



# Spiritual Warfare

## Part 6: Wrong Warfare - Hedges

by **Jim Osman**  
Pastor/Teacher

**Kootenai Community Church**  
[kootenaichurch.org](http://kootenaichurch.org)

It is time to turn a bit of a corner in this series<sup>1</sup>. The material we have covered so far has created a biblical framework in which certain practices can be evaluated and a foundation upon which a biblical theology of spiritual warfare can be built.

We have affirmed that the Bible and the Bible alone should govern our theology of spiritual warfare (Part 2). We have seen from **2 Corinthians 10** that spiritual warfare is not a hand-to-hand battle with demons over territory, but a battle over truth waged with the Word of God (Part 3). We have spent some time considering our threefold enemy, and how they work in concert (Parts 4 & 5). We now turn to evaluate certain specific practices often associated with spiritual warfare.

### **Why Bother?**

Imagine a soldier on the front lines who ignored the commands of his superior and chose to prosecute a battle according to his own designs. The soldier may think that his method of prosecuting the battle is better or more effective than his commander's. He may think it to be more effective. He might believe that what he has practiced for so many years could not possibly be wrong. No matter his motives, to fail to follow the orders of his commander, and to go outside of the boundaries set by his superior, is gross insubordination and disobedience to clear commands.

We have a Commander-In-Chief who has described our warfare to us, commissioned us to it, and equipped us to fight it. If He has given orders as to how this battle for the truth is to be waged, then we are negligent at best, and disobedient at worst, to ignore His instruction and adopt methodologies that He has not sanctioned nor commanded.

Our Superior is no mere fallible human. He is infallible

and omniscient. To engage in spiritual warfare practices which He has neither commanded nor approved is disobedience, insubordination, and outright foolishness. It is to fight using carnal, fleshly weapons of man's making, to live and battle in our own strength, and to invite disaster.<sup>2</sup>

It is therefore necessary that we evaluate certain practices which have crept in to this realm of spiritual warfare. Some of the things we are going to be discussing might be things you have done, read about, or seen/heard others do. It is my conviction that well-intentioned people have taught a lot of spurious things in the area of spiritual warfare. Some have become such a part of the warp and woof of modern American evangelicalism as to make questioning them an act of treason! Yet question we must.

We have a responsibility to evaluate our thinking and behavior in light of Scripture and seek to conform our lives to His Word. If what we have been taught to be effective spiritual warfare is, in fact, not founded upon the text of Scripture, we should be quick to abandon it, however dear the practice may be or however effective we might perceive it to be.

Why do we have to evaluate these things? If we don't analyze the specifics of our practice in light of Scripture, then we just end up plugging our "carnal weapons" into a biblical paradigm. That just results in confusion and ineffective warfare.

Nothing of what you are going to read in the next few articles is intended to be a **criticism**. Please don't take it that way. Our desire should always be to bring our thoughts, motives, practices and beliefs to the anvil of God's Word to pound them into conformity to His revealed truth.

A necessary corollary to teaching the truth is to identify

<sup>1</sup> The first five parts of this series are archived on our website at [www.kootenaichurch.org](http://www.kootenaichurch.org).

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 tells us that our warfare is not to be waged using weapons, methods, or tactics which are of man's creation. We are not free to adopt any practice which seems fit to us.

error and offer correction. When God's people are engaged in unbiblical practices, the loving thing to do is to point it out and correct it. It is unloving to allow someone to continue in error which is a danger to their spiritual well being.<sup>3</sup>

***To be engaged in wrong warfare is as bad or worse than no warfare at all.*** My desire is that God's people will abandon unbiblical thinking and extra-biblical and unbiblical practices and engage in true spiritual warfare, according to the orders and example of our Commander given in His Word.

If we don't address erroneous practices and expose the unbiblical methodologies currently used, then we can't build a biblical methodology in its place. It is impossible to build a new building where an old, useless one currently stands. It is therefore necessary to do a little **destruction** on the proposed site, before any **construction** can take place.

### **Woven Into The Fabric**

Practices such as binding Satan and/or his demons, praying a "hedge of thorns" around people, places and things, renouncing generational curses and sins in order to be delivered from them, naming and praying against territorial spirits, exorcising demons from Christians and/or non-Christians, exorcising demons from houses or inanimate objects, rebuking the devil, and pleading the name and/or blood of Jesus have become virtually woven into the fabric of modern notions of spiritual warfare.

