

CHAPTER 27

DEALING WITH WITCHCRAFT AND CURSES – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO TWO VERY BIG SUBJECTS

*....Blessed be everyone who blesses you,
and cursed be everyone who curses you.”
Numbers 24:9(b) (RSV)*

*“.....in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments”
Isaiah 47:9(b) (RSV)*

*“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you -----?”
Galatians 3:1(a) (RSV)*

*Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying,
So a curse without cause does not alight.
Proverbs 26:2 (NASB)*

¹⁰ There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, ¹¹ or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. ¹² For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord; and because of these abominable practices the Lord your God is driving them out before you. ¹³ You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. ¹⁴ For these nations, which you are about to dispossess, give heed to soothsayers and to diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you so to do.

Deuteronomy 18:10-14 (RSV)

⁶ And he burned his sons as an offering in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and practiced soothsaying and augury and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger.

2 Chronicles 33:6 (RSV)

¹⁹ And when they say to you, “Consult the mediums and the wizards who chirp and mutter,” should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?

Isaiah 8:19 (RSV)

Now it happened, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, “Is it peace, Jehu?” So he answered, “What peace, as long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft are so many?”

2 Kings 9:22 (NKJV)

*I will destroy your witchcraft
and you will no longer cast spells.
Micah 5:12 (NIV)*

*all because of the wanton lust of a prostitute,
alluring, the mistress of sorceries,
who enslaved nations by her prostitution
and peoples by her witchcraft.*

Nahum 3:4 (NIV)

⁵ “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage

earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,” says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 3:5 (NASB)

⁹ But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,¹⁰ to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.”¹¹ And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

Acts 8:9-11 (NKJV)

²⁴ But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you.

Revelation 2:24 (NASB)

And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Revelation 9:21 (NKJV)

*“.....and all nations were deceived by thy sorcery
Revelation 18:23(b) (RSV)*

Why we need to be aware of the power of witchcraft

This chapter is in this book because witchcraft and curses are an integral part of how the wicked undermine you. So, we need to understand these things if we are to tackle the wicked more effectively. However, this is a huge subject and we cannot possibly deal with it all in one chapter. To make matters worse, it is also badly misunderstood by very many Christians. Therefore there is a lot that needs to be ‘unlearned’ as well as learned.

Even to begin to study curses and witchcraft we would need to spend time defining a number of words. Then we can go on to consider how to defend ourselves from all of this. As we begin to look at this, please don’t assume that witchcraft can’t possibly be real, or that it can’t have any effect on us today. Sadly, it is entirely real and needs to be taken far more seriously than it is in the modern Church.

What exactly is a curse?

The word ‘*curse*’ may conjure up images from Macbeth or from horror films of witches in pointy hats. The reality is far more mundane. Curses are negative words, spoken by a person, which harm, hinder or blight the life of some other person or group. The words spoken may also be charged with supernatural power, either from God or the demons, and then fulfilled as a result of that power.

It may, or may not, be the intention of the person who utters the curse that these harmful consequences should follow. He may not necessarily believe in the power of curses, or even that such things exist. Indeed, he may not even know that he has uttered a curse. Tragically, we often see this when a parent or teacher says words which have an ongoing effect on the person to whom, or about whom, they were said.

Even as adults, many are still blighted by negative or belittling words, spoken over them in childhood, which continue to ring in their ears and shrink their confidence. Often it was said by someone who had no idea of the terrible harm their words would cause. A curse need not necessarily be about anything that you might classify as ‘spiritual’. It can relate to anything at all. The operative point is that it has power to affect that person’s happiness, marriage, career, finances, health, fertility and so on.

Who can utter a curse?

The ability to utter a curse is not limited to witches or other occult-practitioners. Anybody can do it, and virtually all of us have done so, whether we realise it or not. Moreover, and this may surprise many people, even *God Himself* curses people. Indeed, He is responsible for more curses than any other person, because He does it on such a huge scale. Isaiah speaks of this and confirms that most of the Earth is under God's curse because of our sins and transgressions:

⁵ *The earth lies polluted
under its inhabitants;
for they have transgressed the laws,
violated the statutes,
broken the everlasting covenant.*
⁶ *Therefore a curse devours the earth,
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;
therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched,
and few men are left.*
Isaiah 24:5-6 (RSV)

The most famous curses God uttered were at 'the Fall'. That was when He cursed Adam and Eve, and all their descendants, because of their sin. He even cursed the ground itself, and the whole Earth, such that farming and gardening are now hard labour rather than a pleasure. Much later Moses also set out an array of specific curses which God would bring upon the Jewish people if they failed to listen to His voice and obey His commands:

"But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you."

Deuteronomy 28:15 (RSV)

There are then another 53 verses in Deuteronomy 28 which spell out exactly what those curses will consist of and result in. Please go through them, as there are far too many to list here. However, they are preceded in the chapter by a series of blessings, which God also says will come upon the Jewish people if they *do* listen to Him and obey His commands. These are listed in verses 3-14, but this is how they are introduced:

¹*"And if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God.*
Deuteronomy 28:1-2 (RSV)

The grim list of curses set out in Deuteronomy 28:15-68 are graphically described. The blessings are equally specific. The history of the Jewish people for the past 3500 years shows the outworking of both the blessings and the curses. God raised the Jews up, and also brought them down, depending on the level of their obedience or disobedience to Him. There are also many other curses that God has spoken at other times and to other people. These continue to operate, even today.

A curse that comes from God Himself is usually a statement or pronouncement by Him as to what will happen to a person if they do something which He has forbidden. More to the point, it is what He Himself will do to that person, or which He will cause to happen to them. The outworking and fulfilment of the curse are inevitable, because it was God who spoke it. In this verse, Jeremiah tells us that we are cursed if we trust in man, or in our own flesh, or in anyone else's flesh:

*Thus says the Lord:
"Cursed is the man who trusts in man*

*and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the Lord.
Jeremiah 17:5 (ESV)*

We also see from Zechariah that a curse is sent out upon all who steal or lie and that they will be “cut off”. That curse will even enter the house of the liar or thief and remain with them as it takes effect and exerts its influence over them:

¹ Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a flying scroll! ² And he said to me, “What do you see?” I answered, “I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits, and its breadth ten cubits.” ³ Then he said to me, “This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land; for every one who steals shall be cut off henceforth according to it, and every one who swears falsely shall be cut off henceforth according to it. ⁴ I will send it forth, says the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of him who swears falsely by my name; and it shall abide in his house and consume it, both timber and stones.”

Zechariah 5:1-4 (RSV)

Malachi spoke in similar terms of the curse that God sent out upon those priests who did not listen to Him and who did not give glory to His name:

“And now, O priests, this command is for you. ² If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart.

Malachi 2:1-2 (ESV)

Malachi also speaks of how God cursed those who ‘robbed’ Him by failing to give their proper tithes and offerings. That is how financial giving was arranged under the Law of Moses, though our duty to give is expressed very differently now, in the Church age. The operative point is that this is what happened to those who failed to give properly under the Mosaic covenant, when tithing still applied:

⁸ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

Malachi 3:8-10 (ESV)

That specific curse for failing to give financially in accordance with the Law of Moses does not apply to us today. But other curses do apply and we can still be affected by those. Therefore, if we have any common sense, we will choose to live in such a way as to make ourselves eligible to receive God’s blessings and so as to avoid His curses. Some might recoil from the very idea that a Christian could ever be affected by a curse that God has spoken. However I believe that we can be affected, just as much as an unbeliever can.

For example, God has put in place a law, or you could call it a binding principle, whereby anybody who exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. You could think of those two statements as a fixed law that God has woven into the fabric of the universe. Alternatively, you could choose to see it as being both a curse and a blessing, depending on what we decide to do. Here is the passage:

*whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.
Matthew 23:12 (RSV)*

Therefore if you ignore Jesus’ words and choose to exalt yourself by boasting, pride, self-importance or self-exaltation, then God is obligated to humble you. His own words require Him to do so. That is

He must move you lower down in response to your own exalting of yourself. That is an example of a curse in operation. A negative outcome is occurring because of what *God said*, and because of what you did to bring yourself within its scope.

Conversely, if you choose to humble yourself, then the blessing will operate instead and therefore God will exalt you. There is another very similar law, or curse, if you prefer. This likewise affects us all, whether we are Christians or not. It is called the "*law of sowing and reaping*". It means that God has decreed that a person's actions and decisions whether good or evil, will later come back upon themselves. Apostle Paul speaks of this:

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.
Galatians 6:7 (RSV)

This law is stated by Paul, but he is speaking under God's inspiration. It is therefore what God is saying. It also applies to us all, whether we are saved or unsaved. Therefore, whatever we do, whether good or evil, selfish or unselfish, obedient or disobedient, will inevitably bear fruit *of its own kind*. We will then be made to reap that fruit in our own lives, whether it is good or bad. So, if we do evil we will inevitably reap a harvest of evil. It will pursue us, wherever we go. But if we do good, we will reap a harvest of good. That could be seen as an unbreakable law of the universe.

