to do battle with the enemy? Then go to my Old Testament, and you will learn from the examples there. I have recorded them all for you, so you can learn the lessons of godliness!"

The First Lesson We Draw From the Old Testament Is Just How Safe a Child of God Is When He Trusts in the Blood!

On the night of Passover, not a single Israelite was in danger from the death angel who swept through Egypt. Every man, woman and child of God rested safely and securely under the blood covering that was spread on the doorposts of their homes. This picture of safety in the Old Testament represents the protective power of our Lord's blood over his children today. As Christians, we are to be a believing, trusting people who have the blood of Christ sprinkled on the doorposts of our hearts.

Israel's trust in the blood of the slain lamb accomplished many things in their lives. It not only protected them from the death angel, but it also brought them out of Egypt and delivered them from the bondage of Pharaoh. Yet, there were other enemies from which Israel needed deliverance. And, likewise today, our trust in the blood of Christ is about much more than obtaining salvation for eternity. It also involves relying on God's power to deliver us from every stronghold of the enemy.

Please don't mistake me here. If you are saved - living under the covering of Christ's blood, secured by faith in his work on the cross for you - that is absolutely wonderful. But what about your ongoing battle with the power of sin, which rages inside you? What about your besetting habit? What about the roaring lion who seeks to devour you? What power do you have to do battle with these enemies of your soul?

The fact is, even if we have been saved and secured by Christ's blood, we are still engaged in a battle with overwhelming principalities, satanic powers, demonic strongholds. And we are to claim the power that is available to us through God's New Covenant. But that power comes only by faith!

Isaiah Delivered a Strong Message to the Blood-Secured Children of Israel.

The prophet Isaiah warned Israel that there was no possibility of victory for them if they attempted to fight their adversary in their own strength. Isaiah 31 paints a perfect picture of the futility of trying to do battle with the enemy in our human ability. I believe this chapter is a type and shadow of the ineffectiveness of our attempts today to defeat lusts, habits and besetting sins by relying on human ideas and aids.

At the time Isaiah wrote this message of warning, King Sennacherib and the Assyrian army had already marched through Judah. They had captured most of the cities in their path, and now they planned to besiege Jerusalem. In Hebrew, the word "Sennacherib" means "successful." And "Assyria" means "sin on the increase." Put together, these two words provide an image of an evil enemy who was having great success against God's people.

Indeed, Assyria represents every sinful, demonic, lustful spirit that comes against us. And Sennacherib is the devil himself, convinced he will succeed in defeating us and bringing us into despair. I believe God wants to show us through this chapter how the devil and his demonic hordes are bringing waves of temptations against the church - with increasing intensity and much success!

This chapter is also an example to us of how sin will increase in the last days. Scripture says society will wax worse and worse, and the church will be inundated with deceptions and doctrines of demons. I believe we're seeing that happen right now. Demonic hordes have infiltrated all media and every form of technology, flooding our culture with sensuality, nudity, perversions of all kinds. As prophesied in Revelation 12, Satan has "...cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman..." (Revelation 12:15).

Hezekiah was king in Israel at the time Sennacherib and the Assyrians approached. And as he looked down on the huge army surrounding the city, his old "can do" man kicked in. The king reasoned that with just a little time, thought and some outside help, the Israelites could deliver themselves from this awful circumstance. He said, "We're facing an overwhelming situation here. Assyria is a powerful enemy. But I think all we need is a little military aid. We can probably hold off their army while we scout around for someone to help us."

So Hezekiah sent an envoy of ambassadors to Egypt, bearing gifts of silver and gold, in an attempt to hire their army for support. He thought that with the Egyptians' horses, chariots and infantry, Israel could push the Assyrians back.

Now, you may think Israel simply lacked faith in the midst of this situation. But God called their actions outright rebellion! Isaiah writes: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!" (Isaiah 31:1). God was saying, "You have revolted against me! You know I am your only source for victory. Yet you have refused to turn to me!"

Israel here represents the believer who puts his trust in the flesh. Isaiah writes: "Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit..." (same verse). The prophet is saying, in essence, "You think you are able to deliver yourselves from this enemy by your own power. You think victory lies in your own strength, intellect and abilities. Yet you are trusting in mere flesh! Return now to the Lord. He is your only hope of deliverance!"

