

## PART I

# AT WAR WITH THE RULERS OF DARKNESS

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 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 place. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:10-17).*

The young man suddenly appeared out of nowhere and sat down next to me at the other end of the couch. It was in the fall of 1997, and

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I was working off duty at the Marriott in downtown Kansas City. Working an off-duty job is a common practice for those of us in law enforcement. I was picking up a little extra cash by providing security for the hotel. The best part was it afforded me lots of time to quietly sit and think. I was contemplating my future. I was praying and meditating while seeking God's direction for my life. (Don't worry, I was praying with my eyes wide open!)

Was God calling me to leave my career and go into full-time vocational ministry? Several years earlier I had joined the KCPD believing I would have a twenty-five or thirty-year career in law enforcement. Now I sensed maybe God was calling me to preach His Word and minister the gospel on a full-time basis. It was a big decision that would completely change the direction of my life, and I didn't want to get it wrong.

When the young man suddenly appeared and sat down, he leaned forward for a few seconds, putting his head in his hands. Then he sat back, looked directly at me, and asked, "Do you know the purpose of life?" I sat there a bit stunned and remember saying, "No, what is it?" To which he responded, "The purpose of life is to know God and make God known." With that said, he stood up and disappeared around the corner.

He had no sooner left when my spirit leapt inside of me! I thought, *Who was that guy? Where did he come from? Wait, I want to talk to you some more!* I jumped off the couch just moments after this mysterious individual abruptly departed. With three quick steps, I was at the corner, fully expecting to see him walking down the long corridor where I could catch up to him and talk to him some more. But he was gone.

He had vanished. There were no doors on either side of the corridor. No exits. There was nowhere he could have gone. There was no way he could have made it to the end of that long, empty hallway. He

had literally disappeared into thin air. I was convinced right then and there that God had sent an angel to minister His message to me. The purpose of my life was to “know God and make God known.” It is a mission I have devoted every day of my life to since that day in 1997.

## **GOD’S MESSENGERS**

Who and what are angels? Hebrews 1:14 says, “*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?*” From this verse, we learn that angels, among other things, are God’s servants and messengers that He dispatches to minister to “*those who will inherit salvation.*”

While God’s angels are messengers and ministers, so are Satan’s. Paul says in Second Corinthians 12:7, “*...a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me....*” Angels are messengers of God, but in Paul’s case, he encountered a messenger of Satan. Angels are ministers of good or evil, depending on who they are working for. One of Satan’s angels had been assigned to Paul to afflict and buffet him. This demonic messenger was there to minister evil to Paul, yet Paul knew that God would use it for good.

It’s important to remember that angels don’t always take on the form of a human to minister to us, but the Bible absolutely teaches they can:

*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels* (Hebrews 13:2).

Imagine the implications! You could be interacting with somebody who looks like a human, but the entire time it is actually an angel that has taken on the form of a human being. We can see this pattern repeatedly in Scripture.

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Genesis 18–19 is a remarkable story of how God sent angels in preparation for His destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the sin and wickedness of those cities. In Genesis 18:2, Abraham looked up and saw three “*men*” standing before him. Although the Bible calls them men, we quickly learn they were more than mere men. Abraham immediately rose up, ran to them, bowed down, and called one of them “Lord.” He recognized one of these “*men*” as the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ and began to worship Him.

In Genesis 18:4, Abraham washed their feet; in verse 5, he offered them food; in verse 7, he killed “*a tender and good calf*” and prepared to honor them with a feast. These angels had taken on the form of human beings with human bodies that were capable of biological functions like eating food. When you read the entire text, you learn that the “*man*” referred to as the Lord stayed back with Abraham as recorded in Genesis 18:22, while the other two “*men*” went down to Sodom.

