



Spiritual Warfare

Part 10: Wrong Warfare - Spiritual Mapping

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What do you get when Christians abandon Scripture as the sole sufficient guide for faith and practice, and launch out to attack the enemy in their own strength and wisdom? You get “spiritual mapping” and the practice of “Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare.” It is difficult to point to a more disastrous, dangerous, and spiritually destructive practice in modern spiritual warfare theology than that of engaging “territorial spirits.”

The practice I am evaluating in this article is sometimes referred to as “Spiritual Mapping,” “Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare,” “Territorial Spirits,” or even just “Mapping.” This is perhaps the fastest-growing approach to evangelism in the church today. The practice and teaching is gaining ground in both charismatic and non-charismatic churches, and making dramatic inroads both here in the United States as well as on the foreign mission field.

The Practice Defined And Described

The practice of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare (SLSW) seeks to engage in intercessory prayer for different geographical locations to overcome and dislodge supposed demonic strongholds in those locations. SLSW teaches that there is an extensive demonic hierarchy over geographical areas which must be actively overcome through intercessory prayer and repentance before effective gospel ministry will be possible. According to SLSW practitioners, these demons must be confronted, bound, and removed before the gospel can effectively penetrate. These regional and geographic demons are referred to as “territorial spirits.” It is believed that territorial spirits become entrenched in different regions because of sins committed there. John Dawson has advocated *identificational repentance*, which is the practice of discovering the sin and guilt which gave the demon the foothold in the area and repenting of that sin in order to break the demon's grip.

“Mapping” is the related practice of determining the exact boundaries of territorial spirits assigned to different regions, nations, or cities. It is believed that the demons must be specifically identified and named in order to pray, bind, and exorcise them effectively. This practice has been made popular by George Otis, Jr., famous for his *Transformation* videos. Like Otis,

John Dawson encourages people to research their city's history in order to identify the particular blend of demonic forces which may be keeping people in spiritual darkness.

The teachings of John Dawson and George Otis have been promoted by C. Peter Wagner, who from 1991 to 1999 taught at Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission. During that period of time, hundreds of pastors, leaders, and missionaries were exposed to this practice.¹

The practice was virtually unheard of until the early 1980s, after a series of city-wide gospel campaigns in Latin America met with unexpected success. That success was attributed by the evangelists to days spent in prayer, wrestling against the powers of darkness.² A movement was born! Thanks to the charismatic influence of C. Peter Wagner, this teaching gained a full head of steam. In 1993 Wagner published a book titled, ***Breaking Strongholds In Your City: How to Use Spiritual Mapping to Make Your Prayers More Strategic, Effective and Targeted*** (Regal Publishers), in which he confessed that he had never heard of the term “spiritual mapping” until 1990. He admitted that it was an entirely new practice, but was “*one of the most important things the Spirit is saying to the churches in the 1990s. . .*”³ It is amazing what error abounds when we think the Spirit is saying something different today than He did 2,000 years ago. One wonders how the church ever evangelized millions, penetrated unreached people groups, and survived until today without this supposedly vital practice.

According to advocates of SLSW and spiritual mapping, once the particular sins that have brought demonic power over a city or geographical region have been identified, they must be repented of and renounced. Identifying these “spirits” is often the result of personalized revelation from the Holy Spirit in prayer.⁴

- 1 Other leaders in this movement include David Yonggi Cho, Cindy Jacobs, Dick Bernal, and Larry Lea. The ***A.D. 2000 United Prayer Track*** is the ministry currently headed by George Otis, Jr.
- 2 <http://www.plymothbrethren.org/article/418>
- 3 C. Peter Wagner, *Breaking Strongholds in Your City: How To Use Spiritual Mapping To Make Your Prayers More Strategic, Effective and Targeted* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1993), 11-12.
- 4 John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities For God: How To Break Spiritual Strongholds* (Lake Mary: Creation House, 1989), 154. Obviously I

