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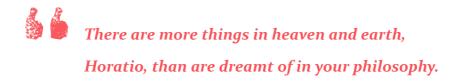


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PRIMER introduction





The ghost of Hamlet's father has just appeared to Hamlet and his friend Horatio. Horatio struggles to comprehend what he has just seen, and so Hamlet famously tells him he needs to widen his horizons.

The same could be said for much of our theology, since the Bible speaks of a spiritual realm to which we pay very little attention. That would not be true for many of our brothers and sisters around the world and it would not be true for Western Christians in the past. Martin Luther's most famous hymn, for example, makes the theme prominent:

And though this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us: The Prince of Darkness grim, We tremble not for him.

What Luther does so brilliantly here is to marry an honest acknowledgment of spiritual forces of evil with a deep sense of Christian assurance. As I think about it, that expresses very well the aim of this issue of *Primer* too.



We have just finished reflecting on the doctrine of God (in issues o8 and o9). Everything we have said about God there tells us that the devil is not his equal. But he is his enemy and his rival, and so here we shall spend time reflecting on Satan, and the activity of demons in the world and against the church. We need our eyes open to these things.

That said, what should emerge throughout is a deep sense of Christian assurance – "We tremble not for him" – and also a sense of calling: at an individual level, to help others in the spiritual battle; and as a church, to be faithful in our mission, even as the devil pursues his own.

To see how this issue equips us for those tasks, let me introduce you to its shape.

We begin with two longer reads. First, Kirsten Birkett provides an overview of magic, superstition, and the occult in Western culture and reflects on what we should learn from their recent resurgence. We then turn to Scripture and Keith Ferdinando walks us through a biblical theology of spiritual warfare. After that, in my article, we zoom in on Revelation 11-13 for an exposé of the devil's war against the church.

> Our regular historical piece comes from Thomas Brooks' *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, where we get a deep dive into the nature of temptation and Satan's role in that. Lewis Allen is our guide to Brooks, and helps us reflect on that question.

> Brooks provides a wonderfully pastoral text, and that emphasis continues in Helen Thorne's article. Before his death in 2019, David Powlison wrote a final book on the connection between spiritual warfare and pastoral counselling. Helen takes us through his argument and shows us how we might put it into practice.

The final piece is a Q&A. We know this is a topic where there are lots of questions and so we have gathered up some of the major loose ends and put them to our contributors. You can hear them weighing in on Halloween, guardian angels, consulting the dead, exorcisms, and more!

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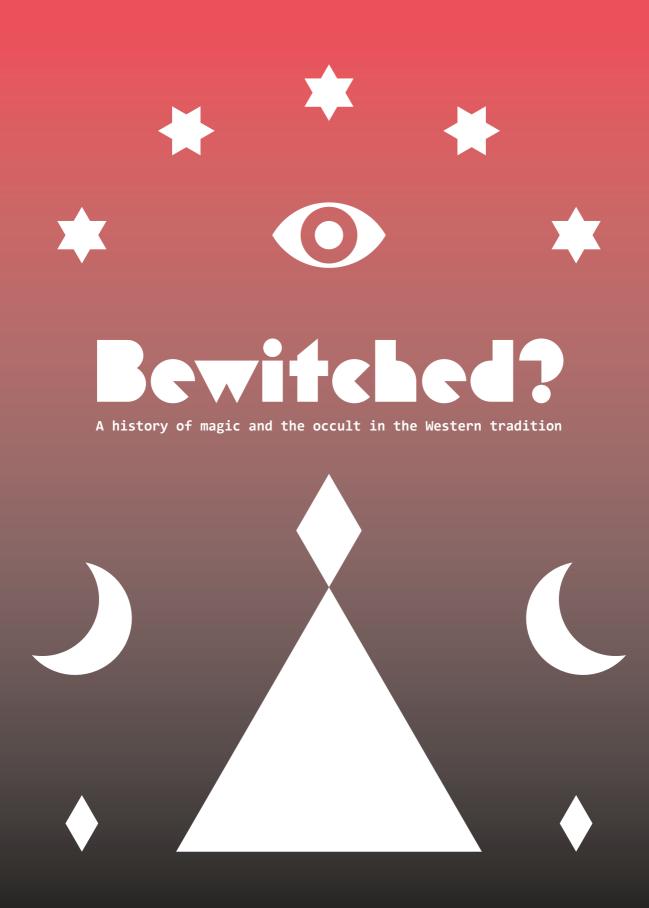
🍯 @_david_shaw

Percentage of people describing themselves as atheists who 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agree with the existence of: LIFE AFTER DEATH 19% REINCARNATION ASTROLOGY OBJECTS WITH MYSTICAL THAT SIGNIFICANT EVENTS ____11% ARE MEANT TO BE, EVENTS SUPERNATURAL BEINGS _____20% UNIVERSAL SPIRITS OF LIFE FORCE______19% UNDERLYING FORCES OF GOOD AND EVIL______30%

KARMA _____7%

Understanding Unbelief programme, University of Kent

SOURCE:



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'Transform your home, create your sanctuary' is the tagline on a beautifully-produced book called *HausMagick*. Is it a

book on home decorating? Or

KIRSTEN BIRKETT is Associate Minister at St Paul's Church Hadley Wood and a Latimer Trust Research Fellow. Her PhD included research into late medieval magic and its relationship with English Reformation theology.

Erica Feldman, HausMagick: Transform your Home, Create your Sanctuary (London: Ebury Press, 2019).

witchcraft? Remarkably, it's both: as well as advice on clearing out clutter and avoiding harsh lighting, this book gives spells for expelling ghosts and protecting your home from evil.

I open Netflix, ready for my next fix of Zumbo's Just Desserts, and the homepage tells me Sabrina the Teenage Witch is apparently planning to storm Hell and become its Queen. I type 'occult' in the search box, just out of curiosity, and I am given seemingly endless choices - ghosts, witches, monsters, demons.

Not so long ago, magic was considered forbidden and evil; now it is no more remarkable than paint colours or chocolate fondant. Our culture has come a long way.



We all know what we mean by magic, or the occult, or superstition. It's that category of things that are strange, or weird; the uncanny, the esoteric, the fanciful, the spooky. We know what sort of things go in that category: spells, fortune-telling, potions, perhaps elves and fairies, perhaps demons and ghosts. We recognise its literature and its cultural trappings. We know it exists as a concept even if we're not sure it exists in reality. It is, however, difficult to define *precisely* what we mean by it. The problem comes in finding a definition that distinguishes magic and the occult from religion on the one hand, and science on the other. Moreover, even though there is something that we instinctively want to label 'magic' in almost every culture, it is harder still to find a definition that works cross-culturally. Yet it does exist in some form in almost every culture, so scholars who study it – its sociology, its history, its impact – have tried for centuries to define what it is.

For discussion of the definition of magic, see Michael Labahn and Bert Jan Peerbolte (eds), A Kind of Magic: Understanding Magic in the New Testament and its Religious Environment (London: T&T Clark, 2007); Owen Davies, Magic: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Many scholars in these discussions assume that Christianity is a religion that, like many others, relates to the deity primarily through ritual or good works. Magic, then, is simply religion that is for some reason rejected and socially excluded, religion that is not respectable. This is a misunderstanding of the Christian gospel. However, many Christians have a similar misunderstanding. It seems to me that a lot of what passes for Christianity is simply magic made respectable.

i.e. a view of the world that reduces everything down to what is observable to "rational" and "objective" scientists.

The Bible makes different distinctions; the inner and outer man, the 'flesh' (this age of sin) as opposed to the 'Spirit' (to do with the age to come), the 'seen' and 'unseen,' both of which we know are real. One traditional way is to define magic in terms of contrast with something else. Magic can be thought of as wrong science; that is, practices that are meant to control natural forces, but which don't, because they call upon forces or beings that don't exist. Alternatively, magic can be thought of in terms of wrong religion; attempting to manipulate real, supernatural forces, but doing it in the wrong way – say by manipulation or (coercive) ritual, rather than supplication; or by calling upon the wrong supernatural power, for example the devil rather than God. Even within cultures that accept magic in some way, some types of magic may be rejected because they are used for wrong ends; causing harm, rather than good. So 'black' magic might be distinguished from 'good' magic.

The definition, then, reveals a lot about the biases of the definer as well as the thing itself. Magic, religion, and science are all ways of relating to reality and treating it in a way that reflects one's fundamental beliefs about the nature of that reality. It is not primarily about a distinction between natural and supernatural. Many of those who claim to practice magic think of themselves as using natural forces; the religious, too, may say that it is only a rationalist and reductionist naturalism that insists that 'natural' and 'supernatural' are distinct categories. Often the distinction is made merely as a way of rejecting anything in the 'supernatural' is the only part of reality open to scientific investigation, taken as the standard of all knowledge.

Magic in the ancient world

See my discussion of magic in the ancient world in Kirsten Birkett, Spells, Sorcerers and Spirits: Magic and the Occult in the Bible (London: The Latimer Trust, 2015). More generally, see John H. Walton, Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Bible (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007).

Mesopotamia stretched from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. The name means "between rivers" (referring to the Tigris and Euphrates). It primarily covered parts of modern-day Syria and Iraq. In the ancient world, Israel was almost unique in having a classification of magic as a clear, separate, and forbidden category. Magic, religion, and the 'natural' world in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures were frequently not really distinct; priests, healers, and magic specialists might have some demarcation of duties, but enjoyed equal status and overlapping roles in public life. In Egypt, magic was part of the temple worship; magical spells were kept in the temple, and spells were used to get the soul safely to the underworld and to help it pass judgment. Mesopotamian priests could help those who received bad portents or omens by using magic to avert the evil.

Magic was the use of power to achieve an end; power which might come from the gods, other spiritual beings, or the universe in general. Divination was a way of finding things out, again from such powers. Magic techniques could use actions: in ritual, or by doing such things as making figurines or drawing. They almost always used words, spoken or written; words were not considered arbitrary or invented by humans, but reflecting true reality. Words, then, could control the cosmos, giving the healer power over illness or to drive off evil, as well as enabling a diviner to know the future. Divination relied on direct communication from greater beings, or by 'reading' the cosmos. A passage from a Babylonian Diviner's manual states:

Ulla Koch-Westerholtz, Mesopotamian Astrology: An Introduction to Babylonian and Assyrian Celestial Divination (Copenhagen: Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications, 1995). The signs of the earth together with those of the sky produce a signal, heaven and earth both bring us portents, each separately but not different, since sky and earth are interconnected. A sign that is evil in the sky is evil on the earth, a sign that is evil on earth is evil in the sky.

Divination used various means. Egyptians used oracles, where people sought guidance from priests. Questions could be about major public or political events, or ordinary private life. Prophecy could come without asking, to a layperson or priest, in a dream, needing proper interpretation. From Neo-Sumerian times dreams were regarded as divine communication brought to the dreamer by a spirit messenger. Babies born with mutations, or monstrous animal births, were generally considered meaningful, and texts survive describing how they might be understood. In Mesopotamia, astrology is attested from the Old Babylonian period, and later came to be the dominant means of divination. Even before the invention of the zodiac, heavenly bodies were considered to give signs of what was to come on earth. There are many surviving astrological texts, which were also translated into other languages.

As well as divination, professionals and laypeople would practice magic in order to avoid misfortune and to ward off demons, ghosts, or curses from witches. Evil might be represented by a figurine or something representative of the source of evil, and then ritually destroyed. Magic could be used to make people take oaths seriously or used for warfare purposes. There are Egyptian magical remedies for plague, nightmares, headaches, bleeding, burns, swallowing a fly or getting a fishbone stuck in the throat, difficult childbirth, hungry babies, bothersome animals, for domestic or foreign enemies, and such positive goals as success in love and legal cases. An empire based in Southern Mesopotamia around 2112-2004 B.C.

Around 2000-1600 B.C. The "Old Babylonian Period" describes an early Babylonian empire (as opposed to the later Babylonian empire we meet in the OT which destroys Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and carries the people into exile).

Around the 5th century B.C. It was the later Babylonian empire that provides the first records of dividing the sky into 12 segments associated with different constellations. The Hittite Empire flourished between 1600-1178 B.C. in modern-day Turkey.

> Sophocles, Oedipus Rex, lines 440-442.

Plato, *Republic*, Book II, 364b-365a; Laws, 909a-d; 933 a-e.

Classic histories of medieval magic are: Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1971) and Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). There were some things considered forbidden magic in most Ancient Near East cultures, although not in Egypt. Necromancy, consulting the dead for knowledge or to bring a curse on enemies, was often considered evil; but honouring of the dead – ancestor worship – was considered a good thing, and dead spirits could be called upon for blessing. In Hittite culture, black magic, used to hurt people or property, was illegal. Mesopotamians similarly had a clear distinction between good and bad magic, but based on the effect, rather than method or source of power.

The Graeco-Roman world was similarly familiar with magic; the Greeks gave us our word 'magic,' from the *magos* who practised *mageia*. These were the learned Persians known for wisdom, but they were also foreign, and traditional enemies; so the word had very negative connotations. Sophocles described the *magos* as "...this wizard... this scheming quack, this fortune-teller peddling lies, eyes peeled for his own profit – seer blind in his craft." Plato criticised them as harmful. Roman culture was generally similarly negative. Magic was frequently associated with human sacrifices, perverse sexual practices, and all sorts of evil. In Rome, the practice of *mageia* became a capital offense.

🖡 Medieval magic

The medieval church was similarly against magic, but failed to eradicate it. By the Middle Ages, a whole gamut of magical beliefs survived as what is known as folk, or low, magic. All sorts of medieval people practised this kind of folk magic — there is no reason to suppose it was restricted to special individuals. Herbs were commonly used. Divination by dreams was common, and astrology, based on phases of the moon and thunder, was popular. There were also pregnancy and fertility tests relying on rituals carried out over urine or using particular foods, or prediction of the sex of an unborn baby from dreams and omens from animals. Gems and other stones could have protective powers, and the amniotic membrane was held to bring fame and particularly protection against drowning. The gold of an alchemist was held to cure leprosy, and other such bizarre cures were rumoured.

Belief in the power of words had long been one of the most basic principles of magic. Certainly in England from Anglo-Saxon times, words, in the form of charms, were a prominent part of healing magic. They could be said or sung aloud, or written on some ingredient to eat or drink; as part of a complicated herbal remedy, or alone; written and hung around the neck, or otherwise kept about the person, or thrown away. Words formed a huge part of the practices that were thought to make people well, and there is really no distinction in the herbal remedies between the recipes that use herbs alone and those that include, or entirely consist of, words.

Similarly in the 16th and 17th centuries, healing magic relied heavily upon words. In 1612, James Mason complained of sorcerers who could be

known by "curing diseases with certain words or characters, or such like." Manuscripts survive listing charms for falling sickness, thorn pricks, headaches, toothache, bleeding, and whatever else you care to mention. As well as curative charms, the use of words in preventative charms and talismans has been well documented. A talisman with Latin, Greek, religious, and just plain incomprehensible words could be powerful enough to protect from water, fire, enchantment, evil end, or enemy, and also ensure safe childbirth.

Snippets of liturgy, out of context and with no meaning, would be used as part of magical remedies. The Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary or the Creed might be said over herbs, written on wafers to be eaten, or drunk with holy water. A sickness may be ordered to depart 'in the name of', 'by the power of' Jesus, Mary, or God. Protective amulets such as hares' feet, herbs, and talismans with inscriptions were used. The inscriptions could be meaningless words, snippets of prayer or parts of one of the gospels.

The strong belief in the power of words in popular magic is hardly surprising. Medieval church ceremonies specifically depended upon words for their efficacy. Churches were on holy ground through the words used to consecrate them. Most daily church practices taught that particular words were very powerful, and brought about temporal effects.

The medieval world, in both its church and popular beliefs, also held to the existence of a great many spiritual or non-material beings. Demons were purveyors of evil, and were part of the natural world; their bodies were very light, so could move quickly from place to place, and they also had superior senses. Angels were similar in type, but served God and could legitimately be sought out and revered.

Folk magic drew upon ideas of good and evil supernatural beings of a very similar kind. Folk healing magic was never systematic in its explanations of disease, but it is clear that there was a strong idea of some illness coming from spiritual creatures akin to demons. Many recipes, for instance, exist for 'elfshot,' attributing the problem to the darts of an aery sprite; other recipes were specifically for devil-illness or demonic possession. Possession could explain mental afflictions and could be cured by incantation or exorcism. Demons could haunt places, particularly churchyards, and had to be exorcised. Demons were the bringers of all kind of illness and evil, and healing recipes were inclined to include measures to keep the demons out as well as to cure their effects.

In folk belief, fairies were common neighbourhood creatures. They were tolerated, and often placated with offerings, as part of life. They took human form and lived in woods and fields, making a nuisance of themselves or doing more sinister things, such as stealing children and swapping their own babies. Strange flattened circles found in the grass were frequently attributed to fairy dances. Some kinds, however, could be quite helpful; in folklore, there are several stories of "Browny" who would James Mason, The Anatomie of Sorcerie: Wherein the Wicked Impietie of Charmers, Inchanters, and such is Discouered and Confuted (London, 1612), 91; available online. do chores around the house and farm, but who had to be given gifts in return. More sinister was the "Night-Mare" who would haunt people during their sleep.

There are also records of particular magic used to conjure spirits and force them to do the conjurer's will. This was the more ritualised magic, relying on drawings of circles and symbols, and chanting set formulas. The spirits were potentially malevolent, or at least unwilling, as the enchanter had to draw circles of defence and use symbols to bind the spirit. Once invoked, the spirit could perform all number of services - healing, giving knowledge, conferring invisibility - and then had to be ritually dismissed. Though such practices were banned by the church, the belief in and use of spiritual beings continued; and there is record of clergy using such magic themselves.

Various substances were believed to possess inherent mystical powers; water itself could be very potent. 'Holy' wells all over the country had reputations for magical healing power. This belief followed more or less naturally from the church's use of holy water. Once blessed, it was different from ordinary water: it had somehow some of God's power within it. It had a special effect on objects it consecrated. The baptismal water, in church doctrine, genuinely brought a human from the devil's realm to God's realm. It is no surprise that baptism was believed to bring healing, when the liturgy itself attributed so much spiritual power to the elements. Likewise, the bread and wine of the Mass, once consecrated, contained God himself. Much has been written about the beliefs surrounding the host, its supposed healing powers and the precautions necessary to keep it from being stolen. The host was more than just the inanimate object it appeared to the senses: within it was further, hidden power.

