

Putting the Devil in His Place

John M. Buttrey II

The Scriptures are clear about the devil being dangerous. He is described as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), our adversary (1 Peter 5:8), a murderer (John 8:44), the tempter (1 Thess. 3:5), and the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10). These are just some of the terms used to describe his evil nature. Add to these the need expressed by the apostle Paul, to cloth ourselves with the full armor of God in order to stand against the devil (Eph. 6:10-17).

These descriptive warnings considered, the devil is certainly not one we should toy with, or take lightly. However, let me remind you of some other descriptions in Scripture concerning the devil.

James tells us, if we resist him, he will flee (James 4:7). Paul says with every temptation the devil throws at us, God will provide a way of escape, and that we will not be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). In his letter to the Romans, Paul says in Christ we have been freed from sin (Rom. 6:7). The Hebrew writer says Jesus rendered the devil powerless over death (Heb. 2:14).

It is important for us to also keep in mind that the devil is a created being (Col. 1:16). As a created being, the devil is no equal to God. God is omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-10); the devil roams about on the earth (Job 1:7). God is all knowing (Rom. 11:33-34); the devil is not (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12).

Scripture records the devil repeatedly being defeated by God. The devil could not prevent Moses from being a deliverer for the children of Israel. The devil could not stop the rebuilding of the temple upon the return from exile. The devil could not prevent the birth of Jesus. Even Herod's evil plan (no doubt of the devil) of killing the Hebrew babies under two years of age did not foil God's plan. The devil could not stop the resurrection, nor the establishment of the church. In fact, all these many years later, despite the devil's attempts to silence and destroy, the church of Jesus Christ continues to proclaim the word of God. James tells us the devil cannot even tempt God (James 1:13). God always wins!

So, just how powerful is the devil? Believe it or not, less powerful than many of us might imagine. Somewhere we have mistakenly gotten the idea that the devil is far more powerful than Scripture reveals. For example, did you know there is no record in Scripture of the devil performing a miracle? Protesting that statement, some would point to the magicians in Egypt who turned their staffs into serpents (Ex. 7:11-12). Take a deep breath and think for a moment. Does anyone really believe Pharaoh's magicians were actually able to reproduce a miracle of God? The Bible tells us they did this with their secret arts (Ex. 7:11). You will recall that Aaron's rod consumed their serpents. What the magicians of Egypt performed was a magic trick. Had the devil been able to perform a miracle this would have been a good place to do it!

How about the contest at Mount Carmel in the days of Elijah? Had the devil been able to call fire down from Heaven, it would have saved the prophets of Baal a lot of embarrassment, and would have kept the people of Israel from returning to God. But alas, there was no fire from Heaven.

Of course, there is also the example in the book of Job, where Satan seems to have control over the forces of nature. Keep in mind, in the case of Job, God permitted the devil to attack Job. It is God almighty, the Creator, who controls the laws of nature, not the devil! This is clearly revealed in the later chapters of Job.

Some who are reading this may wonder about the demons we read of in the New Testament, who *seemingly* performed miraculous acts. For example, consider the case of the girl in Philippi who was possessed by "a spirit of divination." This demon could supposedly foretell the future in terms of fortune telling (Acts 16:16). The word "divination" is the Greek word *puthon* (English: python). Vines' notes of this word:

[Puthon] in Greek mythology was the name of the Pythian serpent or dragon, dwelling in Pytho, at the foot of mount Parnassus, guarding the oracle of Delphi, and slain by Apollo. Thence the name was transferred to Apollo himself. Later the word was applied to diviners or soothsayers, regarded as inspired by Apollo.

People today still go to fortune tellers believing that these people can actually foretell their future. It is hard to imagine that any demon actually knew the future of any individual. Lies and deception are the devil's trademark.

Another interesting case involving demons, is the man possessed by the legion of demons. The demons gave him supernatural strength (Mark 5:1-20). How were they able to give a man such strength that it would allow him to break chains? Other cases of demon possession caused blindness and/or the inability to speak (Matt. 12:22); or inflict bodily harm on one's self (Mark 9:18-18); or other physical disorders (Luke 13:11-17).

The ability of demons to trouble and/or harm individuals, and certainly to possess them, was an area of authority permitted by God. The devil did not create the demons and give them their abilities! God is the Creator of all things. Remember, the devil exists and operates by the authority of God. With the choice of good or evil, we are able to enjoy the gift of free will. The demons were ultimately subject to the authority of Jesus and his followers. Like the devil, they too, are defeated by God.

How powerful is the devil? Considering the facts discussed earlier, that we cannot be tempted beyond what we are able, and that there is always a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13), that we are freed from sin (Rom. 6:7), and that Jesus rendered him powerless over death (Heb. 2:14), it would seem that the devil is only as powerful as we allow him to be. In this way, notice what James said about the process of temptation:

*But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. **Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren*** (James 1:14-16 Emphasis Mine).

The devil has been using the same method of temptation since the beginning of time: The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (cf. Gen. 3:6; Matt. 4:1-11; 1 John 2:16). It is time for us to wise up and put the devil in his place. Do not be deceived brethren.