

Praying the Psalms in 2022

Good morning and thank you for the great privilege once again to be sharing with you here at Christ Chapel. The title of this morning's message is "Praying the Psalms in 2022". Before we begin, let's ask for God's blessing!

Our Scripture this morning is found in Psalm 18 and I will be reading from the English Standard Version or ESV – the same as your pew Bibles. As this is a long Psalm – 50 verses - we won't be covering this Psalm in depth. Rather we will mention a few highlights of Psalm 18 and also note a curious characteristic of the book of Psalms as a whole that we typically don't talk much about from the pulpit. **We will conclude by praying through Psalm 18 as an example of how we might consider praying in 2022.** We will be doing a fair amount of Bible reading and jumping around, so if you are using a pew Bible, I would encourage you to consider shouting out the page numbers when you find a passage to help others who are using the pew Bibles, OK? Also, I need a few volunteers to participate in a little experiment with me right now by turning to 2 Samuel 22 rather than Psalm 18. When I am done reading Psalm 18, I will ask you to share with us what you have observed in 2 Samuel 22. Is anyone willing to do that for me? (hands). Thank you!

Psalm 18 was composed by David in the later years of his reign after God had rescued him from all his foes and helped his kingdom to victory over all the neighboring heathen nations. It is essentially David's testimony in song. I will start reading from the Psalm heading: For the director of music. Of David the servant of the Lord. He sang to the Lord the words of this **song** when the Lord **delivered (OT5337)** him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said:

1 I love you, O Lord, my strength.

2 The Lord is my rock and my fortress and **my deliverer (OT6403)**, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

3 I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from **my enemies (OT341)**.

4 The cords of **death** encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me;

5 the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of **death** confronted me.

6 In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

7 Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry.

8 Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him.

9 He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet.

10 He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind.

11 He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him, thick clouds dark with water.

12 Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.

13 The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire.

14 And he sent out his arrows and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings and routed them.

15 Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.

16 He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters.

17 He **rescued (OT5337)** me from my strong **enemy (OT341)** and from **those who hated me (foes OT8130)**, for they were too mighty for me.

18 They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support.

19 He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued (OT2502) me, because he delighted in me.

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20 The Lord dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.

21 For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God.

22 For all his rules were before me, and his statutes I did not put away from me.

23 I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from my guilt.

24 So the Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.

25 With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;

26 with the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous [NIV- show Yourself shrewd].

27 For you save a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down.

28 For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness.

29 For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall.

30 This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.

31 For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God?—

32 the God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless.

33 He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights.

34 He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

35 You have given me the shield of your salvation (OT3468), and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great.

36 You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip.

37 I pursued my **enemies (OT341)** and overtook them, and did not turn back till they were consumed.

38 I thrust them through, so that they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet.

39 For you equipped me with strength for the battle; you made those who rise against me sink under me.

40 You made my **enemies (OT341)** turn their backs to me, and **those who hated me (foes - OT8130)** I destroyed.

41 They cried for help, but there was none to save; they cried to the Lord, but he did not answer them.

42 I beat them fine as dust before the wind; I cast them out like the mire of the streets.

43 **You delivered me (OT6403)** from strife with the people; you made me the head of the nations; people whom I had not known served me.

44 As soon as they heard of me they obeyed me; foreigners came cringing to me.

45 Foreigners lost heart and came trembling out of their fortresses.

46 The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation—

47 the God who gave me vengeance and subdued peoples under me,

48 **who delivered me (OT6403)** **from my enemies (OT341)**; yes, you exalted me above those who rose against me; you rescued me (OT5337) from the man of violence.

49 For this I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations, and sing to your name.

50 Great salvation (OT3444) he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever. ESV

Now, may I ask my trusty volunteers what have you observed about 2 Samuel 22? Very similar to Psalm 18 isn't it? Thank you for your willingness to "be on a different page" than the rest of us. Your exceptional courage may come in handy when we come to the conclusion of our sermon today! 😊 As we all know, of course, there are many portions of scripture that are repeated in the Bible, but I would suggest that few of them are as long or as complete as Psalm 18 and 2Samuel 22. The lesson here, I believe, is that this Psalm of David is so important for us to study and apply to our Christian lives

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that God included it in the Bible in its entirety twice! As you may recall, there is a very important OT biblical principle specifically mentioned by Jesus in Matt 18:16 and by the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor 13:1b "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" NIV.

