

Opposing Satan, the Counterfeit Word

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Abstract

A primary goal of this journal article is to explore how Satan (especially through his minions) strives to undermine the will of the Saviour (particularly through his followers). A correspondent aim is to deliberate how to oppose the devil's attacks. One major finding is that Lucifer uses spurious forms of verbal communication to tempt, deceive, and accuse people, including believers. Also, Satan's decision to operate in this way is a deliberate perversion of how God used his powerful, creative decree to bring the entire universe into existence and sustain it in all its manifold wonder. A case study analysis of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (cf. Matt 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–11) indicates that he relied on the Word of God to thwart the devil's attacks. Similarly, an examination of Ephesians 6:10–20 (the premier Pauline passage dealing with the subject of spiritual warfare) shows that Jesus' followers should make full use of scripture to parry the attacks made by Satan, the counterfeit word.

1. Introduction

In 2 Corinthians, Paul defended his ministry by making explicit statements about himself and his detractors. While the apostle Paul

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

never specifically identified these antagonists, a portrait of them can be created from the epistle. For instance, the spiritual frauds came from outside Corinth and needed letters of recommendation (3:1). One possibility is that they were from Judea. Paul complained about the pretenders invading his sphere of ministry (10:13–16). Above all, he was alarmed that they preached a false gospel—one that may have de-emphasized the Messiah’s role in the salvation of believers (11:4). The deceivers apparently also claimed their spiritual authority exceeded that of Paul (v. 5).

There is an insidious issue connected with the preceding observations. Specifically, in Paul’s day, the devil’s minions portrayed themselves as Jesus’ ambassadors (v. 13), heralds of truth (v. 14), and ministers promoting ‘righteousness’. Even more fiendish is the reality that Lucifer actively and persistently disguised himself as God’s premier spiritual emissary, when in reality the evil one was the Messiah’s archenemy. Though Paul took note of the devil’s antagonistic agenda, the apostle did not detail in his letter the ways in which the devil presented himself as a counterfeit to the Son. Even today, a larger unanswered question concerns how the deceiver strives to undermine the will of the Redeemer, especially what he accomplishes through his followers.

While the devil seems powerful enough to use a brute force approach, Treat, in *The Crucified King* (2014:199–200), offers an alternative method that is far more subtle and seductive. In particular, ‘Satan rules over his kingdom of darkness through his deceitful word’. Moreover, his stratagems are at least threefold, including the use of ‘temptation’, ‘deception’, and ‘accusation’ (cf. Eph 6:11 and the analysis appearing in section 4.0 below). Admittedly, on the surface, what Treat puts forward seems relatively clear-cut; yet, as he observes, the significance

and details of this basic truth have been largely ‘overlooked’ in the academic literature. Expressed differently, there is room for further research concerning how the devil ‘rules through ... his tempting, deceiving, accusing word’ with the goal of exercising ‘power over sinners’ and bringing about their eternal, spiritual ‘death’. Arguably, an opportunity remains to address the preceding gap in the theological dialogue. The goal, then, of the current journal article is to advance the discussion in a modest and meaningful way by exploring this pivotal issue further.

2. An Analysis of What Scripture Reveals about Satan, His Minions, and How the Devil Operates Through Them

In any deliberation involving Satan and his minions,² it is clarifying to recognise that they are spirit creatures, along with the rest of the angels who are loyal to God (Heb 1:14). Concerning the latter group, while they live in heaven (Matt 22:30), at times God dispatches them to earth as his messengers. Angels are mighty and powerful beings (Ps 103:20; 2 Thess 1:7) who possess great wisdom (2 Sam 14:20). Ordinarily, angels are invisible to people (2 Kings 6:17), though they have appeared as humans (Ezek 1:5; Luke 24:4). Angels do not marry or reproduce (Matt 22:30). Also, because angels are not subject to death (Luke 20:36), they will live forever and remain constant in number. Angels have the ability to fly (Dan 9:21); yet, contrary to popular belief and artistic portrayal, few angels in the Bible are explicitly stated to have wings. In fact, Isaiah 6:2 and Revelation 4:8 may be the sole instances. The elect angels exist as an organised hierarchy (Eph 6:12;

² In addition to the following discourse, cf. the discussion in Bell (2013); Benoit (1983); Bietenhard (1986); Bietenhard and Brown (1986); Erickson (2013:403–19); Fletcher-Louis (2013); Funderburk (2009); Grudem (1994:397–436); Hamilton (1992); Hiebert (2009); Horton (2011:406–7); Mueller (1934:196–204); Newsom and Watson (1992); Robbins (2007:60–9); Treat (2014:199–203).

Col 1:16). Their duties include serving God by ministering to believers (Heb 1:14), protecting them (Dan 6:22), guarding them (Ps 91:11), guiding them (Acts 8:26), and helping them (Dan 10:13).

As noted in the preceding paragraph, in addition to the elect angels—who worship and serve God (1 Tim 5:21; Heb 1:6)—there are fallen angels who serve the purposes of the devil (cf. Isa 14:12–14; Rev 12:7–9). In the Old Testament, he is referred as ‘Satan’ (1 Chron 21:1; Job 1:6, 7, 8, 9, 12; 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7; Zech 3:1, 2). This transliterates the Hebrew noun *sātān* that means ‘adversary’, ‘opponent’, or ‘accuser’ (Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm 1994–2000; Swanson 2001). Other names used in the New Testament for Satan reveal his diabolical character, which is illustrated as follows:³ ‘Beelzebul, the prince of demons’ (Matt 12:24); ‘a murderer from the beginning ... a liar and the father of lies’ (John 8:44); ‘the prince of this world’ (12:31; 14:30); ‘the god of this age’ (2 Cor 4:4); ‘Belial’ (meaning ‘the wicked one’; 6:15); the ‘ruler of the kingdom of the air’ (Eph 2:2); ‘the tempter’ (1 Thess 3:5); ‘the evil one’ (2 Thess 3:3); the ‘enemy ... a roaring lion’ (1 Pet 5:8); ‘Abaddon’ (meaning ‘destruction’) and ‘Apollyon’ (meaning ‘destroyer’; Rev 9:11); ‘the great dragon ... that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the world astray’ (12:9); ‘the accuser of our brothers and sisters’ (v. 10); and the ‘devil, who deceived them’ (20:10).