From Keith Thomas' magisterial work on medieval magic onward, it has been argued that although the medieval church was officially against magic, medieval theology itself contributed to the prevalence of magical belief. Reformation theology, however, countered this magical worldview by presenting a different theological view of the world and how to relate to God. In the 21st century we no longer live in a world where pre-Reformation theology is almost universally accepted; but we no longer have a Reformation view of God and the spiritual, either, and it is notable that the old magic with its belief in the occult power of words, rituals and special objects is well and truly on the return.

See Kieckhefer, Magic in the Middle Ages, 151-172.

The term *host* refers to the bread used in communion. It comes from the Latin word for victim or sacrifice (*hostia*) and reflects the Medieval and Roman Catholic view that the bread becomes the body of Christ and that the Mass is a sacrifice in which Christ is offered.

Reformation theology itself presented a worldview that discredited magic, mainly because of its strong critique of the medieval ceremonies, saint-worship, views of the devil, and sacramental theology that encouraged a magical view of the workings of the world. However, before we get to the modern world, there are still a few other aspects of historical magic to survey. These are important for context, and understanding some of the influences upon modern Western culture.

🗰 Medieval witchcraft

Witchcraft is an aspect of medieval magic which has created a vast literature, far more than any other aspect, but unlike everything discussed above, it is likely that no one ever practised it. Plenty of people were accused of, and tried for, witchcraft, but there is little or no evidence of people actually meeting in covens, worshipping the devil, believing they could fly, and so on. There have been any number of theories concerning why, nonetheless, witches were so vehemently pursued. Perhaps it was a result of social friction during times of cultural stress; a local wise woman or man, who may use the kind of charms listed above (these people certainly did exist), could become a scapegoat for hard times. Scholars have also proposed that the concept of witchcraft as the work of the devil was imposed upon witchcraft trials by theologically-trained intellectuals.

Overall, the majority of witches brought to trial in Europe were women; however, many thousands of men were also accused, and many accusers (of both male and female alleged witches) were women. Nonetheless, the witchcraft trials have come to be seen as classic examples of misogyny and the misuse of male power, even if the actual trial evidence did not necessarily bear this out. Despite the fact that they fly in the face of this historical scholarship, modern reinterpretations of witchcraft have become significant in the modern rise of pagan occultism, as we will see.

Intellectuals and "natural magic" in the Renaissance

With the Renaissance came a fascination with the recovery of learning in many spheres, and one of those was magic. Learned men indulged in all sorts of magical speculation, with visits, correspondence, public lectures, and written expositions. Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) compiled and Some of the better texts on witchcraft are James Sharpe, Witchcraft in Early Modern England (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001); Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700: A Documentary History (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). The best entry-level textbook is generally held to be Brian P. Levack, The Witch-hunt in Early Modern Europe (London: Routledge, 2016). See Brian P. Copenhaver, Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Interesting fact: it is from the Hermetic writings that we

get the phrase "hermetically sealed," because they include spells designed to seal vessels.

Cabala (or Kabbalah) refers to a strand of Jewish mysticism involving a fascination with energies at work in the world and orders of angels.

translated the *Hermetic Corpus*. This was a body of texts on theology, philosophy, and magic, which were composed in late antiquity, but during the Renaissance were believed to be much older, even pre-dating the Bible. They reflected various strands of Egyptian and Greek philosophy and interest in ritual magic. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) developed these ideas further, and combined them with Jewish cabala, astrology, and Christian mysticism. Practising this 'high' magic, people could reach the level of gods. This was considered 'natural' magic; not drawing upon supernatural entities, but on what were thought to be natural forces, emanating throughout the cosmos.

The fall and rise of magic

Ronald Hutton, The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 132. One of the most remarkable shifts of opinion in world history was that which occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the majority of Europe's social, political, and intellectual elites moved from believing that humans could do damage by uncanny, non-physical means to believing that they could not.

Magic was a universal reality for centuries, believed in by common folk, scholars, high and low social classes alike. Opinions differed as to how it worked or whether it could be good; but certainly most people believed it to be real. Then, quite suddenly, magic almost wholesale moved into the category of fantasy or irrational superstition, from the point of view of the educated. All over the Western world, laws against witchcraft were repealed. It was now considered fraud, rather than dangerous effective action. Similarly, learned magic fell out of fashion; the intellectual view of the universe came to be dominated by science, with naturalistic, empirical science growing in strength.

Even during that time, folk-magic of various sorts persisted; but it was no longer a mainstream view.

Yet the pause in strong belief in and practice of magic was only to be brief, a matter of a few centuries. It appears that humans like magic; and now it is back. Magic spells commercially available, professionals making a living from

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magic, revivals of pagan religion, witchcraft covens, and a range of thoroughly magical kinds of thinking about how the universe works, are now coming front and centre.

The nineteenth-century revival of magic

Ritual magic started again in an organised way in France, during the nineteenth century. Alphonse Louis Constant, under the name Eliphas Zahed Levi, began publishing works of magic in the 1850s. In these he provided a conceptual framework for magic, as well as practical manuals for going about ritual ceremonies. He coined the term 'occultism' for what he was doing. His work picked up a number of esoteric traditions, including those popular with Renaissance scholars: ideas were taken from the Hermetic corpus and the cabala, and linked with ancient Egyptian religion and the use of Tarot cards.

This was the beginning of a number of new esoteric and magical trends in the Western world. In England, the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia was founded, based on the rumoured secret society of Rosicrucians, using alchemy and Hermetic magic. All members had to be both professing Christians and senior masons; they studied cabala, hermetic texts, and other wisdom. During this same period Helena Blavatsky introduced Theosophy to Britain – a philosophy allegedly revealed to her by Mahatmas (Ascended Masters, such as Jesus and Buddha) in Tibet. Later in the century (1888) a group influenced by Eliphas Levi founded the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Members ranged from Christians who doubted real magic and rejected pagan deities, to others (including the notorious Aleister Crowley) who claimed to call up demons. Egyptian figures were popular, especially Isis; also the male deity Pan, now promoted from his Greek origins to a more universal role.

What was different about this modern magic was that it was not practised for specific ends, but was more about the person's spiritual development, reaching to a divine status. Levi called this high magic, and he believed he had a high calling: improving the human race, releasing their inherent spiritual qualities through the use of magic. It was not so much about gaining power over the world, although that might result; primarily, in the spirit of self-improvement, the magician gained power over him or herself. This new This section on the rise of modern magic is mainly taken from Hutton, *The Triumph* of the Moon; also Sabina Magliocco, 'New Age and Neopagan Magic', in Collins, *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft*, 635-664; see also Nevill Drury, *Stealing Fire from Heaven: the Rise of Modern Western Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Crowley (1875-1947) became notorious because of his fascination with the occult, as well as rebelling against many social conventions. He appears second from the left in the back row on the cover of The Beatles' album Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.

conception of magic, a development of the Renaissance idea, was to prove highly influential for 20th and 21st century magic.

At the same time, there was also a tendency to study spiritual manifestations – ghosts, spiritualism, and so on – through science. Organisations such as the Society for Psychical Research (founded in 1888) wanted to approach spiritual phenomena in a scientific spirit, based entirely on empiricism. Other movements such as mesmerism similarly aimed to combine spiritual and scientific ideas. Romanticism, on the other hand, rejected the compromise between the scientific and the spiritual, disliking the reductionist and rationalist approach to the world that science embodied, wanting a closer and more emotional attachment to wild nature.

'Wild nature' was to become the centre of various other influential trends in the rise of modern magic. In England in particular, the 19th century saw a great interest in folklore and folk customs. In what was probably a Romantic reaction to the "dark Satanic mills" of industrial Britain, suddenly "Ye Olde Merrie England" was imbued with nostalgic longing. Curiously, however, even though Merrie England (meaning generally medieval and Tudor England) was most definitely *Christian*, this historical fascination primarily looked for pagan influences. Merrie England meant the Green Man, maypoles and harvest festivals, and other customs that were interpreted as both ancient and pagan. The Arthurian legend was re-presented as a survival of a pagan fertility religion. Authors such as Kenneth Grahame (of *Wind in the Willows* fame) romanticised rural life and presented the mythical Pan as the true 'God' of the English countryside.

These ideas fed into a modern conception of what medieval witchcraft had been about. If the witches were not the demonic agents claimed at the time, what were they? New reconstructions were attempted, many of them part of anti-church polemic. Jules Michelet, for instance – a passionate French anti-Catholic and anti-Monarchist – wrote a popular work in 1862 on witches, *La Sorciere*. In it he described witches as champions of spiritual freedom, women's rights and the working class. They were, he claimed, survivors of a pagan religion: the witches were priestesses of this religion, handed down secretly from mother to daughter. The witch was also a rebel, wanting the liberation of the serfs, and a free spirit who communed with animals and forest trees. Michelet accepted the suggestion they had also worshipped Pan, whom Christians called the devil, but was actually the spirit of freedom and joy and 'wild liberty.'

It was almost pure fantasy, but became hugely popular, influencing both popular and scholarly views. It also struck a chord with an American author. Matilda Joslyn Gage, a leader of rights for women in the US, wrote *Woman, Church, and State*, taking up Michelet's theory of the witch as pagan priestess, and linked it with a theory that prehistoric society had

Empiricism: Seeking knowledge through scientific observation.

Mesmerism: The idea that "animal magnetism" exists between living creatures and can be manipulated.

As pointed out by Hutton, Triumph, 120.

Incidentally, it was Michelet who coined the term 'Renaissance' for the 15th century rebirth of ideas after what he saw as the dark times of church rule. been matriarchal. It was a British scholar, however, who made this story of the witch as pagan-priestess-in-secret into a published academic thesis. Margaret Murray was an archaeologist – the first woman to be appointed as a lecturer in archaeology in Britain – with a great interest in folklore. Her book *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, published in 1921, was particularly powerful, and presented the theory in its most respectable guise. She argued that the persecuted witches were actually practitioners of a goddess-worshipping pagan religion, which had survived 'underground' since ancient times. Murray also wrote the article on witchcraft that appeared in *Encyclopedia Britannica* for some forty years. The theory had a great deal of popular appeal, but unfortunately was based on very little evidence, and has now been thoroughly discredited. However, this idea, of a tradition of witchcraft based on pagan religion, surviving from ancient times, was so evocative that it has clung on. Modern pagan witchcraft, often called Wicca, thrived on it.

Wicca itself began with Gerald Gardner (1884-1964), who spent most of his career working as a civil servant in colonial Malaysia. He was an amateur archaeologist with an interest in folklore and druidry. He ran a museum of witchcraft, and in 1954 published a book called Witchcraft Today, with a preface by Margaret Murray; he also practised what he preached, and began establishing witch covens in Britain. He is regarded as the 'father' of modern witchcraft, describing a religion that went back to pagan times, with witches worshipping the earth goddess and the horned god of the hunt. The movement spread, and was quickly taken up in the United States, where it was welcomed by the burgeoning feminist movement and the counter-culture of the sixties. Modern pagan witchcraft was born. Developed by American feminists, the witch became the symbol of the sexually-liberated woman, powerful in her own right, and not restricted by patriarchal structures, in a magical world connected with nature. Other paganisms followed, as the sixties counter-culture also gave rise to what is known as the New Age - itself influenced by 19th century occultism and theosophy. All forms of magic burgeoned.

Magic and Superstition in the modern day

Our culture is now permeated by the general mystical movement of the New Age, and the more specific groupings of pagans: witches, wiccans, and other groups and individuals who identify with this new form of magical spirituality. As mentioned before, magic within these newer traditions is not just about gaining power over the world, although there are certainly many practitioners who are sure their spells work. More important to many is the idea of personal spiritual development. Spells and magical rituals bring one to a higher level of consciousness, and are part of personal transformation. The influence of Asian religions has introduced ideas of Gage also invented the figure of '9 million European witches killed.' This did not have much impact at the time, but the figure was later taken up in the 1970s as part of the rhetoric of feminist witchcraft. spiritual enlightenment as the goal. That said, there is also the belief that magic allows us to impose ourselves on the world in some way.

According to the book we started with, *HausMagick*, a spell focuses the intention in such a way that the universe takes notice. Saying a spell is sending the mind and will out to forces in the universe to change it. It is not quite the same as the medieval trust in the efficacy of words; in modern witchcraft, the particular words might not matter at all; but there needs to be something to focus the will, engage the right energy and 'manifest' one's intention.

Magical beings are back in the world, too. Gods and goddesses, nature spirits, spirits of the dead, angels and aliens are available; they might be aspects of a single divine principle, or independent beings in themselves. Communication with them happens through meditation, channelling, ritual, or trance, or spirit guides may take the initiative and contact people. The principles of magic spells are much the same as those in the medieval tradition – principles of sympathy and antipathy, like-cures-like, microcosm linked to macrocosm and so on; as well as the use of amulets, charms and special stones (usually, these days, crystals). There is also use of ritual, which creates and channels energy.

There is also, now, a world of other neo-paganisms; groups reconstructing ancient pre-Christian religions along ethnic lines, trying to be historically accurate. There are groups of ancient Norse and Germanic Heathens; druids and other Celtic groups; reconstructions of the Greek pantheon, and revivals of the ancient Egyptian gods. These are often connected with strong nationalism. Other groups base their traditions on indigenous shamans, taking up activities such as spirit journeys, contacting animal guides, drumming, and dancing.

Neo-paganism in all its forms is considered to be a religion, ethical and positive, holding to principles of doing no harm and that everything returns threefold. Like the various strands of New Age, it tends to be positive and optimistic, seeing all the spiritual world, and people, as basically good.

Interestingly, as I write this article, the New Scientist magazine is advertising a feature in its current edition about how the mind creates reality.

Maybe aliens and fairies have something in common: Robert Kirk, a Scottish minister who died around 1692, wrote that women in his parish reported being abducted by fairies. Robert Kirk, The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies (New York: Dover Publications, 2008), 50.

All these ideas are based on the notion that there is a mystical connection between things that are similar in some way. Sympathy implies that (say) a red string can cure a bleeding wound because of the similarity in colour; like-cureslike is popularised as 'hair of the dog,' suggesting what causes an injury will help in healing the injury. Microcosm/macrocosm teaches that things here on earth are echoed in the skies; so stars can affect or predict something to do with a human body.



Our modern world demonstrates the impossibility of forcing an entirely naturalistic framework upon people *en masse*. For many, a naturalistic, atheistic worldview is inhuman and unconvincing; it is untrue, and people will react against it. Whether the reaction is simply at the level of magazine astrological columns, pub psychics and online tarot readings; or full-blown religious Neopaganism, with circles, covens, and celebrations; the spiritual world will not be suppressed for long.

Naturalistic atheism, so prevalent in the scientific disciplines, is profoundly alienating for many people, as is the disconnected, technological world it has created. Humans *are* worshippers, and telling them there is nothing to worship in the end does not work. "Both New Age and Neo-pagan magic are thus quintessential products of modernity", writes Sabina Magliocco: "less rejections of rationality than creative responses to a disenchanted world in which personal spiritual experiences are both necessary to the human spirit and deeply distrusted by the dominant paradigm."

Rationalism has failed to provide answers. People long for a better world in which disconnection can be overcome and relationships flourish. They want a vision of the future in which harmony is restored. At the same time, there has been widespread and focused rejection of Christianity, and the Christian message has been both distorted and silenced in public discussion. The true way to understand our connection with nature, and with God, is no longer part of public knowledge in the post-Christian West.

Moreover, people still have spooky experiences, and some of them are probably real. Where do people go when they have what seem to be spiritual encounters? Probably to those who do not know how to understand them; including many Christians. So how should we view the modern rush to the occult? I suggest a few ideas for further consideration.

 Almost below the radar are the myriad psychics, fortune-tellers, card-readers, and astrologers, who hold evenings in pubs or take clients online or tell fortunes in their offices. Should we be concerned about these? Certainly there is the concern that large numbers of people are being cheated out of their money by Magliocco, 'New Age and Neopagan Magic,' 659. con artists. There is also more to lose than money. I remember an article I read in an Australian newspaper, by an anonymous ex-psychic who had plied his or her trade by being very convincing at reading body language and leading conversation so that the 'fortunes' seemed real. This particular artist suffered pangs of conscience and left the work when a patient suffering from cancer came for help. No doubt many more hard-hearted people stay in the business of cheating those who are desperate or gullible enough to seek help through such means.

Yet these figures have always been there. These are the ones truly in the tradition of the old wise woman and cunning man, the village purveyors of remedies and small spells. The market creates them; there will always be people who are lonely, or ill, or lost, and for whatever reason gravitate to non-mainstream solutions. From medieval times to now, some of these popular practitioners will be fraudsters making money from the gullible, some genuinely believe in their own powers. The customers need consumer protection, help for their problems, and probably a dose of common sense. Those who go not out of need, but because it's a bit of fun, need to be told it is no such thing.

- **2.** Pagans, witches, and shamans all appear to be feeling rightly alienated by the modern world. They reflect a disconnect from nature, from each other, and from their own selves. Yet they are looking for answers in the wrong places and we need to reach them. There is a lot about paganism's public profile that is very attractive; watch the short video on The Atlantic website, 'Inside Paganism.' It features ordinary people finding that the world is not as bleak and friendless as they thought; that there is a true spiritual world, and they can be valued and find connection in groups who know that world. They also, incidentally, have images of older women who are clearly respected and regarded as wise. Christian evangelism could perhaps learn from this. We do, after all, have the true wisdom; how can we get it to them?
- 3. We must also realise that spiritual beings exist, and they are not all good. One of the aspects of New Age that turned me away from it as a teenager was my rather uneducated, but real, conviction that these people were genuinely reaching a spiritual reality but could give me no assurance that all the beings thus reached were

theatLantic.com/video/index/604084/pagans

good. This pervasive belief in the good of everything remains a rather naïve and potentially dangerous part of the various sub-cultures. Enjoying nature, exploring natural remedies, meditating, chanting, and dressing up in a kind of re-enactment ceremony will not get you closer to God, but it is not dangerous. Thinking that everything spiritual is necessarily good, may be.

