

“Your Adversary the Devil”

“Your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” —I Peter 5:8

IS THERE a Devil, a real being with an individual personality? If so, who created him, and why does an all-powerful God of righteousness and love permit such a being to exist? Throughout the ages these questions have been pondered by sincere and thoughtful persons. Many answers have been given. On the one hand, there is the view that the Devil is a hideous looking creature with cloven hoofs and a spiked tail whose chief business is to preside over the alleged tortures of the unsaved dead; while on the other hand, the claim is made that the Devil of the Bible is merely an evil principle, widespread and powerful in its opposition to God and to righteousness, but not a personality.

To us it seems evident from the Scriptures that there is a personal Devil. He is, we believe, of a higher order of creation than man. This in itself suggests a most interesting and vitally important truth; namely, that there are higher orders of creation than the human. Indirectly the Bible assures us of this by informing us that man was made a “little lower than the angels.”—Ps. 8:4,5

This would be a reasonable conclusion even though we did not have the Bible to guide us in our thinking. A highly placed officer in America’s air force was asked if he thought it possible that the so-called flying saucers were flown into our atmosphere by beings from other planets. He expressed no opinion directly on the question, but did say that in view of our very limited knowledge of the universe, how it was made, and what makes it function, it would be very unreasonable to conclude that man is the most intelligent being in the universe. This was good reasoning.

What scientists have discovered makes it relatively easy to believe in the existence of worlds, or spheres of life, beyond the comprehension of human senses. In the realm of sound, for example, we know that the human ear is quite limited, that sounds which are very real are inaudible to us if they are below or above a certain range of frequency. And the same is true of sight.

The marvelous miracle of the various wireless systems of communication also helps us to realize the power of invisible forces which are beyond our comprehension. Our faith, then, need not be staggered by the definite assertions of the Bible that prior to the creation of man God created various orders of being higher than the human. Because these are invisible to us, we speak of them as spirit beings, meaning that they are not fleshly, or earthly.

Nevertheless they are real, and the Bible mentions some of them, such as “angels,” “principalities,” and “powers.” (Eph. 1:18-21; 3:10) The Apostle Paul informs us that when Jesus was raised from the dead the Creator exalted him high above these—above “every name that is named”—and “set him at his own right hand in the heavenlies.”—vs. 20

From these and other scriptures which we might quote, we learn that there are various planes of life in the unseen realms of the universe, even as there are various levels of existence in our material world. These begin with the lowest forms of shellfish, and go on up the scale to the crowning work of God’s earthly creation, which is man. We may assume that the lowest form of

spirit being is just above the human; and the highest, we know, is the divine, the Creator's own nature.

Holy and Unholy Angels

The Bible clearly indicates that existing in the universe today are both holy and unholy angels. An angel announced the birth of Jesus, and a host of them sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:10-14) In Jesus' Parable of the Sheep and the Goats we are informed that those represented by the "goats" are sent away "into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels."—Matt. 25:41

Thus we have reference to the two classes of angels—the holy and the unholy. This statement also indicates that the Devil is the chief one among the unholy angels. But this powerful spirit being was not always the Devil. The Scriptures clearly show that he was created perfect, and that he remained so "till iniquity was found in thee."—Ezek. 28:15

Under the title, "king of Babylon," Satan is referred to prior to his fall as "Lucifer, son of the morning." (Isa. 14:12) The "iniquity" which developed in his heart is described as pride and ambition. Concerning this Isaiah wrote, "Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the most High."—Isa. 14:13,14

It was this ambitious determination to be like the most High that caused Lucifer to be cast off from divine favor and become a permanent adversary of his Creator. Isaiah refers to his fall, saying, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" Jesus confirms this "fall" of Lucifer, saying, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven."—Luke 10:18

The Bible gives various names to the fallen Lucifer. He is called "the Devil, and Satan," meaning deceiver and opponent. (Rev. 20:2) In this same text he is also called a "dragon." The Greek original of this name means to fascinate, or to allure. In John 12:31 he is described as the "prince of this world"; also in John 14:30, and 16:11.