In some cases, advocates of SLSW teach that the names of demons over geographic regions should be discovered. According to Wagner,

Another Latin American, Rita Cabezas, has done considerable research on the names of the highest levels of the hierarchy of Satan. I will not at this point describe her research methodology except to mention that the beginning stages were associated with her extensive psychological/deliverance practice and that it later evolved into receiving revelatory words of knowledge. She has discovered that directly under Satan are six worldwide principalities, named (allowing that this was done in Spanish) Damian, Asmodeo, Menguelesh, Arios, Beelzebub and Nosferasteus. Under each, she reports, are six governors over each nation. For example, those over Costa Rica are Shiebo, Quiebo, Ameneo, Mephistopheles, Nostradamus and Azazel. Those over the U.S.A. are Ralphes, Anoritho, Manchester, Apolion, Deviltook and one unnamed.⁵

To advocates of SLSW, knowing this information is essential to effective spiritual warfare and gospel ministry. These demons should be researched, known by name, prayed against, bound, rebuked and cast out **by name** through the unified prayers of God's people.

Biblical Support?

Most advocates of SLSW point to **Daniel 10:13** and the reference to the "prince of Persia" as support for this teaching. A look at this passage in its context reveals that this very veiled and scant reference does not support these practices at all.

Daniel was given a message which distressed him greatly. It was revealed to Daniel that the nation, in spite of their return from captivity, would be involved in many conflicts, a great war (**10:1**). Daniel was so distressed that he fasted and prayed for three weeks (v. 2). After three weeks, Daniel was visited by an angel⁶ who revealed that **"from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was**

would take issue with anyone who teaches that God is revealing to the church today information essential for the proclamation and success of the gospel.

- 5 C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoger, eds., *Wrestling with Dark Angels* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1990), pp. 84-85 as quoted in Thomas Ice & Robert Dean, Jr., *Overrun By Demons: The Church's New Preoccupation With The Demonic* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 31.
- 6 Some people take this to be the pre-incarnate Christ, The Angel Of The Lord, which I think is unlikely, since Christ would not need the assistance of Michael to defeat the prince of the Kingdom of Persia (10:13ff). On this occasion, God chose to use an angel to bring a message to Daniel. This was probably Gabriel, who earlier was used to bring a message to Daniel (see **Daniel 8:15-17**), though we cannot be sure.

withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia" (10:13). After the angelic messenger explained the vision and strengthened Daniel, he said, **"Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come. However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince" (10:21).**

This passage offers us a glimpse into the warfare waged in the spiritual realm that Paul mentions in **Ephesians 6**. It is a very interesting passage of Scripture and from it we can draw the following conclusions:

First, there is a very real spiritual battle being waged of which we are, for the most part, completely oblivious.

Second, there was a demon or evil spirit assigned to Persia and to Greece, whose primary goal was to oppose the plan and purpose of God in regards to those nations, and to oppose the people of God in those nations.⁷

Beyond that, we are not told anything. We are not told that nations today have the same type of "prince." We are not told what the names of the princes of Persia and Greece were. We are not told what the names of the princes of other nations are today. All we can conclude is that there was an evil spiritual force behind the rulers of the nations of Persia and Greece, probably in the same way that Satan was really the influence behind the King of Tyre (**Ezekiel 28:11-19**) and the king of Babylon (**Isaiah 14:3-21**).

Did Daniel pray against these evil spirits? Did he even know this resistance to Gabriel was taking place? Did Daniel cast down, bind, rebuke, or exorcise these spirits? Did this battle involve any humans whatsoever? The answer to all these questions is no. Daniel was not even asked to pray for Gabriel in his return mission to fight again with the prince of Persia (**Daniel 10:20-21**). This conflict was fought by God, through His angels in the heavenlies.