So, why might Psalm 18 be included in the Bible twice? Well, we probably won't know for sure until we can ask Jesus about this in heaven, but we can make a few interesting observations about this Psalm. The Hebrew word translated into English as "enemy" (OT341) occurs 270 times in the Old Testament. 75 times this word appears in the Psalms – more times than in any other Old Testament book. Psalm 18 has 5 occurrences of the word "enemy" (verses 3,17,37,40,48) – and that's more than any other Psalm. The Hebrew word translated as "foes" (OT8130) by the NIV, which in the ESV is translated "those who hated me", occurs 52 times in the Old Testament - 31 times appearing in the Psalms - more than in any other OT book. Psalm 18 has 2 occurrences of the word "foes" (verses 17,40). The Hebrew word for "deliverance" (OT6403) which means "deliverance from enemies" occurs 25 times in the Old Testament, 17 of them appearing in the Psalms - more than in any other OT book. Psalm 18 has 3 occurrences of this word for deliverance (verses 2,43,48) – more than any other Psalm. There is much we can learn by analyzing the Psalm in this way, but the last word we'll mention this morning is the Hebrew word for "rescue" (OT5337) which occurs 213 times in the Old Testament, 45 of them occur in the Psalms - more than in any other book. Psalm 18 has 3 occurrences of the word "rescue" (verses 1,17,48).

Perhaps some of you right now may be asking; "OK, Eric, so what's the point in looking at all these words?" and that's what I really like about this group – really practical questions that get to the heart of the matter! To help me answer this great question, let me first ask you a question - what do these words from Psalm 18 sound like to you - are they words that reflect something peaceful going on in David's life? No, these are "words of conflict", right? And to make matters worse, we even find some even harsher words – or "imprecations" - by David against his enemies in Psalm 18:40-42:
40 You made **my enemies (OT341)** turn their backs in flight, and I **destroyed** my **foes (OT8130)**.
41 They cried for help, but there was no one to save them — to the Lord, but he did not answer.
42 **I beat them as fine as dust** borne on the wind; **I poured them out like mud** in the streets.

Perhaps **now you may be wondering how I could ever suggest that Psalm 18 could be an example for how we as peaceful, loving Christians should pray in 2022** since it contains so many "words of conflict" – especially in light of Jesus' New Testament teaching about loving our enemies". Right? Well, once again you are living up to your excellent reputation for asking great questions, but please be merciful as I try to find a way to redeem myself here, OK ☺?

By the way, how many of you have ever heard the term "Imprecatory Psalm"? Well, for those who haven't, please don't feel bad – we evangelicals don't talk about Imprecatory Psalms too much from the pulpit. What does "imprecatory" mean? Well, the dictionary definition of an "imprecation" is a "spoken malediction or curse", or perhaps in more contemporary language - a "harsh word". Some Psalms, as you may have noticed at some point in your Bible reading, have just a few harsh words in them. Other Psalms are so full of harsh words that entire Psalms have been labeled "imprecatory" – such as Psalm 55, 69, 109, and 137. These "imprecatory Psalms" have been criticized by some theologians for years – and some denominations have even removed these scripture passages from their liturgy and church worship books.

So what's up with this – you might ask - are we really supposed to be ignoring these imprecatory Bible passages? Well, before we return to Psalm 18, let's answer this very important question.

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There are at least 2 reasons why I would suggest that harsh words or “imprecations” in the Psalms should not be dismissed as some have done.

First, recall that the Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Tim 3:16 **All** scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: KJV. Clearly Paul’s use of the word **All** is very comprehensive, so it doesn’t appear that Paul makes any exceptions that will allow us to dismiss these Bible passages.

Second, it is important to notice that **Jesus quoted from the Psalms more than any other OT book** – so if we might think that imprecatory Psalms are not really applicable to us in New Testament times, Jesus’ quotations from these passages seems to indicate otherwise. The following are some of the many occasions when Jesus quoted from the Psalms. By the way, I have included this list on the page of sermon notes on the table at the door, and it is also on the CCCC page of my website kingdomtopics.org if desired:

Jesus quotes Ps 8:2 and 110:1 when He was outwitting the Pharisees on several occasions (Mt 21:16, 22:44; Mk 12:36, 14:62; Lk 20:42–43).