Admittedly, specialists within academia, along with many sceptics in popular culture, tend to dismiss Satan and his wretched horde as nothing but a myth or fantasy. In contrast, the above passages depict these entities as real beings who, through the use of guile and subversion, interfere in historical events. Succinctly stated, the demons are fallen angels who joined with Satan in rebellion against the Lord.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are taken from the 2011 NIV.

While the Bible does not discuss the origin of evil spirits, the New Testament does speak about the fall and later imprisonment of a group of angels (cf. 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 1:6). The traditional view is that the demons' insurrection occurred at some time before God created the world. Then, after he had brought the human race into existence, Lucifer and his assailants contaminated people with wickedness (cf. Gen 3; Matt 25:41; Rev 12:9).

As stated above, Satan is the premier deceiver who pretends to be an agent of God (cf. John 8:44; 2 Cor 11:3, 14; 2 Thess 2:9–10; Rev 12:9; 20:3). While the Prince of Darkness could use a variety of methods to tempt, deceive, and accuse believers, he most often leverages verbal communication in a variety of furtive ways. The earliest example of the latter is recorded in Genesis 3, in which the Satan-inspired serpent employed subterfuge to convince Eve to doubt God's Word and disobey his command. In turn, Eve persuaded her husband to do the same. The couple had been blinded by the snake's insidious promise, and in return they received shame and alienation. Such was the wretched end of the once-blessed relationship Adam and Eve had enjoyed with their Creator in the ancient Eden orchard. For Adam, Eve, and all their physical descendants, the sobering aftermath of the Fall was that physical and spiritual death became a permanent part of the human experience (cf. Rom 5:12, 14, 18; 6:23).

The preceding way in which the evil one behaved represents a cunning perversion of how God operates.⁴ Specifically, as Genesis 1 discloses, at the dawn of time the Lord used his powerful decree to create everything in the cosmos from nothing (i.e. *creatio ex nihilo*). Furthermore, during each of the creation days, God progressively formed and filled the world. In doing so, he tamed what was wild and

⁴ In addition to the following discourse, cf. the discussion in Lioy 2005:23–55; Lioy 2010:5–15; Lioy 2011:13–23.

brought to life what was desolate. These observations do not necessarily rule out God's use of intermediate processes (including cosmological, geological, and biological means) stretching over long expanses of time to bring the material realm into existence and sustain it in all its manifold wonder.

Along the way, God declared what he brought into existence to be 'good'. *Tôb* is the Hebrew adjective rendered 'good' in the Genesis creation narrative (cf. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31) and concerns both the intrinsic nature and instrumental functionality of the material realm. Here, the notion of creation is portrayed as an action of the triune God alone in which he commands into existence that which had no reality prior to the issuing of his actualizing edict (cf. Gen 1:1–2; John 1:3; Heb 1:2; 11:3; 2 Pet 3:5). The portrait Genesis 1:2 paints is not one in which God sets the universe in motion and passively allows natural forces to operate, but one in which he is directly involved in every aspect of creation through his Word. The sevenfold occurrence of *tôb* ('good') in the primeval account does not mean that the unspoiled creation was an idyllic paradise of unlimited perfection. Expressed differently, the divine assessment is aesthetic, not ethical. Accordingly, what the divine Artisan brought into existence was superbly suited for its God-ordained role and purpose. The implication is that from the beginning, every aspect of the cosmos had functional integrity.

3. A Case Study Analysis: Jesus' temptation in the Wilderness (Matt 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–11)⁵

Scripture portrays the devil as a ravenous lion which constantly prowls around in search for an unsuspecting victim to 'devour' (1 Pet 5:8). It is not a question of *whether* an attack takes place, but rather *when* it occurs. Not even the Saviour, during his earthly sojourn, was exempt from Satan's assaults. With respect to the latter, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness provides a useful case study to analyse how to overcome the archenemy's enticements. An examination of the Synoptic Gospels (i.e. Matt 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–11) reveals that the Messiah, as the believers' High Priest (cf. Heb 2:18; 4:15), did not triumph by using a brute force approach; instead, the Son relied on the Word of God to thwart the devil's counterfeit verbal communications.

Jesus' temptation draws attention to his unique status as the divine Messiah. Immediately prior to this episode, he was anointed with God's Spirit (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:51), which signified the Son's inauguration into his public ministry (Acts 10:37–38). Matthew 4:1 and Luke 4:1 both say that the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness in order that the devil could put him to the test (the latter being the primary lexical emphasis of the Greek verb *peirazō* in these verses, the secondary notion of temptation or enticement notwithstanding; cf. Danker 2000; Louw and Nida 1989). Mark 1:12 literally says that the Spirit 'thrust [Jesus] into the wilderness' (in which the main verb, *ekballō*, appears as an historical present; cf. Runge

⁵ The following representative, scholarly works were consulted in the case study analysis of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness: Blomberg (1992); Bock (1994); Culpepper (1995); Edwards (2002); Fitzgerald (1972); France (2002); France (2007); Garlington (1994); Geldenhuys (1983); Gibson (1994); Johnson (1996); Just (2003); Keener (1999); Lane (1974); Marshall (1978); Mathewson (2011); Morris (1972); Nolland (2005); Oden and Hall (2005); Simonetti (2001); Stegner (1990); Stein (2008); Strauss (2007); Taylor (2001); Turner (2008).