If this passage does not teach us to name and pray against demonic powers attached to various geographical locations, then what does it teach us? It teaches us that the battle is real and God is fighting it. It teaches us that there are real demonic forces which oppose, resist, and seek the ruin of the people of God. It teaches us that God's holy angels eventually triumph in God's power over all His enemies. It teaches us that Satan is the "god of this world"⁸ and that the whole world, including political rulers, and nations, lies under His sway.⁹ None of this should surprise us since we can glean the same information from other places of Scripture.

7 In the same sense, Michael the archangel is called a prince of Israel in **Daniel 12:1**, **"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise."** Michael has a special relationship to Israel (**Daniel 10:21; Jude 9**).

8 2 Corinthians 4:3-4.

9 1 John 5:19.

Other Problems

The practice of spiritual mapping and naming territorial spirits is fraught with problems.

First, it is without precedent or prescription in Scripture.

The Bible is silent about this. You will read your New Testament in vain looking for references to apostles or Christians engaged in spiritual mapping. The practice was not even invented until around 1990. It clearly cannot find its genesis in Scripture, or it would have been a practice of the church since the first century.

Paul never had to name demons, spiritually map cities, or engage in identificational repentance prior to taking the gospel into a new city. Oh, if only the Apostle had known this principle, he might have been successful in his endeavors! If only he had been as spiritual and wise as John Dawson and C. Peter Wagner! Imagine what Jesus and the apostles could have accomplished if they had taken their cues from these men!

There is not a single example or instruction in all of the Bible to support this nonsense. Not one! That leads us to a second problem.

Second, this practice is an entirely man-made, carnal, fleshly activity. We continually return to the principle stated at the beginning of this series,¹⁰ that we must let the Scriptures inform our methods of spiritual warfare. Our Commander-In-Chief has given us all the instructions and information necessary to wage this warfare. He has not left us without essential information. We are to wage the war in the manner He has prescribed, not in a manner prescribed by some teacher of questionable theology 1990 years after the Apostles.

The weapons of our warfare are not man-made and carnal (**2 Corinthians 10:3-5**). The practice of spiritual mapping is man-made and carnal. It is fleshly. It is entirely of human origin, a goofy invention of charismatic teachers who think God is currently revealing a practice for the church of today that He has withheld from His people for 19 centuries.

To adopt this practice is to abandon the God-ordained means of waging warfare—truth. It is to trade in a nuclear weapon for a cardboard sword. As with all man-made methods and fads, spiritual mapping will run its course, the books advocating it will fall out of print, and the teachers teaching it will pass from the scene. Unfortunately, another dangerous and disastrous, man-made fad will quickly take its place, deceiving and distracting believers from the real battle -- truth and the sufficiency of Scripture.

A third problem is the method by which information of the spiritual realm is gathered. Since the Bible is completely silent on the subject of the names of individual demons, the information about this must be gleaned from some source **outside of Scripture**. Please don't miss the obvious implication of this! We are told that knowing these demon's names, hierarchy, and geographical assignment is **essential** to effective spiritual warfare and the unhindered spread of the gospel. Yet Scripture does not

reveal that information. What does that tell you about Scripture? It must be *insufficient*. God has not revealed all that we need to know. We must go outside the Bible to get the good stuff! It is this completely inadequate view of Scripture that runs rampant in Charismatic circles and among advocates of this practice.

Take as an example the quote from Wagner cited above about the methods of Rita Cabezas who has supposedly "*done considerable research on the names of the highest levels of the hierarchy of Satan*"¹¹ in order to find out that under Satan were "*six worldwide principalities*."¹² Wagner indicates that this knowledge was gleaned in two ways: first, "*extensive psychological/deliverance practice*"¹³ and later, "*receiving revelatory words of knowledge*." That means that Cabezas gleaned some information from her direct interaction with demons during deliverance sessions (exorcisms), and other information was revealed by God personally to her through direct revelation.

