
CAN THE DEVIL READ MY MIND?

BY DAVID CASSIDY



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CORE CHRISTIANITY

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*“And [Jesus] said to them, ‘I watched Satan
fall from heaven like lightning.’”*

Luke 10:18

INTRODUCTION

The Prince of Darkness Grim

THE FIRST TIME I EVER thought seriously about Satan was while singing a hymn. At the Lutheran church I grew up in, we sang Protestant Reformer Martin Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress” with passion and resilient faith. While extolling God’s power to protect and save his people, Luther’s lyrics also note the presence of Satan and his hatred of all who follow Christ. I’ll never forget the effect of these lines:

For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal. . . .
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

Luther, a man with a price on his head, was keenly aware of Satan’s opposition. As he worked to reform the church, he saw Satan’s lies and the power of false accusations inspired by his malevolent intent. Despite all these threats from the “Prince of Darkness grim,” the Reformer didn’t tremble. Neither should we. We have to be aware of Satan, but at the same time, we confess and live in the transforming grace of Jesus’ victory over him on our behalf.

Luther took his cues from Scripture, of course—especially the

apostles. He could no doubt sense the ominous footfall of the one Peter described as a “your adversary” who “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).¹ Yet he also believed that Jesus “appeared ... to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8) and that God would “soon crush” this terrible foe “under your feet” (Rom. 16:20). Paul told the fledgling congregations in Asia Minor that they were in the fight of their lives, a struggle for their souls and for the progress of the gospel in the world. The battle was “not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). For such a fight they would need to “take up the full armor of God” (Eph. 6:13).

The Christian’s life is a battle. The sooner we come to terms with the rage of our enemy and learn to depend on the power of the Lord of Hosts for our strength in the conflict, the sooner we’ll be able to properly equip ourselves. Like all soldiers, we need solid intel on our foe, including familiarity with his tactics and weapons. We also need to know our own weapons and how to deploy them. Paul wrote to Timothy that he should be prepared to “suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3). This isn’t an easy battle, and it will last our entire lives. If we understand the nature of this warfare, the enemy we face, and how God has acted in Christ to deliver us from evil and defeat the powers of Satan, then at the end we’ll be able to say with Paul, “I fought the good fight . . . I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7).

That’s why this subject is important. As Christians we want to see Jesus’ victory over the darkness extended into the whole world. We desire to please God, not giving into the subtle and sometimes violent

1 Unless otherwise marked, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *The New American Bible* (United States: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1970).

ways Satan seeks to overthrow our faith. We also want to discern Satan's footprints as he seeks to trap our friends and family with his lies, stealing from them life and joy in the gospel.

The wonderful British author C.S. Lewis wrote, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist² or a magician with the same delight."³

In this booklet, we'll look to avoid those twin errors and instead grasp two great truths. The first is that we really do have a sinister enemy. He's the devil, or Satan, and he's joined by a great many lesser creatures called demons in his efforts to despoil God's world, destroy God's people, and deny Christ's gospel. The second is that we really do have a mighty savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Lord of Mighty Angels, who has come to deliver everyone bound by the devil, disarm the darkness through his cross, and destroy this enemy forever.

Jesus and Satan are not equals battling for an uncertain outcome. Our Savior has already conquered this foe through his death and resurrection, crushing Satan's head beneath his nail-scarred heel and extending the boundaries of his kingdom through the gospel. Knowing that this is the case, let's now turn to what the Scriptures say about Satan. Laying aside the popular images we may have in our heads, we'll learn where he came from, what he's capable of, and what will become of him.

² By *materialist*, Lewis isn't referring to a greedy person but to someone who believes that reality consists only in what can be known by our senses and denies the reality of an unseen world.

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), ix.

*“Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like
a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

1 Peter 5:8

CHAPTER ONE

Your Adversary the Devil

THE CANDY BOWL IS READY by the door. The witch's caldron on the porch steams, with party-store eyes floating in a brew of green slime. The doorbell rings and on your doorstep await the cutest collection of kiddos: fairies, movie stars, superheroes, and the most darling devil you've ever seen. "Trick or Treat!" they all scream, their tiny hands grabbing a candy bar or three.

