



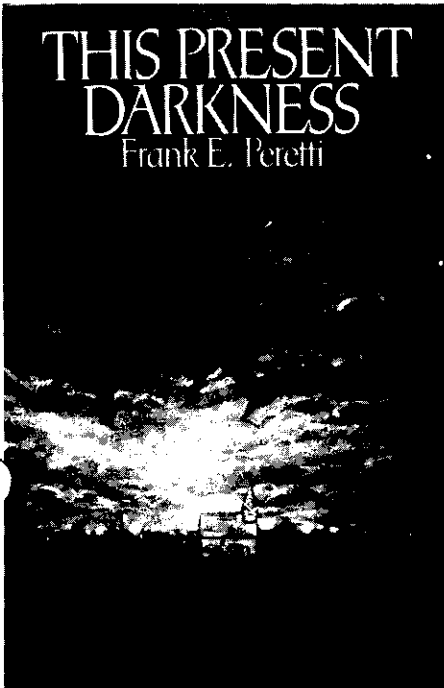
Media Spotlight

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR MEDIA

SPECIAL REPORT

THIS PRESENT DARKNESS SPIRITUAL WARFARE - FACT OR FANTASY?

by Albert James Dager



The residents of the sleepy college town of Ashton, comfortable in their middle American lifestyle, had no idea that their community was about to play a significant role in the ages-old battle between the forces of good and evil. A malevolent storm was brewing in the nether regions—a storm that would challenge the mightiest of God’s angels in their task to preserve the earth from satanic conquest. And the people of Ashton were to play the major role in equipping His angels with the power they would need to meet that challenge.

Author Frank E. Peretti weaves tales of suspense tempered with humor in his books, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*, both of which have remained among the top ten best-selling Christian books, the former since 1988 and the latter since 1989.

Peretti’s first of the two, *This Present Darkness*, sat on bookstore shelves virtual-

ly unnoticed for two years. In 1988 it took off, due largely to word-of-mouth promotion among various dominionist-oriented people. They saw in *This Present Darkness* something that they perceived to be new and of great importance in their own struggles against evil. Before long, both *Darkness* books attained cult status among Christians holding many diverse theological expressions. It has remained a staple among dominionists—those who believe that the Church has received a mandate from God to rule the nations before Jesus returns. (Some deny He will ever return, so it is up to the Church to wage the spiritual warfare necessary to implement the dominionist mandate.)

Peretti’s books present a concept of prayer as a means to influence the spirit realm directly—especially God’s angels. His tales braid stories of human struggles with those of warfare between God’s angels and Satan’s minions. Demon spirits, dark, sinister, fierce in their antagonism against God and man, gather in brooding clouds of evil discernible only to other spirits in their realm: God’s angels strategically planted to offset this attack here, that countermove there.

Flailing with swords against forces vastly superior in number, God’s angels take their share of blows. A broken wing, a deep gash in the body, pain from countless injuries incurred during moments of lull in the earthmen’s prayer lives. But with every prayer come new surges of strength, equipping the angels with the ability to stand against the strongest demons.

On the other side, lesser demons are terrorized by their superiors, kicked into submission, ridiculed, and abased at every turn. Tiny demons disappear into puffs of smoke, if not at the hands of God’s angels, then at the behest of their superiors displeased with their lack of performance.

In the end, the Christians win the day, along with a lot of souls, and keep their communities free from control by Satan.

Peretti’s tales are absorbing and fun to read. They may even be described as positively inspiring. But lest readers get carried away by the romance of the brand of spiritual warfare Peretti offers, they should realize that these books are merely fantasy. The concepts of spiritual warfare and the spirit realm they reflect are not accurate or biblically based. If we are really going to learn about spiritual warfare we should approach it from the standpoint of reality rather than fantasy.

SCRIPTURE THE KEY

All we know about the spirit realm is what Scripture reveals. Anything beyond that is conjecture. When we fictionalize reality we have a novel. When we fictionalize conjecture we have fantasy. And that is what we have in Peretti’s books: fantasy. And if taken as an accurate portrayal of spiritual warfare, it could prove harmful.

An example of Peretti’s fantasy-based spiritual warfare is the use of the all-too-common phrase, “I rebuke you, Satan,” which has become a staple during some Christians’ prayer time. Let’s consider this approach from the standpoint of reality.

Satan is not omnipresent. He is in a specific locale, most likely the heavenlies, working under the permission of God to test the hearts of men (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6). So he probably doesn’t even hear our rebukes. We see from these same verses that he is an angel, a “son of God,” who rebelled and drew others from God.

There is no doubt that Satan’s forces are organized into principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:10-12), probably of varied strengths. But there is no evidence that they fight among themselves. Jesus’ words in Matthew 12:20-28 indicate otherwise. The best that can be said of Peretti’s depiction of infighting among demons is that it is amusing conjecture.

As far as the levels of satanic dominion are concerned we are told only that there was a prince of Persia whom an angel (commonly believed to be Gabriel, but possibly the preincarnate Word of God [Daniel 10:5-6]) fought with the aid of Michael in order to make room for the coming prince of Grecia (Daniel 10:12-20). Notice from these verses that God’s angels did not eliminate evil government, but merely worked to replace one with another according to God’s will.

