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Kingdom of God..."*

THE SERPENT

By J. Preston Eby

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The Serpent

Where Did the Devil Come From?

THE SERPENT

"Now the SERPENT was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made ... and the SERPENT said unto the woman, You shall not surely die ... and the Lord God said unto the SERPENT, Because you have done this you are cursed above every beast of the field; upon your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life: and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Gen. 3:1, 4, 14-15).

The book of Genesis is probably the most important book ever written. The word "genesis" of course means "origin" or "beginning," and the book of Genesis gives the only true and reliable account of the basic entities and conditions of the universe and of life. Genesis yields vital information concerning the origin of ALL THINGS - and therefore the meaning of ALL THINGS!

When God speaks of "the beginning" He is speaking of the originating point of the subject in question. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen.1:1). Away back yonder, before the dim and distant ages that are gone, our heavenly Father purposed and planned and commanded; and lo, the worlds came into being! Out of invisibility came forth the visible; where previously there had been but empty space, now matter appeared and took form: a kingdom was in the making. It all began in "the beginning." All these things had their origin in Him, and they were His workmanship from the beginning of their creation. It is interesting to note that in the Hebrew text this word "beginning" is in the plural number - "beginnings." There were many things begun all at the same time, as the manifold wisdom of God found expression in innumerable ways to bring forth into the realm of visibility the majestic

purposes of God. There is neither time nor space to enumerate all that is included in just two words: ALL THINGS. "For by Him were ALL THINGS created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: ALL THINGS were created by Him and for Him: and He is before all things" (Col. 1:16-17).

The truth to which the Spirit of God would now draw our attention is this: When God speaks of "the beginning" He is speaking of the ORIGINATING POINT of the subject in question. It is written of Jesus when He had turned water into wine, "THIS BEGINNING of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him" (Jn. 2:11). This means, simply, that the miraculous aspect of the ministry of Jesus Christ had as its originating point this miracle of the water turned into wine. He had performed no miracles before this time, but from this day forth many more were to follow. This, so far as His miracles were concerned, was "the beginning." Thus we may clearly see that if something is manifested in a certain form "from the beginning" that means that from the time it was first formed, established, and came into being it has been in that condition.

Webster defines "beginning" as (1) a start (2) the time or place of starting or coming into being; origin; source. It should not be difficult for anyone who has working knowledge of the English language to understand the meaning of "in the beginning" or "from the beginning." The beginning of anything is simply THE TIME OR PLACE OF ITS STARTING OR COMING INTO BEING.

Yet, the whole teaching of the church system has perpetrated a crude notion which collides head-on with this plain and unmistakable truth of God's Word! Despite the fact that "from the beginning" obviously means from the start, origin, or coming into being of a thing, men have taught a doctrine for long centuries which blatantly contradicts this simple statement of divine fact. I speak of that which is taught concerning Satan - the Devil.

Orthodoxy had long taught that Satan was, in the beginning, a high and beautiful archangel in heaven. The theologians and preachers recite over and over how Satan was originally "the anointed cherub that covers ... the most beautiful and wise of all God's creation!" This being was, so they say, the ruler and leader of the angelic beings and apparently led them in their praise of God and shouts of joy ...the greatest being God ever created, one who had unequalled strength, wisdom, beauty, privilege, and authority, and was next to God Himself. This blameless, perfect one, named Lucifer, was created without any form of evil and with the greatest intelligence of any created being. Then, we are told, this Lucifer, suddenly realizing how beautiful and intelligent he was, became inflated with power and pride and his heart was lifted up in rebellion against God. According to the story, Lucifer gathered one-third of the heavenly angels to his cause, mustering an army with which he planned to knock God off His throne and supplant himself as king and god of the universe and there was war in heaven! Luckily, God won, cast Lucifer out of heaven and he became, instead of an holy angel, the Devil that he is today.

It is nothing short of amazing that such a doctrine could have enjoyed such widespread acceptance in the light of the plain teachings of the Scriptures on this subject. Any man who fails to discern between facts and fables, and who opposes or rebels against facts, is a fool. Fools manifest their true state by resisting and ignoring facts. Please remember, there is a world of difference between facts, beliefs, and fantasies. I believe the core of our natural earth is hot, perhaps molten. But no man knows anything about the true conditions down there. There is no possible way of ascertaining or demonstrating the truth or falsity of my belief. So it remains merely a belief: it may be true, or it may be false. On the other hand, if I thought our natural sun were made of red paint, that would be a fantasy, just a highly improbable or irrational idea of my own. But facts are altogether different. They are actualities, realities, whether they can be demonstrated as such or not. Ice is cold. That is a fact which can be demonstrated. The earth is round. That fact has through recent centuries been conclusively demonstrated. It

is neither a belief or a fantasy. Fire burns; one must have air to breathe; these are facts, and, only fools will oppose or resist them. Now we are going to state some facts. Let us contrast what MEN say and believe with what GOD says!

