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SPIRIT OF LIFE MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL
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SESSION 24 SPIRITUAL WARFARE PART 8
WHAT ARE STRONGHOLDS

Today a walled city is mostly outdated because modern warfare has made the walls useless. Airplanes have taken away any advantage the walls can provide. However, even before aircraft, the development of the cannon demonstrated the days of walled cities were limited. Cannons allowed attackers to pulverize walls with artillery causing the walls to crumble. Artillery also shocked the inhabitants inside the walls who never faced anything like it before. The smashing artillery caused a quick surrender of its inhabitants and therefore, the cannon caused the walled stronghold to cease.

In history, strongholds played a vital role. No army could successfully defeat an opponent and let their stronghold stand within conquered territory. One of the main objectives of armies was to remove strongholds within conquered territory. We, as the Lord's army, need to take notice of the objectives to remove strongholds. Like conquerors of old, we need to target the spiritual strongholds of our enemy, Satan.

Mehmed II demonstrated this point in 1453 with the fall of Constantinople. He hired the famous Hungarian gunsmith Urban to construct cannons whose size was unheard of before. With these cannons, he was able to pound the walls of Constantinople, also known as ancient Byzantium. Over a thousand years before Mehmed II, Constantine created Constantinople (Byzantium) as the capital city of the Eastern Roman Empire in 330.

Constantinople was a stronghold and the seat of Byzantine Christianity for more than 1100 years. Now it became the seat of Islamic power. The Muslim ruler changed the name from Constantinople to Istanbul. From this city Mehmed II planned to advance his kingdom throughout Europe and the Middle East, establishing a world empire. He died before he could succeed. The history of Constantinople allows us to illustrate the meaning of the term "strongholds" which Paul refers to both directly and indirectly.

What is a stronghold?

Strongholds are an ancient part of human history. As populations of the earth multiplied, they formed communities called cities. People soon realized living in the open allowed you to become a victim to the fallen nature. Invading or marauding people would attack unsuspecting or defenseless cities and in so doing took their goods and people.

Putting walls around your settlement with a gate gave the inhabitants a source of protection and control since the walls needed to be breached before contact could be made. The better the defense, the more secure the inhabitants. Soon builders of walled cities realized that walls also make good offense because it allowed an army a secure base of operations. An army could rest and relax between offensive campaigns. The more secure the location the more effective and powerful the force within.

A city with strong walls and a secure location, usually a hilltop or mountain, would be able to grow in stature and power enriching its inhabitants. As the city prospered, it could then begin to exert control on the surrounding cities and villages which were less secure. Soon the city would become known as a city-state. Some examples of these city-states are Babylon, Nineveh, Damascus, Rome, Carthage, and others too numerous to list. Eventually some of these city-states became nations. Some would become empires like Rome and Assyria. This was a common occurrence throughout the earth as humanity spread following the days of Noah. The importance of the walled city would diminish as technology became more and more pervasive. Nonetheless, the picture of the walled city or fortress was known as a *stronghold*.

Strongholds were points which were hard to defeat because of their design and their walls, often located on a hilltop, along with the offensive capabilities of an army within. The army could launch attacks and then retreat to the safety of its walled city. Thus, their point of operation became a “strong hold.” This picture of the physical stronghold is used to also represent the spiritual stronghold. Spiritual strongholds are represented in scripture in the same way as physical ones. They are points of operation where attacks are waged on outlying areas. They become points of offensive operations which are hard to remove unless concerted effort is made to remove them.

Spiritually speaking, Paul defines strongholds as an ***“argument or high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.”*** A stronghold is a point of operation from where Satan can keep the unbeliever captive, or the believer incapacitated.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 [NKJV]

“3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments [imagination] and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,”

Israel an example of war

Waging war in the spiritual realms illustrates events in the physical. Israel's entering the Promised Land is an illustration of the faithful entering the land of promise and rest. We see from Israel's example a nation, who, because of unbelief, was not able to receive the promises of God because they lacked faith. Only when they believed could they enter God's rest, but the faithless generation was kept out. In the same way today, many "born-again saints" fail to receive the blessings promised because of disbelief. They do not believe God is strong enough to overcome the strongholds in our life.

Before Israel was to enter the Promised Land, Moses had the nation of Israel send out 12 spies into the land to see what the cities were like, including if there were any strongholds in the land

Numbers 13:17-19 [NKJV]

"17 Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, 'Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, 18 and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; 19 whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds...'"

The twelve spies returned and reported what they saw, and we get two different perspectives from the spies. Ten spies reported the land was too strong to take because the cities were fortified (Strongholds) and large, the inhabitants were giants, according to the 10-spies.

Numbers 13:27-29

'27 Then they told him and said: 'We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.'"