Do we really think that we can trust a demon to give reliable information when asked for it? I have read books by Rebecca Brown and Mike Warnke in which they have claimed that when a demon is commanded to speak the truth and only the truth in the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God, they are bound and obligated to tell the truth. Really? How do we know that? Is there a verse somewhere in Scripture that tells us that? No. Does Scripture teach that we should be interviewing demon-possessed people in order to obtain knowledge about the satanic hierarchy? No.

Should we be trusting any information that comes from the prince of darkness, the father of lies (**John 8:44**)? We should not be basing theology, prayer, and warfare on it. Not only should we not be trusting it, we should not even be seeking it! This is total nonsense.

It means nothing to advocates of spiritual mapping to point out that Scripture is silent on the subject and that the apostles never prescribed nor practiced this method of spiritual warfare. To them, the Scriptures only serve to support what they receive through private revelation. Sure, the Bible does not give us the names of the six worldwide principalities of the satanic hierarchy, but God personally revealed that to someone. According to C. Peter Wagner, this is what "*the Spirit is saying to the churches in the 1990s. . .*"¹⁴ It is different than what the Spirit revealed to the church of the first century, and different than what the Spirit has been revealing to the churches for the last 1900 years.

This is what you get when you abandon Scripture as the sole sufficient source of information and revelation. The floodgates are opened to nearly any practice and any heresy. It is justified with, "The Lord is revealing this to me/us/the church by a word of knowledge. This is what God is showing us today. We have a *fresh word* from God for our generation." Of course that implies

11 *Wrestling*, p. 84-85.

12 *Ibid*.

13 Wagner would not comment on her methodology, but the mention of psychological practices makes one wonder if hypnotism was involved.

14 *Breaking Strongholds in Your City*, 11-12.

10 See Part 2 of this series titled, "Spiritual Warfare, Part 2: Our Source Of Intelligence."

that Scripture is the stale word, for a prior generation, a prior church, but is not really necessary for us. If God is revealing this type of essential information to us today, then really, there is no need for Scripture at all. I see it as an all-or-nothing issue.

In this case, we have “Christians” willing to set aside the more sure Word of God (**2 Peter 1:19**) in favor of personalized subjective revelation and even the testimony of demons. They affirm through this methodology that Scripture is not sufficient to equip us for the warfare, but the testimony of demons given during exorcisms, or personal subjective revelations from God will do the trick. That is tragic on so many levels!

A biblical view of spiritual warfare does not treat Scripture as an appendix for my personal revelations and the testimony of demons, but as the only sufficient source of truth by which the war is waged. Our Commander-in-Chief has not left us without adequate information, and He is not changing the battle plan in the middle of the war.

If God is revealing this information to these modern-day spiritual warfare “experts,” should we not be writing this in the back of our Bibles as additional revelation? Should it not be published with each Bible as the 67th book? Certainly, if this is what the Spirit is speaking to the church today, it is just as authoritative and relevant - dare I say, more so - than what the Spirit said to the church of the first century. After all, this is supposedly essential to the health and success of the church!

Fourth, this methodology diminishes the power and authority of the gospel. This should come as no surprise. If the Bible itself barely is treated with less credulity than personal revelation and the words of demons, it should come as no shock that the gospel gets minimized and diminished.

We are told that, prior to evangelizing a city, a region, or a nation, the area must be researched, repented for, and prayed for in a unified fashion. We are told that specific demonic strongholds and spirits, and even the demons themselves, must be addressed, rebuked, exorcised and cast down in order to break the hold of Satan and make a way for the gospel.

Not according to the Apostle Paul. The gospel itself is the “power of God unto salvation” (**Romans 1:16**). It needs no help. God is sovereign and will save whomever He wants, whenever He wants, and Satan does not, and cannot, stand in the way of God redeeming His elect.

The preaching of the Cross is attended by the Spirit of God (**1 Thess. 1:5**), and is powerful to the saving of the soul. Demonic strongholds and satanic activity notwithstanding. One thing and one thing only is necessary for God to redeem a sinner: the preaching of the gospel. This is what Paul was about (**Acts 20:20-24**).