2008). One is left with the impression that this event occurred by divine necessity and with urgency (cf. Deut 8:2). The adjective *erēmos*, which is rendered ‘wilderness’ (Matt 4:1), denotes an uninhabited region, though not necessarily a parched or arid locale (such as a desert; cf. Danker 2000; Louw and Nida 1989). The identity of the specific area near the Jordan River to which this verse refers remains unknown.

At various times in Jesus’ earthly life, he experienced events that paralleled important episodes in Israel’s history. For instance, the nation, as God’s corporate ‘son’ (Exod 4:23), was led by Moses into the desert (15:22). Then, for the next four decades (cf. Deut 1:3), the Lord tested his people as they wandered in the wilderness (cf. Exod 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut 8:2–5). Tragically, as scripture reveals, that generation of Israelites failed the divine test, even though they enjoyed the provision of the Father (cf. Deut 2:7; Neh 9:21; Ps 78:17–22) and the presence of the Spirit (cf. Neh 9:20; Isa 63:7–10). The people’s unbelief led them to transgress against the Lord repeatedly (cf. Num 14:33; 32:13; Ps 95:10–11; Heb. 3:7–19). In contrast, Jesus, as the ideal Israelite and representative of the human race (or second Adam; cf. Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:45), not only endured real testing, but also triumphed over it in the power of the Spirit through the efficacious use of God’s Word.⁶

Matthew 4:2 discloses that during Jesus’ time in the wilderness, he fasted ‘forty days and forty nights’, which in turn left him famished. ‘Forty’ is a number to which some scholars assign sacred significance. Various Old Testament luminaries also had life-shaping experiences

⁶ This writer considers Jesus to be the substitute and representative for the true Israel, namely, the church (cf. Gal 6:16). Whereas ancient Israel as a nation failed in its arrogance and rebellion, the Messiah made up for this by his perfect life and atoning death on the cross. Humankind’s sins were placed on him and believing sinners receive his pardoning grace.

that lasted 40 days, including Moses (Exod 34:28; Deut 9:9, 18), David (1 Sam 17:16), and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8). Jesus' temptation episode is a reminder that he, as the 'pioneer and perfecter of faith' (Heb 12:2), inaugurated a new exodus to provide redemption for the people of God (cf. 1 Cor 10:1–5). In the present episode, when Satan launched his final attacks, the Saviour was at an extreme disadvantage; yet, despite the devil's repeated efforts, he failed to lure the Son to transgress against the Father. As a result of this encounter, the Messiah proved that he truly is the Father's loyal and beloved Son (cf. Isa 42:1; Matt 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35; 2 Pet 1:17).

In Satan's first attempt to entice Jesus to sin,⁷ the 'tempter' (Matt 4:3; perhaps in human form) said that since (*ei* begins a first-class conditional Greek clause) Jesus is the 'Son of God' (cf. 3:17), he should turn some of the stones that were lying about into bread (as would a sorcerer). 'Son of God' is an eschatological, royal, and messianic title that the New Testament writers applied to Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Acts 13:33; Rom 1:4; Rev 2:18). The phrase not only emphasises the

⁷ The discourse in this section follows the chronological sequencing of the temptations presented in Matthew 4:1–11 (cf. the use of the Greek adverb *tote*, 'then', in vv. 1, 5, 10, 11), rather than the topical arrangement of events appearing in Luke 4:1–11, in which the ordering of temptations two and three are the reverse of what is recorded in Matthew; nonetheless, the analysis takes into account pertinent information appearing in each of the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Blomberg 1992:84; Bock 1994:374; Culpepper 1995:97; France 2007:126; Garlington 1994:293–4; Geldenhuys 1983:161; Keener 1999:142–3; Marshall 1978:166–7; Morris 1972:102; Nolland 2005:161; Stegner 1990:6; Strauss 2007:269; Turner 2008:124). In connection with the latter observations, it is important to recognise that the Synoptic Gospels are not structured as biographies or history in any general, or contemporary, sense; rather, they are *interpreted* histories. In addition, the narratives they record are not raw facts, as though readers were viewing electronic recordings obtained from surveillance cameras; instead, the accounts are carefully directed, arranged, and structured presentations of historical incidents. Moreover, the concern of the gospel writers was not to document history for history's sake; rather, they offered a *theological* explanation of the episodes they recounted in an objective and reliable manner, including Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

equality of the Son with the Father (as well as the Spirit; cf. John 5:18), but also the special and intimate relationship that exists between them (cf. Matt 16:16; Luke 1:35).⁸ Jesus, while being put to the test in the wilderness, could have used some bread after a gruelling 40-day fast, just as the Israelites needed manna to sustain them in the wilderness (cf. Exod 16:13–36); but it would have been wrong for the Messiah to utilise his divine power for a purely selfish purpose. Jesus’ power was meant to accomplish his redemptive ministry.

Doubtless, Lucifer was attempting to get the Son to show distrust in his Father’s provision. He designed the fast for his Son, and would provide for him at the proper time. Satan, however, wanted the Son to rebel by taking matters into his own hands. Rather than yield to the tempter’s proposal, Jesus quoted from the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 8:3. This verse teaches that the redeemed live not only by consuming food, but also (and more importantly) need to take in God’s Word for spiritual nourishment (Matt 4:4; cf. John 4:32–34). The Son could do without bread, but he must not jettison his responsibility to obey the Father (cf. Luke 4:3–4). The section of Deuteronomy 8 that Jesus quoted deals with the Israelites and the test that the Lord put them through in the wilderness. The passage indicates that the relationship between temptations and testing is quite close. Like the Israelites, Jesus faced the temptations in the wilderness, but unlike those who refused to enter the Promised Land (cf. Num 13–14), the Son effectively used Scripture to pass his test and remain faithful to the Father.