Genesis 19:1 records, “*Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom....*” These two “*men*” are called angels, yet they look like human men to the wicked citizens of Sodom. Abraham’s nephew, Lot, brought them into his house for the night because they obviously looked like men. Genesis 19:4-5 continues:

*Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally.”*

What was it this wicked mob of men wanted to do with these two “men” they had seen go into Lot’s house? Well, I’ll give you a hint. They didn’t want them to come outside so they could all roast marshmallows together around a campfire. Had these two men not really been angels that supernaturally blinded the men of the city (Genesis 19:11), the entire mob would have sexually assaulted and raped them. I’m not trying to be graphic, just real. Angels have the ability to take on the appearance of human beings with fully functioning human bodies. Hebrews 13:2 confirms that “*some have unwittingly entertained angels.*”

Angels are always described as male throughout the pages of the Bible. I know this blows away the images of the plump porcelain-skinned little cherubs fluttering about with stubby little wings while plucking little harps, but that imagery has been formed in our imagination by pop culture. The Bible paints a much different picture. The Bible always describes angels as masculine creatures. This is contrary to our politically correct, gender-neutral world. I would rather be biblically correct than politically correct.

To many in our modern world, this all sounds crazy. The idea of angels interacting with humans or the idea of the unseen realm materializing into the physical realm seems more like a sci-fi movie. Even among Christians, there is a tendency to try to take the supernatural out of the Bible and explain everything through a naturalistic lens. It is how we are conditioned as Westerners. Much of the worldview of Western civilization is built on naturalism, rationalism, and intellectualism. We aren’t a superstitious people. We’re sophisticated and educated, which is why the tendency even among today’s Christians is to explain away the supernatural elements of the Bible.

Even trained theologians and Bible scholars routinely attempt to remove the supernatural from the Bible. As my congregation has

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heard me say many times, “The Bible is not hard to understand, just sometimes hard to believe.” It’s hard to believe because our rational minds are conditioned to explain everything we see, hear, and experience through a naturalistic filter. The Bible teaches something different altogether. There is the natural world but also the supernatural world. There is the physical realm but also the spiritual realm. There is the realm we can see, as well as the unseen realm, and the two intersect on a daily basis.

This is why the apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12, “*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but...against the rulers of the darkness of this age....*”

## CHAPTER 1

# THE UNSEEN ENEMY

*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* (Ephesians 6:12).

Who are these rulers of darkness? They are the unseen enemy. God has an angel army, and Satan does too. Paul is telling us we are locked in a struggle with demons, “*spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*” They are the fallen angels that rebelled with Satan, and Paul says we wrestle with them daily.

While God’s angels can and do take on human form as illustrated by the story of Genesis 18–19, Satan’s angels can as well. (Now wait...take a deep breath before you march next door and



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accuse your neighbor of being a demon!) Most of the time Satan's demonic army prefers to work in the unseen realm. In our Western culture, they especially prefer to launch their attacks while never being noticed, seen, or suspected. Most Americans don't believe in Satan or demons, and that is exactly how Satan wants it. Even most Christians, while perhaps believing in Satan and demons theologically, don't really believe they affect their daily lives practically.

We read the gospel accounts of how Jesus routinely interacted with the demonic. And in the book of Acts, we see how Paul and the apostles encountered the demonic consistently, and then either consciously or subconsciously we think to ourselves, *Well, that stuff just happened back then, but it doesn't now.*

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"I need you to call me quickly, I'm dealing with a spirit of suicide."

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"I need you to call me quickly, I'm dealing with a spirit of suicide." That was the text I received a while back from a member of our ministry team I'll call "Kathy." She was ministering to a woman I'll call "Sarah," who had only a few weeks earlier placed her faith in Jesus and was now a new Christian. When I called Kathy, she began describing what her new disciple was going through. Sarah was suicidal almost every night and had been for many years. It began when she was a teenager. She had been sexually molested repeatedly beginning when



she was only five years of age. The sexual abuse continued through her teen years and even into her adult years.

For years, Sarah saw what seemed like a dark shadow that appeared in her bedroom at night and attached itself to her. She would be filled with a feeling of hopelessness and doom. She had made several attempts to take her life over the years, and she had been in and out of multiple mental health programs and hospitals. She spent years taking various medications for depression and mental illness. She also received counseling and psychotherapy, but nothing helped.

I immediately went to Kathy's home and listened to Sarah's story. I explained that I thought she was battling a demon. She had come to faith in Christ and had received the Spirit of God. People who are born again of God's Spirit cannot be possessed by an evil spirit, but because Sarah had just come to faith in Christ, this spiritual confrontation was imminent. There were spiritual powers at war for control of her life.

