

GOD

God Wants Us to Win

Everyone has at times been involved in some kind of contest. Contests come in many forms, such as chances to win something, athletic competitions, or even wars. No matter what the contest, the logical goal to strive for is to win, to claim the victory.

Throughout history God's people have been involved in contests, and whether they won or lost depended on whether they trusted in God to win.

We'll take a look at how God's chosen people in Old Testament times trusted in God to win battles and wars against armies of physical opponents motivated by the adversary, the devil. We'll then consider how, once the adversary was defeated through the accomplishments of Jesus Christ, our contest that we strive to win is no longer a physical struggle but is a spiritual competition. The prize that we receive is not only benefits and blessings of a more abundant life now but also rewards for all eternity. No matter what the contest, to win and claim the victory, we need to trust in God.

In Old Testament times, the children of Israel were continually involved in warfare and battles with unbelievers. The enemy was always, in their understanding, armies of people, so the battles involved men of war using physical weapons.

What was ultimately at stake, however, was the survival of the Christ-line so that God's Promised Seed, the Messiah, could finally come and through his accomplishments redeem mankind. This is something that the devil wanted to prevent, so he orchestrated attacks on God's chosen people in his ongoing attempt to wipe them out, which would defeat God's purpose by cutting off the people from whom this Messiah would come. If we were to read the numerous accounts of the resulting battles, we would see that whether or not the children of Israel won depended on their obedience to God and their trust in Him.

God promised His people that He would lead them to victory if they would serve and obey Him. Deuteronomy, chapter 31 records words Moses spoke to the children of Israel regarding their moving into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua:

Deuteronomy

31:3a And the Lord thy God, he will go over before thee, *and* he will destroy these nations from before thee...

31:6 Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he *it is* that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Later, verse 8 repeats what is stated in verse 6, establishing it. God made the promise: it was up to the children of Israel to believe Him and trust in Him that He would keep it.

I Chronicles, chapter 5 records a victory over an enemy army, with the reason for this victory given in verse 20:

I Chronicles

5:20 And they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all that *were* with them: for they cried to God in the battle, and he was entreated of them; because they put their trust in him.

The word “trust” here is from the Hebrew word *batach*, to trust by leaning on or relying on. The victors trusted in, relied on, God rather than on their own weapons and ability.

One great man who trusted in God and was victorious was the Judean king Hezekiah. II Chronicles, chapter 32 records Hezekiah addressing his people in the face of enemy attack.

II Chronicles

32:7 Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that *is* with him: for *there be* more with us than with him:

It’s often been said, “You and God make a majority.”

32:8 With him (*the king of Assyria*) *is* an arm of flesh; but with us *is* the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

The word “rested” in verse 8 can also be understood as “leaned on”. The people could “lean on”, or rely on, Hezekiah’s words because they trusted that God would come through. The reason for Hezekiah’s success not only in this battle but throughout his reign is summed up in II Kings, chapter 18:

II Kings

18:5a He trusted in the Lord God of Israel...

18:6 For he clave to the Lord, *and* departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses.

18:7a And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth...

The word “trusted” in verse 5 is again from that Hebrew word *batach*, to trust by leaning on. Hezekiah leaned on, relied on, God rather than on the strength of his armies.

Another great believer who won battles because he put his trust in God was David. His attitude of trust in God in the face of major opposition was made clear early in his life, when he faced the Philistine giant Goliath:

I Samuel

17:45 Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

17:47 And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle *is* the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands.

Psalms 44 tells us more about trusting in God to win battles:

Psalms

44:5 Through thee (*God*) will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us.

44:6 For I will not trust in (*batach – rely on*) my bow, neither shall my sword save me.

44:7 But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us.

In Psalm 37 we find another Hebrew word for “trust” as it relates to this topic:

37:39 But the salvation of the righteous *is* of the Lord: he *is* their strength in time of trouble.

37:40 And the Lord shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.

Here, the word “trust” is from the Hebrew word *chasah*, to trust by taking refuge in. When they were under attack, they took refuge in God, who delivered them.