The legitimacy of these practices is assumed and never questioned. These have become so much a part of the fabric of the prayers and lives of some people and churches, that to question their legitimacy, in some circles, qualifies one as a "heretic."<sup>4</sup>

Some who are reading about these things have never, prior to this series of articles, been exposed to any of this teaching or these practices. Consider yourself very fortunate! You might find it hard to believe that people actually do this, but trust me--they do. It is not isolated to some fringe group of Christianity. These things are taught in very fundamentalist, conservative, Bible-believing, and gospel-centered churches. I in no way question the

3 Jesus and the Apostles constantly confronted unbiblical practices and beliefs (**Matthew 5-8; John 3, 8, 10**). Whole books of the Bible were written to this very end (**Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter, 1 John, Jude**).

4 There was a time when I thought that all of these were biblical methods of spiritual warfare. However, I believe that a careful look at Scripture reveals that these practices are based upon bad interpretation and verses cited out of context. See part 1 of this series for more on this.

intentions of these folks. We only seek to evaluate the practice.

### **"Praying The Hedge of Thorns"**

If you have never been exposed to this teaching before, you are asking yourself, "What in the world is that?!?"

Supposedly, this is the practice of erecting a "spiritual hedge" around persons, places, or things to prohibit satanic influence, attack, or presence. Once a "hedge of thorns" is prayed around someone, Satan and his demons can't get through. This is different than the practice of binding Satan. In binding Satan, he is kept from doing something (supposedly) that he otherwise could do. In praying the hedge of thorns, you are not taking Satan's ability away, but rather protecting someone from it. This practice of "praying a hedge" (supposedly) prevents demonic/satanic influence in the life or mind of the person so protected by the hedge.

It is an all-purpose hedge. You might pray it for your spouse, your family, your home, your children, your job, your car, your church, or even your town. If you want to win unbelievers to Christ, first pray a hedge of thorns around the person so they cannot be attacked or influenced demonically.

It would sound something like this, "Lord, I pray a hedge of protection around this house in Jesus' name. I pray a hedge of thorns around my kids in Jesus' name. I pray a hedge around Bob, who needs salvation. And Lord, I pray a hedge of thorns around the church service this Sunday, in Jesus' name. . ."

Apparently praying this one time is not sufficient, for we are encouraged by experts in spiritual warfare to pray it regularly, at least daily if not several times a day. I'm not sure if this is because the hedge breaks down over time, or if Satan is crafty enough to find a means of getting over or through the hedge. I would think that if this methodology was effective at all, it would only need to be done one time. Why can't we simply pray a hedge of protection (hedge of thorns) around everything and just prevent Satan from influencing anything at all? Better yet, why not just pray a hedge of thorns around Satan himself and all his demons? Rather than building a hedge around everything and every one to keep the devil out, why not pray a hedge around *him* to keep him in? It would be a hedge of thorns penitentiary for Satan.

I was first exposed to this teaching at a Basic Youth Conflicts Seminar in Spokane taught via video by Bill Gothard. He mentioned this practice and gave details on how to effectively do it. He also cited the "supporting" references of **Hosea 2:6** and **Job 1:10**. It was not too long later that I was exposed to this teaching in a much more

developed form. It *sounded* biblical. It made sense that we could prohibit Satan from influencing people or places by using this practice, which seemed to be referenced in those two passages.

The danger comes in thinking that “praying the hedge” is actually a prayer mantra that is necessary to erect a spiritual barrier that Satan cannot penetrate. It is taught that this practice is essential to effectively hindering the advance of the kingdom of darkness.

But is that really what these passages teach? Let's examine the texts and see. First, **Hosea 2:6** - **“Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, And I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths.”**

At first glance you'll notice a reference to “hedge” and “thorns.” See? There it is! That is the “hedge of thorns!”

You don't have to be a careful student of Scripture to recognize that the mere mention of “hedge” and “thorns” in one verse is not sufficient to support the elaborate practice described above. A consideration given to the context in which this verse appears shows its true meaning and reveals that no such practice of “praying a hedge” against demonic forces is in view by Hosea. In fact, this is a perfect example of wrenching a verse from its context and using it to prop up a teaching that is completely foreign to the meaning and intention of the passage.