However, it is also legitimate to view it as both a curse and a blessing, depending on what we choose to do, and thus the effect it has on us. We have just looked at some examples of curses, and also of blessings, that have come from God Himself. However, both curses and blessings can also be spoken by human beings. Moreover, they can speak these in their own right, not only on God's behalf. Furthermore, they can be spoken by *any of us*, whether we are Christians or not and whether we believe in the power of curses or not. We shall look at some examples below of curses that were uttered by characters in the Bible and the negative consequences that flowed from those.

The key point is that *anybody* can utter a curse, not just those people. We do not need to have any special position or title. Neither do we need any knowledge or understanding of what we are doing, or of the effect our words will have. Accordingly, it is all the more vital that we begin to take this whole subject seriously and gain a proper understanding of how it all operates. That will help us to avoid cursing other people without even realising we are doing so. It will also help us to realise what is going on *when other people curse us*, and what we can do about that in order to defend ourselves.

Self-imposed curses, by which a person speaks a curse over himself, even if they don't realise they are doing so

One of the commonest forms of a curse is where it is self-imposed. The person curses themselves, usually without being aware that they are doing so, or having any belief that it will take effect. An example of this in the Bible is Rebekah, the wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau. She spoke a curse over herself, probably without having any idea of the seriousness of what she was saying. The account begins when Isaac tells Esau that he wants to give him his (Isaac's) blessing before he dies. He then sends Esau out to hunt for game, so that they can eat before he gives him that blessing:

¹When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son, and said to him, "My son"; and he answered, "Here I am." ²He said, "Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. ³Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me, ⁴and prepare for me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat; that I may bless you before I die."

Genesis 27:1-4 (RSV)

Isaac's wife, Rebekah, heard all of this. However, she favoured Jacob and wanted him to receive the blessing instead of Esau. So, she quickly thought of a scheme by which Isaac could be tricked into

giving the blessing to Jacob. She told Jacob to get two goats from the herd. Then she could cook them, and Jacob could take the food to Isaac and pretend to be Esau, so as to be given the blessing:

⁵ Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, ⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, ⁷ ‘Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food, that I may eat it, and bless you before the Lord before I die.’ ⁸ Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. ⁹ Go to the flock, and fetch me two good kids, that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he loves; ¹⁰ and you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.”

Genesis 27:5-10 (RSV)

Jacob was anxious about his mother’s scheme and feared that his father would discover the trick and curse him rather than bless him. That was when Rebekah spoke the fateful words by which she cursed herself. To be more precise, she redirected a curse from Jacob onto herself. She urged Jacob to go ahead and do it and said “Upon me be your curse....”

¹¹ But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. ¹² Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing.” ¹³ His mother said to him, “Upon me be your curse, my son; only obey my word, and go, fetch them to me.”

Genesis 27:11-13 (RSV)

Then Jacob went ahead, Isaac was deceived, and the blessing was given to Jacob. This blessing was the one that is due to the first born son. Do not confuse it with the birth right, which Jacob had already induced Esau to sell to him for a bowl of soup. That flippant transaction, which greatly angered God, was in the past, and was Esau’s own fault. This second episode had to do with the blessing that Isaac, as a father, wanted to give to his first born. That is what Jacob stole from Esau by this deception.

Before we see what happened to Rebekah due to her self-imposed curse, let’s look at how the blessing was given to Jacob and how it couldn’t be taken back afterwards. That is very significant in itself and shows the great power that words have, whether to bless or to curse. They can be difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to undo. That is why we need to be extremely careful what we say, especially to our children. This is what happened when Jacob’s trick was discovered:

³⁰ As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. ³¹ He also prepared savory food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, “Let my father arise, and eat of his son’s game, that you may bless me.” ³² His father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” He answered, “I am your son, your first-born, Esau.” ³³ Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, “Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him?—yes, and he shall be blessed.” ³⁴ When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, “Bless me, even me also, O my father!” ³⁵ But he said, “Your brother came with guile, and he has taken away your blessing.” ³⁶ Esau said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.” Then he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?” ³⁷ Isaac answered Esau, “Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?”

Genesis 27:30-37 (RSV)

Esau was angry when he realised what Jacob had done, and he resolved to kill him:

⁴¹ Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”

Genesis 27:41 (RSV)

As a result, Jacob had to flee, or Esau would have killed him. Jacob stayed away for 20 years and Rebekah never saw him again. She died while he was hiding from Esau. That in itself must have been a torment to her because he was her favourite son. That is why she suggested the trick in the first place. At some later point she spoke to her husband, after Jacob had gone, and said “*I am weary of my life....*”. That was part of the outworking of the curse which she had brought upon herself, or redirected towards herself, by her unwise words. It was already taking effect:

⁴⁶ Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?”

Genesis 27:46 (RSV)

In addition to missing Jacob, she was also anxious as to what would become of him and whom he would marry. She feared he would end up marrying one of the Hittite women, who were pagans and Canaanites. Actually, he married Rachel and Leah, the daughters of Rebekah’s brother Laban. But Rebekah would never have known that, because Jacob could not come back to visit her to give her news or Esau would have killed him. Thus Rebekah spent her final years in a ‘weariness’ of regret and torment. She also died young, and before her husband, which is unusual in itself.

She was experiencing the outworking of the curses which would, otherwise, have come upon Jacob. Firstly there would be Esau’s own curses, which he must have uttered himself. Secondly, there would be God’s curse, which comes upon all liars. Both of these curses, and more, were then *redirected* towards Rebekah as a result of her own words, by which she declared that they would come upon her and had even asked that they do so. Sadly, we never hear of Rebekah again after this.

How does a curse operate?

Let’s now consider *how* a curse operates. That is who, or what, gives the curse its power and causes the specified consequences to occur? The short answer is that it is either God, the Devil or the demons. If a curse is spoken by God Himself, then He will implement it or instruct angels to do so. If a curse is spoken by a person, whether or not they are intentionally serving Satan, then the demons will cause it to be fulfilled. That is another reason why we need to be so careful in what we say.

We may not know, or believe, any of this. We could even be convinced that demons do not exist. Yet that ignorance or unbelief will make no difference. The cursing words which we speak, whether over ourselves or others, will still be implemented. The demons are not constrained by whether or not you believe in them, or in the reality and power of curses. All that matters is that you *actually spoke* the cursing words. If you did, the demons are within their rights to latch on to your words, and to bring about the specified consequences.

They will do so regardless of what you may think about demons, or about your own words. Imagine a person is speaking about themselves and they say: “*I believe I will get cancer one day. It’s bound to happen to me, knowing my luck.*” When the person says that, and especially if they *keep on* saying it, they are asking for trouble. They are unwittingly invoking a curse over themselves and inviting the demons to make their own words into a reality, which they are well able to do.

Let’s deal with the general point first. Are demons *capable* of inflicting illness upon a person, for whatever reason, not just due to curses? We see many such cases in Scripture where sickness, and even death, were the direct result of demonic activity. Of course, that is not true of all sickness, but it is clearly true of some of it. Moreover, it is made all the more likely in cases where the demons are positively invited to do so. Remember, the Bible says that Satan seeks to *devour* us, even Christians. One of the ways he does that is by causing illness or death:

Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8 (RSV)

For example, there is the account of the woman in Luke chapter 13 whom Jesus healed on a Sabbath day. She was bent over and could not straighten her back. Jesus Himself said that she had “*a spirit of infirmity*” and directly attributed her physical condition to Satan. He even specified that Satan had been causing her spinal deformity for 18 years. By that Jesus either meant Satan himself, or one of his demons on his behalf - most probably the latter:

And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?”

Luke 13:16 (RSV)

This verse demonstrates that it is possible, at least in some cases, for a demon to bring physical illness into a person’s life. One of the ways in which that can happen is where the person speaks it over themselves, and effectively *invites* the demons to bring about that outcome. However, self-imposed curses do not only apply in the context of illness. There are many other negative events or outcomes that we might speak over ourselves, or over our children, church or business, as a result of unguarded words.

This will happen even if we don’t believe our words have power, or don’t intend any harm. That said, the demons’ entitlement to cause such problems is increased if the person uttering the cursing words *does believe* in what he is doing and does *intend that harm should result*. If so, they are not only speaking cursing words, but doing so *with faith*. The person may even be in direct contact with the demons and entering into agreements with them, so as to bring about the desired outcomes.

How one person’s curse can, and does, impact other people’s lives

We see many cases in the Bible where a person’s cursing words have led to harmful consequences, or even death, for another person. Sometimes that was intended. Other times the person uttering the curse did not intend, or expect, any harm to follow. There is no room in this chapter to go through all of these. However, I hope to do a thorough study of the subject in a future book which will focus entirely upon curses, witchcraft and the occult.

