

The Weapon of Prayer



Part 12/15

Spiritual Warfare
By Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as I continue to share with you on the theme of "Spiritual Warfare." This week I am dealing specifically with weapons of attack, weapons that will enable us to assail and cast down Satan's strongholds.

In my introductory talk yesterday I pointed out that we somehow tend to form a wrong picture of Christ's purpose for His church. The first time in the gospels that Jesus spoke of His church, He gave us the promise that all the gates of hell, or of Hades, shall not prevail against it or shall not be too strong for it. I pointed out that Hades is the word for Satan's unseen kingdom in the spiritual world. Traditionally, on the basis of these words of Jesus, we have pictures of the church on the defensive. We have thought of the church being besieged in a city by the forces of Satan and we have interpreted the promise of Jesus that Satan would not be able to batter down the gates until Jesus had come and caught away the church. That's completely a defensive posture. But actually, what Jesus pictured was exactly the opposite.

Jesus pictured the church on the offensive, Satan on the defensive; the church attacking Satan's citadels and strongholds and His promise was that the gates of Satan's kingdom would not be able to keep out the attacking church. The implication was that the church would be able to move in, storm Satan's strongholds, release his captives and carry off his spoil. That is the purpose of Jesus.

Now, in order that we may assail and cast down Satan's strongholds, God has provided us with appropriate spiritual weapons. 2 Corinthians 10:4, Paul says:

> "...for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses." (NAS)

Whose fortresses? Of course, Satan's fortresses. In other words, God has provided us with spiritual weapons. On the basis of much study and also personal experience, I believe that Scripture reveals four main weapons of attack, spiritual weapons of attack. They are: prayer, praise, preaching, and testimony. I'll just repeat that: prayer, praise, preaching, and testimony. Today I am going to deal with the weapon of prayer.

Of course, I have to qualify this by saying that prayer is much more than a weapon. There are many different aspects to prayer but in one aspect, prayer is a weapon of

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spiritual warfare. I believe it is the most powerful of all the weapons that God has committed to us.

In Ephesians 6, after Paul has listed the six items of defensive armor, he then continues in Ephesians 6:18:

> "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." (NIV)

I believe at that point He moves from the defensive to the offensive. I believe it is no accident that that comes immediately after the list of defensive armor. I believe he's there mentioning the greatest of all weapons of attack, the weapon of prayer. I tend to think of prayer as an intercontinental ballistic missile. Do you know what that is? I don't understand it fully myself, but it is a kind of missile that is launched by a rocket from one continent and it can be directed by electronics, by radar, to a target in a completely different continent and it can land on that target out of the air and simply smash it to pieces.

You see, there is no limitation to prayer. There is no limitation of time, there is no limitation of distance. Prayer is like that intercontinental ballistic missile. With it, we can assail Satan's strongholds anywhere, his strongholds in the heavenlies included.

Now let us look at an example of the prayer of attack from the book of Acts. I am going to read from Acts 12:1-6. This relates a situation in which the church had come under persecution by King Herod. James, one of the leaders, had already been executed by Herod. Now Peter had been arrested and was scheduled for execution shortly. This is the situation:

> "It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. [He wouldn't do it during the Passover because that would have been considered desecrating a holy period in the Jewish calendar.] So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. [Notice that phrase, 'but the church was earnestly praying.'] The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance." (NIV)

I want you to picture this scene. This is the maximum security jail, it's the inner prison and Herod is so determined that no one shall rescue Peter that he actually has four squads of four soldiers each watching him night and day, four hours at a time. I think it is implied that one soldier was chained either to Peter's hands or to Peter's feet. So he was absolutely under the maximum. In the natural, any kind of rescue was totally impossible. But, it says, the church was earnestly praying. I have to comment on this: a crisis adjusts our priorities. I don't know how earnest the church had been in prayer maybe for some time, then suddenly James was snatched from them. Now they saw the danger of Peter, their natural leader, being taken. I think that was motivation for earnest prayer. They were not only praying in the daytime but the record indicates they were praying at night. It's important to notice that there are times when merely praying in the day will not be enough. Jesus said in Luke 18 that God would avenge His own elect who cried unto him day and night. There's a kind of intensity in prayer that is sometimes needed to release God's intervention.

Also, I want to remind you of a promise that Jesus had given to Peter. He gave it in John 21:18-19. He said this to Peter:

> "'I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, 'Follow me!'" (NIV)

I wonder whether Peter was meditating on that promise in the prison. Jesus said, "when you are old." At that time, Peter was not yet an old man. I suppose that somehow he

must have reasoned something was going to happen to cause the word of Jesus to stand. And stand it did but it took the prayer of the church to make it effective.

