

## **A Biblical Framework for Dealing with Principalities and Spiritual Rulers**

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*This short paper is written to aid intercessors in knowing how to effectively pray for their cities. Since “praying against territorial spirits” or “rebuking principalities” is a common practice, we need some foundational truths from the Scripture to correct and adjust our mindsets AND our prayers in order to be effective. This is not intended to be an exhaustive study, but rather a biblical framework from which to grow and mature in wisdom and insight.*

Following Pentecost, the disciples continually confronted opposition from the spiritual rulers of cities. These High Priests, Pharisees and other spiritual rulers personify the demonic spiritual authorities over their cities. Their examples illustrate principles of engagement with territorial spirits and our proper response as believers.

1. Acts 4: Peter and John before the council, threatened, but they continued to teach and preach the truth, followed by signs and wonders. They responded by asking the Lord for greater boldness to speak His Word – NOT fight or attack the spiritual rulers of the city (vs. 27-29)
2. Acts 5:17-21 – When the spiritual rulers rose up to arrest the disciples, an angel released them from jail and told them to stand in the temple and speak the words of Life (not pray against something).
3. Acts 5:33-35 – The spiritual rulers of the city were ENRAGED at the testimony of the disciples. But Gamaliel stood up and invoked PEACE, knowing that the rulers would do something harsh.
4. Acts 5:40-42 – After they were beaten for testifying of Jesus, they REJOICED and did not cease teaching and preaching the good news of Jesus.
5. Acts 6:8-15 – When Stephen was brought before the council, “they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.” They “stirred up the people” yet he simply testified to the works of God.
6. Acts 6:51-53 - At the end of his speech, Stephen prophetically exposed their sin. He did not pronounce final judgment (tell them to leave, be cast away, be silent, etc.) Rather, under the unction of the Holy Spirit, he revealed their sin from God’s perspective.
7. Acts 6:54 – The spiritual rulers (principalities) were ENRAGED and “ground their teeth at him” (demonic stronghold). He died a martyrs death and it caused a greater persecution of the Church because the rulers had been stirred up. God used it to spread the gospel, however.
8. Acts 8 – Simon the Magician impacted the entire city with his witchcraft. Peter preached the good news with signs and wonders following. This resulted in Simon coming to Christ, disempowering the power over the people. The enemy was disarmed because Simon got saved (not because Peter came against him).
9. Acts 9:23-25 – When Saul was under a death threat, the disciples didn’t fight the system – they escaped. They knew better than to draw attention – and a fight.
10. Acts 9:28-31 – When the Hellenists of Damascus sought to kill Barnabas, the disciples came and took him away so as to keep the peace (until the city was ready for deliverance). It said the church was being build up, learning to walk in the fear of the Lord.
11. Acts 9:36-43 – It was the practice of the disciples to win entire cities to the Lord through healings, signs and wonders. This was their method of “deliverance” from the unbelieving mindsets and systems of the day.
12. Acts 12:4-19 – Peter was supernaturally released from prison after Herod planned to kill him. The saints who prayed for him didn’t fight or stand up to the rulers, demanding his release. He was released by an angel and then quietly left the city.
13. Acts 13:4-12 – Paul confronted the magician, Elymas (accompanying the unbelieving proconsul of the city). Under the unction of the Holy Spirit, Paul prophetically exposed the sin of Elymas. He didn’t command him to stop – he appealed to him (“...will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the

Lord?”). His hope was to win Elymas over! He prophesied a sign (blindness) in order to get Elymas to believe. As a result, the proconsul did believe at the “teaching of the Lord.”