The Church Today Has Its Own Versions of Egyptian Chariots!

Like Israel, many Christians today quickly turn to manmade things in an attempt to achieve victory over the flesh. One glaring example is the vast number of self-help books found on the shelves of Christian bookstores. Literally thousands of books promise surefire ways of improving our flesh, appeasing our flesh, subduing our flesh. Indeed, everywhere we turn, we're offered fleshly options to all our needs. Churches promise anointed revival meetings where we can have all our spiritual needs fulfilled by a prayer or a touch. Evangelists offer instant deliverance, instant healing, instant words from God.

The truth is, God gave Israel the option of choosing himself or the flesh in the midst of their situation. He said, "Go ahead and exercise your own will. Dig deeply into your inner man, and pull out all of your strengths and abilities. Study your books, plan your strategies, do everything you know how to do. But you'll still be leaning on the arm of the flesh! Nothing you try will work. None of your efforts will bring you one moment of victory!"

Marshall Applewhite, the leader of the Heaven's Gate cult that committed mass suicide in March of 1997, had expected to be taken on a space ship to a "higher level" of existence. I ask you - why would anyone ever believe such a fantasy? I believe there was a very tragic reason behind it all.

This man grew up the son of a Presbyterian minister. As an adult, he became active in the church himself, serving as a choir director. He got married, had two children and was considered a wonderful family man by all who knew him. But Applewhite had a problem that wouldn't go away - a strong

homosexual drive.

He lived with guilt, fear and condemnation, all raging inside him. He consulted doctors and psychiatrists, saying his urge was a "beast" that had total control over him. He even checked himself into a hospital once, in the hope of being "cured." This man tried everything he could to rid himself of his desires. But nothing ever brought him deliverance.

Years later, after Applewhite had left his family, he started a group called "The Overcomers." This group taught sexual abstinence, and Applewhite hoped that the kind of lifestyle they preached would free him. But it never did. One news account said he eventually castrated himself in order to "evict" his demon. Of the thirty-eight others who died in the Heaven's Gate suicide, one-third had submitted to castration in a desperate attempt to find freedom from the dominion of "sin."

We may be repulsed by Applewhite's cultic practices and the mass suicide he orchestrated. But, sadly, multitudes of Christians today also fight losing battles against life-controlling habits and lusts. Sin has taken dominion over many in the church, even those who weep and plead for deliverance. Their cry is loud and clear: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24). "...what I hate, that I do" (verse 15).

The more I study God's word, the clearer it becomes to me: All human striving for deliverance from sin is doomed to fail. And God will let us go through the wringer time after time, until we're totally convinced we must die to all efforts of the flesh.

When Israel attempted to defeat their powerful enemy through human power, God immediately denounced the effort: "...both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together" (Isaiah 31:3). God's word declares in very clear language that all victory depends on him alone. Only he has the power to deliver us from our enemies.

You may have a godly will, a solid moral background, an unpolluted mind. In fact, you may be one of the cleanest people walking this earth. But none of these things is an effective weapon when it comes to battling the powers of hell. The Bible says none of your human gifts or abilities will ever work against the devil. You will always fail by your own efforts!

Isaiah Makes It Clear - Our Enemies Will Never Be Defeated By the Sword of Man!

If you are in the midst of an overwhelming struggle, you must learn the word God gave to Zechariah: "...Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord" (Zechariah 4:6). Your victory will never come through the sword of man - not even your own sword!

Isaiah writes: "Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited" (Isaiah 31:8). The prophet is saying a sword will indeed defeat the Assyrians. But what kind of sword will this be, if not Israel's?

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John mentions a holy sword of the Lord: "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations..." (Revelation 19:15). John is speaking of Christ here, saying, "A piercing, victorious sword will come out of our Lord's mouth!"

By associating this sword with Christ's mouth, John is saying that our effective weapon in battle against all our enemies will be the voice of the Lord. Indeed, this is the very image Isaiah uses to describe how God will overthrow the Assyrians: "For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod" (Isaiah 30:31).

Isaiah is saying, "Your Lord promises to fight for you. He will make his voice known, and it will put all your enemies to chase!" "The Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones" (verse 30).

