

At times the unexpected happens us to, and it may be tragic. Using the Bible, this book will help you make sense out of things that make no sense. We will pull back the curtain of the unexpected to find answers to you questions.

SHINING LIGHT INTO THE DARKNESS:
Finding God's Purposes and Hope When Life's Events Make No Sense
By Mark Barrett

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MARK BARRETT

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C H A P T E R

1

Where Is God When Things Go Wrong?

Genesis 39:20–21

Have you ever had one of those days, or weeks, or even years when everything seems to be going wrong? You called 911, and you were put on hold. You're only forty-nine years old, and you were offered the senior's discount. You're trying to lose weight, and you gained five pounds. On a more serious note, you go to the doctor one day and discover you have cancer. Or you've been trying to have a child and you miscarry. The bills were weighing heavy on you, and you lost your job. I'm pretty sure most people reading this know what I'm talking about, and your own stories are filling your thoughts as you read. It's the scenario that you're just walking through life, minding your own business, when *wham*, you get hit in the head with a two-by-four and you think, "God, where are you? I've been serving you, I've been living for you, why have you let me down like this? I don't deserve it."

Those were my exact thoughts after Nathan took his own life. My wife and I had raised him in a Christian home. We had read to him from the Bible, prayed with him, taught him godly principles, and exemplified a godly lifestyle the best we could. He was always a gentle boy and never needed harsh discipline. He had a quiet nature, what some would call an introverted nature. This made it seem like he didn't have many needs, and if he did, he didn't express them but internalized them. He attended two years of a wonderful Bible

school and was flourishing in his walk with God and the direction of his life. He had long-term plans of becoming a missionary. And then *wham*, out of nowhere the unthought-of happened. No one would have ever considered gentle Nathan could even carry out such an act. Suicide would have been the furthest thing from our minds. In fact, when the police showed up at our door and told us what happened, I told them that it was not possible for him to do such a thing. I said that he must have been murdered and wondered if they had dusted for fingerprints to see who committed this crime against him. To this day I cannot imagine the pain that led our son to take his own life.

When sudden tragedy occurs, when things happen we would have never anticipated could happen, it is easy for us to turn from God and blame Him for the bad things that occur, whether to us or in our world. We conclude, “How could a loving God ever allow such an awful thing to happen?” I certainly asked that same question when Nathan died. I didn’t blame God, but I wondered how God could allow it to happen. I still struggle today with questions that relate to the “Why?” and the “Why didn’t God?” However, God’s Word helped me in answering these questions.

Let’s be reminded of Joseph of the Old Testament. Joseph had more than his share of dark days and nights. I’m sure you remember the story of how his brothers were jealous of him because of the favoritism shown him by his father Jacob. One day Jacob sent Joseph out to the fields to check on his brothers and see if they were all right. When his brother saw him coming, they plotted against him. They took him and threw him into a pit, and then they sold him to a trading caravan headed to Egypt, and from there he was sold as a slave.

His story can be found in Genesis 39:20, which says, “Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison.” He was put into a dark, dirty dungeon with some of the roughest characters in all of Egypt, and not because he had done something wrong but because he had done something right. He wasn’t there because of a bad crime, but because of a good character. In fact, for a good part of his life his tombstone could have read “Nice guys finish last.” And yet through it all, he remained a nice guy. The story of

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Joseph gives us some lessons about how to make it when everything goes wrong.

It is no coincidence that at the beginning of the entire story about Joseph that we read about the dream he had. The dream is found in Genesis 37. His dream was prophetic by way of a promise to Joseph, and a lesson we're going to learn from this is that when everything goes wrong, remember the promises of God.

Let's take a look at the first dream as Joseph told it, found in Genesis 37:7, "There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf." That was a dream about how God was going to elevate Joseph above the world's resources. The second dream is found in Genesis 37:9, "Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, 'Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.'" In this dream, God told him that he was going to be elevated above the world's rulers.

Now should he have kept these dreams to himself? Could it be that when he shared them he sounded a little boastful in his tone? We don't know for sure, but maybe. Furthermore, maybe that's why his brothers were jealous. However, the reality is that these were dreams that God had given to Joseph, and God used the immaturity of Joseph and even the way in which he shared the dreams with his family to get Joseph to the right country and in the right position so that He could fulfill these dreams.

And all the while Joseph was going through those dark days, and all the while things seemed to keep going wrong for him, in all those dark days, God was preparing Joseph and training him for his future duties. And in the back of Joseph's mind was the memory that God had promised him elevation and exaltation.

You see, when dark and dreary nights come into our lives, instead of sinking on the premises, we need to stand on the promises. If it were not for the promises of God's Word, I am not certain how Barbara and I could have endured and walked through those first dark days after Nathan's death. It felt like we had been abandoned by God. Our world had completely caved in and the ground had been

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taken out from under our feet and we had no strength in ourselves. But we kept turning to God's Word to find help and hope. Some days I would read the Bible and feel like I was looking at blank pages. Other days I would find a verse or a thought that would encourage and refresh me. But it was remaining in the Word, even when I didn't feel I was getting anything out of it, that gave me hope and strength to walk through the day. In my journal I would write down verses from the Scripture that would remind me that God is faithful and that He loves me and cares for me no matter what. These verses became my supply line of comfort and gave me a solid foundation to stand on when it felt like there was none.