Caleb and Joshua rejected the view of the 10-spies. They saw God as capable of giving them victory over the giants and strongholds of the land. The ten spies rejected Caleb's plea, restating the perceived hopeless situation the nation found itself in. All hope was lost. The nation would need to find a leader to take them back to Egypt.

Numbers 13:30-31

"30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it." 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we."

You could almost see the struggle of the *faithful minority* versus the *faithless majority*. The people were so defeated and faithless in God's ability they would have stoned Moses, Joshua, and Caleb if the Lord did not intervene (**Numbers 14**). They were planning to go back to Egypt after they selected a leader. The Lord would have destroyed the faithless generation, but Moses interceded. God instead allowed the generation of faithless Israel to wander the deserts of Sinai and die there. We must remember this rebellion follows the miracles of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and their seeing God's presence leading them in a *cloud* by day and a *pillar of fire* at night.

Israel's plight illustrates a point when we reject God's promises because of unbelief. We end up wandering in a wilderness because we refuse to take God at His word. This is the reason we need to put on the *whole* armor of God. Joshua and Caleb were able to see victory despite the strongholds in the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb were wearing God's armor as opposed to the 10-spies. They were willing to wage war on the Canaanite cities because they knew it was not them but the Lord who would give them victory.

Wearing the Armor of God

Israel sets the example for the faithful because within the nation were two groups: those who believed the Lord and those who did not. Because of the unbelief of the majority the nation was forced to wander in the dusty and rocky Sinai desert for 40 years. We (the saved), grafted into the covenant of Israel, should take notice. Why did Israel fail to enter the land? Was it because God was unfaithful? *No, it was because the people would not trust Him.*

Why did Israel tremble in fear at Goliath and David boldly wanted to fight? In both cases, the faithful trusted the Lord. Joshua and Caleb saw God open the Red Sea. They saw Him in the cloud and fire. They knew their God. David too, knew his God. He was more than capable of giving David victory (**I Samuel 17**).

Before the battle took place in the field *it was in the mind.* The minds of the unbelieving 10 spies were controlled by fear. The army of Israel before the Philistine Goliath, a giant, was *defeated in the mind,* before an arrow flew. The battle began in the mind just as it does for us.

The armor of God gives us the ability to be victors in the *battle of the mind*. Putting on the full armor of God, allows us to stand against the schemes of Satan, whose goal is to pin the faithful to the ground.

Here we stand, God's warriors about to enter battle. How are we to wage war? First, we must remember Paul's instructions, we need to *put on the full armor God*, having done that, we need to make the conscious decision *to stand*. We need to choose to stand as opposed to being taken down by our opponent Satan.

We must prepare for battle in the spiritual war; our objective should always be victory through the Lord's strength, not our own power. Look at verses **10 and 11 of Ephesians chapter 6**, what is the key to success?

Ephesians 6:10-12

"10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 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."

The key to Joshua, Caleb, and David was their reliance on the Lord's ability, His power, and His might. They were strong in the Lord. In **verses 10 and 11**, our part is to make a conscious effort. **Verse 10** tells us, *be strong*, **verse 11**, says *put on*. Are you willing to move forward in battle trusting the Lord?

Preparing to assault strongholds: Spying out the land

Using Israel as our example, what was their first action before they entered the promised land? Moses told them to spy out the land, to survey it, and locate the strongholds. We need to do the same. We need to locate places where the enemy has strongholds in our life. Remember, our battle is not physical but spiritual. In **Ephesians 6:10-18**, only two pieces of the armor are offensive in nature, what are they?

They are the *sword* (**vs. 17**) and *prayer* (**vs. 18**). In describing the armor, many times people stop at verse 17, but verse 18 is just as much a part of the armor.

Ephesians 6:18

"18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."

The sword of the Lord, which is the word of God, and Prayer are offensive weapons against the strongholds which allow Satan to keep people captive.

With these two weapons, we can take the offensive, rather than being defensive. We can pursue our strongholds to pull them down. We need to enter the battle wearing our armor, prepared to assault the stronghold with our sword and prayer.

Looking back at Israel, the first generation of the Exodus failed to enter the land of promise. However, the next generation now led by Joshua, did not fail. Because they believed, they prepared for battle against the stronghold of Jericho. The Lord Himself led the battle as the commander of Lord's hosts and Joshua was merely to follow orders (**Joshua 5**). They succeeded and Jericho fell because the nation obeyed the Lord (**Joshua 6**). However, the next battle was not so successful because the nation disobeyed. The stronghold of Ai was able to defeat the armies of Israel (**Joshua 7**). Why could a little stronghold defeat Israel? The nation sinned when Achan of Judah took garments from Jericho. He violated God's command and the whole nation suffered, falling to the stronghold of Ai.

