

OUR SUPERIOR WEAPON

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Text: Hebrews 4:12

In the context of admonishing these first-century Christians, as well as us today, concerning the necessity of obeying God's Word and implementing it in our lives, Paul uses a powerful comparison to reveal the power of the Word of God. He compares the Word of God with a natural sword. He uses similar language in **Ephesians 6:17** when he says, *"Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."* NIV

The language is powerful and was especially so for first-century Christians who were more familiar with swords and the weaponry of that day. The image of a sword brought home the idea of a powerful weapon.

What do you think of when I mention the sword?

I. NOTE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A NATURAL SWORD.

A. A natural sword conveys the image of power.

Swords of political and military leaders, nobles, and warriors were frequently ornamented with elegantly decorated hilts and blades inlaid with gold and silver. Swords also held symbolic importance. Oaths of honor were commonly taken on the sword, and sovereigns still confer knighthood by tapping the shoulder with a sword. To surrender a sword has always been a sign of defeat or submission.¹

B. In the hands of a trained warrior it is an effective weapon of defense or offense.

C. It is a weapon designed to penetrate the body and injure or destroy.

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II. NOTE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR SUPERIOR SPIRITUAL SWORD.

A. It is alive and active.

The words "Living and active" shows that there is a dynamic quality about God's revelation. It does things. Specifically it penetrates and, in this capacity, is likened to a "double-edged sword." EBC

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, *“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

1 Thessalonians 2:13 reads, *“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”* NIV

B. The Word of God does not penetrate the body of man to destroy, but rather penetrates the heart and mind to save.

“The Word of God is unique. No sword can penetrate as it can... What the author is saying is that God's Word can reach to the innermost recesses of our being. We must not think that we can bluff our way out of anything, for there are no secrets hidden from God. We cannot keep our thoughts to ourselves... Nothing evades the scope of this Word. What man holds as most secret he finds subject to its scrutiny and judgment.” EBC

In the following verse, Hebrews 4:13 the writer of Hebrews reminds us that, *“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is*

uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” NIV

2 Corinthians 3:6 tells us that, *“He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” NIV*

C. The Word of God is not only an instrument of change but also of deliverance.

The writer of Hebrews said in chapter 4, the first two verses, *“Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.*

Paul writes in Romans 6:16-18, *“Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you **wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching** to which you were entrusted. **You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.**” NIV*

CONCLUSION

Aqaba in 1917 seemed impregnable. Any enemy vessel approaching the port would have to face the battery of huge naval guns above the town. Behind Aqaba in every direction lay barren, waterless, inhospitable desert. To the east lay the deadly "anvil of the sun." The Turks believed Aqaba to be safe from any attack. But they were wrong.

Lawrence of Arabia led a force of irregular Arab cavalry across the "anvil of the sun." Together, they rallied support among the local people. On July 6, 1917, the Arab forces swept into Aqaba from the north, from the blind side. A climactic

moment of the magnificent film Lawrence of Arabia is the long, panning shot of the Arabs on their camels and horses, with Lawrence at their head, galloping past the gigantic naval guns that are completely powerless to stop them. The guns were facing in the wrong direction. Aqaba fell, and the Turkish hold on Palestine was broken, to be replaced by the British mandate and eventually by the State of Israel.

The Turks failed to defend Aqaba because they made two mistakes. They did not know their enemy, and they did not have the right weapons.

We must be careful not to make the same mistakes. Ephesians 6:12 makes it very clear who our enemy is: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world."

-- Michael Boyland in Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching (Baker), from the editors of Leadership.