

Untangling the Roots of the Invisible War

As the first book of the Bible opens, God shapes a world as a home for humankind. He fills this world with beauty and living creatures, which He calls “good.” He regulates the course of the stars in the heavens. He patterns day and night, with season following season, to provide the world with stability and security. And then God creates human beings in His own “image” and “likeness” (Gen. 1:26).

It is clear in the Genesis account that God created us in His image so that He might love us and that we might return His love. Animal life is “good,” but after creating humans God pronounced His handiwork “very good.” And God sought out the first humans in a Garden He designed for their delight, to walk and talk with them.

The picture drawn in Genesis 1 and 2 is one of God and humans sharing an essential likeness, taking delight in each other. This picture reminds us that the Bible basically tells a love story. Scripture is about the relationship between the Creator and unique creatures He fashioned with the capacity to know and to love Him, even as He knows and loves us.

But the idyllic vision of early Genesis is soon shattered. A stranger appears, hosted in the body of a serpent, whose intent is to drive a wedge between God and human; to distort and destroy the love relationship that existed at the beginning.

We all know who the enemy is from our Sunday school days. Even children understand that the serpent represents God’s enemy, Satan. Even children understand that Satan succeeded in alienating human beings from the Creator. As an early American primer for schoolchildren rhymed, “In Adam’s fall/we sinned

all.”

The problem with the Sunday school approach, however, is that the treatment of the story—while factually accurate—is superficial. There are significant issues raised in early Genesis that we tend to ignore.

Genesis 1, for instance, usually is taken as a description of the creation of the universe. The account of each day’s work describes what God did, step by step, to fashion the heavenly bodies and the planet that is our home. But there is no mention of the stranger’s creation in a single one of the six days of God’s handiwork. So where did Satan come from? And when did Satan come onto the scene?

Answers to these questions provide important insights into the nature of an invisible war that is still being waged in a dimension that is largely hidden from our view. Yet one thing is clear from the Genesis account: Wherever Satan came from and whenever he came, this being has an impact on our world.

Later in the Genesis story, Adam and Eve are driven from the Garden that God fashioned for them. At that time God places beings called “cherubim” on the east side of the Garden “to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24). Commentators differ on the mission of the cherubim. Were they placed there to keep Adam and Eve from returning to the Garden? Or were they placed there to keep Satan from closing off forever the possibility of endless life for human beings?

Whatever the reason, early Genesis speaks of a stranger who succeeds in alienating Adam and Eve from the Creator. Early Genesis also identifies another kind of being, cherubim, armed with a flaming sword and charged with guarding the way to the Tree of Life.

Again, any Sunday school student can identify both the stranger and the cherubim. Ask a child, and she will tell

you that the first is a “bad angel” and the second is a “good angel.” But even her teacher is unlikely to notice that neither of these beings is mentioned in the Creation account. Even the teacher is unlikely to see the significance of their appearance here, in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis. Yet their appearance here truly is significant. The appearances of Satan and the cherubim tell us that there is a dimension beyond our own, and that beings from this dimension can enter our world. And it tells us that these beings can impact you and me in what we too often think of as the “real world.”

What is more, early Genesis tells us much about the stranger and about what is happening in this other dimension, a dimension we often call the spiritual world, but which the apostle Paul calls “the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). What does Genesis tell us? First, that there is at least one being in the spiritual world that is the enemy of the Creator. He is filled with animosity for the Creator and is determined to do everything he can to disrupt God’s plan for human beings. This enemy is intent on turning these creatures God loves against Him, and on twisting their love for Him into fear.

Second, the flaming sword held by the cherubim tells us that God has His supporters in the spiritual realm. It also indicates that there is active warfare going on there between Satan, along with any forces he might have, and the Creator, with the angels who are committed to His cause.

And once again, we are shown that this war between God and Satan, although conducted in a spiritual realm to which we have no access, can and does have an impact on us in our world.

Next time, we will look more closely at the stranger, Satan, to discover his origin and motives. And we will look more closely at his followers, for Satan does have followers. But for now it is enough to recognize that a spiritual

world, populated by beings who are at war with each other, is revealed in the earliest chapters of the Word of God. And it is enough to see in these early chapters of Genesis that the war is not fought in the heavenlies alone. Earth, too, is a battlefield. Even as the forces of evil corrupted Adam and Eve, so Satan's forces seek to corrupt human beings today.

What is so exciting to me in writing the book from which this article is excerpted is the realization that you and I are not simply spectators (or victims) of this invisible war. God has called and equipped us to be *warriors*. And as spiritual warriors, we can conquer evil spirits when they attack us and our fellow human beings.

As we read deeper into this book, we will learn how to conduct spiritual warfare Jesus' way, to set others, and ourselves, free.

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