



# Spiritual Warfare

## Part 4: The Enemy And His Army

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One of the first rules of warfare is to “know thy enemy.”<sup>1</sup> This certainly applies in the arena of spiritual warfare. We cannot afford to be ignorant of Satan’s devices (**2 Cor. 2:11**). Our ignorance of him and his methods only makes his job that much easier. Scripture reveals a tremendous amount of information about Satan and his demonic horde, in order that we might know who our enemy is, how he works, and how we can stand strong against his schemes.

It is never pleasant to spend time discussing the devil. I get no joy out of giving him any press time at all. Though this may be unpleasant, it is necessary. We need to have a theology of Satan in order that we might be kept from two opposite and equally dangerous extremes.

When it comes to the existence of Satan, people often make one of two mistakes. First, they ignore or disbelieve his existence. Satan is portrayed in our culture as nothing more than a myth, a legend, a debunked unscientific notion of a bygone era. He is caricatured as a fiendish little man-like figure in a red suit, with a cape, tale, and pitchfork. The world is not alone in its ignorance concerning the devil; his existence and reality are largely denied even in the church.

A recent Barna survey of over 1,800 “self-described Christians” found that “*four out of ten strongly agree that Satan is 'not a living being but is a symbol of evil.' An additional two out of ten said they 'agree somewhat' with that perspective.*”<sup>2</sup> That means that 60% of “Christians” think that Satan is only a symbol for evil and not a real living being. No wonder the church is falling victim to his every ploy and deception. Most of those in the church don’t even believe they have a real enemy!

A second error, on the opposite extreme, is to become preoccupied with Satan and his powers. There are many

who fall into the ditch of not only believing he exists, but of attributing to him far more power, influence, and ability than he really has. They see a demon behind every bush, under every rock, and behind every event. Many Christians live in constant fear and unending terror of Satan and his demons. They fear touching something, walking by something, or saying something which will give the devil a foothold and influence in their lives. Their constant preoccupation with the demonic shifts their focus from the victory in Christ to their own victimhood at the hands of evil forces.

Our own ability to stand against the forces of wickedness in heavenly places requires that we know our enemy and understand his methods. This article is designed to offer a very brief theology of Satan in order that we might avoid both extremes.

### **A Brief History Of The Devil**

The Bible is full of references to Satan. He is called by a number of different names throughout Scripture. He is referred to in seven books of the Old Testament. Every writer of the New Testament mentions Satan. In the gospels alone he is mentioned twenty-nine times. Twenty-five of those twenty-nine mentions are by Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

Satan appears very early in human history (**Genesis 3**), to our first parents in the garden. When writing Genesis, Moses did not explain how or why the devil existed, nor does he explain what made him evil. The last reference to Satan in the Bible foretells his doom, “**And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**” (**Revelation 20:10**)

The first thing we know about the devil is that he is a

1 Previous articles in this series can be accessed at our website.  
2 <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/260-most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exists>

3 Robert Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 66.

created being. Jesus as God is the Creator of all things (**Col. 1:15-16**), and that includes all of the angelic hosts. There is only one uncreated eternal being in all of the universe, and that is God. God did not create evil or create evil beings. Angels were part of God's creation which He declared to be "very good" (**Genesis 1:31**).

As to the time of the creation of the angels, it is difficult to be dogmatic, but it seems that it was sometime immediately prior to the creation of the heavens and the earth, or at sometime during the creation week of **Genesis 1**. By **Genesis 3**, Satan has been created and has rebelled. So the fall of Satan happened sometime between the "very good" of **Genesis 1:31** and the appearance of this tempter in **Genesis 3:1**. Exactly when angels were created we are not told.

Second, we can know that Satan is a living and personal being. He has all the traits of personality. He has an intellect. He is crafty. He plans and plots and uses all his resources to oppose God, His plan, and His people. His ability to deceive and scheme is an evidence of his intellect, reason, emotions and will. Another evidence of his personality is his ability to communicate with others, including Jesus (**Luke 4:1-12**).

