

Satan assailed Christ with his fiercest and most subtle temptations; but he was repulsed in every conflict. Those battles were fought in our behalf; those victories make it possible for us to conquer. Christ will give strength to all who seek it. No man without his own consent can be overcome by Satan. The tempter has no power to control the will or to force the soul to sin. He may distress, but he cannot contaminate. He can cause agony, but not defilement. The fact that Christ has conquered should inspire His followers with courage to fight manfully the battle against sin and Satan.

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31. Agency Of Evil Spirits.



The connection of the visible with the invisible world, the ministration of angels of God, and the agency of evil spirits, are plainly revealed in the Scriptures, and inseparably interwoven

with human history. There is a growing tendency to disbelief in the existence of evil spirits, while the holy angels that “minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation,”⁸⁹⁷ are regarded by many as the spirits of the dead. But the Scriptures not only teach the existence of angels, both good and evil, but present unquestionable proof that these are not the disembodied spirits of dead men.

Before the creation of man, angels were in existence; for when the foundations of the earth were laid, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.”⁸⁹⁸ After the fall of man, angels were sent to guard the tree of life, and this before a human being had died. Angels are in nature superior to men; for the psalmist says that man was made “a little lower than the angels.”⁸⁹⁹

We are informed in Scripture as to the number, and the power and glory, of the heavenly beings, of their connection with the government of God, and also of their relation to the work of redemption. “The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all.” And, says the prophet, “I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne.” In the presence-chamber of the King of kings they wait—“angels, that excel in strength,” “ministers of His, that do His pleasure,” [512] “hearkening unto the voice of His word.”⁹⁰⁰ Ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, were the heavenly messengers beheld by the prophet Daniel. The apostle Paul declared them “an innumerable company.”⁹⁰¹ As God's messengers they go forth, like “the appearance of a flash of lightning,”⁹⁰² so dazzling their glory, and so swift their flight. The angel that

⁸⁹⁷ Heb 1:14.

⁸⁹⁸ Job 38:7.

⁸⁹⁹ Ps. 8:5.

⁹⁰⁰ Ps. 103:19-21; Rev. 5:11.

⁹⁰¹ Dan. 7:10; Heb. 12:22.

⁹⁰² Eze. 1:14.

appeared at the Saviour's tomb, his countenance "like lightning, and his raiment white as snow," caused the keepers for fear of him to quake, and they "became as dead men."⁹⁰³ When Sennacherib, the haughty Assyrian, reproached and blasphemed God, and threatened Israel with destruction, "it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand." There were "cut off all the mighty men of valor, and the leaders and captains," from the army of Sennacherib. "So he returned with shame of face to his own land."⁹⁰⁴

Angels are sent on missions of mercy to the children of God. To Abraham, with promises of blessing; to the gates of Sodom, to rescue righteous Lot from its fiery doom; to Elijah, as he was about to perish from weariness and hunger in the desert; to Elisha, with chariots and horses of fire surrounding the little town where he was shut in by his foes; to Daniel, while seeking divine wisdom in the court of a heathen king, or abandoned to become the lions' prey; to Peter, doomed to death in Herod's dungeon; to the prisoners at Philippi; to Paul and his companions in the night of tempest on the sea; to open the mind of Cornelius to receive the gospel; to dispatch Peter with the message of salvation to the Gentile stranger,—thus holy angels have, in all ages, ministered to God's people.

A guardian angel is appointed to every follower of Christ. These heavenly watchers shield the righteous from the power of the wicked one. This Satan himself recognized when he said, "Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast not Thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?"⁹⁰⁵ The agency by which God protects His people is presented in the words of the psalmist, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth

⁹⁰³ Matt. 28:3, 4.

⁹⁰⁴ 2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 32:21.

⁹⁰⁵ Job 1:9, 10.

them.”⁹⁰⁶ Said the Saviour, speaking of those that believe in Him, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father.”⁹⁰⁷ The angels appointed to minister to the children of God have at all times access to His presence.

Thus God's people, exposed to the deceptive power and un-sleeping malice of the prince of darkness, and in conflict with all the forces of evil, are assured of the unceasing guardianship of heavenly angels. Nor is such assurance given without need. If God has granted to His children promise of grace and protection, it is because there are mighty agencies of evil to be met,—agencies numerous, determined, and untiring, of whose malignity and power none can safely be ignorant or unheeding.

Evil spirits, in the beginning created sinless, were equal in nature, power, and glory with the holy beings that are now God's messengers. But fallen through sin, they are leagued together for the dishonor of God and the destruction of men. United with Satan in his rebellion, and with him cast out from heaven, they have, through all succeeding ages, co-operated with him in his warfare against the divine authority. We are told in Scripture of their confederacy and government, of their various orders, of their intelligence and subtlety, and of their malicious designs against the peace and happiness of men.

Old Testament history presents occasional mentions of their existence and agency; but it was during the time when Christ was upon the earth that evil spirits manifested their power in the most striking manner. Christ had come to enter upon the plan devised for man's redemption, and Satan determined to assert his right to control the world. He had succeeded in establishing idolatry in every part of the earth except the land of Palestine. To the only land that had not fully yielded to the tempter's sway, Christ came to shed upon the people the light of heaven. Here two rival

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⁹⁰⁶ Ps. 34:7.

