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The Disciple-Making Minister

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

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Chapter Thirty

Modern Myths About Spiritual Warfare, Part 1

The subject of spiritual warfare has become increasingly popular in the church in recent years. Unfortunately, much of what is being taught contradicts Scripture. Consequently, many ministers around the world are teaching and practicing a kind of spiritual warfare that the Bible never prescribes. Certainly there is such a thing as *scriptural* spiritual warfare, and that is what disciple-making ministers should be practicing and teaching.

In this chapter and the next I'll address some of the most common misconceptions regarding Satan and spiritual warfare. This is a condensation of an entire book I wrote on this subject titled, *Modern Myths About Satan and Spiritual Warfare*. That book can be read in its entirety in English on our website at www.shepherdserve.org.

Myth #1: "In eternity past, God and Satan engaged in a great battle. Today, the cosmic struggle still rages between them."

This particular myth contradicts one of the most well-established, fundamental truths about God that is revealed in Scripture—that He is all-powerful, or *omnipotent*.

Jesus told us that *all things* are possible with God (see Matt. 19:26). Jeremiah affirmed that there is *nothing* too difficult for Him (see Jer. 32:17). No person or force can stop Him from fulfilling His plans (see 2 Chron. 20:6; Job 41:10; 42:2). Through Jeremiah God asks, "For who is like Me....And who then...can stand against Me?" (Jer. 50:44). The answer is *no one*, not even Satan.

If God is truly all-powerful as the above-mentioned scriptures affirm, then to say that God and Satan were or are in a battle is to imply that He is not all-powerful. If God lost even a single round, was slightly overcome by Satan even to a small degree or had to struggle against him for even a short time, then He is not all-powerful as He declares Himself to be.

Christ's Commentary on Satan's Power

Jesus once said something concerning Satan's fall from heaven that will help us understand how much power Satan has in comparison to our omnipotent God:

And the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning" (Luke 10:17-18).

When the all-powerful God decreed Satan's expulsion from heaven, *Satan could not resist*. Jesus chose the metaphor, *like lightning*, to emphasize the speed with which Satan fell. He fell, not *like molasses*, but *like lightning*. Satan was in heaven one second, and in the next—BOOM!—he was gone!

If God can so quickly and easily expel Satan himself, it should have been no surprise that His commissioned servants could also quickly and easily expel demons. Like Christ's first disciples, too many Christians today have a great respect for the power of the devil and have not yet grasped that God's power is far, far, *far* greater. God is the Creator, and Satan is only a creation. *Satan is no match for God*.

The War That Never Was

As strange as it may seem to some of our ears, we need to understand that *God and Satan are not, have never been, and never will be in a battle*. Yes, they do have differing agendas, and it could be said that they are in opposition. But when two parties are in opposition to one another, and one is immensely more powerful than the other, their conflicts are not considered battles. Could an earthworm fight with an elephant? Satan, like an earthworm, made a feeble attempt to oppose One who was immensely more powerful. His opposition was quickly dealt with, and he was expelled from heaven "like lightning." There was no battle—there was only an expulsion.

If God is all-powerful, then Satan doesn't have a ghost of a chance at even slightly hindering God from doing what He wants to do. And if God does permit Satan to do anything, ultimately it is only to accomplish His own divine will. This truth will become abundantly clear as we continue to examine the scriptures on this subject.

Interestingly, God's supreme authority over Satan was not only demonstrated in eternity past, but will also be demonstrated in the future. We read in Revelation that *one solitary angel* will bind Satan and incarcerate him for a thousand years (see Rev. 20:1-3). That future incident could not be considered a battle between God and Satan any more than Satan's original expulsion from heaven could be considered a battle. Note also that Satan will not have the power to break out of his prison and will only be released when it suits God's purposes (see Rev. 20:7-9).

What About the Future "War in Heaven"?

If it is true that God and Satan are not, have never been, and never will be in a battle, then why do we read in the book of Revelation of a future war in heaven that involves Satan (see Rev. 12:7-9)? That's a good question, and one that can be answered easily.

Notice that this war will be between *Michael and his angels* and *Satan and his angels*. God Himself is not mentioned as being involved in the battle. If He were, the conflict could hardly be described as a war, because God, being all-powerful, could easily squelch any opposition in a moment of time as He has already proven.

Angels, including Michael, are not all-powerful, and thus their conflict with Satan and his angels can be described as a war because there will be some actual conflict for a portion of time. Still, being more powerful, they will overcome Satan and his hordes.

Why would God not become personally involved in this particular battle, leaving it to His angels? I have no idea. Certainly God, being all-knowing, knew that His angels could win the war, and so perhaps He figured there was no need for Him to be involved personally.

I have no doubt that God could have easily and quickly annihilated the wicked Canaanites in the days of Joshua, but He chose to give the task to the Israelites. What God could have done effortlessly in seconds, He required them to do, expending great efforts over a period of months. Perhaps this was more pleasing to God as it required faith on the part of the Israelites. Perhaps that is the reason He will not personally be involved in that future war in heaven. The Bible, however, does not tell us.

Just because there is going to be a war someday in heaven between Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels, that is no reason for us to think that God is not all-powerful—any more than Israel's battles in Canaan are reason for us to think that God is not all-powerful.

Was Not Satan Defeated by Jesus on the Cross?

Finally, in regard to this first myth of God and Satan's reputed battles, I would like to conclude by considering the commonly-used statement: *Jesus defeated Satan on the cross*. Scripture never actually states that Jesus *defeated* Satan on the cross.

When we say that Jesus *defeated* Satan, we make it sound as if Jesus and Satan were in a battle, which implies that God is not all-powerful and that Satan was not already under the complete authority of God. There are more biblical ways of describing what happened to Satan when Jesus gave His life on Calvary. For example, Scripture tells us that through His death, Jesus rendered "powerless him who had the power of death" (see Heb. 2:14-15).

To what extent did Jesus render Satan powerless? Obviously, Satan is not completely powerless now, or else the apostle John would never have written, "The whole world lies in the *power* of the evil one" (1 John 5:19, emphasis added). According to Hebrews 2:14-15, Satan was rendered powerless in regard to "*the power of death.*" What does that mean?

Scripture makes reference to three kinds of death: *spiritual death*, *physical death*, and *the second death*.

As we learned in an earlier chapter, the *second death* (or *eternal death*) is referred to in Revelation 2:22; 20:6,14; 21:8, and it is the time when unbelievers will be thrown into the lake of fire.

Physical death occurs when a person's spirit departs from his body, which then ceases to function.

Spiritual death describes the condition of a human spirit that has not been born again by the Holy Spirit. A spiritually dead person has a spirit that is alienated from God, a spirit that possesses a sinful nature, a spirit that is, to some degree, joined to Satan. Ephesians 2:1-3 paints for us a picture of the spiritually dead person:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Paul wrote that the Ephesian Christians were *dead* in their trespasses and sins. Obviously he was not referring to physical death because he was writing to physically alive people. Therefore, he must have been saying that they were *dead, spiritually speaking*.

What killed them, spiritually? It was their "trespasses and sins." Remember God told Adam that in the day he disobeyed, he would die (see Gen. 2:17). God was not speaking of physical death, but spiritual death, because Adam did not die physically on the day

he ate the forbidden fruit. Rather, he died spiritually that day, and did not die physically until hundreds of years later.

Paul continued by saying that the Ephesians, as spiritually dead people, had walked in (or practiced) those trespasses and sins, following the “course of the world” (that is, doing what everyone else was doing) and following “the prince of the power of the air.”

Who is “the prince of the power of the air”? He is Satan, who rules his dark domain as commander-in-chief over other evil spirits who inhabit the atmosphere. Those evil spirits are listed by various ranks in a later chapter of Ephesians (see Eph. 6:12).

Paul said that dark prince is a “spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” The expression, “sons of disobedience,” is just another description for all unbelievers, emphasizing that their nature is sinful. Paul later said that they “*were by nature* children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3, emphasis added). Additionally, he said that Satan was working *in* them.

The Devil for a Dad

Whether unsaved people realize it or not, they are following Satan and are his subjects in the kingdom of darkness. They have his evil, selfish nature residing in their spiritually-dead spirits. Satan is actually their spiritual lord and father. That is why Jesus once said to some unsaved religious leaders: “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:44).

This is the bleak picture of the person who has not been born again! He is walking through life spiritually dead, full of Satan’s nature, heading for an inevitable physical death that he greatly fears; and whether he realizes it or not, he will one day experience the worst death of all, eternal death, as he is cast into the lake of fire.