Now let's see how God answered the prayer of the church. An angel came to deliver Peter. This is the description, chapter 12:8-11:

> "Then the angel said to him, 'Put on your clothes and sandals.' And Peter did so. 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,' the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and come to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked through the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.'" (NIV)

So that's how God answered the prayers of the church, by supernatural intervention through an angel. However, the deliverance was only the first part of the result of their prayer. The second part was a judgment by an angel on the persecuting King Herod. We need to see this. The closing verses of Acts 12 says this:

> "After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed. Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply. On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, 'This is the voice of a god, not of a man.' [In other words, they flattered Herod by calling him a god. Now, notice the result.] Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died." (19-23 NIV)

Now, let's look how prayer works in that situation as a weapon of attack. I would express it this way: Prayer broke through in the heavenlies and released the intervention of angels. We can compare the time in Daniel 10, when Daniel prayed and the angel came from heaven with the answer.

Now let's look at the final comment of Scripture in Acts 12:24:

> "But the word of God continued to increase and spread." (NIV)

This pictures the irresistible progress of God's word. And especially of the promise that Jesus had given to Peter that he was to be an old man before he died. But you see, it took prayer to enforce the promises of God's word. This is what I want you to understand. The promises of God's Word are not a substitute for our prayer, they provoke our prayer and it takes our prayers to make the promises of God's Word effective in our Spirit. It takes our prayer also to release the intervention of angels on our behalf.

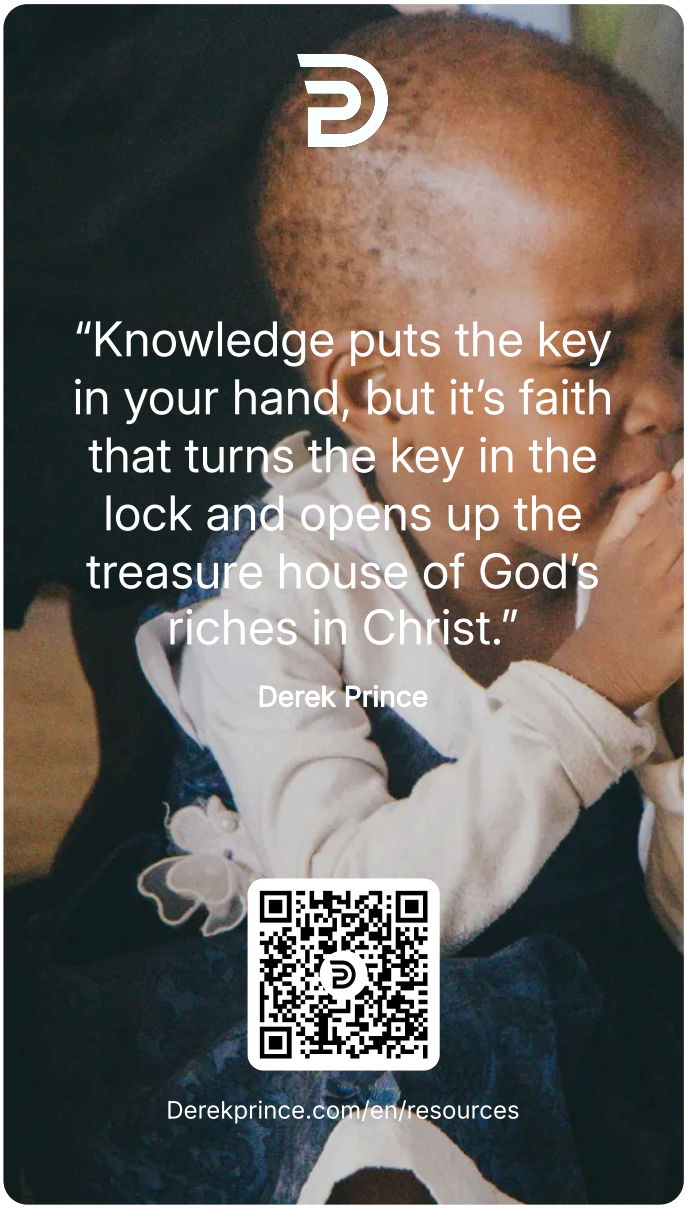
The Scripture says that angels are ministering spirits, sent forth for our benefit but they don't come, as a rule, until we pray through and by our prayer we release that intervention of angels which is God's answer. So, bear in mind that prayer breaks through Satan's kingdom in the heavenlies and releases divine angelic intervention.

Well, our time is up for today but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be dealing with our second great weapon of attack, the weapon of praise.

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