

Swept off your Feet

Beyond Worship-as-Usual

Connecting with God for a Strong Finish

CHAPTER 33

Seeking Worshipers—Finding Warriors

Tales of bloodshed far exceed narratives of worship both in and out of the Bible. From the start, Adam and Eve compelled God to slay an animal to provide a covering for their shame. With resentful rage, Cain murdered his brother Abel because God favored his offering. Since then, bloodshed has punctuated the militant history of the human race.

David's reputation as a warrior rivals his reputation as a worshiper. When a lion or bear threatened his father's sheep, David pursued the predator and struck it death. When Goliath threatened Israel's security, the shepherd slung a stone at his forehead and then decapitated him. Israel's maidens hailed King Saul for killing thousands but they hailed David for killing ten thousands.

David was a triumphant commander on the battlefield—though not always. When Satan tempted him to number the fighting men in Israel, David missed the mark.¹ Instead of bowing before Almighty God, he stumbled miserably before Satan. David's obsession to number warriors cost Israel 70,000 men.

Because bloodshed was such a prominent part of David's life, God forbade him from building the temple. He announced, "*You shall not*

¹ 1 Chr 21:1-17

build a house for My name because you are a man of war and have shed blood.”²

David’s reputation as a worshiper stands out less conspicuously compared to his military exploits. Only two biblical accounts mention David offering worship: once after the death of his child with Bathsheba, whose husband David had arranged to murder in battle, and then at the end of David’s life as his servants blessed Solomon. While only two accounts describe David offering worship, the Bible mentions him worshipping twice as much as anyone else on earth.

Throughout biblical history, warfare performed by multitudes of warriors surpasses worship presented by worshipers. The contrast is hard to miss. Nonetheless, our Heavenly Father seeks worshipers on earth—and He intends to find them.

Expect the Unexpected

I wish the tough times were over. I wish the really-tough times would stay confined to history books and movies; but reality is stubborn. It refuses to conform to perfect-world fantasies. Despite our best intentions for peace, brutality and destruction punctuate history.

Tyrants and terrorists strike without warning
As victims retaliate revenged of their mourning

Earthquake and volcano unleash deadly force
As hurricane and tsunamis demolish the coast

Famine and disease ravage the nations
As headline and deadline panic the masses

Most of the time, we are not facing overwhelming circumstances but life can be difficult. Sometimes it is extremely difficult. Occasionally it involves all-out war. From relational conflicts to savage atrocities, life-threatening events arise to arrest our attention and they demand a Christ-like response.

² 1 Chr 27:3 NAS

Eventually, the most severe of times will make their global debut. Horrific tribulation will escort worshipers and warriors through the end of this age. A generation of people like you and me will live through perilous times. Perhaps we will experience them. Perhaps others will. Eventually, one generation will experience the consummate ferocity of the Apocalypse. The perplexing and terrifying events, which John describes in “The Revelation”, will transition from Bible studies and quiet times to real-life experience. At some point, individuals will no longer ponder eschatological nuances because they will be too busy encountering them.

While apocalyptic scenarios may not be imminent, this world cannot avoid the vortex of God’s wrath and Satan’s rage forever. As this supernatural vortex gains momentum, we all need to connect with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit for strength and courage to prevail.

Unfortunately, some of us are crash and burn experts poised to lose heart during the hardest of times. Others seem well prepared to face amazing challenges with astonishing courage. All over the world, ordinary people are required to muster extraordinary strength for an extraordinary cause. For some, extreme circumstances already press them beyond their capacity. For others, difficult times promise to arise with a renewed vengeance.

Prepare for War

The Prophet Joel exhorts nations everywhere to prepare for war—not war in a traditional sense but war with God. He said:

*Proclaim this among the nations:
“Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men,
let all the men of war draw near, let them come up.
Beat your plowshares into swords
and your pruning hooks into spears;
Let the weak say, “I am strong.”
Assemble and come, all you nations,
and gather together all around.*

Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD.