Man says that Satan IN THE BEGINNING was holy, but later fell from that estate. JESUS said of Satan, "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a MURDERER (not an angel) from the BEGINNING, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he, speaks of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it. (Jn. 8:44). In these studies on the Garden of Eden we are searching out the BEGINNING, probing into the very midst of the past, the times before this age and past ages, that we might understand the grand and glorious purposes of our omnipotent and omniscient heavenly Father which He has purposed from the beginning of the world. How authoritatively the Lord Jesus reveals that way back there, in THE BEGINNING, in even HIS beginning, Satan WAS A MURDERER!

The verse we have just quoted states that Satan "Abode not" in the truth. In the Greek text this verb is the imperfect tense of HISTEMI meaning, I keep my standing, or simply, I stand, and the form is meaning that even before the fall or as far back as this person existed HE WAS NOT TRUE. Dr. Robert Young, in his Literal translation of the Bible, renders this verse: "He was a manslayer from the beginning, and in the truth HE HAS NOT STOOD, because there is no truth in him. The Rotherham version reads: "He was a murderer from the beginning, and IN THE TRUTH HE STOOD NOT; because the truth was not in him." J. B. Phillips gives the plainest and most accurate translation: "He ALWAYS WAS a MURDERER, and has NEVER DEALT WITH THE TRUTH, since the truth will have nothing to do with him. Whenever he tells a lie, he speaks in character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

MAN says that Satan IN THE BEGINNING was perfect and sinless. But the apostle John, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, penned these words in regard to Satan's origin: "He that commits sin is of the devil; for the devil SINS

FROM THE BEGINNING" (I Jn. 3:8). This could not be rightly said of Adam. According to Genesis 2 and 3, it was not until after Adam was created in spirit essence, after he was lowered into the realm of flesh, after he was placed in the Garden, after he named all the animals, after the woman was taken from his side, after she listened to the serpent and ate the forbidden fruit - it was AFTER ALL THESE THINGS that Adam sinned. Adam was not a sinner from the beginning. But the Devil, according to I Jn. 3:8 W-A-S A SINNER F-R-O-M T-H-E B-E-G-I-N-N-I-N-G! Now, if we are to believe the Bible means what it says - and I believe it does - we must believe that from his very beginning SATAN WAS EVIL.

WHO MADE THE DEVIL

Did GOD create the Devil? Well, we know he did not create himself! And he did not "just happen"! The reason some have held the view that Satan was originally an angel is because it seems to relieve God of the responsibility of evil and sin in the world. When they are asked if a good God created a bad Devil, they can reply: "No, He did not create the Devil; He created a beautiful and powerful angel who later became the Devil!" This sounds good on the surface, but when the Spirit of wisdom and revelation comes from God, this line of reasoning is seen to be but shallow inductions of the natural mind.

How COULD an all-wise and holy God create an evil Devil? Our reply to that is another question: If God, all-wise and all-knowing, created a being and designed within this being the inherent ability and potential to become evil - a will capable of rebelling against Him, and if in His omniscience He knew beforehand that this creature would become evil, is God then any LESS responsible for the Devil? If we say God created a good being and did not know he would become evil, then the Devil got a step ahead of God! If the Devil could do something back there which God did not know he would do, or did not plan for him to do, THEN HOW CAN WE BE SURE HE MIGHT NOT PULL A FAST ONE ON GOD AGAIN! Ah, beloved, such carnal reasoning is an affront to the majesty of the Most High God! Is it any less thinkable

that God would create an evil one than just to create one with the God-given ability to become evil? In either case, there is absolutely no way to absolve GOD from the Devil!

That "all things are of God" is declared over and over again in the Bible. Did not the Lord say to Pharaoh, that wicked man of rebellion against all that was of God, "Even for this same purpose have I RAISED YOU UP, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth?" (Rom. 9:17). The infinite wisdom of God's mind cannot be ascertained by these carnal little heads of ours. We must banish our childish theology and bring our minds into harmony with the mind of Christ. We must begin to peer through the mighty telescope of God's wisdom as it looks through the vast universe of good and evil until heavenly light bursts with blazing brilliance upon our inquiring spirits and we see with crystal clear vision that God is in all things, and is responsible for all things, including all the so-called evil things as well as good things. Is it not a fearful thing to say that evil is of God? There is nothing fearful about this view unless the TRUTH be fearful! I would not be surprised if some of the compatriots of the prophet Amos may have thought he was speaking blasphemy when by the Holy Spirit he said, "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be EVIL in a city, and THE LORD HAS NOT DONE IT?" (Amos 3:6) There are untold millions of Christians who do not like to believe that A-L-L T-H-I-N-G-S A-R-E O-F G-O-D - including evil. They much prefer to believe, as the harlot system has taught them, that in the beginning God made everything "perfect," then one of the "perfect" angels "made himself" into the Devil and the Devil came in and wrecked the work of God's hands and so degraded God's beautiful and perfect creation that the Lord Almighty Himself was hard put to the test to discover some way to restore the creation from the clutches of the Devil and after six long and tortuous millenniums of conflict and struggle, contest and effort the battle still rages on year after year and generation after generation, the Devil out-foxing God at times, and God getting the upper hand eventually. Childish prattle! Vain imaginations! Carnal-minded stupidity!