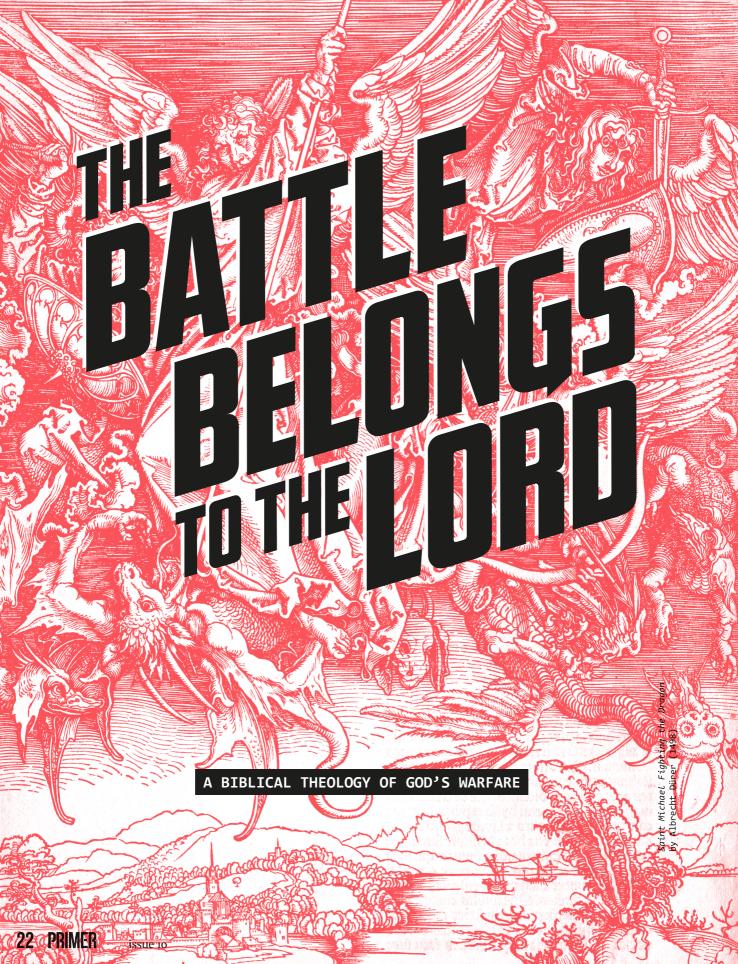
4. At the same time, Christians need not fear the evil spiritual world themselves. Christ has defeated evil, and those who have his word and his Spirit have all the defences necessary. All we need do is resist the devil and he will flee. It is ironic that we find Christians, who need not fear such evil, terrified of it, while those who should fear it embrace it indiscriminately. We have the solution. We need to explain that spiritual evil exists, without sounding shrill or judgmental; we can do that when we remember that evil has been dealt with. Christ has conquered evil with his loving sacrifice.

We have the answers to magic, ancient or modern. We always have had. The message that saw expensive magical books gladly destroyed in Ephesus, still saves today. Proclaiming that message should be our response to the occult at any time.

See Acts 19.

Questions for further thought and discussion

- 1. "Magic, religion, and science are all ways of relating to reality." What is the significance of that statement? In what ways does Kirsten think the biblical, Protestant faith addresses the other options (magic and science)?
- How would you explain the incredibly widespread and persistent belief in evil and the power of magic?
- 3. How are churches still affected by superstitious thinking or tempted to relate to God through magical means?
- 4. According to Kirsten, what explains the recent rise in interest in witchcraft and magic? How as a church could you engage with those cultural trends in constructive or subversive ways?





The first words of Scripture proclaim God as the eternal Creator of all that exists:

Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The narrator immediately goes on to relate how God shaped the earth and filled it with life in all its varied forms. But the Bible is slow and guarded in speaking of the supernatural realm of created spiritual beings that God also created (Ps 148:1-5), that he had, indeed, already created before he established the earth such that celestial beings "sang together" and "shouted for joy" when he did so (Job 38:7).

The Old Testament reveals their existence in a fragmentary and almost incidental way, as it speaks here and there of immaterial spirits, powerful, wise and personal, with intelligence, will, self-awareness and moral accountability. They are variously identified as angels (Gen 28:12; 32:1, etc.), sons of God (Gen 6:2; Job 1:6; 2:1; Pss 29:1; 89:6), sons of the Most High (Ps 82:6), divinities or celestial beings (*elohim*) (Ps 82:1,6), holy ones (Deut 33:2-3; Job 5:1; 15:15; Ps 89:5,7; Zech 14:5), cherubim (Gen 3:24; Ezek 1; 10), seraphim (Is 6:2-3,6-7), and watchers (Dan 4:13,17,23). Moreover, it tells us that these beings form God's council or assembly (1 Kings 22:19-23; Pss 82:1; 89:5, 7; Jer 23:18), and his heavenly host (1 Kings 22:19; Pss 89:8; 148:2).

The reticence of Old Testament testimony means that we cannot simply assume that the varied names necessarily imply beings of different kinds. The parallelism in Ps 89:5-7, for example, suggests that holy ones and sons of God are probably identical in nature. Nor should we suppose, however, that all are simply undifferentiated angels.

There is limited and somewhat piecemeal evidence of hierarchy among them, as when Michael, the only angel to be named in the Old Testament, is identified first as "one of the chief princes" (Dan 10:13) and then, in the New Testament, as an archangel (Jude 9; cf. 1 Thess 4:16). The Bible does, however, point to the various roles of these beings. In heaven itself they guard access to God's presence and offer unceasing worship, and when sent by him to earth they act as mediators of his will among human beings in numerous ways: carrying his messages, executing his judgments, transmitting his law, serving the mission of his incarnate Son, and generally acting in a multitude of respects as "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Heb 1:14).

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The word "gods" (*elohim*) is to be understood in Ps 82:1, 6, and occasionally elsewhere, to refer to celestial but not divine beings.

A DECLARATION OF WAR: "THAT ANCIENT SNAKE... SATAN"

The first indication of spiritual conflict in the Bible is found when a speaking serpent appears in Eden and addresses Eve (Gen 3:1-5). As a serpent, one of "the wild animals" (Gen 3:1), it is of course part of God's good physical creation, but it speaks malevolently, contradicting God's word spoken to Adam and maligning God himself. By tempting Eve to eat forbidden fruit, it knowingly seeks to bring that death to the human couple which God had warned them of. More than that, by yielding to its temptation, Adam would bring the whole human race of which he was representative under the same judgment, while the earth, their home, would suffer immense disruption in the form of illness, famine, and every kind of natural upheaval and disaster. Meanwhile, the fact that the serpent speaks at all indicates that it is more than a mere animal, and in the New Testament it is unmasked as Satan: "the great dragon ... that ancient snake called the devil, or Satan" (Rev 12:9; 20:2; see also 2 Cor 11:3-4,13-15).

The Hebrew word, *satan*, translates as *adversary* and is often used in the Old Testament, sometimes of human adversaries (1 Sam 29:4; 2 Sam 19:22; 1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25; Ps 109:6), once of the angel of the Lord opposing Balaam (Num 22:22), but on a few occasions of a supernatural adversary which is clearly not the angel of the Lord (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; 1 Chron 21:1; Zech 3:1). In both Job and Zechariah the word *satan* is used with an article as *the satan*; it is only in 1 Chron 21:1 where there is no article that it has clearly become a proper name, Satan. Article or not, however, in all three Old Testament locations (the) Satan demonstrates an unmistakable animosity towards God and his people.

In Job, Satan appears at the assembly of the celestial sons of God where he denies God's word, much like the serpent in Genesis, but in this case it is God's word commending Job's righteousness. He accuses Job of hypocrisy, implicitly charging God with naivety, even foolishness, and he does so to God's face, before the whole assembly, and with evident contempt. To prove his case he then pursues Job's physical and spiritual destruction, again echoing the serpent's murderous intent in its temptation of Eve. Significantly, however, Satan can do nothing outside God's permissive will. In Job 1, God allows him to destroy Job's wealth but forbids any attack on his person; and then in Job 2 God allows him to afflict Job's body but forbids the taking of his life.

Jesus too speaks of how Satan sought permission to sift Peter (Luke 22:31), and Paul was afflicted by "a messenger of Satan" given to him in God's good providence (2 Cor 12:7-9). Satan is always subject to God's sovereign will. As Calvin says, "he obeys his Creator, whether he will or not, because he is compelled to yield him service wherever God impels him."

In Zechariah, Satan is again accuser, this time of Joshua the high priest, the representative of Israel, and God vehemently rebukes him as one who stands in the way of his redemptive purpose for his people. Finally, in both Job and 1 Chronicles Satan tempts, either through the afflictions by which he tries to entice Job to curse God, or by inciting David to sin by numbering the people of Israel, and in so doing he again echoes the serpent's temptations in Eden.

SATAN'S TACTICS

A pattern, therefore, emerges in the Old Testament characterisation of the serpent who is Satan. Satan tempts to sin; he accuses of sin; and in both tempting and accusing his purpose is that his prey suffer the divine penalty of death for their sin. It is a pattern that carries over into the New Testament where Satan is the tempter (Matt 4:3; 1 Thess 3:5), who tempts Jesus in the desert as he tempted Adam in the garden; the accuser "of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night" (Rev 12:10); and the one whom Jesus identifies as "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).

Jesus' description is especially significant in its association of Satan's murderous purposes with his lies: "he was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth... for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). The combination, murderer and liar, defines the very character J. Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. J. T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.14.17, 176. of Satan; the double identification does not just identify what he does but exposes who he truly is. It recalls the serpent's work in Eden, using lies as the lethal instrument of its temptation. Satan is the hunter, setting his trap with a bait of lies by which he lures his intended victims to destruction.

In Eden, and everywhere and always, the serpent's lies focus on the character of God himself. Satan sought to corrupt Adam and Eve's knowledge of the God who had made and vastly blessed them, in order to draw them into his own rebellion and so to their own ruin in a number of ways:

- he denied the truth of God's word and made him out to be a liar;
- he contradicted God's warning of condemnation for eating the forbidden fruit, so denying his justice and Adam and Eve's accountability;
- and he disputed God's infinite goodness and generosity by claiming that God had forbidden the fruit of the one tree only to frustrate the potential of Adam and Eve as human beings. They would, it said, find fulfilment only by repudiating their Creator and going their own way.

Unique though the temptation in Eden certainly was, the lies of the serpent are typical of all temptation. He is the one who leads astray and deceives the whole earth (Rev 12:9; 20:3, 7). His lies are embedded in the minds of fallen men and women, warping their knowledge of God and of all else besides, and lying at the heart of their sin and folly. "When this distortion of God's character is complete, we inevitably mistrust him; we lose sight of his love and grace; we see him as essentially a forbidding God."

Sinclair Ferguson, The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance – Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 83.

SATAN'S ALLIES

Just as the Bible's teaching on creation focuses on the earth rather than the heavens, so it is when it speaks of the origins of sin. As one made by God, Satan was created good, and if he is now evil he must somehow have fallen from the perfection of his created state. But the Bible speaks of it, if at all, only incidentally. Some find reference to his fall in Isa 14:12-20 and Ezek 28:12-19, although explicitly the two passages refer only to the fall of the rulers of Babylon and Tyre respectively, albeit in poetic and hyperbolic terms. Paul perhaps suggests that pride produced Satan's fall (1 Tim 3:6). And Jesus describes the devil as "not holding to the truth" (John 8:44), which might more literally be rendered, "he did not stand in the truth" and so imply that he once "stood in the truth" but fell from it. What is sure is that this celestial being, originally part of God's perfect "heavens," corrupted itself in a way incomprehensible to us, rebelled against its Creator, and then set out to promote rebellion in Eden also.

Nor is Satan the only celestial being that has fallen. Other sinning angels appear in the Old Testament, including sons of God (or of the Most High), celestial beings (elohim), princes and demons. References are again few and brief, and focus on their activities on earth where they have a pervasive influence as instigators of human wickedness and as enemies of God and his people. So, the "sons of God" who "saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and... married any of them they chose" (Gen 6:2), were most likely fallen angelic beings, despite the obvious difficulties with this view. Elsewhere in the Old Testament "sons of God" are celestial beings, and the contrast ("sons of God" and "daughters of humans") suggests that that is the case here also. Jude apparently thought so when, referring to this incident, he compares the sin of the angels with that of Sodom and Gomorrah, which "in a similar way... gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion" (Jude 6-7). For Jude, the evil committed by both the "sons of God" and Sodom and Gomorrah was "similar" in that they transgressed sexual categories in defiance of God's created order. As in Genesis 3, therefore, temptation was brought to earth from the heavens and human beings sinfully acquiesced to it. In consequence, and following the flow of the text, they came under judgment both in the reduction in their lifespan (Gen 6:3) and also, perhaps, of the flood (Gen 6:5-7).

The Song of Moses (Deut 32:1-43) refers briefly to God's division of the peoples "according to the number of the sons of God" (32:8). It may be that these "sons of God" were appointed to exercise a delegated supervision over the nations, while the LORD took particular care of his own people, Israel (32:9). As revelation progresses, however, brief references show fallen celestial beings implicated in the corruption of the nations. Isaiah refers to a complicity

See Michael Heiser, The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015), 73-91, and G. A. Cole, Against the Darkness: The Doctrine of Angels, Satan, and Demons (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 90-94, for recent defences of this approach.

J. R. W. Stott, The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary (Leicester: IVP, 1988), 141.

See Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 92-100, for one defence of this approach. By contrast, Cole, *Against the Darkness*, 114-117, argues that Gen 6:1-4 describes the marriage between male descendants of Seth (sons of God) and female descendants of Cain.

Following the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT), which is here the more likely reading than the Hebrew text's "according to the number of the sons of Israel."

in wickedness of "the powers in the heavens above" and "the kings on the earth below," which God will punish and bring to an end (Isa 24:21).

Daniel describes an incident when an unnamed angel was sent to him to explain a vision he had received. However, the "prince of the Persian kingdom," evidently a fallen angelic being, resisted the angel for twenty one days (Dan 10:13), perhaps to prevent the fulfilment of the vision that included the fall of Persia. Through the intervention of Michael, "one of the chief princes," the unnamed angel was finally able to reach Daniel and explain the vision, but he went on to report that he would soon return to "fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come" (10:20). Michael is later identified as "the great prince who protects your people" (Dan 12:1). The passage points to conflict in the heavens between angels who serve God and those identified with particular nations who rebelliously seek to resist the fulfilment of his purposes on earth, especially with regard to God's own people.

Then, Psalm 82 records God's public condemnation in the divine assembly of the "gods" (*elohim*) or "sons of the Most High" for the injustice of their actions on earth. They have defended the wicked when they should rather have defended the weak from their oppression. They apparently stand behind the injustice and oppression of godless human rulers and, as a result, "the foundations of the earth are shaken"—the foundations of God's justice and righteousness on which the stability and wellbeing of human society depend (82:5). Finally, God pronounces judgment on them: "I said, 'You are "gods"; you are all sons of the Most High.' But you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler" (82:6-7).

Finally, a few references identify demons as the real objects of idolatrous worship by Israel. At one point the law sternly forbids Israelites from offering sacrifices "in the open fields" as they pass through the wilderness (Lev 17:1-7), apparently "to prevent sacrifices to the *goat-demons* who inhabited the wilderness." Moses' Song also refers to acts of apostate worship by Israel during the Exodus wanderings and identifies it as a worship of demons (Deut 32:17). And Psalm 106 recalls Israel's history and its settlement in the Promised Land where again they engaged in worship of demons learned from Canaanites, even to the point of offering up their children in sacrifice to them (106:36-37).

G. J. Wenham, The Book of Leviticus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 243. Occasionally, then, the Old Testament pulls back the curtain to give fleeting glimpses of the presence of rebellious heavenly beings behind the sins of fallen humanity, including Israel: inciting moral depravity, fuelling the injustice of human government, and instigating idolatrous worship.

THE DOMINION OF DARKNESS

The New Testament demonstrates a reticence regarding fallen heavenly beings similar to that of the Old, but the picture becomes significantly fuller and clearer. Demons, often called unclean spirits (Mark 1:23, 26; 9:25), are prominent, especially in the gospels. Like Satan, they have personal attributes of intelligence, will, self-awareness and speech. They introduce false teaching into the church (1 Tim 4:1) and, as in the Old Testament, stand behind the practices of false religion (1 Cor 10:20; Rev 9:20) - both activities resonating with the biblical picture of Satan as liar and deceiver. A phenomenon found mostly in the synoptic gospels, and once in Acts, is demonic "possession" or the "demonisation" of people, in which demons seize control of individuals with devastating consequences - emotional, psychological, social, and physical. Jesus identifies such demonisation as Satan's work (Mark 3:22-27), and it is certainly consistent with his identity as a "murderer." In John's gospel, which records no case of possession, Satan himself "enters" Judas at the moment of Judas' final "surrender... to the power of darkness": "As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him" (John 13:27).

Paul employs a distinctive terminology to refer to celestial powers, especially in his letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, speaking of rulers, authorities, powers, dominions and thrones (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10,15. See also 1 Pet 3:22). He does not use the language in a systematic way but groups the various names together in apparently random combinations. They communicate the variety and multiplicity of the unseen spiritual beings he speaks of, and also something of their power. In many cases it is clear from the context that Paul uses the names to speak of rebellious spirits, and other references can also be understood in the same sense. The words resonated forcefully with Paul's readers, especially in places like Ephesus and Colossae, where they were used of powerful spirits that might possess and afflict human beings, and that could be invoked and manipulated by sorcerers against enemies. They stirred real fear. These are, therefore, fallen angels or demons, which were created by God, are now subservient to Satan, oppose God's purposes, attack his people physically and spiritually, were invoked in contemporary magic, and are decisively defeated by the death and resurrection of God's incarnate Son.

Above all, it is Satan himself who emerges more clearly in the New Testament. In particular it identifies him as one who is supreme over a See, for example, the accounts in Mark's gospel, 1:21-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29, and also in Acts 16:16-18.

Lesslie Newbigin, quoted in D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John (Leicester: IVP, 1991), 475.

In Eph 1:21 the phrase, "and every name that is invoked," suggests that Paul has in mind the invocation, or naming, of the powers and authorities for the purpose of magic. See Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 114. "dominion of darkness" (Col 1:13) both in heaven and on earth. So, Jesus speaks of "the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41), and the book of Revelation of "the dragon and his angels" (Rev 12:7). Jesus similarly identifies Satan as Beelzebul, "prince of demons" (Matt 12:24-27; Mark 3:22-23; Luke 11:15-18), and Paul speaks of "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Eph 2:2), referring no doubt to Satan and identifying him as ruler of evil spirits which were believed to inhabit the "air." A brief reference in Rev 12:4 may also imply that the dragon – "that ancient snake called the devil, or Satan" (12:9) – was itself responsible for the rebellion of all the other fallen celestial beings: "Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth."