Barbara

Although we lost the same person, our son, Mark and I grieved very differently. Yet the common ground we both have is God's Word. I have been reminded many times over the years, but especially during this time since 2017, that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). At the time of Nathan's death, I had been a Christian for forty-six years. I received Christ as my Savior when I was nine years old. Through the years I have made it a practice to memorize Scripture. Why do I share this? Because God's Word was and is the foundation that held strong through the absolute worst storm of my life. I turned to my Bible even on those days when it might not have seemed to help, but I just needed to do it out of habit. It was midfall, and I had been reading through the Psalms, looking for encouragement yet not really having anything speak fresh to me. Then I started Psalm 40, "I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire. He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my heart a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord." Oh, my! The blessing of those three verses! It struck me that my job was to wait patiently for the Lord and

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everything else was up to Him. He would turn to me, hear my cry, lift me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire, set my feet on rock, giving me a firm place to stand. He would even put a new song in my heart, a hymn of praise to my God. I kept reading through the Psalms, but it was these three verses that I clung to and am still reminded of when I grow impatient with this process of healing and learning to adjust to a life I never ever thought I would have to live.”

I can almost hear Joseph now as he makes the pit and the prison his personal platform of praise, living in the full confidence that God’s promise for him would be fulfilled. In fact, I think that if the song would have been written, Joseph would have been singing it. The words go like this: “Standing on the promises that cannot fail, When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, by the living word of God I shall prevail, standing on the promises of God.” I’ll tell you from personal experience that when the days were dark and when the devil had come and said to me, “What does your future look like now, Pastor?” my response has been “My future looks as bright as the promises of God.” When things go wrong, remember the promises of God.

Also, when things go wrong, rely on the providence of God. Let’s think about what Joseph had to go through, and let’s decide how we would feel about what he went through if we were in his shoes.

Joseph’s brothers were jealous of him and abused him. He was thrown into a pit by his brothers near a town called Dothan, which was known for its pits. There was a lack of water in Dothan, so they dug pits or cisterns to collect rainwater in them. They were either hollowed out of limestone bedrock or dug into the ground and lined with plaster. Since most of Israel’s rainfall is confined to three or four months of the year, these cisterns collected the rainwater and made it available during the dry season. It wasn’t unusual that there wasn’t any water in them during this part of the year. Joseph was thrown into one of those dry pits.

From there he was sold as a slave and taken to Egypt, and then his owner’s wife lied about him trying to seduce her. It was actually

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the other way around, but Joseph continually rejected her advances. Therefore, Joseph's master, Potiphar, had him thrown into a dungeon where he was forgotten about.

Joseph had lost his freedom because he would not compromise his purity, and he wouldn't corrupt his integrity, and he refused to cast away his dignity. In other words, he wasn't suffering for doing wrong, but for doing what was right. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:20, "For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God." We tend to think that if something bad happens to a good person it's because they were doing something wrong. But in reality, it could be that something bad happened because they were doing something right. Maybe it's a bit like the story of the pastor who was coming home from a missions trip. One of the church members met him at the airport, and the pastor asked how things were going. The church member said, "I've got some bad news. While you were gone, a cyclone came through town and tore my house down." The pastor responded, "To be honest with you, I've been praying for you, and I've been concerned about the way you've been living, and I think this was God's punishment on you." The church member replied, "It blew your house down too." Let's be careful about assigning blame.

Like most people who are going through deep waters that don't have an explanation, Joseph must have experienced times of doubt and confusion during the thirteen years he was a slave and in prison. It's difficult going through trials when you're doing good and you think you should be having good times. When you live a pure life, your eating habits are well-adjusted, and you exercise, yet you still end up with heart disease, it can be confusing. When you work hard at your job and end up being laid off, it can be frustrating. When you pour your heart into a relationship and it goes sour, it can be heart-breaking. When you raise a child and pour your love into him and he takes his own life, your world is turned upside down.

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Barbara

Sometimes, motherhood is planned and other times not. When I was just a young girl of eight, I remember being mesmerized with a young baby who was visiting our home with her mother. The first thoughts of what I wanted for my future unfolded: I wanted to be a mother. The idea was planted and would obviously take years to happen. Many years passed, and I found myself at a crossroad in my job, as the company I worked for was being bought out. The last words my boss said to me were words of encouragement to forge on in the business world. With no hesitation, my words were “All I want to be is a wife and mother.” I had also felt a call to ministry, but God had not revealed what that would look like and I had only just started dating Mark in the previous couple of months. We would be married within the year, and our boys would start arriving in two-year intervals just three and a half years later. A common thought at the time was to have two children to keep things simple. Ha! Our family somehow didn’t feel complete. We had our third and final son and called him Nathan. Ironically, his name means gift. There had been some difficult things that we had been processing at the time, and to name him Nathan seemed so fitting—a gift in the midst of difficulties. Little did we know that our beautiful gift from God would yield so much pain twenty-six years later. Yet losing Nathan ushered in a new period of searching and growth that would redefine the joy that his name brings—the gift of grief.