In Ephesians 2:2 Satan is described as "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." In II Corinthians 4:4 he is called the "god of this world" who has "blinded the minds of them which believe not, test the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

The Bible also refers to the Devil simply as the "Adversary." (I Pet. 5:8) This is a general title descriptive of all his efforts to oppose the Lord and the Lord's people, whether by deception, allurements, fear, or otherwise. This opposition to God first made its appearance in the Garden of Eden. The Prophet Ezekiel wrote concerning the fallen "king of Tyrus," as he symbolically identifies him, "Thou hast been in Eden, the garden of God."—Ezek. 28:13

The Prophet Ezekiel also states concerning this powerful spirit being, "Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth." (Ezek. 28:14) We do not know all that this statement might imply, but it does indicate that Lucifer was permitted contact with our first parents. In the Genesis account of what occurred in Eden, the now fallen Lucifer is shown in his nefarious role as a "serpent," described in Revelation 20:2 as "that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan."

Deception and Opposition

The first record of the Devil's contact with humankind reveals him in the role of deceiver. God had informed Adam that the penalty for eating the forbidden fruit would be death "Thou

shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) Later, Adam communicated this information to Eve, so she also knew that “the wages of sin is death.”—Rom. 6:23

But the Devil, as “that old serpent,” appeared to Eve and questioned this point. “Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” he asked. To this Eve replied, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.”—Gen. 3:1-3

To this the “serpent” promptly replied, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. 3:4) This was the blackest of lies that was ever told, and it introduced a controversy into human minds which has raged from that day even until now. Two assertions had been made to our first parents; one by God, their Creator; the other by the adversary of God, the Devil. God said, “Thou shalt surely die,” and God’s adversary said, “Ye shall not surely die.”

Those opposing thoughts have come down through the centuries and have been the foundation of truth on the one hand, and of error on the other. By that one vicious lie Satan set the pattern for all his deceptive efforts to prevent humanity from knowing and serving the true and loving God, the Creator. The claim that there is no death has found ready acceptance into all heathen religions and has caused a perversion of Bible truths in the minds of millions. Thus, as the Scriptures declare, “that old serpent” has deceived the nations.—Rev. 20:3

Mother Eve was deceived by the Devil, and Adam joined in her transgression, partaking of the forbidden fruit. Then, as God had forewarned, they were sentenced to death and driven out of their garden home into the unfinished earth to die. In pronouncing sentence upon them God also made a statement to the “serpent,” which was a prophecy, in fact, of future developments. He said, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”—Gen. 3:15

In the light of the unfolding plan of God as it can be traced from book to book throughout the Bible, this “seed” of the woman is found to be none other than the messianic company of which Jesus is the Head, and the church, his body. This same “seed” is later associated with the offspring of Abraham, in the promise made to him that through his “seed” all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) In Galatians 3:16,27-29 Paul explains that Christ and those who are baptized into Christ constitute this promised seed which would be the channel of blessing to all nations.

The “seed” of “that old serpent, the Devil, and Satan,” are all those who, knowingly or unknowingly, lend themselves to support his cause. The “tares” for example, in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, are described by Jesus as the “children of the wicked one.” (Matt. 13:38) Jesus spoke of the religious leaders of his day as being of their father, the Devil.—John 8:44

In Matthew 25:41 Jesus speaks of “the Devil and his angels.” The Scriptures indicate that these angels were originally holy, but that they fell into sin, and have since co-operated with the Devil in his campaign of deceit. Peter speaks of these as “spirits,” that is, spirit beings, or angels, “which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah.” (I Pet. 3:19,20) Peter also refers to them as the “angels that sinned,” and Jude describes them, as the “angels which kept not their first estate.”—II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6

In Genesis 6:2 these angels are referred to as the “sons of God,” with the explanation that they “took them wives” from among the daughters of men. It was thus that they left their first estate. But it was contrary to God’s will for angels thus to materialize and intermarry with the human

race. So, with the coming of the Deluge, which destroyed the illegitimate offspring of this unholy union, these angels themselves were restrained in “chains of darkness.”—II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6

But they have enjoyed sufficient freedom to enable them to co-operate with the Devil in deceiving the human race into continuing to believe his original lie, “Thou shalt not surely die.” One way they do this is by feigning that they are a dead relative or friend, to try and prove that the dead are not really dead, but more alive than ever.

Thus, throughout the ages, Satan has operated through fallen, unholy angels in the unseen world, and also through human beings whom he could use to further his campaign of deceit and opposition to God and to the people of God. Many times this opposition has manifested itself in violent persecution of those upon whom God’s favor has been bestowed. Indeed, this has been true in the experiences of most of God’s faithful servants throughout all the ages.