Satan's power extends also to fallen humanity, whose disobedience he instigated in the first place. Three times Jesus calls him "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11); Paul identifies him as "the god of this age" (2 Cor 4:4), and sees humanity as subject to "the power of Satan" (Acts 26:18); and John says that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19).

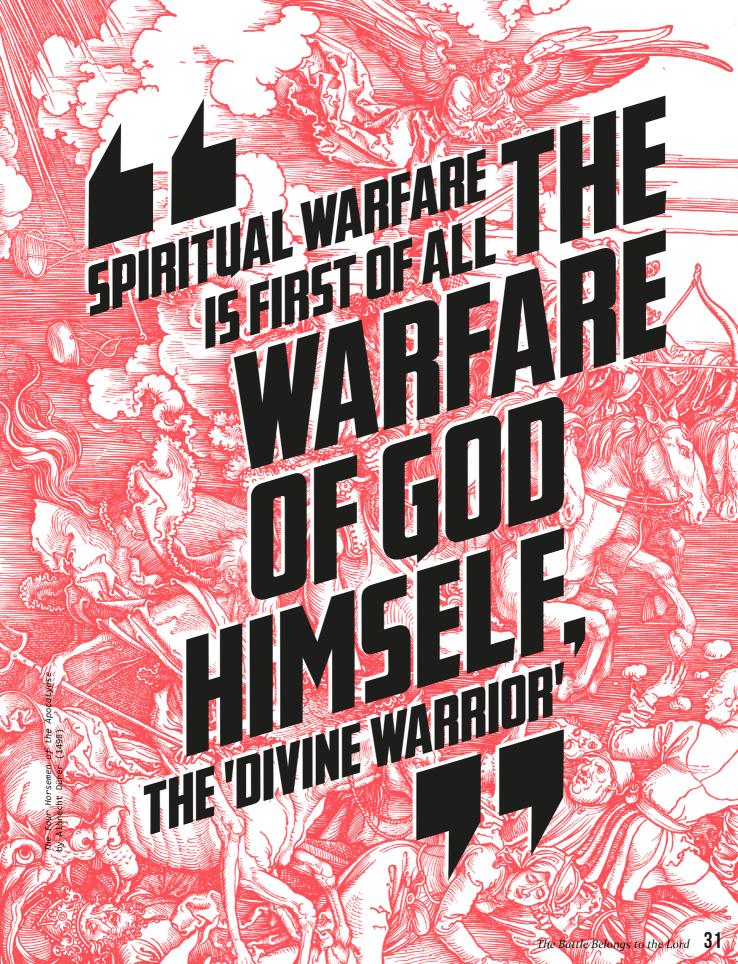
The wickedness and power of Satan do not, however, remove human responsibility for their own sin. At the beginning, seduced though they were by the serpent, God called Adam and Eve to account for their disobedience and punished them: they were guilty sinners and not mere victims unwittingly caught up in a cosmic conflict. Now, as a result of its rebellion, fallen humanity is in "darkness" (Eph 5:8) and held captive by the power of sin from which it is unable to break free: "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Rom 8:7). Moreover, despite all the violence and conflict that sin generates among them, fallen men and women are bound tightly together in a solidarity of godlessness, following "the ways of this world" (Eph 2:2) with its shared idolatrous values, ambitions, and lusts. Nevertheless, they remain guilty for their ongoing rebellion and ever-increasing transgressions, helpless and enslaved though they are, by Satan, the world, and the sinful nature.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Spiritual warfare is first of all the warfare of God himself, the 'divine warrior' (Exod 15:3). He fights his enemies both spiritual and human; he wars in the heavens and on earth in pursuit of their defeat and final judgment, which he

The "air" was seen as an intermediate sphere between earth and the habitation of God, in which evil spirits dwelt.

It might alternatively refer to persecution of the saints, echoing Dan 8:10.



surely will achieve. His warfare has also, however, another purpose. He fights to secure the redemption from sin, Satan, and death of a people among whom he will dwell forever in "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1). It is a warfare he carries on with unusual weapons, and at its climactic moment he achieves the "strangest victory."

The little phrase is from the hymn by C. Idle, In Silent Pain the Eternal Son.

As far as the earth is concerned God's warfare starts in Eden. He punishes Adam and Eve for their sin, and he curses the serpent. There is also, however, grace for the human couple, and God's words to the serpent are of enormous importance in pointing to the direction that his redeeming warfare will take.

First, God puts enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between their respective seeds or offspring (Gen 3:15). In so doing he ends the woman's suicidal complicity in sin with the serpent and draws her back to himself, thereby establishing an absolute division between the two of them and, through them, between two divergent and mutually-opposed branches of humanity. One branch will go the way of the serpent, deceived and enslaved by its lies, sharing in its rebellion and reflecting its murderous character; and the other, the "seed" of the woman, will share her enmity against the serpent and form a people belonging to God. So it is with these words – "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers" – that God announces the spiritual warfare of his people as they join in his own conflict with the serpent and all that share in its rebellion.

Second, the enmity – the warfare – will come to a head when one single representative offspring of the woman crushes the serpent's head on behalf of all her offspring. However, in doing so he suffers the bruising of his own heel: "the promise of victory includes the cost of suffering." Indeed, suffering will be a constant in the warfare of God and his people with the serpent and his, which becomes quickly evident when righteous Abel suffers at the hands of Cain, "who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother" (1 John 3:12). And, climactically, Jesus himself, the representative offspring of the woman of whom God spoke to the serpent, identified those who wished to kill him as offspring of the devil, "doing the works of your own father" who "was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:37,40,44). Even now, and until Christ's return, the dragon makes war against the rest of the offspring of the woman, "those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus" (Rev 12:17).

THE WARFARE OF GOD'S SON

The Lord Jesus Christ is the incarnate divine warrior and offspring of the woman in order to destroy definitively the works of the devil (1 John 3:8) and rescue those he holds captive (Col 1:13-14). He engages and overcomes Satan and his angels on several fronts.

J. R. Treat, The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 58.

THE DESERT TEMPTATIONS

First, Jesus is tempted by the devil. Coming immediately after his anointing, and at the very outset of his ministry, the temptation narratives (Matt 4:1-11: Luke 4:1-13; Mark 1:12-13) draw attention to the underlying cosmic background to Jesus' ministry and the unrelenting pressure which Satan's dominion of darkness would bring to bear on him. The temptations focus on Jesus' trusting submission as Son to the will of his Father, and especially to the suffering which lay at the heart of his ministry on earth and would culminate at the cross. They are temptations that would recur, through Peter's hostile response to Jesus' declaration of his coming trials, for example: "Never Lord! ... This shall never happen to you" (Matt 16:22); and then through the scoffers at the cross: "Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" (Matt 27:40).

While Satan is the tempter, however, he is not the real initiator of the temptations, although he seizes the opportunity to attack God's redemptive new creation work in Christ at its very beginning, just as he had attacked God's first creation in Eden. All the synoptic gospels point to the Spirit's role in sending Jesus into the desert, and Matthew, particularly, underlines the paradoxical purpose for which he was sent: "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt 4:1). God willed that Satan should test his Son, and he permitted Satan to do so. Why should that be? First, Jesus experienced temptation as the second Adam; the representative and head of a new humanity. Where Adam failed, with catastrophic consequences for all humanity (Rom 5:15-19), Jesus prevailed, resisting the tempter on behalf of those he had come to save. Second, Jesus faced Satan as the new Israel. His forty days and nights in the desert recall Israel's forty years in the desert, and his use of words drawn from Deuteronomy (Deut 8:3; 6:16, 13) to respond to each of Satan's temptations recalls Israel's desert experience. Once again, however, while Israel had repeatedly grumbled and rebelled throughout its exodus wanderings, Jesus trusted and obeyed. He is at the same time both God's new humanity and his new people, faithful and obedient where Adam and Israel had failed.

THE EXPULSION OF DEMONS

Jesus was renowned for expelling unclean spirits from demonised people. There is substantial testimony in the gospels to this aspect of his ministry, and no evidence from the period of anybody else as effective as he. Both during and after his lifetime his name was invoked by exorcists who did not belong to his own disciples (Mark 9:38; Luke 9:49: Acts 19:13-16). Further, he expelled demons without using any of the ritual that usually accompanied contemporary exorcism. He did not force demons to speak; he used no magic incantations or rites; he invoked no god or spirit; he did not even pray. He simply "drove out the spirits with a word" (Matt 8:16), and the people marvelled: "He even gives orders to impure spirits and they Synoptic = Matthew, Mark and Luke. Synoptic means they can be 'seen together' and read in parallel because they overlap significantly. obey him" (Mark 1:27). Even his enemies could not deny his effectiveness in expelling demons, and so attributed his obvious success to Beelzebul: "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons" (Matt 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15).

Jesus identified his expulsion of demons as an assault on the power of Satan. When accused of expelling demons by the power of Beelzebul, his response identifies a solidarity between Satan and unclean spirits. To attack them was to attack him, and so it was inconceivable that Satan would be complicit in their expulsion (Matt 12:25-26). On the contrary, Jesus claimed that his expulsions of demons were brought about by the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:28) or the "finger of God" (Luke 11:20). Jesus is, therefore, the Spirit-anointed servant of the Lord (Isa 42:1), in whom God's kingdom is present to bring salvation to his people and defeat to his enemies; and he is that same "finger of God" that the Egyptian magicians had discerned in the plagues of Egypt (Exod 8:19), who is now bringing about a new exodus as he delivers men and women from captivity to Satan. Jesus made a very similar point when his disciples returned from a mission he had sent them on and reported how the demons submitted to them: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). The disciples' power over demons, like his own, was evidence of Satan's overthrow, and they would, indeed, continue to "overcome all the power of the enemy" (Luke 10:19).

THE PREACHING OF TRUTH

At his trial before Pilate, Jesus identified the reason for his entry into the world: "The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth" (John 18:37). That testimony is central to his spiritual warfare. Satan operates through lies. His very nature is to lie and deceive: lies are "his native language" and "there is no truth in him" (John 8:44). It was his lies – the slandering of God himself – that enticed Adam and Eve into sin in the first place, and that are now rooted in the hearts and minds of fallen human beings and enslave them. Jesus, therefore, taught the truth so that his disciples would know the truth, and that the truth would set them free from the liar, his lies, and all their consequences (John 8:32). As he did so, that same declaration of truth aroused the violent hostility of those who could not hear it, because they belonged to their father and spoke his language (John 8:43-44).

The heart of the truth Jesus taught focused on his own person. He is himself the truth (John 14:6), the one whose glory was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Most important of all, as eternal Word of the Father and Son of God made flesh, he has made the invisible God known with flawless clarity: "the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (John 1:18). Jesus confronts and refutes the devil's lies about God because in his own being God is present and reveals himself in absolute truth and clarity.

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The definitive victory over Satan and his angels was won by the sacrificial death of God's Son. At numerous points the New Testament refers to this, but most clearly at the heart of Paul's letter to the Colossians. In Col 2:13-15 Paul summarises the gospel. The Colossians had been dead because of their sins and the sinful nature that produced them, but God made them alive with Christ by forgiving their sins. Paul then uses the metaphor of a bond of debt, an IOU, to describe how God dealt with sins. He effaced it, as a scribe might smooth over the writing on a tablet of soft wax; he simply lifted it from the scene; and, most telling, he nailed it to the cross. By his death, the Lord Jesus Christ paid off the "debt" of human sin. Then, in an apparent shift of gear, in verse 15 Paul goes on to describe God's victory over the powers and authorities, using three more metaphors. God has disarmed them, publicly exposed them, and done so by leading them as defeated enemies in his triumphal procession; and all of this he has accomplished in Christ.

The flow of the argument indicates that the defeat of the powers is achieved by payment of the IOU. It is the sin of human beings that brings about their enslavement to the dominion of darkness where Satan reigns. Therefore, when God forgives sin, nailing it to the cross, he destroys the foundation of their tyranny and defeats them. They can no longer accuse and pursue the condemnation and destruction of those whose sins have been forgiven: "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns?" (Rom 8:33). The redeemed are freed at the cross not only from the burden of their sins but also from bondage to the tyranny of Satan that sin had produced. Christ's death "for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3) has brought a titanic reversal in the spiritual realm. It is the defining moment in God's spiritual warfare both on earth and in the heavens. And it is sealed by Jesus'

Jesus' words, "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44), define Satan. He tempts to sin and accuses of sin in order to bring about the death of his victims. At the cross, however, by atoning for the sins of his people, Jesus also overcame death for them. Accordingly, he rose from death himself, and did so as "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep," who *in him* will also be made alive (1 Cor 15:20-22). He ended death's reign, and frustrated Satan's murderous ambition.

EHALTATION

The New Testament repeatedly proclaims that Jesus Christ is Lord. More quoted or alluded to in the New Testament than any other Old Testament text is Psalm 10:1: "The Lord says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Jesus' present exaltation and reign is central to his warfare for two main reasons.

For example, John 12:31-32; Heb 2:14-15; 1 Pet 3:18-22; Rev 12:7-11.

"...the uncircumcision of your flesh..."

First, alluding to Psalm 110:1, Paul affirms that Christ, risen and exalted, is now seated "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (Eph 1:21). Christ is Lord over all the powers of darkness. Moreover, believers are raised with him and are "seated... with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6); they too are now "far above" the powers which once held them captive and tyrannised them. As they wait for the fulfilment of their salvation, they are, therefore, kept safe in Christ until it comes (cf. 1 Pet 1:5). They will still face the temptations, persecutions, deceptions, and lies that Satan inspires; in a culture like that of Ephesus they may fear the malevolence of demons and sorcerers; but they are in Christ who is far above every evil power. God has "appointed him [Christ] to be head over everything *for the church*" (Eph 1:22): as "head over everything" he keeps his church and will bring it to glory.

Second, Jesus' reign also undergirds the advance of the gospel. As "head over everything for the church" he not only keeps his people but he also gathers them. Accordingly, the Great Commission is prefaced by Jesus' declaration of his comprehensive authority, not only on earth but also in heaven (Matt 28:18). So, Satan, "who leads the whole world astray" (Rev 12:9), and the rebellious "sons of the Most High" and "princes" of nations (Ps 82; Dan 10:13, 20), will never be able to impede the progress of the gospel. God's people will surely be rescued from their dominion and brought into the kingdom of God's Son (Col 1:13).

THE LAST BATTLE

In the final act of God's warfare, Satan and all who have participated in his rebellion will be defeated and judged. Numerous passages of Scripture speak of this moment, including Isaiah, Paul, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself (Isa 24:21; 1 Cor 15:24-25; Matt 25:41), and especially the book of Revelation where Christ himself leads "the armies of heaven" into battle against the beast, the false prophet "and the kings of the earth" (Rev 19:14, 19-20).

The Warfare of God's People

David Powlison, 'The Classical Model,' in J. K. Beilby and P. R. Eddy (eds.), Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 96. Although the next few articles explore this in more depth, we should finish by noting that in this present age, the church shares in the warfare of God. He is "carrying out his invasion, piercing the darkness with light," and his people participate in that invasion, sent by the Son of God to be his witnesses and to make disciples of all nations. This is the great task of the church, to take the gospel to people bound in darkness: "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). At the same time Satan attacks God's people: tempting them to sin, stirring up error among them, and instigating physical persecution against them, sometimes on a massive scale (Rev 13:5-7). From this perspective the whole New Testament defines the battle God's people face and guides them in the fight.

Questions for further thought and discussion

- 1. In what sense does Satan obey his Creator? (see the Calvin quote on page 25)
- 2. What are Satan's tactics throughout history? Apart from Gen 3 and Matt 4, where else could you detect them in Scripture?
- 3. Why do you think it's important to remember that "Spiritual warfare is first of all the warfare of God himself, the 'divine warrior'" (page 30)?
- 4. How does Keith start to show that the forgiveness of sins and the defeat of spiritual evil are not two completely separate ways of thinking about the cross?

If you want to dig deeper into that question, the best two works are:

Henri A. G. Blocher, "Agnus Victor: The Atonement as Victory and Vicarious Punishment," in What Does It Mean to Be Saved?: Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 67-91.

Mark D. Thompson, "No Charge Admitted: Justification and the Defeat of the Evil Powers," in *Christ's Victory Over Evil* (Nottingham: IVP, 2009), 123-49.

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Spiritual Warfare and the Witness of the Church in Revelation 11-13



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38 PRIMER

issue 10

Blessed is the one who stays awake!

I think that's a helpful blessing to hold onto as we approach the book of Revelation, and I didn't make it up. In Rev 16:15 we read "blessed is the one who stays awake." A similar idea is there in Rev 3:2 where the church in Sardis is rebuked and called to "wake up! And strengthen what remains."

Those verses reflect the common New Testament idea that the Christian is someone who has woken up and must not drift back to sleep.

Rom 13:11	the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.
1 Thess 5:5b-6	We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.
Eph 5:14	Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

That's the invitation of the gospel. We have woken up from a kind of sleep and we live in the real world. We have left behind dreams and shadows. We know the night is far gone and the day is at hand. And so "blessed is the one who stays awake."

So it is a common NT theme, but it seems to me that it is an especially helpful way to approach the book of Revelation. Because it is easy to think we are entering a kind of escapist dream world, or perhaps a nightmare world we'd want to wake up from. And yet the book of Revelation is really designed to keep us awake to the real world of God and the gospel. It is the spiritual equivalent of one of those high-energy high-caffeine drinks. It gives you wings, takes you to heaven, and shows you how things really are.

One of its most vital revelations is the reality of spiritual warfare and how that relates to the earthly suffering and witness of the church. Again, nothing could be less escapist or fantastical. Revelation does not provide distraction to numb or soothe the pain. Instead it stocks our imaginations with the most vivid and serious images to keep us awake and on task.

In this article, then, we will focus on the central chapters of Revelation, where we get an unprecedented window onto spiritual warfare in the life of the church. But to properly appreciate them, we need to grasp the flow of the preceding chapters.