One major point is that curses do not only affect ourselves. We have the potential to harm others too, whether or not we intend to. The words we speak operate either as an invitation or a request. The demons who accompany us will then latch onto those words and seek to bring about the negative consequence. They do so not to help us against our enemies, but to advance their own evil purposes. They therefore use your own foolish or hasty words as a means of obtaining the right to do things which they may not, otherwise, have been authorised to do.

The demons are subject to restrictions which limit what they can do, or whom they can attack. The most obvious example is Job. Satan could not touch him at all until God permitted it. Even then, he could only do so in the specific ways that God authorised and no more. If you are a parent you are the God-given protector of your child. You are meant to operate like a shield or umbrella, to keep the demons from being able to attack him.

If however you yourself speak cursing words over, or about, or to, that child, you are effectively removing that shield or umbrella. You are therefore enabling, or even authorising, the demons to do harm which they would not, otherwise, have been permitted to do. You might never realise the dreadful significance of your own words, or intend any harm. But your words will still be seized upon by the demons and put into effect or taken advantage of.

Who is most vulnerable to being affected by other people's curses and why?

You might then wonder why we aren't all subject to many different curses all the time, from ourselves or others. The answer is that not all curses that are directed at us, deliberately or otherwise, are *able to take effect*. It depends on a number of factors and the net effect is that some of us are far more affected by curses than others. There is an intriguing verse in Proverbs in which Solomon considers why some curses hit their target, and become operative, whereas others don't:

*Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying,
a curse that is causeless does not alight.*

Proverbs 26:2 (RSV)

Solomon means that a curse will only take effect in a person's life, if there is some *reason or basis* for it to do so. There would need to be some sin, or occult activity, either by them or by a parent or grandparent, which creates an opening. Or it could be due to the absence of the proper protections that should be in place from a parent, church leader or other authority figure. Alternatively, it could relate to other words spoken, or things done, which have given the demons the right to become involved in the person's life.

Then the demon who is seeking to put the curse into effect is able to use that opening, or rely on that weakness, sin, or other legal pretext, as a basis for intervening in that person's life. Imagine a person uses tarot cards, or an ouija board, or he goes to see a medium or attends a séance, or is involved in Freemasonry. Or, perhaps it could be that a *parent or grandparent* did one or more of those things. That occult activity would then provide a 'legal' basis for a curse to take effect at some point thereafter, not only upon the life of that person themselves, *but also their children or grandchildren*.

That may sound profoundly unfair to us. However, where did you get the idea that there is anything fair about demons or their activities? They look for openings wherever they can find them. Then they exploit them as viciously and ruthlessly as they can, without any regard to what is 'fair'. They have no ethics or morals and will not hesitate to bring harm into the life of a child or grandchild as a result of what its parents or grandparents did. Alternatively, the demons might make use of, or rely upon, some other form of sin, such as abortion or perhaps sexual sin, or even child abuse.

Such things create openings into people's lives and allow curses to 'land' on the person themselves, *and also on their descendants*, and to take effect. Indeed, it can also lead to demonisation of one type or another. At the lower end of the scale, the person can become oppressed and/or influenced in various ways by a demon who is on *the outside* of them. Or if it is more serious, it can even result in a demon obtaining the legal right to enter the person and to take up occupancy *inside* them.

Both outcomes, at either end of the spectrum, are very common. They also occur regardless of what we believe or don't believe about curses, or the wider activities of demons. Accordingly, before we begin to look at how curses can be broken, and at how demons can be resisted and even expelled, we need to consider how we can avoid being affected by curses in the first place. That means avoiding all forms of the occult, but also all sexual sin, and every other form of sin too.

We also need to humble ourselves, 'crucify the flesh', repent, turn away from sin, love the truth, fear God, be transformed by the renewing of our minds and become mature disciples with strong self-control. The extent to which we do all those such things will have a major bearing on our ability to avoid these spiritual problems. Even the way in which we treat the poor and needy has a bearing on the extent to which curses will be allowed to affect us:

*He who gives to the poor will not want,
but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.*

Proverbs 28:27 (RSV)

Joshua's curse against anyone who would rebuild the city of Jericho

This is an example of a very specific curse which was uttered by a man *in his own right*, not by God. Yet it took effect and had a devastating impact many years later. The curse was spoken after the old Canaanite city of Jericho was destroyed by God, when the Israelites were taking possession of the land. Joshua did not want the city to be rebuilt and he spoke a curse over any man who should ever rebuild it. He said it would result in the death of both his eldest and youngest sons:

²⁶ *Joshua laid an oath upon them at that time, saying, "Cursed before the Lord be the man that rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho.*

*At the cost of his first-born shall he
lay its foundation,
and at the cost of his youngest son
shall he set up its gates."*

Joshua 6:26 (RSV)

That curse was later fulfilled, exactly as Joshua had said, even though it took place centuries later. It was fulfilled in the days of King Ahab, when a man called Hiel of Bethel rebuilt the city. Doing so cost him the deaths of his eldest and youngest sons, exactly as Joshua had said:

³³ *And Ahab made an Ashe'rah. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. ³⁴ In his days Hi'el of Bethel built Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of Abi'ram his first-born, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.*

1 Kings 16:33-34 (RSV)

I am not sure why God allowed, or even caused, that curse to take effect in the lives of Hiel of Bethel and his sons. However what matters, for our present purposes, is that *it happened*. Therefore we need to accept that curses are real, that they can be spoken by people against other people, and that they can take effect even long afterwards. That being so, we have to find a place for this subject in our theology and start to see its relevance in our daily lives.

The cursing words with which the people of Israel swore not to allow any of their daughters to marry Benjaminites - a vow they later regretted

Here is another strange account involving the tribe of Benjamin and the vow made by the other 11 tribes when a civil war arose. They all vowed not to let their daughters marry Benjaminites. They fortified that with a curse upon anyone from their tribes who might break the vow and allow his daughter to marry a Benjaminite. The account begins when a civil war broke out due to a dispute. This led to a fierce battle in which the Benjaminites were heavily defeated. They lost 25,000 young men, and only 600 were left:

⁴³ *Cutting down the Benjaminites, they pursued them and trod them down from Nohah as far as opposite Gib'e-ah on the east. ⁴⁴ Eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell, all of them men of valor. ⁴⁵ And they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon; five thousand men of them were cut down in the highways, and they were pursued hard to Gidom, and two thousand men of them were slain. ⁴⁶ So all who fell that day of Benjamin were twenty-five thousand men that drew the sword, all of them men of valor. ⁴⁷ But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and abode at the rock of Rimmon four months. ⁴⁸ And the men of Israel turned back against the Benjaminites, and smote them with the edge of the sword, men and beasts and all that they found. And all the towns which they found they set on fire.*

Judges 20:43-48 (RSV)

When the battle was over, and they realised the scale of the devastation to the tribe of Benjamin, the other 11 tribes regretted it. They wished now that they could give their daughters to the Benjaminites after all, so that that tribe could be repopulated. But they knew they couldn't, because of the hasty vow they had made and the curse which went with it. They all knew that that curse was *real and effective*:

Now the men of Israel had sworn at Mizpah, "No one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin."² And the people came to Bethel, and sat there till evening before God, and they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly.³ And they said, "O Lord, the God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that there should be today one tribe lacking in Israel?"⁴ And on the morrow the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.⁵ And the people of Israel said, "Which of all the tribes of Israel did not come up in the assembly to the Lord?" For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the Lord to Mizpah, saying, "He shall be put to death."⁶ And the people of Israel had compassion for Benjamin their brother, and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel this day.⁷ What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the Lord that we will not give them any of our daughters for wives?"

Judges 21:1-7 (RSV)

The purpose of setting out this account here is to show that the 11 tribes all took their curse entirely seriously. They wanted to give their daughters to the Benjaminites, and bitterly regretted having made the vow. But they could not do so, because they knew their curse would take effect, and cause them harm, if they broke the vow:

¹⁶ Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?"¹⁷ And they said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe be not blotted out from Israel.¹⁸ Yet we cannot give them wives of our daughters." For the people of Israel had sworn, "Cursed be he who gives a wife to Benjamin."

Judges 21:16-18 (RSV)

They later solved the problem in a roundabout way by which they got some wives for the Benjaminites by other means. However, the fact that they went to such elaborate lengths indicates that they all took the curse absolutely seriously. The account is in the Bible for us to learn from. It shows, firstly, that we should not make foolish, hasty vows, or indeed any vows at all. But it also demonstrates that curses are completely real and need to be taken far more seriously than they generally are.