This annual rite of Halloween brings laughter and cavities to many people. But have you ever wondered if our view of Satan might be shaped more by that little devil at the door than by Scripture? When you stop to think about it, do you really know who—or what—the devil is and what he's trying to do? Is Satan for real? Is he everywhere, all-knowing, and all-powerful—a kind of mirror image of God, but bad instead of good? Are God and Satan two equals battling it out for cosmic supremacy? Why does God allow Satan to do anything at all?

Good questions. Let's dig in.

THE DEVIL IMAGINED

The name *Satan* has its origin in the Hebrew word *ha-satan*, and it means *the adversary*. The name *devil* has a Greek origin, *diabolos*, from which we get our word *diabolical*. It means *divider*, *slanderer*, or *accuser*. Both are present in this exhortation to the church from the apostle Peter: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour"

(1 Pet. 5:8 ESV¹). Peter was well aware of this ancient foe's attempts to confuse, deceive, possess, slander, murder, enslave, tempt, and oppress people. If he took Satan's opposition to the church seriously, warning us to be "on the alert" against him, we'd best take the adversary seriously as well.

To do this, we need to develop our views on the devil and dark powers from the Bible, and that starts with clearing away misconceptions about him. It's probably safe to say that most people's images of the devil are informed more by pop culture and literature than by Scripture. There's a long and colorful history of portraying the devil in both Near-Eastern and Western art. Some of the earliest visual depictions of the devil show him as a version of *Pan*, the half-human, half-goat Greco-Roman fertility god. This is where depictions of the devil with hoofs and horns originate. Norse and other European gods had similar forms and were known to rule over the realm of the dead, known as *hel*. The red-suited, pitch-fork toting devil who rules over hell and is depicted in cartoons and Halloween costumes owes more to mythology than the Bible.

Dante's *Inferno* shows the devil as a three-faced monster with six giant bat wings. He's frozen in ice in the deepest part of hell, imprisoned there forever, gnawing on the head of Judas Iscariot. In *Paradise Lost*, John Milton portrays the devil as Lucifer, ruling in Hell's capital city of Pandemonium with the help of lesser fallen angels who've been thrown out of heaven along with him. He responds to his exile with the famous line, "It is better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." Milton makes Satan a complex, subtle, almost sympathetic figure. He notes that Satan's fall was due to pride, while his tactics to bring

1 Scripture quotations labeled "ESV" are from the *ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®)*, Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

about the fall of Adam and Eve were rooted in calculated deception.

Milton's Satan is clever and keenly aware of the weaknesses in his human targets. In Goethe's *Faust*, the devil wants to lead Faust astray by getting him to sell his soul in exchange for unlimited knowledge and pleasure. More recently, in *Memnoch the Devil*, Anne Rice portrays Satan as attractive, cool, smart, and desirable. Who could possibly say 'No' to such a beautiful being?

To this day, these sinister, powerful, seductive, and intelligent images of our adversary show up in films like Disney's *Fantasia* and songs like *The Devil Went Down to Georgia*. While great poems, songs, and films should be enjoyed, we must also realize that these mythological images of Satan often leave a mark on our minds. They can make his character loom larger in our thoughts than is appropriate, leading us to believe he's more intelligent and powerful than he actually is. On the other hand, we may consider him ridiculous and therefore easily dismissed. Looking to Scripture will help us avoid these extremes, enabling us to discard unhelpful myths while taking the biblical warnings seriously.

WHERE DID THE DEVIL COME FROM?

On many Sunday mornings, the church I grew up in used the Nicene Creed to confess our faith. Summarizing what the church believes about the Father, the Son, the Spirit, the church, and the final judgment at Christ's return, it begins, "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and *invisible*" (italics mine).² God is the Creator not only of all that we

2 Burn, A. E. 1909. The Nicene creed (London: Rivingtons).

can see but also of all that's hidden from our eyes. In addition to the world we enjoy and explore through our senses, there's a dimension to the creation that isn't seen by us even though we experience its influence. This is the realm of the angels.