Getting our bearings in Revelation

In **Rev 2-3** we meet the collection of churches to whom the book is written, harassed by false teaching, suffering and worldliness. The first great vision comes in **Rev 4** where we meet the One who is on the throne, and the many gathered around the throne in worship. It is a reminder that God's throne room, and nowhere else, is the command centre of the universe – an encouragement to the likes of the church in Pergamum where Satan has set up his throne (Rev 2:13), and a rebuke to a church like Laodicea who have lost sight of God's rule and their dependence on him.

The one thing missing in heaven is someone worthy to open the scroll; in other words, someone who can reveal and enact God's purposes so that his will is done on the earth as it is in heaven. And so in **Rev 5** we meet the lion-lamb Jesus (Rev 5:5-6) who is worthy to open the scroll. That work begins in **Rev 6-7** where the seven seals are opened. The seals don't exactly reveal the contents of the scroll, but they do indicate what God's purposes are. They describe judgment falling on a world in which God's people are martyred for their witness (Rev 7:9-11) and yet at the same time those martyrs are sealed and preserved such that they are still able to take their place around the throne in worship (Rev 7:9-17).

Revelation 8-9 described another set of seven, this time the seven trumpets blown. Again, the contents of the scroll have not been revealed yet, but here is another window onto what God's purposes are for the world. These chapters are also among the hardest in Revelation to interpret, describing another series of judgments upon the earth and the opening of the Abyss, out of which pour demonic forces described as hybrid locust/scorpions.

There are, though, a few key indications of what is going on here. First, to blow seven trumpets is a Jericho kind of action – this is a declaration of war (see Josh 6). Second, the judgments that fall in Rev 8 are closely related to the plagues on Egypt. Water turned to blood, the sun turning dark, and so on. In the Exodus, God was going to war against the "gods" of Egypt. So here, God is demonstrating his authority. Third, the end of chapter 9 is telling:

Both the Nile and the Sun were worshipped as gods in Egypt.

Rev 9:20-21

The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood – idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts. What was the right response to these judgments? To turn from idolatry, and yet the people refused. Here then is the picture: The world worships idols and demons. God's response is to hand them over to those very things to suffer the consequences but it does not result in repentance.

That, I think, is the key message from Rev 8-9. It raises a question against C. S. Lewis' famous idea that "pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." In some respects that is true. The suffering that God inflicts on the world in Rev 8-9 does turn up the volume on the stupidity of worshipping idols, and for many of us God will have used our experience of suffering in our conversions. But here in Rev 9 the suffering that comes from God's judgment has no rousing effect. Judgment alone will not transform the world. For that task, God sends the church, and that brings us to **Rev 10-11** and (finally) to the scroll.

In Rev 10 there is to be no more delay. John is presented with the scroll and told to "take it and eat it" (10:9). It tastes sweet like honey, but is also bitter, and he is told "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings." This is clearly a call to prophetic ministry (echoing the call of Ezekiel very closely – see Ezek 3), and it is what heaven has longed for: the scroll's contents are the prophet's words which will bring about salvation and judgment in the world.

This prophetic ministry is not limited to John, however. That has already been made clear by references to the testimony of all the saints in Rev 6:9, but it is also indicated by the way that Rev 10 presents us with the two witnesses who prophesy against the world performing signs and wonders (echoing again the ministry of Moses at the Exodus, and also the miracles of Elijah). For as long as they are prophesying they are invincible (11:6-7) but then they are martyred, exposed to shame for a brief time (three and a half days), before being raised to new life and brought up to heaven.

There are echoes here of Rom 1: humanity worships created things and God hands them over to those very things in judgment. And there are echoes of 1 Cor 10:18-22, because there Paul links demons to idolatry. At one level an idol is nothing, a mere thing created by humans (1 Cor 10:19). On the other hand, there are demons behind pagan idols (10:20) who deceive and persuade and seduce, and that is Satan's power at work. For more on this idea, see Ro Mody's excellent study: *Empty and Evil: The Worship of Other Faiths in 1 Corinthians 8-10 and Today* (London: Latimer Trust, 2010).

The Problem of Pain (London: Fontana, 1976), 81.

Some commentators are unconvinced that this scroll is the same as the scroll in Rev 5 because it is described here as a "little scroll" (10:2, 9). But John connects the two by describing them both as delivered by a mighty "angel" (5:2 and 10:1) and in Rev 10 the "little scroll" is also called simply the "scroll" in 10:8. On this point, see Richard Bauckham's The Theology of the Book of Revelation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 80-81.

The two witnesses might then be identified with Moses and Elijah, but it is best to see them as representing the church as a whole which continues their prophetic work. That there are *two* also echoes the corroborated testimony of two witnesses (Deut 17:6, 19:15, Matt 18:16). They prophesy the truth, exposing the deception of the devil (Rev 12:9). Their description as lampstands also connects them to the church in light of Rev 1:12, 20. In some ways, this is the same picture of the church's experience we find in Rev 7. Suffering for a time, then vindicated. But there is a new focus here on the effect of their ministry:

Rom 13:11 At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

Now that might not look very encouraging but in fact it is trebly encouraging.

- First, only a tenth of the city collapses. This is opposite to a trajectory so far in Revelation where judgment falls on a quarter of the earth (Rev 6:8) and then a third of the earth (Rev 8:7). Now only a tenth. The remaining 90% survive.
- Second, in Scripture, 7,000 signifies not a large number but a small one. In 1 Kings 19 the whole nation of Israel has rejected God apart from Elijah and the 7,000 God has reserved for himself (19:18). Here in Revelation it is only 7,000 that fall under judgment, the rest survive. So this is an Elijah-style ministry but with a vastly greater impact.
- The result of this is that the survivors, the 90%, give glory to the God of heaven. And remember the contrast with Rev 9. When God hands the world over to its idols, there is no repentance. But when God sends his church into the world, God is glorified.

The simple point of Rev 11 is that *the church* is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world. Simple, but not easy – because the church is sent into a hostile world where "Satan has his throne." And so, after Rev 4-11, which give such a crucial role to the church's mission, we get an equally rich picture of the spiritual battle they face in Rev 12-13. In Rev 12 the spiritual war that has been raging throughout time is unveiled. In Rev 13 we will see in greater detail how the devil wars against the church in the present age.

Revelation 12: Here be dragons!

Rev 12:1-6

¹A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ²She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. ³Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. ⁴Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. ⁵She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. ⁶The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.



Perhaps the clearest thing here is the identity of the child. He is Christ, the one who is installed as king over the nations in Psalm 2, the psalm quoted there in verse 5. The dragon is identified a little later in Rev 12 as "that

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And it fits with Old Testament language about Israel as a mother. Isaiah 54, for example, speaks about the nation as a barren woman whose disgrace will soon be over when God fulfils his promises.

In light of this parallel I think Rev 12:4 describes violence against God's people (described as stars cast to the earth) rather than describing Satan and other fallen angels being cast out of heaven. Antiochus' attacks are also the source of the reference to 1,260 days, because the temple was desecrated for about 3 ½ years before it was rededicated after the Jewish uprising known as the Maccabean revolt. In Scripture that period becomes synonymous with an intense but time-limited period of suffering. It is referred to in a variety of ways: 3 ½ days or years (Rev 11:9); 1,260 days (Rev 11:3, 12:6); or "a time, times and half a time" (Dan 7:25, 12:7, Rev 12:14).

ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan." The woman stands for Israel, the one from whom the Messiah comes, her twelve tribes pictured in the twelve stars about her head.

If those are the characters, what story is being told here? At one level it is the nativity story. This is a Christmas story in which a dragon takes its place alongside the donkeys and the sheep in the stable. In that sense, the dragon stands behind Herod's attempts to murder Jesus at his birth. But what is so intriguing about the story is that it evokes quite so many other stories as well. The story of God's people fleeing into the wilderness pursued by a dragon (as they will be in Rev 12:13), echoes the Exodus when God made a way through the sea and "pierced the dragon" in Isaiah's retelling of it (51:9-10, ESV). Similarly, Pharoah's slaughter of Hebrew boys is echoed in this attack on the male child in Rev 12.

Then there is the infamous attack on God's people that happened in the 2nd century B.C. when Jerusalem was desecrated under the attacks of Antiochus Epiphanes IV. Those attacks were prophesied in Daniel 8 where Antiochus is described as a horn which "threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them" just like the dragon in Rev 12 "swept a third of the stars out of the sky." Indeed, Daniel's prophecy also stands behind the description of the dragon in Rev 12:3 "with seven heads and ten horns." That's an allusion to the four beasts in Dan 7 that strut upon the world stage, because between them they have seven heads and ten horns. That makes the dragon a mash-up of all those empires depicted as beasts in Dan 7.

And finally, of course, we have here the story of a woman and a death-dealing serpent. This story is also the Eden story.

So what is going on here? The answer is something very significant indeed for our understanding of spiritual warfare. John is telling us that the birth of Jesus is the climax of a long history of demonic attack on God's people. He is unveiling the reality of a spiritual warfare only hinted at in the Old Testament but running right through it. Behind the serpent in the garden, behind Pharoah, behind the empires of Assyria and Babylon and Persia and Greece and Rome, and behind Herod, stands Satan: the dragon seeking to devour God's people. Wonderfully though, that long war is not only unveiled here but it is won in a manner both decisive and comical. Decisive because the baby is snatched up to heaven (John here compresses the birth/life/death and resurrection of Jesus into a single sentence) and seated on the throne. Comical because, well, it is. This fearsome dragon cannot get the better of a woman in labour and a newborn baby. Some dragon! It looks certain to devour its prey and then its slavering jaws snap shut on thin air. Psalm 2 describes heaven's laughter at the nations' rage (Ps 2:4). I suspect we're supposed to join in heaven's laughter here when we see how utterly outmatched the devil is in this battle between good and evil.

The nature of his defeat is captured in 12:10 – "the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been cast out." When Jesus, the slain lamb (Rev 5:6) ascends to heaven, the accuser descends; unceremoniously dumped down on earth. It is the moment anticipated in John 12:31 as Jesus looks towards the cross: "now the prince of this world will be cast out." That he is characterised as the accuser here is significant. The point is that the prosecuting case he brings against God's people (see e.g. Zech 3) has been dismissed. God's people have overcome the devil "by the blood of the lamb" (Rev 12:11); they are radiant because "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14). The only thing the devil ever told the truth about – the guilt of their sin – has been removed, and so in the words of Rom 8:33-34, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one."

What does this mean for the church? On the one hand, it is cause for celebration: "rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them!" says Rev 12:12. But on the other hand, for those of us on earth, it means woe,

Rev 12:12-13

...because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short. When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

The woman is protected by God in the wilderness, she is carried on eagles' wings (Rev 12:14) in another echo of the Exodus (Exod 19:4) and so the dragon, frustrated once more, goes off "to wage war against the rest of her offspring – those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus."

For the church, commissioned and sent in Rev 11, these are stark words, but they are also encouraging words. "His time is short." To the churches in Sardis or Pergamum – or Islamabad or Khartoum – it might feel brutal but every blow says "not long now." My translation.

My translation - in both passages, John records the same verb: to "cast out."

Revelation 13: Beware cheap imitations

When the devil goes to war against the church, what does that look like? The answer comes in Rev 13 with its vision of the two beasts, one from the sea and one from the land. The key thing to notice is that the dragon's strategy is derivative. All he can do is imitate God's actions.

God has installed Jesus as his king and commissioned his people to be prophet-witnesses. The dragon sets up his own king (the sea beast) who has his own prophet-witness (the land beast). In many respects, the sea beast is a cheap imitation of Jesus. Let me flesh that out:

- When we first meet Jesus he is the lion-lamb who appears as one slain (5:6); here the beast is a hybrid leopard/lion/ bear (13:2) who has recovered from a fatal wound (13:3, 14)
- In 5:13 God (the one on the throne) shares his power, honour, and authority with Jesus and together they are worshipped. In 13:2 and 13:4, the beast from the land is given power and authority from the throne of the dragon and together they are worshipped.
- Jesus is worshipped in Rev 7:9 by people from "every nation, tribe, people, and language." In Rev 13:7 the beast is given "authority over every tribe, people, language and nation" and is worshipped by them in 13:8.
- Jesus seals and marks out his people as belonging to him (7:3 and 14:1); the beast marks out his people too (13:16-17).
- Jesus is served and proclaimed by his witness-prophets (11:10) who perform miracles, so that people worship Jesus. The sea beast is served by the land beast who performs miracles (13:13-14) so that people worship the first beast (16:3, 19:20, 20:10).
- Strikingly, Revelation also records two competing rhetorical questions. Revelation 6:16 speaks about the day of the wrath of the one who sits on the throne and the wrath of the lamb. The next verse asks "the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?" Now here in Rev 13 we're told the world "worshipped the beast and asked, 'Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?"" Both Jesus and the beast are heralded as unstoppable and invincible.

So how does the devil wage war against the church? By setting up a rival king, primarily as one who will beat down the church, blaspheming, slandering, and putting believers to death. Just like Jesus

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has his evangelists, so too does this beast, and they are busy recruiting worshippers for the beast.

And what does this look like in practice? Well, the book of Daniel is helpful once again, because Daniel's visions of successive empires in chapter 7 describe them as a lion, a bear, a leopard, and then a terrifyingly violent but otherwise indescribable beast. For Daniel they represent successive empires, but here in Revelation the beast is a mash-up of them all. The point is that the beast is incarnated in every power that sets itself up against God and his people. To the extent that every kingdom presents itself as a rival to Jesus, it is beastly; it is demonic.

For the original audience, the Roman Empire would have been an obvious incarnation of this. The emperor Nero was infamous for his beastly cruelty. One Roman historian, Philostratus, said this of him:

Life of Apollonius of Tyana, 4.38. I know not how many heads he has, nor whether he has crooked talons and jagged teeth. In any case, though this monster is said to be a social beast and to inhabit the heart of cities, yet he is also much wilder and fiercer in his disposition than animals of the mountain and forest, that even though you can sometimes tame and alter the character of lions and leopards by flattering them, this one is only roused to greater cruelty than before by those who stroke him, so that he tears and devours all alike.

But the beast is not limited to that moment in history. Nero might have set up a 30-metre bronze statue of himself ("the Colossus of Nero"), like the beast in Rev 13:14, but Nebuchadnezzar had been there before (Dan 3), and history has seen countless other examples, right down to the Kim family in North Korea today, whose statues dominate the landscape of Pyongyang.

As the *Open Doors* website makes clear, the situation in North Korea is a very close parallel to what's described here in Rev 13:

worldwatch.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/ world-watch-list/north-korea/ accessed 24th Feb 2020. Anybody who believes in a higher authority than the dictatorial Kim family is considered an enemy of the state. Kim Jong-un and his family are worshipped as gods, and posters of Kim Jong-Un must be hung in all homes and schools.

The state is a rival king, blasphemously and arrogantly demanding loyalty and punishing the church and anyone else who resists.

barnabasfund.org/us/news/ china-orders-churches-toreplace-ten-commandmentswith-presidential-quotes

'In China, they're closing churches, jailing pastors – and even rewriting scripture', theguardian.com

Of course, in many respects we still enjoy a government that fulfils the biblical mandate of Rom 13. The warning from Revelation is that states have a tendency to over-reach and claim for themselves a right to the unconditional loyalty and worship of their subjects in ways that Christians will be forced to resist. Or think of China where state-controlled churches received an order in 2019 to remove the Ten Commandments from display and replace them with communist party quotes. The *Barnabus Aid* website reports that "some churches that refused to obey have been shut down and other congregations have been told their members will be blacklisted, meaning the travel, education and employment options of Christians will be restricted by the authorities."

Last year *The Guardian* also reported that "one of the goals of a government work plan for 'promoting Chinese Christianity' between 2018 and 2022 is 'thought reform.' The plan calls for 'retranslating and annotating' the Bible, to find commonalities with socialism and establish a 'correct understanding' of the text." The dragon seems an apt national symbol just now.

But we see it in more subtle ways too in our own state's aggressive promotion of things like transgenderism. In George Orwell's *1984*, Big Brother's power is so far-reaching that he can make people say things that they know are untrue. That two plus two is five. That black is white. In our day, that men can be women and women can be men. I was recently invited to complete some diversity training and was asked to describe a situation in which someone maintained that a man was still a man, even if he now identifies as a woman. It was a multiple choice quiz. To "misgender" like that, is it (a) "prejudice" (b) "bullying" or (c) "harassment"? You could not progress on the test until you had chosen one of those options. That's "thought reform."

Behind all these regimes, we would not be wrong to say that the devil is at work. The imprisonment or martyrdom of believers at the hands of hostile governments is how he wages war against the church. Behind their dungeons lies a dragon. To be sure it is not the only way he wages his war, but it is what Rev 13 teaches us to expect: a brutal and violent attack on the church through worldly power.

As Rev 13 says, "this calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people." The danger for us is that we are beaten down and silenced by these attacks; that we start to believe the propaganda of the beast that no-one can wage war against it and all we can do is make our peace and cut our losses. That's how Big Brother works. He makes you think that his control of you is so total that there is no escape. It's the propaganda of every beastly empire: "Resistance is futile." "You belong to us and we can do whatever we want to you." "This is just how things are now."

And yet Rev 12-13 bursts that bubble in such style. It teaches us to know that the devil's time is short. And it teaches us to laugh at the propaganda of the beast. His followers say "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?" and yet we know that the dragon is toothless in the end. He cannot win, and every beastly empire he sets up will rise and then fall. Nebuchadnezzar was humbled, Rome fell, the Kim family will perish, and the current obsessions with gender and enforced tolerance will pass. There is only one kingdom that lasts. But that news isn't designed simply to reassure us while we hunker down and ride out the storm. As we've seen, God's people are called and empowered to be witnesses, triumphing over the devil the same way Jesus did, clothed with his righteousness, testifying to the truth, safe under the Father's protection.

Blessed is the one who stays awake to that!

Questions for further thought and discussion

- 1. What do you think we lose if we don't pay attention to Revelation and its contribution to a theology of spiritual warfare?
- 2. How do you think Rev 12 should inform the way we teach the OT narratives it alludes to?
- 3. What other examples of Rev 13 style beasts and their propaganda can you think of?
- 4. How do we help believers to embrace this vision of "overcoming" by faithful witness (Rev 12:11), when it outwardly looks like we are simply "overcome" by evil (Rev 13:7)?