I asked Sarah if she believed Jesus had the power to set her free. She indicated she did. I prayed over Sarah and then looked at her and said, "Sarah, say this with me, 'Jesus set me free.'" As soon as I did, her mouth and jaw clenched tightly shut, and she began to shake. I knew I was dealing directly with a demon, but I never had a class on "How to Cast Out a Demon."

Although I had never directly encountered this kind of situation before, I was confident in my Kingdom authority as a child of God. I recalled what Jesus said in Luke 10:19, "*Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy....*" I kept encouraging Sarah to say, "Jesus, set me free." I could see her trying to move her lips, but her jaw was clenched shut. Something was holding her mouth shut. I repeated to Sarah, "Say, 'Jesus set me free,'" while Kathy and another ministry partner

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continued praying for her. Sarah just continued to clench her mouth shut and shake.

This had been going on for several minutes when the Holy Spirit told me what to do. I said, “Demonic spirit, in the name of Jesus identify yourself. What is your name?” Immediately Sarah opened her mouth, and the word “death” came out. It was a spirit of death. I commanded the spirit of death to come out of Sarah in Jesus’ name. Suddenly she sat back in her chair and stopped shaking. Her body relaxed and her eyes were now open for the first time in several minutes. As she looked at me, I said, “Sarah, tell me how you feel right now.” With a smile beginning to crease her mouth, she said the word “free.” She was free.

We all began to pray together and sing praises to our Savior! I left that night believing Sarah had been delivered from the jaws of the enemy. And she had. What I didn’t know was there were yet more.

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“Come quickly, there are more demons  
Sarah is dealing with!”

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“Come quickly, there are more demons Sarah is dealing with!” That was the text I received the next day, and fortunately, I was nearby. I arrived minutes later and walked into the room in time to see Kathy bandaging Sarah’s arm. Sarah was clearly in a trance-like condition. Kathy told me that as she was again ministering God’s Word to Sarah, she went into a trance-like state and without warning pulled out a

box-cutter-type razor blade from her pocket and began slashing her arm repeatedly. Kathy had been able to wrestle the razor blade away from Sarah. (One more reason to never do this alone. Remember, in Luke 10, Jesus sent out the disciples in pairs.)

We commanded this demon to identify itself, and when Sarah opened her mouth, the word “self-hatred” came out. It was a demon of self-hatred. Once again I said to Sarah, “Say, ‘Jesus set me free.’” As soon as I did, the same thing happened as it had the night before. Her jaw clenched shut, and her lips were sealed tight. I could see her trying to move her mouth, but she clearly could not. Something was holding it shut as her body shook. We commanded the spirit of self-hatred to depart in Jesus’ name.

At one point, Sarah raised her fist above her head and began to beat herself violently. I noted that as she beat herself, her arm was not moving in a natural motion, but rather in a mechanical robotic type movement. Clearly, something other than Sarah was controlling her arm. We continued commanding the spirit to depart in Jesus’ name, and within minutes Sarah sat back, and her body relaxed. We knew it was gone and Sarah did too. She was back. This time we asked Sarah if she thought there were more. And there were...

Over the next thirty days, Sarah was delivered from no less than twenty demons identifying themselves with names like shame, fear, lies, deceit, despair, and murder, just to name a few, besides death and self-hatred that were identified early on. Today Sarah is still part of our church, and she is living spiritually free. She has had no relapses and has not been suicidal or had any symptoms of mental illness since that life-changing encounter with the power of Jesus! She admits that when she is not renewing her mind in the Word and renouncing the lies with the Truth, she can feel the darkness encroaching on her once again. But now she knows what to do.

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Now I have to tell you, since this encounter with Sarah, I have shared this story with a number of pastors of several different Bible-believing churches who have asked me privately for my theological opinion on the work of demons and deliverance ministry as a whole. Each of these pastors came from theologically conservative traditions, meaning they fully believe in the authority and inerrancy of the Bible. None would doubt the existence of either Satan or demons.