It is extremely important that we understand that spiritual, physical, and eternal death are all manifestations of God’s wrath upon sinful humanity and that Satan has a part in all of it. God has permitted Satan to rule over the kingdom of darkness and over all those who “love the darkness” (John 3:19). In effect, God said to Satan, “You may hold in captivity through your power those who are not submitted to Me.” Satan became a subordinate instrument of God’s wrath upon human rebels. Because all have sinned, all are under Satan’s power, filled with his nature in their spirits and held captive to do his will (see 2 Tim. 2:26).

The Ransom for Our Captivity

We can thank God, however, that He had mercy on humanity, and because of His mercy, no one has to remain in his or her pitiful condition. Because Jesus’ substitutionary death satisfied the claims of divine justice, all those who believe in Christ can escape from spiritual death and Satan’s captivity because they are no longer under God’s wrath. When we believe in the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes into our spirits and eradicates Satan’s nature from it, causing our spirits to be born again (see John 3:1-16) and allowing us to become partakers of God’s divine nature (see 2 Pet. 1:4).

Now back to our original question. When the writer of Hebrews stated that Jesus, through His death, rendered “powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,” he meant that the power of *spiritual* death, which Satan holds over every unsaved person, has been broken for all those who are “in Christ.” We are made spiritually alive because of Christ who has paid the penalty for our sins.

Moreover, because we are no longer spiritually dead and under Satan’s dominion, we no longer have to fear *physical death*, since we know what awaits us—a glorious eternal inheritance.

Finally, because of Jesus, we have been delivered from suffering the *second death*, being cast into the lake of fire.

Did Jesus *defeat* the devil on the cross? No, He did not, because there was no battle between Jesus and Satan. Jesus did, however, render Satan powerless in regard to Satan's power over spiritual death, by which he holds unsaved people captive in sin. Satan still holds the power of spiritual death over unsaved people, but as far as those who are in Christ are concerned, Satan is powerless over them.

The Disarming of the Powers

This also helps us understand Paul's statement about the "disarming of rulers and authorities" found in Colossians 2:13-15:

And when you were [spiritually] dead in your transgressions...He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. *When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him* (emphasis added).

Paul uses obvious metaphorical language in this passage. In the first part, he compares our guilt to a "certificate of debt." What we could not pay was paid for us by Christ, who took our sin-debt to the cross.

In the second part, just as ancient kings stripped their defeated foes of their weapons and triumphantly paraded them through their city streets, so Christ's death was a triumph over "rulers and authorities," that is, the lower ranks of demons who rule over rebellious humans, holding them captive.

Could we not say, based upon this passage, that Christ *defeated* Satan? Perhaps, but with some qualification. We must keep in mind that in this passage, Paul was writing metaphorically. And every metaphor has a point where the similarities turn to dissimilarities, as we learned in the chapter about biblical interpretation.

In interpreting Paul's metaphors in Colossians 2:13-15, we must be cautious. Obviously, there wasn't an actual "certificate of debt" that had all our sins written on it that was nailed to the cross. That is, however, symbolic of what Jesus accomplished.

Similarly, the demons who ruled over unsaved humanity were not literally disarmed of their swords and shields and paraded publicly through the streets by Jesus. The language Paul uses is symbolic of what Jesus accomplished for us. We were held captive by those evil spirits. By dying for our sins, however, Jesus released us from our captivity. Jesus didn't literally fight against those evil spirits and they were not at war with Him. They, by God's righteous permission, held *us* in their power all of our lives. Their "armaments," as it were, were pointed, not at Christ, but at us. Jesus, however, "disarmed" them. They can't keep us captive any longer.

Let us not think that there was some age-long fight between Jesus and Satan's evil spirits, and finally, Jesus won the battle on the cross. If we are going to say that Jesus defeated the devil, let us be certain we understand that He defeated the devil *for us*, and not for Himself.

I once chased away a small dog in my yard who was terrifying my baby daughter. I might say I *defeated* that little dog, but I hope you understand that dog was never any threat to me, only to my daughter. It was the same with Jesus and Satan. Jesus chased a dog away from us that never bothered Him at all.

How did He chase away that Satan-dog? He did it by bearing the punishment for our sins, thus releasing us from our guilt before God, thus delivering us from God's wrath, and thus the evil spirits whom God righteously permits to enslave human rebels no longer had any right to enslave us. Praise God for that!

This leads us to an appropriate place to examine a second related myth.

Myth #2: “There are constant battles in the spiritual realm between God’s angels and Satan’s angels. The outcome of those battles is determined by our spiritual warfare.”

We’ve already learned from the book of Revelation that there will one day be a war in heaven between Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels. Other than that, there is only *one* other angelic battle that Scripture mentions, found in the tenth chapter of Daniel.¹

Daniel tells us that he had been mourning for three weeks during the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, when an angel appeared to him by the Tigris River. The purpose of the angel’s visit was to impart understanding to him concerning Israel’s future, and we’ve already briefly studied what Daniel was told in a previous chapter about the Rapture and End Times. During their conversation, the unnamed angel said to Daniel:

Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the *prince of the kingdom of Persia* was withstanding me for twenty-one days; *then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me*, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia (Dan. 10:12-13, emphasis added).

Daniel learned that his prayer had been heard three weeks prior to his encounter with this angel, but that it had taken the angel three weeks to get to him. The reason for the angel’s delay was because “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” had withstood him. He was able to break through, however, when Michael, “one of the chief princes,” came to help him.

When the angel was about to depart from Daniel, he said to him,

I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come. However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince (Dan. 10:20-21).

Several interesting facts can be learned from this passage of Scripture. Again we see that God’s angels are not all-powerful, and that they can actually be involved in fighting wicked angels.

Second, we learn that some angels (such as Michael) are more powerful than others (such as the one who spoke with Daniel).

Questions for Which We Have No Answers

We may ask “Why didn’t God send *Michael* with the message for Daniel in the first place so that there would not have been a three-week delay?” The fact is that the Bible

¹ Two possible objections answered: (1) Jude mentions a dispute between Michael and Satan about the body of Moses, but there is no mention of an actual battle. In fact, Jude tells us that Michael would “not dare pronounce against him [Satan] a railing judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you’” (Jude 1:9). (2) When Elisha and his servant were surrounded by a Syrian army in the city of Dothan, Elisha prayed for God to open his servant’s eyes (2 Kings 6:15-17). Consequently, his servant saw “horses and chariots of fire” which we assume were mounted and occupied by an army of angels in the spiritual realm. This is not, however, a definite indication that these angels had been or were about to be involved in a battle with demonic angels. Angels are used at times by God to execute His wrath against wicked human beings, an example being the slaughter of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers by one angel, recorded in 2 Kings 19:35.

doesn't tell us why God sent an angel whom He undoubtedly knew would not be able to break past the "prince of Persia" without the help of Michael. In fact, we have no idea why God would use *any* angel to deliver a message to someone! Why didn't He go personally, or speak to Daniel audibly, or bring Daniel temporarily to heaven to tell him? We just don't know.

But does this passage prove that there are constant battles in the spiritual realm between God's angels and Satan's angels? No, it only proves that, several thousand years ago, there was one three-week struggle between one of God's weaker angels and one of Satan's angels named "the prince of Persia," a battle, which, if God had so willed, would never have occurred. *The only other angelic battle mentioned in the entire Bible is the one future war in heaven, recorded in the book of Revelation.* That's it. There *may* have been other angelic battles that have occurred, but it would be an assumption on our part to so conclude.

A Myth Based Upon a Myth

Does this story of Daniel and the prince of Persia prove that our spiritual warfare can determine the outcome of angelic battles? Again, this idea *assumes* (based upon a few scriptures) that there *are* regular angelic battles. But let's take a leap in the dark and say that, yes, there are regular angelic battles. Does this story about Daniel prove that our spiritual warfare can determine the outcome of angelic battles that perhaps do occur?

The question is often asked by those who promote this particular myth, "What if Daniel had given up after one day?" The answer to that question, of course, no one actually knows, because the fact is that Daniel didn't stop seeking God in prayer until the unnamed angel arrived. The implication in asking it, however, is to convince us that Daniel, through continued spiritual warfare, was the key to the unnamed angel's breakthrough in the heavenlies. If Daniel had quit doing spiritual battle, supposedly the angel would never have made it past the prince of Persia. They want us to believe that we, like Daniel, must continue in spiritual battle, or else some evil angel may triumph over one of God's angels.