Next, the adversary supernaturally escorted Jesus to Jerusalem and positioned him on the pinnacle of the ‘temple’ (Matt 4:5; in which the

⁸ For a concise yet substantive treatment of the divine sonship of the Messiah, cf. Cole (2009); Fossum (1992); Michel and Marshall (1986); Robbins (2007:95–101); Win (2013).

main verb, *paralambanō*, appears as an historical present; cf. Runge 2008). In all likelihood, this was the southeastern portion of the sanctuary complex, where there was a steep drop-off to the Kidron Valley over 30 metres below. The tempter invited Jesus to prove in a spectacular way that he was God the Son (cf. the use of *ei* to begin a first-class conditional Greek clause). Supposedly, he could throw himself down from the apex of the sanctuary and trust the Father to protect him (v. 6). Within Second Temple Judaism, a common interpretation of Malachi 3:1 held that the Messiah would appear in the sky, descend to the temple, and proclaim deliverance (cf. Wis of Sol 2:18). Apparently, Satan wanted Jesus to combine such an appearance with a sensational descent, complete with angels, to win popular approval for his kingdom.

The antagonist cleverly misquoted the Septuagint version of Psalm 91:11–12 by leaving out the phrase ‘to guard you in all your ways’. This passage teaches that God provides his angels to watch over his people when they live in accordance with his will (cf. Exod 19:4–5; Deut 32:10–11). Satan claimed that the Father would protect the Son as he plummeted to the ground; but since such a stunt would not be within the will of God, the promise of divine protection would not apply. Rather than yield to the devil’s underhanded suggestion, Jesus quoted from the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 6:16, saying, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’ (Matt 4:7; cf. Luke 4:9–12). The Saviour realised that the redeemed cannot dictate the terms of divine intervention by arranging situations of need. To do otherwise would be a foolish presumption, that is, an attempt to deny the mutual accountability and responsibility woven into their covenant relationship with God; yet, he freely grants what his people need in order for them to grow in their relationship with him.

In the third and final temptation, Lucifer supernaturally transported Jesus to a ‘very high mountain’ (Matt 4:8; in which the main verb, *paralambanō*, appears as an historical present; cf. Runge 2008). Its location remains uncertain, leaving open the likelihood that this experience (along with that narrated in v. 5) could have been visionary in nature. If the stated possibility is valid, then, according to Mathewson (2011:89), Jesus’ ‘visionary experience’ would be comparable to what various ‘apocalyptic seers’ experienced (e.g. Enoch, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel; cf. Isa 6:1; Ezek 2:2; 3:12, 14; 8:1–3; 11:1; 37:1; 40:1–2; 43:5; Dan 7:1; 8:1; 10:1–2; 1 Enoch 75:1; 2 Bar 6:3; 3 Bar 2:1; Apoc Abr 15:2–3; Apoc Zeph 2:1; 3:2; T Abr 10:1; Rev 1:10; 4:1–2; 17:1–3; 21:9–10).

All the same, this writer maintains that Jesus’ temptation, as recounted in the Synoptic Gospels, actually occurred within space-time history. The latter stands in contrast to the view espoused by Schiavo (2002:142, 145), who thinks the use of ‘symbolic-mythological language’ in the biblical text indicates that Jesus merely had a ‘transcendental experience of religious ecstasy’. Robbins (2007:157) goes even further when he claims that a ‘quest for historical specifics enfeebles the narrative’. The emphasis in this essay on the inherent historicity of the temptation narrative also is in contrast to the supposition put forward by Stegner (1990:27), who maintains that the account is ‘essentially the literary creation of the evangelists and their sources’, who allegedly fabricated the episode as a ‘polemic against the Herodian king Agrippa I’ and his ‘severe persecution’ of the ‘primitive church’.

Returning to the synoptic pericope, the devil in an instant paraded before the Son all the nations of the world and their splendour, promising them to him if he would fall prostrate before his antagonist in

‘worship’ (v. 9; cf. John 12:31; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; 1 John 5:19). Through the Messiah’s death and resurrection, the Father intended to free the world from Satan’s oppressive control (cf. Heb 2:14–15) and give the Son the nations throughout the earth as his rightful inheritance (cf. Ps 2:8). Therefore, rather than oblige his archenemy’s enticements, Jesus commanded him to depart at once (Matt 4:10). Jesus explained that, based on the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20, worship and service were to be given only to God.

In summary, throughout the series of devil-inspired inducements, the Son adroitly used scripture to demonstrate his unwavering commitment to do the Father’s will (cf. Luke 4:5–8; John 5:19, 30; 6:38). When the Prince of Darkness had completed every temptation, he departed from the Lord (Matt 4:11; in which the main verb, *aphiēmi*, appears as an historical present; cf. Runge 2008). Even so, when the next opportunity came, Satan would tempt Jesus again, especially by using a variety of counterfeit verbal communications (cf. Luke 4:13). Matthew 4:11 notes that angels promptly came (cf. the use of the Greek interjection *idou*) and attended to Jesus’ needs (as well as throughout his 40-day sojourn in the wilderness; cf. Mark 1:13). The Synoptic Gospels do not state how these heavenly emissaries ministered to the Saviour, though in all likelihood they brought nourishment as well as encouragement. Previously, angels offered care and support to the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness (cf. Exod 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2) and food to Elijah when he fled to Horeb for safety from Ahab (cf. 1 Kings 19:3–8).

Mark 1:13 reveals that during the Messiah’s sojourn in the wilderness, he was out among the ‘wild animals’ (rendering the Greek noun

thērion; cf. Danker 2000; Louw and Nida 1989).⁹ In the Saviour's day, far more wild animals roamed the countryside than today, including lions that prowled the wooded areas along the Jordan River (cf. Jer 5:6; 49:19). The mention of these beasts adds drama to the Markan account of Jesus' confronting evil (cf. Test Ben 5:2; Test Iss 7:7; Test Naph 8:4).

Another reason for mentioning these creatures is that the author of the second Synoptic Gospel possibly wanted to emphasise the divine protection Jesus received in the midst of the danger he faced (cf. Ezek 34:25; Dan 6:22).