Next, Isaiah uses the image of birds to illustrate God's protective power over his people: "As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it" (31:5). The Hebrew meaning of this verse is, "As the hen-birds flutter over their young, so shall Jehovah, God of hosts, spread out his wings over Jerusalem."

God was telling Israel, "If you want to be protected from the onslaught of the enemy, then hide under my wings. I will secure you, covering you the way a mother hen covers her chicks. You don't have to live in fear of your enemies any longer!"

Let me ask you: Are you in a great warfare right now? Are you facing an enemy that is too powerful for you? If so, how do you expect to remain pure, faithful, Christlike, while others around you are falling left and right? How will you gain victory over your lusts and temptations, when Satan comes against you like a roaring lion?

God asks simply that you lay down your sword - and that you trust him to take up his sword on your behalf. He wants you to come to the point where you say, "Lord, I know the battle is not mine anymore. I've failed so many times. Now I come to you in simple faith. Help me, God. Deliver me from these overwhelming foes!"

God Let Israel Do Things Their Own Way - and They Failed!

Egypt never responded to Israel's request for help. That once-mighty nation had become a broken reed. Meanwhile, Sennacherib and the Assyrian army had surrounded Jerusalem. And at that point, Hezekiah decided, "We're not going to lean on the arm of the flesh this time. We're going to do it all God's way!"

The king immediately humbled himself and sought God in prayer: "And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord" (Isaiah 37:1). Hezekiah confessed, "Lord, I know I have nothing of myself to give you, except my faith. I can't fight Sennacherib. I'm helpless in my own strength. It all has to come from you, Lord. So, what should we do now? We're surrounded by our enemies. Please, give us your direction!"

Hezekiah knew that Isaiah would have God's word of guidance. So this time he sent his envoy to the prophet. These men said to Isaiah, "...the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth" (verse 3). In other words: "This time we want to do everything God's way. But you've got to know, we're totally weak. Our defenses are depleted, with no strength left. What should we do?"

Isaiah did have God's word for them. The prophet said, "...Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard...I will cause (Sennacherib) to fall by the sword..." (verses 6-7). God was saying, "Any enemy of yours is an enemy of mine now - because you have turned the battle over to me! If anyone talks against you, hurts you or abuses you, it is an attack against me. And I will take care of that enemy, whether human or demonic!"

"...He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it" (verse 33). God says, "Others may be falling all around you, but that doesn't mean a thing. You are walking in covenant with me. And I have promised to do battle against every enemy that assails you!"

I think God must have an incredible sense of humor - because he sent just one angel to put the entire Assyrian army to flight. Scripture says, "Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses"(verse 36).

What an amazing sight that must have been. That morning, the Assyrians awoke to find 185,000 of their fellow soldiers slain - yet not a mark was found on any of them. And it all happened because the Israelites merely humbled themselves and sought God!

The Bible tells us the Assyrians quickly hightailed it out of Judah: "So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed..." (verse 37). Yet, not only were Israel's enemies scattered, but God made sure they were destroyed as well. Scripture tells us that soon afterward, Sennacherib was slain by his own two sons while worshiping in his pagan temple (see verse 38).

What a wonderful picture God has given us of his power to deliver us from our enemies in our flesh. The enemy may shoot fiery arrows at us, but they will not strike. Satan may noisily attack us with a huge army of lusts and temptations, but in the end he will turn and run. God has declared, "I will defend every child of mine who believes in me enough to lay down his own sword!"

Dear saint, the Lord is urging you: "Cling to me in the midst of your battle. Your victory is all a matter of faith in God's power and willingness to deliver you. When the enemy has overwhelmed you, come to me and pour out your soul. Seek me with all your heart, and I will do battle for you. I'll protect you as you walk in covenant with me. Your part is simply to humble yourself, truly believe in my covenant promises and seek my face. Then you will receive my word of direction. And you will see all your enemies put to flight. Your only way to full and complete victory is to faith your way out of your crisis!"

The battle is never ours. It is always the Lord's. Faith and faith alone-faith in God's promise to keep you from falling, to put in you a will to want to do right - this is the way to glorious freedom.

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