Why, oh why can men not believe the simple, unvarnished Word of God? Ah, we have God's own Word for it - His positive statement that HE CREATES EVIL. "That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, THAT THERE IS NONE BESIDE ME. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and CREATE EVIL. I THE LORD DO ALL OF THESE THINGS" (Isa. 45:7). God creates evil! It cannot be! But here it is in the Word. What will you do with it, beloved? "We must explain it somehow," the fundamentalist says, "surely it cannot mean that God creates evil, sin, sinners, devils, or wrongdoing - it must mean that He creates physical evil - famines, pestilences, hurricanes, tornadoes, forest fires, floods, calamities, judgments, etc. which God sends upon mankind as punishment for their wickedness." Not so! The word here for "evil" is the Hebrew word "ra" which is used throughout the Old Testament to denote wickedness, sin and wrongdoing. In some five hundred passages it is so used!

For example, in Gen. 6:5 we read, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of his heart was only evil (ra) continually." Again, "And the Lord's anger was kindled against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done evil (ra) in the sight of the Lord, was consumed" (Num. 32:13). In Ps. 34:13-15 we are admonished, "Keep your tongue from evil (ra), and your lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil (ra), and do good ... the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry. The very same word in the original is also rendered "wicked" and "wickedness" more than a hundred times. So God declares, "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things!" Why should puny man attempt to shield the Almighty from the responsibility He Himself has taken? If He says He creates peace, then believe Him. If He says He creates evil, then believe that, too. Do you remember how they brought the blind man to Jesus, and as the poor fellow stood there, the disciples said to Jesus, "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" Jesus

replied, "Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: BUT THAT THE WORKS OF GOD SHOULD BE MADE MANIFEST IN HIM" (Jn. 9:2-3). So through the evil of blindness the glory of God was manifested in the end!

Before continuing with this thought we need to establish one other point where the word of men and the Word of God differs. MAN says that the serpent in the Garden was one of these long slender reptiles that have backbones and ribs and scales on the outside of their bodies. Numerous pictures have been painted of the snake dangling from the limb of a tree, conversing with Mother Eve. In the book of Revelation we have a truth given by revelation to the apostle John wherein is revealed a most important fact concerning Satan and the serpent. This truth is stated twice in the book. Two is the number of WITNESS, thus has God given a clear and unmistakable WITNESS concerning the identity of the serpent. Hear, now, the Word of the Lord! "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him ... and I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years" (Rev. 12:9; 20:1-2).

Here Satan is called "that old serpent." The word "old" is from the Greek word "archaios" which means ORIGINAL or PRIMEVAL. "Primeval" means FROM THE FIRST AGE OR AGES: PRIMITIVE. "Archaios" is from the Greek word "arche" which means A COMMENCEMENT OR BEGINNING. Furthermore, "arche" is an abstraction of the Greek word "archomai" which means TO COMMENCE IN ORDER OF TIME. Putting this all together can we not see that Satan is that OLD serpent, that ANCIENT serpent, that ORIGINAL serpent, that PRIMEVAL serpent, the serpent of THE FIRST AGE, from the BEGINNING, who existed as a serpent right FROM THE COMMENCEMENT OF TIME!

Phillip's translation reads, "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven with the key of the pit and a huge chain in his hand. He seized the dragon, the SERPENT OF

ANCIENT DAYS, who IS both the Devil and Satan ..." Another version states, "And he seized the dragon, the ORIGINAL SERPENT, WHO IS the Devil and Satan ..." The Amplified Bible says, "And he gripped and overpowered the dragon, that OLD SERPENT OF PRIMEVAL TIMES, WHO IS the Devil and Satan ..." It is a common fault among us to repeat what the theologians and preachers of Babylon say instead of saying what GOD SAYS, but it is a very great blessing to us when once we comprehend the utter simplicity of the truth of God and simply believe it. Practically all sermons preached today are merely the philosophy of the preacher, and practically all the philosophy of the preacher is the tradition of men handed down from one generation to the next. These philosophies and traditions of the church become the established doctrines of the sect, and the graduates from the Seminaries become so zealous in propounding them that they never once think to seek HIS face, come to know HIS will, or be partakers of HIS glorious mind. Thus through a lifetime men go on preaching, contending and arguing their time-honored traditions until they become like the Pharisees of old, making the WORD OF GOD OF NO EFFECT through their traditions. They become thoroughly robbed of their vital association with Him, and lost to them is the grand and glorious TRUTH as it is IN JESUS.

