

## **The Original Snake in the Grass:** Genesis 3:1-7, Ephesians 6:10-13

Have you ever heard someone say? "Go to the devil." or "Let the devil take him?"

We have all heard of the devil or Satan – just two of his many names – at one time or the other and probably gave such references very little thought; which actually makes Satan very happy, for as someone once said, "*The devil's greatest trick is to make people believe he does not exist.*" Because, like all liars and cheats, Satan works best in the dark places of our world and our heart where it is more difficult to see what he is actually up to.

Too many people believe the devil is just a symbolic representation of all the evil that is in the world, or perhaps just an old wives tale, designed to scare people into going to church. But the Bible says, that the devil is a very real spiritual being, a singular individual, just another sadly corrupted part of God's creation, like you and me.

The Bible also clearly teaches that the Devil is not a god nor has he ever been God's alternate equal – as some religions try to describe him. In fact, Satan is a fallen angel who began as a personal servant of God until sometime in pre-history when he led a rebellion against God and was subsequently cast out of Heaven down to our planet where he succeeded in stealing "dominion over the earth" from Adam so that he now rules over everyone who wants to live their life separate from God.

BUT, while not a god, the Devil is a very intelligent, very devious, very powerful, very evil being, who with his own network of fallen angels and other evil servants now exercises world-wide dominion over humanity; where he seeks to be worshiped through many of the false religions and idols that he has helped to create throughout history (1 Corinthians 10:19-20).

Though Satan's eventual doom is assured, until his time is up, he now lives to do as much damage as possible to God's kingdom and to those people who have a special relationship with God, such as the Hebrew people, and Christians.

Surprisingly, even though what evil he can do is still being somewhat restrained by the power of God, you should also know that all the evil that he does succeed in accomplishing somehow mysteriously works in accordance with God's higher purposes to bring about a greater good; as exemplified by his attempts to defeat Jesus – a topic we will get to in a moment (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8, Romans 8:28).

The Bible actually tells us a lot about Satan, much more than can be covered in a brief sermon, so all that we will attempt today is to share some basic knowledge on how this adversary of both God and humanity operates, and to remind you of the weapons God has provided to help you protect yourself against satanic attacks on your life.

The devil is dangerous to those who are ignorant of his intentions, but he is also a defeated enemy, and as the Bible reminds us he is nowhere near as powerful as God's indwelling Holy Spirit that resides within each Christian.

Little children, you are from God,  
and have conquered them [the spirit of the anti-christ]  
**for the one who is in you  
is greater than the one who is in the world.**  
1 John 4:4

We will take up the topic of Satan in more depth during our Something More Bible study this coming Tuesday at 4:30p. But for today, let's begin where human's first met up with this ancient "snake in the grass" ... Back in the Garden of Eden.

As I have affirmed earlier, I truly believe there was both an Adam and Eve, and probably a garden in Eden where they fell from grace, but the telling of their story in Genesis, with talking snakes and trees that impart magical abilities, comes across more as an allegory – as an Aesop's Fable kind of morality play – meant to help both those early Hebrews and us better understand, beyond the actual events, just who both God and Satan are, are how we humans got in such a predicament of inhabiting this beautiful but broken world, filled with much evidence of God yet also much evil.

So for our benefit today, I would rather look behind the story of the snake in the garden to identify our very real adversary and his original intentions for the lies which he put into the mouth of a snake.

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How you are fallen from heaven,  
O Day Star, son of Dawn! You said in your heart,...  
I will raise my throne above the stars of God; ...  
**I will make myself like the Most High.'**  
Isaiah 14:12-15

The fallen angel whom we now name Satan or the devil apparently once was a "covering cherub" – one of God's personal attendants. But he wanted to be more than a servant of God, he wanted to be like God – notice that this is the same temptation by which he snared A&E

In Heaven, his name was "**Morning Star**" which translates into Latin as "**Lucifer**". The other more common names by which we now call him "**satan**," "**diabolos**," and "**devil**," are from the Hebrew, Greek, and Old English languages. But these are all

more descriptors, more of a label than an actual name; they all mean the same thing: "the adversary, the accuser, the one who opposes."