The reality is that there are going to be times when you can’t make sense of sorrow. There are times when the math just doesn’t add up. In fact, the hardest things in life to stand are the things we don’t understand. As a pastor for nearly forty years, I’ve seen this so many times in people’s lives. I’ve seen mates walk away from their marriages without warning to the other one. I’ve performed funerals for children who died in accidents. I’ve sat by the bedside of people who were dying, who just weeks before seemed to be healthy and robust.

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But there is a great truth we need to remember from Joseph's life, which is that just because things don't make sense to us, that doesn't mean they don't make sense. Everything that happens makes sense to God. What is hidden from us isn't hidden from God. There are going to be times that faith is going to have to swim where reason can't even wade because we believe God knows what He is doing.

When all Joseph could see was the prison, God could see the palace. That's why Joseph could say in Genesis 50:20, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive." The next time life deals you a bad hand, remember these two prison promises. These are lessons I learned the first few months after Nathan's death.

The first one comes from Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." That verse is so familiar to many of us who have been followers of Christ for a long time that we often don't take it as seriously as we should. This verse came to life for me the months after our tragedy. You see, we don't always see it in the immediate. It might take God some time to bring it about. We might even grow impatient in waiting. But just like Jesus turned the water into wine, God will take something bad that has happened to us and turn it into something good. We don't have to understand the bad thing that has happened, and we don't even have to understand the promise. But what we do have to do is to believe what God has said and begin to live in the hope of our future in God. Almost immediately after Nathan's death, both Barbara and I agreed that God had to use this tragedy for good in some way. To be honest, we're still waiting for that promise to be fulfilled. We haven't seen people turn to the Lord because of it. We haven't seen any great transformation in the lives of people yet. But we believe in this promise from the Lord, and we're continuing to live our life in light of it, and we know that God will turn it into something good.

The second prison promise is found in Psalm 138:8, "The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever; Do not forsake the works of Your hands." In other words, the

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Lord will surely fulfill His purpose for our life, and we can rely on the providence of God to do so.

Another lesson we learn from Joseph's life is that when everything goes wrong, we can rest in the presence of God. Joseph was girded by the promises of God, he was guided by the providence of God, and he was guarded by the presence of God. Genesis 39:2 says, "The Lord was with Joseph." Verse 3 says, "His master saw that the Lord was with him." Verse 21 says, "But the Lord was with Joseph." In verse 23, we're told, "Because the Lord was with him." Every step of the way God was with Joseph. He was with Joseph when he was down in the pit. He was with him when he was a slave. And God never forgot about him when he was in prison. God was with Joseph in the same way that when Noah was in the ark, navigating his way through the storm, God was with him. In the same way that when the three Hebrew men were thrown into the fiery furnace, God got into the fire with them. In the same way that when Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, God shut the mouths of the lions because he was there with Daniel. When the disciples were in that boat on the stormy sea, Jesus got into the boat with them. And as children of God, there might be times when we feel lonely and deserted, but it's impossible for us to ever be alone. No matter how deep the water, you never drown. No matter how hot the furnace, you'll never burn because you can count on the presence of God. When Nathan died, for the first week we had lots of friends who came to visit us and comfort us. Our other two sons and wives came to be with us and to attend the funeral. But then after the funeral, everyone left, and there was just Barbara and me. The house was too quiet. After a while the phone stopped ringing, and everyone else went back to work to their own families and their own lives. We would see people in the stores, at church, or in a Bible study; and for other people life returned to normal. Rarely did anyone ask us how we were doing, how we were handling life, how they could be praying for us. It was very lonely on the people side, but we were comforted in knowing that God had never left us and that He was walking with us through the storm. We could feel His hand upon us giving us strength to handle the journey each day. The journey isn't over yet. Almost four years later we are

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still grieving our loss. Some days we grieve in tears, and some days there is simply a feeling of emptiness. This is the process of grief that we need to go through and should not push away and we should embrace as part of the healing process.

When it seems like everything is going wrong and there is no end in sight, we need to respond with the patience of God.

In Genesis 39:20, we are told, “Then Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison.” Keep in mind that Joseph was only about seventeen years old at the time. Genesis 41:46 tells us, “Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.” Put those two verses together and you realize Joseph was in prison for thirteen years for doing what was right. He was in prison because of his jealous brothers, a lying woman, and an ungrateful butler. It’s amazing to me that all during his time in prison he never got bitter, he never held a grudge, and he never took revenge. When he finally became the prime minister of Egypt, he never mentioned his brothers who sold him into slavery, he never said anything about Potiphar’s wife who had seduced him and lied about him and had him thrown into prison, he never uttered a word about the butler who forgot to mention Joseph after Joseph had gotten him about of prison, but he just kept on keeping on, loving and living for God, keeping his mind and heart on God’s promises.