Satan is not just a power force, a myth, a legend, or a personification for evil. He is a real being, with intellect, craft, will, a plan and an ability to carry out his plan. Personal pronouns are applied to Satan in the Bible. All these things indicate that he is a personal being. He is not a human, nor was he once a man. He was a created being - a cherub.

Third, we can know that Satan is a fallen angel. He once had a position of immense importance and prominence among the angels that God created. Two Old Testament passages describe Satan's original condition and his fall from that position (**Isaiah 14** and **Ezekiel 28**).

**Ezekiel 28** is addressed to the "leader of Tyre" (v. 2);<sup>4</sup> however, beginning in verse 12, Ezekiel addresses the "King of Tyre" and describes this person in such a way as to rule out the possibility that Ezekiel was describing a man. Whereas verses 2-10 are addressed to the actual human king, verses 11-19 describes the evil spiritual power - Satan, who energized that ruler. You can read the verses below and see that these things could not be said of the human "prince of Tyre" but apply to Satan himself.

**Ezekiel 28:12-15, "Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord God, "You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering:**

4 The "leader of Tyre" or "prince of Tyre" was at that time Ethbaal III who ruled the entire Phoenician seacoast city of Tyre.

**the ruby, the topaz and the diamond; The beryl, the onyx and the jasper; the lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; and the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you."**

Ezekiel goes on to describe Satan's fall and God's subsequent judgment upon him. Satan, the "covering cherub," was "filled with violence" and "sinned" and so he was "cast as profane from the mountain of God" (v. 16). His heart was "lifted up," and he "corrupted [his] wisdom by reason of [his] splendor" (v. 17). Those verses describe his fall.

Isaiah uses the same device in his prophecy against the king of Babylon (**Isaiah 14:4-23**) as we get a glimpse behind the king of Babylon to one who was "fallen from heaven," the "star of the morning, son of the dawn" who had "weakened the nations" (v. 12). This describes Satan who said in his heart, "I will ascend to Heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (vv. 13-14)

Satan once lived in the courts of God as one of God's cherub angels. He was a beautiful, brilliant, lovely, glorious angel - until unrighteousness was found in him. Pride was his downfall, and Satan was cast from Heaven - probably to the newly created earth.<sup>5</sup>

Fourth, we can know a lot about Satan from the names that Scripture gives him. The name "Satan" means "adversary," and shows his true character as the one who opposes God and His plans and purposes.

He is also called "devil." That is the second most common name for Satan. Devil is the translation of the Greek *diabolos*, which comes from the verb meaning "to throw." This describes his activity as one who hurls accusations and slanders and tears down God and His people. **1 Peter 5:8** calls him the "the devil, [who] prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

He is also called the "serpent" since in his temptation of Eve he used a serpent (**Genesis 3:1-6**). This name speaks of his craftiness, subtlety, and beguiling nature.

5 The philosophical problem of how a perfect angel could sin and thus fall from perfection is not without a solution. We won't address that at this time. It is beyond the scope of this article.

His power and scope of influence are described when he is called “**the prince of the power of the air**” (Eph. 2:2). His temporary control of this present world system is in view when he is called the “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4). As the god of this world, Satan is busy blinding unbelievers to the truth. As a result, the “**whole world lies under the power of the evil one**” (1 John 5:19) during “**this present evil age**” (Gal. 1:4).

A large part of his work is in view when he is called “the tempter” (1 Thess. 3:5). The devastating destruction of his ways explains why he is called “the dragon” (Rev. 12:3-4, 7, 9, 13, 16-17).

Finally, he is called “the evil one” (John 17:15; 1 John 5:18-19), and the “father of lies” (John 8:44). Those are just a few of his names.

### His Schemes

Satan opposes everything that God does. Even if it might mean his eventual downfall and destruction (and it certainly does), He seeks to thwart all the plans and purposes of God.

We can know something of his ways since we are not to be “**ignorant of his schemes**” (2 Cor. 2:2) in order that we might “**stand firm against the schemes of the devil**” (Eph. 6:11). One of the downfalls of many Christians is their total ignorance of Satan's schemes and tricks. However, when we look to Scripture we see all we need to know about how Satan operates and what he seeks to do.