PRIMER something old

THOMAS BROOKS And <u>precious</u> <u>Remedies Against</u> <u>Satan's Devices</u> The candles in the medieval chapel flickered their light over a robed choir and clergy. As the service moved towards the celebration of baptism, the question rang out, "do you reject the devil, and all rebellion against God?" I watched my twenty-one year old niece, and heard her reply, "I reject them." This young student from a non-church background, conditioned to believe all of the secular orthodoxies of her student culture, was now uttering the surely unthinkable: there is a devil. How her secular friends must have shuddered with disdain.

This is the Christian confession, though: the devil is real, and from him and his power we need a deliverer. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." (1 John 3:8). To confess Christ as Saviour and Lord means to acknowledge his ultimate enemy. In general, our age thinks itself far too enlightened to believe in a personal power of evil; but as the modern church we need to check our convictions. Could it be that the keen sense of evil and of the worker of evil, which earlier ages of the church possessed, is just what we need to recover today? Jesus Christ himself believed in Satan and warned his followers against his power. He understood his own mission in terms of defeating the devil. His victory is ours, but so is his ongoing battle against the works of Satan. We need instructing about Satan, so that we can say with the Apostle Paul, "we are not unaware of his schemes" (2 Cor 2:11).

As Bible Christians, the 17th century Puritans believed in the reality of the devil. Of the sermons and books which survive from that period on the subject, none have proved as enduringly helpful as Thomas Brooks's *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices* (1652). The excerpt below brings out of the shadows the church's prowling enemy (1 Pet 5:8), and shines light on his ways, and on our safe steps as believers.

THOMAS BROOKS - CHARLES Spurgeon's Star Man

Of all the Puritans, Brooks is possibly the most accessible for modern readers. Charles Spurgeon was a great fan, and said of him, "Brooks scatters stars with both hands, with an eagle eye of faith as well as the eagle eye of imagination." His works, plainly written, and with a direct and encouraging tone, are published in six volumes by The Banner of Truth Trust, and keep to the main themes of the Christian life, with his most famous works dealing with topics such as prayer, suffering, and assurance.

An incomplete record survives of the life and ministry of Thomas Brooks (1608–1680). He was shaped in his Christian beliefs by an education at Christ's College, Cambridge. At one point in his writings, Brooks makes an allusion to having lived abroad as a young man, but by the end of the English Civil War he was ministering in London, and preached before Parliament in 1650. Along with over 2,000 other faithful Gospel ministers, Brooks suffered

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Charles Spurgeon, Smooth Stones Taken from Ancient Brooks (Sheldon & Co.: New York, 1860), iii.



ejection from the Church of England in 1662 after the restoration of the monarchy, but he remained in London, ministering at great personal risk. Brooks's loyalty to his people and faith in God meant that he refused to flee the Plague in 1665, and was active in serving those whose lives had been devastated by the Great Fire the following year. In the second half of his life, Brooks increasingly committed himself to a written ministry, and was very ably supported by his wife, Martha. Following her death, Brooks was blessed with another wife, Patience, in his final years.

For Brooks, it was essential that every Christian must be aware of Satan and of how to deal with his strategies. Brooks said that he wrote *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices* because he didn't know of any other book on the subject, and because he knew that we Christians are far too complacent about the devil, even though we have every reason to be on our guard against him. Knowing our enemy is part of our basic Christian duty: "Christ, the Scripture, your own hearts, and Satan's devices, are the four prime things that should be first and most studied and searched." Today, many evangelicals feel confident about the first two priorities. A fully biblical spirituality, Brooks challenges us, explores all four areas.

PRECIOUS REMEDIES

Precious Remedies is a sustained reflection on 2 Cor 2:11, sharing its aim that we not be unaware of Satan's schemes. Brooks briefly sets out his case for the reader's need to be aware of Satan and his strategies, and then explores them in four sections: Satan draws the soul to sin, keeps souls from pursuing grace, works hard to keep believers doubting and discouraged, and does his worst against all sorts of people in the world. The book is strong stuff, and not the obviously uplifting and reassuring fare which modern readers expect; but give the book some time, and you will discover that Brooks has brilliant insights into the human condition and the difficulties of the Christian life, and you'll quickly discover that *Precious Remedies* is rich in practical counsel.

Our excerpt comes from the section towards the end of the book, *Six propositions concerning Satan and his devices*.

Thomas Brooks, Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices (1652. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 15.

SIX PROPOSITIONS Concerning Satan And his devices **K**

Proposition (1). That though Satan has his devices to draw souls to sin, yet we must be careful that we do not lay all our temptations upon Satan, that we do not wrong the devil, and father that upon him that is to be fathered upon our own base hearts.

This is an incredibly perceptive section. Brooks recognises the activity of Satan, but insists that our own corrupt heart-desires will find their way to sin by themselves, devil or no devil (paragraph 1). When Satan does work, he can only do so by tempting us to sin; he has no actual power to lead us into it (paragraph 2). So the Christian who claims to believe in the devil has a special responsibility to resist him.

I think that oftentimes men charge that upon the devil that which is to be charged upon their own hearts. "The Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (Gen 3:13). Sin and shifting of sin, came into the world together. This is no small baseness of our hearts, that they will blame that naughtiness upon Satan. Man has an evil root within him; that were there no devil to tempt him, nor no wicked men in the world to entice him, yet that root of bitterness, that cursed sinful nature which is in him, would draw him to sin, though he knows beforehand that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). "For out of the heart come evil thoughts-murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matt 15:19). The whole frame of man is out of frame. The understanding is dark, the will cross, the memory slippery, the affections crooked, the conscience corrupted, the tongue poisoned, and the heart wholly evil, only evil, and continually evil. Should God chain up Satan, and give him no liberty to tempt or entice people to vanity or folly, yet they could not but sin against him, by reason of that cursed nature that is in them, that will still be provoking them to those sins that will provoke and stir up the anger of God against them (Jude 15, 16).

In other words, he is cunning.

Satan has only a *persuading* sleight, not an *enforcing* might. He may tempt us – but without ourselves he cannot conquer us; he may entice us – but without ourselves he cannot hurt us. Our hearts carry the greatest guilt in every sin. Satan can never undo a man without himself; but a man may easily undo himself without Satan. Satan can only present the golden cup but he has no power to force us to drink the poison that is in the cup; he can only present to us the glory of the world, he cannot force us to fall down and worship him, to enjoy the world; he can only spread his snares, he has no power to force us to walk in the midst of his snares. Therefore do the devil so much right, as not to excuse yourselves, by your accusing him, and laying the load upon him, that you should lay upon your own hearts.

The Roman statesman and philosopher (106-46 B.C.).

In other words, we provide all the fuel for sin. Gregory of Nazianzus (around A.D. 329-390) was an archbishop in Cappadocia (Modern-day Turkey) and a major theologian of the 4th century. We are no sooner born, than buried in a bog of wickedness (Cicero).

The fire is our wood, though it be the devil's flame (Gregory of Nazianzus).

So, can anyone ever say "the devil made me do it", in Brooks's opinion? Take a look at James 4:7: "resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Proposition (2). That Satan has a great hand and stroke in most sins. It was Satan who tempted our first parents to rebellion (Gen 3:1-5). It was Satan who provoked David to number the people (1 Chron 21:1). It was Satan who put Peter upon rebuking Christ; therefore says Christ, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matt 16:22-23). It was Satan who put Cain upon murdering of righteous Abel, therefore it is that he is called "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). It was Satan who put treason into the heart of Judas against Christ: "the evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus" (John 13:2). It was Satan who put Ananias upon lying; Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:3).

Brooks is thinking of 2 Sam 14:19.

As the hand of Joab was in the tale of the woman of Tekoa, so Satan's hand is usually in all the sins that men commit. Such is Satan's malice against God, and his envy against man, that he will have a hand one way or other in all the sins, though he knows that all the sins he provokes others to shall be charged upon him to his greater woe, and eternal torment.

Ambrose (around A.D. 340-397) was the archbishop of Milan. This passage comes from a letter he wrote in the year 396. Ambrose brings in the devil boasting against Christ and challenging Judas as his own: "He is not yours, Lord Jesus, he is mine; his thoughts beat for me; he eats with you—but is fed by me: he takes bread from you—but money from me; he drinks wine with you, and sells your blood to me." Such is his malice against Christ, and his wrath and rage against man, that he will take all advantages to draw men to that which may give him advantage to triumph over men's souls forever.

Satan wants to destroy God's children, and he will use any weakness to do so.

William Spurstowe (around 1605-1666) said that Satan tempts young men with sexual lust, middle-aged men with a desire for honour and greatness, and older men with greed and irritability.

If Satan were to tempt you today, what in your life stage would he use?

William Spurstowe, The Wiles of Satan (1666. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2004), 61.

Proposition (3). That Satan must have a double permission before he can do anything against us.

He must have permission from God, and permission from ourselves, before he can do anything against our happiness...

This is a stunning thought. Do we think of the devil as needing our permission? Brooks is right, surely. Follow his logic in the third paragraph below.

...He must have his permission from God, as you may see in the example of Job (Job 1:11, 12; 2:3-5). Though the devil had malice enough to destroy him, yet he had not so much as power to touch him, until God gave him permission.

They could not so much as enter into the swine without permission from Christ (Luke 8:32). Satan would gladly have combated with Peter—but this he could not do without leave. "Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat." (Luke 22:31). So Satan could never have overthrown Ahab and Saul—but by permission from God (1 Kings 22). Ah! what a cordial, what a comfort should this be to the saints—that their greatest, subtlest, and most vigilant enemy cannot hurt nor harm them, without permission from him who is their sweetest Saviour, their dearest husband, and their choicest friend.

And as Satan must have permission from God, so he must have permission from us. When he tempts, we must assent; when he makes offers, we must hearken; when he commands, we must obey, or else all his labour and temptations will be frustrated, and the evil that he tempts us to shall be put down only to his account. That is a remarkable passage in Acts 5:3 "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit?" He does not debate the matter with Satan; he does not say, "Satan, why have you filled Ananias's heart to make him lie to the Holy Spirit?" but he debates the case with Ananias; Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart with infidelity, hypocrisy, and obstinate audacity, to lie to the Holy Spirit? As if he had said, 'Satan could never have done this in you, which will now forever undo you, unless you

had given him permission." If, when a temptation comes, a man cries out, and says, "Ah, Lord! here is a temptation that would force me, that would deflower my soul, and I have no strength to withstand it! Oh! help! help! for your honour's sake, for your Son's sake, for your promise's sake!" it is a sign that Satan has not gained your consent – but committed a rape upon your souls, which he shall dearly pay for.

The picture here is of a man suffering something like rape from the devil as he is tempted ("deflower my soul"). Brooks assures us that our desperate cry to God under fierce trial is a sign that we do not consent to sin or the devil's temptations, for which he is responsible and will be punished.

Proposition (4). That no weapons but spiritual weapons will be useful and serviceable to the soul in fighting and combating with the devil.

This the apostle shows: "Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Eph 6:13). So the same apostle tells you, "the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Cor 10:4). You have not to do with a weak – but with a mighty enemy, and therefore you had need to look to it, that your weapons are mighty – which they cannot be, unless they are spiritual. Carnal weapons have no power in them towards the making of a conquest upon Satan. It was not David's sling nor stone that gave him the honour and advantage of setting his feet upon Goliath—but his faith in the name of the Lord Almighty. "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (1 Sam 17:45).

He who fights against Satan, in the strength of his own resolutions, constitution or education, will certainly fly and fall before him. Satan will be too hard for such a soul, and lead him captive at his pleasure...

We would do well to reflect on the weapons we think will beat Satan. Brooks warns us that none of our will-power, wise behaviour or even our understanding of our temptation will conquer him. We need a full-orbed obedience to God's word, and total trust in Christ in every situation.

...The only way to stand, conquer, and triumph, is still to plead, "It is written," as Christ did (Matt 4:10). There is no sword but the two-edged sword of the Spirit, that will be found to be metal of proof when a soul comes to engage against Satan; therefore, when you are tempted to impurity, plead, 'It is written, "be holy, as I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16); and, "Let us cleanse ourselves

from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord" (2 Cor 7:1). If he tempts you to distrust God's providence and fatherly care of you, plead, 'It is written, "Those who fear the Lord shall lack no good thing." (Psalm 34:9).

We read of many that, out of fortitude, could subdue nature – but were at a loss when they came to deal with a corruption or a temptation. Heraclitus's motto was, 'A Deo victoria!' *It is God that gives victory*; and that should be every Christian's motto.

It is written, "the Lord bestows favour and honour; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless" (Psalm 84:11).

If he tempts you to fear that you shall faint, and fall, and never be able to run to the end of the race that is set before you, plead, it is written, "the righteous will hold to their ways, and those with clean hands will grow stronger" (Job 17:9).

It is written, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me" (Jer 32:40).

It is written, "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isa 40:31).

If Satan tempts you to think that because your sun for the present is set in a cloud, that therefore it will rise no more, and that the face of God will shine upon you no more; that your best days are now at an end, and that you must spend all your time in sorrow and sighing; plead, It is written, "you will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (Mic 7:19).

In fact, this motto belongs to one Heraclius, the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire from A.D. 610-641.

It seems Brooks has got Heraclius mixed up with Heraclitus – such an easy mistake to make!

Heraclitus (around 535-475 B.C.) was the ancient Greek philosopher who captured the changeableness of all things with the memorable phrase that "you never step in the same river twice."

Of all of his devilish contrivances, isn't this Satan's most frequent ploy – to suggest that God is absent or against us, because life is tough? Look out for Brooks's use of Ephesians 6:17 below.

It is written, "'In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,' says the Lord your Redeemer" (Isa 54:8).

It is written, "'Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,' says the Lord, who has compassion on you." (Isa 54:10)

It is written, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no

compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me" (Isa 49:15-16).

If ever you would be too hard for Satan, and after all his assaults, have your bow abide in strength, then take to yourself the Word of God, which is the two-edged sword of the Spirit, and "the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Eph 6:17). It is not spitting at Satan's name, nor crossing yourselves, nor leaning to your own resolutions, that will get you the victory.

This comes in Luther's Galatians commentary:

"I remember how Doctor Staupitz used to say to me: 'I have promised God a thousand times that I would become a better man, but I never kept my promise. From now on I am not going to make any more vows. Experience has taught me that I cannot keep them. Unless God is merciful to me for Christ's sake and grants unto me a blessed departure, I shall not be able to stand before Him.'" Luther comments: "His was a God-pleasing despair."

Here Brooks is combining Heb

4:12 and Eph 6:17.

Luther reports of Johann von Staupitz, a German minister, that he acknowledged himself, that before he came to understand aright the free and powerful grace of God, he vowed and resolved a hundred times against some particular sin, and never could get power over it. At last he saw the reason to be his trusting to his own resolution. Therefore be skilful in the word of righteousness, and in the actings of faith upon Christ and his victory, and that crown of glory which is set before you, and Satan will certainly "flee from you" (James 4:7).

Proposition (5). That we may read much of Satan's nature and disposition by the diverse names and epithets that are given him in the Scripture.

Sometimes he is called *Behemoth*, whereby the greatness and brutishness of the devil is figured (Job 40:15). Those evil spirits are sometimes called accusers, for their calumnies and slanders; and evil ones, for their malice.

Satan is *Adversarius*, an adversary, that troubles and molests (1 Pet. 5:8). *Abaddon* is a destroyer (Rev. 9:11). They are *tempters*, for their suggestion; *lions*, for their devouring; *dragons*, for their cruelty; and *serpents*, for their subtlety. As his names are, so is he; as face answers to face, so do Satan's names answer to his nature. He has the worst names and the worst nature of all created creatures.

Jeremiah Burroughs develops a similar catalogue of the devil's names, but also ends with a word of hope:

Jeremiah Burroughs, Thomas Hall, Edward Reynolds, An Exposition of the Prophecy of Hosea (1643. Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1863), 618. "Satan has three titles given him in Scripture, setting forth his malignity against the Church of God: a dragon, to denote his malice (Rev 12:3); a serpent, to denote his subtlety (Gen 3:1); and a lion, to donate his strength (1 Peter 5:8). But none of these can stand before prayer."

Now, here comes the climax; and such a beautiful passage from Brooks to finish:

Behemoth and Leviathan are often associated with the devil because they are beasts of land and sea (cf. Rev 13); Leviathan especially so, since it is characterised by pride (Job 41:34), and as a serpent/ dragon (Isa 27:1).

Proposition (6). That God will shortly tread down Satan under the saints' feet.

Christ, our champion, has already won the field, and will shortly set our feet upon the necks of our spiritual enemies. Satan is a foiled adversary. Christ has led him captive, and triumphed over him upon the cross. Christ has already overcome him, and put weapons into your hands, that you may overcome him also, and set your feet upon his neck. Though Satan be a roaring lion, yet Christ, who is the lion of the tribe of Judah, will make Satan fly and fall before you. Let Satan do his worst, yet you shall have the honour and the happiness to triumph over him. Cheer up, you precious sons of Zion, for the certainty and sweetness of victory will abundantly recompense you for all the pains you have taken in making resistance against Satan's temptations. The broken horns of Satan shall be trumpets of our triumph and the coronets of our joy. "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Romans 16:20.

Questions for further thought and discussion

1. What did you make of Brooks's claim that "Christ, the Scripture, your own hearts, and Satan's devices, are the four prime things that should be first and most studied and searched"?

2. How important is it to know that Satan needs "double permission before he can do anything against us"? Why?

3. "It is not spitting at Satan's name, nor crossing yourselves, nor leaning to your own resolutions, that will get you the victory." So, what will, according to Brooks?

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Thinking about Spiritual Warfare with David Powlison's *Safe & Sound*



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Imagine a conversation over coffee one Sunday morning and your friend shyly admits: "I don't know what to do, my anger is out of control and I'm hurting the people around me." Or a quiet chat around the kitchen table that leads to a tearful confession, "I hate myself for doing it, but I use porn every week." Maybe think of a question in your small group, "When I was younger, before I became a Christian, I was involved in tarot cards and Ouija boards – what does God think about that now?" Or even a briefing for a mission trip: "Be aware that witchcraft is prevalent in the area in which you will be based." They're all conversations that could happen in any church, but the way the discussion proceeds might vary widely.

For some, comfort is going to be the first port of call. After all, these are each indicators that people are struggling with the pain of this fallen world. For others, doctrine is clearly the way – surely the people involved need to understand God's justice, holiness, supremacy and even jealousy. Maybe a call to repentance would be your instinct? Or the opportunity to start with prayer? Each can have a place in a biblically-informed response.