MAN, on the one hand, says that a fallen angel, Satan, used the serpent in Eden. God, on the other hand, says that that original serpent IS THE DEVIL and Satan. I once read a book which explained how Satan was the greatest ventriloquist of all time, he threw his voice into the serpent so that the serpent only appeared to speak - it was really the Devil! GOD SAYS that THE SERPENT HIMSELF WAS MORE SUBTLE than any beast of the field, that the SERPENT SPOKE, and that the serpent IS THE DEVIL AND SATAN! MAN says that the Devil somehow got into the serpent and spoke through its mouth, whereas GOD declares that THAT ORIGINAL SERPENT I-S THE DEVIL!

Children in school learn what we call definitions. A definition is an explanatory statement which tells us just exactly what a certain thing is, as "an island is a tract of land completely

surrounded by water." God also gives us definitions in His Word. He tells us exactly what certain things are. And in the Scripture just quoted He has told us exactly what the serpent is: "That original serpent, WHICH IS the Devil and Satan." Now let us make this a little plainer. Definitions of men can be given backward. For instance, the definition, "An island is a tract of land completely surrounded by water," can be given thus: "A tract of land completely surrounded by water is an island." This is but another way of stating the same fact. It does not, in any way, change the meaning. Now let us try this on the definition of the serpent. "That original serpent IS the Devil" - "Satan IS that original serpent." That, dear reader, is GOD'S OWN DEFINITION of the serpent in Eden!

As soon as this truth dawns upon your enlightened heart, the knowledge of WHENCE CAME THE SERPENT will speedily follow. The Word of God is certain and unmistakable. The Holy Spirit emphatically declares, "Now THE SERPENT was more subtle than any BEAST of the field which THE LORD GOD HAD MADE" (Gen. 3:1). Two things are here revealed: the nature of the serpent is a BEASTLY nature - and GOD MADE HIM! Suppose that instead of trying to explain this passage in harmony with some cut-and-dried creed, we let all creeds go and wait upon the Spirit of the Lord to give understanding of what the passage really means, and then, if the creed does not harmonize with the light the Spirit brings, throw the creed away. At any rate here is the statement in the Word and we will be brave enough to receive it as TRUTH and trust the same One who made it to explain it. "The SERPENT was more subtle than any BEAST of the field which THE LORD GOD HAD MADE." These words deserve pages of explanation, but can you not see that they are filled with the spirit of revelation? God MADE the serpent, God MADE him with a beastly nature, God MADE him subtle, God MADE him the Devil and Satan, God MADE him a liar and a murderer from the beginning!

It is completely impossible for any man to truly know and love God until his spirit has been taught that before all things, through all things, in all things, and after all things is God, omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, eternal, purposeful, and filled with righteousness, love, kindness,

forgiveness and truth. He was before ALL THINGS and BY HIM ALL THINGS CONSIST. There is no angel, principality, or power anywhere in all the endless vastnesses of infinity that does not hold his authority by direct appointment of God. In Him all men and angels and creatures live and move and have their being. BY Him and FOR Him and TO Him are ALL THINGS. From Him everything comes, by Him everything exists, and in Him everything ends bringing glory to God forever and forever, Amen.

The imagination that a thing can have its beginning in God, and then become something other than what God foresaw, purposed, intended, or planned for it is a vain imagination that comes from the distorted mind and the wild imagination of man and not a truth that comes from the omniscient mind of our heavenly Father, for OF HIM AND THROUGH HIM AND TO HIM, are all things; to HIM be glory forever and ever! Amen! (Rom. 11:36). Even more enlightening is the translation from Goodspeed which says, "For FROM HIM EVERYTHING COMES: THROUGH HIM EVERYTHING EXISTS; AND IN HIM EVERYTHING ENDS. GLORY TO HIM FOREVER! AMEN." Or as the Amplified Bible bluntly and beautifully words it, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. - For all things originate with Him and come from Him; all things live through Him, and all things center in and tend to consummate and to end in Him. To Him be glory forever! Amen - so be it."

