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CHAPTER 41

Seeking Worshipers—Finding Warriors

Legends of warfare exceed legends of worship both in and out of the Bible. From the start, the biblical record does not portray Adam and Eve as trend setting worshipers. Harboring jealousy and resentment, their firstborn son Cain, murdered his brother after God favored Abel’s sacrifice over his offering. Since this first fratricide, bloodshed has marked the militant history of the human race.

Throughout his life, David excelled as a legendary commander on the battlefield. When Goliath threatened Israel, the young shepherd slung a stone at his forehead, decapitated the giant, and helped rout the Philistines. This valiant victory established David as a heroic warrior. Israel’s maidens hailed King Saul for killing thousands, but they hailed David for killing ten-thousands.

Near the end of David’s reign, God’s anger blazed against Israel. In a narrative touting their triumph over the Ammonites and Philistines and then specifying the extraordinary exploits of David’s 37 mighty warriors, Israel incurred God’s wrath. Instead of bowing humbly before God’s provision and protection, King David stumbled before Satan’s temptation. He missed the mark when both God and Satan “*incited*” him “*against Israel*” to number more than a million warriors under his command.¹ Rather than activating his musical talents and prophetic gifts to offer thanksgiving and praise, David insisted on a rigorous military census that lasted nearly 10 months. David failed to engage his reputation as a worship leader or function as an advocate-intercessor for his nation. Instead of leading Israel in contrite confession and repentance, David further provoked God’s wrath. Only after a deadly plague had destroyed 70,000 men did he offer an appropriate re-

¹ “the anger of **the Lord** burned against Israel and it incited David” (2 Sam 24:1 NAS)
 “**Satan** stood up against Israel and moved [incited] David” (1 Chr 21:1 NAS)

sponse and *“the LORD was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel”*.²

Because bloodshed played such a prominent part of David’s life, God forbade him from building His temple. He declared, *“You shall not build a house for My name because you are a man of war and have shed blood.”*³

Compared with his renowned military exploits, David’s reputation as a worshiper stands out less conspicuously. Though lauded as a praise Rockstar (singer, psalmist, and musician), only ten of his Psalms mention worship. The Bible describes David offering worship twice: once after the death of his child with Bathsheba, whose husband David had murdered during battle, and at the very end of David’s life (after this plague) when his servants blessed his other child with Bathsheba, King Solomon.

While only two accounts depict David worshiping God, the Bible mentions him as much as any other person on earth. The biblical record features various offerings, sacrifices, psalms of praise and thanksgiving, and detailed religious service but it rarely describes worshipers. Though significant in status, purpose, and meaning, their eminence is not emphasized on earth. Throughout biblical history, bloodshed by multitudes of warriors far surpasses narratives depicting worship. The contrast is clear and irrefutable—at least for the time being.

Expect the Unexpected

We all want difficult times to end. We want the really difficult times to confine themselves to history books and movies; but reality is stubborn. It refuses to conform to perfect-world fantasies. Despite sincere intentions for peace and amity, bloodshed and brutality punctuate history along with plagues and catastrophic disasters.

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

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

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

Most of the time, we are not facing overwhelming circumstances, but life can be difficult. Sometimes it is extremely difficult. Occasionally, all-out war domi-

² 2 Sam 24:25

³ 1 Chr 27:3 NAS

nates the agenda. From relational conflicts to savage atrocities, life-threatening events arise to arrest our attention and they demand a Christ-like response.

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 encounter the consummate ferocity of the Apocalypse. The perplexing and terrifying events that John describes in “The Revelation” will transition from Bible studies and quiet times to real-life experience. At some point, individuals will no longer analyze eschatological nuances because they will be too busy encountering them.

Apocalyptic scenarios may not be imminent. Nonetheless, this world cannot avoid the vortex of God’s wrath and Satan’s rage forever. When this spiritual vortex gains momentum, the reliability of our relationship with God will be indispensable. Only God can provide the emotional fortitude and sustained courage required to combat demonic evil with its anger, fear, rage, terror, and grief.

Unfortunately, some of us are crash and burn experts poised to lose heart during the hardest of times. Others seem prepared to face daunting challenges with astonishing valor. All over the world, ordinary people are required to muster extraordinary strength for an extraordinary cause. For some, extreme circumstances are crushing men, women, and children beyond their capacity. For others, difficult times are promised with a vengeance.