First, may I point out that Daniel was not "doing spiritual warfare"—he was *praying to God*. There is no mention of him saying anything to any demonic angels, or binding them, or "warring" against them. Daniel, in fact, *had no knowledge that there was any on-going angelic battle until three weeks had passed and the unnamed angel appeared to him*. He spent those three weeks fasting and seeking God.

So let us rephrase the question: If Daniel had quit praying and seeking God after one or two days, would that unnamed angel have failed to get God's message through to him? We don't know. May I point out, however, that the unnamed angel never said to Daniel, "It's a good thing you kept praying, or else I would never have made it." No, the angel gave credit to *Michael* for his breakthrough. Obviously it was *God* who sent the unnamed angel *and* Michael, and He sent them in response to Daniel's prayer for understanding of what was to take place in Israel's future.

It would be an assumption to think that if Daniel had stopped fasting or seeking God, God would have said, "O.K. you two angels, Daniel has stopped fasting and praying, so even though I sent one of you to take a message to him on the first day he started praying, forget about getting that message to Daniel. It looks like there never will be an eleventh or twelfth chapter in Daniel's book."

Daniel obviously did persevere in *prayer* (not "spiritual warfare"), and God responded by sending angels. We, too, should persevere in prayer to God, and if God so wills, our answer could come by the agency of an angel. But don't forget that there are plenty of examples of angels delivering important messages to biblical people where no

mention is made of anyone praying a single prayer, much less praying for three weeks.² We need to remain balanced. Furthermore, there are scores of instances of angels who gave messages to biblical people that include no mention of those angels having to fight demonic angels on the way from heaven. Those angels *may* have had to fight evil angels in order to deliver their messages, but if they did, we don't know about it, because the Bible doesn't tell us.

So on we go to a third commonly-believed myth.

Myth #3: "When Adam Fell, Satan Got Adam's Lease to Control the World."

What exactly did happen to Satan at the fall of humanity? Some think that Satan gained a big promotion when Adam fell. They say Adam was originally "the god of this world," but at Adam's fall *Satan* gained that position, thus giving him the right to do whatever he wanted to do on the earth. Even God was supposedly powerless to stop him from then on, because Adam had the "legal right" to give his position to Satan, and God had to honor His agreement with Adam which now belonged to Satan. Satan supposedly now possesses "Adam's lease," and God can't stop Satan until "Adam's lease runs out."

Is this theory true? Did Satan gain "Adam's lease" at the fall of humanity?

Absolutely not. Satan gained nothing at the fall of humanity except a curse from God and a divine promise of his total demise.

The fact is that the Bible never says that Adam was the original "god of this world." Second, the Bible never says that Adam had a legal right to give anyone else his supposed authority over the world. Third, the Bible never says that Adam had a lease that would one day expire. All of these ideas are unscriptural.

What authority did Adam originally possess? We read in Genesis that God told Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and *subdue* it; and *rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth*" (Gen. 1:28, emphasis added).

God said nothing to Adam about being a "god" over the earth, or that he could control *everything*, such as the weather, and all the future people who would be born, and so on. He simply gave both Adam and Eve, as the first humans, dominion over the fish, birds and animals and commanded them to fill the earth and subdue it.

When God pronounced judgment upon the man, He said nothing about Adam losing his supposed position as "god of this world." Moreover, He said nothing to Adam or Eve about losing their dominion over fish, birds and cattle. In fact, I think it is obvious that humanity is still ruling over the fish and birds and "every creeping thing." The human race is still filling the earth and subduing it. Adam lost none of his original, God-given authority at the fall.

Isn't Satan "God of This World"?

But didn't Paul refer to Satan as the "god of this world," and Jesus refer to him as "ruler of this world"? Yes they did, but neither made any intimation that Adam was formerly "the god of this world" or that Satan gained the title from Adam when he fell.

Additionally, Satan's title as "god of this world" does not prove that Satan can do anything he wants on the earth or that God is powerless to stop him. Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven *and on earth*" (Matt. 28:18, emphasis added). If Jesus has *all* authority on the earth, then Satan can operate only with *His* permission.

² See, for example, Matt. 1:20; 2:13,19; 4:11; Luke 1:11-20, 26-38.

Who gave Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth? It must have been God the Father, who possessed it Himself in order to give it to Jesus. That is why Jesus spoke of His Father as “Lord of heaven *and earth*” (Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21, emphasis added). God has had all authority over the earth since He created it. He gave a little authority to humans at the beginning, and humanity has never lost what God originally gave.

When the Bible speaks of Satan being the god or ruler of this world, it simply means that the people of the world (who are not born again) are following Satan. He is the one they are serving, whether they realize it or not. He is their god.

Satan’s Real-Estate Offer?

Much of the Satan-Gained theory is built upon the story of Satan’s temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, recorded by Matthew and Luke. Let’s examine Luke’s account to see what we can learn:

And he [Satan] led Him [Jesus] up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, “I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only’” (Luke 4:5-8).

Does this incident prove that Satan has control over *everything* in the world, or that Adam handed it over to him, or that God is powerless to stop the devil? No, and for a number of good reasons.

First, we should be careful basing our theology on a statement made by someone whom Jesus called “the father of lies” (John 8:44). Satan sometimes does tell the truth, but in this case, our warning flag should be waving furiously, because what Satan said apparently contradicts something that God has said.

In the fourth chapter of the book of Daniel, we find the story of King Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliation. Nebuchadnezzar, full of pride over his position and accomplishments, was told by the prophet Daniel that he would be given the mind of an animal until he recognized that “*the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes*” (Dan. 4:25, emphasis added). Four times this same declaration is made in connection with this story, underscoring its importance (see Dan. 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21).

Notice that Daniel said, “*the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind.*” That indicates God has some control on the earth, doesn’t it?

Notice also that Daniel’s claim seems to be a direct contradiction of what Satan said to Jesus. Daniel said God “*bestows it on whomever He wishes,*” and Satan said, “I give it to whomever I wish” (Luke 4:6).

So who are you going to believe? Personally, I’m going to believe Daniel.

There is, however, a possibility that Satan was telling the truth—if we look at what he said from a different angle.

Satan is “the god of this world,” which, as I have already stated, means that he is ruling over the kingdom of darkness, which includes people in every nation who are in rebellion against God. The Bible states that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). When Satan claimed he could give authority over the kingdoms of the earth to whomever he wished, he could very well have been speaking *only of his own domain, the kingdom of darkness*, which is made up of sub-kingdoms that roughly correspond to geopolitical kingdoms. We are informed by Scripture that Satan has several ranks of evil spirits through which he rules his kingdom (see Eph. 6:12), and could assume that he is the one who promotes or demotes those spirits within his ranks,

as he is the chief. In that case, Satan was legitimately offering Jesus the position of number two evil spirit—after himself—to help him rule his dark kingdom. All Jesus had to do was fall before Satan and worship him. Thankfully, Jesus passed that opportunity for “advancement.”

Who Gave Satan His Authority?

But what about Satan’s claim that the authority of those kingdoms had been “handed over” to him?

Again, there is the very real possibility that Satan was lying. But let’s give him the benefit of the doubt and assume he was telling the truth.

Notice Satan did not say that *Adam* had handed it over to him. As we have already seen, Adam couldn’t have handed it over to Satan because Adam never had it to give. Adam ruled fish, birds, and cattle, not kingdoms. (There were, in fact, no kingdoms of people to rule when Adam fell.) Additionally, if Satan was offering Jesus rule over the kingdom of darkness, which consisted of all evil spirits and unsaved people, then there is absolutely no way that Adam could have handed that jurisdiction over to Satan. *Satan was ruling over fallen angels before Adam was created.*

Satan *may* have meant that all the people of the world had handed him authority over them, as they were not submitted to God and thus were, knowingly or unknowingly, submitted to him.

An even better possibility is that *God* handed it over to him. It is very possible, in the light of Scripture, that God said to Satan, “You and your evil spirits have My permission to rule over everyone who is not submitted to Me.” That may seem hard for you to swallow now, but you will later see that is probably the best explanation of Satan’s claim. If God truly is “ruler over the realm of mankind” (Dan. 4:25), then any authority Satan has over mankind *must* have been granted by God.