The words of this precious portion of Scripture cast a ray of divine illumination across the gloomy pages of human tradition that for centuries has confused men's minds and attributed to Satan the power to be and to do apart from, and in rebellion against God, causing men's faith in the omniscience, immutability, and omnipotence of the Lord to falter and die. There came a blessed day in my life when my Father in heaven let me hear a secret from His own heart, a secret that few have understood throughout all generations of the Church. When He breathed into my listening ear it well nigh stunned me because of my own tradition and unbelief, yet I could not doubt the truth He taught me when He said, "For by Him were ALL THINGS created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and INVISIBLE, whether they be

thrones, or dominions, or PRINCIPALITIES, or POWERS: ALL THINGS were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Col. 1:16-17). "ALL THINGS were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (Jn.1:3). I was as one shocked by a lightning bolt out of the sky by these words because for years all my teachers had instilled the very opposite into my mind. "God," they told me, "made a beautiful, glorious angel, but the Devil made himself!" But when I heard the voice of the all-wise Lord, speaking from the throne of His all-powerful majesty, taking upon HIMSELF all the responsibility for THE ENTIRE CREATION, my heart was amazed in His presence and for the first time in my life the "purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will," began to unfold in my deepest heart.

God is THE CAUSE of all that is. It all exists with the one purpose of showing forth His glory. Every object in nature and every creature in the universe has its only reason of existence in this - that the wondrous goodness and wisdom and power of God may shine out through it. God is the end and aim of all things, because He is their beginning and origin. All must fulfill His will because all came from Him and exist only through Him.

WHY THE DEVIL

Over the years many books have been written, many songs have been sung, many sermons have been preached, and many things have been said about and blamed on the Devil. Sad to say, but the vast majority of Christians fear the Devil more than they do God! Satan has been blamed for everything from the car breaking down to ingrown toenails. People have painted him as a huge, ugly, impish personage with horns, bedecked with a red suit, having a long pointed tail and carrying a pitchfork. The Word of God, however, has somewhat to say about who and what Satan is and WHY HE IS WHAT HE IS.

Jesus declared of Satan, "The THIEF comes not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn.

10:10). Out of God's own mouth proceeds the assertion, "I have created the WASTER to destroy" (Isa. 54:16). We gather from this passage that Satan is a created being with a definite purpose. That purpose is stated in the opening words of the above quoted verse: "I have created the smith (the Devil) that blows the coals in the fire, and that BRINGS FORTH AN INSTRUMENT for his work."

The "Smith" that "blows upon the fire" is also the one who heats the furnace seven times hotter! "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing had happened unto you." (I Pet. 4:12). Our trials and testings are associated in the Word of God with the ministry of Satan. You never thought of Satan having a MINISTRY? "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be TEMPTED (tested) OF THE DEVIL. And when the Tempter came to Him, he said, If You be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread" (Mat.4:1-3). "Fear none of those things which You shall suffer: behold, the Devil shall cast some of you into prison, THAT YOU MAY BE TRIED ... be faithful... and I will give you a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, THAT HE MAY SIFT YOU AS WHEAT: but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren" (Lk. 22:31-32). "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, SEEKING WHOM HE MAY DEVOUR: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same AFFLICTIONS are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (I Pet. 5:8-9).

We flounder a bit in our understanding of these things, but as time passes by and the Holy Spirit takes the things of God and reveals them unto us, we begin to understand that in all the universe a thing is a thing ONLY BECAUSE IT HAS ITS OPPOSITE. Good without the knowledge of evil can scarcely be called good at all. Who could possibly speak of the day if night had never been known? There was no first light if there were no darkness? What could we know of life if there were no death? What would we know of health if there were no sickness? What would we know of wealth if poverty

had not spread its specter upon the earth? No man can be trusted until he has been EXPOSED TO THE OPPOSITES, until he has been tempted. No man can be declared strong until he has been tested for weakness. Nor can he be an overcomer until he has faced the dreadful foe. Those who are worthy to slay their Goliaths must first have slain their lion and their bear. No man can be an overcoming Son of God until he has encountered THE SERPENT IN THE WILDERNESS and come forth victorious!

Everything has its right and wrong, its truth and error, its good and bad, and the one must overcome the other. Sweet must overcome and swallow up bitter, smooth rough, soft hard. Life swallows up death, said Paul in II Cor. 5:4; and it gets its strength from HAVING AN OPPOSITE WHICH IT HAS SWALLOWED UP. You cannot say a certain yes in a decision, until you have first canvassed the alternatives and said an equally certain no to each of them. The strength of the yes is swallowing up the nos! Not in having no nos, not in ignoring their existence, but in facing them and replacing them by the final yes. Ah, beloved, God is God BECAUSE THERE IS AN OPPOSITE, an adversary, an opponent, and God will be God to you, dear one, when you have encountered the adversary in all his works AND OVERCOME HIM THERE! And here we have God's perfect wisdom in the formation of the human race and in bringing forth a convenient opposite, the wrong one, the evil one, THROUGH WHOM HE WOULD BRING HIS VAST FAMILY OF SONS TO MATURITY. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He OBEDIENCE by the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). "For it became Him.... in bringing many Sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation PERFECT through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10).