He quotes Psalm 22:1 while dying on the cross (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34).

He quotes Psalm 31:5 when He commits His spirit to the Father (Lk 23:46).

He quotes Ps 41:9 when He was talking about his betrayal (Jn 13:18).

Jesus quotes from Ps 78:24 after feeding a multitude (Jn 6:31).

He quotes Ps 82:6 when the Jews want to stone Jesus for claiming to be God (Jn 10:34).

He quotes Psalm 110:1 when Pilate asks if He is the son of God (Mt 26:64).

He quotes Psalms 118:22-23 to the chief priests and elders, calling himself the chief cornerstone (Matt 21:42; Mk 12:10; Luke 20:17).

Jesus quotes Psalm 118:26 when foretelling Jerusalem’s destruction (Matt 23:39; Lk 13:35).

Jesus quotes from Psalm 35 and Psalm 69 – **major imprecatory Psalms BTW** - when said that he’d be “hated without cause” (Jn 15:25).

So, in light of Jesus’ use of the Psalms, and what the Apostle Paul has said, it seems clear that we should not dismiss “imprecatory Psalms” – or any other words of conflict with enemies.

So now your question might be “well, what about loving our enemies – doesn’t that New Testament teaching conflict with all this somehow?” Another great question - you guys are hitting it out of the park today! For the answer, let’s take a quick look at what Jesus said – or perhaps more importantly, what Jesus **didn’t** say – about our enemies in His Sermon on the Mount. Let’s turn to Matthew 5:40 (Matthew 5:40 – BTW shout out the page if you have it) - but for those of us who have recently gotten into the habit of looking on a different page than everybody else ☺, you might want to turn to Luke 6:27-30 (Luke 6:27-30) which is the parallel passage of this event.

Matthew 5:40-44 “And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42 Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. 43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” ESV. Luke 6:27-30 is similar but reverses the sequence of the sentences.

OK, so clearly Jesus says that we are to love our enemies, but let’s be sure which enemies He is actually talking about. Isn’t Jesus talking about human beings - and only human beings - here? From the context of this passage it seems clear that Jesus is not talking about **spiritual enemies** – He’s **not talking about satan and the forces of darkness**. Agreed? Demons don’t sue human beings for tunics or cloaks! Evil spirits don’t beg or borrow things from us! And just to be sure that we are on target with our

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understanding here, let's look at several other Bible verses concerning how we should view evil spiritual enemies:

Ps 97:10a says "Let those who love the Lord hate evil..." NIV

Prov 8:13a says "To fear the Lord is to hate evil." NIV

Rom 12:9b says "Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." NIV

Perhaps no verse in the New Testament sums all this up better than Eph 6:12 when the Apostle Paul says: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [**not against human beings**], but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places [**against spiritual beings**]." Paul then goes on, as we all know, to talk about the weapons that God has provided for us in this spiritual warfare – the armor of God for our protection, and the Sword of the Spirit for attacking the enemy. What is the Sword of the Spirit? Paul tells us that this Sword is the Word of God! And so let's ask ourselves, what are the Psalms with all their words of conflict and imprecations? The Words of God – the Sword of the Spirit – the Sword that God has given us to use against the spiritual forces of darkness!

This, I would suggest, is the answer to our question "**how could Psalm 18 be an example for how we as peaceful, loving Christians should pray in 2022?**" We should love our human enemies, of course, but we should hate all evil spiritual enemies and be praying against them with the Word of God – the Sword of the Spirit. The Psalms, it just so happens, with all their words of conflict and imprecations, are ideally suited for this kind of warfare prayer!

Should we ignore the words of conflict and imprecations in the Psalms as so many have done? No. That is exactly what satan wants us to do – to not wield God's powerful Sword of the Spirit against evil.

Rather, in 2022 we need to be on a different page – a page that our Western culture is not typically on - a page that even some evangelicals may not be accustomed to - a page that embraces a spiritual warfare worldview.