The Devil would know from God’s prophecy in the Garden of Eden that the “serpent’s” head would be bruised by the “seed” of the woman, that it was God’s design that eventually he would be destroyed. (Ps. 145:20; Heb. 2:14) But this one who became so ambitious as to say, “I will exalt my throne above the stars of God,” would be foolish enough to assume that probably he could defeat the divine purpose, and still become the undisputed ruler of the human race.

However, he would not be sufficiently enlightened concerning the plan of God to know just who was meant by the “seed of the woman,” at least, not until that “seed” actually appeared. For this reason he was on the alert to persecute and when possible, to destroy, all those whom God favored, and to whom he made promises. The first example of this was the murder of righteous Abel.

In the 11th chapter of Hebrews the Apostle Paul, in dramatic fashion, reviews some of the persecutions which came upon; the people of God prior to our Lord’s first advent; and all because they had respect unto the promises of God, and were faithful to them. Satan was the mastermind back of all their trials. It was his endeavor to stamp out the seed of promise.

The Annunciation to Mary, and the birth of Jesus, revealed to Satan a new and to him, no doubt, a startling development in the plan of God as it pertained to the promised seed. At once he endeavored to thwart the divine plan by trying to destroy the babe Jesus. Later, throughout the course of Jesus’ ministry, the Devil used the scribes and Pharisees to attack Jesus from various angles. Jesus told these hypocrites that they were “of their father, the Devil,” whose works they did. Thus Jesus clearly identified his persecutors as being of the seed of “that old serpent” whose enmity toward him was so bitterly manifested.

These enemies finally did succeed in causing the death of Jesus. From the standpoint of the Devil, this no doubt seemed like the achievement of a signal victory over God and the forces of righteousness. But his glorying was short-lived, for on the “third day” the Heavenly Father, the Creator, raised his beloved Son from the dead, highly exalting him above all angels—holy and unholy—principalities and powers, and every name that is named.—Eph. 1:20-22

Satan Continues

But even so great a miracle on behalf of the One whom he had savagely attacked in his effort to destroy the seed of promise did not discourage the Devil from continuing his efforts to hinder the outworking of God’s plan. He was doubtless aware that after his resurrection, Jesus made contact with his disciples, commissioning them to be his witnesses throughout Judea and the

world. He would know also of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them at Pentecost. So now he turned his attention toward these followers of the Master.

First, in this connection, we see again the bitter opposition of Israel's religious leaders whom Jesus had identified as the seed or children of the Devil. They continued to perform his bidding by persecuting the disciples and thus attempting to prevent the spread of the Gospel of Christ.

They caused them to be imprisoned, and forbade them to witness for Jesus. Some of them were put to death, as for example, the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Riots were stirred up against those early Christian workers; and other efforts made to discourage them from continuing in a cause which was becoming increasingly unpopular.—Rev. 2:10

All of these manifestations of opposition against the disciples bore the same earmarks as those used against their Head and Leader, Jesus. As we have seen, Jesus identified them as works of the Devil. There is surely to be seen in this a striking fulfillment of the prophecy uttered in Eden concerning the enmity which would exist between the seed of "that old serpent" and the seed of the woman, the Messiah class.

But only the "heel" of God's seed was to be "bruised," according to the prophecy. The heel is not a vital organ of the body. It can be very painfully bruised without causing death. So Satan's persecution of Christ and his church has been bitter, and to those who have endured the brunt of it, painful; but the development of the seed has continued. Jesus was put to death in the flesh—a painful bruising indeed—but he was made alive in the spirit; and this was the important consideration, for he, as the promised seed was to be spiritual, not earthly.—I Pet.3:18

Meanwhile, the Lord has given encouragement to the seed class by his many promises of grace to help in time of need. In Romans 16:20 the Apostle Paul promised, "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." It seems obvious that in making this statement Paul had in mind the prophecy which the Lord uttered in Eden. Paul saw and felt the enmity which existed between the two seeds, yet he was fully confident of the ultimate and glorious outcome in the complete destruction of Satan and all his forces.

Satan's Many Devices

The Devil has not limited his attacks against the people of God to physical violence. Indeed, his most effective methods of attack have been through their minds, by means of alluring temptations and subtle, deceptive philosophies which destroy the truth of God's Word. In fact, his first attack against his Creator was the accusation made in the Garden of Eden that God had lied when he said to Adam that the penalty for sin would be death.

