

# Soldier Up!

Saints & Spiritual Warfare

## *"Hindered Fellas"*

It was 1957, and there was no such thing in movies as CGI. Nonetheless, the blowing-up of the bridge in the film, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, is a masterpiece of destruction.

They really blew it up and only had one take to get it right.

You can probably think of at least one famous bridge-blowing scene from the movies.

Blowing-up bridges is a timeless military strategy to hinder the progress of your enemy.

It's so effective, it is even used by supernatural forces, against believers who are pressing forward, gaining ground, with the Gospel.

In First Thessalonians 2:17-18, the apostle Paul tells the church at Thessalonica that he wanted to return to them, but that Satan "hindered" him. That word, "hindered," means *breaking-up the road and putting up obstacles*. Satan had effectively blown-up the bridge.

Satan not only *hindered* Paul in his mission; he tried to *hobble* him. In Second Corinthians 12:7 we read,

2Co 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

If Satan hindered and tried to hobble Paul, he and his forces will attempt to do the same to us.

Paul's commission was to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, but he always started his ministry among the Jews. The local synagogue was the place where the Old Testament Law was known and revered. Paul could get a sympathetic hearing in the synagogue, at least until persecution began. Furthermore, there were always many Gentile "God-fearers" in the synagogues, and through them Paul could begin a witness to the pagan Gentiles.

Thessalonica was a particularly difficult theater of operations for Paul. He ministered in the synagogue for three Sabbaths. Many people believed in Jesus Christ and were saved. However, the nonbelieving Jews began to oppose the work, and Paul and his helpers had to leave the city.

Concerned about the state of the fledgling believers, Paul desired to return. But, as we've said,

1Th 2:17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.

1Th 2:18 Therefore we wanted to come to you - even I, Paul, time and again - but Satan **hindered** us.

The first thing to note, and it's pretty amazing, is that the devil marshaled his vast resources against Paul and two of his traveling companions.

Three humble men, bearing no letters of authority, holding no earthly position, nevertheless commanded the attention of the devil and his demons.

It's because they had the good news, the Gospel, which was, and is, the power of God unto salvation.

Their presence in Thessalonica had already saved many, and was spreading from the believers there throughout the entire region.

The devil had done all he could to get Paul driven from there; yet the Gospel had taken hold. What might happen if Paul were to return to Thessalonica, to further strengthen the believers?

The devil, therefore, set out to "hinder" Paul; **and he was successful.**

Notice, this was not the providential action of God. By that I mean we read of other occasions where God, by the Holy Spirit, forbid Paul from going certain places.

In the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Acts it says, "And we were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia" (v6). And then it says, "And when we assayed to go into Bithynia, the Holy Ghost forbad us" (v7).

Apparently Paul could discern when God was closing doors of ministry, and when Satan was hindering. All I can suggest, as to how, is that there needs to be a discernment of the Spirit. You need to grow sensitive to feel the leading of God the Holy Spirit, and know immediately when you are being blocked by a deceiving, destructive spirit.

There is a lot of speculation about exactly how the devil hindered Paul. That's all we can do, is to speculate, because we are not told exactly what he did.

W.A. Criswell, reknowned Southern Baptist pastor and leader, once preached on this text, saying,

I look down on this bed and there is a child, eleven years old: the child has wasted away. It's a skeleton, soon to die - polio, the dread disease; Satan has hindered us. Here's a beautiful fellowship, a church of Jesus and they're divided and torn asunder; Satan has hindered us. Here's a fine, strong and beautiful Christian, working for the Lord and now, cut down and in pain and in misery and in ill health; Satan has hindered us. And here's a noble and wonderful family, all torn apart. Satan has hindered us. How many areas? And in how many ways? There he stands and there he is, our adversary and "the Accuser of the brethren" who accuses them day and night" (Revelation 12:10).

