

Dealing with the Tempter

A little boy always went next door to play even though his mom had warned him against doing so. This worried his mom so badly that she asked him why he was so disobedient.

He replied that Satan tempted him so bad and he did not know what to do.

His mom then advised him to say 'get behind me Satan' whenever he was tempted. She then built a fence around the house.

This worked for a week, then one sunny afternoon his mom looked out the window and there was her son playing on the neighbour's lawn having cut a hole in the fence.

"Jeremiah", she yelled, "come here!" She then said "did I not tell you to say 'get behind me Satan' whenever he tempted you?"

"Yes", the boy replied, "I said, 'get behind me Satan', then he went behind me and pushed me through the hole in the fence."

For many people, Satan is but a joke: a little man dressed up in a red suit with a pitchfork, sticking it in people.

Far from it. Satan is a ruthless enemy that is seeking to destroy people's lives.

The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness brings Satan on the stage of life in a clear way.

Before we see the serpent in the garden of Eden in the beginning. Though not named as Satan, the interchange with Eve and Adam gives us a hint of the workings of Satan.

In the book of Job, we see him at the throne of God, accusing Job that his faith/righteousness is based on the blessings and protection of God. Take it away and Job will curse God. Nearly everything was taken away but Job did not curse God though Job wanted some answers to why this has happened to him.

In the prophetic literature of Isaiah and Ezekiel, the prophets give us a hint of who Satan is though the activities of local kings. We start getting the picture that Satan or Lucifer was an angel at the throne of God who wanted to be God. He and many other angels were kicked out to roam the earth because of their desire to usurp God as Lord.

It is in the life of Jesus that we clearly see Satan coming to the fore. Beginning with the temptations in the wilderness, Satan becomes a prominent player and a dangerous one. In the ministry of Jesus recorded by the gospel writers of Mark, Matthew and Luke we see people, young and old, who have been demonised where their life has been affected and afflicted with various physical symptoms. In John's gospel, in our passage, today, Jesus warns that the enemy has come to steal, kill and destroy. John also recounts that it was Satan who infected Judas to betray Jesus.

In Paul's writings we have references in Corinthians and Ephesians. The latter epistle warns us that our fight is not against flesh and blood but powers, principalities and the dark forces. Peter warns the church that the devil is like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. James calls the church to resist the plans of Satan. The book of revelation is about Satan's desire to destroy the church and take over the world using the political leaders of the age.

Paul and John warn that Satan will return as the AntiChrist to rule the world.

This brief synopsis shows that Jesus and the Early Church took the reality and activity of Satan very seriously. He was a huge threat to God's advancement of the gospel.

Sadly the modern church has been lulled into sense of comfort. The theological liberals don't believe he exists and have minimised the power of evil. The evangelical church believes in his existence but does not want to talk about it too much in case Satan is emphasized too much. The Pentecostal church that was founded on the healing and deliverance ministry of Christ are so afraid about the legal issues that this ministry has disappeared from many of the churches.

The message from most churches is about becoming a better person and receiving the blessings of God. The challenges and strongholds that many people find themselves are given psychological, work based answers but the enemy behind their problem is never mentioned.

People are frightened because they do not want to be seen as a looney finding a devil behind every bush.

Guess what. Satan is behind most bushes especially when you have tried everything and nothing has made a difference. Maybe casting the strong devil out could be the answer!

So before we look at the temptations that Jesus faced and which we are prone to, let us be reminded about who our enemy is and what he gets up to.

The original [Hebrew](#) term *satan* is a generic noun meaning "accuser" or "adversary", which is used throughout the Hebrew Bible to refer to ordinary human adversaries, as well as a specific supernatural entity. The word is derived from a verb meaning primarily "to obstruct, oppose". When it is used without the definitive article (simply *satan*), the word can refer to any accuser, but when it is used with the definitive article (*ha-satan*), it usually refers specifically to the heavenly accuser: the satan.

The [Greek](#) *diabolos* "[slandere r](#)", from *diaballein* "to slander": *dia*- "across, through" + *ballein* "to hurl".