He has induced millions of sincere people to believe this, and since they are convinced that there is no death, that what man calls death is merely a passageway into another life, he has induced many of the unwary to believe that torment in the life to come is the penalty of sin, not death, as Paul so clearly stated it. Thus has he defamed the character of God and caused many to disbelieve in him.

Satan's deceptive attacks, designed to entice God's people away from the course of righteousness and truth, have been along many lines. Paul speaks of a "thorn in the flesh"—which evidently was his defective eyesight—as a "messenger of Satan" to buffet, or discourage him. Paul recognized that Satan was using this as a means of casting doubt in his mind concerning the wisdom and love of God.—II Cor. 12:7

Paul wrote to the brethren in Corinth urging them to forgive a brother who had done wrong, and who had been punished by the church. Since this brother had received his punishment, they should not make the burden more severe by withholding forgiveness from him, and Paul explains why: “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.”—II Cor. 2:11

These are but some of the examples held out to us in the Word of God of the devious ways in which the Devil attacks the people of God. The Bible speaks of others. Our text suggests one—he goes about as a “roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.” This indicates an attack through the medium of fear, a fear which paralyzes action and renders a Christian ready and easy prey for the Devil.

In II Corinthians 11:14 Paul wrote that “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” Here is another method of attack—another form of deception. And the Devil has often used this one. In the name of truth and righteousness, of “light,” he has foisted upon the minds of men many of his darkest errors. He has often succeeded in leading the unwary into almost complete darkness by making them believe that they were following the light.

Our Defense

Paul’s assurance that we are not ignorant of Satan’s devices is most encouraging. This means, of course, that we “need” not be ignorant of them, and will not, if we pay humble and zealous attention to the instructions of God’s Word. The truths of the Bible which acquaint us with Satan’s wiles and inform us how to deal with them are referred to by the Apostle Paul as the Christian’s “armor,” and he urges us to put on this armor in order that we “may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil.”—Eph 6:11

Jesus said to Peter, “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” (Luke 22:31,32) Because Jesus prayed for Peter, he was finally victorious over Satan’s attacks. The Devil has likewise desired to ensnare all the Lord’s people. None have been free from his attacks. But the humble and faithful have been victorious over him, not in their own strength and wisdom, but through the power and guidance of the Lord. The “heel” of the promised seed has been and continues to be “bruised,” but ultimately Satan’s “head” will be crushed; for the promise is that in God’s due time he will be destroyed.

Other Activities

While Satan’s chief effort has been his sustained attempt to destroy the seed of promise, he has had other interests as well. Jesus described him as the “prince of this world.” (John 12:31) This indicates that he has wielded a tremendous influence in the affairs of men in general.

On one occasion Satan tempted Jesus by offering him all the kingdoms of this world if he would bow down and worship him. (Matt. 4:8-10) Jesus refused this offer, saying to Satan, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt then serve.” Nevertheless, Jesus did not indicate that Satan was not then in a position to make good the offer had it been accepted. On Satan’s part, this was a subtle attempt to defeat God’s purpose to establish Jesus as the new King of earth who would reign for a thousand years and restore the rebellious race to harmony with God. The success of this plot would have resulted in the destruction of the seed of promise.

Satan failed to induce Jesus to take this step of disobedience to God, and to the plan of God, Later, however, he succeeded with many of the professed followers of Jesus. This was during the Dark Ages when, appearing as an angel of light, he brought about the union of church and state.

According to the plan of God, the true church of Christ was to wait for the return of her Lord, and then, united with him to whom all power in heaven and earth has been given, reign for a thousand years to restore the lost world to God.

Failure to wait for this glorious consummation of the divine plan, and to unite instead with the arm of the State, is designated in the Book of Revelation as spiritual harlotry. But it happened, and the whole civilized world now recognizes the evils of the system of government which thereby emerged. Few, however, realize that it came about under the direction of “the prince of this world” in an effort to counterfeit the true kingdom of Christ which God had promised.

In II Corinthians 4:4 Paul speaks of Satan as the “god of this world” who “hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” Fundamentally, all of Satan’s efforts are designed to prevent mankind from knowing the truth concerning God, and to keep them enslaved in darkness. The title, “god of this world” is particularly appropriate in this connection.