King David's curse uttered against Mount Gilboa, on which his friend Jonathan died

Let's look at another example of a specific curse in operation. This one is rather different because it was spoken against an inanimate object, rather than a person or group. King David uttered a curse against Mount Gilboa, the very mountain itself, because his best friend, Jonathan, was killed on it. He then declared that there should be no rain upon it:

*"Ye mountains of Gilbo'a,
let there be no dew or rain upon you,
nor uprising of the deep!
For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,
the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.*

2 Samuel 1:21 (RSV)

The intriguing thing is that, even now, 3000 years later, Mount Gilboa does not receive adequate rainfall and is of little use for agriculture. David's curse evidently took effect, and is *still in operation* today. Some might call that a coincidence, but I don't. Every little detail in the Bible is there for a reason and can provide useful insights to those who make the effort to search for them. What happened to Mount Gilboa, and why it happened, are useful pointers. They help us to see the reality of cursing words, how they operate, and the effect they can have, even centuries later.

Jotham's curse over Abimelech and also the citizens of Shechem

There is a strange account in the book of Judges about Jotham. He was the son of Gideon, who was also known as 'Jerubbaal'. Jotham uttered a curse against his wicked half-brother, Abimelech, and all the citizens of a city called Shechem. They had supported Abimelech and made him their king, because Abimelech's mother came from Shechem. Abimelech murdered all of his brothers, except for Jotham, who escaped. Jotham went to Mount Gerazim, which is alongside Shechem, and spoke a curse over the whole city and all its citizens, because they had supported Abimelech.

We later learn that, in some unspecified way, the people of Shechem had actually helped Abimelech when he murdered Jotham's brothers. That is an important detail, as it helps to explain why the people of Shechem were so severely affected by the curse that Jotham later uttered. His curse was not "causeless", because they themselves had acted sinfully, in that they had assisted in a mass murder. That fact made them much more vulnerable to be affected by Jotham's cursing words than they would otherwise have been:

¹⁶ "Now therefore, if you acted in good faith and honor when you made Abim'elech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubba'al and his house, and have done to him as his deeds deserved—¹⁷ for my father fought for you, and risked his life, and rescued you from the hand of Mid'ian; ¹⁸ and you have risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, seventy men on one stone, and have made Abim'elech, the son of his maidservant, king over the citizens of Shechem, because he is your kinsman—¹⁹ if you then have acted in good faith and honor with Jerubba'al and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abim'elech, and let him also rejoice in you; ²⁰ but if not, let fire come out from Abim'elech, and devour the citizens of Shechem, and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the citizens of Shechem, and from Beth-millo, and devour Abim'elech."²¹ And Jotham ran away and fled, and went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abim'elech his brother.

Judges 9:16-21 (RSV)

Note how specific Jotham's curse is. He not only curses Abimelech himself with death. He also asks for fire to devour the citizens of Shechem, both of which events later occur. In this case, it would seem that the power behind the curse, which was bringing it to fulfilment, was God Himself. In verse 22 we see that God Himself sends an evil spirit between Abimelech and the people of Shechem, who had previously supported him.

This results in them falling out with Abimelech, such that they then cooperate with his enemy, Gaal. He is in rebellion against Abimelech and they put men in place to ambush him. However, while waiting to ambush Abimelech, the men of Shechem also behaved wickedly in another way, by robbing travellers on that road. In doing that, they provided another 'cause' for Jotham's curse to 'alight' upon them, for the same reasons explained earlier by Solomon:

²² Abim'elech ruled over Israel three years. ²³ And God sent an evil spirit between Abim'elech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abim'elech; ²⁴ that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubba'al might come and their blood be laid upon Abim'elech their brother, who slew them, and upon the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to slay his brothers. ²⁵ And the men of Shechem put men in ambush against him on the mountain tops, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abim'elech.

Judges 9:22-25 (RSV)

The people of Shechem also worshipped a pagan god, rather than the God of Israel. That provides yet another 'cause' for Jotham's curse to alight upon them. They were idolaters and were probably involved in other aspects of the occult too. Such things are highly significant and provide a powerful basis for curses to come upon anyone who engages in them. If you come across a person whose life is blighted, one of the first questions to ask is whether they, or their parents or grandparents, have had any involvement in the occult. It is remarkably common and has a huge impact in people's lives:

²⁶ *And Ga'al the son of Ebed moved into Shechem with his kinsmen; and the men of Shechem put confidence in him. ²⁷ And they went out into the field, and gathered the grapes from their vineyards and trod them, and held festival, and went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and reviled Abim'elech. ²⁸ And Ga'al the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abim'elech, and who are we of Shechem, that we should serve him? Did not the son of Jerubba'al and Zebul his officer serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem? Why then should we serve him? ²⁹ Would that this people were under my hand! then I would remove Abim'elech. I would say to Abim'elech, 'Increase your army, and come out.'*"

Judges 9:26-29 (RSV)

Then Abimelech hears of this rebellion and he begins to make plans for a counter-attack against Shechem:

And Abim'elech and all the men that were with him rose up by night, and laid wait against Shechem in four companies.

Judges 9:34 (RSV)

Abimelech's plans succeed and his men then defeat Gaal, who flees from Shechem:

⁴⁰ *And Abim'elech chased him, and he fled before him; and many fell wounded, up to the entrance of the gate. ⁴¹ And Abim'elech dwelt at Aru'mah; and Zebul drove out Ga'al and his kinsmen, so that they could not live on at Shechem.*

Judges 9:40-41 (RSV)

Abimelech then turns on the city of Shechem and destroys it. In doing this, albeit without realising it, Abimelech is being used by God to fulfil Jotham's curse on the people of Shechem. That is the case, even though he himself is also going to be destroyed later, as a result of that same curse:

⁴⁴ *Abim'elech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city, while the two companies rushed upon all who were in the fields and slew them. ⁴⁵ And Abim'elech fought against the city all that day; he took the city, and killed the people that were in it; and he razed the city and sowed it with salt.*

Judges 9:44-45 (RSV)

At this point, the people of Shechem entered the stronghold of the tower of Elberith, because they thought they would be safe there. But they weren't. Abimelech then set the stronghold on fire, with all the people still in it. He killed 1000 of them by fire, exactly in line with Jotham's curse, which was remorselessly fulfilled against him, and all the people of Shechem:

⁴⁶ *When all the people of the Tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the stronghold of the house of El-be'rith. ⁴⁷ Abim'elech was told that all the people of the Tower of Shechem were gathered together. ⁴⁸ And Abim'elech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the men that were with him; and Abim'elech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bundle of brushwood, and took it up and laid it on his shoulder. And he said to the men that were with him, "What you have seen me do, make haste to do, as I have done." ⁴⁹ So every one of the people cut down his bundle and following Abim'elech put it against the stronghold, and they set the stronghold on fire over them, so that all the people of the Tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women.*

Judges 9:46-49 (RSV)

That's not yet the end of the account. Abimelech then went to a place called Thebez to attack it. When he did, the people took refuge in a tower and a woman threw a millstone down. The stone landed on Abimelech's head, wounding him mortally, so that he asked his armour-bearer to finish him off. Thus, in the end, he too became a victim of Jotham's curse:

⁵⁰ Then Abim'elech went to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it. ⁵¹ But there was a strong tower within the city, and all the people of the city fled to it, all the men and women, and shut themselves in; and they went to the roof of the tower. ⁵² And Abim'elech came to the tower, and fought against it, and drew near to the door of the tower to burn it with fire. ⁵³ And a certain woman threw an upper millstone upon Abim'elech's head, and crushed his skull. ⁵⁴ Then he called hastily to the young man his armor-bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.'" And his young man thrust him through, and he died. ⁵⁵ And when the men of Israel saw that Abim'elech was dead, they departed every man to his home.

Judges 9:50-55 (RSV)

In case anybody still doubts who was behind these strange events and who caused Jotham's curse to be fulfilled, the next passage makes it unmistakably clear. We are explicitly told that it was God Himself. He made the curse of Jotham come upon Abimelech and on the people of Shechem who had made him their king and aided him in his earlier murders.

So, it is not mere supposition. It is plainly stated that God was involved throughout. That is not politically correct, and may cause controversy, because it does not fit in with the modern, western, liberal view of God. But it happens to be true and it is a truth that we need to face up to, and try to understand, rather than ignoring it or pretending it isn't in the Bible:

⁵⁶ Thus God requited the crime of Abim'elech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers; ⁵⁷ and God also made all the wickedness of the men of Shechem fall back upon their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubba'al.

Judges 9:56-57 (RSV)

When did you last hear any preacher speak about this incident, or any other such episode, in which a curse is empowered and implemented by God Himself? It is a no-go area for preachers. Therefore, most of God's people have no understanding of these themes, and no idea what to do about curses. My aim in this short chapter is only to introduce you to these issues. It is impossible to cover the subject fully. That will have to come later, when I hope to go into much greater detail in a book I intend to write on 'Spiritual warfare'.