"How did God create angels?" the Westminster Larger Catechism asks. It answers, "God created all the angels as spirits, immortal, holy, excelling in knowledge, mighty in power, to execute his commandments, and to praise his name, yet subject to change."³ We hold that God made everything good. This includes all the angels, who are referred to in Scripture as holy (see Ps. 89:5–7). This invisible realm predates the visible creation. Job 38:7 records God saying, "When the stars were made, all my angels praised me with a loud voice." What a magnificent choir that was!

In the Bible, angels serve God by serving as mediators of his message, carrying out his will in the world, inspiring human action, inflicting his judgments, and delivering his people from danger. They are "ministering spirits, sent out to provide service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14). For example, the angel Gabriel tells Mary she will be Jesus' mother and exhorts Joseph to take her as his wife. Another angel announces Jesus' birth to the shepherds on a Bethlehem hillside (Luke 1:26–38; Matt. 1:18–21). Angels minister to Jesus after Satan tempts him (Matt. 4; Luke 4), and Jesus tells his disciples that he can ask the Father for "twelve legions of angels" to rescue him from the cross if he wants to do so (Matt. 26:53). That's 72,000 angels! When one considers that a *single angel* once killed an entire Assyrian army of 185,000 soldiers (Isa. 37:36), Jesus' point about the angelic forces at his disposal is easy to see. In the Bible, angels are holy, powerful, and busy servants! No wonder the Psalms

3 Q&A 16. *The Confessions of Our Faith* (Glasgow, Scotland, Free Presbyterian Publications, 1958), 135–136.

say that God “makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire” (Heb. 1:7).

While angels were created holy, they were “subject to change” (WLC 16)—and change some did! The catechism says, “God by his providence permitted some of the angels, willfully and irreversibly, to fall into sin and damnation” (WLC 19). Scripture refers to “angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling” and are now “kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment” (Jude 6).

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH SATAN?

John writes that the devil “has been sinning from the beginning” (1 John 3:8) and Jesus says that Satan was “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). “The beginning” refers to God’s creation of the visible world (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1). Satan was already wicked in the beginning, which shows that his origin is with the holy angelic order that God created *before* the world existed.

Satan was created good, but he was among those angels who fell away from God. Perhaps this was due to pride. Paul may be referring to this when he warns against hastily electing a man as an elder in the church, noting the special danger that accompanies a new believer suddenly entrusted with authority: “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6 ESV). Whatever the cause of Satan’s fall, Jesus speaks of God’s victory over this creature saying, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:17 ESV). He’s recalling the moment Satan’s rebellion against God failed and he was cast out of heaven.

Where did Satan come from? He came from God. Beyond this, neither the Old or New Testaments offer any specifics about the devil's origin or the reason for his rebellion. This is a mystery known only to God.

Satan was created as a glorious angel but became a rebel against God. Now, he's beyond redemption's reach. While that leaves many unanswered questions for us, the Bible isn't silent about the devil's identity, activity, and destiny.

THE DEVIL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Satan isn't mentioned often in the Old Testament. He's named in Job 1–2, where he's one of “the sons of God” appearing before God to report on what's happening on the earth; in 1 Chronicles 21:1, where he entices David into ordering a census of Israel; and in Zechariah 3:1–2, where he appears before God to make accusations against God's servant Joshua, high priest in the time of Nehemiah. The mention of demons is even more rare, though we do encounter references to “evil spirits,” notably in association with King Saul (1 Kings 16:14) and in connection with the worship of idols (Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37).

Even though those are the only places in the Old Testament we see Satan referred to by name, that doesn't mean they're the only places he makes an appearance. Genesis 3 contains the tragic narrative of humankind's rebellion against God. There, we read of a serpent that “was more cunning than any animal of the field which the Lord God had made” (Gen. 3:1). This serpent beguiles Eve. He questions her and levies accusations against God, tempting Eve to believe his lies. Eve “took and ate” the forbidden fruit and shared it with Adam, who ate some also, in full knowledge of what he was doing (Gen.