### **What Was Hosea Saying?**

Hosea was a prophet that God called for a rather unusual object lesson to the nation of Israel. God commanded Hosea to **“take a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD,”** which thing Hosea did in marrying Gomer (1:2-3). Even the names which were given to the children of Hosea and Gomer bore prophetic significance as a sign and message to the nation (1:4-11).

This was a powerful prophetic object lesson. The practices of harlotry, adultery, and impurity are commonly used to illustrate the nature of the spiritual apostasy of the nation.<sup>5</sup> To forsake their God by covenant and to turn to other gods in idolatry was as the sin of harlotry and adultery. Hosea's marriage to Gomer and her subsequent unfaithfulness proved to be a vivid picture of God's covenant relationship with the nation of Israel and the pollution of that covenant by their persistent idolatry, which was likened to harlotry.

It is in that context that we come to Chapter 2 of Hosea's

prophecy. With that in mind, read the entire context while noticing the underlined references to the unfaithfulness of the nation.

### **Hosea 2**

**1** Say to your brothers, “Ammi,” and to your sisters, “Ruhamah.” **2** “Contend with your mother, contend, For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband; And let her put away her harlotry from her face And her adultery from between her breasts, **3** Or I will strip her naked And expose her as on the day when she was born. I will also make her like a wilderness, Make her like desert land And slay her with thirst. **4** “Also, I will have no compassion on her children, Because they are children of harlotry. **5** “For their mother has played the harlot; She who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, Who give me my bread and my water, My wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’ **6** **“Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, And I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths.** **7** “She will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; And she will seek them, but will not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband, For it was better for me then than now!’ **8** “For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil, And lavished on her silver and gold, Which they used for Baal. **9** “Therefore, I will take back My grain at harvest time And My new wine in its season. I will also take away My wool and My flax Given to cover her nakedness. **10** “And then I will uncover her lewdness In the sight of her lovers, And no one will rescue her out of My hand. **11** “I will also put an end to all her gaiety, Her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths And all her festal assemblies. **12** “I will destroy her vines and fig trees, Of which she said, ‘These are my wages Which my lovers have given me.’ And I will make them a forest, And the beasts of the field will devour them. **13** “I will punish her for the days of the Baals When she used to offer sacrifices to them And adorn herself with her earrings and jewelry, And follow her lovers, so that she forgot Me,” declares the LORD.<sup>6</sup>

It is difficult to miss the point! Does the passage sound like it has anything to do with spiritual warfare? Does it sound like it has anything at all to do with instruction on how to prevent satanic influence, demonic oppression, or with protecting the righteous? It does not. In fact, the passage is a passage of judgment, not protection! Hosea is describing a coming judgment of God upon the nation that involved “hedging them in with thorns” so that they would return to

<sup>5</sup> Ezekiel 16:20, 25; 23:43.

<sup>6</sup> Hosea 2:1–13 (NASB95)

Him. The text has nothing to do with how to protect God's people from Satan. **The hedge of thorns is not protection but judgment!** It was not done for His people, but against them.

God was revealing that the nation was about to experience severe judgment for its spiritual harlotry. God would "hedge up her [the nation] way with thorns" and "build a wall against her [the nation - His people by covenant] so that she cannot find her paths."

What "way" was God promising to hedge with thorns? It would be the nation's idolatrous paths, their pursuit of other gods. Notice the references to pursuing their spiritual harlotry:

*She said, "I will go after my lovers" (v. 5)*  
*She will pursue her lovers, but not overtake them (v. 5)*  
*She will seek them, but will not find them (v. 5)*  
*She used to . . . follow her lovers (v. 13)*

It is those paths of unrighteous pursuit of spiritual adultery and harlotry that God is describing through Hosea. The judgment of God upon the nation would be a path of difficulty and pain--hedged as with thorns.

The metaphor is an easy one to understand. You can imagine being on a straight and narrow path on which both sides are hedged with thorns. To turn to the right or to the left, to seek to depart from said path would only result in running into thorns--misery! In fact, that is evident in the very next verse. **Hosea 2:7, "She will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; And she will seek them, but will not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my first husband, For it was better for me than now!'"**

The whole intention of God hedging in the nation from its perverse ways, was so that in experiencing the misery of spiritual harlotry, they would say, "I will go back to my first husband [God - their covenant partner]."