One of the Devil’s first lines of attack is to take away the truth before it has a chance to take effect in one’s life. In the Parable of the Sower, in which the seed represents the Word of God, that which fell by the wayside was “devoured” by the “fowls of the air.” Explaining this, Jesus said, “Those by the wayside are they that hear; then cometh the Devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts.”—Luke 8:12

The Devil’s control over the kingdoms of this world is used by him whenever possible to prevent the truth of God’s Word from reaching the People and thus break his strangle hold of ignorance over them. Witness the result of this during the Dark Ages, when thousands were cruelly, yet officially, tortured because of their love for the Bible and its teachings.

Satan is not ashamed to use any method whatsoever to prevent the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ from shining into the hearts and minds of men and women. Legal suppression of the Bible, fear of dire future punishment if one reads it, social ostracism, loss of prestige in the community—these are but some of the methods used by him to discourage People from examining the Word of God and being blessed by its glorious theme song of divine love.

All Sin of the Devil

I John 3:8-10 is another revealing passage concerning the Devil’s influence in the affairs of men, particularly Christians. We quote: “He that committeth sin is of the Devil; for the Devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil. ... In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

We are not to assume from this that every sin which is committed means that the one who sins is by design in league with the Devil. What it does mean is that the Devil is the powerful personality who originally set in motion the principal of sin, and continuously promotes evil in any and every way he can, with the result that fundamentally all sin is of him.

There are two powerful principles operating in the world—good and evil. God is the sponsor of all good, and the Devil the mastermind of all evil. In the text just quoted, John mentions one of the most outstanding characteristics of good, which is love. Selfishness, on the other hand, is one of the principal manifestations of sin, or unrighteousness.

These two principals have been at war with each other throughout the ages, and particularly since the first advent of Christ. There is no question as to the outcome of this struggle, for the Scriptures assure us that divine power will be exercised to bind the sponsor of evil, and finally destroy him, that he might “deceive the nations” no more.

This is described in Revelation 20:1,2 as being accomplished by an “angel” which comes down from God, with a great “chain” in his hand, who lays hold “on that old serpent which is the Devil, and Satan,” and binds him for a thousand years. The “angel” (Greek, *messenger*) which does this binding is undoubtedly the seed of promise, the Messiah. He comes from or is sent by God, which emphasizes the fact that divine power is utilized to restrain this powerful adversary and thus prevent him from further misleading the people.

Why Permitted

The question naturally arises, why has God permitted the Devil to continue his nefarious work of deception, and of opposition to righteousness, for so long? Why, in fact, did God not immediately restrain Lucifer when iniquity was found in him? Why was he permitted to deceive Eve on the subject of death, and why has he been allowed to deceive practically the whole world into believing his lie that there is no death?

The reason is found in the divine permission of evil along all lines. Man was created a free moral agent, and given both the liberty and the ability to choose between right and wrong. For God to have shielded man from evil influences and thus to have prevented him from sinning would have been an abridgement of his free moral agency, and this God will not do. He desires, rather, that all of his intelligent creatures have an opportunity, either by experience or by observation, to learn for themselves the terrible results of disobedience.

Thus, in the Garden of Eden, our first parents had the two propositions set before them. Their Creator said, “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” That “old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan,” said, “Thou shalt not surely die.” God could have prevented this lie from being told to Eve, and through Eve, to Adam; but he wanted them to decide upon whom to believe, and whom to obey.

God has permitted Satan to continue his opposition, through deception and otherwise, in order that all of Adam’s children, the entire human race, may likewise learn by actual experience that believing and following the testimony of “that old serpent” can only lead to sorrow, pain, and death. It has been a long nighttime of weeping, although for each individual, only as long as he lived. But in this short span of life, each one has tasted the bitter results of mistrusting and disobeying God.

True, in the case of the vast majority, they have not even known the basic cause of human distress; but this they will learn when, by divine power, they are awakened from the sleep of death during the thousand years of Christ’s reign, when the Devil will be bound and not able to continue misrepresenting the issues involved. God’s love and wisdom can be seen in the permission of evil only from this standpoint.

If, by permitting the fallen Lucifer to induce our first parents to disobey divine law, countless millions would be tormented in a fiery hell forever, the Creator would be revealed as a fiend rather than a God of love. Even if the permission of evil resulted in the eternal death of practically the whole human race, there still would be no way of explaining it in keeping with our conception of the love and wisdom of God.