BAIT

But let me ask you to reflect for a moment: how quickly, in your church, would the conversation turn to "spiritual warfare"? Would you see the evil one's work in all these scenarios? Some of them? None of them?

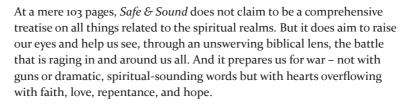
Can you see the war!

If you were to survey churches across the globe, you would find congregations and church leaders who would treat all the above as examples of sin or suffering with roots in the flesh and the idols of the heart. You would find others who, without hesitation, would default to "binding spirits," "casting out demons," and "storming territory in Jesus' victorious name." And there's plenty of ground in between. Of course, personal theology doesn't always fit into nice neat categories – some people adopt elements of different approaches – and there's a spectrum of belief in our 21st century world.

In light of that, it might seem obvious to contend that it's important to dig deep into Scripture and see what God has to say on the matter. Clearly, we need to access faithful, thoughtful contemporary material that enables us all to avoid the dual trap that C.S. Lewis notes in his compelling work, *The Screwtape Letters*:

The Screwtape Letters (New York: Macmillan, 1942), ix. 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 materialist or a magician with the same delight.

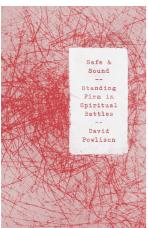
But here there can be a problem – we are, arguably, short of good books on spiritual warfare in the Reformed, evangelical fold. Enter David Powlison's, *Safe & Sound*.



Where does it begin? With the phrase, 'spiritual warfare' itself. Since that term never appears in the Bible, it's important to be clear what is meant. Christians have long thought (on the basis of Ephesians 2:1-3 and 1 John 2:15-16) that we have a three-fold enemy: the world, the flesh, and the devil. But what kind of war is it? And how do we fight?

What is spiritual wanfare?

Powlison starts by introducing us to four key elements to fuel our understanding:



- "Spiritual warfare is a metaphor for standing on the Lord's side in the epic struggle between the Lord and his enemies...
- Spiritual warfare is a moral struggle...
- Spiritual warfare is a synonym for the struggles of the Christian life...
- Spiritual warfare is a battle for lordship..." (13-14).

In other words, the term is an acknowledgement that there is both light and dark in this world and whilst, as Christians, we are children of the light (Eph 5:8), there is an ever-present pull back to the darkness. That single fact impacts everything – it's a struggle to believe what is true about God, what is true about ourselves, and it's a struggle to act in ways that honour Christ (James 3:13-4:12). In any given situation we have to battle to live out our identity as children of the light rather than giving in to the father of lies and turning to darker ways.

One striking aspect of such a description is that it makes the experience of spiritual warfare entirely normal. It is not a specialised arena of the Christian life, it's the context for every believer's walk. If that sounds a little mundane, we should not be too surprised. Genesis 3 is the most awful, rebellion-starting, death-inducing crisis that humanity has everknown. It's the low point of eternity. What tactic did Satan use to bring such carnage into the world? He twisted God's word and encouraged Adam and Eve to eat some fruit! No sign of the weird manifestations of evil that inhabit the horror movie genre – a simple doubt, a nudge to indulge and everything went terribly wrong.

How do we fight!

The common nature of the battle must not lull us into a false sense of security, however. This war is no walk in the park. So, what perspectives do we need to adopt?

Powlison helps us avoid the dual temptations of fear and indifference, and, in doing so, takes us to the armour of God in Ephesians 6. Having previously seen in Paul's letter that the spiritual forces of evil are real (Eph 1:21; 3:10) but God is immeasurably more powerful (Eph 1:19), he gives us a whirlwind tour of the warzone, helping us to navigate away from common myths.

The first corrective is to lead readers away from believing that they are in the battle alone. Given the Ephesian emphasis on the power of the Lord, we do well to remember that it is, first and foremost, the Lord who fights. And, in the context of Paul's teaching on the body of Christ, it is wise to remove any hint of "little individuals running around in armour" (21) from All unmarked page references refer to *Safe & Sound*.

our minds. Christians stand and fight together; spiritual warfare has an intensely communal call.

Powlison, similarly, reminds us that "armour" (in the original language) carried connotations less of protective gear and more of "complete weaponry" (22). God gives all the tools needed to fight with confidence and to do so on the front foot. We are not weak followers of Christ desperately trying to hold back evil but bold soldiers following a victorious King on a mission to bring the light to dark places.

In short, "Spiritual warfare means finding strength to live a life of faith, humility, love, goodness, courage, and wisdom. It means facing all the darkly evil forces that mightily oppose such things. It means strength for us to live our lives with the same merciful purposes as Christ. It means strength to forgive others as God in Christ forgave us. It means strength for us to walk in love as he loved us and gave himself for us. This is our walk and warfare" (24).

So, what is this armour we are called to don? Rather than pulling us towards 1st century – or even contemporary – imagery of soldiers prepared for war, Powlison draws our gaze back to the Old Testament roots of Ephesians 6. Why are we called to put on a belt, a breastplate, shoes and more? Because they are the clothes of Messianic hope:

the belt of truth (6:14)	Isa 11:5 – Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash round his waist.
the breastplate of righteousness (6:14)	Isa 59:17 – He put on righteousness as his breastplate
feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace (6:15)	Isa 52:7 – How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'
the shield of faith (6:16)	Ps 18:1-2 – I love you, LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
the helmet of salvation (6:17)	Isa 59:17 – He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.
the sword of the Spirit (6:17)	Isa 49:2 – He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.

What a Christ-centred wardrobe that is! In fact, every article of clothing is a reference to Christ himself. We're not putting on techniques or tactics, we are called to put on him. To be rooted in and dependent on his truth, righteousness, peace, safety, salvation, and words. And to express that dependence by "praying at all times in the Spirit" (6:18) for the good of those we love.

And with those encouraging words we reach the end of the first section of the book, where Powlison has described the nature of spiritual warfare in broad terms. The next section works through models of spiritual warfare: the normal battles of the Christian life, and then more difficult situations like sickness, demonic behaviour, and death.

/raining for battle

Being given instructions on how to fight is all well and good but, when it comes to learning spiritual warfare, there's no substitute for seeing a soldier in action. So, it is to examples of how to fight well that Powlison now turns.

Paul does not just describe the armour of God in the pages of his letter, he shows what it means to wear the armour well:

As we read this letter, we are witnesses to how Paul also continually speaks to the human heart. He wears the belt, speaking truth in love with constructive, timely and gracegiving words. He wears the breastplate of righteousness, a living demonstration of a man redeemed by grace and living faithfully as God's workmanship. His feet walk in the gospel of peace, reconciling people with God and onceestranged peoples with each other. Paul takes up the shield of faith, audibly seeking the God of power and strength. He wears the helmet of salvation: his message, his ministry, his incandescent awareness of Jesus our Savior. And, of course, Paul is taking up the Word of God in the power of the Spirit. Ephesians is the Word of God and it is brimming with the Spirit's presence! And throughout Ephesians, Paul continually cites and applies other Scriptures in ways that are both faithful and fresh.

Paul's prayers similarly give a glimpse of what it means to pray in the Spirit. The fact he prays is instructive in itself – Paul was conscious that forces bigger than him were at work and dependence on Christ is the only way to see victory. How he prays throughout his letters is similarly intriguing, though. There is real opposition and pain but Satan is never addressed, no special powers are sought or techniques employed, "Paul's core intercession is very simple: 'May God strengthen you to know him'" (44).

Enemy tactics in times of sin

In the Reformed, evangelical world our tendency can sometimes be to miss the work of the devil in our daily struggles. The influence of the world is often clear in our minds – the sinfulness of our flesh a constant reality – but Satan gets pushed out of sight.

Powlison reminds us next that the whole world is in the power of the Evil One (1 John 5:19) – that despicable rival to God who wants nothing more than to separate us from the One who loves us best. Satan wants us to be in his family and bear his likeness. And in *Safe & Sound* we find three common areas where we might be able to see his handiwork in action:

- **ANGER:** Satan is an accuser and a liar. When anger leads us to blame others, to avoid personal responsibility and to make wild statements about the intention of others, we reflect his darkness rather than God's light. Each time we falsely say, "You always do that" or "It's all your fault" we are people who have seen Satan's ways and run towards him.
- FEAR: Satan's lies don't only come out in anger, sometimes they torment us in times of stress. How often have we found ourselves thinking, "God's not loving – clearly he's not got my best interests at heart – he's withholding something good – time to take things into my own hands"? They were some of the falsehoods that held sway in Gen 3 when humans first listened to Satan's call to follow him, and today still we find it easy to turn our ear to his whispers of destruction and despair.
- **ESCAPISM:** Here Satan taunts us with false hope: "here's where you'll find relief this is what you really need." But his invitation to find comfort in alcohol, pornography, or binge-watching box sets is hollow. There is no respite in his arms.

As these familiar patterns remind, "we choose to act like Satan as the judge and accuser. We listen to his false prophecies about ourselves and our future and forget to turn to the living God for truth" (49). But it doesn't have to be this way. We can identify his lies, see them for the fake promises that they are, combat falsehood with truth by putting on his word and, dependent on him in prayer, we can make different choices: to be humble, to trust, to be satisfied in him.

Enemy tactics in times of suffering

Illness may be another context where the battle is less easy to see. We know ill-health is hard, and we would certainly not want to go down the route of suggesting that sickness comes as a result of a specific sin in an individual's life, but there are still choices to be made and Satan is invested in helping us make choices that are wrong. As we wrestle with symptoms and side-effects, are we going to run towards our heavenly Father or run away? Are we going to make things harder by grumbling or respond in trust? Are we going to express faithless stoicism or humble dependence on the Shepherd who can lead us through?

Here, Powlison introduces us to Psalm 28 – a song that helps us walk through the battle well. He emphasises the Psalm offers us "a template, not a timetable" (58) – God does not expect us to have finished fighting by the time we reach the final verse – but it is useful structure within which to engage.

It starts with a cry for help (v1-2) and his words can act as an encouragement to us too. We need to give voice to our vulnerability and need. Of course, God knows already but he still loves it when we turn to him. In verses 3-5, the Psalmist names and describes his enemies. Our enemies will, of course, be different to David's but the process of clarifying who and what we are fighting against is a useful step. Thirdly, David moves to gratitude and praise (v6-7) – he reminds himself who God is and how he should relate to him. We may not feel like praising, but reminding ourselves that he is worthy of praise can lift our eyes. We may not find trust easy, but knowing that he is safe to trust can be a helpful spur. Finally, David intercedes for others (v8-9). He looks beyond his own needs and seeks the good of those around him. All four steps are useful in helping us choose light not darkness, hope not despair.

But not all contexts are so "normal" that we're tempted to neglect the reality of spiritual warfare. There are other cases where we might be tempted to think that extreme situations call for more extreme measures.

Where might we feel the battle is too hard

It is a sad but inescapable fact that many in our world have been impacted by direct involvement in the occult. For some, their involvement will have been limited to fleeting experimentation – others will have been sucked into years of dark ceremonies and subjected to extreme abuse and fear.

Many of us wonder if this more direct, or maybe deliberate, engagement with the kingdom of darkness opens the way for a different kind of spiritual warfare. Interestingly, in Scripture we find no real evidence that such thinking is true.

Powlison takes us to the story of Manasseh in 1 Kings 21. Far from a model king, leading the nation in the ways of the Lord, Manasseh engaged in the despicable practices of the nations (2 Kings 21:2) and that included everything from fortune-telling and mediums, through idol-worship to child sacrifice. If anyone was deliberately pursuing darkness, it was him! So, is this where we find a call to exorcism or more? No. He is warned by prophets, humbled through an invading army, asks for mercy, is restored and lived on in faith.

"Notice the pattern: (1) deep immersion in vile practices; (2) pointed ministry of the word; (3) negative consequences for intransigence; (4) deeply repentant faith; (5) restoration and a fruitful life. The degree of spiritual perversity in his sin did not change either the mode of ministry or the dynamics of change" (62). Similarly, Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8) was called to repentance not exorcism. The Bible does not encourage us to believe that demonic influence removes all human agency or accountability. Consistently, in Scripture, when someone has made a moral choice to pursue darkness, the way to fight is to encourage them to turn around and return to the light and we do them a disservice to employ any other techniques, however compellingly others may commend them.

It is, however, an inescapable fact that Jesus *did* engage in exorcisms. It's no surprise that Satan was particularly active at the point in history when the Son of God was walking the earth and Jesus responded to that by helping the people Satan was afflicting. He healed them, with a word, and in doing so showed them a glimpse of who he is and what he had come to do. But there is no hint of him seeking out demons or focusing on the demonic – rather he was moved by the suffering of the person in front of him and brought them healing in a not dissimilar manner to the way he addressed sickness.

Does that mean that we shouldn't emulate Jesus when it comes to deliverance? Well, there is certainly much we can imitate when it comes to meeting people suffering from the effects of evil and showing them compassion and hope but, there are many ways in which our ministry will be different to Jesus'. Scripture certainly never encourages us to control the weather with a word, to cater church events through the multiplication of bread or to pay taxes by finding our money in the mouth of a fish – all of which we see in Jesus' ministry. Being the Son of God, he did some things that show us who he is but these things are not meant to be imitated. We can never speak with our own authority, as Jesus can, ours is always a derived authority (91) and therefore we should expect to engage in healing ministry (whether that's sickness or evil) in ways that are deeply different to him.

What about verses like John 14:12 where Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father"? Powlison reminds us that, after this verse, "Jesus then speaks in great detail about prayer, love, and the Holy Spirit. We have received ways of living through the Spirit's power that are more powerful, if sometimes less dramatic, than the "command-control mode." When Jesus was on earth, God's glory depended on his immediate authoritative presence. But we are given a mode that can reach throughout the world. We are to raise all who believe in Christ through the preaching of his gospel" (95).

Does this continue to hold true when the people we are walking alongside are "manifesting" strange and disturbing behaviours? It is undeniable that, in some pastoral situations, we may see things that we cannot easily explain – sometimes the dark forces may well be acting in unusually influential ways – but rather than departing from the biblical pattern set out, Powlison encourages us to be people who "normalise the abnormal" and "humanise the bizarre." We are to "deal with bizarre evil the way the Bible tells us to deal with evil of any sort; clear scriptural truth; bold, faithexpressing prayers that plead the mercies and power of Christ; heartfelt worship; meaningful fellowship" (71).

Indeed there are great dangers in misdiagnosing or labelling things as demonic. When that path is taken, the temptation is to focus on the evil and not the person in front of us, we become distracted from pointing them to Jesus and that plays right into the evil one's hands.

Powlison ends his book with a focus on the last battle: death. Satan's ultimate goal is always to kill and destroy and, given this chapter was written as the author was wrestling with the final months of pancreatic cancer, his words have particular poignancy here. Reflecting on Psalm 23, he reminds us that even in our final weeks, the battle rages on. "When we face death, we have the same question before us as we have in every area of life: Who will be our shepherd?" (79). We know that Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection have destroyed the power of death but will we live as if that is true as our bodies fail?

Take up and fight

Returning then to our scenarios at the start, *Safe & Sound* is a useful reminder that the evil one is active in all four of the situations sketched out. He wants the anger to continue so that relationships and hope can be eroded; he revels in the dehumanising chaos that pornography wreaks; he longs for Christians to have their gaze drawn back to their old self and for guilt to overwhelm; and he enjoys Christians feeling scared as they go into unfamiliar ground. He will use everything in his power to get us either to ignore him or be in awe of him in each of those contexts so that we are distracted from the fight.

The term "command-control mode" is Powlison's way of describing Jesus' power to say something (command) and make it happen (control). An example of this would be him calming a storm with the words "be still" (Mark 4). Fighting, however, is what we are called to do. And maybe the easiest way to orientate ourselves for the fight is to draw on Powlison's four diagnostic questions:

- Who is fathering you?
- Whose words are catching your ear?
- Whose desires are you following?
- Who do you say I am? (42)

What would that look like in practice?

Let's take our angry person. How could some conversation on spiritual warfare begin to help them in their struggles and their sin? We can begin by acknowledging that the world is full of wrong things that hurt us -Satan is active and it's no surprise we struggle with the outworkings of his plans to destroy. We could look at examples of how Satan uses anger to his advantage (maybe Cain in Genesis 4, Saul in 1 Samuel 20 or the prophet in Jonah 4). We can ask our friend in what ways they see those same tendencies in their life - in what ways are they acting more like Satan than God when they lose control? And we can help them tease out the specific ways in which they are listening to Satan's lies which tempt them to "defend their corner", "get one over", "make others pay." Helping them to see how they are listening to and indulging words of darkness and death will not be a comfortable path (and certainly it needs to be one walked with gentleness and humility), but it illuminates the battle going on around them. Of course, there may be other factors at play too (we don't want to disregard the real pain that provocation brings or the challenges of self-control) but identifying and seeing the horror of the spiritual war is both necessary in bringing a sobering humility and liberating in the way it brings possibilities of change.

Now that the person knows their enemy, they can fight! With their brothers and sisters supporting them every step of the way, they can come back to the Lord in repentance, they can search Scripture and listen to what God says to the angry and hurt. We can show them words of comfort, words of reorientation, words of hope. We can help them dwell deeply in Jesus' response to injustice – consider well what it meant for Paul to be content when so much in his life seemed to be falling apart. They can ask the Spirit to help them desire to honour God, to pursue peace and the good of others, they can acknowledge God's sovereignty over the things that they are finding hard. And, in prayerful dependence on the Lord, they can fight – fight for love, fight for peace, fight for a life that glorifies God, confident the Spirit is equipping every step of the way.

Such things are not the whole of a pastoral response (for example, we will also want to look at the person's past and see how the hurts of former years have left them sensitive to criticism now, and we'll want to look at practical anger-management techniques or ways of reducing workload or stress) but they are rightly a component. Pursuing such paths helps us – and those

around us – to lift our eyes to see the spiritual realities swirling around the earthly experience of suffering and sin.

And we can be confident that those diagnostic questions and the avenues of discussion which they open up are useful even when conversation of explicit occult involvement rears its head. No sin is too big that crosscentred repentance is not enough; no lies of the evil one so intense that they cannot be gradually eroded by the careful, loving application of biblical truth; and no life so wayward that it cannot be restored by following the Shepherd to the glories of eternal life.