What types of misery [thorns] was God promising the unfaithful nation? Look at this list from the chapter:

*She will be stripped naked (v. 3)*  
*She will be exposed (v. 3)*  
*She will be made like a wilderness (v. 3)*  
*She will be made like a desert land (v. 3)*  
*She will be slayed with thirst (v. 3)*  
*God will have no compassion (v. 4)*  
*God will withhold the provision of grain at harvest (v.9)*  
*God would withhold the provision of wine (v. 9)*  
*God would take away provision of wool and flax (v. 9)*  
*God would uncover her lewdness (v. 10)*  
*And prevent rescue from her dire situation (v. 10)*

*God would put an end to her happiness (v. 11)*  
*Festive assemblies and celebrations would end (v. 11)*  
*God would destroy vines and fig trees (v. 12)*  
*She would be punished for worship of Baal (v. 13)*

All of those things are the thorns that would afflict God's people. God was saying, "I will bring judgment on this nation because of their harlotries with other gods. I will make these people so miserable in their sins, I will remove every blessing, and make every pursuit of idols so painful, that they will eventually return to Me."

Oh, and by the way, you can pray this "hedge of thorns" around your loved ones for protection from Satan and demonic influence. *Huh?!*

Obviously such a notion is entirely foreign to the context. Yet this whole theology of spiritual warfare and a whole prayer practice is built upon the mention of "hedge" and "thorns" in the same verse without any consideration of what the verse actually teaches.

The referenced verse has nothing at all to do with spiritual warfare and protection from demons. Nothing. It refers to an act of God in judgment to punish the nation and prevent them from pursuing their idolatrous lusts.

There is nothing in **Hosea 2** that indicates that such a hedge can be created through prayer. There is nothing here that teaches that this was a result of prayer. There is no mention of Satan or how such a "hedge of thorns" prevents his activity. There is no indication that you and I can even do anything to construct such a hedge. It is not even a literal hedge. It is a metaphor for *punishment* not *protection*. It was a figure of speech, and one that has nothing at all to do with spiritual warfare.

### **But What About Job?**

But doesn't the book of Job mention a hedge that protected righteous Job? Yes, in fact, a second passage pressed into service to support the practice of praying a hedge of protection is **Job 1:8-10, "The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.' Then Satan answered the LORD, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.'"**

Some would say, "See, there is a hedge mentioned there, one of protection that kept Satan from attacking Job." True,

but the operative questions are, "What was this 'hedge' and where did it come from?" This "hedge" was clearly God's sovereign protection and blessing on Job. That is evident from the fact that Satan challenged God to remove such blessing and protection in order to show that Job would curse Him.

You can read the whole first chapter of Job and you will see that it is not a manual on spiritual warfare. The point of the passage is not to teach us how to pray effectively against Satan. In **Job 1**, we get a glimpse into the spiritual realm at something we cannot affect; namely, God's sovereign protection of His people and the continuance or removal of that protection for His own sovereign purposes.

Job does not describe spiritual warfare tactics. That is the furthest thing from the mind of the author and the context. Does the passage say that this hedge was made of thorns? No. Does the passage say that this hedge was placed in response to the spiritual warfare prayers of Job or of others on his behalf? No. In fact, this was the sovereign protection of God over Job-- something Satan could not penetrate without God's permission--was effected by God and God alone and removed by God and God alone!

All that we can say about this 'hedge' is that it refers to God's sovereign protection of Job and all that was his. We are not told to pray for this. Nor do we have any examples of someone praying for this. We simply see in this passage that Satan's reach is limited by the sovereign hand of God.

I would argue that such a hedge is already the present possession of each individual believer--all the saints. Satan would kill all of us if he could. What is it that prevents him from harming God's people or even killing them? Nothing but God's sovereign protection of His people. Why am I not dead right now? Why are my wife and kids preserved at any given moment? God keeps evil at bay by His sovereign hand. Satan is on a leash and it goes no further than God allows. One lesson we learn from **Job 1** is that if we are preserved from anything it is because God is protecting us. If we are not preserved from something, it is because God has allowed it.

Clearly it goes *way beyond* what is written to teach that such a protection against Satan can be constructed, and needs to be constructed through a specific mantra-style prayer in order to protect one from demonic influence and attack.

Clearly **Job 1** and **Hosea 2** are not in any way connected. The "hedge" in one refers to protection, in the other, punishment. One refers to the sovereign protection of God upon possessions, the other refers to God moving to afflict people by removing their possessions. The only thing

those two passages have in common is that neither of them teaches the practice of "praying a hedge of thorns."