Moses also used curses in particular situations.

Another practice, which sounds strange to us, is what God told Moses to do where a woman was accused of adultery but there was no evidence to prove or disprove it. She had to take an oath by which she invoked a curse over herself if she was guilty. If she had committed adultery, but not otherwise, that self-imposed curse would bring about a painful death. If anybody still doubts that a curse can affect us, we have here a specific biblical authority which makes clear that it can. The woman had to go to the priest and swear an oath as follows:

¹⁹ The priest shall have her take an oath and shall say to the woman, "If no man has lain with you and if you have not gone astray into uncleanness, being under the authority of your husband, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings a curse; ²⁰ if you, however, have gone astray, being under the authority of your husband, and if you have defiled yourself and a man other than your husband has had intercourse with you" ²¹ (then the priest shall have the woman swear with the oath of the curse, and the priest shall say to the woman), "the Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people by the Lord's making your thigh waste away and your abdomen swell; ²² and this water that brings a curse shall go into your stomach, and make your abdomen swell and your thigh waste away." And the woman shall say, "Amen. Amen."

²³ The priest shall then write these curses on a scroll, and he shall wash them off into the water of bitterness. ²⁴ Then he shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings a curse, so that the water which brings a curse will go into her and cause bitterness. ²⁵ The priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, and he shall wave the grain offering before the Lord

and bring it to the altar; ²⁶ and the priest shall take a handful of the grain offering as its memorial offering and offer it up in smoke on the altar, and afterward he shall make the woman drink the water. ²⁷ When he has made her drink the water, then it shall come about, if she has defiled herself and has been unfaithful to her husband, that the water which brings a curse will go into her and cause bitterness, and her abdomen will swell and her thigh will waste away, and the woman will become a curse among her people. ²⁸ But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, she will then be free and conceive children.

Numbers 5:19-28 (RSV)

Many may not believe this could possibly work, but the fact remains that it is in the Bible. Moreover, Moses and the people took it entirely seriously. We should too, and start to realise the effect that curses have in our lives. In our courts we still ask witnesses to swear on the Bible. When that practice first began, most witnesses took it deadly seriously. They knew they were invoking a curse upon themselves if they were to lie, because they were swearing “*by Almighty God, to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth*”.

Therefore, in the past, when a far higher proportion of people were Christians, or at least had some fear of God, witnesses were genuinely afraid to lie on oath. The oath really meant something and they knew God would bring judgment upon them if they lied. Today it is generally seen as just a quaint old ritual. The public’s view may have changed, but God’s has not. He still takes it very seriously if witnesses lie after having sworn, *by His Name*, not to do so. They will come under God’s judgment, probably in this life, but certainly in the next.

A young man I know was cursed by a witch and became seriously epileptic within a few days.

Anyone who still doubts the reality of curses and witchcraft may also wish to reflect on this incident. I know a young man, ‘Anthony’, who was active in a Pentecostal church. He went on an evangelistic mission with a group which was not part of his own church. It was in a very rural part of the UK. He told the pastor of his church about this and he advised him not to go. I’m not sure why, but he evidently saw a problem of some kind. However, Anthony ignored that advice and went anyway.

Furthermore, while on the mission trip, he didn’t take things as seriously as he should have done. He went out drinking in the evenings, contrary to the wishes of the mission leaders. So, he was also ignoring their express instructions. While they were evangelising, they were approached by a hostile woman who told them she was a witch. She said she didn’t want them in her village. This woman was an occult-practitioner and was deadly serious. For some reason, she then walked straight up to Anthony in particular and spoke cursing words directly at him.

She may have discerned, perhaps by demonic guidance, that he was more vulnerable than the others. The incident was serious enough for him to remember it, and even to be scared by it, but not to pray for protection, or to ask others to do so. Neither did he ring the elders of his church, or even tell the leaders of the mission. He did nothing at all, partly because he saw no need, and partly because he didn’t know what to do anyway, or how. A few days later he had a major epileptic fit, the first he had ever had, and he has had them regularly ever since, despite strong medication.

The drugs may perhaps reduce the number of seizures, but they don’t stop them. That non-response to medication is a strong indicator that his epilepsy is not caused by organic factors, but is due to demons. The reason I mentioned those seemingly minor details at the start of this story is that I believe they caused Anthony to be exposed. Accordingly the curse, when it was uttered, was able to ‘alight’ upon him, as per what Solomon said in Proverbs 26:2. Let’s recap the unwise and inappropriate things he did, or failed to do, which made him more vulnerable than the others:

a) He ignored the advice of his pastor who said he ought not to go.

- b) He was disrespectful and rebellious on the mission trip by defying the leaders' wishes and drinking in the evenings.
- c) He was not in a strong condition as a disciple generally and did not know his Bible well.
- d) He also had a lot of occultic 'baggage' in his life from his grandparents and even his great grandparents. Some of them had been involved in spiritualism, fortune-telling and Freemasonry. Those ungodly things in his family background would make him an easier candidate for the witch to curse and provide major openings into his life for the demons to use.
- e) When the curse was uttered against him he did not take it seriously. He just brushed it aside as if it didn't require any action or attention. We should certainly not fear the power of demons. But, on the other hand, a frivolous, jocular attitude is also wrong and is asking for trouble.
- f) He did not pray, or ask anybody else to pray for him.
- g) He went on the trip with a casual, complacent attitude. Yet the reality is that he was taking part in a 'raid' against enemy territory. What the group was doing would inevitably arouse human and demonic opposition. He should have realised that beforehand and prayed for protection. He was like a man who goes for a walk, at night, in a high crime area, run by drug-dealers and violent gangs, as if there was no need to be concerned.

How can we prevent ourselves being affected by curses, or be set free from the power of curses if they are already affecting us?

Let's look at what Anthony could, and should, have done before, during and after this incident with the witch. Firstly, he ought to have enquired into his own family background. He should have known that that could affect him, and that it needed to be addressed, so that he could be free of its influence. Then, when he learned of his grandparents' involvement in spiritualism, séances, Freemasonry and fortune telling, he should have prayed about it and:

- a) renounced it all, as specifically and earnestly as he could, preferably item by item
- b) asked for God to cut him off from any spiritual 'inheritance' that may have come down to him from any relative who had engaged in the occult and which might be casting a sinister shadow over him
- c) asked God to protect him from the effect of any curses which might already be in operation in his life as a result of the actions of his grandparents and great-grandparents and to break the effect of those curses
- d) carefully weighed the advice of the elder/pastor who had urged him not to go. That is not to say that he was obliged to 'obey' that leader. He was not. But he should at least have listened to the advice. It was possible the pastor knew something, or that God was speaking through him. The very fact that he felt prompted to urge Anthony not to go was unusual, and should have been seen as significant. It suggested that God was giving him advance warning of this very danger.
- e) respected the requests of those leading the mission and abided by any reasonable instructions
- f) responded immediately, as soon as the curse was uttered, by *renouncing* it, there and then, to the witch's face. He could have said "*I reject all of your words and renounce and cancel them now, in the name of Jesus Christ*".

Let me give an example to illustrate that last point. When my baby daughter was being dedicated the wife of a local church leader, who was a misguided and spiritually mixed-up lady, came over to us.

Then she suddenly began to speak prophetically over our daughter, without our permission. Moreover, the words she was beginning to say were foolish and negative. I felt an immediate sense of alarm. Indeed, the Holy Spirit was warning me to take *instant action*. So I spoke up, sharply and loudly, and told her to stop speaking. I then said to her, fully audibly, for all nearby to hear:

“I reject and renounce every word you have just said. It was not from the Holy Spirit, and I ask God now, in Jesus’ name, to protect this child from any influence that might have come from you, or your words.”

Some might think it was harsh of me to speak in that blunt way, and that I may have hurt her feelings. But I could not allow any such consideration to limit my actions. I had to reject and revoke her words, immediately and unmistakably, and to stop her *before she said anything else*. That was my clear duty as a father. I had to shield my daughter from the effect of that foolish woman’s cursing words and to renounce any ‘divination’ or ‘fortune-telling’. That said, with false prophets, and false people generally, you can’t offend them anyway, even if you wanted to. They have skins like a rhinoceros.

What exactly is witchcraft, at its most basic level?

Let’s now look briefly at witchcraft and try to define it. At its most basic level it is the attempt to manipulate, dominate, intimidate or otherwise control any other person or group. It initially operates at the level of the *soul* rather than the *spirit*. That is it is conducted via the person’s own soul, namely their *mind, emotions and will*, and is exerted upon the other person’s mind, emotions and will. Therefore witchcraft need not necessarily involve any demons. It can be done by human beings, to other human beings, *by purely natural means*, at a soulish rather than spiritual level.