Satan is only ruling the kingdom of darkness, which could also be called the “kingdom of rebellion.” He was ruling over that kingdom since the day he was expelled from heaven, which was prior to Adam’s fall. Up until Adam’s fall, the kingdom of darkness consisted only of angelic rebels. But when Adam sinned, he joined the kingdom of rebellion, and Satan’s kingdom ever since then has included not just rebellious angels, but rebellious humans.

Satan had rule over his dark domain before Adam was even created, and so let us not think that when Adam fell, Satan gained something that Adam previously possessed. No, when Adam sinned, he joined a kingdom of rebellion that had existed for some time, a kingdom ruled by Satan.

Was God Surprised by the Fall?

Another flaw in the “Satan’s-Gain theory” is that it makes God look rather stupid, as if He was caught off-guard by the events of the fall and as a result found Himself in a sad predicament. Did God not know that Satan would tempt Adam and Eve and that the fall of man would result? If God is all-knowing, and He is, then He must have known what was going to happen. That is why the Bible informs us that He made plans to redeem humanity even before He created humanity (see Matt. 25:34; Acts 2:2-23; 4:27-28; 1 Cor. 2:7-8; Eph. 3:8-11; 2 Tim. 1:8-10; Rev. 13:8).

God created the devil knowing he would fall, and He created Adam and Eve knowing they would fall. There is absolutely no way that Satan could have tricked God and gained something that God would rather Satan not have.

Am I saying that God *wants* Satan to be “the god of this world?” Yes, for as long as it suits His divine purposes. If God didn’t want Satan to operate, He would simply stop him, as we are told in Revelation 20:1-2 He will one day do.

I am not saying, however, that God wants *anyone* to remain under Satan's rule. God wants *everyone* to be saved and escape the domain of Satan (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13; 1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:9). Yet God permits Satan to rule over everyone who loves darkness (see John. 3:19)—those who continue in their rebellion against Him.

But isn't there anything we can do to help people escape Satan's dark kingdom? Yes, we can pray for them and call them to repent and believe the gospel (as Jesus has commanded us). If they do, they'll be delivered from Satan's authority. But to think that we can "pull down" the wicked spirits that hold people in their grasp is erroneous. If people want to stay in darkness, God will let them. Jesus told His disciples that if people in certain cities did not receive their message, they should shake the dust off their feet and go to another city (Matt 10:14). He did not tell them to stay and pull down the strongholds over the city so that the people would become more receptive. God allows wicked spirits to hold in bondage those who refuse to repent and turn to Him.

Further Proof of God's Supreme Authority Over Satan

There are many other scriptures that abundantly prove that God did not lose any control over Satan at the fall of man. The Bible repeatedly affirms that God always has had and always will have complete control over Satan. The devil can do only what God permits. Let's first examine some Old Testament illustrations of this fact.

The first two chapters of the book of Job include a classic example of God's authority over Satan. There we read of Satan, before the throne of God, accusing Job. Job was obeying God more than any other person on the earth at the time, and so naturally, Satan targeted him. God knew Satan had "set his heart" on Job (Job 1:8, see note in margin of NASB), and He listened as Satan accused Job of serving Him only because of all the blessings he enjoyed (see Job 1:9-12).

Satan said that God had put a hedge around Job and requested that He take away Job's blessings. Consequently, God permitted Satan to afflict Job to a limited degree. Initially, Satan could not touch Job's body. Later, however, God did allow Satan to afflict Job's body, yet forbade Satan to kill him (Job 2:5-6).

This one passage of scripture clearly proves that Satan cannot do anything he wants. He couldn't touch Job's possessions until God permitted him. He couldn't steal Job's health until God permitted him. And he couldn't kill Job because God would not allow it.³ God has control over Satan, even since the fall of Adam.

Saul's Evil Spirit "From God"

There are several examples of God using Satan's evil spirits as agents of His wrath in the Old Testament. We read in 1 Samuel 16:14: "Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him." This situation obviously occurred because of God's discipline upon disobedient King Saul.

The question is, what is meant by the phrase "an evil spirit from God"? Does it mean that God sent an evil spirit who lived with Him in heaven, or does it mean that God sovereignly permitted one of Satan's evil spirits to afflict Saul? I think that most Christians would tend to accept the second possibility in light of the rest of what the Bible teaches. The reason the scripture says that the evil spirit was "from God" was because that evil spirit's harassment was a direct result of God's divine discipline of Saul. Thus we see that evil spirits are under God's sovereign control.

³ This entire passage is also proof that Job did not "open the door to Satan through his fear" a myth believed by some. God Himself said to Satan concerning Job in 2:3: "And he [Job] still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him *without cause*" (emphasis added). I discuss this in detail in my book, *God's Tests*, pp. 175-181, which is also available to read in English on our website (www.shepherdserve.org).

In Judges 9:23 we read, “God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem,” in order that divine judgment might come upon them for their wicked deeds. Again, this evil spirit was not from God’s heaven, but from Satan’s realm, and was divinely permitted to work evil plans against certain deserving persons. Evil spirits cannot successfully work their evil plans against anyone without God’s permission. If that is not true, then God is not all-powerful. Thus we can once more safely conclude that when Adam fell, Satan did not gain authority that was beyond God’s control.

New Testament Examples of God’s Power Over Satan

The New Testament provides additional evidence that refutes the Satan-Gained theory.

For example, we read in Luke 9:1 that Jesus gave His twelve disciples “authority over all the demons.” Additionally, in Luke 10:19, Jesus told them, “Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over *all the power of the enemy*, and nothing shall injure you” (emphasis added).

If Jesus gave them authority over *all the power* of Satan, He first must have had that authority Himself. Satan is under God’s authority.

Later in Luke’s gospel we read of Jesus saying to Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat” (Luke 22:31). The text indicates that Satan could not sift Peter without first obtaining permission from God. Again, Satan is under God’s control.⁴

Satan’s Thousand-Year Prison Term

When we read of the binding of Satan by one angel in Revelation 20, there is no mention of Adam’s lease expiring. The reason given for his incarceration is simply “that he should not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev. 20:3).

Interestingly, after Satan is imprisoned for 1,000 years, he will be released and “will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth” (Rev. 20:8). Those deceived nations will then muster their armies to attack Jerusalem, where Jesus will be ruling. When they have surrounded the city, fire will come down from heaven and “devour them” (Rev. 20:9).

Would anyone be so foolish as to say that Adam’s lease included one final short period of time after those 1,000 years, and so God was obligated to release Satan for that reason? Such an idea is absurd.

No, what we learn once more from this section of Scripture is that God has complete control of the devil and permits him to work his deception only to fulfill His own divine purposes.

During the future thousand-year rule of Jesus, Satan will be out of operation, unable to deceive anyone. There will be, however, people on the earth who are only outwardly obedient to Christ’s rule, but who inwardly would love to see Him overthrown. Yet they will not attempt a coup knowing that they have no chance to overthrow the one who will “rule with a rod of iron” (Rev. 19:15).

But when Satan is released, he will be able to deceive those who, in their hearts, hate Christ, and they will foolishly attempt the impossible. As Satan is permitted to deceive potential rebels, the condition of people’s hearts will be revealed, and then God will righteously judge those who are unfit to live in His kingdom.

That, of course, is one of the reasons God permits Satan to deceive people today. We will later investigate God’s fuller purposes for Satan, but suffice it for now to say that God does not want anyone to *remain* deceived. He does, however, want to know what is

⁴ See also 1 Corinthians 10:13, which indicates that God limits our temptation, which indicates that He limits the tempter.

in people's hearts. Satan can't deceive those who know and believe the truth. But God allows the devil to deceive those who, because of their callous hearts, reject the truth.

Speaking of the time of the antichrist, Paul wrote;

And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and *with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness* (2 Thes. 2:8-12, emphasis added).

Notice that *God* is the one given the credit for sending a "deluding influence so that they might believe what is false." But also notice that these people who will be deluded are people who "did not believe the truth," indicating they had an opportunity, but still rejected the gospel. God will allow Satan to empower the antichrist with false signs and wonders so that Christ-rejecters will be deceived, and God's ultimate purpose is that "they may all be judged." For that same reason, God permits Satan to deceive people today.

If God had no reason to permit Satan to operate on the earth, He could have easily banished him to some other place in the universe when he fell. We are told in 2 Peter 2:4 that there are certain sinful angels whom God has *already* cast into hell and committed "to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment." Our omnipotent God could have done the same thing to Satan and to any of his angels if it suited His divine purposes. But for a while longer, God has good reasons to permit Satan and his angels to operate on the earth.

