

Our Invisible Enemy

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”

—I Peter 5:8,9

THE QUESTION MAY BE asked, is there a personal devil, an enemy of God and of man? If so, who created him, and why does an all-powerful God of righteousness and love permit such a being to exist? Throughout the ages, these questions have been pondered by sincere and thoughtful persons, and many answers have been given. On the one hand, there is the view that the devil is a hideous-looking creature with cloven hoofs and a spiked tail whose chief business is to preside over the alleged torture of the unsaved dead. On the other hand, the claim is made that the devil of the Bible is merely an evil principle, widespread and powerful in its opposition to God and to righteousness, but not a personality.

The Scriptures teach that there is a personal Devil, that he is of a higher order of creation than man, and invisible to man. This powerful being was created perfect, and is referred to as “Lucifer, son of the morning.” (Isa. 14:12) He fell from his perfection and from his loyalty to the Creator when pride and ambition developed in his heart. The Prophet Isaiah wrote further concerning him, “Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.”—vss. 13,14

A variety of names and titles are given in the Bible that describe the Devil’s various traits and characteristics. He is referred to as “that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan.” (Rev. 20:2) In John 12:31, he is described as “the prince of this world,” and he is also thus depicted in John 14:30 and 16:11. In Ephesians 2:2, Satan is described as “the prince of the power of the air” and, in II Corinthians 4:4, as “the god of this world.”

Through the various references given to us in the Bible concerning him, we are able to gain a fairly comprehensive understanding of his many methods of attack against the Lord’s people. The first activity of Satan described in the Bible is recorded in Genesis. This is the account of the manner in which he deceived mother Eve. He asked Eve if it were true that God had said she would die if she partook of the forbidden fruit. Affirming that this was true, Satan’s reply was: “Ye shall not surely die.”—Gen. 3:1-4

GOD'S WORD ATTACKED

These scriptures point to an attack on the integrity of God's Holy Word. This has been one of Satan's methods of attack against God and his people throughout the ages since that early time in the history of the world. In this first instance, Eve was deceived, although Adam was not. So it has been since, many have been deceived by Satan's lies, while a few in every age have remained steadfastly loyal to the Word of God. The importance of this on the part of God's people is emphasized by the Prophet Isaiah, who wrote, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."—Isa. 8:20

It was not until the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai that the Word of God began to be made available in written form. Prior to that, God spoke to his people largely through one or another of his holy angels. This continued until the First Advent of Jesus when an angel announced his birth and declared it to be glad tidings of great joy to all people. Meanwhile, the prophetic writings before Jesus' First Advent were added to the books of the Law. These inspired writings became a part of the written Word of God—that part which we now refer to as the Old Testament.

Throughout these books of the Old Testament rings the harmonious theme song of the Word of God. This theme centers around the great kingdom plan of God to redeem and restore mankind to life—the life which was lost when our first parents disobeyed the divine law in the Garden of Eden. In this melody of divine love, there is presented the hope of a coming Messiah—the Christ—and it was

this Christ whose birth was announced by the angel. By his birth, the plan of God had taken a giant step forward in its development.

NEW TESTAMENT RECORDS

The teachings of Jesus were first recorded in the four Gospel accounts of his earthly ministry. In due time, there also came the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John. Later, the book of Revelation was added. Thus the New Testament was included with the writings of the Old Testament to give us the complete Word of God. It is this vast storehouse of Truth which our Heavenly Father has used throughout this present Gospel Age to nourish and strengthen his people as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. How wonderfully the precious Truths of the divine plan refresh us as we feed upon them day by day.

Satan has always been on the alert to disparage the Word of God and to render it ineffective in the hearts and lives of those who receive it. A reference is made to one aspect of this effort in Luke's gospel where he recorded Jesus' teaching: "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."—Luke 8:11,12

This scripture is a part of the parable of the sower in which we are told that the "seed" which is sown is the Word of God. This refers to the glorious Gospel message of the kingdom which is the main theme of the Bible. Concerning the seed sown by the wayside, Jesus said, "Then cometh the devil,

and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”

Jesus was pointing to the Devil’s efforts to prevent the Word of God from taking root in the lives of the people. Perhaps many of us have wondered why it is that so often, when we see someone beginning to take a keen interest in the truth of God’s Word, their interest may inexplicably wane. Jesus has given us the answer. In the case of Eve, Satan insisted that God’s Word was not the truth, and in the parable we see him snatching the Word from the hearts of the newly interested.