Here’s the key to Joseph’s success in all that he did and to his steady mind. His commitment was dependent on an unfailing, all-knowing, ever-present God. Someone has said that you can tell the size of a Christian by what it takes to stop him. I know of so many Christians who have gone through difficult days, and they are filled with bitterness, haunted with revenge, and they shake their fist at God and say, “Is this the best You have for me? Because if it is, I don’t want any part of it.” Barbara and I never had those thoughts. We were and we are confident that because God is an all-knowing God, He knew infinitely what Nathan was going through, that He was there by His spirit when Nathan took his last breath but for some reason allowed it anyway. We cannot understand all the reasons, for

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who can know the mind of God? But we are confident that God has a plan, and we are standing on His promises. The enemy intended this for evil, but God intended it for good. Martin Luther said something that might not seem earth-shattering, but it says a lot about him. He said, “Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I will still plant my little apple tree and pay my debts.” What he was saying is that no matter what happens tomorrow, he was going to do what is right, be right, and live right. You see, true commitment is not conditional. If a person will not serve God in a prison, then he’s not fit to serve God in a palace.

Where is God when everything or even some things go wrong? Where is He when sleep won’t come? Where is He when we wake up in a hospital bed with pain that will not stop? Where is He when the unthinkable happens in our lives? Let me assure you that when you hurt, God hurts. When you are stuck in your prison, God is right there with you even as He was with Joseph. Why did Jesus weep at the tomb of Lazarus when He knew He was going to raise him from the dead? Because He weeps with us and understands our sorrows. When no one listens to you, God listens. When you wipe away tears of loneliness, or frustration, or anguish, in heaven there is a pierced hand approaching a heavenly face and wiping a tear.

Sometimes storms of life come along to teach us that God is in control and that we can lean on Him. It is those times that God is trying to draw us closer to Himself. Oh, and one more thing. There isn’t anything louder than the silence of our heavenly father. Don’t interpret His silence as a lack of love because we know when everything goes wrong, God is right here with us.

C H A P T E R

7

Exposing Satan's War Plan

1 Timothy 1:18

Everyone of us today are in a war, but very few people are even aware that it's happening. Every day we turn on the news and hear about wars going on around the world. We hear about the war against ISIS. We hear about the war in Syria that has caused a refugee crisis. We hear of the wars in Pakistan, Myanmar, and the Ukraine. However, when was the last time you turned on the news and heard a report about the spiritual war that has been going on for thousands of years, has caused mass casualties, and is threatening to destroy lives every day?

John 10:10 tells us, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." The thief Jesus is referring to is none other than Satan and all his demons. Satan's only purpose in this world is to steal God's joy from people, to destroy people's lives, and even to kill people before they can enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ, or to remove Christians from the earth so that they cannot effectively serve Christ. We believe our son Nathan was in a spiritual war that eventually took his life. Nathan was a genuine servant of the Lord and had so much potential for making an impact for the sake of Christ. He was serving in winter Christian camps and was planning to become a missionary in camping ministry. He served in the youth ministry of our church, and he was constantly helping his friends with whatever needs they had, whether that be helping someone to move or helping someone to repair car brakes. Yet he was in a spiritual battle that he may not

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have even known he was in or had not figured out how to fight. He seems to have been struggling to find joy but probably didn't understand the biblical definition of joy as will be described in a future chapter. We believe that he listened to Satan's lies that told him he could never be good enough or to measure up to the standards he had set in his own life. I don't believe Nathan truly grasped the goodness of God's grace as described earlier in this book. I believe he was on a journey toward something he could never find because it was a dead-end journey that Satan deceived him into believing was true, but it was a lie.

Barbara

Very early on in our marriage, I realized I was a perfectionist. Although I lived a very full life as a young adult by being involved in my church and having a good job, I had lived at home until Mark and I married. I didn't realize it until we were in our own space and had opportunities of my own that I was a bit of a perfectionist. As a student and then an employee, it can be looked on as just having a good work ethic, which is highly acceptable and necessary. But a few months into our marriage, we were having friends in for supper. I made a pecan pie. Simple enough, except that it was about the second pie crust I made and the crust was far from perfect. As the pie baked, the imperfections (i.e., cracks) expanded. Pecan pie, being syrupy, leaked through the crust. I took a look at it, and I refused to serve it. Mark and I tried it the next day, and interestingly enough, it tasted fine—in fact, just like a pecan pie should! Almost instantly I realized how foolish I was and also that I had the tendencies of perfectionism. I also determined that I would not allow my life to be ruled that way. It may have been then that the truth in Philippians 1:6 took root, “Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