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In the New Testament, the words

Satan
and
diabolos
are used interchangeably as synonyms.

The bible gives us a clear understanding of his strategies.

Primer on Satan's Strategies

If you need a refresher for what those “designs” are, here is a summary. May God make you a mighty warrior! May he “train your hands for war and your fingers for battle” (Psalm 144:1).

1. Satan lies, and is the father of lies.

“When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). The first time Satan appears in the Bible in Genesis 3, the first words on his lips are suspicious of the truth (“Did God say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?”). And the second words on his lips were a subtle falsehood (“You will not die”). John says that Satan “has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44). We are dealing with the essence of falsehood and deception.

2. He blinds the minds of unbelievers.

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:4). So he not only speaks what is false. He hides what is true. He keeps us from seeing the treasure of the gospel. He lets us see facts, even proofs, but not preciousness.

3. He masquerades in costumes of light and righteousness.

In 2 Corinthians 11:13–15, Paul says that some people are posing as apostles who are not. He explains like this: “Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”

4. Satan does signs and wonders.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:9, the last days are described like this: *The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.*

In Matthew 24:24 Jesus describes the last days like this: “False Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible even the elect.” There is no hint that these “signs and wonders” will be tricks. Rather they will be the real deal as Satan copies what God can do. Only with discernment of God will people know.

5. Satan tempts people to sin.

This is what he did unsuccessfully to Jesus in the wilderness — he wanted him to abandon the path of suffering and obedience (Matthew 4:1–11). This is what he did successfully to Judas in the last hours of Jesus’s life (Luke 22:3–6). And in 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul warns against this for all the believers: “I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”

6. Satan plucks the word of God out of people’s hearts and chokes faith.

Jesus told the parable of the four soils in Mark 4:1–9. In it, the seed of the word of God is sown, and some falls on the path and birds quickly take it away. He explains in verse 15, “Satan immediately comes and takes away the word which was sown in them.” Satan snatches the

word because he hates faith which the word produces (Romans 10:17).

7. Satan causes some sickness and disease.

Jesus healed a woman once who was bent over and could not straighten herself. When some criticized him for doing that on the Sabbath, he said, "Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" (Luke 13:16). Jesus saw Satan as the one who had caused this disease.

But don't make the mistake of saying every sickness is the work of the devil. To be sure, even when a "thorn in the flesh" is God's design for our sanctification, it also may be the "messenger of Satan" (2 Corinthians 12:7).

8. Satan is a murderer.

Jesus said to those who were planning to kill him, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth" (John 8:44). To put it in a word, Satan is blood-thirsty. Christ came into the world that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). Satan comes that he might destroy life wherever he can and in the end make it eternally miserable.

9. Satan fights against the plans of missionaries.

Paul tells of how his missionary plans were frustrated in 1 Thessalonians 2:17–18: "We endeavoured the more eagerly, and with great desire, to see you face to face; because we wanted to come to you . . . but Satan hindered us." Satan hates evangelism and discipleship, and he will throw every obstacle he can in the way of missionaries and people with a zeal for evangelism.

10. Satan accuses Christians before God.

Revelation 12:10 says, “I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.’” Satan’s defeat is sure. But his accusations haven’t ceased.

It is the same with us as it was with Job. Satan says to God about us, They don’t really love you; they love your benefits. “Stretch out your hand and touch all that [they have], and [they] will curse you to your face” (Job 1:11). Their faith isn’t real. Satan accuses us before God, as he did Job. But it is a glorious thing that followers of Jesus have an advocate who “always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

Satan is a terrifying enemy and we take him for granted at our peril.

The good news is this:

1 John 3:8: “The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil.”

Hebrews 2:14: “Christ took on human nature that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil.”

Colossians 2:15: “God disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.” In other words, the decisive blow was struck at Calvary.

Revelation 20:10 says one day the warfare will be over: “The devil . . . [will be] thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone . . . and will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” (See Matthew 8:29; 25:41)

While Christ has won the victory, we have to claim that victory for ourselves.