Even where we see the more heavy-duty witchcraft, such as mind-control, or even hypnosis, it can still be happening at a purely soulish level. However, witchcraft can also be, and frequently is, even more sinister than that. It can be supplemented by the addition of demonic power. Thus it often involves a *spiritual* dimension as well as the soulish. Then the person who is engaging in witchcraft becomes capable of even greater control, manipulation and domination than if he was to rely only on his own soulish power.

In case you think I am exaggerating the power and influence of witchcraft, consider how the prophet Isaiah spoke of it. He would not be invited to speak in many churches today, given his views. At any rate, he wouldn’t often be invited back. In chapter 47 Isaiah is speaking about those who engage in witchcraft. He does not say that they have no real power, or that they are just playing silly games based solely on their imagination. He takes them entirely seriously and says their enchantments have “*great power*”:

“.....in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments.”
Isaiah 47:9 (b) (RSV)

Admittedly, Isaiah is saying in the passage below that those who practise witchcraft and use sorcery and enchantments will ultimately fail and be destroyed. Of course they will, but that is not the point. The point is that, here and now, until they encounter God’s judgment and wrath, they *do* have real power, and at a very high level. If Isaiah took witchcraft seriously, and felt it could do harm, we must stop under-estimating it, ignoring it or making light of it, even though those who practice it will fail and be punished in the end:

¹² **“Keep on, then, with your magic spells
and with your many sorceries,
which you have labored at since childhood.
Perhaps you will succeed,
perhaps you will cause terror.**

¹³ *All the counsel you have received has only worn you out!
 Let your astrologers come forward,
 those stargazers who make predictions month by month,
 let them save you from what is coming upon you.*
¹⁴ *Surely they are like stubble;
 the fire will burn them up.
 They cannot even save themselves
 from the power of the flame.
 These are not coals for warmth;
 this is not a fire to sit by.*

Isaiah 47:12-14 (NIV)

Witchcraft becomes far more serious, and powerful, when it moves into the spiritual realm and the assistance of demons is enlisted in addition to the person's own soulish power.

Witchcraft is real and can profoundly affect *us and those around us*, not just other people, long ago or far away. That applies to both kinds of witchcraft, the ordinary soulish type, and the full-blown black magic variety. That is where the witch seeks demonic help to give added power to their curses or enchantments. We already know, or should know, that demons oppose us in their own right, without the need for anybody to ask them to do so. That is the very reason why we are told to resist them, and even to expel them.

It is only a short step from there to realise that demons can also work in conjunction with wicked human beings. That cooperation between the witch and the demon makes witchcraft far more damaging. So, there is all the more reason to take it seriously and to seek God's protection from it. Therefore, we must not be complacent about witchcraft, but we need not fear it either. We need to be balanced and show a proper sense of concern, as we would if crossing a busy road. We would all take that seriously, but we would not be afraid of it.

Witchcraft was practised by the King of Moab, when he sacrificed his eldest son. By so doing, he altered the course of a battle, presumably because he obtained the 'help' of a demon.

A more direct example of witchcraft, which illustrates that it has real power and is not imaginary, is the King of Moab in 2 Kings, chapter 3. He was an enemy of Israel and his army was fighting, but losing badly. The Moabite soldiers were being slaughtered by Israel's army:

²¹ *When all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, all who were able to put on armor, from the youngest to the oldest, were called out, and were drawn up at the frontier.*
²² *And when they rose early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, the Moabites saw the water opposite them as red as blood.* ²³ *And they said, "This is blood; the kings have surely fought together, and slain one another. Now then, Moab, to the spoil!"* ²⁴ *But when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose and attacked the Moabites, till they fled before them; and they went forward, slaughtering the Moabites as they went.*

2 Kings 3:21-24 (RSV)

When the battle was at a crucial stage, and his forces were being defeated, the King of Moab used witchcraft to provide more power to support his army. He didn't do it half-heartedly. He took his own eldest son and killed him as a sacrifice to his 'gods' which were, of course, demons. This use of the power of witchcraft had a profound effect and reversed the whole course of the battle:

²⁶ *When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom; but they could not.* ²⁷ *Then he took his*

eldest son who was to reign in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there came great wrath upon Israel; and they withdrew from him and returned to their own land.

2 Kings 3:26-27 (RSV)

I have heard it argued that the sacrifice of his son did not have any real power. Some suggest that it was “*all in the mind*” and simply emboldened the Moabites, causing them to *imagine* that they would be given added power. It is said that they therefore fought harder, due to being encouraged by that superstitious illusion. That seems to me to be a very lame explanation. One would only arrive at that sceptical conclusion because one *wanted* to do so, and was simply unwilling to believe that witchcraft could be real, regardless of the evidence.

If one examines the passage honestly, without any pre-existing agenda or scepticism, it is plain that the King of Moab’s witchcraft really did affect the outcome of the battle. That being so, if witchcraft was real back then, and for him, then it must be equally real now, for us. That is the only honest, logical, realistic conclusion that we can reach. We should therefore be taking active steps to identify and counteract witchcraft in our own lives and churches, rather than denying its existence or ignoring it, as most western Christians do.

If anyone is going to argue that things have changed, such that witchcraft was real back then, for the King of Moab, but is no longer real today, or for us, or for the people we know, they need to explain *how* and *why* things changed. They also need to say what they think caused the power of witchcraft to cease. The Bible says nothing whatsoever to that effect. Therefore any such argument is purely man-made, as there is nothing in the Bible to support it. In my view, there is no reason to think that anything at all has changed, so far as witchcraft is concerned.

Witchcraft was also practised by some of the Israelites, after they learned it from the Canaanites.

It wasn’t only the surrounding Canaanites who practised witchcraft. The Israelites began to do so too. Indeed, that was one of the reasons why God told them to exterminate all the Canaanites in the first place. He knew that, otherwise, the Israelites would imitate their wicked ways. This grim passage shows how the Israelites themselves later became involved in witchcraft, divination and sorcery, not just idolatry:

⁹ And the people of Israel did secretly against the Lord their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places at all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city; ¹⁰ they set up for themselves pillars and Ashe'rim on every high hill and under every green tree; ¹¹ and there they burned incense on all the high places, as the nations did whom the Lord carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the Lord to anger, ¹² and they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, “You shall not do this.” ¹³ Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.” ¹⁴ But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the Lord their God. ¹⁵ They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and the warnings which he gave them. They went after false idols, and became false, and they followed the nations that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them that they should not do like them. ¹⁶ And they forsook all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made for themselves molten images of two calves; and they made an Ashe'rah, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Ba'al. ¹⁷ And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings, and used divination and sorcery, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger.

2 Kings 17:9-17 (RSV)

It was to avoid the Canaanites’ idolatry and witchcraft being copied by the Israelites that God specifically commanded them to wipe them all out. Tragically, they did not fully obey that command:

¹⁶ *But in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, ¹⁷ but you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Per'izzites, the Hivites and the Jeb'usites, as the Lord your God has commanded; ¹⁸ that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices which they have done in the service of their gods, and so to sin against the Lord your God.*

Deuteronomy 20:16-18 (RSV)

King Ahaz of Judah also burned his own son to death as an offering, just as the King of Moab had done. Indeed, a number of the Kings of Israel, and even of Judah, did likewise. They sacrificed their own children as part of their idolatry and witchcraft:

² *Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God, as his father David had done, ³ but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. ⁴ And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.*

2 Kings 16:2-4 (RSV)

King Manasseh of Judah also practised witchcraft and even burned his own son as an offering, as the King of Moab had done.

Likewise King Manasseh, who was also from Judah, burned his own son, and not solely for purposes of idolatry. He engaged in various forms of witchcraft, including soothsaying and augury (fortune-telling) and he also dealt with mediums and wizards:

¹ *Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Heph'zibah. ² And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. ³ For he rebuilt the high places which Hezeki'ah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Ba'al, and made an Ashe'rah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them. ⁴ And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem will I put my name." ⁵ And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. ⁶ And he burned his son as an offering, and practiced soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger.*

2 Kings 21:1-6 (RSV)

However Manasseh's grandson, Josiah, who succeeded him as King of Judah, was extremely vigilant and zealous. He drove witchcraft out of Judah and got rid of all the mediums and wizards. The fact that he did this is one of the things for which God praised him. God considered him to be better than all previous kings. That in itself indicates how seriously God takes witchcraft:

²⁴ *Moreover Josi'ah put away the mediums and the wizards and the teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might establish the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilki'ah the priest found in the house of the Lord. ²⁵ Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.*

2 Kings 23:24-25 (RSV)

Witchcraft has grown exponentially in the West and is now a huge problem. The vast numbers of witchcraft books being sold today demonstrate how many people are involved in it.