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I believe this is an example of how Satan can deceive anyone and in this case a believer. Perfectionism removes the power of God's grace in our lives as it allows us to trust in our abilities as opposed to the power of God. If you had asked us about perfectionism and Nathan before he died, we probably would have said that he had a great work ethic, but we didn't see his need or striving for perfection at that point. He was also very laidback in many ways, and I respected him for that and appreciated how his example encouraged me to "chill" at times. Again, I think now that this is another way that Satan deceived us as parents. So many people today are struggling with listening to Satan's lies, and they don't even identify where the struggle comes from, things like insecurity, depression, and anxiety, and yes, perfectionism. Some have become addicted to something—i.e., work, alcohol, drugs, shopping, etc.—to cover their pain; others are striving for joy, or peace, or comfort through their jobs or family or friends. They are in a spiritual war and have not identified it as such. I, too, have struggled with perfectionism. I didn't identify it until I was in my late thirties. I was working on a project with a friend, building an island for our kitchen. In the middle of the project my friend looked at me and said, "You're such a perfectionist." Of course, I disagreed with him and went home and told Barb what he had said about me. She shrugged her shoulders and said, "Yes, you are. Didn't you know that?" Ever since that incident, I have identified areas in my life where I am a perfectionist: in my preaching, in taking care of my car, and in other trivial things that really shouldn't matter that much. Sometimes my perfectionist personality has led to depressive days because in my own mind I had not lived up to my own expectations. It is a serious issue in the Christian life.

Second Corinthians 11:14 warns us that "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." He will trick us into believing that the light we are following is the true light, and he does it so effectively that we are caught in his trap without even realizing it, like the proverbial frog in the kettle. We blindly continue pursuing his false light until it destroys our life. It happens to Christians and non-Christians alike. Non-Christians have no filter of discernment, but the Bible gives ample warning to Christians if we will look and listen.

In this chapter I will be exposing the war plan of Satan. We will be looking at what it means to be in a spiritual battle. After Nathan died, I was so angry at what the devil had done and what Nathan had allowed the devil to do that I went into a half-hour rant one evening in the privacy of my room. I never, ever talk to Satan, but that night I was so angry that I told him that although he thinks he got away with something and although he may have pulled the wool over Nathan's eyes, he just picked a fight with me and God. I told him that I would do everything in my power to expose his evil, deceptive darkness. I lectured him that he is a defeated foe and that a day is coming soon when he would be cast into outer darkness forever and that until that time I would warn people about his schemes, tell people about God's grace and forgiveness that will set them free from Satan's bondage, and that no stone would go unturned to expose his lies. I said so much more, but you get the idea. This chapter and other chapters to follow are my deliverance on that promise. Please read carefully, take it all in, underline, and look at the scriptures I share with you from the Bible, and then share it with others who are also being deceived by the enemy. We are at war, but we are fighting a defeated enemy. We need to make a choice to expose him for who he is.

The text I will be exploring is found in 1 Timothy 1:18–20. Dr. John MacArthur's writings and sermons on this subject have offered some tremendous insights that have helped me in understanding this text. This is what the text says: "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."

I am not an expert in the Greek language, but Dr. MacArthur says that the word *warfare* comes from a Greek word from which we get our word *strategy*. It means to fight as a soldier and to fight a noble campaign. In other words, the spiritual war we are in is not simply a skirmish and it is not simply a brief fight, but it is a long-term, continual campaign that Satan is using against us. The reason the apostle Paul wrote this letter to Timothy and the reason it has

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been passed down to us is to gear us up for fighting an excellent campaign. What Paul has in mind is not a human, physical war but a spiritual war that can affect us physically. As Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, he was aware that our spiritual enemy had infiltrated the church in Ephesus. Error was being taught in the church. False leaders were in positions of prominence and power and authority, and godliness was under attack. What Paul said to Timothy in these three verses is instructive to all of us because we are all engaged in the same spiritual campaign against us today. Maybe you are thinking of a church or an individual that is like the church in Ephesus when Paul wrote this letter, a church or a person under attack.

First, this war is primarily between God and Satan. It is a war between God and His truth and Satan and his lies. It is a war between God and His will and Satan and his will. Furthermore, it is a war that is not only fought between God and Satan but also between demons and holy angels, and between ungodly and godly men.

So the war begins at the level of God and Satan, but then it filters its way down to us. There are a number of elements involved in this war. In Luke 14 Jesus gave us an obvious principle that He applied to this subject in verse 31 when He said, "Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?" What Jesus is saying is that no king goes to war unless he understands the terms of battle. The king knows beforehand the power of his enemy, and he knows what is at stake when he goes into battle. I fear this is what has escaped the minds of so many modern-day believers today. So many people have bought into easy believism and cheap grace and the idea that Jesus is where you go to get all the goodies. They have missed the fact that we are in a spiritual battle and that life will not always be easy and that the stakes are high.

Where did this warfare originate? In the beginning of time, there was no war and there was no rebellion. Everything in God's universe and in the world were in perfect harmony with one another. Then there came a disastrous event that set God and Satan against one another for all eternity. We see it unfold for us in Ezekiel 28. Before