As one has written, "God is constructing a temple, made of living stones, through which to manifest Himself throughout the ages to come, hallelujah, and Satan was created (a sinner from the beginning) as a chisel and hammer to be used in the construction of this building. The living stones that are even now being placed in this temple have been chosen, says the Lord, in the "furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10). God, however, is mercy; God is love; God is

compassion. He is a healer, not a destroyer. It was, nonetheless, necessary that an oven be heated in which to purify the gold - a furnace in which the wood, hay, and stubble were to be burned - but God, in His nature of love, could not perform the necessary affliction. It was for this reason that He created AN INSTRUMENT that was capable of performing this essential action in the lives of men, for in Satan God literally created a chastening rod.

"If we can realize that behind the acts of Satan is the mighty hand of God working to bring forth gold from these earthen vessels, we can rejoice, as David, in our afflictions and trials and exclaim with him, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes' (Ps.119: 7). Praise God! When we begin to see the GOOD that comes from the assaults of Satan on our lives, we are able to appreciate all the more the greatness of our God and the depth of the wisdom of His great mind. Praise His wonderful Name! He is truly a God of power and might, and ALL things are in His hand - even this adversary whom we call the Devil."

Ah, beloved, there is purpose in affliction. There is purpose in trial. There is purpose in temptation. There is purpose in suffering. There is purpose in sorrow. There is purpose in pain. There is purpose in sickness and infirmity. There is purpose in light and darkness. There is purpose in good and there is purpose in evil. There is purpose in adversity and in the adver-sary who brings it. Yes, my brother, my sister, there is purpose in the existence and work of Satan! Without this understanding all the work of God in all ages becomes a hit and miss, trial and error affair unworthy of our mighty God of whom it is written, "The Most High ... lives forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His Kingdom is from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and HE does ACCORDING TO HIS WILL in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and NONE CAN STAY HIS HAND, or say, What doest Thou?"

One of the fundamental laws of creation is that an OPPOSING FORCE is necessary for growth, and to produce strength, stamina, and endurance. Any living thing that

grows up without any opposition is weak and powerless. God's NEW CREATION must be strong and powerful, and anything that desires to be strong, or anyone, must wrestle with a force that is contrary to them. Any man who wants to develop muscular power to be strong, must spend weeks and months and years in vigorous training doing heavy exercises, lifting heavy weights, using the OPPOSING FORCE of gravity to DEVELOP HIS STRENGTH. A man who wants to be a great wrestler, doesn't just wrestle when he is in the ring. At his training center he has his wrestling partners with whom he wrestles by the hour. If he didn't do this he would be weak and powerless in the ring.

A boxer has his punching bags and sparring partners, with whom he spends hours every day. Those OPPOSING FORCES are indispensable to develop strength. A plant that grows in a greenhouse sheltered from the winds and rains, pampered day after day, may grow large, but it is inherently weak, and if suddenly exposed to the elements will wither and die. But a plant that is constantly exposed to the fierce winds and, pounding rains, burning heat and chilling cold, is strong and not easily destroyed.

So it is with us as human beings. One who grows up in a sheltered environment, who is pampered all his life, grows up a weak, spineless individual. ADVERSITY builds strength of character. If we were never exposed to trials and tribulation, we would grow up weak indeed! The more we are exposed to ADVERSE circumstances, the more we have to wrestle with our environment, the more we are CHALLENGED by the world around us, the stronger we become. Saints, IF WE WOULD BE THE SONS OF THE MOST HIGH we must be STRONG in the Lord and in the power of HIS might! Our Father wants us to be strong, so He has wisely given us wrestling partners to wrestle with, so we will become strong. There are opposing forces (thank God for them!) that we must constantly battle against. Some of these adverse things are the principalities and powers in the heavenlies. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

There is a great and magnificent future ahead for the Sons of God, and a great work our Father has for us to do in the ages to come, and He is preparing us and making us ready for the high and holy place he has for us. Can we not see that ALL THE OPPOSING FORCES WE NOW ENCOUNTER are working together for our good - to develop the strength, character, wisdom, and power we must acquire? Why the Devil? After every battle I may say, Thank you, Mr. Devil! for helping to make me a Son of God. In due time the saints are going to take the place of these principalities and powers in the heavenlies, and instead of them ruling over us, we shall rule over them. This is even now reality to the degree that we have met them in battle and conquered. This is God's plan for us!

We see this principle fulfilled in the life of Job. Job was no baby saint, for no one less than God Himself had given testimony that Job was a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil. God had blessed this man with great wealth and a large family. He had seven sons and three daughters. He owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses. His household was very great with many hired servants so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

The thing we want to note is that although Job was wealthy in temporal things, rich in spiritual things and proclaimed perfect by the Lord Himself, he had not been "tried by fire" as Sons of God must be - he was as yet UNTRIED, UNTESTED, and UNPROVEN. In the midst of Job's ordeal of affliction and suffering the spirit of prophecy came upon him and he opened his mouth and spoke concerning the purpose of God in it all, declaring, "But He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Never do I cease to be amazed at how the preachers and teachers, apparently without exception, join their voices in unison with those of Job's contemptible comforters, indicting and blaming poor old Job, charging that God brought all these calamities upon him because he had sin in his life, or because he was self-righteous, or because of some other appalling fault in Job. The only reliable

testimony we have of Job's true state of being is that spoken by the Lord Himself, and HE declared that Job was A PERFECT MAN! Perfect, yes, but untried! His perfection remained to be proven, tested, and demonstrated.

