

## Understanding Spiritual Warfare

*See now that I myself am he! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand. (Deuteronomy 32:39)*

### The War is Spiritual

The song of Moses presumes a spiritual battle between God and the forces of evil—who presented themselves to Israel as \_\_\_\_\_ (cf., 1 Cor. 10:20). But we, too, are engaged in a great spiritual battle. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). If you fail to understand the spiritual nature of this war, \_\_\_\_\_.

### The Song of Moses (32:1-47)

- **Deut. 32:1-4. Faithful God.** The song of Moses is a dirge to be sung when Israel finds itself punished for disobedience—it explains how Israel lost its way. The song opens with a doxology underscoring the glory of God: why would Israel abandon such a great God?
- **32:5-9. Repay.** Israel’s rebellion was a sorry way to repay a generous God. **Sons of Israel/God.** Some manuscripts read “sons of Israel,” but others read “sons of God.” Assuming the latter, the text suggests that God gave evil spirits authority over the nations as a form of punishment (cf., Psa. 82; Jn. 12:31; Eph. 2:2; 1 Jn. 5:19).
- **32:10-14. The Lord alone.** Israel was rescued like a baby abandoned in the desert crags.
- **32:15-21. Jeshurun.** Nickname for Israel probably meaning “\_\_\_\_\_.” Israel grew fat from its blessings, then abandoned the God who gave it those blessings. **False gods.** The term means “demons;” idols are nothing other than demons. The battle for human allegiance is ultimately a battle between God and demons.
- **32:22-27. Taunt of the enemy.** God would have punished Israel even more severely, but He didn’t want Israel’s enemies to gloat.
- **32:28-33. Their end.** Wisdom consists of the ability to see the consequences of one’s actions. Israel failed to see the destructive consequences of their rebellion. **Sodom and Gomorrah.** These two



*An ibex (goat) in the crags of the Negev, where the Israelites wandered before taking the land (dmy)*



*Ballista (catapult) balls from the Roman siege of Jerusalem, 70 AD; Rome destroyed Jerusalem 650 years after Babylon had (dmy)*

cities were destroyed for immorality (Gen. 19). Because of their rebellion, Israel was served poison.

- **32:34-42. In my vaults.** God’s intentions are sealed and fixed: God’s justice is non-negotiable. **Avenge.** This verse is quoted in the NT to remind us that God is just (Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30). By quoting this verse, the NT affirms that Deuteronomy is God’s Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Matt. 5:17-20). **Where are their gods?** The idols Israel trusted could not save them. **Hate me.** Disobedience to God is a form of hatred. “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching” (Jn. 14:23) Any definition of love that does not include obedience is false.
- **32:43. Rejoice.** The song ends with the promise that God will restore Israel after He has executed justice. God is just, but He is also compassionate (see Exod. 34:6-7).

## How to Engage Spiritual Warfare

1. Recognize that \_\_\_\_\_. Behind every struggle, failure, sin, temptation, virtue, act of grace, and decision to do right lies the battle between good and evil. Whether you know it or not, you are engaged in a cosmic spiritual battle.
2. Identify the real enemy: the devil. Fight him rather than other people. You defeat the devil every time you \_\_\_\_\_ (James 5:20).
3. Be on guard. Your enemy is looking for ways to hurt you. Pay special attention to your weaknesses, but also pay attention to your \_\_\_\_\_ (1 Peter 5:8).
4. Beware of Satan's primary weapon: \_\_\_\_\_ (Gen. 3:1-7, 13; John 8:44; 2 Cor. 11:14-15; 2 Tim. 2:26; 2 Pet. 2:1). Satan lies, and by so doing, blinds us (2 Cor. 4:4). So the most powerful weapon you have is the truth of Christ (John 8:32; 2 Cor. 10:3-5).
5. Use the weapons of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:12-18). Chief among these is \_\_\_\_\_ (6:18-19).
6. Remember that the battle belongs to the Lord (1 Sam. 17:45-47; 2 Thess. 3:3).



Relief from the ancient city of Ephesus showing Roman armor: a helmet, shin greaves, sword, and belt; cf., Eph. 6:12ff. (dmy)

### The Spiritual Behind the Physical

“If you could pull back the curtains on the visible universe—that part of creation that scientists study—you would see a deeper, spiritual reality behind the physical. You would see a world of personal forces animating the universe, giving it its purpose: now creating, now resting, now wrestling, now luring, now calming. You would see angels and demons. You would see the meaning of the universe (its *why*) and not just the mechanics of the universe (its *how*). You would see everything that is spiritual.

The Book of Revelation bears this out graphically. Behind every earthquake in Revelation is a spiritual decision made in heaven. Behind persecution are evil spirits. Behind the rise and collapse of empires are spirits in mortal combat.

Behind the curtain of the visible universe is an entire world of the spiritual. It is analogous to the way that a movie screen shows a mere projection of real actors filmed a year before it ever entered the theater. If the movie is good, even though it is composed only of pixels on a screen, it elicits real emotions. That's because behind the projection lie real people who actually generated the feelings, who live and breathe and themselves have feelings. In the same way, behind every single physical phenomenon is a spiritual force animating and empowering it.”

*Excerpted from David Young, The Holy Spirit: Filled, Empowered, Led (Renew, 2021), pp. 16-17*

For additional reading, see C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, Neil Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, Joe Beam, *Seeing the Unseen*, Russell Moore, *Tempted and Tried*, Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*.

*Answers: idols, you cannot win, righteous one, everything is spiritual, make a disciple, strengths, deceit, prayer*