

## *The Holy War* Study Guide – Week 1

These study guides were prepared from an unabridged, original text version of John Bunyan's *The Holy War*. Effort has been made to consider that the reader may be using an updated English version or Ethel Barrett's *The War for Mansoul*.

Helpful reminder: Just as Bunyan did with *Pilgrim's Progress*, he constructs the setting for the story and then the story itself from the perspective of one recounting events that have already taken place, rather than from someone recounting events as they occur. As the story progresses, we'll see how the story he is recounting is occurring constantly in the lives of believers.

In an effort to emphasize how pervasively and skillfully Bunyan weaves the Bible into the story, each lesson will begin with the same two questions:

- What primary Bible passages come to your mind as you read this assignment?
- To what degree does the story accurately depict Bible teaching?

Though the questions may appear redundant, they reinforce the point that the best devotional literature is the literature that points us back to the Word.

Bunyan briefly includes some biographical / testimonial information – what does he say about himself?

Bunyan's wealth of military experience begins to come through early in the story. In most of his sermons and other writings, he doesn't draw on his military past for personal illustrations. However, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and more specifically, in *The Holy War*, his familiarity with military terminology and strategy becomes increasingly evident, and he harnesses this knowledge into the arena of spiritual warfare.

Remember reading how WWI was supposed to be a "war to end all wars"? Instead it simply proved to have been the first of a series of major international wars that have continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the same way, the battle Diabolus wages for the soul does not end the war, but rather bears testimony to the fact that all of history will subsequently be affected by the continuing conflict. This is true on a large scale, and it is true in the life of every believer.

"'We all thought one battle would decide it,' says Richard Baxter, writing about the [English] Civil War. 'But we were all very much mistaken,' sardonically adds Carlyle. Yes; and you will be much mistaken too if you enter on the war with sin in our soul, in your senses and in your members, with power and shot for one engagement only. When you enlist here, lay well to heart that it is for

life. There is no discharge in this war. There are no ornamental old pensioners here. It is a warfare for eternal life, and nothing will end it but the end of your evil days on earth” (Alexander Whyte, *Bunyan Characters, Third Series*, “The City of Mansoul”).

What are some of the original characteristics of the town of Mansoul of which it can be said “There is not its equal under the whole heaven”?

What does the famous stately castle palace in Mansoul represent and who was its intended sole occupant?

What provision did Shaddai make for the protection of the town?

Who is *Diabolus* and what is the significance of his name?

- King of the Blacks (Dark world)
- Great and mighty, but poor and beggarly prince

What was *Diabolus*’ original station?

What Bible passages can help us ascertain why and how *Diabolus* and his followers sought to change their station?

What might 1 Timothy 3:6 suggest to us about the motive of the Devil and his followers? (cf. Isaiah 14:12-15)

*Diabolus* and his followers’ first assault met a seemingly immediate and assuredly decisive rebuff by Shaddai and they were penalized severely for their sinful treason. What was their punishment and what Bible passages can be used to support it?

As *Diabolus* and his men prepared for their second assault, they held a council of war to plot their strategy.

- Who is present at the Council? If you have opportunity, look up the meanings of these names. What do they communicate about the character of the Devil and his servants?
  
- What were their primary questions entertained by the council and how did the council resolve them?
  - Whether all of the council members should openly participate in the assault on Mansoul.
  
  - Whether to confront the town in their true ragged garments or find a way to disguise themselves
  
  - Whether to mask their treasonous plot or to openly declare it.
  
  - Whether they should couple a strategy of feigned concern for the people of Mansoul with some strategic aggressive offensive strikes aimed at the town's strongest leaders.

At which of the five gates did Diabolus decide to make his pitch to the leaders of Mansoul?