The overwhelming import of this text is to alert us that spiritual warfare is real, and it can be severe. Satan might blow-up a bridge that you have come to depend upon; or that you believe is essential to your life and testimony.

How do we respond? Well, first of all, *don't stop praying*. Especially because Paul knew it was the devil hindering him, he prayed day and night.

1Th 3:10 night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?

It is a reminder that prayer *can* change circumstances. Since God had not said "No," Paul kept shelling Satan and his forces with prayer.

Remember - while Daniel prayed, a demon hindered God's messenger angel for 21 days before he could get to Daniel.

I know what you're thinking, cause I'm thinking it to. *My hindrance has been going on much longer than three weeks.*

On one level, it isn't the timing that is as important as the understanding that there are things going on behind the scenes that we probably will never be privy to.

As Dori might say, if she were to be born-again: "Just keep praying; just keep praying. Praying. Praying."

Just as important, *persevere* - and by that I mean, press forward along other fronts in your warfare.

Never forget Paul's over-all strategy, "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

In another place he said,

Act 20:24 But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul didn't let Satanic hindrances stall the ministry of the Gospel. He pressed on.

How do you defeat a guy like that? Well, you might try to hobble him.

Remember Satan's second accusation against Job? Take away his health, he argued before the throne, and that guy will stop following God.

2Co 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

Paul had many visions and revelations. He saw Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus on the day he was saved; he had a vision when he was called to minister to the Gentiles; it was by a vision the he was sent to Macedonia; when things got tough in Corinth God encouraged him with a vision.

In the future, he would have others: After his arrest in Jerusalem; in the midst of the storm at sea that would leave him shipwrecked on Malta.

Add to all these that Paul had spent some three years in the desert receiving teaching directly from the risen Lord.

“Thorn” is the translation of a word used of a tent-peg or a rather large stake upon which you were tortured or impaled.

“In the flesh” indicates it was most definitely a physical infirmity. There are a multitude of theories as to what it was; we just don’t know.

“A messenger of Satan” means it was a satanic strategy designed to stumble Paul. It does not mean it was a demon who oppressed Paul. It is similar to the situation with Job in the Old Testament. Satan desired to destroy Paul, and God let him reach through the hedge surrounding Paul.

2 Corinthians 12:8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

Paul immediately went to prayer; he prayed repeatedly to be delivered from this infirmity. I would suggest that his motive was that he would be better able to serve the Lord if free from the infirmity.

Which leads us to our dilemma, Why does God weaken the hedge?

Well, Paul doesn't tell us, but he does indicate something that can happen.

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

The hobbling allowed "the power of Christ" to "rest upon" him. The word "rest" is *tabernacle*. Jesus Christ tabernacles, or dwells, with you, in your infirmities.

I can tabernacle with God, at those times, in a way I simply cannot if I remain unscathed. Let's call it the tabernacle of trouble, for lack of a better word. It's a building I probably would not enter on my own.

The devil is willing to roll the dice, betting I am not a modern-day Job. He's betting I will fall away, or at least, grow bitter and quit serving The Lord.

It's been said many times: Bitter or better - it's up to me to decide.

2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Wow. Paul lists a few other ways the devil was hindering him. This is like that scene in the movies where the hero is being tortured, but he responds to it as if he has the upper hand.

If you have the liberty to watch the *Avengers* movie, you'll recall that Black Widow was being tortured by her captors when she got a phone call. She answered, saying, "I'm in the middle of an interrogation," as if she was in charge.

She was, it turns out. And so are we, if we remember this is war, and that hobbling us is something the devil is going to do as often as he is let through the hedge.

When Jesus answered Paul, he realized that the infirmity was serving the purpose of keeping him humble. He further realized that God's "grace" is always sufficient for every situation you face.

"Sufficient" means *adequate to provide contentment*. It is adequate for me to learn, in whatever state I am in, to be content.

If you are being hindered, or are hobbled, take heart in your tabernacling with Jesus. Pray until you receive an answer; persevere.