Yet only one of them has had a similar experience in his pastoral ministry and nodded in affirmation as I recounted the story. All the rest looked at me and said something like, “Phil, if it was anyone other than you telling me this story, I’d think they were crazy.” Why? Why would even pastors and teachers of God’s Word think it’s crazy to encounter demons in a real, tangible way when both the Old and New Testaments are full of passages that clearly articulate the reality of the demonic?

### **WHY THE SKEPTICISM?**

I know the answer to that question. I know why even pastors have a hard time believing a story like this when they hear it from another pastor whom they know isn’t crazy and is quite conservative theologically. The reason I know the answer is because at one time my response would have been just like theirs.

The first reason is how the subject of the demonic has been sensationalized and dramatized by those in the Church who frankly want to make it all about them and put on the biggest show in town. It’s nothing more than an attention getter. Many have seen the circus many churches have become when their leaders are all about the hype. Most of us, including myself, are not interested in the “circus” that sometimes follows deliverance ministries. As a result, many in the Church have become jaded by the constant implications that the

demonic might be closer than we think, and we are called to be the weapons in God's hands to confront the darkness.

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There is another reason why so many in the Church are reluctant to recognize demonic influences. It is church culture and church tradition. I came from a church tradition and was raised in a church culture that would have certainly believed theologically in the existence of the demonic. But for some reason, while that church tradition acknowledged demons theologically, they refused to acknowledge demons practically. I remember receiving very little teaching on the demonic, and I was a kid raised in Sunday school. I've spent my entire life in church. I heard hundreds of sermons before I ever preached my first one. Until I preached on the subject of spiritual warfare myself, I'm not sure I had ever actually heard a single sermon, much less a whole sermon series, on the subject or the work of Satan in our lives as he wars against us.

Our Westernized Christianity gives many in the body of Christ a naturalistic filter, especially when we encounter the supernatural. Our rational minds are trained to immediately dismiss anything that doesn't fit within the natural and the physical.

I think somewhere along the way many pastors, churches, and Christians have adopted the "wasp theology" on Satan. When I was

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a little boy and a wasp would fly nearby, I would get anxious. I knew that a wasp has a stinger on the tail and could inflict some serious pain. But I remember my mom always saying, “Don’t worry. If you don’t bother it, it won’t bother you.” For some reason, my approach to avoid getting stung by a wasp became my theology for not getting stung by Satan. “If I ignore him, he’ll ignore me.”

I believe that’s what many others in the body of Christ think as well. Subtly, without any real direct teaching on the subject, I was taught to not even acknowledge Satan. I think in an effort to not “*give place to the devil*” (Ephesians 4:27), I was taught to make no mention of the devil and give him no thought or attention. This is hardly a winning strategy when you consider the words of Paul in Ephesians 6:12, “*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age.*”

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Whether or not you’re paying attention to him, the enemy is paying attention to you.

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Whether or not you’re paying attention to him, the enemy is paying attention to you. If you’re not aware of Satan’s interest in you, you are already his prisoner in at least some fashion and probably a prisoner unaware! If God didn’t want us to be aware of the demons or to actively engage them in warfare, then the Holy Spirit would have never inspired Paul to pen Ephesians 6:10-17 that describes the armor of God.

## FROM GOD'S WORD ONLY

Now I have to warn you—it's critical you get this knowledge of the enemy from God's Word and nowhere else. God has already revealed everything you need to know in the Bible. The word "occult" means secret or esoteric knowledge and includes anything related to the worship of or communion with secret powers or spirits through psychics, New Age mysticism, participation in séances for the purpose of communicating with the dead, spiritism, sorcery, Wicca, witchcraft, palm readers, tarot cards, fortune tellers, Ouija boards, voodoo, the zodiac, astrology and more. These and other practices were forbidden by God as His people were preparing to enter the Promised Land. They were going to encounter pagan people who practiced them (Deuteronomy 18:9-12).

It's true that many of the people who practice these things today are nothing more than fakes and phonies who only want your money. It's equally true that the practices themselves are not fake and not phony. This is real, and it's not a game. You may take a trip to the psychic fair and hang a crystal from the rear-view mirror—and if you do, you're apt to come home with a demon sitting in the back seat of your car. God forbids these kinds of practices because they are the "welcome mat" to the door of your home. They are the doorway of the demonic into your life.