A third reason for mentioning wild animals may be that untamed beasts were associated with evil powers. The historical episode, in a sense, became a symbol of the cosmic struggle of good and evil in which the Son was engaged. Likewise, the wild beasts might be connected to the hope of the messianic era, when animal enemies such as the wolf and the lamb would live in peace (cf. Isa 11:6–9; 32:14–20; 65:25; Hos 2:18).

A fourth reason may relate to Mark's audience. If the author was writing his gospel primarily for Gentile Christians about AD 64–67, particularly those living in Rome (cf. 1 Pet 5:13), they would be facing persecutions from Nero that often included being thrown to the lions for refusing to worship the emperor. The early Christians could take comfort in the fact that Jesus also had confronted wild animals.

⁹ In addition to the following discourse, cf. the discussion in Edwards 2002:40–2; France 2002 86–7; Garlington 1994:288–90; Gibson 1994:19–23; Heil 2006:64–77; Lane 1974:61–2; Stein 2008:63–6;

4. A Biblical Response to Satan's Diabolical Schemes (Eph 6:10–20)¹⁰

The previous section analysed how Jesus, during his time of temptation in the wilderness, relied on the Word of God to overcome Satan's counterfeit verbal communications. The present section shifts the focus to the way in which Jesus' disciples can effectively leverage a biblical response to the archenemy's diabolical schemes.¹¹ The basis for the following discourse is an exegetical and theological examination of Ephesians 6:10–20, which this writer considers to be the premier Pauline passage dealing with the subject of spiritual warfare. Verse 10 records the apostle's opening admonition, while verse 11 indicates the way in which the directive is accomplished. Verse 12 provides additional explanation concerning why believers should heed Paul's injunction, and verse 13 states the result of doing so. Then, verses 14–17 detail the individual components of the believers' spiritual armour, followed by an emphasis on the importance of prayer in verses 18–20.

The general premise is that like the Saviour, believers do not triumph over the Prince of Darkness by using a brute force approach; instead, it is necessary for them to make full use of God's instruments of war—

¹⁰ The following representative, scholarly works were consulted in the biblical and theological analysis of Ephesians 6:10–20: Abbott (1979); Asher (2011); Bruce (1984); Calvin (1854); Cohick (2013); Edwards (2005); Foster (2008); Foulkes (1979); Guelich (1991); Hendriksen (1995); Hoehner (2002); Kitchen (1994); Lenski (1961); Lincoln (1990); Lincoln (1995); Neufeld (1997); Perkins (2000); Robinson (1979); Smillie (1997); Thielman (2007); Wenkel (2007); Wild (1984); Wood (1978).

¹¹ Throughout this section, plural nouns are intentionally chosen to refer to believers as the corporate Church or universal body of Christ. This is because, as Asher (2011:745–6) has clarified, 'every verb or noun' Paul used in Ephesians 6:10–17 to denote the Saviour's disciples is 'plural, illustrating what the ancients rightly and widely understood: success on the battlefield' depended upon a 'cooperative and unified effort'. In similar fashion, Hoehner (2002:853–4) points out the necessity of Christians, 'as a body', remaining 'united under their commander-in-chief' and standing 'against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places'.

particularly, scripture—to counter the devil’s ‘tempting, deceiving, accusing word’ (Treat 2014:200). As the following analysis maintains, scripture (especially in connection with the incarnate, efficacious Word; cf. John 1:1, 14, 18) is the predominant, controlling idea in verses 10–20. Throughout much of Paul’s discourse, he exhorted believers to take a defensive stance against Satan (cf. 1 Cor 16:13). Even the ‘sword’ (Eph 6:17) given by the Spirit—namely, the ‘word of God’—is not primarily intended to launch a direct attack against Lucifer, but rather to protect Christians in the midst of their spiritual battles (cf. Jude 1:9).

The undertaking begins with believers drawing strength from their union with the Saviour (cf. Rom 13:12, 14; Phil 4:13). In turn, it is through the provision of his ‘mighty power’ (Eph 6:10) that Jesus’ followers can withstand the assaults made by the devil, especially through his minions (cf. Zech 4:6; Eph 1:19; Rev 12:11). Victory is possible only when Christians clothe themselves with every piece of spiritual ‘armour’ (Eph 6:11) God supplies (cf. the use of the Greek noun *panoplia*). As a result of doing so, they are able to remain unwavering in resisting the adversary’s machinations. Perhaps more than any of his peers, Paul understood from experience the power of evil. After all, he had often been the object of satanic efforts to hurt him and hinder his work. Also, the apostle knew his readers were on Satan’s list of targets. So, in bringing Ephesians to a close (cf. the use of the Greek adjective *loipos* at the beginning of v. 10),¹² Paul focused on the intense, ongoing spiritual struggle (cf. the use of the noun *palē*) that lay before believers.

¹² Cohick (2013:153) regards Ephesians 6:10–20 as the ‘final section’ in which the writer ‘pulls together the important concepts he has articulated throughout the letter’. Based on a rhetorical analysis of the epistle, Lincoln (1995:100–1) favours categorising 6:10–20 as a *peroratio*, in which the writer recapitulates the key themes of his treatise and makes the latter the basis for his emotional appeal to his readers to take decisive action.

The battle the apostle described is not a human one, namely, involving flesh-and-blood combatants; rather, the fight is a supernatural one, namely, involving a hierarchy of malevolent powers. The apostle used three Greek nouns to denote these metaphysical entities: *archē* ('rulers'; v. 12), *exousia* ('authorities'), and *kosmokratōr* ('[world] powers'). Together, these terms indicate that demons exercise a certain amount of control and influence in the present era; yet, it is limited by God in scope and duration. One of the major themes of Ephesians is that Jesus is the ultimate power in the universe. He enables those who trust in Him to triumph over the despotic forces operative in this sin-cursed age (cf. 1:21; 2:2). Moreover, Paul disclosed that Satan's henchmen are literally characterised by 'darkness' (*skotos*; 6:12). The latter noun indicates these fallen angels masquerade as agents of what is good, when in fact they are emissaries of what is evil. The preceding truth is reinforced by the apostle's declaration that these rogues are supernatural in origin (cf. the use of the adjective *pneumatikos*), are morally depraved, and strive to achieve malicious objectives (cf. the use of the noun *ponēria*). Even though the 'heavenly realms' (*epouranios*) are the demons' domicile, they have made earth their principal battleground.