II Samuel, chapter 22 records a song of David (also found in Psalm 18) that basically sums up David's attitude of trusting in God to win in the battles against the enemies of God's chosen people.

II Samuel

22:1 And David spake unto the Lord the words of this song in the day *that* the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul:

22:2 And he said, The Lord *is* my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer;

22:3 The God of (*who is*) my rock; in him will I trust (*chasah – take refuge*): he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my savior; thou savest me from violence.

22:30 For by thee I have run through a troop: by my God have I leaped over a wall.

22:31 As for God, his way *is* perfect; the word of the Lord *is* tried: he *is* a buckler to all them that trust (*chasah*) in him.

We've seen that in Old Testament times when the believers trusted in God, they could win the physical battles they were continually fighting. God is the same God today, so as we put our trust in Him, we too can win the battles we may face.

However, because Jesus Christ, the Promised Seed, did come and accomplished what he was sent to do, we as born-again children of God are no longer soldiers fighting in physical warfare against physical enemies. Even though there are wars that are still fought among nations of the world, because Jesus Christ won the victory and the devil has been defeated in his quest to keep mankind from redemption, we are involved in a new type of contest.

The contest we are in is spiritual rather than physical, and we strive to win not our salvation (we are already saved), but present blessings and future rewards.

We see the nature of our spiritual contest in Ephesians, chapter 6:

Ephesians

6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

We, the born-again sons and daughters of God living in today's Administration of Grace, are admonished to "be strong". These words are from the Greek word *endunamoō*, more accurately "be powerful inwardly". In the Aramaic text, we find the word for "prevail". We are to be powerful inwardly as we prevail. Notice that verse 10 says we are to be strong "in the Lord, and in the power of his might." We will prevail as we stand together in the Body ("in the Lord"). "Power" here is from *kratos*, power with an impact, and "might" is from *ischus*, meaning strength or ability to do. It doesn't say we are to be strong in our own ability: we are to be strong in power with an impact that comes from God. We have access God's great power, as it says in Ephesians 1:19: "the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe". We don't rely on ourselves: we rely on, or trust in, God.

6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Here we see the word "armor", and from this word and various words we'll see in later verses it seems to say that our contest is still a military contest, making us "soldiers". In-depth Biblical research, including a consideration of Aramaic manuscripts, has indicated, however, that the military terminology found here in Ephesians Chapter 6, as well as in places like II Corinthians 10:4 ("the weapons of our warfare"), I Timothy 1:18 ("war a good warfare"), and II Timothy 2:3 ("good soldier of Jesus Christ") and 2:4 ("to be a soldier") may instead have an athletic connotation. Back when the King James Version was translated, recent military activities had influenced the translators. However, the corresponding words in Aramaic manuscripts, as well as certain other words in the same context in the King James Version, indicate that rather than being military, these contests are athletic in nature.

We are no longer soldiers: God through the accomplishments of Jesus Christ won the ultimate victory over the adversary. Instead, the contest we are in today is more of an athletic competition, taking place in the arena of our minds: we are "spiritual athletes". Our salvation has already been won: now we strive in the contest to win rewards in our more abundant life today and for eternity.

So, in Ephesians 6:11, the words "the whole armor" may also be understood as "all the resources" or "all the equipment". Just like in an athletic contest where one would use certain equipment, we are to use the appropriate "equipment", or resources, to win in our contest.

Notice that it says that we are to "put on" these resources: we need to do it, by the freedom of our will. This involves taking action. When we do, we then will be able to "stand

against the wiles of the devil.” We can stand against the wiles, the methods and strategies, of our opponent, the devil.

Our contest is spiritual, not physical, as we see in the next verse:

6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (*from on high*).

Notice the athletic term: wrestling was the most demanding event in the Olympic Games, demanding total concentration and discipline. Our opponent is not “flesh and blood”: we are not in a contest against other people. If you work through the rest of this verse in the texts you will see that our opponent is the devil and his devil spirit realm. Even though the devil has been defeated through the accomplishments of Jesus Christ, he now tries his best to hinder the Christian, especially trying to keep us from winning any rewards.