we get to that prophecy, let me set the stage for you. Ezekiel is giving a prophecy against a place called Tyre. Tyre is a godless city we are introduced to in Ezekiel 26 and where God pronounced judgment on this city. It is located in the present-day Lebanon. Then in chapter 27, we read a kind of a funeral song about what is going to happen to Tyre. Reading further into chapter 28, in speaking against Tyre, Ezekiel goes beyond Tyre and its king and talks about the source of the king's antagonism against God. We learn that the king of Tyre is simply a pawn in the activity of Satan and that Satan is actually using the king to accomplish his purposes against God. We know from studying other Old Testament scriptures and Daniel's prophecy that Satan is behind all the godless nations of the world and that he and his demons are energizing a host of anti-God activities in the world. It was no different for Tyre. Although there was a king of Tyre, he was just a tool in the hand of the one behind the scenes, which really involves a warfare between God and Satan. We see this beginning in verse 11, "Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me." Ezekiel is referring to himself. He continues in verse 12, "Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre." What follows in verse 12 could not be referring to a human being when he says, "Thus says the Lord God: 'You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.'" The word *signet* as translated in the ESV is referring to being sealed or being made complete. When you place a letter in an envelope, you seal the flap closed. It means to be consummated. In this passage the prophet is referring to Satan as having been given the seal of perfection, in that he was perfectly created by God. I don't know of any human being that we could say that of. Verse 12 goes on to say that Satan was "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty." You will never be able to say of a human being that he is full of wisdom or not lacking in wisdom and perfect in beauty.

Furthermore, verse 13a says, "You were in Eden, the garden of God." That statement cannot be referring to the king of Tyre, as he was not in the garden of Eden. Rather, the prophet is thinking about the serpent or the devil who was in the garden and tempted Adam and Eve. As an aside, this also means that the fall of Satan and the angels must have occurred sometime after the creation and occu-

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pation of the garden and sometime before Satan was turned into a serpent.

Here is something else I want you to see about our adversary, the devil. Verse 13c goes on to give a description of Satan's person as God created him. I feel the NKJV carries the clearest translation of this portion of scripture. "The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created." The NASB translates it as "The workmanship of your settings and sockets." The ESV translates it as "Your settings and your engravings." *Timbrels, settings* are small drums like those used to beat out the timing for a fife player. A fife is a small, high-pitched, transverse flute used primarily to accompany drums in a military or marching band. *Pipes, sockets* probably refer to tubes used to produce tones by blowing air through them, as in a pipe organ. I believe this is a reference to Satan's musical ability given to him by God. The *timbrels and pipes* are a reference to his vocal chords.

The prophet goes on to tell us why Satan may have needed these musical abilities in verse 14, "You were an anointed guardian cherub" (ESV). Let me help you to understand what that means. If you go to Ezekiel 10, we find a vision of the heavenly throne of God. It is a very strange picture of a wheel within a wheel. We also read of four cherubim standing at the four corners of the throne of God, and their job was to bring glory and praise to God. Satan was the "anointed guardian cherub." His job was to cover the mercy seat of atonement where sacrifice was made for the sin of man. He was the fifth cherub, which you don't see in Ezekiel 10 because he had already fallen. However, his job was a bit like a choir director, leading praises to God from the throne of God. Satan wasn't sent out to do other activities for God, but he was assigned to the throne room of God to bring praise to Him. The timbrels and pipes would have come in handy for this service to God.

Now when Satan fell from heaven, he did not lose his musical abilities. However, now he does not use them to bring glory to God, but rather to turn God's creatures against God. I believe his expertise in music can be seen in some of the music of our day as he influences

people through certain music. You see, Satan knows his music and he hates the Lord, and that's a dangerous combination.

Also, notice verse 14 says, "I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God" (ESV). That means that God created angels to fit into a ranking. So there are cherubim and seraphim. In addition, there are rulers and principalities and powers. Those are all terms of different positions or rankings in the hierarchy of the angels. Satan had been set as the supreme and anointed cherub. "In the midst of the stones of fire you walked" (verse 14c). Angels are not omnipresent like God is. They can be in only one place at a time. Satan's place was in the presence of God. Other angels could be absent from the presence of God doing other tasks for God, but not Satan. He was always with God. Verse 15a goes on to say, "You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created." Again, you cannot say that of any human being. He is emphasizing the absolute perfection of this creature. Then disaster strikes. Verse 15 continues, "till unrighteousness was found in you." Here we find the beginning of spiritual warfare as Satan pits himself against God. We are not certain how this happened because he lived in a perfect and sinless environment as a sinless and perfect creature. The only evidence we can find is found in verse 16, where it says, "In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned." Somehow this angel became so enamoured with his own beauty and wisdom that pride built up inside of him and defiled him.

We find further evidence of the sin of Satan by going to Isaiah 14. Here again we find a prophecy indicating a greater power that is behind the scenes. This prophecy has to do with Babylon and its destruction. However, there was a greater power behind Babylon, in the same way there was a greater power behind Tyre. We find the power source in verse 12a, "How you have fallen from heaven, you star of the morning, son of the dawn!" (ESV). NKJV puts it this way: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning." The word *Lucifer* was not a direct Hebrew translation, but rather it is taken from the Latin. Lucifer is an accurate translation of *morning star* in Latin, but not if you are translating it from Hebrew. The word *Lucifer*, therefore, is not a proper name but is the Latin word

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for *morning star* or *day star*. It is probably a reference to the mortal Babylonian ruler. However, it seems to go beyond a description of a mortal king. If Jesus's reference in Luke 10:18, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like lightning," and John's in Revelation 19:1, "Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth," had this passage in mind, then there must be a secondary meaning to the passage. It seems to be referring to a Babylonian king and predicting his fall. Then Jesus and John used this text to indicate that Satan would fall. I recognize there is an argument for Isaiah 14 not being a description of Satan, and I could probably go on to give an argument on both sides. However, I am convinced this is a description of Satan.