Verse 12 reflects the language of astrology used in Paul's day. Ancient observers taught that wicked entities inhabit the celestial objects seen in the nighttime sky (i.e. the sun, moon, and stars), and from there control the fate of people and governments. Elsewhere, the Bible describes cosmic forces that are at work in the world to destroy the relationship between God and humanity (cf. Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24; Col 2:15; 1 Pet 3:22). The underlying reality is that Satan rules a potent demonic horde. Also, in this conflict, the devil and his subordinates use whatever devices and tactics they have to achieve their destructive ends. The spiritual struggle is no less acute today than it was when Paul lived. While the Prince of Darkness has adapted his strategies to current situations, his depraved goals have not changed. Specifically, he wants

to do the following: (1) prevent unbelievers from hearing the gospel; (2) undermine the faith of believers; and (3) thwart Christians from advancing God's redemptive programme in the world.

As noted earlier in this section, believers cannot prevail by making a direct, frontal assault against the cosmic powers of this fallen age. Indeed, no matter how hard Christians try, they are powerless to defeat their spiritual foes; instead, they must fight the vile entities by utilising God's Word. Because of the critical nature of the battle and what is at stake, Paul urged his readers not to delay in making full use of the spiritual resources God supplies. As a result of doing so, believers would be ready in the time of wickedness and immorality to actively oppose Satan when he launches his attack (whether in the present moment or at the eschatological end of the age; v. 13; cf. Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; 1 Enoch 50:2; 55:3; 63:8; 96:2; 99:4; Jub 23:16–25; Test Dan 5:4–6; Test Lev 5:5; 2 Apoc Bar 48:31; Apoc Abr 29:9; Matt 24:21; Mark 13:19; 1 Thess 5:2–4; 2 Thess 2:3–12). Paul was convinced that with the right preparation (alongside courageous fighting), his readers would still be standing, and retain their ground when the battle was over. According to traditional military doctrine, the army in possession of the field after a battle is the victor.

As a prisoner in Rome, Paul was chained to an imperial guard at all times (cf. the use of the Greek prepositional phrase *en halysei* in Eph 6:20). So, it was appropriate for the apostle to view his guard as a model and to think about the believers' spiritual struggle in military terms (cf. Acts 28:16, 20). The Old Testament also significantly influenced Paul, especially since the Hebrew Scriptures utilised military images to depict spiritual realities, including the truth of the Creator, as the divine Warrior, defending and protecting the righteous remnant (e.g.

Isa 11:4–5; 52:7; 59:17–20; Wis of Sol 5:15–23).¹³ Most likely, Paul’s guards did not wear full battle dress; nonetheless, they could easily bring to the apostle’s mind the times he had seen Roman soldiers fully armed. As every seasoned legionnaire of the empire knew, the time to put on his armour was not when the projectiles were hurled. He prepared himself before the battle ensued by taking up armour and weapons.

For the preceding reason, in Ephesians 6:10–13, Paul urged his readers to be prepared. Then, in verses 14–17, he described the six items that believers should carry into spiritual battle. According to Lincoln (1995:100), a ‘major *crux interpretum*’ is whether the various ‘pieces of armour’ in these verses ‘represent objective soteriological benefits bestowed by God or subjective ethical qualities required by believers’. The discourse put forward in this section places greater stress on the first interpretive option, for it does a superior job of explaining Paul’s overall martial analogy. On one level, within this passage the apostle made his foremost concern the believers’ acquittal from sin in union with the Saviour (i.e. forensic righteousness); yet, on another level, this does not rule out the value of Christians relying on the Spirit to maintain rectitude and piety in their daily lives (i.e. ethical righteousness), especially as they parry the attacks launched by the forces of darkness. As Reinhard (2005:532) affirms, the preceding

¹³ As the assessment of Thielman (2007:830–1) indicates, there is no scholarly consensus regarding the extent of ‘Paul’s indebtedness’ to martial imagery found in the Old Testament (particularly the Septuagint version) and Second Temple ‘Jewish Wisdom literature’. For a substantive treatment of the divine Warrior motif in Scripture, cf. Ames (2012); Emery (2003); Hiebert (1992); Kelle (2008); Klassen (1992); Longman (2009); Neufeld (1997).

‘emphasis’ helps maintain the dynamic ‘tension between sovereign provision and human responsibility’.¹⁴

Paul listed the six items in the order in which Roman soldiers would don their hardware to get ready for armed conflict. Regardless of what transpired, believers were commanded to stand fast and never surrender any ground to the enemy (cf. the use of the Greek verb *histēmi* in v. 14). The means for doing so are connected with each piece of spiritual equipment the Lord made available.

The first hardware item is ‘truth’, which believers are to fasten, as they would a ‘belt’, around their ‘waist’. A Roman soldier’s sash held in his tunic and breastplate, and became a place to hang his sword. On a primary level, ‘truth’ (the noun *alētheia*) refers to the gospel message and apostolic teaching (cf. 1:13; 4:15–25; 5:9); on a secondary level, ‘truth’ denotes one’s virtue. As long as believers remain in vital union with the Son, Satan cannot undermine the believers’ integrity (cf. Ps 28:7; John 15:5; Phil 4:13).