3:6). Adam's sin plunged himself, his bride, all their posterity, and all of creation into fear, shame, death, and alienation from God (Gen. 3:7–24; Rom. 5:12; 8:20–23).

Christian scholars usually see Satan's tempting, deceiving presence behind the scenes of this encounter, animating the words and actions of the serpent. There are good reasons for this. In Revelation, we find this reference to Satan's demise: "And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (Rev. 12:9). Later we read virtually the same words, "And he took hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:2).

In addition, Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians about his concern that they might be led away from their faithfulness to Christ, referring to the events of Genesis 3: "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his trickery, your minds will be led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). He goes on to remind them that the danger lies in the devil's deception of the church through false teachers. "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light," Paul writes, "Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds" (2 Cor. 11:13–15).

Most significantly, however, is the way God speaks to the serpent in Genesis 3. He puts "enmity" between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent that will end with the heel of the woman's seed being "bruised" as the head of the serpent is "crushed" (Gen. 3:15). With these words, God declares war on Satan. The serpent will not hold onto the woman's allegiance. Rather, God will preserve a

people for himself—a faithful seed from which the offspring of the woman will one day rise to destroy the serpent and his followers forever. This is often considered the first promise of the gospel in the Bible, and it unfolds in the rest of the biblical narrative of God’s redemption of sinners and creation. There can be no doubt about how this influenced Jesus’ saving mission and the ultimate outcome of his grace in our lives. “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil,” writes John (1 John 3:8). Paul closes his great epistle to the Romans with the stunning benediction, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20).

THE DEVIL AND DEMONS IN THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

Unlike the Old Testament, where Satan mostly works “off-stage,” the New Testament is full of dramatic encounters between Satan and Christ. The New Testament is replete with references to the devil, Satan, demons, and forces of darkness. It also introduces new names like Beelzebub, Belial, and “the prince of the power of the air” (Matt. 12:24; 2 Cor. 6:15; Eph. 2:1–3). What’s behind this explosion of satanic activity? What do all these new names and terms mean?

Most of the unfamiliar names for the devil in the Gospels entered the discourse of the Jewish culture during the time between the testaments. Books like *Jubilees*, *War Scroll*, *Rule of the Community*, *Baba Bathra*, *1 Enoch*, and *The Wisdom of Solomon* were not considered Scripture by most Jews, but they were highly regarded. In these books, we first encounter names like Belial. Beelzebub, however—“Lord of the Flies”—dates back to a Philistine god mentioned in 2 Kings 1:2. Jesus refers to him as Satan in Luke 11:18.

We also note the widespread activity of demons, invisible beings

who seem to be described as the “angels” that follow the devil (Matt. 25:41). In the apocryphal Jewish book of *Jubilees*, the demons emerge as the survivors of a great judgment against them after they seduced “the daughters of men,” a reference to the Nephilim—the renowned pre-flood giants of Genesis 6:1–4.⁴ These survivors continue to stand with Satan to accomplish his mission in the world. Whatever their origin, demons are clearly vicious agents of the devil who do all they can to harm people. They possess people not only in distant gentile regions like the Decapolis (Mark 5:1–20) but also in Jewish areas like Capernaum. Here, Mark writes, Jesus first encounters a demon and casts it out of a possessed person (Mark 1:21–29).

In the New Testament we find almost 80 references to Satan or the devil(s), and their activity is described in detail. Looking first to the Gospels, we should pay attention to the ways the devil and demons sought to undermine Jesus and his mission; harm people in physical, spiritual, and psychological ways; take possession of people’s bodies and control their faculties; and rob people of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed. Here are some examples:

- He tempts Jesus to disobey his Father and abandon his mission (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–14).
- Through Peter, he tries to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem to die (Matt. 16:23).
- He enters the heart of Judas Iscariot and entices him to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3; John 13:27).
- He “binds” a woman, causing her to suffer with physical illness

4 See the FAQ in chapter 4 for more about the Nephilim.

for many years (Luke 13:16).