From the divine standpoint, the permission of evil is as but one brief session in a school of experience, and there is to be, in the resurrection, another session in which the practical meaning of disobedience will be seen. Thus we can understand why a loving God has permitted the Devil to continue his reign of unrighteousness throughout all the centuries for, in the divine plan, each and every generation must have its contact with the “god of this world”—and experience the baneful results of his unrighteous rule. Meanwhile, Satan’s deceptions, and his malicious oppositions to God and to righteousness, have been a special test upon God’s people. It has given them an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the Lord and to his Word of truth in a manner which otherwise would have been impossible. Their loyalty has been costly, but they have maintained their confidence in God’s promises to reward them commensurately with whatever the cost of obedience might be. For the followers of the Master during the Gospel Age this reward will be “glory and honor and immortality,” and blessed association with Jesus during the thousand years of his reign.—Rom. 2:7; Rev, 20:4

Righteousness to Flourish

During Christ’s thousand-year reign, with the Devil bound, truth and righteousness will have free course throughout the earth. This is symbolized in Isaiah 29:18-20, as the opening of a book and the people being able to understand and appreciate what is written therein. We quote:

“And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy one of Israel. For the terrible one [Satan] is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off.”

First, the generation living when Christ’s authority begins to manifest itself will be taught the truth concerning God and righteousness. This same program of enlightenment will continue for a thousand years, so that as each generation is awakened from death the restored ones will have an opportunity to learn the truth. Thus, as the Prophet Isaiah promised, “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa. 11:9) Part of this knowledge will be the truth concerning God’s great love in providing redemption from sin and death through the shed blood of his Son, the Redeemer. This truth, Paul asserts, will be “testified” to all.—I Tim. 2:3-6

The thousand-year period of Christ’s reign is also described in the Bible as a day of judgment, and in Isaiah 26:9 we read that when the Lord’s judgments are abroad “in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” The next verse reads, “Let favor be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.”

This is an evident reference to those who, when every favor of the Lord is shown them, and they have been fully enlightened concerning God and righteousness, willfully pursue a wicked course of opposition to God. They refuse to “behold the majesty of the Lord” even when full opportunity to do so is given to them. Peter refers to this class, saying, “It shall come to pass, that the soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.”—Acts 3:23

Loosed and Destroyed

Each generation in its turn, throughout the reign of sin and death, has had its baptism of tears resulting from sin. For a thousand years, awakened from the sleep of death, they will have an

opposite experience. Their tears will be wiped away. Pain and death will be destroyed. (Rev. 21:4) It will be during that thousand years of blessed experience that the prophecy of Psalm 85:9-13 will be fulfilled, which reads:

“Surely His salvation is nigh them that fear [reverence] Him; that glory may dwell in our land [the earth]. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before Him; and shall set us in the way of His steps.”

With the Lord, for a thousand years, giving “that which is good” to the people, at the close of that period they will be in a position to make an intelligent choice between good and evil. Our first parents having partaken of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” they, together with their entire progeny—all mankind—will, at the close of the Millennium, have acquired by experience and by precept and observation a full understanding of both these principles.

Then will come the final test; for in the divine plan “that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan,” is to be “loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.” (Rev. 20:7,8) The great numbers here mentioned are not the deceived ones, but the people of the whole earth whom the Devil tries to deceive.

And the record indicates that despite their knowledge of both good and evil, some even then will be deceived by Satan and join with him in opposition against the Lord and against his restored people in the earth. Verse 9 shows this, but also assures us that then Satan and all who join willfully with him will be destroyed. As John saw it in vision, “Fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.”—Rev. 20:9

In the next verse, the Devil is shown to be destroyed in the “like of fire,” where death likewise is destroyed. It also says that he will be “tormented” forever. The Greek word here translated “tormented” is *basanos*. Liddell and Scott define it as a “touchstone.” The thought evidently is that although Satan will be destroyed, he will be held as a touchstone in the minds of the people, an example of the terrible results of a course of willful opposition to the Creator of the universe, the great God of love and mercy.

Looking back through the centuries of evil, they will remember that all the sorrow, regardless of what may have been the immediate cause, was basically due to the ambition of “that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan,” to be like the most High, and his rebellion against God and against his laws of truth and righteousness.

And this realization will serve as a safeguard in preventing future uprisings against the Creator. Because of this, the Prophet Nahum wrote that “affliction shall not rise up the second time.” (Nahum 1:9) We rejoice in this assurance, and may it give us courage to resist the machinations of the Devil now as, while waiting for the glorious consummation of the divine plan of salvation, we endeavor faithfully to walk in the ways of righteousness!