Three of detailed descriptions of this fallen angel and his intentions can be found in sections of Ezekiel 28:12-19, Isaiah 45:12-15 and Revelation 12:1-13. Putting these accounts together we get the following summary.

Apparently this angel once known as "*Morning Star*" was persuasive enough to enlist a third of the heavenly host in his rebellion. After a fearful battle, he and his followers were exiled from Heaven down to the earth where they commenced to set up their own fallen kingdom with the intent of destroying God's kingdom on earth. When that heavenly battle happened is not clear, but the fall of Adam and Eve is where Satan was able to gain control over the human race; which is what makes this story of the snake in the garden so significant.

As God had warned them, Adam and Eve's act of defiance led to their immediate spiritual death for both them and their progeny. Because their sin now separated them and us from fellowship with God, those humans born thereafter were easy prey for the devils' schemes.

Having thus gotten fallen humanity under his reign, Satan's next strategy was to defeat God's rescue operation – which he knew would be coming. The Hebrew scriptures, our Old Testament, record that the devil first tried to pollute or exterminate those family lines through which the promised messiah had to come. When that failed, he next sought to either turn or kill God's son when he came to live as a human on earth.

With both the Magi and Joseph warned to flee, the first attempt to kill the baby Jesus failed. But Satan finally thought he had succeeded when he got the corrupt Hebrew leadership to reject their promised Messiah and hand him over to the Romans for crucifixion. Jesus died.

Little did the devil know, as I mentioned earlier, that **God works through even the worst of circumstances to bring about good for those who, like Jesus, love God and are called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28)**. Jesus' undeserved death after his sinless life was necessary in order for him to substitute himself for us; to offer his life in payment of our death penalty; *by his wounds we were healed* (Isaiah 53, Colossians 2:15).

After God the Father then restored Jesus back to life – Satan surely knew that his ultimate doom had been sealed, nevertheless he determined to battle on not only in continuing to attack the Children of Israel through whom God's promised Messiah had come but now also the children of God who were thereafter reborn by faith in Christ (Revelation 12:13-17).

The Bible prophetically promises that Satan's days are numbered and that both Hell and, at the end of time, "the Lake of fire" were specifically prepared as the future eternal residence for both him and his fellow conspirators. But both places can also equally serve to hold those humans who insist on living their lives apart from God's love (Matthew 25:41).

This is the time we now live in: Satan continues his war against God and God's people; whether through his own delusional thinking that he can still defeat God, or out of sheer hatred for the one true God whom he sought to replace and for everyone who now enjoys that close fellowship with God which he by his own sin had lost. That is how the angel once known as "The Morning Star" came to be known as Satan "the adversary."

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Next, we need to turn our attention to how Satan attempts both to keep humans from trusting in Christ in the first place and how he then strives to silence these new born children of God thereafter.

Though he and his fallen angels can physically harm people in our world, this is where, until his final day, he has apparently been restrained (2 Thessalonians 2:7-9). Satan can only do as much to any person as God allows him (cf. the book of Job).

So most of his tactics are mentally, spiritually based. The devil is a master of temptation, deception, distraction, deceit, fear, hatred, and prejudice, which if left unchecked in a person's life can lead to obsession, intoxication, addiction, possession, even death.

Today, most of the devil's work is done by people who have either knowingly or unknowingly submitted themselves to his control. This helps to explain such human abominations as Adolph Hitler, Osama Ben Laden, and all the mass shooter and terrorist attacks that currently plague our world. Do not be deceived, demonic influence and possession are as real in our day as they were the days of Jesus; the major difference being that our western secular scientific mindset has largely blinded us to these forms of satanic attack.

But Satan's methods are obvious to everyone who keeps their faith focused on God. You can follow his basic pattern of attack in his contest with Jesus. Immediately after his baptism, Jesus went into the desert to fast and pray for forty days. Satan waited until the 40 day fast was over and Jesus was at his physical and spiritual weakest to make his move (Matthew 4:1-11).