14. Acts 13:48-52 – Paul and the disciples were seeing many conversions to Christ in Antioch. But the Jews incited the “devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city” (spiritual authorities) and stirred up persecution, driving Paul and Barnabas out of the city. They “shook off the dust from their feet” and left for Iconium, filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. No fight. No war. Rejoicing at all the salvations.
15. Acts 14:1-7 – The spiritual rulers at Iconium stirred up trouble for Paul and Barnabas, seeking to stone them. But, the disciples performed signs and wonders and brought many people to the Lord. When they learned of the plots against them, THEY LEFT. **If the APOSTLES refused to fight the spiritual rulers, why are we? They focused, instead, on winning souls and changing belief systems!**
16. Acts 14:19-23 – Paul and Barnabas RETURNED to Iconium and Antioch, encouraging and building up the churches there, knowing that it would be a process to see the spiritual authorities of the city to diminish in power and control. They appointed elders with prayer and fasting and dedicated them to the Lord. This was a priority in order to DISPLACE the spiritual ruling in the city. **It’s true godly authority that must be established in any city in order to be delivered from demonic strongholds that have been governing. Until godly government is established, do not attempt deliverance (spiritual warfare).**
17. Acts 16:6-10 – The Holy Spirit forbid Paul to go into Macedonia, then the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to go into Bithynia. This demonstrates the importance of timing and not making everything about spiritual authority and power.
18. Acts 16:11-24 – When Paul and Silas entered Philippi, their first appointment was with Lydia who got saved, along with her entire household. (They didn’t go directly to the city square to preach). Then Paul had to rebuke a slave girl who manifested a demonic spirit (he was trying to avoid the confrontation because of the attention it would draw). As a result, it DID draw the attention of the spiritual rulers who brought Paul and Silas before the court, beating them and putting them in prison (where they were supernaturally saved by an earthquake).
19. Acts 17: The confrontation in Thessalonica demonstrated, again, that the disciples were not looking to pick a fight. Their goal was to establish proper spiritual authority through the church and proclaiming the kingdom of God. **This was a repeated pattern of the disciples – when strife was stirred up, they would leave the city so as not to stir up any more trouble (until the proper time to displace the authorities).**
20. Acts 17:16 – Paul was provoked at the idolatry in the city (a city-wide stronghold). He REASONED in the synagogue against the mindsets that had given room to the idolatry. (Same thing in Acts 18:4).
21. Jesus commanded Paul “Do not be afraid, but GO ON SPEAKING and do not be silent, for I am with you and no one will attack you to harm you, for I HAVE MANY IN THIS CITY WHO ARE MY PEOPLE.” (Acts 18:10). **Jesus indicated the importance of a corporate presence in a city in order to bring ultimate freedom from demonic strongholds. His focus was on SPEAKING HIS WORDS and not giving in to fear.**
22. Acts 19:8-10 – Paul spoke for months in the synagogue teaching about the kingdom of God. When rebels started to stir up dissension, he left and focused on those who were ready to hear the Word. This continued for 2 years so that “all the residents of Asia” heard the word of the Lord. **The disciples looked for good ground – those who were spiritually hungry – not necessarily the crowds.**
23. Acts 19:11-17 – The sons of Sceva used the name of Jesus but had no authority. It says the priests invoked the evil SPIRITS (plural), but the evil SPIRIT (singular) spoke back. This could indicate a principality that was controlling the demonized men. When confronted by improper spiritual authority, the sons of Sceva were destroyed (regardless of their invoking of the name of Jesus). Just because we use the name of Jesus doesn’t mean we have ultimate authority over demons (a belief commonly held by many Charismatics – we have authority at all times in all places – not true).
24. Acts 19:28-41 – The people of the city became ENRAGED and the city was filled with CONFUSION when news spread of the disciples teaching (against the idolatry in the city). It was Demetrius, a county clerk, who quieted the spirit of confusion through REASON (vs.39-41). After the uproar ceased, Paul left. The community-wide “attack” was silenced through appealing to people’s thoughts and attitudes.

25. Acts 22 – Paul in Jerusalem – stirred up the anger of the Jews when their sins became evident through his preaching. However, when the authorities of the city tried to bind him and flog him, they realized he was a Roman citizen (had authority in the land). They had to release him because he was in his own “field”. Do believers know their “fields” of authority – when and where they are – and aren’t?
26. Acts 23 – Paul before the Council prophesied to them and they became divided among themselves, causing great commotion. He was removed to safety. Jesus commended him for testifying to “the facts” about him.
27. Acts 23:12 – The Jews made a vow – witchcraft, binding themselves by oath – to kill Paul. He was rescued by a Roman centurion, having learned he was a Roman citizen (again, due to his authority on the land).

#### **Principles Learned:**

1. There is no indication of “spiritual warfare” in “coming against” demonic strongholds of a city or region.
2. The priority was always preaching the kingdom of God and changing mindsets of the people.
3. The disciples focused on winning souls to Jesus, knowing that their changed allegiance would disempower the principalities over their city.
4. Long-term history of the cities show that as the churches grew and godly leadership matured, the atmosphere of the city changed and more people came to salvation as a result. (Notice the eventual shift of cities as the apostles matured believers and placed godly authorities in the church).
5. Spiritual authority has its boundaries. Even the disciples were not “allowed” to go into certain regions (without even knowing why) at times.
6. Paul appealed to the spiritual rulers of cities and regions. His ultimate goal was to win them over by the truths of the Kingdom – not in a power fight.
7. When there were times of spiritual confrontation, the disciples down-played them or avoided them, seeking first to save the person afflicted with the demon.

#### **Take-Aways:**

1. “Taking down” or “confronting” community strongholds is biblically inaccurate and ineffective, bordering on dangerous.
2. Focus should be on what it’s going to take to Guard, Keep and Occupy a city before even attempting to address community strongholds.
3. Personal strongholds are to be demolished by submitting them to Christ and renewing our minds – not simply by “rebuking” them.
4. **The Charismatic church, in general, has focused too much on taking down the enemy and not enough time building up the Church.**