To show how elevated this creature was, in Revelation 22:16, when God wanted to talk about the brilliance and magnificence of Christ, He calls Him "the bright and morning star." As I already indicated, here in Isaiah the name Lucifer in the Latin means "day star, son of morning." This shows us the marvelous glory of this creature. Then the prophet goes on to tell of the sin that rose up in his heart in verse 13, "But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north.'" Did you notice how many times the phrase *I will* is used? Clearly the sin was pride. Lucifer was so enamoured with his own beauty, and he was so close to God that he became jealous of God and wanted to be equal to God. It is the same sin that was found in the garden when Satan said to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:5, "On the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil." The very thing Lucifer wanted for himself is what he tempted Adam and Eve with. Isaiah 14:13 goes on to say, "But you said in your heart." Again, this sin is one that issues forth from the heart. It is invented by Lucifer. In essence, he said to himself, "It isn't enough for me where I am, but I want to go higher. I want to be at the very dwelling place of God and take my place with Him." Verse 13b continues, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God." The *stars* are the other angels. He is saying, "Even though I'm the leading angel, I will go beyond all the other

angels.” Verse 14 goes on to say, “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds.” John MacArthur explains that in the Hebrew language the word *clouds* is singular and should be translated *cloud*. He is referring to the Shekinah glory of God. Lucifer was saying, “I am going to be above the height of God’s glory.” It is out of this self-generated sin that a spiritual warfare began.

God responded to this attack in verse 15 with a counter attack and says, “But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.” Essentially God is saying that He would take Lucifer on and that He would devastate him.

Now you understand who Satan is and the nature of the supernatural conflict we are in. It is a conflict that is basically between God and Satan. It is not simply a little skirmish, but it is going on all the time, every single day, every day of the year. We can see the conflict in live action in the book of Job, where in chapter 1 Satan is described as wandering here and there in the earth. Then having appeared before the throne of God, he challenged God as to who Job would follow if God allowed everything to be taken away from him. First, this shows us that Satan is and will always be accountable to God and can do nothing without His permission. Second, it shows us that Satan is always trying to get one up on God, and in doing so he is attempting to diminish the power of God, the glory of God, the work of God, the purpose of God, and the will of God. This is the enemy we are up against today, and we need to take the battle seriously.

Maybe you are wondering how you fit into this conflict. If it is a conflict between God and Satan, then where do we as followers of Jesus Christ and humanity fit into the battle? First, Satan isn’t alone in this conflict. It is in Revelation 12:3 where we read, “And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.” This verse is the summation of all forms of anti-God world governments. Satan is depicted as having ten horns because he is the supreme ruler of governments. So this is a description of Satan and how he embodies all the evil of the systems of man. Verse 4a goes on to say, “His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.” When God cast Lucifer out of heaven, he took with him one-third of all the

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other angels of heaven. We don't know how many angels that entails, but they number more than we can count. The Bible talks about the angels in terms of ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, which in the Greek language is the largest Greek word to express numeration. They do not have a word larger than ten thousand. It's like us saying, "Zillions and zillions." A third of them are actively involved with Satan. This tells us that Satan is not alone in this conflict. Two-thirds of the angels stayed loyal to God, and one-third defected with Satan. Furthermore, because the angels are not omnipresent, Satan does his dirty deeds in the world through these other evil angels who follow him. Now some of these evil angels aren't of any use to Satan because the book of Jude tells us that some of them are locked up in eternal chains. Therefore, although Satan started out with a third of the angels, some of them were put into chains.

We find the target of these fallen angels in Revelation 12. Verse 1 tells us, "And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." The woman referred to is Israel. The sun and the moon probably refer to Jacob and Rachel, and the twelve stars are the twelve sons of Israel. Verse 2 says the woman is with child. This is the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pick up in verse 5, "She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne." So Israel bears the child, and in the midst of the vision, in verses 3 to 4, we see Satan gathering his forces. At the end of verse 4 it says that he is ready to devour the child as soon as he was born. And in fact, that is exactly what happened in Bethlehem when Herod killed all the babies two years and under. Satan had been trying to destroy the Messiah all through history. He tried to destroy the godly line by corrupting an entire generation of people whom God had to drown in the flood. He tried to destroy the line of David by corrupting the nation of Israel so that there wouldn't be a seed. He tried to kill Christ through Herod. He tried to kill Christ by tempting him to fall to temptation in the wilderness. He tried to kill Christ in the garden and on the cross and by trying to keep Him in the grave. The dragon

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always fights against the Messiah, and he will fight against Christ when he comes in His return, and he will go on fighting until he is finally bound forever in the pit of hell.