You know, like it or not, when we accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior we became involved in a spiritual war against the evil forces of darkness because our King Jesus is! Jesus has accomplished the decisive victory against satan at the cross, of course, but until Jesus comes again to throw all the forces of darkness into the lake of fire, the spiritual battles on earth will continue to rage. Meanwhile, as soldiers of King Jesus, we have been commissioned to fight against Jesus' spiritual enemies to enforce the victory that He has achieved at the cross. Let me say that again: we the church – the Ekklesia of King Jesus - have been commissioned to fight against Jesus' spiritual enemies **to enforce the victory** that Jesus achieved at the cross to set satan's prisoners free from bondage through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we all sadly know, every day it seems we have another example in the news of satan seeking to steal, kill, and destroy people on earth – school massacre's and killing sprees, vehicles driving into pedestrians, the increase in murders, the increase in lawlessness, etc. I recently asked the Racing to a Bolder Faith spiritual warfare class, have you ever noticed how similar the killers involved in these shootings are to the Gadarene demoniac in the Bible (Matt 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20, Luke 8:26-39)? These killers are often "loners" (like the demoniac) preoccupied with death and the occult (dwelling in the cemetery), restless and unable to sleep (roaming the hills at night), infatuated with pornography and nakedness (the demoniac not wearing clothes), violent, cutting themselves, hearing voices, speaking about themselves in the plural (us, we they, sound familiar??), etc. etc. Folks, as I'm sure you all know, these killings are demonic – plain and simple! What has caused it? Well for one thing, we've opened the demonic floodgates to the occult in our country through many things that we don't have time to go into right now, but occult movies, music, and entertainment choices are just a few of them.

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What can be done about this demonic flood? Well, I would suggest that we pray imprecatory prayers against these evil spiritual enemies - just like David did! David understood his enemies very well, and he knew how to fight against them in the power of the Holy Spirit. I would suggest that it is high time that we did this too! We should be praying against the forces of darkness in our towns, our schools, our civic activities, our government, our friends, our families, and everything else in between. I believe these spiritual warfare prayers should specifically seek to "...release the oppressed" from demonic influence just as Jesus did (Luke 4:18) in order to reduce the demonic violence in our society and push back the darkness. I would also suggest that we pray against the spiritual forces that are working against church attendance! Our evangelical churches should be full, but as you know, satan appears to have been winning for at least a generation or two in keeping many Americans away from gospel truth - not to mention the more recent destruction from the last 2 years of COVID! And even greater challenges lie ahead as the spirit of lawlessness continues to push its way into every aspect of our society, so we need to learn as quickly as possible how God would have us to fight against the spiritual enemies of Jesus.

OK. So now it's time for the practical portion of this message! It's time to consider whether the Lord would have us to be on "a different page" so to speak with respect to Psalm 18 and other Psalms and use them for spiritual warfare praying in 2022. If this agrees with your spirit, the following is one example of how you might go about it. Several years ago I found a book entitled "Praying the Psalms for Spiritual Warfare" by Dr. A.O. Itiola. Dr. Itiola is the founder of Fresh Anointing International Church, a full-gospel ministry headquartered in Westbury, NY with churches in America, Africa, England and Russia. The following is how he suggests that we might pray through Psalm 18 against the forces of darkness. Please note that I will be substituting the words "us" "our" and "we" whenever Dr. Itiola uses the words "me", "my" and "I". Also, note that Dr. Itiola used a slightly different Bible translation than the ESV in your pew, but please consider following along in Psalm 18 in your Bibles as I read a verse and then follow it with his short prayer in each case. I will admit to you in advance that as a rather "plain-vanilla" evangelical this style of prayer was a little hard for me to get used to at first, but now I have to tell you that I am greatly blessed by this type of praying and I hope you will be too. Some verses will be skipped - we are starting in verse 3.

Ps 18:3 I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

Lord, let our prayer and praise save us from our spiritual enemies, in Jesus' Name.

4 The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

Lord, we refuse to surrender to the threat of death, in Jesus' Name. We refuse to be intimidated by [the ungodly], in Jesus' Name.

5 The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me.

Lord, we claim victory over every power of death and hell working against our lives. They will not succeed at hindering Your plan for our lives, in Jesus' Name.

6 In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.

Lord, give us the strength to call upon you in times of trouble, in Jesus' Name.