An interesting English military historical parallel may well have factored into Bunyan's design of the town of Mansoul:

In the south of England, in the time of Edward the Confessor and after the battle of Hastings, there were five cities which had special immunities and peculiar privileges bestowed upon them, in recognition of the special dangers to which they were exposed and the eminent services they performed as facing the hostile shores of France. Owing to their privileges and their position, the 'Cinque Ports' came to be cities of great strength, till, as time went on, they became a positive weakness rather than a strength to the land that lay behind them. Privilege bred pride, and in their pride the Cinque Ports proclaimed wars and formed alliances on their own account: piracies by sea and robberies by land were hatched within their walls; and it took centuries to reduce those pampered and arrogant ports to the safe and peaceful rank of ordinary English cities. The Revolution of 1688 did something, and the

Reform Bill of 1832 did more to make Dover and her insolent sisters like the other free and equal cities of England; but to this day there are remnants of public shows and pageantries left in those old towns sufficient to witness to the former privileges, power, and pride of the famous Cinque Ports. Now, Mansoul, in like manner, has her cinque ports. And the whole of *Holy War* is one long and detailed history of how the five senses are clothed with such power as they possess; how they abuse and misuse their power; what disloyalty and despite they show to their sovereign; what conspiracies and depredations they enter into; what untold miseries they let in upon themselves and upon the land that lies behind them; what years and years of siege, legislation, and rule it takes to reduce our bodily senses, those proud and licentious gates, to their true and proper allegiance, and to make their possessors a people loyal and contented, law-abiding and happy (Alexander Whyte, *Bunyan Characters, Third Series*. London: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, c. 1895, pp.15-16). See more at <http://www.cinqueports.org>.

Who are the identified leaders of Mansoul? What do they represent individually / collectively? Throughout the story, the reader will be introduced to “Mansouliaus” (natives to the town of Mansoul) and “Diabolonians” (intruders to the town, but often able to take up sustained residence there). In reality, all of the Mansouliaus are parts of the inner man of a single individual, and all of the Diabolonians constitute elements of the flesh that still reside in every believer even after salvation.

Note the similarities in strategy that *Diabolus* employs to those employed by the serpent with Eve in the Garden of Eden.

1. He plants doubt about the goodness of God to them – “deliverance from a bondage that unawares to yourselves you are captivated and enslaved under”; credits the King with power, but also with less than good motives for His citizens (“unreasonable, intricate, and intolerable”)

What does he mean by describing the King’s laws as . . .

- Unreasonable?
- Intricate?
- Intolerable?

[In this section, Bunyan raises the issue of their having been prohibited from eating from a particular apple tree, reminiscent of the scene in the Garden of Eden. Previous to this point in the story, no mention has been made of this prohibition.]

Read the following excerpt from C. S. Lewis’ *Screwtape Letters*:

You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness [Auschwitz?]. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts. *The Screwtape Letters*, London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd. (1942), pp.64-65. (referenced in p. ix of *Christian Reflections* by C. S. Lewis)

2. Whets interest in something God did not intend for them to have
3. Questions the validity of the King's warnings and the appropriateness of the penalty
4. Minimizes the offence against the King

Tisiphone shoots Captain Resistance, "the only man of war in the town," as the temptation was underway. What does the timing of the attack suggest?

Ill-pause represents the moment of hesitation over a temptation. Instead of resisting the temptation in the Garden, Eve paused for further consideration of it. In that moment of pause, the temptation tends to grow more eloquent in our ears (Ill-pause's special gift). During my sophomore year of high school, my Bible teacher, Mr. Leinbach taught us something helpful from Genesis 3. Attempting to impress upon us the way temptation often works he identified steps in Eve's being drawn into sin. The fateful "ill-pause" heads the list:

- Lingered
- Listened
- Loosened
- Looked
- Longed for
- Latched onto
- Lapped up

In Ill-pause's eloquent appeal, he attributes to his master qualities that *Diabolus* denied to Shaddai. What were some of those claims?

At the point in which the townsmen relent and partake of the forbidden fruit, Lord Innocency dies. What does his death represent?