- Satan first tempted Jesus to question God's ability to provide (your hungry, make your own bread),
- then he questioned God's ability to protect (jump off this wall and trust the angels to catch you).

- Lastly Satan returned to his own fallen desires by which he also entrapped the first Adam: “worship me” and I’ll make you the ruler over all the kingdoms of the world

Having been rebuffed three times, Satan knew that he could never turn Jesus away from God, so he returned to plotting his murder.

No matter what he thought, Satan never had any power over Jesus; remember that Jesus voluntarily allowed himself to be captured, tried, and killed. But the same cannot be said for us (John 14:30). Born into a fallen world over which Satan holds rule, we begin our life enslaved under the powers of sin and death. This is how Paul described us before we come to faith in Christ.

*You were dead through the trespasses and sins<sup>2</sup>  
in which you once lived, following the course of this world,  
following the ruler of the power of the air,  
the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient*

<sup>3</sup>*All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.* <sup>4</sup>*But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us* <sup>5</sup>*even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—* <sup>6</sup>*and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, Ephesians 2:1-6*

As the Bible teaches, we are “saved” not because we found Jesus, but because through him, God found and rescued us (Colossians 1:13). Jesus’ birth into our world was nothing less than an invasion, a rescue mission, where the Son of God came to seek and to save those who were lost (Luke 19:10, Matthew 20:28).

Once we have been reborn into God’s family, Satan loses his power over our destiny, but he has not lost his ability to tempt, distract, and resist our efforts at Christian growth or witness. Which is why the Bible cautions us, not to remain as defenseless spiritual babies but to grow up in our faith, to put on spiritual armor designed to resist the devil, and to keep a sharp lookout for any of his schemes intended to silence our witness (1 Peter 5:8-11).

The last three chapters of the book Ephesians are largely instructions for how Christians should live to honor God while resisting the devil’s attacks

Put on the whole armor of God,  
so that you may be able to stand  
against the wiles of the devil  
Ephesians 6:11

Spiritual warfare against Satan needs to be fought with spiritual weapons

- The devil's lies must be countered with truthful speech.
- Evil accusations and slanders against a believer's character must be countered with a publicly proven life of righteousness.
- People need to hear the gospel message in order to ask Christ to be their savior.... So believers must always be ready to share, letting nothing block the spread of God's good news.
- And all external attacks along with our internal doubts can be deflected by a strong and growing faith in the power of God to deliver on His promises to us.
- Having a firm assurance of our own salvation, secured for us by Christ Jesus, should also give us the courage to face any attack (physical or spiritual) that Satan can bring against us.
- But the most powerful weapon in our defense is our growing knowledge of God's word, "the sword of the Spirit," buried deep within our minds and lived out in our lives.

AS Paul wrote in the conclusion of his letter to the Ephesian Christians ...

*Finally, **be strong in the Lord** and in the strength of his power. <sup>11</sup>**Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.** <sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup>Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.*

Ephesians 6:10-14

Finally, what about us Christians living today? Having been rebirthed and hopefully trained and outfitted for spiritual warfare, what would God have us to be doing?

The answer is that having joined God's family we have also been enlisted in His invasion force with the continuing task both through our lives and the our witness of reclaiming this world from Satan's domain and restoring God's kingdom so that God's "will" will once again be on earth as it is in heaven. And we continue to fight this battle by faith in the power of God to guide, guard, and protect us until the day that He calls us home.

As for the devil, our instruction coming from James the brother of Jesus is simple and straightforward,

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7
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At the end of his ministry, knowing that his own physical death was close at hand, the Apostle Paul wrote these words of assurance and encouragement to his young disciple, friend, and now pastor Timothy:

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, **relying on the power of God, <sup>9</sup>who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.** This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, <sup>10</sup>but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

<sup>11</sup>For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, <sup>12</sup>and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, ***for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able To keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.*** <sup>13</sup>Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup>Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us. (1 Timothy 1:8-14)

So now let us ask God, through His indwelling Holy Spirit, to guide and strengthen us in continuing both to guard and share this good treasure – the Gospel message – which He has entrusted with us.