The Demons' Fear of Torment

As we close our study of this particular myth, one final scriptural example to consider is the story of the Gadarene demoniacs:

And when He [Jesus] had come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs; they were so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road. And behold, they cried out, saying, "What do we have to do with You, Son of God? *Have You come here to torment us before the time?*" (Matt. 8:28-29, emphasis added).

This story is often used by the proponents of the Satan-Gained theory to support their ideas. They say, "Those demons appealed to Jesus' justice. They knew He had no right to torment them before the time when Adam's lease expires, the time when they and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented day and night forever."

But actually just the opposite is true. They knew Jesus had the power and every right to torment them any time He desired, which is why they begged Him for mercy. They obviously were very afraid that the Son of God might send them to be tormented much sooner. Luke tells us they entreated Him "not to command them to depart to the abyss" (Luke 8:31). If Jesus didn't have that right because of some supposed legal right of the devil, they wouldn't have been concerned at all.

Those demons knew they were completely at the mercy of Jesus, as illustrated by their plea not to be sent out of the country (Mark 5:10), their entreaty to be permitted to

enter the nearby herd of pigs (Mark 5:12), their begging to not be cast into “the abyss” (Luke 8:31), and their imploring Christ not to be tormented before “the time.”

Myth #4: “Satan, as ‘the god of this world’ has control over everything on the earth, including human governments, natural disasters, and the weather.”

Satan is spoken of in Scripture as being “the god of this world” by the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 4:4) and “the ruler of this world” by Jesus (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Based on these titles for Satan, many have assumed that Satan has total control over the earth. Although we have already considered enough scriptures to expose the error of this particular myth, it will do us well to study even further so that we can have a full understanding of just how limited Satan’s power really is. We must be cautious that our entire understanding of Satan is not built upon only four scriptures that refer to him as god, or ruler, of the world.

As we examine more of the Bible, we discover that not only did Jesus refer to Satan as “ruler of this world,” but He also referred to His heavenly Father as “Lord of heaven *and earth*” (Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21, emphasis added). Additionally, not only did the apostle Paul refer to Satan as “the god of this world,” but he, like Jesus, referred to God as “Lord of heaven *and earth*” (Acts 17:24, emphasis added). This proves to us that neither Jesus nor Paul would want us to think that Satan has complete control over the earth. Satan’s authority must be limited.

A very important distinction between these contrasting scriptures is to be found in the words *world* and *earth*. Although we often use these two words synonymously, in the original Greek the two are usually not the same. Once we understand how they differ, our understanding of God and Satan’s authority on the earth increases dramatically.

Jesus referred to God the Father as Lord of the *earth*. The word translated *earth* is the Greek word *ge*. It refers to the physical planet upon which we live, and from it the English word *geography* is derived.

Contrariwise, Jesus said that Satan is the ruler of this *world*. The Greek word for *world* here is *kosmos*, and it refers primarily to order or arrangement. It speaks of *people* rather than of the physical planet itself. That is why Christians often speak of Satan as the “god of this world’s *system*.”

Presently, God does not have complete control over the *world*, because He does not have complete control over all the *people* of the world. The reason for this is that He has given all people a choice regarding who will be their master, and many have chosen to give their allegiance to Satan. Humanity’s free will, of course, is a part of God’s plan.

Paul used a different word for *world*, the Greek word *aion*, when he wrote of the god of this *world*. *Aion* can and often is translated as *age*, that is, a marked period of time. Satan is the god of this present age.

What does all this mean? The *earth* is the physical planet upon which we live. The *world* speaks of the people who presently live upon the earth, and more specifically, those who are not serving Jesus. They are serving Satan, and are caught up in his perverted, sinful system. We, as Christians, are said to be “in the world” but not “of the world” (John 17:11,14). We live among the citizens of the kingdom of darkness, but we are actually in the kingdom of light, the kingdom of God.

So now we have our answer. To put it simply: God sovereignly controls the entire earth. Satan, by God’s permission, only has control of the “world’s system,” which is control over those who are citizens of his dark kingdom. For this reason, the apostle John wrote that the “whole *world* (not the whole *earth*) lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

This is not to say that God has no authority over *the world*, or the world’s *system*, or the people of the world. He is, as Daniel stated, “ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes” (Dan. 4:25). He still can exalt or humble any person

He desires. However, as supreme “ruler over the realm of mankind,” He has sovereignly permitted Satan to rule over the portion of mankind that is in rebellion against Him.

Satan’s Offer Considered

This distinction between the earth and the world is also helpful in understanding Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. There Satan showed Jesus “all the kingdoms of the *world* in a moment’s time.” Satan could not have been offering Jesus a political position over earthly human governments, what we might call a president or prime minister. Satan is *not* the one who exalts and humbles earthly human rulers—God is.

Rather, Satan must have shown Jesus all the sub-kingdoms of his worldwide kingdom of darkness. He showed Jesus the hierarchy of evil spirits who, in their respective territories, reign over the kingdom of darkness, as well as the rebel humans who are their subjects. Satan offered Jesus control over *his* domain—if Jesus would join Satan’s rebellion against God. Jesus would then have become second-in-command over the kingdom of darkness.

God’s Control Over Earthly, Human Governments

Let’s establish even more specifically the limits of Satan’s authority by first examining scriptures that affirm God’s authority over earthly, human governments. Satan has *some* authority in human governments only because he has some authority over unsaved people, and governments are often controlled by unsaved people. But ultimately, God is sovereign over human governments, and Satan can only manipulate them to the degree that God allows.

We’ve already examined Daniel’s statement to King Nebuchadnezzar, but because it is so illuminating, let us briefly consider it once more.

Great King Nebuchadnezzar was lifted up in pride because of his power and accomplishments, and so God decreed that he would be brought down to a low estate in order that he might learn that “the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes, and sets over it the lowliest of men” (Dan. 4:17). Obviously God deserved the credit for Nebuchadnezzar’s rise to political greatness. This is true of every earthly leader. The apostle Paul, speaking of earthly rulers, declared that “there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (Rom. 13:1).

God is the original and supreme authority of the entire universe. If anyone has any authority, it can only be because God delegated some of His or permitted someone to have some.

But what about evil rulers? Did Paul mean that even they are established by God? Yes he did. Earlier in the same letter, Paul wrote, “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth’” (Rom. 9:17). God exalted hard-hearted Pharaoh for the purpose of glorifying Himself. God would show forth His great power through His delivering miracles—an opportunity afforded by a stubborn man whom He exalted.

Is this fact not also apparent in Jesus’ conversation with Pilate? Amazed that Jesus would not answer his questions, Pilate said to Jesus, “You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?” (John 19:10).

Jesus replied, “You would have no authority over Me, *unless it had been given you from above*” (John 19:11, emphasis added). Knowing Pilate’s cowardly character, God had

exalted him in order that His preordained plan for Jesus to die on the cross would be consummated.

Just a cursory reading of the Old Testament books of history reveals that God sometimes uses evil human rulers as agents of His wrath upon deserving people. Nebuchadnezzar was used by God to bring His judgment upon many Old Testament nations.

There are numerous examples of rulers whom God exalted or brought down in the Bible. In the New Testament, for example, we read of Herod, who failed to give glory to God when some of his subjects cried out before him, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" (Acts 12:22).

The result? "And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him...and he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:23).

Keep in mind that Herod was definitely a citizen of Satan's kingdom, but he was not out of God's jurisdiction. Obviously, God could bring down any present earthly leader if He desired.⁵

God's Personal Testimony

Finally, let us read what God Himself once said through the prophet Jeremiah in regard to His sovereignty over earthly, human kingdoms.

"Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it" (Jer. 18:6-10).

Can you see that there is no way that Satan, when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, could have been legitimately offering Jesus rule over earthly, human, political kingdoms? If he was telling the truth (as he sometimes does), then all he could have been offering Jesus was control over his kingdom of darkness.

But does Satan have *influence* in human governments? Yes, but only because he is the spiritual lord of unsaved people, and unsaved people are involved in human governments. Yet he only has as much influence as God permits him to have, and God can foil any of Satan's schemes any time He desires. The apostle John wrote of Jesus as being "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5).

Does Satan Cause Natural Disasters and Adverse Weather?