You may get that secret knowledge, but you will get it like Eve got hers when she ate of the tree in Genesis 3. She got that knowledge all right and a whole lot more! You should even beware of the movies you watch and the music you listen to. Anything that glorifies the darkness or the demonic is something that has the power to give the enemy access into your life.

I'm convinced now after years of studying the Word and years of pastoral ministry, that there are scores of demonized people walking

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among us every day. And there are scores of demonized people walking into our churches every week. I don't mean all of them are demonically possessed, though that's probably more common than most of us can imagine. The Greek words *daimon* and *daimonion* appear dozens of times in the New Testament and are commonly translated as demon. The verb form of *daimonion* is *daimonizo* and occurs around twelve times in the New Testament. Our English equivalent is *demonize* meaning someone who is demonized or "has a demon."

The Collins English Dictionary defines *demonize* as "to subject to demonic influence." Defined in this manner, it's safe to say we have all been demonized at some time in our lives. There are different levels of demonization. Not every demonized person is as demonized as Sarah had been for most of her life until those glorious thirty days when Jesus set her free. Demonization can imply anything from demonic possession, oppression, manipulation, or affliction. It can, but does not always, imply complete control or domination by a demon. It can also imply far lesser forms of influence.

By definition, the apostle Paul himself was demonized. He acknowledged suffering from demonic affliction as recorded in Second Corinthians 12:7. While I'm personally convinced a believer indwelt by God's Spirit (Romans 8:9) cannot simultaneously be possessed by an evil spirit, I'm also convinced believers can be demonically oppressed, controlled, or manipulated if they are unrepentant of sin or unsubmitted to the lordship of Christ at any time in their lives. This is why Ephesians 4:27 says, *Don't give place to the devil*. The devil has lost all place in your life as a born-again child of God. Sin, however, returns control to him. Embracing a lie instead of the truth can give him a foothold, and that foothold can become a demonic stronghold (2 Corinthians 10:4).



The devil has no place in your life as a born-again child of God.

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This is probably the condition of many Christians suffering under varying levels of demonic control. Knowing what I know now, there were times in my pastoral ministry over the years when I counseled someone who was demonized. I wish I would have known back then what I know now. I wish I would have had the spiritual insight back then to more effectively help them.

I recall praying for several different people in counseling sessions on several different occasions. On each occasion, I was praying over them and for them and invoking Jesus' name against any demonic power or principality that might have been afflicting them. As I was praying, they began hyperventilating and shaking to the point I thought I was going to have to summon an ambulance. But as I kept praying, they suddenly slumped back in their chair, relaxed their body, and their breathing returned to normal. I don't know for sure, but I think it's possible on these occasions I had cast out a demon without even knowing it. I didn't know then what I know now.

What I do know now is to take seriously and literally what Paul reminds us of in Second Corinthians 10:3, "*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.*"



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phil Hopper has been the Lead Pastor of Abundant Life Church in Lee's Summit, Missouri, since 2000. He watched God do extraordinary things in the life of the church as it has grown from 100 people to a megachurch touching thousands and thousands of people each week.

Prior to entering the ministry, he was a police officer and sergeant with the Kansas City Police Department where he served as a SWAT team member. It was through this experience that God uniquely prepared him for the ministry. Phil lives in the Lee's Summit area with his wife, Christa. They have three children: Jake, Makay, and Josh.



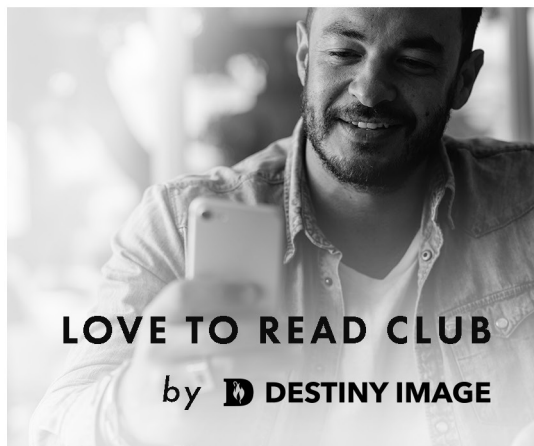
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