THE CHANGING PICTURE

Satan was not satisfied with the harm he could do by snatching away the Word of God from the hearts of individuals who might be interested in receiving it. As time went on, a much more ambitious scheme unfolded. Paul cautioned the Lord’s people and foretold that there would come a great falling away from the faith, and indeed, this has occurred. “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”—II Thess. 2:1-4

The most holy faith of the Scriptures was maintained through the apostolic days by the apostles' authority and insistence on strict adherence to the Word of God. Paul complimented the Bereans because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what he was telling them was true. (Acts 17:10,11) This insistence on a "thus saith the Lord" for every item of truth was one of the basic safeguards of the Early Church.

Following the death of the apostles, this situation began to change. At that time, the Bible was only available in manuscript form and copies were scarce. Many of the believers had to depend on the knowledge of a few favored ones who possessed the Bible, and could impart it to them. The idea soon developed that loyalty to the Word of God really meant loyalty to someone else's understanding of the Word of God. This natural consequence of circumstances was taken advantage of by Satan. As time went on, the tradition developed that, while the Bible was the supreme authority of truth, it could be interpreted properly only by the church and its leaders. The result was that human traditions and superstitions slowly began to replace the beautiful and inspiring doctrines of the Bible. This viewpoint is widely held even to this day.

It is apparent that essentially every precious doctrine of the divine plan has become distorted by interpreters of the Bible. Yet, it was so subtly accomplished that the majority supposed they were in harmony with the Scriptures. Satan has removed from the hearts of professed Christians the glorious kingdom hope set forth in the inspired Word of God.

THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

The clear and unmistakable teaching of the Bible is that the promised kingdom of the Messiah would not be established until after his return at his Second Advent. Satan has distorted this beautiful truth. Playing upon the ambitions of the human heart, he succeeded in getting many believers to accept the notion that the kingdom of Christ did not have to wait for Christ's return, but was set up and functioning through a great church-state system.

Satan had tried something similar to this in one of his temptations of Jesus. He told the Master that if he would fall down and worship him, he would give him all the kingdoms of this world. Jesus met this temptation in the proper manner, quoting a Scripture: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."—Matt. 4:8-10

While Satan failed to mislead Jesus, he succeeded later with some of Jesus' professed followers. They saw the glamour of power and authority among men who had succumbed to the lure of high-sounding titles. They gave up waiting for Christ to return to establish his kingdom and undertook to do it themselves. This became known as Christendom, or Christ's kingdom.

The fact that in Christendom there was almost continuous war, persecution, and evil of every kind—all so contrary to the joyful conditions of Christ's true kingdom as presented to us in the Word of God—seemed to count for little or nothing in their claims to kingdom authority. Many chose to ignore the facts, and while there were no real evidences

of Christ's true kingdom having been established, they continued to be guided by the false interpretations of the Bible through which they were being deceived by Satan.

There were some points of Truth with which some individuals seemed to have difficulty. For example, in Revelation 20:4-6 the length of Christ's kingdom is given. It was to be a thousand years long. The claim was made that the Christendom of their making was already enjoying this millennial kingdom. However, others realized that according to the promises of the Bible, the Millennium was a time during which the dead were to be restored to life, and that no dead were being restored. Here Satan prompted a tampering with the Word of God by inducing a translator to insert the interpolation, "The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." (Rev. 20:5) Therefore, no one would need to look for the resurrection amidst the wars and troubles of their so-called Millennium.

KINGDOM HOPE LOST

The substitution of Christendom for the real Messianic kingdom, in addition to reflecting a disregard for the teachings of the Word of God, also took away the hope of God's professed people for the real kingdom of promise. Once the church-state systems were established, the preaching of the second coming of Christ and the establishment at that time of the kingdom of promise almost entirely ceased. Thus with this one master stroke, Satan snatched from the hearts of many honest-hearted believers the great kingdom theme of the Bible. He

did it by substituting misinterpretations of the Bible for the Bible itself.

The Word of God teaches that the followers of the Master should look to each other for mutual help in their study of the Truth. It would be a mistake to suppose that anyone, by deliberately isolating himself from others of like precious faith, could expect the Lord to specially guide them in the understanding of his Word. The Lord has placed various servants in his church such as pastors, teachers, and evangelists. He expects all of us to help one another as much as we can. However, in following this arrangement we should keep in mind that the Bible itself is the final word of authority. Even reasonable conclusions should be rejected unless they are in harmony with the plain statements of the inspired Word of God.