7 The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because he was angry.

Lord, let your wrath make the foundations of the high places of our spiritual enemies shake and tremble, in Jesus' Name.

8 Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it.

Lord, send out your smoke and fire to devour all the works of the spiritual enemies against us, in Jesus' Name.

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11 He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him — the dark rain clouds of the sky.

Lord, You who made the darkness your secret place, arise, locate and attack every spiritual enemy that hides under darkness to do us harm, in Jesus' Name.

12 Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.

13 The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire.

14 He shot his arrows and scattered [the enemies], great bolts of lightning and routed them.

Lord, send down your hail stones, coals of fire, thunder, arrows and lightning to scatter and discomfit all those that are waging war against us, in Jesus' Name.

15 The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of breath from your nostrils.

Lord, rebuke our spiritual enemies and let the blast of the breath of Your nostrils uncover their secrets, in Jesus' Name.

16 He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters.

Lord, draw us out with your mighty power from many waters that are trying to drown us.

17 He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me.

Lord, deliver us from our strong enemies and those that hate us, in Jesus' Name.

18 They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the Lord was my support.

Lord, rescue us from those who try to hinder our deliverance in the day of our calamity and put them to shame.

27 You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.

Lord, save us from every form of affliction and turn the pride of our spiritual enemies into shame, in Jesus' Name.

28 You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.

Lord, make a light for us whenever darkness surrounds us, in Jesus' Name.

29 With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.

Lord, give us the strength to run through every demonic troop and leap over every demonic wall erected to hinder our progress.

32 It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.

Lord, gird us with your strength and make our way perfect, in Jesus' Name.

33 He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights.

Lord, make us run faster than our enemies and lift us higher than them, in Jesus' Name.

34 He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

Lord, teach us spiritual warfare and strengthen us for battle, in Jesus' Name.

35 You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great.

Lord, give us the shield of your salvation. Hold us up with your right hand. Make us great by Your gentleness, in Jesus' Name.

37 I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed.

In the Name of Jesus, we receive anointing to pursue and overtake our enemies, and render them powerless.

38 I crushed them so that they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet.

In the Name of Jesus, we receive power to wound our spiritual enemies. We decree that they will not be able to rise against us but will be forever banished under our feet.

39 You armed me with strength for battle; you made my adversaries bow at my feet.

Lord, strengthen us for battle and subdue under us those who rise up against us, in Jesus' Name.

40 You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes.

We take authority over all our spiritual enemies and we destroy their power, in Jesus' Name.

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41 They cried for help, but there was no one to save them — to the Lord, but he did not answer.

Lord, let the cries of all our spiritual enemies go unanswered, in Jesus' Name.

42 I beat them as fine as dust borne on the wind; I poured them out like mud in the streets.

Lord, give us power to crush all the powers of darkness working against us. Let them become as the dust and dirt in the streets, in Jesus' Name.

44 As soon as they hear me, they obey me; foreigners cringe before me.

Lord, make us a terror to all demonic spirits that as soon as they hear of us, they shall submit and obey us, in Jesus' Name. Amen!

If you would like to give this type of prayer a try on your own, this Psalm 18 prayer is included in my sermon notes by the door - along with the reference to Dr. Itiola's book for more examples of Psalm praying. With this kind of prayer in 2022 I believe that we will not only see more positive things happening in our own lives but also see more positive things happening in our churches - including more healings and more miracles. Church history over the last 2000 years confirms that when healings and miracles happen, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the church grows!

Well, thanks so much for inviting us once again to worship with you. By the way, if you are interested in a great book on the topic of our spiritual authority in Christ, I would recommend the book entitled: "I Give You Authority" by Charles Kraft. Some of those who attended our Racing to a BOLDER Faith class read the book and told me that they were really blessed by it. Please note that I also shared many other book referrals during the course – some of them even having short excerpts available. You can freely download that - as well as all the spiritual warfare class notes – from my website www.kingdomtopics.org by clicking on the tab that says CCCC at the top of the screen. There is also some excellent audio materials on blessings, curses, deliverance, and healing that you can listen to if desired. I believe that you might find this material very helpful for what lies ahead.

Let's pray.

Benediction:

Jude 24-25 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. NIV

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