- He snatches away from hearts the seed of the word sown by Jesus (Matt. 13:18; Mark 4:15).
- He is a murderer and the father of lies (John 8:44–45).

When we consider the many ways Satan tries to destroy people, we can be thankful that Christ has come to liberate and “[heal] all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38).

The prayer Jesus gives to his disciples, commonly called The Lord’s Prayer, begins with the petition, “Thy Kingdom come,” and concludes with, “Deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:9–13). Jesus’ conquest over the evil one and his attendants is directly tied to the coming of Christ’s kingdom. “If I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you,” Jesus says (Luke 11:20). Jesus’ ministry is characterized by his “teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction,” including the healing of “those oppressed by demons” (Matt. 4:23–24).

When Christ the King brought his dominion to this world, the demons who had been hiding in the shadows for centuries were exposed by the light of his coming. He banished them from their parasitical dwellings. Jesus went on not only to liberate oppressed people from these sinister spirits but also to overthrow Satan himself through the power of his death and resurrection.

Historically speaking, Jesus’ power over demons is one of the most clearly attested aspects of his ministry, no matter how embarrassing this may be to sophisticated intellectuals of the 21st century who

prefer to dismiss the idea of demons as they would garden fairies and leprechauns. Even disbelieving historians note that Jesus' power of exorcism was so great and the healings attributed to this power so attractive that his opponents, unable to deny their reality, resorted to accusing him of doing this work through the power of Satan, a charge Jesus easily dismissed.⁵ In other words, if we wish to take Jesus seriously, we will also have to take seriously his view of demons and the devil, together with his ministry to liberate people from their malicious influence.

The ministry of Jesus was extended in the world through his apostles, and we read of their ministries in the book of Acts. Here we especially see the work of Peter and Paul highlighted, learning how God used them to expand the work of the gospel not only in Judea but more broadly into the gentile world. As the reach of the mission grew larger and took in people and cities whose only experience of religion was the worship of idols, the apostles would encounter Satanic opposition and conflict.

First, we see Paul confronting a sorcerer early in his first mission. He refers to this opponent as a “son of the devil,” and “enemy of all righteousness,” cursing him with blindness as a sign of Jesus' victory over the darkness of evil (Acts 13:6–12). In Philippi, we read of Paul exorcising a demon from a possessed slave girl being trafficked by her owners because of her psychic powers (Acts 16:16–24). Through Paul's ministry, the gospel took hold so strongly in the ancient city of Ephesus—famous for its worship of Artemis in her Temple, one of the wonders of the ancient world—that its converted citizens abandoned their occult practices, burning their books and materials, a conflagration worth about 5000 days' wages by today's standards.

5 Marcus Borg, *Jesus, A New Vision* (London: SPCK, 1987), 60–65.

The power to liberate demonically oppressed people through the power of the name of Jesus was already well-known in many circles (Acts 19:14ff) and this increased the attractiveness of the faith for many.

THE DEVIL AND DEMONS IN THE EPISTLES

In the remaining chapters of this booklet, we'll take a deeper look at how the apostles describe Satan, his allies, and Jesus' triumph over them, as well as how Christian believers continue to engage with wicked spiritual forces. We'll look at Satan's strategies to hinder the spread of the gospel, harass God's servants, tempt believers into sin, deceive believers with lies, and shame believers with accusations. But in this 30,000-foot view of the Bible's teaching on the subject, let's note a few central themes regarding Satan's efforts to slow the progress of the gospel and attack Christian people and churches.

1. Blinding Unbelievers

In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul writes that Satan, whom he describes as “the god of this age,” blinds the minds of unbelievers to the beauty of Jesus, the danger of their sinfulness, and the wonders of the gospel.