The preaching of the gospel does not need our research into a city’s sins and history. It does not need our “identificational repentance,” our spiritual mapping, prayer walks, naming of territorial spirits or discovery of Satan’s hierarchy. If the success of the gospel depended on such fleshly, carnal, man-made activities, God would have revealed it in Scripture through the Apostles.

The gospel spread from Jerusalem (**Acts 1**) to the farthest reaches of the Roman empire (**Romans 15:17-25**) in only 30 years. How did it do this without prayer walks, spiritual mapping, and praying through demonic strongholds? How did the Apostles plant churches in idolatrous, demonic, fleshly, sinful cities like Corinth and Athens without identifying the six worldwide principalities and the names of demons supposedly assigned to oppress those regions?

Simple. They believed that people would be born again by the Spirit-empowered declaration of the gospel. The gospel causes people to be born again, and the entrance of the gospel breaks the powers of darkness and delivers captives from the kingdom of Satan (**Colossians 1:13-14**).

Does the gospel need the implementation of man-made spiritual warfare strategies for its success? Does the gospel require we glean intelligence from demons and pray accordingly to be effective? The power of the gospel resides in the will of the Trinity to bring redemption to God’s elect through the preaching of it.

This methodology makes the success of evangelism dependent upon human ingenuity and activity rather than the sovereignty and power of God.

Fifth, and I have saved this for last, it is just a silly practice. Let’s accept for a moment that everything that SLSW and spiritual mapping advocates claim is true. Don’t you think that Satan would just shuffle his hierarchy around every few weeks to keep us off balance? If knowing the names and territories of demons gives us the ability to bring down Satanic strongholds, don’t you think that after we had interviewed enough demons and received enough words of knowledge, Satan would just reassign his minions?

If the demon assigned to Kootenai is named “Luciferious,”¹⁵ and the success of evangelism in our city depended on naming and praying specifically against this demon, then once we found that out, don’t you think Satan would just give the demon of Ponderay control over Kootenai, and reassign Luciferious to Ponderay? Then we would be back at square one! He would keep us forever guessing, chasing shadows, trying to hit a moving target. Then we would have to interview more demons and get more words of knowledge to find the name of the new demon ruler assigned to Kootenai. Minutes later, he would be reassigned and we would be back at the beginning.

If we have identified these spiritual strongholds, named them by name, cast them down, rebuked them, and exorcised them, then why after 20 years of this superior knowledge from God have we gained no ground? Should not the named and mapped regions be filled with the gospel, sound doctrine, and good churches? Yet can anyone name a single city in which this nonsense has been employed which has experienced dramatic revival and gospel renewal? Seattle, San Francisco, Miami and Michigan are all still in the clutches of the evil one?

¹⁵ I am just picking a demon-sounding name out of the air for this!

Nothing But A Distraction

Satan is content to have Christians focus their time, attention, efforts, and prayers on things that accomplish nothing. He is delighted if we use every man-made, silly convention under the sun to fight him. So long as Christians are not resting in the sufficiency of Scripture (truth) and fighting the war against His lies with the truth (**2 Cor. 10:3-5**), and proclaiming the gospel of truth, his kingdom can advance.

Well meaning, but deceived Christians have bought his lie that Scripture is not sufficient. He has thus removed from the church, it's one, infinitely powerful weapon. He has distracted the soldiers with goofy games and silly strategies that are powerless. They have the appearance of real warfare, but the substance of a shadow. They are illusions and distractions.

The one true war - the truth war - wages on. The church has laid aside truth and embraced mysticism. Our armory has been exchanged for carnal weapons of man's making and man's devising. The word of God takes a back seat to the testimony of demons. That is the sad state of evangelicalism's view of spiritual warfare. Spiritual mapping and naming demons is just one manifestation of it.

Test all things, and hold fast to that which is true!

Without Wax -