The second martial item Paul listed is the ‘breastplate of righteousness’ (Eph 6:14). Roman soldiers wore over the entire front of their torso a large protective corselet made out of bronze, or, if they were wealthy, of chain mail. The Christians’ vestment is their upright standing with the Father through their faith in the Son. On a primary level, it is through the proclamation of the gospel that the believers’ acquittal is made possible (cf. Rom 1:16–17; Eph 4:24; 5:9); on a secondary level, as they draw on the Saviour’s righteousness, they are able to live devout

¹⁴ For a different analysis of the possible merits and demerits of each hermeneutical option, cf. Bruce 1984:407–12; Calvin 1854:338–40; Hendriksen 1995:276–80; Hoehner 2002:838–50; Kitchen 1994:119–126; Lenski 1961:665–74; Lincoln 1990:447–51; Lincoln 1995:105–6, 112–4; Reinhard 2005:522–6; Wenkel 2007:277–87.

and holy lives. They have the assurance of knowing that not even Lucifer can succeed in impugning them before the Lord.

In Ephesians 6:15, Paul did not specify the third piece of equipment; nevertheless, his use of the Greek verb *hypodeō* ('bind underneath') leaves little doubt that he had in mind sandals and other shoes Roman soldiers would fasten to their feet. While marching, imperial troops wore strong, leather-soled half-boots studded with nails to give them traction. Similarly, Christians are to be fully prepared, like a sure-footed legionnaire, to proclaim the 'gospel' (*euangelion*; cf. Isa 52:7; Eph 1:13; 3:6, 8; 5:26). The good news of salvation discloses the basis for 'peace' (*eirēnē*; Eph 6:15) existing between God and repentant sinners (cf. Eph 1:2; 2:14–18; 4:3). Indeed, the believers' reconciliation with the Father, won by the Son at Calvary, enables them to remain steadfast in their spiritual battle with Satan.

Paul declared in 6:16 that at all times and in every circumstance involving the use of the previous items, it is imperative for Christians to take in hand their 'faith' (the Greek noun *pistis*) in the Son, as they would a 'shield' (the noun *thyreos*). As noted earlier, God's Word, especially the gospel, is the means by which believers are enabled to trust in the Saviour and stand firm in their commitment to him (cf. 1:1, 13, 15, 19; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13). Roman soldiers carried large rectangular shields made of wood covered with hide and bound with iron. These one-and-a-half metre long shields provided effective protection from blows and even from the flaming projectiles (including arrows, darts, and javelins) hurled at them by their enemies. These incendiary objects were often used in the siege of cities. Bows and arrows would effectively hit targets from long range (about 275-350 metres). If a soldier became terrified of flaming arrows stuck in his shield, he might throw it down and become more vulnerable to attack. Therefore, shields were sometimes dipped in water to extinguish

burning projectiles. Paul revealed that gospel-inspired faith in the Son empowers believers to deflect Satan's attacks.

The fifth piece of equipment is the believers' 'salvation' (the Greek adjective *sōtērios*; v. 17), which they are to wear like a 'helmet' (the noun *perikephalaia*; cf. Isa 59:17; 1 Thess 5:8). Their deliverance from divine judgment is not something they earned by performing a subjective litany of pious deeds; instead, as the gospel objectively reveals, salvation is freely received (the verb *dechomai*; Eph 6:17) by trusting in the Son. Roman soldiers wore helmets of bronze and leather to protect their heads. Just as imperial troops received their helmets from their armour-bearers, so Christians take hold of salvation from the Lord to use in their conflict with Satan. Moreover, believers look forward to a future day when Jesus will bring their salvation to completion and utterly vanquish the devil.

The sixth and last piece of equipment in the Christian's armoury is the 'sword' (the Greek noun *machaira*) provided by the Spirit. Paul did not mention the long spear or lance that was the Roman soldier's chief offensive weapon; instead, he referred to the short two-edged sword Roman legionaries carried and used to defend themselves in hand-to-hand combat with their enemies. The apostle equated this item with the 'word of God' (perhaps inclusive of both the incarnate and written Word). In using the noun *rhēma* to refer to scripture (cf. Luke 3:2; John 3:34; 8:47; Heb 6:5), Paul had in mind more than just its content; he was especially emphasising the effective communication of divine truth (cf. 2 Cor 10:5). As noted in the preceding section of this essay, when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he adroitly used scripture to defend himself against the tempter. Likewise, the Spirit can help believers use God's Word to protect themselves when the same foe attacks them.

Ephesians 6:18 reveals that whenever believers make full use of God's instruments of war, they need to undergird their efforts with prayer. Simply put, praying is talking to God (i.e. a consecrated form of verbal communication). Admittedly, prayer is not a piece of spiritual armour Christians wear; yet, regardless of the time or circumstance, when the Prince of Darkness attacks, believers are to keep in touch with God constantly through a variety of petitions (cf. the use of the Greek noun *proseuchē*) and supplications (cf. the use of the noun *deēsis*). The prepositional phrase *en pneumati* means to pray in communion with and in the power of the Spirit; cf. Rom 8:26–27). With the preceding goal in mind (cf. the use of the prepositional phrase *eis autos*; Eph 6:18), Jesus' followers are to remain 'alert' (cf. the use of the verb *agrypneō*), patient, and steadfast in their efforts (cf. the use of the verb *proskarterēsis*). Perhaps the most unpopular concept regarding the practice of prayer is persistence. Whatever the misgivings Jesus' followers may have about coming before the all-knowing, all-powerful God with the same specific petitions over and over, tenacity is scriptural (cf. Luke 18:1–8).

Furthermore, Christians do not just pray for themselves, but just as importantly make requests to God (cf. the use of the noun *deēsis*; Eph 6:18) on behalf of their fellow believers (cf. Phil 2:4). Paul referred to the latter using the noun *hagios* (Eph 6:18), which implies that Christians are God's holy people. He chose and set them apart to live for him and serve others. In the midst of intense spiritual warfare, a cooperative effort among believers is imperative, especially as they lovingly and humbly uphold one another verbally in prayer. As an example of a saint for whom the Ephesians could pray, Paul offered himself. He did not ask his readers to petition for his release from prison; instead, he requested prayer for a courageous spirit in proclaiming the gospel while imprisoned (v. 19).