Because Satan is "the god of this world," many have also assumed that he controls the weather and is the one who causes all natural disasters, such as droughts, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and so on. But is this what Scripture teaches us? Again, we must be careful that we don't base our entire theology of Satan upon one scripture that

⁵ Does this mean that we should not pray for governmental leaders, or vote in elections, knowing that God exalts whomever He wants over us? No, in a democracy, God's wrath is practically built in. We get whom we vote for, and wicked people usually elect other wicked people. For this reason, the righteous should cast their vote. Additionally, in both Old and New Testaments, we are instructed to pray for our governmental leaders (Jer. 29:7; 1 Tim. 2:1-4), which indicates that we can influence God as He determines who will be put into office. Because God's judgment sometimes comes in the form of wicked governmental leaders, and because most nations are so deserving of judgment, we can ask for and obtain some mercy from Him, so that our particular country does not get *everything* it deserves.

says that, “the thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy” (John 10:10). How often I’ve heard people quote this verse as proof that anything that steals, kills or destroys is from Satan. When we examine more of the Bible, however, we learn that God Himself sometimes kills and destroys. Consider these three passages out of many possible examples:

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to *destroy* (James 4:12, emphasis added).

But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has *killed* has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! (Luke 12:5, emphasis added.)

And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to *destroy* both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28, emphasis added).

If we say that *everything* that involves killing or destroying is the work of Satan, we are mistaken. There are scores of examples in the Bible of God killing and destroying.

We should ask ourselves, *When Jesus spoke of the thief who comes to kill, steal, and destroy, was He actually speaking about the devil?* Again, all we need to do is read His statement contextually. One verse prior to His statement about the thief coming to kill, steal, and destroy, Jesus said, “All who came before Me are *thieves* and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them” (John 10:8). When we read Jesus’ entire discourse in John 10:1-15 stating He is the good Shepherd, it becomes even more obvious that His terms *thief* and *thieves* are references to false teachers and religious leaders.

Various Views of Adverse Weather and Natural Disasters

When a hurricane or earthquake strikes, it raises a theological question in the minds of people who believe in God: “Who is causing this?” There are only two possibilities for Bible-believing Christians: Either God or Satan causes them.

Some may object: “Oh no! God is not to blame! People are to blame. God is judging them for *their* sins.”

If God is *causing* hurricanes and earthquakes because of His judgment upon sin, then certainly we can lay the *blame* on rebel humans rather than on God, but still, God bears *responsibility*, as the natural disasters would not occur without His decree.

Or, if it is true that God *allows Satan* to send hurricanes and earthquakes to bring His judgment upon sinners, then we could say that *Satan* causes them, but still, God bears responsibility. The reason is because *He* is the one who permitted Satan to cause the destruction and because those disasters occur as a result of *His* reaction to sin.

Some say that neither God nor Satan are responsible for hurricanes and earthquakes, but that they are simply a “natural phenomena in our fallen world of sin.” In a vague way, they are also attempting to lay the blame on humankind for natural disasters, but still missing the point. This explanation does not take God out of the picture. If hurricanes are simply a “natural phenomena in our fallen world of sin,” who decided that they would be? Obviously hurricanes are not *man-made*. That is, hurricanes don’t develop whenever a certain volume of lies are spoken into the atmosphere. Earthquakes don’t occur when a certain number of people commit adultery.

No, if there is a relationship between hurricanes and sin, then God is involved, because hurricanes are a manifestation of His judgment upon sin. Even if they occur randomly, it would have to be God who decreed that they would occur randomly, and thus He is involved.

Even if there is *no* relationship between sin and natural disasters, and God goofed when He designed the world, so that there are faults in the earth's crust that sometimes shift and weather systems that occasionally go berserk, still God would bear responsibility for earthquakes and hurricanes as He is the Creator, and His mistakes harm people.

There is No "Mother Nature"

So we have only two possible answers for the question of natural disasters. Either God or Satan is responsible. Before we look at specific scriptures to determine which answer is correct, let's think further about those two possible answers.

If Satan is the one who causes natural disasters, then either God can or cannot stop him. If God *can* stop Satan from causing natural disasters but doesn't, then He again bears some responsibility. The disaster never would have occurred without His permission.

And now on the other side. Let's assume, for a moment, that God *can't* stop Satan, but He would like to stop him. Is that really a possibility?

If God can't stop Satan from causing a natural disaster, then either Satan is more powerful than God, or Satan is smarter than God. This is, in effect, what adherents to the "Satan gained control over the world at Adam's fall" theory are saying. They claim that Satan has a legal right to do whatever he pleases on the earth because he stole Adam's lease. Now, supposedly, God would like to stop Satan but can't because He must honor Adam's lease that Satan now possesses. In other words, God was too stupid to foresee what would happen at the fall, but Satan, being more intelligent than God, has now gained power that God wishes he didn't have. Personally, I'm not about to say that Satan is wiser than God.

If the "Satan-Gained" theory were true, we would want to know why Satan doesn't cause more earthquakes and hurricanes than he presently does, and why he doesn't target large populations of Christians. (If you say "because God won't let him target populations of Christians," then you've just admitted that Satan cannot operate without God's permission.)

When we narrow it down specifically, the only two possible answers to our question are these: Either (1) God causes earthquakes and hurricanes or (2) Satan does *with God's permission*.

Can you see that regardless of which answer is correct, God is the one who is ultimately responsible? When people say, "God didn't send that hurricane—Satan did with God's permission," they are not totally letting God "off the hook" as they might hope. If God could have stopped Satan from causing the hurricane, regardless of whether He wanted to or not, then He bears responsibility. Human rebels may be the ones to *blame* because of their sin (if the hurricane was sent by God or permitted by God as judgment), but still, it is foolish to say that God is in no way involved or responsible.

Scripture's Testimony

What, specifically, does Scripture say about "natural disasters"? Does the Bible say that God or the devil causes them? Let's look at earthquakes first because the Bible speaks of many.

According to Scripture, earthquakes might occur due to God's judgment upon deserving sinners. We read in Jeremiah: "At His [God's] wrath *the earth quakes*, and the nations cannot endure His indignation" (Jer. 10:10, emphasis added).

Isaiah warns,

From the Lord of hosts you will be punished with thunder and *earthquake* and loud noise, with whirlwind and tempest and the flame of a consuming fire (Is. 29:6, emphasis added).

You may recall that during the days of Moses, the earth opened up and swallowed Korah and his rebellious followers (see Num. 16:23-34). This was clearly an act of God's judgment. Other examples of God's judgment by earthquakes can be found in Ezek. 38:19; Ps. 18:7; 77:18; Hag. 2:6; Luke 21:11; Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 16:18.

Some earthquakes that are recorded in Scripture are not necessarily acts of God's judgment, but nevertheless, were caused by God. For example, according to the Gospel of Matthew, there was an earthquake when Jesus died (Matt. 27:51,54), and one when He was resurrected (Matt. 28:2). Did Satan cause those?

When Paul and Silas were singing praises to God at midnight in a Philippian jail, "suddenly there came a great *earthquake*, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened" (Acts 16:26, emphasis added). Did Satan cause that earthquake? I don't think so! Even the jailer was saved after he witnessed God's power. And that is not the only God-caused earthquake in the book of Acts (see Acts 4:31).

I recently read of some well-meaning Christians who, upon hearing of a prediction of an earthquake in a certain area, traveled to the site to do "spiritual warfare" against the devil. Can you see the error in their assumption? It would have been scriptural for them to *pray to God for His mercy* upon the people who lived in that area. And if they had done that, there would have been no need to waste their time and money traveling to the potential earthquake site—they could have prayed to God right where they lived. But to battle the devil in order to stop an earthquake is unscriptural.

How About Hurricanes?

The word *hurricane* is not found in Scripture, but we can definitely find some examples of strong winds there. For example:

Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters; they have seen the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For *He spoke and raised up a stormy wind*, which lifted up the waves of the sea (Ps. 107:23-25, emphasis added).

And *the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea* and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up (Jonah 1:4, emphasis added).

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree (Rev. 7:1).

Obviously, God can start winds and stop them.⁶

In the entire Bible, there is only one scripture that gives Satan credit for sending a wind. It was during Job's trials, when a messenger reported to him: "A great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died" (Job 1:19).