The scale and popularity of witchcraft has been growing exponentially for decades. If you doubt that, you need only go into any large secular bookshop. Examine the many shelves of books they have on the subject of witchcraft, magic, spells, the occult, and all sorts of associated themes. It is truly shocking and dwarfs the shelf space which they devote to Christianity. That growth is partly due to the phenomenal success of the Harry Potter books. They were greatly used by Satan to popularise witchcraft and the occult in general.

Moreover, they are not invented fantasies or make-believe. Most of the things done and spoken about in the Harry Potter books are real and are based on solid facts about witchcraft. Either J.K Rowling has experience of witchcraft herself, or she has done a lot of research. Her books are far from being harmless. They were intended, at least by Satan, if not by their author, to soften up a whole generation and to make the occult appear attractive. However, the explosion of interest in witchcraft was already happening even before the Harry Potter books were written.

I remember examining the shelves of a well-known national bookshop and stationer in the early 1990s. Even then, the number and range of witchcraft books was astonishing. The books covered all sorts of issues, such as how to use enchantments to make someone fall in love with you, how to get money, how to use spells to get another couple to split up, how to curse someone with illness and so on. It was appalling, even then, and it is far worse today. Again, some might argue that all of these things are just imaginary and have no real effect, but I don't accept that.

I think they are entirely real, just as the King of Moab's witchcraft was real when he reversed the course of a battle by sacrificing his own son. Nevertheless, despite its great power, witchcraft has its limits. It is not infinitely powerful, as God's power is. Pharaoh's magicians, who were witches and occult-practitioners, tried to match the miracles performed by Moses. They were able to do so, up to a point, as when they produced frogs. That alone shows what immense power Satan has:

⁵ *And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your rod over the rivers, over the canals, and over the pools, and cause frogs to come upon the land of Egypt!'"* ⁶ *So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt.* ⁷ *But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs upon the land of Egypt.*

Exodus 8:5-7 (RSV)

Nevertheless, Pharaoh's magicians did not have unlimited power and could not do everything that Moses did. For some reason, which the Bible does not disclose, they were not able to produce gnats, even though they had reproduced many of the other plagues. Somehow, God must have drawn the line and stopped them at this point. It illustrates the fact that God's power is infinitely greater than Satan's, which is something that we all need to remember:

¹⁶ *Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your rod and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats throughout all the land of Egypt.'" ¹⁷ And they did so; Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and struck the dust of the earth, and there came gnats on man and beast; all the dust of the earth became gnats throughout all the land of Egypt. ¹⁸ The magicians tried by their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. ¹⁹ And the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the Lord had said.*

Exodus 8:16-19 (RSV)

We need to be balanced about witchcraft, curses and the supernatural in general, and avoid both unbelief and gullibility

When it comes to the supernatural there is a serious lack of balance within the Church. On the whole, people are either sceptical and reject everything, or they are gullible and believe anything. Many Christians are inconsistent. Though they would claim to be ‘Bible-believing’, they do not accept what the Bible says about demons, curses, witchcraft, or the supernatural as a whole. Yet the Bible speaks very clearly of all those things. Some may believe these things occurred back then, to the people in the Bible, but not here or now, to themselves, or to the people they know.

Others go to the opposite extreme and are willing to believe and imitate anything they are told, regardless of whether it is in the Bible. They lean so heavily towards the supernatural, and think so much in terms of experiences, rather than solid biblically-based doctrine, that they become gullible. Often they have so little knowledge of the Bible, they are unable to test what they are taught, or to compare it to Scripture. Therefore they are just as easily led into an over-emphasis on the supernatural as sceptics are led into denying or under-emphasising it.

I have met many people of both types because, over the last 35 years, as I moved around, God led me to join several churches from different denominations. I have seen some people with utterly closed minds who believe nothing. But others I have met went overboard and were obsessed with the supernatural. They saw spiritual, or ‘super-spiritual’, factors behind everything that happened and paid too little attention to the ordinary ‘bread and butter’ issues of repentance, forgiving others, crucifying the flesh, growing in maturity as disciples and immersing ourselves in God’s Word.

They preferred to seek for short-cuts to success in the Christian life. But there are no shortcuts. Becoming a mature, rounded, well-informed, effective disciple takes time and effort. It also requires us to do *all* of the things that the Bible tells us to do, not just those which we prefer. If you are an evangelical and have been taught to shy away from the supernatural, and that everything is purely natural and physical, think again. Examine the Bible, with an *open mind*, and ask yourself what you see there. Then ask why you assume that anything is now different from what it was in the past.

But if you are Pentecostal or Charismatic, or perhaps even ‘*charismaniac*’, and you under-emphasise Scripture, and focus on the supernatural rather than discipleship, and on demons rather than your flesh, then you too need to think again. In particular you need to re-balance your beliefs and your practices to make them biblical, rather than just getting into line with whatever your denomination does. Please see my Book 3 which contains a more detailed section on the vital need for balance.

The mistaken idea that *everything* was achieved for us at the cross, such that we don’t need to do anything at all - even the things we are told to do

If you ever speak about the supernatural, and about demons or curses in particular, you will get an agitated or even hostile reaction. These subjects unsettle people. They feel uncomfortable that their own beliefs, practices and traditions are being contradicted or even questioned. I spoke at a conference recently and was approached afterwards by a man who wanted to correct my theology. He told me he didn’t believe that any Christian has any need for deliverance from demons and that we need not concern ourselves with witchcraft, spiritual warfare or curses.

He said “*everything was dealt with at the cross*” and that to suggest that anybody needs deliverance, or to break free of any curses, “*is to say that the cross isn’t enough*”. That statement may sound spiritual, and imply that he has a high view of the cross, but there is deep confusion behind it. That has caused him to reject a number of biblical truths on the misguided basis that the cross did away with them. The truth is the cross achieved everything it was *intended to achieve*, and it did so perfectly. However, the cross did *not* achieve the things which it was never intended to achieve.

For example, what Jesus did on the cross paid the penalty for our sin and made it possible for God to forgive us, if we repent and believe. His wrath was poured out on His own Son instead of on us. Other things were achieved too, and I address those in my Book 1. However, some things were *not* achieved at the cross and they still need to be done, either by us, or the Holy Spirit, or both. For example, growing in maturity as a disciple was not achieved at the cross. It remains to be done by each of us in our own lives. It is not a past event. It is an ongoing process and very much involves us.

So does repenting, forgiving others, crucifying the flesh, dying to self, picking up our cross daily, loving others, renewing our minds, studying the Bible, taking every thought captive and so on. We cannot treat those things as having already been done for us, in the past, by Jesus. They need to be done now, by us, albeit with the help of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, deliverance from demons and the breaking of curses are not automatic and have not already occurred, such that we need not do anything about them. I will address this in Book 9 on demonology, and in my future book on spiritual warfare.

But what can we do if we have cursed ourselves, or others, or if we have been affected by other people's curses or witchcraft?

I have drawn attention to the importance of our own, and other people's, cursing words and how we can be affected by those. However, I do not want to give the impression that there is nothing we can do to deal with the effect of such curses, whether due to witchcraft or generational factors. There are things we can do to defend ourselves and our families, churches and businesses, and also to undo what has been done in the past. In particular, we need to *repent* of our own sinful or occultic behaviour and *renounce* any such activities by our parents and grandparents.

We also need to *revoke* any cursing words spoken by ourselves or others and to ask God to cancel their effect. In particular, it is very important to *forgive* others who have cursed us, or whose sins and occultic activities have affected us. Such forgiveness has the effect of removing or reducing the effect of such curses in our lives. So too does our own repentance about the things we did ourselves. When we admit the wrongness of our own sins and sinful words, and then renounce and revoke them, we can be set free from their effect in our lives, just as repentance sets us free from the *penalty* of sin.

When Jesus died on the cross for us He not only took all the *sins* of the whole world upon Himself. He also took all the *curses* of the whole world upon Himself. So, in the same way that the Bible says Jesus *became sin* for us, He also *became a curse* for us. In other words, Jesus took all the sins of mankind upon Himself to such an extent that, in the eyes of God the Father, Jesus *was sin*. That is God saw Him as sin itself and therefore rejected Him and poured out His wrath upon Him. Many Christians know that, or at least the essence of it, in the context of sin.

However, Jesus also took all the curses of the world upon Himself, such that God also saw Him *as a curse*. The very fact that Jesus was crucified on a cross, or on a *tree* as the Bible puts it, is significant. Apostle Paul, alluding to Deuteronomy 21:23, says "*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*". In Hebrew the same word is used for a whole tree as for a part of a tree. So, the large beam of wood that Jesus was nailed to was called a 'tree'. God ordained, long ago, that being hung upon a tree or log of wood symbolised being under His curse. Here is the passage from Galatians:

¹³ *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"—¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

Galatians 3:13-14 (NASB)

Therefore, when Jesus hung on the tree, He *became a curse for us*. That means that the very curses which blight our own lives can now be placed upon Him, if we ask for that, just as our sins can be. Some might object at this point that if all the curses have already been placed upon Him by God, when He was on the cross, then why do we need to do anything now to repent, revoke, renounce or forgive?