In contrast to verse 17, where the apostle used the Greek noun *rhēma* to refer to scripture, in verse 19, he choose the synonymous noun *logos* to denote both the content of the message and the act of communicating it to others. The latter emphasis is reinforced by Paul’s reference to the literal ‘opening’ of his ‘mouth’. He further developed this thought by asking his readers to pray that the Spirit would literally give the apostle ‘boldness’ (cf. the use of the noun *parrēsia*). He did not have in mind a brash, arrogant disposition; rather, Paul wanted to remain fearless, especially as he explained (cf. the use of the verb *gnōrizō*) to the unsaved the ‘mystery of the gospel’.

The Greek noun *mystērion* generally denoted what was once obscured or concealed. From time to time, Paul dealt with false teachers (e.g. adherents of the mystery cults and advocates of pre-Gnostic doctrines) who promoted the belief that only a few select people were privy to the deepest knowledge about God and his truths. They often called this awareness a ‘mystery’. In contrast, Paul meant an eternal, redemptive truth that was either once hidden from or ambiguously understood by humankind, but had now been fully disclosed through the Messiah (cf. 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:9; 3:2–10; Col 1:26–27). The message of redemption was most cogently articulated in the ‘gospel’ (Eph 1:19; cf. the use of the noun *euangelion*; lit. ‘good news’).

In verse 20, Paul explained that it was for the sake of (cf. the use of the Greek preposition *hyper*) the gospel that he was incarcerated (literally, ‘in chains’) as an ‘ambassador’ (cf. the use of the verb *presbeuō*). When Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner about AD 60, he was not kept in one of the civil or military prisons; instead, he was permitted to rent his own home, to receive visitors, and to preach the gospel (Acts 28:30–31). Soldiers of the Praetorian Guard, the emperor’s protective entourage, took turns watching the apostle while chained to him. Despite Paul’s

confinement, he requested prayer from his readers for the opportunity to share the good news in an unfettered manner (cf. the use of the verb *parrēsasōmai*; Eph 6:20). The apostle believed he was divinely obligated to do so (cf. the use of the verb *dei*).

According to Philippians 1:12–14, Paul was able to share the gospel openly and candidly with the soldiers guarding him, as well as others associated with the apostle’s case. His first imprisonment (of two) lasted about two years. During this period, Paul wrote Philemon, Colossians, Philippians, and Ephesians. This remarkable evangelistic activity suggests that in the apostle’s estimation, his imprisonment was a God-given opportunity. Specifically, it enabled Paul to convey the good news to officials high in the Roman government (perhaps including the emperor, Nero). These were people the apostle would not otherwise have had occasion to meet. Since the government officials had the power of life and death over Paul, he most likely felt some anxiety; yet, he did not want either unease or attacks from Satan to prevent the apostle from fulfilling his divinely-ordained ministry. We can imagine Paul, during moments of doubt or duress, making efficacious use of the God’s instruments of warfare—particularly scripture—to remain victorious over Satan, the counterfeit word.¹⁵

5. Conclusion

A primary goal of this journal article has been to explore a relatively under-researched issue, namely, how Satan (especially through his minions) strives to undermine the will of the Saviour (particularly through his followers). A correspondent aim has been to deliberate how to oppose Lucifer’s attacks. An examination of relevant, representative

¹⁵ Perkins (2000:463) extends the pastoral emphasis to believers, whom Paul enjoined to ‘hear sermons, read scripture, talk with other Christians, engage in regular prayer, sing the praises of God, and so on’.

passages of scripture indicates that the devil does not resort to a brute force approach; instead, his methods are far more subtle and seductive. Specifically, the conclusion of this essay is that Satan is the counterfeit word, who uses spurious forms of verbal communication to tempt, deceive, and accuse people, including believers. The goal of the Prince of Darkness is nothing less than to bring about the eternal, spiritual death of his targets.

To establish a context of understanding, a concise yet substantive analysis was undertaken of what scripture reveals about Satan, his minions, and how the devil operates through them. It was determined that all of them are fallen spiritual beings who seek to thwart the will of God. Though in contemporary thought Lucifer and his wretched horde are nothing more than a myth or fantasy, the Judeo-Christian canon depicts these entities as real beings who assail humanity through guile and subversion. Furthermore, an examination of scripture indicates that God used his powerful, creative word to bring the entire universe into existence and sustain it in all its manifold wonder. It was also established that the Prince of Darkness imitates God by leveraging verbal communication in a variety of furtive ways to manipulate people.

The preceding backdrop of information was followed by a case study analysis of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (cf. Matt 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–11). The intent was to discern how the Saviour overcame the archenemy's enticements. It was determined that the Messiah did not triumph over Lucifer's specious verbal communications using a brute force approach; instead, the Son relied on the Word of God to thwart the devil's attacks. Indeed, it was discovered that despite the adversary's repeated efforts, he failed to lure the Son to transgress against the Father. Similarly, an analysis of Ephesians 6:10–

20 indicates that Jesus' followers can effectively leverage a biblical response to the diabolical schemes utilised by their spiritual foe.

The decision to examine the preceding passage is based on the author's conviction that it represents the premier Pauline text dealing with the subject of spiritual warfare, including how to combat the devil. It was concluded that believers do not triumph over the Prince of Darkness by using a brute force approach; rather, they must make full use of God's instruments of war to counter Lucifer's attempts to tempt, deceive, and accuse them. Also, based on an exegetical and theological analysis of Ephesians 6:10–20, it was determined that scripture is at the heart of the Christians' spiritual armour (i.e. it is the predominant, controlling idea in these verses). Moreover, it was ascertained that they are to use God's Word to stand fast and not surrender any ground to the enemy. The objective is not to launch direct, frontal attacks against the antagonist, but rather to protect themselves against his spiritual assaults. Even in moments of intense doubt and duress, Jesus' followers should make full use of scripture to parry the attacks made by Satan, the counterfeit word.

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