⁹⁰⁷ Matt. 18:10.

powers claimed supremacy. Jesus was stretching out His arms of love, inviting all who would to find pardon and peace in Him. The hosts of darkness saw that they did not possess unlimited control, and they understood that if Christ's mission should be successful, their rule was soon to end. Satan raged like a chained lion, and defiantly exhibited his power over the bodies as well as the souls of men.

The fact that men have been possessed with demons, is clearly stated in the New Testament. The persons thus afflicted were not merely suffering with disease from natural causes. Christ had perfect understanding of that with which He was dealing, and He recognized the direct presence and agency of evil spirits.

A striking example of their number, power, and malignity, and also of the power and mercy of Christ, is given in the Scripture account of the healing of the demoniacs at Gadara. Those wretched maniacs, spurning all restraint, writhing, foaming, raging, were filling the air with their cries, doing violence to themselves, and endangering all who should approach them. Their bleeding and disfigured bodies and distracted minds presented a spectacle well-pleasing to the prince of darkness. One of the demons controlling the sufferers declared, "My name is Legion: for we are many."⁹⁰⁸ In the Roman army a legion consisted of from three to five thousand men. Satan's hosts also are marshaled in companies, and the single company to which these demons belonged numbered no less than a legion.

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At the command of Jesus, the evil spirits departed from their victims, leaving them calmly sitting at the Saviour's feet, subdued, intelligent, and gentle. But the demons were permitted to sweep a herd of swine into the sea; and to the dwellers of Gadara the loss of these outweighed the blessings which Christ had bestowed, and the divine Healer was entreated to depart. This was the result which Satan designed to secure. By casting the

⁹⁰⁸ Mark 5:9.

blame of their loss upon Jesus, he aroused the selfish fears of the people, and prevented them from listening to His words. Satan is constantly accusing Christians as the cause of loss, misfortune, and suffering, instead of allowing the reproach to fall where it belongs,—upon himself and his agents.

But the purposes of Christ were not thwarted. He allowed the evil spirits to destroy the herd of swine as a rebuke to those Jews who were raising these unclean beasts for the sake of gain. Had not Christ restrained the demons, they would have plunged into the sea, not only the swine, but also their keepers and owners. The preservation of both the keepers and the owners was due alone to His power, mercifully exercised for their deliverance. Furthermore, this event was permitted to take place that the disciples might witness the cruel power of Satan upon both man and beast. The Saviour desired His followers to have a knowledge of the foe whom they were to meet, that they might not be deceived and overcome by his devices. It was also His will that the people of that region should behold His power to break the bondage of Satan and release his captives. And though Jesus Himself departed, the men so marvelously delivered, remained to declare the mercy of their Benefactor.

Other instances of a similar nature are recorded in the Scriptures. The daughter of the Syro-Phenician woman was grievously vexed with a devil, whom Jesus cast out by His word.⁹⁰⁹ One “possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb;”⁹¹⁰ a youth who had a dumb spirit, that oftentimes “cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him;”⁹¹¹ the maniac who, tormented by “a spirit of an unclean devil,”⁹¹² disturbed the Sabbath quiet of the synagogue at Capernaum,—all were healed by the compassionate Saviour. In nearly every instance, Christ addressed the [516]

⁹⁰⁹ Mark 7:26-30.

⁹¹⁰ Matt. 12:22.

⁹¹¹ Mark 9:17-27.

⁹¹² Luke 4:33-36.

demon as an intelligent entity, commanding him to come out of his victim and to torment him no more. The worshipers at Capernaum, beholding His mighty power, “were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, ‘What a word is this! for with authority and power He commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.’”⁹¹³

Those possessed with devils are usually represented as being in a condition of great suffering; yet there were exceptions to this rule. For the sake of obtaining supernatural power, some welcomed the satanic influence. These of course had no conflict with the demons. Of this class were those who possessed the spirit of divination,—Simon Magus, Elymas the sorcerer, and the damsel who followed Paul and Silas at Philippi.

None are in greater danger from the influence of evil spirits than those who, notwithstanding the direct and ample testimony of the Scriptures, deny the existence and agency of the devil and his angels. So long as we are ignorant of their wiles, they have almost inconceivable advantage; many give heed to their suggestions while they suppose themselves to be following the dictates of their own wisdom. This is why, as we approach the close of time, when Satan is to work with greatest power to deceive and destroy, he spreads everywhere the belief that he does not exist. It is his policy to conceal himself and his manner of working.

There is nothing that the great deceiver fears so much as that we shall become acquainted with his devices. The better to disguise his real character and purposes, he has caused himself to be so represented as to excite no stronger emotion than ridicule or contempt. He is well pleased to be painted as a ludicrous or loathsome object, misshapen, half animal and half human. He is pleased to hear his name used in sport and mockery by those who think themselves intelligent and well informed.

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⁹¹³ Luke 4:36.