Satan tempts people to sin and turn away from God (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5). Satan energizes and promotes every false religion in the world. All idol worship and false religion is a sacrifice to, and worship of, demons (1 Cor. 10:20). He is the author of all deception and falsehood. With the help of his servants (2 Cor. 11:15) He inspires false teachers (1 John 4:1-4; 1 Timothy 4:1-3) and promotes his soul decaying error under the banner of truth and light (2 Cor. 11:14-15).

He loves to falsely accuse Christians and to deceive people into believing those false accusations. He loves to divide the church, sow disunity, destroy peace, split up families, cause strife between brethren, in the church and in families. These are the works of Satan.

All anti-God, worldly thinking is satanically inspired. The whole world lies under his power (1 John 5:18-19) and the whole world system is his creation (1 John 2:15-17). Every way of thinking that is opposed to God, every philosophy, every false doctrine, every lie, every worldview, religion, and thought which is raised up against the truth of God is from

Satan (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). All those who promote, defend, and believe his lies have fallen prey and are either knowingly or unwittingly doing his bidding.

He does not present his lies and deceptions in any truthful manner. He makes sin look alluring, when in fact it is soul-rotting poison. He tricks men into thinking that they can steal a pleasure and never pay the debt. He appears as an angel of light. He disguises error as truth and makes it sound like truth, look like truth, and feel like truth. He hides the darkness and deceives people into thinking they are walking in light when, in fact, they are walking in darkness.

He is amazingly effective at making lies believable, sin desirable, temptation unavoidable, and error irresistible. In fact, he is so effective that the only hope we have of being able to spot his lies is to be so well versed in the truth, so faithful and loving of the truth, such a doer of truth that he will not be able to deceive us because we are rooted and grounded in truth. Apart from that, you and I are sitting ducks!

### His Army

Satan does not work alone. He has a host of evil spirits who are allied with him in his evil purposes. Satan is the ruler of demons (Matt. 12:22) and they do his bidding. They are united with in him in his opposition to God and his people. Though we cannot know for sure, it seems that these demons fell from Heaven and sinned at the same time that Satan did, joining him in his rebellion. They will also join him in his doom. Jesus said in Matthew 25:41 that “**the eternal fire [which] has been prepared for the devil and his angels.**” It seems that Revelation 12:4 refers to the fall of Satan and indicates that he took 1/3 of the angelic hosts with him.

We know from Scripture that the other demons were originally created perfect by God and likewise fell. We also conclude that, like Satan, they are living, real, personal beings. They are active in the world today, involved in the same demonic activities that we attributed to Satan earlier. In Scripture, they are called “unclean spirits” (Matt. 10:1), “demons” (Matt. 12:24), and “evil spirits” (Luke 7:21).

Much of Jesus' ministry involved delivering demoniacs from their demon possession.<sup>6</sup> Those who were possessed by demons demonstrated unusual strength (Mark 5:1-5; Acts 19:13-16). It seems that in the New Testament demons had the ability to inflict various diseases and mental derangements upon their victims. Robert Lightner notes,

<sup>6</sup> I will dedicate an entire article in this series to the subject of exorcisms in the Bible.

*“They inflicted various diseases on people, such as dumbness (Matt. 9:33), blindness (Matt. 12:22), a form of epilepsy (Matt. 17:15-18), and mental derangement (Mark 5:1-20). Do demons do these things today? The Bible does not answer this question, but it would seem that they could and probably sometimes do. However, not all physical and mental illnesses are the results of demonic activity. Even in the New Testament times the two were distinct (Matt. 4:24; Luke 7:21).”<sup>7</sup>*

### His Limitations

All I have written to this point would probably cause panic, terror, sleepless nights and anxiety attacks. But this is not the full story. No treatment of Satan and his demons would be complete without also learning of their limitations.