Also, why do we need to seek to have those curses transferred to, or placed upon, Jesus? However, the very same things could be said in relation to our sin.

That too was placed upon Jesus, for the benefit of the whole world, past present and future. But each of us still need to believe the Gospel and repent in order to be forgiven and justified. We also still need to ask Jesus to be our Saviour and to take *our* sins upon Himself. Accordingly, it is no contradiction to say that Jesus became a curse on the cross and yet also to say that we need to *ask* for the curses which affect us to be transferred to Him, rather than continuing to affect us. Therefore, take the full benefit of every aspect of that free gift, not only in relation to sin, but curses too.

Hand over to Jesus, and place upon Him, any curses that affect you, just as you would hand your sin over to Him. Let those facts about what happened on the cross be at the forefront of your mind when you repent and renounce those things which have caused your life to be blighted. Claim the *full* benefit of what Jesus did for us on the cross, not only the forgiveness of sins, and don't treat it as if everything was automatic. Also persist, rather than expecting that it will all happen instantly. Be willing to keep on tackling these issues. Don't assume it all has to be dealt with overnight, in one go. Sometimes we need to carry on going deeper, like taking layers off an onion.

Ask God to reveal more things which need to be dealt with, from your own past, or from your parents or grandparents, or from things being said or done now. Keep on repenting of sins, renouncing things you have said, and forgiving others for what they have said or done. This may result in ongoing breakthroughs. It reminds me of how I had to keep on removing vine weed from the hedge at the bottom of my garden. I dug up the roots of the vine weed more than once. I also went out many times to spray weed killer onto the leaves of any new growth of vine weed that emerged.

Gradually, over time, I dramatically reduced the vine weed. But it isn't all gone, even now. Nevertheless, its overall extent and effect has greatly diminished. That analogy has some relevance to spiritual warfare and to dealing with witchcraft and curses in particular. Keep at it. Be vigilant. Keep repenting. Keep forgiving. Keep avoiding sin. Keep avoiding the occult. Keep on doing the things which bring God's blessing. Keep on avoiding the things which cause Him to oppose us. In all of these ways we can, over time, see major breakthroughs and our lives can be transformed.

What can we do, in practical terms, to defend ourselves and those we care for from other people's witchcraft and curses?

This little chapter is just a brief introduction. I included it to make people aware that this whole subject of witchcraft and curses exists and how it is connected to the issue of dealing with the wicked. I am conscious that I am stating what the problem is, and how much harm it causes, yet without going into detail about how to defend ourselves and our families, businesses and churches from it. That will have to come later, in another book, in which I will seek to cover the whole area of spiritual warfare much more thoroughly.

It will also give practical advice on how to prevent harm being caused in the first place and how to undo or reverse harm that has already been done. That is too big a subject to fit within this book, which is primarily about dealing with wicked *people*. However, let me close this chapter, and this book, by at least giving some brief advice on how we can defend ourselves from witchcraft and curses, both past and present, and how we can learn to be overcomers.

Firstly, let's look briefly at what the Bible says about the *authority* that each individual Christian has, merely by being a Christian, not by being a leader, or by being special in any way at all. Look at this passage in which the 70 disciples report back to Jesus after coming back from a mission trip on which He had sent them. Bear in mind also that these are not the 12 apostles. They were *ordinary* people, like you and me:

17 Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." 18 And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. 20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Luke 10:17-20 (ESV)

Do you see the enormity of the authority which Jesus says those 70 people had? They themselves were surprised that even the demons were subject to them. That is they were able to speak with authority and the demons had to obey them. That was true of those 70 disciples and it is true of you and me too. The problem is so few Christians are aware of their authority. It is not being taught in churches. Indeed, the opposite is being taught and the faith is therefore sucked out of us, to be replaced by unbelief, due to the unbiblical teaching in so many churches.

When Jesus said they would also "*trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy.....*" He wasn't referring to literal snakes and scorpions. He meant the demons. The authority that each of us has, *even as ordinary Christians*, means we outrank the demons. We have power over them and can force them to go, step aside, leave a person and release their grip on them. We are able, by the authority vested in us, *in Jesus' name*, to do all those things. We can also remain safe while contending with the powers of darkness, including witchcraft and curses.

That said, Jesus' words about snakes and scorpions, though primarily a metaphor, were also meant literally. Therefore if we are operating in the will of God, doing what He wants us to do, then even physical creatures and other such dangers, will not be able to hurt us. Look at what Jesus said when He was sending out His disciples on the 'Great Commission', to take the Gospel to the world. He refers to serpents there too, and we shall see below that His words were literally fulfilled in the ministry of apostle Paul:

15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. 17 These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Mark 16:15-18 (NASB)

These words would be fulfilled in our lives too, if we began to believe them and to act upon them in faith and obedience. In this passage we see apostle Paul emerging unharmed after being bitten by a viper/adder, which is a poisonous snake. It happened on the island of Malta, after Paul had survived a shipwreck and was gathering sticks to make a fire:

1 When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. 2 The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. 3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. 4 When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." 5 However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

Acts 28:1-6 (NASB)

We need to wake up, realise the immense authority we have as Christians, and learn how to exercise it. The authority is already there, *if we are genuinely saved*. But many of us aren't aware that we have it, so we don't use it. I remember the very first day I reported for duty as a police officer. I was wearing

my brand-new uniform and had been sworn in as a constable before a magistrate. In the eyes of the law, and the public, I was just as much a constable as some other officer with 20 years' experience. The problem was I didn't know it, or rather I didn't *feel* it.

Deep down, I still thought I was a civilian. I felt awkward as I walked down the street to the divisional HQ to be introduced to the Chief Superintendent on my first morning on duty. I passed a woman in the street and she spoke to me and I actually felt embarrassed that she thought I was a police officer. It all seemed unreal, and that I wasn't a proper constable, but was only dressed up as one. Nevertheless, regardless of how I felt, the fact is I *was* a real officer and had all the authority and powers that go with it.

Over the next few weeks the reality of that started to sink in, even to me. I began to think I was a constable, and to act like one. Eventually I thought that way even when I wasn't in uniform. Most Christians don't realise the extent of their authority, or exercise it. To change that, you need to "*be transformed by the renewal of your mind*" as Paul said. That also involves realising the extent of your own authority as a disciple. To do that you will need to "*take every thought captive to obey Christ*", as Paul also says in 2 Corinthians 10.

That process of taking every thought captive is spoken of in the context of spiritual warfare. It really amounts to *deciding* what you are going to think, as a deliberate exercise of your *will*, rather than letting your thoughts form themselves randomly. Randomness will never lead you towards the truth, but only towards error. Two of the many aspects of our authority as disciples are our ability to raise up the '*shield of faith*' and to wield the '*sword of the Spirit*', as spoken of by Paul:

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

Ephesians 6:14-18 (NKJV)

Whether you face evil people, crisis situations, demonic opposition, or the power of witchcraft and curses, you can raise the shield of faith and defend yourself and those you care for. In practical terms, that means you take one or more of the statements or promises in God's Word and rely upon them with boldness, and even defiance. That is you put your trust in what God has said or promised and you rely on it. Then you lift up His words and proclaim them in faith, like a shield, to protect yourself or your family or church from whatever threat they face. Then God will protect you:

***¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy,
and spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may exult in you.***

***¹² For you bless the righteous, O Lord;
you cover him with favor as with a shield.*** *Psalm 5:11-12 (ESV)*

***⁶ Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven
with the saving might of his right hand.***

***⁷ Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.***

***⁸ They collapse and fall,
but we rise and stand upright.***

Psalm 20:6-8 (ESV)

This is not magic or voodoo. It is the active reliance upon God's promises and, ultimately, upon Him when you face danger. That is when you really find out whether the shield works - when you lift up God's promises and the enemy's arrows hit against the shield, not you. Likewise, the 'sword of the Spirit' involves taking God's Word and proclaiming it boldly to those around you, to your enemies, to your situation, and even to yourself. It likewise involves reliance upon God's promises and statements, but more as a weapon of *attack* than of defence:

²² And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. ²³ Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Mark 11:22-24 (ESV)

²² And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed.

2 Chronicles 20:22 (ESV)

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 (ESV)

Therefore, this is primarily used when you are going forward and overcoming opposition, rather than when operating defensively. I have said a little about the power of proclamation earlier in this book but I will enlarge upon it in future books. Please see those for further information. This weapon, the sword of the Spirit, can include '*speaking to the mountain*' or to the lake or the wind, or to whatever issue, person or crisis you face, and confronting it with God's Word, wielded as a weapon. Now, having said that, I really must bring Book 6 to an end.