DISCOURAGEMENT

Another method used by Satan to oppose God's people is discouragement, and the Apostle Paul speaks of his own infirmities. We read, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake:

for when I am weak, then am I strong.”—II Cor. 12:7-10

There is some difference of opinion as to just what Paul’s infirmity might have been, but the important thing was the apostle’s recognition of the manner in which Satan was making use of it to discourage him. He asked the Lord three times to remove this thorn in the flesh, but the Lord replied, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”

Satan did not succeed in discouraging Paul, who testified, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

Peter says that we should resist this roaring lion steadfast in the faith. The lesson here seems obvious. All of the Lord’s people have afflictions of one sort or another—illnesses, deaths in the family, economic reverses, misunderstandings, and many others. Satan often endeavors to have us believe that if we were truly the Lord’s people he would take these burdens from us. Thus does our Adversary instill fear in our hearts that perhaps we have been unfaithful to the Lord, and because of this God has withdrawn his favor from us.

Our defense against this sort of attack is to return to the many scriptures which reveal that the followers of the Master are a sacrificing and suffering people, and that there is no assurance that the Lord will protect us from the trials and difficulties which are experienced by mankind in

general. Our attitude in these situations should be to cast all our care upon the Lord knowing that he cares for us, not according to the flesh, but as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

PRIDE

Concerning pride, James wrote, “Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:5-7) James indicates that one of Satan’s methods of attack is to engender pride and ambition in the hearts of the Lord’s people. We are to resist this urge by humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God, knowing that our promised exaltation will come in due time. Genuine promotion that is in harmony with the divine will comes from God and is not self-planned.

Satan is directly or indirectly associated with all influences which tend to divert the Lord’s people from their course of true faithfulness in serving him. We often speak of our enemies as being the world, the flesh, and the devil, but it seems evident that Satan stands at the head of this list. It is he who works to our disadvantage as New Creatures in Christ Jesus through the world and its temptations, and through our fallen flesh. How important it is, therefore, that we keep alert in order to detect his every approach. We should be prepared to resist him through a sincere knowledge of the Word of God and through prayer.

ENMITY

Shortly after mankind's first parents—Adam and Eve—fell into sin and death in the garden of Eden, God said to Satan, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Gen. 3:15) Jesus later said to the scribes and Pharisees of his day, "Ye are of your father the devil." (John 8:44) Here, our Lord was speaking of the serpent's "seed." The seed of the woman refers to Christ and his footstep followers. The foretold enmity of the "seed of the serpent" against the "seed of the woman" was manifested in the bitter persecution inflicted upon Jesus by the religious rulers of his day. This enmity has also continued against his followers with varying degrees of intensity ever since.

However, we know that through it all the "seed" of promise will ultimately be victorious. We are not ignorant of Satan's devices. (II Cor. 2:11) We know that if we follow the Lord's instructions in our good fight of faith and rely always on him to guide and strengthen us, we will neither be overcome nor foiled by the wiles of the Devil. We have the promise of ultimate victory, for Paul wrote, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."—Rom. 16:20

This will be the promised bruising of the head of the serpent. The word "shortly," used here by Paul, is an interesting one, reflecting God's perspective of time. Paul used it nearly two thousand years ago and the serpent's head has not yet been bruised. He is not yet even bound, and is still going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He

still appears as an angel of light to deceive and mislead. To resist him, we still need to have on the whole armor of God, which consists of all the great fundamental doctrines of the divine plan of the ages.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

We have the plain and understandable teachings of the gospel of Christ, which is the only hope for the sin-cursed and dying human family. Let us study these precious truths and bind them upon our hearts. Let us make sure that our understanding of these truths is in harmony with the facts with which we are surrounded. The Scriptures are clear that if we want to have a share in that kingdom, living and reigning with Christ, we must continue to suffer with him faithfully even unto death. This is one of the great fundamentals of the plan of God. Let us be encouraged by it to remain in the narrow way of sacrifice until the end of our Christian journey is reached in death. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

Let us ever keep in mind the admonition of the Apostle Peter in the words of our featured scripture, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."—I Pet. 5:8,9 ■

*"This is the victory that overcometh the world,
even our faith."
—I John 5:4*