6:13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

This verse basically repeats what we saw in verse 11, establishing the truth of what we need to do to win in the spiritual contest. The words “take unto” are from the Greek word *analambanō*, which means much more than simply “take”. It’s from the word *lambanō*, to receive into manifestation: we not only “take” this “equipment”, but we do something with it!

In the Aramaic text, the words “in the evil day” read “the evil one” – as we actively take and use our “equipment”, we can withstand, or stand against, “the evil one”, the devil and his devil spirit realm. Then, “having done all”, we will stand at the *bema*, the award stand, at the end of the competition when Christ returns, receiving our rewards for eternity.

The following verses tell us more about this “equipment” that we are to take and use:

6:14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

6:15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace:

6:16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which *is* the Word of God.

6:18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

Again, even though the King James Version has military terminology in these verses, the figurative “equipment” we are to use can also be understood in terms of athletic since we are in a spiritual competition.

We are to stand with our loins, figuratively representing our body's source of strength, "girt about", or surrounded with, truth. We know from John 17:17 that God's Word is truth. So, we make God's Word the source of our strength.

Our hearts, figuratively the seat of our personal life, are protected by the "breastplate of righteousness". We have God's Word in our hearts, and we can stand undefeated because God has made us righteous.

Our feet, figuratively representing taking action, are prepared, ready to move, with "the gospel of peace", the all-truth found in the seven Church epistles. We have God's Word and have made it our own, ready to act on it.

We take and use our "shield of faith", or, in athletic terminology, our "discus of believing God", using it to quench, or outdistance, all the "fiery darts" (javelins) of the wicked. We also take our "helmet", or garland, of salvation, and the "sword (javelin) of the Spirit", the Word of God.

Finally, with all these resources, we pray "in the spirit", more accurately "by way of spirit", which is perfect prayer by speaking in tongues (I Corinthians 14:14).

Notice all the emphasis on God's Word. We read and study God's Word. We are also to dwell on God's Word. Philippians 4:8 lists eight things that we are to dwell on: things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy. Each one of these refers to an aspect of God's Word. We also stand together in the household as we fellowship with like-minded believers. And, we pray perfectly by speaking in tongues as well as operating the other manifestations of our gift of holy spirit.

When we have taken all these resources God has made available to us and faithfully use them, we can trust in God that He will bring to pass our victory in the spiritual contest. We don't rely on ourselves or on our own power: we are strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Remember, it is God who works in (energizes) us (Philippians 2:13).

We can be even more inspired to trust in God to win when we consider the great truth found in I John 4:4:

I John

4:4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

This verse says that we, the children of God, "have overcome them". The word "overcome" is from the Greek word *nikaō*, which literally means "to be victorious", "to conquer", "to gain the victory". Why are we victorious? The rest of this verse tells us "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world". "He that is in the world" is the god of this world, the devil (II Corinthians 4:4) and his devil-spirit realm.

Who is “he that is in us”? Colossians 1:27 tells us that it is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” And, according to II Corinthians 5:19, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.” When we are born again of God’s spirit, we have God in Christ in us! So, “he that is in us” is definitely far greater than “he that is in the world”. With God in Christ in us, we can be victorious. When we “take on” all the “equipment” that God has made available for us in this spiritual contest, we don’t trust in our own abilities. Instead, we trust in God: we “lean on” that God in Christ in us!

And, we don’t give up. Hebrews 12:1 tells us that we are to “run with patience (endurance in the text) the race that is set before us” (notice the athletic terms). Galatians 6:9 tells us: “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” We just continue to endure as we compete in the spiritual contest, knowing that as we trust in God, we will reap the rewards.

With all that God has made available, we can win.

We saw that in Old Testament times, as God’s people trusted in Him, they won the physical battles they fought. Today, as athletes of the spirit, as we trust in God, we can win, too. What we win, though, is not salvation (we already have that), but blessings now and rewards for all eternity.

God won through the accomplishments of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ won as he trusted in God and carried out his Father’s will, making it available for us to be redeemed. We can win as we trust in God as we compete in the spiritual contest. As far as we are concerned, it’s really a “win-win-win” situation.

- Dr. Rick Batt