Let's not be reluctant or over-zealously unwise, instead in prayerful confidence: "Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" and keep fighting to the glory of God.

Eph 6:11

Questions for further thought and discussion

- 1. How would you respond to someone who argued this account of spiritual warfare is just too mundane? That it can't be as simple as making sure we believe and share the gospel with each other?
- 2. Anger, fear, and escapism? What, specifically, do these tactics and temptations look like during a Covid-19 outbreak?
- 3. It might sound a bit strange to us, but why is "who is fathering you?" a significant pastoral question?
- 4. Aside from Psalm 28, what other passages of Scripture could you turn to with people who experience suffering and the temptations that come with it? Who could you share that with this week?

"The devil fears the word of God. He can't bite it; it breaks his teeth."

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Constitutes The Line of the second se

For our final article we have conjured up a roundtable chat with our contributors. The issue of spiritual warfare generates lots of tricky questions. When we put out a call for questions on social media, these were some of the big ones. If you've got any more, do reach out to us (via the medium of Twitter or Facebook) and we can keep the conversation alive...

Why did God create Satan?

Lewis Allen: Firstly, we need to be clear that it was God himself who created Satan. The world is not at the mercy of two equal but opposing forces, God and the devil, but is ruled by an all-wise, powerful, and loving God. What Satan does, he does with very limited power, and as an already defeated foe, destined one day to burn (Rev 20:10).

So, why was he created, then? The devil is an angel, created as we all are with a responsibility to choose to obey God. Satan, as with all of God's creatures, was created for God's glory, to serve God's purposes. God was never the author of his (or any) sin. Satan's prideful decision to disobey led to his fall (Jude 6). He now rages under his sentence of final destruction (Rev 12:12).

Ultimately, the creation of Satan, and the resulting consequences of his rebellion,

were in order to fulfil the purposes of God. That's right. God, in his inscrutable wisdom, willed a world which would be first devastated by sin and then redeemed by his Son. His purposes of salvation in Christ were never 'Plan B', after the failure of a sin-free universe – the 'Plan A' which got derailed. Satan was created in order that the majesty of Jesus might be declared to all creation, as its Redeemer and Lord. However much we may struggle with this, in the chaos and wretchedness of sin, if we are to honour God's power and goodness, we need to capture this perspective.

As we look at this and all other mysteries, we must say with Jesus, "even so, Father, for this was your good pleasure" (Matt 11:26). And we remember that the one who created Satan has done so that he might live for a moment, and then die. The church, by contrast, like her Lord, is destined to live in glory forever. Do we have guardian angels?

David Shaw: It's helpful to make some distinctions here. Do angels act as guardians? Yes. Does every individual have an angel assigned to them? I doubt it, but it's hard to be sure.

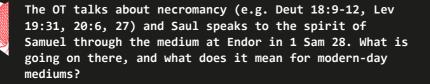
When Satan tempts Jesus to throw himself off the temple in Matt 4:5-7, he quotes Psalm 91 ("He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone") and he's not wrong about the role of angels. They are "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Heb 1:14), and so there's no automatic reason to doubt testimonies of the remarkable ways in which God has preserved the lives or witness of believers through agents that are likely to be angels.

From very early in the church's life, though, Christians began to speak of angels assigned to individuals, perhaps even two: one good and one evil. The text most often quoted is Matt 18:10, where Jesus says "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." This verse stops short of proving that angels are assigned to individuals, but does emphasise the protective and representative function of angels.

Two dangers lurk here: one is to speculate beyond what we can know and get caught up in unhelpful controversies (1 Tim 1:4), the other is to find comfort in the ministry of angels divorced from Christ. Hebrews 1 is emphatic about the superiority of Christ to angels; it would be tragic if we looked to them and not to him.

The Shepherd of Hermas (a late 2nd century Christian work) states that "There are two angels with a man, one of righteousness and one of wickedness." Likewise John Chrysostom (AD 349-407) in his Third Homily on Colossians: "If then we have angels, let us be sober, as though we were in the presence of tutors; for there is a demon present also." Martin Luther taught the same idea in his sermon 'On the Angels.'

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David Shaw: Saul's visit to the medium is clearly designed to highlight his tragic decline as a king: he has been rejected by Yahweh and is doing what the law forbids, seeking guidance where he ought not to in what is a climactic act of sin (see 1 Chron 10:13). Thus the tragic end of Saul and the contrast with David is the key idea in 1 Sam 28. For our purposes, the passage doesn't provide many answers to our questions: is this really the spirit of Samuel or some other kind of vision? By whose power is he raised: the medium's? Or God's? Was the medium able to do this kind of thing ordinarily?

It seems to me that consulting the dead is not forbidden because it doesn't work but because it is seeking guidance and instruction from someone other than God (see Isa 8:19-20). Undoubtedly, then and now, there are a range of things happening. Many so-called mediums will simply be frauds; in other cases it's likely that there is demonic activity, inciting reliance on mediums and the fear of the dead. Perhaps that was the case for the medium in 1 Sam 28 in her usual activities, although the appearance of Samuel seems to be a work of God unlikely to be repeated.

If we ask why people seek contact with the dead there are probably four major motives: (i) reverence for ancestors (ii) seeking guidance, (iii) fear of the dead, and (iv) a desire to reach out to lost loved ones and overcome the separation their death has caused. In each case we need to show people how the gospel meets those needs: our eternal Father speaks and guides, he has placed his Son over every other power and he can keep us safe, and in his Son he has defeated death and brought us hope. How does the spiritual realm relate to cross-cultural evangelism?

Keith Ferdinando: Those taking the gospel into any culture, including their own, encounter the hostility of Satan and the world. If they are pioneers, taking the gospel into a culture for the first time, they might well expect that hostility to be more intense. They are proclaiming "liberty to the captives" (Isa 61:1), to people long deceived by Satan's lies, and he fights to keep them enslaved. So Paul, as he entered towns and cities in which there was no gospel witness, knew that he faced opposition and persecution. He knew also, however, that the real struggle was not with human adversaries, but that he wrestled "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). This is why the Lord Jesus Christ assures his missionary people that he possesses all authority not only on earth but also in heaven, and that, clothed in that authority, he will be with them as they go to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20).

This is also referred to as animism, although the term has fallen out of use due to its supposedly derogatory tone. Among the lies with which Satan deceives the nations, many peoples across the world follow what are often called primal religions (including the 'folk' religious forms of the great world religions). Among much else, this means that they have a lively sense of the presence and the often threatening and malign activity of unseen powers among them. Many believe ancestors watch over their living descendants, revealing themselves to them in dreams, and blessing but also afflicting them; or in spirits which might attack and possess, pursuing ongoing control over their victims; or in sorcery, witchcraft and the evil eye, bringing fear, suspicion, relational

breakdown and violence. A view widely and deeply held in many such contexts is that misfortune always has a personal cause; there is always someone – an ancestor, spirit, witch or sorcerer – behind drought, crop failure, infertility, illness, accident, and death.

Adherents of primal and folk religion need of course to hear that Christ has secured forgiveness and peace with God for all who believe in him. But they need also to know that affliction and pain are the outflow of human fallenness and sin, and not the invariable result of a particular personal agency, including that of invisible beings and powers. And they must especially hear that, in dying and rising, Christ defeated all "the powers and authorities" (Col 2:15); that he is now seated in glory far above them, with "all things under his feet" (Eph 1:21-22); and that his people are raised and seated with him (Eph 2:6). Failure to communicate these dimensions of the gospel effectively means that primal background believers may quickly revert to traditional remedies whenever they encounter serious affliction.

Those who take the gospel into such contexts, as into any other, must take care to put on the full armour of God. Satan's 'schemes' and 'fiery darts' may include spiritual phenomena calculated to frighten or discourage, as was Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor 12:7-10) or his encounter with the sorcerer, Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6-12). In such contexts prayer, the word of God, and faith in the victory of Christ over every enemy are vital, as indeed they are in every context. Is the Reformation to blame for our disenchanted, naturalistic outlook?

Editor's note: 'Disenchantment' is a real buzz-word in lots of social and historical debates today. Many scholars speak about how Enlightenment rationalism and its rejection of religion has 'disenchanted' the world by stripping it of magic or mystery. The new age movement, and Romanticism before it, have been reactions to that. For others, as this question reflects, it is the Protestant Reformation that strips away a sense of magic and mystery.

Kirsten Birkett: The first thing to query is whether 'blame' is the right word for the disenchantment of nature. It is normal these days to see any such disenchantment as a bad thing. Today, when people want to describe something as delightful – a show, a spectacle – they might use words such as 'magical', 'enchanting'. But those who actually live under the real possibility of magical enchantment generally live in fear of dark forces, and can be enslaved to the magical means they use to fight such forces.

The Reformation did do a lot to 'disenchant' nature - in a good way. It taught that Christ has conquered evil. It taught a biblical view of the world, as created by God; it also taught a biblical way of 'accessing' God and the spiritual world. That is, the Reformers taught that God's grace is not a force to be called down through ritual and ceremony. Prayer is not a matter of chanting the right formulae. The consecrated elements of the Lord's Supper are not magical substances to be used for healing, or to make the crops grow. Of course there were medieval people who understood this, and decried the superstitious popular beliefs to the contrary; but nonetheless, Protestant theology was much better able to back up its teaching about the natural world.

This is a right disenchantment of nature, part of what helped a godly investigation of nature. Human nature being what it is, however, it was not long before a right and biblical teaching on nature was to become idolatry. William Perkins, the Puritan preacher, for instance, warned his contemporaries who were becoming enthusiastic about the new possibilities of science: yes, it is good to study God's stars, he said, but beware that you don't forget the Creator who made them. His warning was timely and sadly insightful. Full-on naturalism was eventually to follow a few centuries later, encouraged by intense propaganda campaigns by those who wanted naturalistic science without a creator God.

What we have now is not a right view of nature as God's creation, but a view of it as autonomous and self-creating. Nature is therefore taken as either a fairly inert, value-free entity to be used however humans see fit; or something with its own mystical life-force, to be worshipped. Either option is idolatrous and false. Instead, we affirm that nature is wonderful because God created it wonderful, and he is to be thanked and acknowledged for it.

See the work of Peter Harrison (e.g. in The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) for other ways in which the Protestant worldview contributed to the rise of science.

How should we view the massive popularity of Halloween in the West? A threat or an opportunity?

Lewis Allen: We all know that Halloween is an opportunity for the church to evangelise, and many use it bravely and skilfully in order to preach the gospel. A little honest realism about the modern Halloween obsession, though, reminds us that it's just another sign of a culture marching away from its Christian heritage and casting off any interest in the Christian faith.

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Halloween today is very little about ghosts, and everything about greed and selfexpression – sweets and dressing up for the kids, alcohol and dressing-up for the adults. Of course, let's celebrate and preach the Light of the World at Halloween, but enthusiasm for Halloween in society doesn't speak of a deep quest for spiritual reality in a secular world. It probably signals the opposite, in fact.

David Shaw: The West is a big place. As Lewis says, for many it is simply a festival of consumerism, and as such the most counter-cultural thing Christians could do at Halloween is to be generous or self-sacrificial instead of gluttonous. In other settings, it can be effective to highlight the Christian tradition of celebrating the victory over evil. In some contexts though, Halloween celebrations will take on a darker side where there is less to celebrate and more to avoid. We are going to want to think about the community local to us, as well. A diverse community will likely have a host of misconceptions/fears/expectations about

what Halloween is and how a church would act in relation to it. We'll need to know our neighbour in order to love them. Almost certainly then, the best way to handle Halloween is to make sure it's not the only night of the year when neighbours knock on each other's doors.

Helen Thorne: For many, Halloween is nothing more than an opportunity to dress up and collect sweets in quantities no dentist would deem wise. But, for those who have become Christians from a background of occult involvement, it can be a time when temptations begin to rise. Whether it's remembering ceremonies practised in previous years, being contacted by friends inviting them to join in once more - or simply being bombarded by media images which (whilst rarely an accurate representation of true occult involvement) nudge people to remember how powerful they once believed Satan to be, it can be a difficult time. For those who are hurting, Halloween can be a threat to perseverance in faith - but also an opportunity to remember that light has come in to dark places and, ultimately, that light cannot be overcome. Halloween can be a time to look back and see spiritual growth. It can be a time to revel afresh in the wonder of grace. And, where contact is still maintained, it's an opportunity to speak good news to friends still involved in the occult: sharing words about the all-powerful Jesus whose message of hope brings a freedom and certainty that nothing else can.

What should we make of deliverance ministries? Is it legitimate to speak about unbelievers or believers being possessed?

Keith Ferdinando: There is no obvious biblical reason to rule out the possession of unbelievers. J. L. Nevius served for forty years in China in the second half of the 19th century, and is well known for his book, The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches. He initially held that belief in demons belonged to a 'barbarous and superstitious age', but he changed his mind as a result of the testimonies of Chinese believers and of his own experiences. He was struck by the similarity between cases of possession he came across in China and those recorded in the gospels. He also noticed how Chinese Christians, without instruction from missionaries, were able to drive out demons simply by prayer and calling on the name of Jesus. Out of his long experience came the book, Demon Possession and Allied Themes: Being an Inductive Study of Phenomena of our own Times. The phenomenon of possession, again manifested in ways remarkably close to what we see in the episodes recorded in the synoptic gospels, has in fact been widely spread across many people throughout history.

There is, however, good reason to believe that *believers* are not afflicted by possession. It is difficult to suppose that one whose body is the temple of the Holy Spirit might at the same time be controlled by a demon; or that, having been delivered from the dominion of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son, a person might nevertheless be subject to the most extreme expression of Satan's tyranny. Further, in all the pastoral advice found in the New Testament epistles there is no counsel to guide churches in the appropriate response to believers possessed by demons. Yet one might suppose that if believers could experience possession the issue would have been addressed somewhere, especially perhaps in Ephesians and Colossians which explicitly respond to the churches' concerns about demonic powers. Indeed, to push this a little further, not only are Christians freed from the threat of demonic possession, but the presence of living gospel churches within a society tends to bring multiple blessings to the society as a whole; and, among those blessings, it seems likely that there would be a decrease in the incidence of demon possession across the population in general.

We should perhaps be wary of deliverance ministries as an entity in themselves. Certainly if we encounter possessed people we should *minister* to them in the context of the whole *ministry* of the local church. For such ministry Jesus counselled prayer (Mark 9:29) and his disciples invoked his name (Luke 10:17; Acts 16:18). There is no biblical case for anything more elaborate than that. We should also note that the biblical response to sin is repentance and not the expulsion of a demon of anger, or adultery, or addiction or whatever else. The New Testament does not make any explicit link between possession and sin. Do spiritual forces have anything to do with mental or physical illness?

Kirsten Birkett: This is a

complicated question. The gospels give us examples of people experiencing physical ill-effects as a result of demonic action; in Mark 1:26 an unclean spirit 'convulsed' a man as it came out of him (see also Luke 4:35); the Gerasene man with an unclean spirit experienced unusual strength but also hurt himself (Mark 5:5; Luke 8:29); the examples in Mark 9 and Luke 9 of a boy who would be thrown down by a spirit; the woman of Luke 13:11 and so on. However, Christ was powerful over these spirits, and his word immediately expelled them. Luke 11:21 suggests that such possession is not to be feared by Christians who have Christ living through his Holy Spirit within us. There is no suggestion in the NT that we need fear physical illness as a result of demonic activity.

Mental illness is a more subtle phenomenon. While there is sufficient evidence to suggest that mental illness is a medical condition to do with malfunctioning of the brain, it also frequently involves believing wrong things. A depressed person may believe, for instance, that there is no hope and that he or she will never recover; that the world is always negative and bad things will always happen. It is part of cognitive therapy to challenge wrong beliefs – such therapy works.

The devil traffics in wrong belief. He is the father of lies (John 8:44). The parable of the sower tells us that the devil takes away the word of God so that people will not believe and be saved. Demons teach wrong

doctrine (1 Tim 4:1) and use right doctrine wrongly (James 2:19).

Christians should have their mental universes shaped by Scripture. We are taught to have a right view of the seriousness of sin, and also be fully convinced of our salvation in Christ. We are to rightly mourn for the sad state of the world, as we look forward in certain hope to the new creation and rejoice, now, because of that. We are, like Paul, to be afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair (2 Cor 4:8-9). We are also to have a right view of ourselves, not full of pride (nor of the self-hatred which is simply an inverted pride, still judging ourselves by our own standard). Insofar as our mental life is characterised by such things as fear, despair, hatred, bitterness or anger, we are to fight them with the help of the Spirit; these things are fleshly and could be demonic (Gal 5:16-24; James 3:15). In other words, anything contrary to the word of God is to be countered by the truth, regardless of whether wrong beliefs and attitudes come from demonic temptations to believe lies, a mental disposition to be negative, or just plain old sinfulness listening to the world.

In any case, the response to any putative demonic influence is to preach and believe the gospel. The armour of God is all to do with gospel truth and our faith in it (Eph 6:10-19). Some might want to call that exorcism, but we need to remember that what is effective is the message of Christ's victory over sin and death, bringing us salvation.



What makes us brilliant?

What makes us deadly?

What makes us sapiens?

Those are the questions at the heart of the bestselling *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari.

In many ways the story of humanity in the 21st century is a tragic tale of confusion and anxiety about those very questions. Who are we? How do we know? What value do we have, and why? What divides us and what unites us as a race? Are we gods, or cogs in a machine? Villains or victims?

All that confusion and anxiety shows how far humanity has moved from the knowledge that it is made in God's image. And so in *Primer* issue 11 we are going to focus on the doctrine of humanity.

With contributions from Matthew Lee Anderson, Dave Bish, and Mark Meynell.

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RIMERPRIME

In this issue we tackle the devil, demons, and spiritual warfare with help from Lewis Allen, Kirsten Birkett, Keith Ferdinando, David Shaw, Helen Thorne, and something old from Thomas Brooks.

noun | 'pri-mer
1. a textbook or introduction to

a subject

2. a material used to prepare a surface for further treatment

3. a device or compound used to ignite an explosive charge

Primer is designed to help church leaders engage with the kind of theology the church needs, to chew it over together, and to train up others.

Published twice a year, each issue of *Primer* takes one big area of theology and lays a foundation. We look at how people are talking about the doctrine today, and what good resources are available. We dig out some treasures from church history to help us wrap our heads around the big ideas. We focus on what difference the truth makes to the way we live life and serve the church.

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