### **Biblical Interpretation Gone Awry**

Notice how this practice of praying the hedge is derived from Scripture. The word "hedge" is mentioned in two totally unrelated passages. One of them also mentions thorns. Therefore, we must be able to pray a hedge of thorns around people to protect them. Huh?!

What if I told you that you needed to pray a tower next to someone to protect them from Satan. After all, Satan can't attack someone who has a tower prayed up next to them. How do I know? Because towers are for defense in the Bible. What verse teaches this? Well, the Bible describes towers that protect (**Psalm 61:3**) and the same psalm speaks of prayer (v. 1). Therefore we should pray towers over people for their protection so Satan can't exercise His attacks.

If I started teaching that goofiness, you would rightly charge me with twisting Scripture and creating doctrines out of whole cloth. The mere mention of certain words in the Bible does not condone whatever practice we want to assign to those words. The question is, "What does that text teach?" Neither of the passages we have examined teach anything remotely connected to the modern practice of praying hedges around people.

### **A Prayer For Protection**

So what about praying for protection? Does that mean it is unbiblical to pray for God to watch over us and protect us, even to protect us from the attacks of our spiritual enemies? Certainly not (**Ezra 8:21-23**). There is nothing wrong with praying for protection for one's self or others. The Psalms are filled with references to praying for protection from enemies.<sup>7</sup> These prayers have nothing to do with hedges and thorns, or even Satan and demons.

***I am taking issue with the teaching that says that "praying a hedge of thorns" around someone or something is necessary to advance the Kingdom of Christ or to halt the work of Satan. I am taking issue with the doctrine that promotes a certain mantra prayer as an effective tool in the war against Satan. I am taking issue with the abuse of Hosea 2:6 and Job 1:10. That is the central issue.***

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 7, 17, 57, 59, 94, just to name a couple. There are many.

## **Reforming Prayers**

Okay, so there might be no biblical justification for the practice, but does it really matter? Aren't we just splitting hairs? Certainly God knows what I mean and He can answer that prayer, right? What harm does it do to just go on praying hedges of thorns around people?

It might not do any harm, but does it do any good? Why not pray a row of trees? Pray a field of grass, a big field that Satan will have to spend time traveling across before he gets to us. Why not pray a circle of tomato plants? Maybe Satan doesn't like tomato plants. Pardon my tongue-in-cheekness, but I am just trying to illustrate silliness by being silly.

Praying a hedge of thorns has no more biblical warrant than praying a circle of tomato plants. So, if there is no biblical warrant for it, why would I do it? Why would I teach others to do it, and why would I model it to others? We want our prayers to be guided by Scripture. We want to prosecute this battle according to the instructions of the Commander.

Our concern should be to pray **biblical prayers**. The teaching of Scripture should guide our prayers. We ought to use the language of Scripture and pray for those things that are in keeping with the will of God--**revealed in Scripture**.

Now I believe that it is God's will to protect His people. How does He do that? Through truth. When God's people embrace the truth, understand the truth, live the truth, and appropriate the truth, then they are taking every thought captive to obedience of Christ and waging effective warfare (**2 Cor. 10:3-5**). We can pray for people the way that Paul did (**Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-19; Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 1:9-12**). Remember, we are involved in a **truth war**--a battle for the minds of men waged with the truth, not imaginary hedges of thorns.

It **is biblical** to pray for God to sovereignly protect someone who is in danger. It **is biblical** to pray that God would deliver someone from the influence and power of Satan. It **is biblical** to pray that God would cause someone to come to a knowledge and love of the truth and be delivered from lies to truth, darkness to light and kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of Christ. Those are all biblical, intelligent, meaningful, prayers.

On the contrary, praying a "hedge of thorns" is neither meaningful nor biblical. It is just stringing together a few words that happen to be mentioned in various Bible passages and using it as a prayer weapon. Satan does not fear such prayers!

## **Conclusion**

Once again, if our Commander-in-Chief has not

commissioned us to prosecute the war in this manner, what business do we have doing it? Do we know better than He? Dare we presume that our methods are superior to His? If this were an effective warfare tool, do you not think He would have told us about it? Would we have to wrench verses from their context and abuse their meaning in order to derive a practice commissioned by God? Never.

The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.

Without Wax-