We know from reading the first chapter of the book of Job that it was Satan who caused Job's misfortunes. We must not forget, however, that Satan could do nothing to

⁶ Other scriptures which prove that God is in control of the wind are: Gen. 8:11; Ex. 10:13,19; 14:21; 15:10; Num. 11:31; Ps. 48:7; 78:76; 135:7; 147:18; 148:8; Is. 11:15; 27:8; Jer. 10:13; 51:16; Ezek. 13:11,13; Amos 4:9,13; Jonah 4:8; Hag. 2:17. In many of these examples, God used the wind as a means of judgment.

harm Job or his children without God's permission. So, again, we see that God is sovereign over the wind.

The Gale on Galilee

What about the "fierce gale" that assailed Jesus and His disciples when they were once boating across the Sea of Galilee? Surely it must have been Satan who caused that storm, as God would never send a wind that would capsize a boat that contained His own Son. "A kingdom divided against itself will fall," and so why would God ever send a wind that could potentially harm Jesus and the twelve disciples?

These are good arguments, but let us stop and think for a moment. If God didn't send the storm and Satan did, then we still must admit that God *allowed* Satan to send it. So the same question must still be answered: Why would God allow Satan to send a storm that might potentially harm Jesus and the twelve?

Is there an answer? Perhaps God was teaching the disciples something about faith. Perhaps He was testing them. Perhaps He was testing Jesus, who had to be "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). To be fully tested, Jesus had to have an opportunity to be tempted to fear. Perhaps God wanted to glorify Jesus. Perhaps He wanted to do all of the above.

God led the children of Israel to the edge of the Red Sea knowing full well that they were trapped by Pharaoh's advancing army. But wasn't God *delivering* the Israelites? Then was He not working against Himself by leading them to a place where they would be massacred? Is this not an example of a "kingdom divided against itself"?

No, because God had no intention of letting the Israelites be massacred. And He had no intention, in either sending or allowing Satan to cause a gale on the Sea of Galilee, of letting Jesus and the twelve be drowned.

Regardless, the Bible doesn't say that Satan sent that gale on the Sea of Galilee, and it doesn't say God did either. Some say it had to be Satan because Jesus *rebuked* it. Perhaps, but that is not a watertight argument. Jesus didn't rebuke *God*—He rebuked the wind. God the Father could have done the same thing. That is, He could have stirred up the wind with a word, and then calmed it by rebuking it. Just because Jesus rebuked the gale is no proof that Satan caused it.

Again, we shouldn't base our entire theology on one verse that really proves nothing. I have already made reference to scores of scriptures that prove God is sovereignly in control of the wind, and He is most often given credit for sending it. My main point is that Satan, even though he is "god of this world," definitely does not have independent control over the wind or the right to cause a hurricane anytime or anywhere he desires.

Therefore, when hurricanes occur, we should not view it as something that is beyond God's control, something He would like to stop but can't. Jesus' rebuke of the gale on the Sea of Galilee should be proof enough that God can stop a hurricane if He desires.

And if God is sending (or allowing) a hurricane, then He must have some reason, and the most intelligent answer why He would send or allow a storm that causes widespread *catastrophic* devastation is that He is warning and judging disobedient people.

"But Hurricanes Sometimes Harm Christians"

But what about Christians who are affected by natural disasters? When a hurricane hits, it doesn't just demolish the homes of non-Christians. Aren't Christians exempt from God's wrath due to Jesus' sacrificial death? Then how can we say that God is the one ultimately behind natural disasters when they might very well harm His own children?

These are indeed difficult questions. We must realize, however, that the answers aren't any easier if we base them upon the false premise that Satan causes natural

disasters. If Satan causes all natural disasters, then why does God *allow* him to cause things that might harm God's own children? We still face the same problem.

The Bible does state plainly that those who are in Christ are "not destined for wrath" (1 Thes. 5:9). At the same time, the Bible says that "the wrath of God abides on" those who don't obey Jesus (John 3:36). Yet how can God's wrath abide upon the unsaved without affecting the saved, when the saved live right among the unsaved? The answer is that, sometimes it can't, and we should face up to that fact.

In the days of the exodus, all the Israelites were living together in one location, and the plagues which God sent as judgment upon the Egyptians did not harm them (see Ex. 8:22-23; 9:3-7; 24-26; 12:23). But with us, we live and work side-by-side with the "Egyptians." If God is to judge them by means of a natural disaster, then how are we to escape?

Escape is definitely the key word in understanding the answer to this question. Although Noah escaped God's full wrath when God flooded the earth, he still was adversely affected, as he had to labor to build the ark and then had to spend a year on board with a multitude of smelly animals. (Incidentally, both Old and New Testaments give *God* the credit for the flood of Noah, not Satan; see Gen. 6:17; 2 Pet. 2:5).

Lot escaped with his life when God's judgment fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah, but he still lost everything he had in the destruction of the fire and brimstone. God's judgment upon wicked people affected a righteous man.

Years in advance, Jesus had forewarned the believers in Jerusalem to flee when they saw their city surrounded by armies, because those would be "days of vengeance" (Luke 21:22-23)—clearly indicating God's wrathful purpose for allowing the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Praise God that the Christians who heeded Christ's warning escaped with their lives, but they still lost what they had to leave behind in Jerusalem.

In all three of the above examples, we see that God's people may very well suffer to some degree when God's judgment falls upon the wicked. We cannot, therefore, jump to the conclusion that God is not responsible for natural disasters because they sometimes affect Christians.

What Then Shall We Do?

We live in a world that is cursed by God, a world that is experiencing the wrath of God all the time. Paul wrote, "the wrath of God is revealed [not "*going to be revealed*"] from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18). As those who are living among an evil, God-cursed world, we cannot completely escape the effects of God's wrath upon it, even though that wrath is not aimed specifically at us.

Knowing this, what should we do? First, we should trust God. Jeremiah wrote:

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit (Jer. 17:7-8).

Notice Jeremiah did not say that the man who trusts in the Lord will never be faced with a drought. No, when the heat and the famine come, the man who trusts in the Lord is like a tree that extends its roots by a stream. He has another source of supply, even while the world languishes around him. The story of Elisha being fed by ravens during the famine in Israel comes to mind as an example (see 1 Kings 17:1-6). David wrote of the righteous, "In the days of famine they will have abundance" (Ps. 37:19).

But aren't famines caused by the devil? No, not according to Scripture. God always takes the responsibility, and famine is often spoken of as a consequence of His wrath upon deserving people. For example:

Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, “Behold, *I am about to punish them!* The young men will die by the sword, *their sons and daughters will die by famine*” (Jer. 11:22, emphasis added).

Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Behold, *I am sending* upon them the sword, *famine*, and pestilence, and I will make them like split-open figs that cannot be eaten due to rottenness” (Jer. 29:17).

“Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and *I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it, and cut off from it both man and beast...*” (Ezek. 14:13, emphasis added).

“You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, I blow it away. Why?” declares the Lord of hosts, “Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house. Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And *I called for a drought* on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands” (Hag. 1:9-11, emphasis added).

In the fourth example above, we read that the Israelites were given the blame for the drought because of their sin, but still, God claimed responsibility for sending it.⁷

If God sends a famine upon evil people, and we happen to live among those evil people, then we should trust that He will provide for our needs. Paul affirmed that famine cannot separate us from the love of Christ!: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or *famine*, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom. 8:35, emphasis added). Notice Paul did not say that Christians will never be faced with a famine, but rather implied that they might, even though he as a student of the Scriptures, knew that famines can be sent by God to judge the wicked.

Obedience and Wisdom

Second, we should be obedient and use godly wisdom to avoid being caught in any of God’s wrath that is aimed at the world. Noah had to build his ark, Lot had to head for the hills, the Jerusalem Christians had to flee from their city; all of these had to obey God in order to avoid getting caught in His judgment upon the wicked.

If I lived in a hurricane zone, I’d build a strong house that could not be blown down or a cheap house that could easily be replaced! And I’d pray. Every Christian should pray and remain sensitive to the One whom Jesus promised would “disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13) so that he can avoid God’s wrath upon the world.

We read in Acts 11 of the prophet Agabus who warned of an impending famine that could have been potentially disastrous to Christians living in Judea. Consequently, an offering was received by Paul and Barnabas for their relief (see Acts 11:28-30).

Can such things happen today? Certainly, because the Holy Spirit hasn’t changed, nor has God’s love waned. It is unfortunate, however, that some in the body of Christ are not open to such gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and thus, because they “quench the Spirit” (1 Thes. 5:19) miss out on some of God’s best.