Now, what does God do but deliberately hand over this perfect and upright man into the hands of Satan to do his worst upon him, only that he should not touch his life. It was because God desired to test Job that He brought forth "the smith to blow the coals up on the fire." Please note that it was not Satan's idea to persecute poor old Job! Oh, no! it was God Himself who brought up the subject! There Satan was, presenting himself before the Lord, appearing for duty, and God asked, "Where have you been?" Satan replied, "Walking up and down in the earth" (No mention of Job at all). Well, Satan," the Lord asked, "Have you considered My servant Job? Have you noticed that he eschews evil and fears God? Have you noticed that, Satan?" You can be assured, dear ones, that Satan HAD noticed Job, but he wasn't doing anything to him.

One of the most glorious testimonies of the preservation of the saints of God is given here in this passage by Satan himself. "Does Job fear God for naught? Have You not made a hedge around him and about his house and about all that he has on every side?" Praise the Lord! Yes, there truly is a hedge around the people of God, and that hedge is Jesus Christ Himself. The Psalmist recognized and rejoiced in this fact when he said, "He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, HE IS MY REFUGE and my fortress: my God in Him will I trust:" (Ps. 91:1-2). "You've put a hedge around him," Satan said, "and I can't get to him!" Then he went on to say, "You must put forth YOUR HAND and touch all that he has, and he will curse You to Your face." But the Lord, who searches the reins of the heart, who knows them that are His, knows who can be trusted with affliction, and will not allow any to be tested beyond what they are able to bear. He therefore said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power - in your hand - only upon himself put not forth your hand."

One can only know God by vital relationship to Him. Job KNEW God! Job knew in his deepest heart that God is good, loving, true, righteous, omnipotent, omniscient, immutable and faithful in all His way. At one point in his trial he exclaimed, "I KNOW that my Redeemer lives ... and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God," and again, "I KNOW that You can do everything, and that no thought can be withholding from You" (Job 19:25-26; 42:2). Being a perfect man Job understood the nature of God, he knew what God is like - how He is. Armed with this knowledge he was unshakable and unmovable as the hand of Satan moved against him. With lightning swiftness the misfortunes fell as tribulation and affliction sorely smote this man of God. All hell broke loose upon him. His possessions were gone. His servants were gone. His cattle, his family, and his dwelling place were as though they had never been. And now he was desperately ill, tormented with pain, and without even a bed to sleep on he lies down in the ashes of what was once his beautiful home to listen to the relentless arguments of his friends, monotonously attempting by lengthy speeches to make a fool of him and prove that his present despair was the result of his own sin and disfavor with God. I do not know how many days their debate continued, but such miserable comforters as these are always at hand, ready to attest that those who have entered the furnace of affliction have been bad examples as Christians, unbelieving, or that they harbor secret sins and so are deserving of punishment. Unless the Lord Himself has convicted them of sin by His Spirit, sufferers should pay no attention whatever to them. "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence before God" (1 Jn. 3:21).

In one tragic day all Job's earthly wealth and glory had vanished as a mist before the rising sun. But did Job curse God for all this calamity? Did he even curse the Devil? Was he a fair weather saint without spiritual understanding? No, indeed! He rent his mantle, shaved his head, and falling upon the ground, HE WORSHIPPED GOD with the unmistakable words of reverence, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: THE LORD

GAVE, AND THE LORD HAS TAKEN AWAY; BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD" (Job 1:22).

You see, beloved, all external evidence shouted aloud that God did not love Job, that God had forsaken him, that God did not see him, that God wasn't concerned about what happened to him, and that God wasn't just. It seemed that God had now revealed Himself to be THE OPPOSITE of all Job had experienced and known of Him. But, praise God! Job KNEW God! He therefore KNEW that in spite of all the external evidence, in spite of how terrible and hopeless things appeared, God had not forsaken him, God did love him, God did see him, God was concerned about what happened to him, and God was just. Ah, this is faith - trusting God's goodness and faithfulness, knowing that HE has everything in control, that ALL is according to HIS purpose IN SPITE OF ALL EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY! Faith declares with Job, "Though God slay me, yet will I trust Him," - and then after being slain - TRUSTS HIM! Job, stripped of all, tried by fire, tested in the furnace of affliction, found that the key to life is not some creed or doctrinal statement of what we believe about God, but that which we KNOW OF HIM out of intimacy of fellowship and vital union with Him.