Prepare for War

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

*Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war!
Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack.
Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears.
Let the weakling say, “I am strong!”
Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there.*

Joel 3:9-11a NIV

As Joel grasps the urgency of this prophetic battle cry, he interjects a desperate plea for help, urging the Lord to bring down His “warriors!”⁴ The NAS renders them “mighty ones”. When war breaks out between God and the nations, we will need angelic reinforcements from heaven to mount and sustain an effective re-

⁴ Joel 3:11b NIV

sponse. For a strong finish, we must connect with God beyond superficial formality and religious piety.

Joel's prophecy commands obstinate nations weakened by Satan's deception to consecrate themselves for battle and ultimately for judgement.⁵ War with God always yanks history-as-usual in a new direction. When supernatural rivals detonate global tensions, the ensuing chaos will betray the frail composure of humanity. As God summons nations together for battle, cosmic commotion will annihilate status quo endeavors. Concerns, ambitions, and possessions that we had considered valuable and important will become irrelevant. When the wrath of God and the rage of Satan erupt, spiritual adversity will escalate with material consequences.

Joel proclaimed a universal mandate for people everywhere to prepare for war—a war that will likely involve worshipers and warriors. Eventually two groups of people will emerge—worshipers of God and worshipers of inferior impostors. 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 fallen angels and idols.

As persecution and tribulation increase, followers of Christ face an important decision. Will we exalt Jesus publicly through proclamations of highest praise or recoil in isolation to perform covert ceremonies? Will worshipers openly venerate Jesus as God or settle for remote rituals? How will it be—dynamic and assertive or private and apologetic? Where will it be—in open celebration or secret seclusion? With inspired wisdom from above, King Solomon wrote,

*There is an appointed time for everything.
And there is a time for every event under heaven—
... A time for war and a time for peace.
Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8 (NAS)*

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 express homage and exaltation while others assert dominion and oppression. 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

⁵ Joel 3:12

of tyrants and terrorists armed with implements of war. Too often however, He sees that which He does not seek.

Racing toward a Definitive Endpoint

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

Ecstasy literally means to be outside oneself.⁶ Connecting with Jesus offers metamorphic power. He transforms cocooned cautionaries into daring overcomers propelled beyond their comfort zone by a spirit of love, power, and self-discipline.⁷ Using spiritual armor and mighty weapons, we contend in a material world for the Kingdom of God on earth, warring against principalities and powers that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God.⁸ Despite relentless warfare and harsh physical adversity, God has empowered us to persevere and authorized us to prevail.

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers,
against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against
the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*

Ephesians 6:12 NAS

The balance of global power teeters on a precarious illusion that history-as-usual will endure forever. Deceived by Satan's mendacity, world systems underestimate the repercussions of supernatural warfare. Despite pervasive denial, this present age will end with apocalyptic wrath and rage. Denying this fact diminishes neither the struggle nor the opportunity that awaits us.

God and Satan pit themselves as intractable rivals vying for eternal souls. Their opposition generates spontaneous contention and compulsive strife in this world. When the international community confronts the verdict of God's wrath and Satan's rage, the natural and spiritual climate will change. As wrath and rage intensify, the line between stability and chaos will strain to maintain its composure.

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

⁷ 2 Timothy 1:7 NAS

⁸ Ephesians 6:13; 2 Corinthians 10:5

When this line detonates, the fallout will betray the strengths and weaknesses of the human race. We have no place to hide from this apocalyptic time bomb.

As the eyes of our Heavenly Father scour the earth, He finds behavior that He does not want to see. Seeking worshipers, He finds tyrants and terrorists transforming scenic meadows and sheltered cities into horrific battlefields. Deserving glorious praise from worshipers, God watches depraved despots perform with instruments of mass destruction. Worthy of highest praise, our Heavenly Father sees both the frightened and the ferocious as they harden themselves for battle.

History depicts a brutal tradition studded with anarchy, violence, 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”*.⁹ This testimony in shed blood foreshadows an inauspicious future. When we stand before God on Judgment Day, He will ask, *“What have **you** done”*. Bloodshed from generations cries out to the God who is listening. It ascends with a deafening roar from layers of malicious deeds. As the nations of the world prepare for war, followers of Christ must prepare as well—for worship and warfare.

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⁹ Genesis 4:10 NAS