First, demons are greater than man in knowledge but not omniscient.<sup>8</sup> Angels are considered to have great wisdom (2 Samuel 14:20) and knowledge (Matt. 24:36). Even fallen angels have knowledge beyond the natural realm (Luke 4:34). Yet they are not omniscient beings. Only God is omniscient.

Second, though demons are stronger than men, they are not omnipotent. Angels are said to be greater in power and might (2 Peter 2:11; Psalm 103:20). Angels are called “mighty angels.” Demons in their fallen state still retained that strength and superiority over men (Acts 19:13-16). They are not almighty. Only God is omnipotent.

Though demons are more mobile than man, they are not omnipresent. They have to roam and walk about on the earth (Job 1:7; Zech. 1:11; 1 Peter 5:8). Angels have to move and sometimes there are even delays because of their inability to instantly transport themselves (Daniel 10:10-14). Satan cannot be in more than one place at any given time.

An important limitation on Satan's power is seen in Job 1-2. Satan was unable to touch anything that Job owned, or to afflict Job in any way because God had placed “**a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side.**” (Job 1:10) Satan had to receive permission from God before He could touch Job's possessions (Job 1:12) or his health (Job 2:6).

We can take comfort in the reality that Satan can do **nothing** unless God by His sovereign hand, for His sovereign purposes, and in accordance with His secret will allows it! Satan can only do what God gives him the freedom to do. He cannot do anything at any time to anybody,

<sup>7</sup> Lightner, 92.

<sup>8</sup> This summary of the limitations of demons is borrowed from Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), 134-135.

anywhere without God's permission. Satan is like a dog on his master's leash. God allows him to go so far and no further, to do so much and no more.

God is allowing Satan to work his plan with a certain degree of freedom. I believe that God restrains more of his evil than He allows. God is sovereign over all things, and that includes Satan and his demons, their evil schemes, and their activities.

Satan is not as powerful as God, and God is not “*trying*” to defeat Him. Satan is a crushed and defeated foe whose doom is certain. Ultimately Satan's doom was secured the instant he fell in prideful rebellion since it is impossible that God should fall from His throne or that His plans and purposes fail.

Satan's end and destruction was publicly secured on the cross where Jesus had “**disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them**” (Colossians 2:15). Jesus, through death rendered “**powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil.**” (Heb. 2:14-15) 1 John 3:8 says that “**the Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.**” He has certainly done so. The ruler of this world has been judged (John 16:11).

### So What Is A Christian To Do?

What then should be our response? Remember the two extremes we need to avoid. To ignore Satan, disbelieve his existence and not at all be concerned with his schemes is to be blinded to a very real and very dangerous enemy. To be fixated on Satan and preoccupied with Him is to give far too much attention to an already defeated foe. There is certainly a balanced, middle-ground approach.

In order to avoid the first error, we must **be alert**. We have to know our enemy, his tactics and his limitations. We need to be wise to his schemes of division, deception and destruction. We need to be able to identify satanic attacks and stand against them. We need to be able to discern the difference between truth and error, right and wrong.

We need to keep our heads up and stay engaged in the game. A certain degree of wariness is appropriate. We must walk circumspectly, knowing the times and discerning truth.

In order to avoid the second error, we must **be firm**. We have to rest in the victory, the armor, and the security that has been provided to us. Christ has won the victory. Satan is limited. He is active, but he is defeated. The “check mate” has been secured and now it is only a matter of time and a few moves and the Victor will appear and put down all His enemies.

We are in Christ and cannot be snatched away by Satan (**John 10:25-30**). Our salvation is secure. Our victory over death and every other enemy has been purchased by Christ and His resurrection (**1 Cor. 15:50-58**). We have been given the spiritual armor<sup>9</sup> necessary to stand against the wiles of the devil (**Ephesians 6:10-17**). All we need has been provided - we must stand therein.

An understanding of the Bible's teaching on Satan and his demons will keep us from falling to his temptations and attacks and from constantly living in fear of him. Be alert. Be firm your faith.

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<sup>9</sup> We will look at what this armor is and how it is applied in a future article.