Joel 3:9-11 NKJ



This prophecy commands obstinate nations weakened by Satan’s deception to consecrate themselves for battle. War with God always yanks history-as-usual in a new direction. When supernatural rivals detonate global tensions, the ensuing chaos will betray the strengths and weaknesses of the human race. As God summons the nations together for battle, cosmic turmoil will annihilate the status quo of everyday life. When the wrath of God and the rage of Satan erupt, spiritual adversity will escalate with material consequences. For a strong finish, we must connect with Jesus Christ beyond superficial formalities.

Joel proclaimed a universal mandate for people everywhere to prepare for war—a war that will likely revolve around worshipers.

Eventually two groups of people will emerge—worshipers of God and worshipers of Satan. Polarized at opposite extremes, everyone will lean one way or the other. Those who embrace the truth about God will worship Jesus, their risen Savior. Those who exchange this truth for a lie will worship a fallen angel.

As persecution and tribulation increase, followers of Christ face an important decision. Will they exalt Jesus through proclamations of praise

or recoil in private to ponder pious deeds? Will worshipers openly venerate Him as God or settle for an isolated ritual? How will it be—dynamic or discrete? Where will it be—in open celebration or in silent seclusion?

Our Heavenly Father seeks worshipers invested with grateful hearts, rather than warriors inflamed with hatred and revenge. He looks for worshipers equipped with instruments of praise instead of tyrants and terrorists armed with implements of war.

In heaven and on earth, angels and humans assemble to meet their Father's gaze. Some bow in reverence while others lunge into battle with brutal intent. Both groups are mustering their mettle, some to gain the initiative, and others to assert their authority.

Racing toward a Definitive Endpoint

The balance of global power teeters on a precarious illusion. World systems deceived by Satan's mendacity operate under the tension of this illusion. They presume that history-as-usual will repeat itself forever. To a certain extent, we all underestimate the challenge that awaits us; we underestimate the spiritual repercussions of this battle. Fundamental flaws tilt human security systems toward failure. Despite general denial, this age will reach a final climax. Denying this fact will not diminish the struggle that awaits us.

The word eschaton means last. Theologically, it refers to the end of this age and the beginning of the next. It signifies humanity's final state following the end of history, at least as we know it. We are racing toward a definitive endpoint where the future belongs entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ. He remains the focal point around which all history revolves. To the regret of some and ecstasy of others, an entirely new era is seeking to emerge.

Ecstasy literally means to be outside oneself.³ Connecting with Jesus offers metamorphic power. He transforms cocooned cautionaries into daring overcomers, venturing out with the Holy Spirit to where their own strength cannot take them.

God and Satan pit themselves as intractable rivals. They generate spontaneous contention and compulsive strife. When the international community confronts the verdict of God's wrath and Satan's rage, the spiritual climate will change. As wrath and rage intensify, the line between stability and chaos will strain to keep its composure. When this line detonates, the fallout will betray the strengths and weaknesses of the human race. We have no place to hide from apocalyptic time bombs.

Joel grasped the urgency of this supernatural showdown. He uttered a desperate plea for help, urging God to deploy His "*mighty ones*" from heaven.⁴ When war breaks out between God and the nations, we will need angelic support to mount and sustain an appropriate response.

As the eyes of our Heavenly Father scour the earth, He finds behavior that He does not want to see. While seeking worshipers, He finds tyrants transforming scenic meadows into gruesome battlefields. Deserving state-of-the-art praise from worship mavens, God watches depraved despots perform with instruments of mass destruction. Worthy of highest praise, our Heavenly Father sees both the ferocious and the frightened as they harden themselves for battle.

History depicts a violent tradition studded with aggression and retaliation. After Cain murdered Abel God asked, "*What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground*". Bloodshed from generations of people cries out to the God who is listening.⁵ It ascends with a deafening roar from a foundation of malicious deeds. As the nations of the world prepare for war, this testimony in blood

³ <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki> (6-11-07)

⁴ Joel 3:11 NKJ

⁵ Genesis 4:10 NAS

foreshadows an inauspicious future. Nonetheless, our Heavenly Father seeks worshipers and He deserves to find them.