Take a personal inventory of your life. What areas of your life cause you to fail? Like faithful Joshua and Caleb, we need to spy out the land. We need to determine where Satan's strongholds are. Our goal is to enter the "*Promised Land*" of God's promises. The issue here is not salvation, but victorious Christian living.

In the *Parable of the Sower* (**Matthew 13:3-28**), the seed is sown on different types of soil and in the end the abundant crop comes from *good ground*. Why did the good soil produce a fruitful crop? Good ground was clear of those things which prevented growth. In the parable, the weeds, stones, and thistles, choked off the seed (word) planted by the sower (Jesus). Jesus describes the weeds as the *cares of this world* and the *deceitfulness of riches*.

Matthew 13:23

"But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Jesus tells us the key to bearing an abundant crop in this life requires that we:

- Hear the word.
- Understand the word.
- Bear fruit.

Satan does not want us to bear fruit because his goal is to defeat us and prevent us from having fruit. The strongholds are points of operation allowing Satan to maintain power over us.

Only through the Lord's power will we be able to break free from Satan's control. We have no power from within or without, except for the Lord. God's word reveals the control of Satan in our lives through strongholds. Satan uses these strongholds to launch attacks on us. Therefore, we need to identify where these strongholds are and remove them. Just like an ancient army first had to remove strongholds to hold the land, we need to do the same.

Identifying your strongholds

- **Adultery**
- **Jealousies**
- **Hatred**
- **Idolatry**
- **Heresies**
- **murders**

Wearing the armor of God prepares us for battle. We need to identify just where our strongholds are located. Paul in several portions of scripture identifies specific areas where the flesh is opposed to the spirit. The following scriptures list areas or strongholds where Satan can wage war. Therefore, we need to identify these strongholds in our own life. How does Satan continue to cause us to fall?

Galatians 5:19-21

“19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Ephesians 4:17-19

“17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

Colossians 3:5-10

“5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. 8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,”

2 Corinthians 12:20-21

“20 For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; 21 lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.”

What area of our life gives him the ability to wage war with us? By reading and hearing the scriptures we just gave, can you identify your strongholds? Once we begin to identify the strongholds, we need to wage war against them. Paul describes the type of warfare the Spiritual warrior is to engage in.

For example, Satan had a stronghold in a certain person’s life. He made him think money was the only way to have friends, power, or value. Therefore, from the age of 15, he made a concerted promise to gain wealth so he could master the world around him. His whole life from that point on was focused on money and power. He made it his god and idol. Only after his idol was crushed in his early twenties did he, out of desperation, seek to find truth. Satan ruled over his life from this stronghold. From there he was able to keep his hold on him. He was a bitter and angry person who did not want to live. Then he found Christ and his life changed. The strongholds in his life still existed however and Satan was able to wage war with his thinking, causing him defeat and fear. Over time and study of the scripture, he was able to bring those thoughts captive to Christ.

He learned from scripture the riches of this world were very temporary and that even if he were able to gain the whole world, he would be broke when he died. Scripture revealed to him that true treasure was what you could keep forever. The words of Jesus became the instrument of spiritual warfare.

Jesus said in **Mark 8:35-36**:

"35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Therefore, every time Satan would whisper to his mind the importance of great wealth and fame, he learned to quote this verse back. Soon he was able to wage war against this stronghold in his life and claim victory and no longer trusted in earthly riches as his hope. He soon learned to move on to other strongholds and areas where Satan would launch attacks. Like the armies of old, his goal was to claim territory from the enemy. He needed to assault his strongholds and free the "Promised Land" from Satan's control. Once free from strongholds, he learned to rest in God's promises.

Waging war on your stronghold

Remember, as we read In **2nd Corinthians 10** verses 3 to 5, we are instructed on how to war against strongholds, where Satan launches his attacks. What can we learn from this portion of scripture about spiritual warfare?

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

"3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,"

- The battle is not physical.
- Our weapons are not physical.
- Our weapons are more than able to pull down strongholds, arguments, and high things.
- The war is that which exalts against the knowledge of God (The Word).
- Victory is achieved by bringing every thought into captivity of obedience of Christ.

We have two offensive weapons in this battle. One is the sword of the Lord (God's word) and two, prayer. These are two mighty weapons which allow us to pull down strongholds. Our warfare is against that which is opposed to the knowledge of God. The revelation of God's word exposes these strongholds. For that reason, it is important to combine God's word, the sword, with prayer, to overcome these points of satanic power. Satan knows if we are able to remove these strongholds, a mighty warrior will emerge. His goal is to prevent the victorious spiritual warrior from taking the field.