2. Animating Unbelievers

In Ephesians 2:2, Paul writes that Satan, whom he calls “the prince of the power of the air”—a common title at the time in that part of the world—is working in people who are not followers of Christ, those he refers to as “the sons of disobedience among we all once lived.” While he goes on to say that our battle is not with people but with the “powers” and “spiritual forces of wickedness” (Eph 6:10ff), he

doesn't hesitate to note that before we follow Christ, we are under the influence of Satan, often carrying out his will without even knowing it. Persecution, for instance, is carried out by people, but we bless and pray for persecutors because we know an enslaving darkness controls them.

3. Exploiting Our Sins and Weaknesses

Also in Ephesians, Paul urges Christians, "Do not let the sun do down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity" (Eph. 4:26–27). He knows that when we remain sinfully angry, we leave open doors through which the devil would like to come and create more havoc.

4. Sending Temptations

In 1 Corinthians 7:5, Paul reminds married believers that they should not refrain from sexual union with one another for extended periods of time so that "Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." This principle applies to far more than sexual temptation. When we're in a place of vulnerability and our "flesh is weak," we're more likely to succumb to the enticements that our first parents Adam and Eve couldn't resist. If they fell away when they were perfect, we should be humble and wise enough to admit that we—imperfect and living in a fallen world—are vulnerable to any number of temptations which could be presented to us.

5. Physical, Psychological, and Spiritual Attacks

In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul writes about his "thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me." There's much speculation about what this thorn was. Whether it was a physical illness, persecution,

or even a form of psychological distress, it was certainly from Satan. And rather than delivering him from it, God preserves Paul despite it. Three times Paul asked God to remove this satanic messenger, but God refused Paul's request saying, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9). In a similar way, Jesus told Peter, "Satan has demanded to sift you men like wheat" (Luke 22:31). Jesus doesn't stop this from occurring. Instead, by his gracious intercession, he preserves Peter despite his failure and restores him. We don't know exactly why God chooses to sometimes allow Satan to prevail over his servants in this way, but we can be sure of sufficient grace to accompany us in the ordeal and his intercession to renew us despite our many weaknesses.

6. Hindering Gospel Ministry

In 1 Thessalonians 2:17–18, Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians that he wanted to visit them but "Satan hindered us." Paul doesn't say exactly how Satan did that, but whether it was a lack of resources to make the trip, illness, distracting demands elsewhere, or the absence of safe transport, Paul saw Satan's hand behind what was happening.⁶

7. False Teaching and Deception

In 2 Corinthians 11:1–6, Paul warns the church about false teachers who appear to be God's servants but who are in fact deceivers, leading them away from the truth. He compares these false teachers to Satan himself and their tactics to those the serpent used to entice Eve.

6 This is a curious observation that Paul makes, one we should take seriously. Sometimes we're not able to discern whether we're being hindered by the enemy (and we have no choice but to accept the situation) or being restrained and redirected by the Lord. The issue when that occurs isn't struggling to try to figure out the difference, but trusting in God's providence. That the devil is involved in something doesn't mean that God is not ultimately in control of the situation. We can rest in God's sovereignty and say that "due to the hurricane (or pandemic!) we have been providentially hindered from making that mission trip." There are many things in the realm of the invisible creation that we're not privileged to see or understand—at least, not yet.

There are many malicious “schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:10–20) against which Christians must arm themselves and for which they must prepare. But while we’re to “be on the alert” because the devil is a prowling lion looking for lunch (1 Pet. 5:8), the apostles are equally clear that in all of these assaults, Christ will ultimately lead us into his victory over the darkness and that “neither . . . angels, nor principalities . . . nor powers . . . can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:37–39). Paul assures the Thessalonians, “The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thess. 3:3). The writer of Hebrews declares that God the Son became incarnate as the Lord Jesus Christ “so that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). Because of Jesus’ victory over the devil, we can now “Submit . . . to God . . . resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Let’s turn now to look at how our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ defeated the devil and his powers, how the Christian and the church persevere in that victory now through faith, and what we can anticipate in the future about the ultimate outcome of our struggle against the devil and his forces.