In verse 7, we see that “war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back.” This is an all-consummating statement. There was a war in the past, there is a war going on in the present, and there will be war in the future. Furthermore, this war between Satan and God filters down to us. Verse 17 tells us, “Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” Notice how the war started with God and Satan, then it went down through the holy angels and to the fallen angels, and now it is down to a warfare against those who know Jesus and keep the commandments of God. That’s us, those who have made Jesus Savior and Lord of our lives. And yet Satan isn’t particularly interested in us as individuals. Satan is targeting God. It is only in that we somehow have an impact in this world for the glory of God that Satan becomes interested in us as well. And it is because we stand with God that we are also at war with Satan. When we are defeated by him, there is a sense in which Satan has effectively attacked God. However, when we are victorious, there is a sense in which Satan has been defeated in his attack against God.

That means that when Satan attacks the church and its members get all out of sorts with one another and it gets a bad reputation in the community, Satan is really attacking God. When he attacks marriages by providing variants of what marriage is and by destroying what a real home is, Satan is really attacking God. When Satan attacks individual Christians and brings hardship and trouble and guilt and tragedy into their lives, depending on our response to the attack, God will either be glorified and Satan will be defeated, or God will be dishonored and we will have given a foothold to the enemy.

I have heard people make the statement “I don’t even see a war going on.” If you are able to say that, I am bold enough to stay that you have gone AWOL in your Christian faith and you are an un-courageous soldier because as Christians we expect hardship. We expect

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to be cut off from the affairs of this world because we are in a spiritual war. I have been a soldier in this war for many years now. I have seen battles break out in churches, I have seen leaderships get a big ego and think they know better than anyone else, including the anointed pastor. I have seen marriages broken because of self-righteous people who won't give in and say "I'm sorry," and I have personally experienced the effects of this warfare through disruptions in my own home during times when I've been preaching on certain topics. And now we have experienced the death of our own son, which we believe to be by the hand of Satan. The war rages on, and all of us are a part of the war.

Let me close this chapter by addressing how we can effectively fight this war. I will also address this topic more fully in a following chapter. The apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10:4–6, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete." We cannot use our own intellect in this war. We cannot use our own wisdom or natural talents. Our weapons of warfare are not fleshly/carnal. Our weapons "have divine power to destroy strongholds." We can most definitely bring down the kingdom of Satan. Paul tells us in verse 5 to "take every thought captive to obey Christ." Our weapons of warfare are not mystical. They are not human intellect or in our ability or skill or ingenuity. Our weapons of warfare can be summed up in one thing, which is obedience to the Word of God. You see, the Word of God has power we do not have in ourselves. It is not found in a little formula, the right words to say, or some spiritual zap. Our spiritual warfare is nothing less than learning the life of obedience to the Word of God, and then by using the sword of the Word, we cut a swatch through the darkness. What God wants in this noble warfare is for us to live a life of obedience to Him.

I would like to end this chapter with the beautiful hymn written by Isaac Watts for us to consider as we engage in spiritual battle. The title of the song is "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?"

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Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause or blush to speak His
name?

Must I be carried to the skies on flower beds of ease
while others fought to win the prize and sailed
through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face?

Must I not stem the flood?

Is this vile world a friend to grace to help me on to
God?

Sure I must fight if I would reign

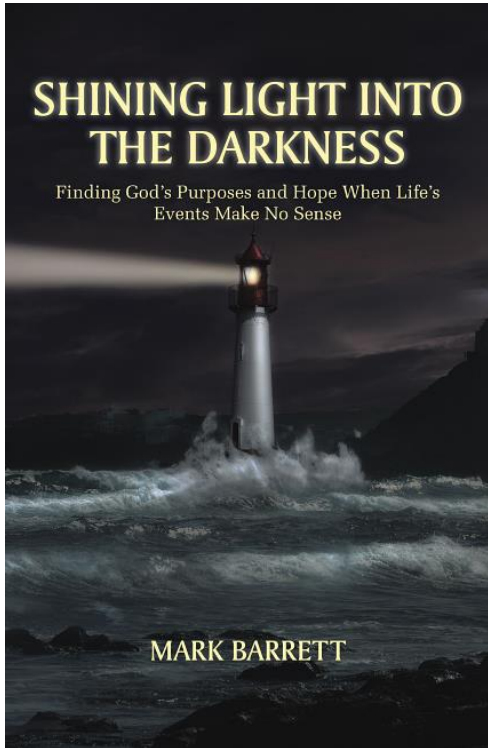
Increase my courage, Lord. I'll bear the toil, endure
the pain, supported by Thy Word.

May this be your prayer as you fight the good fight for the glory
of God.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mark Barrett grew up in the State of Oregon. He has been a pastor for forty years ministering in eight churches in four Canadian provinces and two states. He received his education from Judson Baptist College, Moody Bible Institute, and Multnomah University. Mark has been married to Barbara for thirty-eight years. Together, they have three adult sons, two daughters-in-law, and four grandsons.



At times the unexpected happens us to, and it may be tragic. Using the Bible, this book will help you make sense out of things that make no sense. We will pull back the curtain of the unexpected to find answers to you questions.

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