To defeat Satan, we must first understand the doorways that he continues to come through. What lies have we believed about ourselves that we have taken to heart? Who have we not forgiven totally? What doubts and fears have we not dealt with and let go to Jesus? What secret sins still have not been dealt with like pornography or gambling or adultery? What emotions that we have harboured in our hearts like rage and anger; bitterness and resentment; envy and jealousy; criticism and judgment etc.

What behaviours or thinking that are now controlling us and we have lost the power to control them.

The torment comes because we have not yet fully dealt with the ground that has been given to Satan by ourselves and others. For some it can be quite complex, as many things have been buried deep in our heart and psyche and only through the Holy Spirit can this be brought to the surface and revealed.

The struggle is over our hearts and our allegiance. Satan only has the ground of un-repentant sin. As he is a legalist, you need to ask the Holy Spirit to show you specifically what the heart issue that needs repenting of. It may not be obvious at first and thus you need the Spirit's revelation.

And at the same time there needs to be a change of negative thinking about yourself and your situation.

Most of all you need to appreciate the seriousness of the issue

A Haitian pastor illustrated to his congregation the need for total commitment to Christ. His parable: A certain man wanted to sell his house for \$2,000. Another man wanted very badly to buy it, but because he was poor, he couldn't afford the full price. After much bargaining, the owner agreed to sell the house for half the original price with just one stipulation: He would retain ownership of one small nail protruding from just over the door.

After several years, the original owner wanted the house back, but the new owner was unwilling to sell. So the first owner went out, found the carcass of a dead dog, and hung it from the single nail he still owned. Soon the house became unliveable, and the family was forced to sell the house to the owner of the nail.

The Haitian pastor's conclusion: "If we leave the Devil with even one small peg in our life, he will return to hang his rotting garbage on it, making it unfit for Christ's habitation."

If you deal with the right, Satan has no might.

Now if you wish to be a part of God's advancing kingdom, there is also a problem. Satan does not like you powering on for God and His Kingdom.

The New testament records various Strategies of Satan with believers:

1) annihilate the church or neutralize its witness from within. Acts 5:1-6 tells of Ananias and Saphira withholding part of their money from the sale of the land. God dealt with them and put the fear of God in the rest of the church.

2) virulent persecution from without.

3) smother its witness by according it great popularity and wealth

4) disturb the unity of the church by creating discord and division cf 1 Corinthians

5) subversion of the church through apostasy and heresy (2 Peter 2:1-2).

As an Individual we are also prone to Satan's attacks as we move in the power of God.

Resist!

James says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you!" (James 4:7). How do we do that? Here is how they did it according to Revelation 12:11: "They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." They embraced the triumph of Christ by his blood. They spoke that truth in faith. They did not fear death. And they triumphed.

The New Testament highlights prayer as the pervasive accompaniment of every battle. "Take . . . the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Ephesians 6:17–18). The wearing of God's armour is vital as we battle against the words and wiles of Satan.

As the close of this age draws near, and Satan rages, Jesus calls us to wartime prayer: "Watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). Similarly, Peter makes an urgent call to end-time prayer: "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers" (1 Peter 4:7).

Even Jesus fought against the devil on our behalf with the weapon of prayer. He said to Peter in Luke 22:31–32, "Satan has asked to have you that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." So Jesus illustrates for us the opposition of a specific satanic threat with prayer.

Jesus also commanded the demons to go and we are encouraged to command the demon oppression to go in the name of Jesus.

And, of course, Jesus instructed us to make prayer a daily weapon for protection in general: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13). That is, deliver us from the successful temptation of the evil one. Do you confront the designs of the devil without the

focused and determined power of prayer?

While the enemy lurks like a roaring Lion, seeking to devour someone, we have the power of the cross, the power of God's word and the mighty power of the name of Jesus to tell him to go to the feet of Jesus for judgment.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them!"

We have the power but we must never underestimate Satan's power. If we do, it will be to our peril! Amen.