Evidently there are spirit princes of the ruling earthly kingdoms for their seasons. Whether or not there are specific princes over each country, state, province, county, city, community, social institution, church, business, individual, or other entities, Scripture does not reveal. There probably are satanic forces assigned to some of these areas, if not all. But how many, and what their strengths are, no one can know apart from revelation through the testimony of the demon possessed (Mark 5:9), or by some other means ordained by God. It appears that, presently, the prince of Rome continues to rule the nations.

The point of all this is that spiritual warfare does not consist of shotgunning rebukes into the spirit realm. To say, "I rebuke you, Satan!" does not rebuke him (cause him to cease action) any more than telling your car, "I rebuke you, car!" causes it to stop at every red light. In order to rebuke, or hold something back, we must take some action (such as apply the brake to stop the car) and the thing we want rebuked will be rebuked.

How, then, do we "rebuke" Satan in our lives? God's Word is our weapon. By applying it to our life's situations we rebuke the devil. By holding firmly to the truth we overcome evil. When we see or hear false teaching we come against it with the truth. When we are tempted, we employ God's Word: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Jesus set the example by coming against every challenge with the retort, "It is written."

Scripture is the offensive weapon in our spiritual armor. Our prayer life is only as effective as our knowledge of God's Word allows us to pray with understanding.

The mystical approach of throwing rebukes around has no basis in Scripture; just the opposite. We are not to rail against spiritual principalities and authorities:

Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. (Jude 8-11)

Jude continues with some unpleasant remarks concerning those who rail against spiritual powers. And we can see from his mention of Michael and the devil that God does not look favorably upon those who rail against any authorities including Satan. Yet the Church is filled today with teachers who tell us how they're going to stomp on the devil. They call him names out of spite and rail against him as if to demonstrate that they have power over him.

The fact is that we have power over Satan only as long as we believe and act in accordance with God's Word. Apart from that we can rail all we want, but it is Satan who will have power over us, because we would be found disobedient to God. And the more we resist God's Word—regardless of our intentions to fight the spiritual battle against Satan—the more power Satan will have over us.

The only areas in which we are commanded to invoke rebukes is against men who are in error or pervert the truth of God's Word (Luke 17:3; I Timothy 5:20; II Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13, 2:15). This is not something in which we are to take pleasure, but it must be done in humility and with fear and trembling considering our own weaknesses.

God's Word to the contrary, today's "spiritual" Church goes on rebuking rampages against the devil while refusing to administer correction to false teachers.

The way in which we rebuke false teachers (or stop their mouths) is by challenging them with the Word of God just as Jesus did his enemies.

PRAYER IS ESSENTIAL

Besides God's Word, of course we must employ prayer in our spiritual warfare. But while prayer is one of our most powerful helps in waging that warfare, it does not work in quite the manner Peretti's book suggests—that if Christians do not pray God's angels suffer defeats. Closer to truth is that, if we don't pray God may withhold blessing. Prayer is not what gives the angels strength. God's power gives them strength. This is why Michael, while contending for the body of Moses said, "The Lord rebuke thee." Satan works, believe it or not, at the behest of God. This is amply demonstrated in Job.

Those of the mindset reflected in Peretti's concept of prayer attribute Daniel's prayers with giving "Gabriel" his power to overcome the prince of Persia (Daniel 10). But if we examine these pas-

sages of Scripture we'll see that Daniel was not praying for the defeat of the prince of Persia. So the angel's power to defeat the prince of Persia did not depend upon Daniel's prayers. But the angel, in his conflict with that prince, could not be sent to Daniel until he had completed that task, which took twenty-one days (verse 13).

What is generally overlooked is that the purpose in removing the prince of Persia was to allow another prince—the prince of Grecia—to rise to power. Certainly Daniel did not pray for the prince of Grecia to be given power; he only prayed for understanding of future events revealed to him in visions and dreams.

Other marks of Peretti's fantasies are female angels, baby angels, pipsqueak demons, angels with wings (some may have them, we don't know that they all do), and demons in charge of hell.

As far as "hell," or the underworld, is concerned, Scripture speaks of Hades, the place where departed souls await the resurrection for judgment. There were two compartments—a place of torment and a place of peace (Abraham's bosom)—separated by a great chasm (Luke 16:22-31).

Scripture also reveals the existence of the bottomless pit (Revelation 9), and the lake of fire (Revelation 20). But in none of these are Satan or his demons in charge. God is in charge. He created them for the punishment of Satan and his angels.

Most of the notions of the spirit realm and of spiritual warfare that Peretti presents are elements of pagan mythology. They have no basis in biblical reality. In fairness to Frank Peretti, he has stated that it was never his intention to write textbooks on spiritual warfare; he just likes to tell a good story. I suggested that he should add a disclaimer to his books.

Readers of Peretti's books should keep these things in mind lest they be misled into thinking that this brand of spiritual warfare is scriptural. That is not to say that no elements of Peretti's writing are scriptural. But keep in mind that it is basically fantasy—377 pages of fantasy. That's long reading that would be better spent in God's Word learning the true aspects of spiritual warfare. ■■



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