

4 Elul (Aug. 18, 2007) *Successful Spiritual Warfare: Fighting to Win* J. M. Terrett

Shoftim Judges
 Torah: Deut. 16:18
 Haftarah: Is. 51:12-52:12
 Brit Chadashah: Matt. 3:1-17

Ep. 6:10-18; Ep. 4:26; I Th. 5:19; I P. 5:8, 9; Ja. 4:7; I Ti. 2:24-26; Ja. 3:13-18; Gal. 5:13-15

One aspect of maintaining a healthy spirituality which the High Holy Days teaches us is that we live in a spiritual combat zone. We have to know what it means to live on alert, without either running out of supplies or succumbing to battle fatigue. Part of this process also means understanding that a defeat does not mean we lose the war and just as importantly, that each victory does not mean we have won the war.

For those of you who study war, it is not a constant series of random battles, but the strategic use of military strategy and resources, both defensive and offensive, so that the enemy is both out manoeuvred and outgunned. Also, that our own forces are never placed in a position where defeat is inevitable because retreating to a better position or digging in inside bunkers are also good military moves which give you time to survive and recover until you are ready for victory.

With this in mind, I want to deal with three categories of spiritual warfare which the Bible warns us to be ready for (see the example of our L-rd: **Matt. 4:1-11**). (1) **Biological warfare** where the enemy tries to infect our spirituality with various kinds cult behaviours; (2) **Strategic deployment** where the enemy tries to disable us and oppress us by striking at any unprotected gaps in our spirituality (3) **Espionage**, where counterfeit carnal spirituality tries to use various disguises to destroy our defences from the inside.

Today, I want to do two things very briefly. First of all I want to deal with the three pronged military objective which the enemy of our souls wants to accomplish so that we can recognize this strategy in our own lives and take adequate biblical measures to protect ourselves from it. Then I want to deal with first category of spiritual warfare.

The main attack our enemy uses are various kinds of **temptations**, where he tries to get us to abandon our spirituality and self destruct from the inside out. At the same time he uses various kinds of **condemnation** so that we are so focused on our own failures and weaknesses that we lose our spiritual vision and our personal contact with the L-rd. Lastly, he tries to use an amazing variety of **confusion** to distract us from a truly biblical spiritual focus, so we waste our energy on things which have no eternal, kingdom value.

These attacks may come one at a time, or all at once but we have three **strategic advantages**. Our G-d will always outmanoeuvre the enemy and is present in every attack to show us His ways of escape (**I Cor. 10:13**). Also, as we gain battle experience we will become more adept at recognizing these attacks and at taking immediate action to suffer less damage (**2 Cor. 2:11** read context **2:5-11**). Lastly, the more we cause our lives to revolve around the spiritual disciplines of Biblical spirituality, the bigger our personal and community spiritual arsenal becomes as we develop better spiritual strategies to fulfill G-d's calling on our lives (**2 Tim. 3:16, 17** and **2:20, 21**).

Well lets move on to the first category of spiritual warfare. In **biological warfare** you try and infect your enemy with germs and viruses which will cause them to sicken and be too weak or crippled to carry on the fight or resist an invasion. In the spiritual realm I have called this **cult behaviour** and there are two kinds of cults: **theological** and **psychological**. Rather than give you an exhaustive list of the many thousands which are out there, let me give you a two pronged inoculation which is designed to protect you against either kind of infection, and then I will close.

A theological cult is a break away group from a major religion which either changes some of the original teachings of that religion or introduces new teachings which it claims the original group has either ignored or suppressed. So you see there are Christian cults, Jewish cults, Muslim cults, Hindu cults and even Messianic Jewish cults. How do you recognize them and how do you deal with them when they try and infect you or infect our congregation?

Basically, there are **five things** which the Bible teaches and any departure from one of these basic beliefs means the beginning of a theological cult. While it is not my purpose to defend any of the other religions outside of Judaism and Christianity, the same principle would apply across the board **whenever splinter groups appear and want to change the original teachings of any faith group**. What are the five basic beliefs of our faith?

They are as follows: (1) The **Bible** is the Word of G-d. (2) **Yeshua** is G-d the Son (completely divine). (3) He was born of a **virgin** (completely human). (4) He died on the **cross** for the sins of the world. (5) He **rose** from the dead, **ascended** in Heaven and will one day **return**. So when someone arrives with a new teaching, or a supposedly corrected version of the truth, do not let them pull you into their web, but take the initiative and ask them five questions. If they answer any of them incorrectly or unclearly (yes, but), tell them you are not interested in hearing about their group's ideas, but would love to have them meet your rebbi. That will usually scare most of them off and prevent you from becoming infected with a theological virus.

Psychological cults are more subtle and harder to recognize unless you are aware of **four major areas** where they will try and throw you off balance. First of all they may say that they have discovered some **hidden truth** over and above the five basics and that this truth is necessary for you to be truly saved and truly know G-d. Next they may claim that they are the only **true version** of the faith and that it is not enough just to believe the truths of the Bible, but you have to join their group in order to be saved.

They may also use the **personality** of their leader and claim that you have to be under his **authority** or strictly follow his **teachings** in order to be saved and no longer live in deception. Lastly, they may try and pull you into their **lifestyle** of continuous **excitement** (exhaustion), relentless **activity** and great **fear** or condemnation. This is done to convince you that unless you accept their special teachings or their special approach on biblical teachings and unless you come under their direct authority, you are outside the will of G-d.

This means that either you are living a second class, deficient spirituality or that you are not really saved, but have been deceived – since all other groups and all other approaches are wrong and the only faith which can save you, is their version. This use of fear and condemnation or the use of exaggerated promises based on a new or special teaching which limits salvation and spirituality to a particular person or version of the faith places the person or group into the category of a psychological (or pernicious) cult. **I John 5:11, 12** says that we are saved by accepting the Son and **Matt. 6:33** says we are spiritual when we seek first G-d's righteousness and G-d's kingdom. Any other understanding is cultic and not biblical.

Spiritual **biological warfare** tries to change the **biblical message of salvation**. These changes can either be **theological** (change what you believe) or **psychological** (change the way you believe). As we approach the High Holy Days, it is time to reaffirm our commitment to the simple, plain teachings of the Bible and get our **annual inoculation** against both kinds of spiritual infection. Next week I will talk about **strategic spiritual deployment** so you can see if there are any holes in your spiritual armour and then on the last Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah, we will learn how to be effective in **spiritual counter espionage measures**, so you are learning not to shoot yourself in the foot.

May the L-rd teach us effective spiritual warfare. Let us pray and prepare our hearts for the L-rd's table. Amen.