"The trial of your faith is much more precious than gold that perishes" (1 Pet. 1:7). Surely this is the lesson learned by Job, and this is the lesson being learned by us as we see our earthly dependencies passing away and withering as grass before our eyes. How could we have a more perfect illustration of how God uses EVIL and God uses SATAN as an instrument for our good? Although Job suffered intensely, yet in the end HE WAS GREATLY BLESSED BY HIS HARD AND BITTER EXPERIENCE. If God thus uses Satan, the embodiment of evil, as a minister for good in the case of one individual, is it hard to believe that ALL EVIL is utilized by God for good in all cases?

The New Testament abounds with this same truth, Did you notice how strangely Matthew and Mark speak of Christ's temptation? "And immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil" (Mk. 1:12; Matt. 4:1). What a strange statement! The Holy Spirit of God drives the

sinless Son of God into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan, the arch enemy of all righteousness, a murderer from the beginning, and the father of lies! Ah, but it was necessary for the Son to be PROVEN, to be made STRONG, to OVERCOME in these realms before proceeding on into His glorious ministry and the death of the cross. Truly God creates evil and uses it, too, for His glory! The apostle Paul fully understood this great truth and practiced it himself. He instructed the Corinthian believers to "deliver such as one to Satan FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FLESH that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus," and he declares in his letter to Timothy that he himself has delivered certain brethren unto Satan "that they might learn not to blaspheme." But the apostle had experienced something of this kind of discipline also, for he says, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, THE MESSENGER OF SATAN TO BUFFET ME, lest I should be exalted above measure." All this clearly shows that Satan is a creature created by God for a specific work, and even that work shall result in blessing for God's children and redound to the glory of God!

Dear saints of God, don't believe for one moment that anything in all God's great universe is out of control! God is GOD, He IS in full control of every sphere of activity, and Satan himself is under the province of God. May God enlighten our minds to perceive the truth that Satan has no power at all except that which God delegates to him. Do you REALLY believe that Satan could cause all the trouble in the world UNLESS GOD HAD ORDAINED IT? My friend, if you believe Satan is a problem to Almighty God, then your God is entirely too small! Satan is no thorn in God's side who made him in the first place, who binds his hands daily, who sets his boundaries and limits his power and marks his path. Oh, yes, those who would be Sons of God MUST OVERCOME HIM. Beloved, when that purpose is accomplished, Satan will have completed his course as an INSTRUMENT in the hand of God who has everything under control! Hallelujah!

About The Author

J. Preston Eby was born into a Mennonite family in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. While still a toddler his parents received the baptism in the Holy Spirit through the witness of some Pentecostal brethren in the area. They were led of the Lord to sell their business and move to Alabama to do missionary work. In his twelfth year Preston was filled with the Spirit – and in that same year the Holy Spirit sovereignly unfolded to his understanding the wonderful truth of the reconciliation of all things and all men unto God. No one else around him – in family or church associations – embraced this revelation. Through those early years he kept this truth to himself and pondered it in his heart. Later he came into contact with, and was touched by, a mighty move of the Spirit known as the "Latter Rain", with emphasis on the body of Christ, gifts of the Spirit, laying on of hands, impartation, five-fold ministry, prophetic ministry, spiritual worship, the kingdom of God, and going on to perfection, unto fullness of sonship to God.

The Lord pressed him into a deeper walk with Him, intensifying within his heart the truths of sonship and the kingdom of God, already planted within as seed through the visitation of the Lord as Latter Rain. Along the way he became associated with brother Gerald Derstine and The Gospel Crusade in Sarasota, Florida, serving as an associate minister with him for eight years, first co-pastoring and later pastoring the Revival Tabernacle in that city. His wife Lorain and he, with their family, were on the mission field in Latin America for a total of five years, with ministry in several other areas as well. For seven years, following this, he was an elder in a fellowship of believers in El Paso, Texas where they witnessed a precious move of the Spirit and a body of saints flowing together in the liberty and life of the Spirit.

Eventually the Lord changed even that order, and in 1976 led him into a full-time writing ministry directed to those who

are called and chosen as elect of God to grow up into the full stature of Jesus Christ as sons of God. The writing ministry includes a monthly message titled KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES as well as a number of booklets on various subjects. This ministry is greatly expanding throughout the world and our sincere hope and earnest prayer is that this course shall redound to HIS GLORY in encouragement, strengthening, edification and blessing to unnumbered thousands of God's elect sons everywhere – that creation may at last witness the true manifestation of the sons of God, setting all creation free from the bondage of corruption, restoring all things to God, and bringing to pass the glory of the kingdom of God throughout the whole earth and unto the unbounded heavens.

KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES are sent free to anyone upon request. God's Word is always free to all. God's way is, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Mat. 10:8).