In his autobiography, the late president and founder of the Full Gospel Businessmen, Demos Shakarian, recounts how God spoke through an illiterate boy-prophet to the

⁷ For additional references to God causing famine, see Deut. 32:23-24; 2 Sam. 21:1; 24:12-13; 2 Kin. 8:1; Ps. 105:16; Is. 14:30; Jer. 14:12,15-16; 16:3-4; 24:10; 27:8; 34:17; 42:17; 44:12-13; Ezek. 5:12,16-17; 6:12; 12:16; 14:21; 36:29; Rev. 6:8; 18:8). Jesus Himself said that God “sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45). God controls the rain.

Christians living in Armenia in the late 1800's. He warned them of an impending holocaust, and as a result, thousands of Pentecostal Christians who believed in such supernatural manifestations fled the country, including Shakarian's own grandparents. Shortly thereafter, a Turkish invasion of Armenia resulted in the slaughter of over a million Armenians, including those Christians who refused to heed God's warning.

We would be wise to remain open to the Holy Spirit and be obedient to God, or else it is quite possible that we might experience a dose of God's wrath that He really doesn't want us to experience. Elisha once instructed a woman: "Arise and go with your household, and sojourn wherever you can sojourn; for the Lord has called for a famine, and it shall even come on the land for seven years" (2 Kin. 8:1). What if that woman hadn't listened to the prophet?

In the book of Revelation we read an interesting warning to God's people to come out of "Babylon" lest they be caught in God's judgment upon her:

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her [Babylon], my people, that you may not participate in her sins and *that you may not receive of her plagues*; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities....For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong" (Rev. 18:4-5,8, emphasis added).

In summary, God is sovereign over the weather and natural disasters. God has repeatedly proven Himself as Lord over nature in the Bible, from His causing forty days of rain during Noah's day, to His raining hailstones as well as sending other natural plagues upon Israel's enemies, to His stirring up the wind against Jonah's boat, to His rebuking the storm in the Sea of Galilee. He is, as Jesus said, "Lord of heaven and earth" (Matt. 11:25). For additional specific scriptural proof of God's lordship over nature, see Josh. 10:11; Job 38:22-38; Jer. 5:24; 10:13; 31:35; Ps. 78:45-49; 105:16; 107:33-37; 135:6-7; 147:7-8,15-18; Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17.

A Few Questions Answered

If God is judging people through famines, floods, and earthquakes, then is it wrong for us, as God's representatives, to assist and relieve the suffering of those whom God is punishing?

No, absolutely not. We should realize that God loves everyone, including people He judges. As strange as it may seem to our ears, His judgment through natural disasters is actually an indication of His love. How can that be? Through the hardship and difficulties that natural disasters cause, God is warning people whom He loves that He is holy and judgmental, and that there is a consequence for sin. God allows temporal suffering in order to help people wake up to see their need for a Savior—in order that they might escape the lake of fire. That is love!

As long as people are still breathing, God is still showing them undeserved mercy and there is time for them to repent. Through our compassion and assistance, we can demonstrate God's love for people who are experiencing His temporal wrath, but who can be saved from His eternal wrath. Natural disasters are opportunities to reach out to the world for which Jesus died.

Isn't reaching people with the gospel the most important thing in this life? When we have an eternal perspective, the suffering of those caught in natural disasters is nothing in comparison to the suffering of those who will be cast into the lake of fire.

It is a fact the people generally become more receptive to the gospel when they are suffering. There are numerous biblical examples of this phenomenon, from the

repentance of Israel during the oppression of neighboring nations, to Jesus' story of the prodigal son. Christians should view natural disasters as times when the harvest is potentially very ripe.

Let's Tell the Truth

But what should our message be to those picking up the pieces of their lives after a hurricane or earthquake? How shall we answer if they ask for a theological answer to their predicament? Let's be honest with what the Bible teaches, and tell people that God is holy and that their sin does have consequences. Let's tell them that the ferocious roar of the hurricane is but a small sampling of the power that the almighty God possesses, and the fear they felt as their house shook is nothing in comparison to the terror that will grip them as they are thrown into hell. And let's tell them that even though we all deserve to be cast into hell, God is mercifully giving us time to repent and believe in Jesus, through whom we can be saved from God's wrath.

"But we shouldn't scare people about God, should we?" some ask. The answer is found in Scripture: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). Until people fear God, they really don't know anything.

What if People Become Angry With God?

But might not people become angry at God because of their suffering? Perhaps they will, but we gently need to help them see their pride. None have a right to complain at God for His treatment of them, because we all deserve to have been cast into hell a long time ago. Rather than cursing God for their calamity, people should be praising Him for loving them so much to warn them. God has every right to ignore everyone, leaving them to follow their selfish paths to hell. But God loves people and is calling out to them every day. He quietly calls them through the flowering of apple trees, the songs of birds, the majesty of mountains, and the twinkling of a myriad of stars. He calls to them through their consciences, through His body the church, and through His Holy Spirit. But they ignore His call.

Certainly it is not God's will for people to have to suffer, but when they keep ignoring Him, He loves them enough to use more drastic measures to get their attention. Hurricanes, earthquakes, floods and famines are some of those more drastic measures. God hopes that such calamities will humble people's pride and bring them to their senses.

Is God Unfair in His Judgment?

When we look at God and our world from a biblical perspective, then and only then are we thinking rightly. The biblical perspective is that everyone deserves God's wrath, but that God is merciful. When suffering people say they deserve better treatment from God, surely He must groan. Everyone is receiving much more mercy than he or she deserves.

In keeping with this theme, Jesus once commented on two contemporary calamities. We read in Luke's gospel:

Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him [Jesus] about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam

fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1-5).

The Galileans who died at Pilate’s hand could not say, “God has treated us unfairly by not saving us from Pilate!” No, they were sinners who deserved to die. And, according to Jesus, those Galileans who survived would be wrong to jump to the conclusion that they were less sinful than their murdered neighbors. They had not *earned* greater favor from God—they had been *granted* greater mercy.

Christ’s message was clear: “You are *all* sinners. Sin has consequences. For now, you live because of God’s mercy. So repent before it is too late for you as well.”

Jesus concluded His comments on those tragedies with a parable about God’s mercy:

And He began telling this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’ And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down’” (Luke 13:6-9).

Here are the justice and mercy of God illustrated. God’s justice cries out, “Cut down the worthless tree!” But His mercy pleads, “No, give it more time to bring forth fruit.” Every person who is without Christ is like that tree.

Can We Rebuke Hurricanes and Floods?

One final question about natural disasters: Is it not true that if we have enough faith, we can rebuke and stop natural disasters from occurring?

To have faith means to believe God’s revealed will. Faith, therefore, must be founded on God’s own word or it is not faith at all, but rather hope or presumption. There is no place in the Bible where God gives us the promise that we can rebuke and calm hurricanes, and so there is no way a person could have faith to do so (apart from God sovereignly granting him faith).

Let me explain further. The only way a person could have faith to rebuke a hurricane is if he was certain God did not want that hurricane to strike a certain geographical area. As we have learned from Scripture, God is the one who controls the wind and is thus responsible for hurricanes. Therefore, it would be impossible for someone to have confident faith that he could stop a hurricane when God Himself has decreed its occurrence! The only exception to this would be if God changed His mind about the hurricane, which He might do in response to someone’s prayer that He show mercy, or in response to the repentance of the people whom He was about to judge (the story of Nineveh in Jonah’s day comes to mind as an example). Yet even if God changed His mind, still no one could have faith to rebuke and calm a hurricane unless that person *knew* God had changed His mind and also knew that God wanted him to rebuke and calm the storm.

The only person who ever rebuked and calmed a great wind was Jesus. The only way any of us could do it would be if God gave us the “gift of faith,” (or the gift of “special faith” as it is sometimes called), one of the nine gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. As with all the gifts of the Spirit, the gift of faith operates not as we might will, but only as the Spirit wills (see 1 Cor. 12:11). Therefore, unless God gives you special faith to rebuke an oncoming hurricane, you should not remain in its path, supposedly acting in faith. You should get out of the way! I would also suggest that you pray for

God's protection, and ask Him to have mercy upon the people He was judging, asking Him to spare their lives that they might have more time to repent.

Notice that when Paul was bound for Rome on a boat that was driven for two weeks by gale-force winds, he did not calm it by a rebuke (see Acts 27:14-44). The reason he didn't is because he couldn't. Also notice that God did have mercy upon every person on board, as all 276 of them survived the resulting shipwreck (see Acts 27:24, 34, 44). I would like to think that God had mercy upon them because Paul prayed for God to have mercy on them.