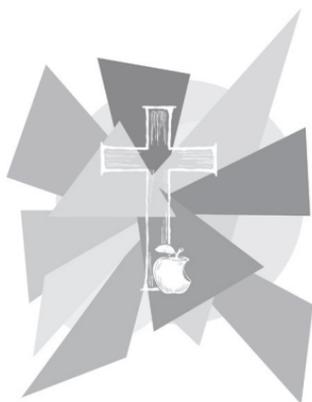


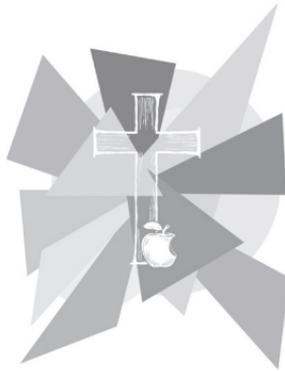
STANDING FIRM

REMAINING STRONG IN HIS STRENGTH



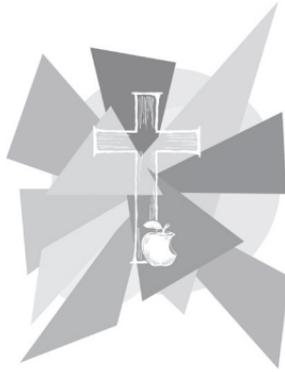
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INTRODUCTION: THE STORY OF A WAR

Most of our days are pretty ordinary, aren't they? We get up and have breakfast; maybe help our kids get ready for school. We head out for work or study or regular chores. Our days generally look very ordinary, very normal. But if you could look at the same scene through a different pair of glasses, you'd see a battle raging. As you listen to the radio over breakfast, there are bullets flying; as you walk into the office, there's an artillery strike; as you do the weekly shop at the supermarket, there are drone attacks.

A battle for people's souls is being waged. It is the great battle of this world. It is a battle we take part in every day whether we're aware of it or not. The story of the Bible is the story of a war, and Christians are caught up in this huge cosmic battle.

This is a theme that runs through the Bible, but it's not a way we tell the story very often. There are, of course, lots of other good and helpful ways of telling the story of the Bible. The danger too of focusing on any one theme is to overemphasise it and distort the others.

But we don't usually think in terms of war. If anything, it's an underemphasised theme. That's what we're trying to address in this book. We're thinking of the war God has engaged in and has already won in Jesus' death and resurrection. That's the war that we are drawn into and participate in as members of Jesus' kingdom. It is a war ultimately against the great enemy, Satan.

It's an unusual war because Satan is already defeated, the main battle has already happened and the victory is secure. But the war isn't over yet, and it shapes our lives now. Christians need to stand firm like soldiers withstanding the onslaught of the enemy.

Understanding this battle does at least two things for us. First, it gives us an enlarged perspective on our lives and the significance of how we act. David, who I talked to following the death of his wife, Helen, understood this. She had died unexpectedly and young, leaving behind David and their young daughter. It was a tragic time. We spent time reflecting on the book of Job and the tragedies he faced. One of David's reflections ran like this: "While I don't understand Helen's death, I do see that how I respond in trusting God now has cosmic significance."

Cosmic significance? Yes.

Job's extreme suffering was a test case before Satan of whether God was worth trusting. Satan was throwing all that he could at Job to turn him against God and prove his case. This was a skirmish in the cosmic battle. David saw his situation in the same terms. The questions and the pain were all still there, but there was a bigger perspective.

Second, understanding the war helps us fight well. *The Art of War* is a famous book on military strategy. It was written by Sun Tzu in China in the fifth century BC and has been influential ever since. One of the most famous lines is this:

“If you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperilled in a hundred battles ... if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperilled in every single battle.”

You need to know your enemy: know how he works, what tactics he employs and what armoury he uses. You need to know yourself: know where you are weak, how your enemy might attack you and so how you might lose. It's a simple principle: know your enemy and yourself, or you'll be vulnerable in battle and liable to be caught out.

There is an “Art of War” in the Christian life too. The apostle Paul says:

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the

powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Eph. 6:12)

We’re fighting in a spiritual battle. How well do we know our enemy? Do we know Satan’s strategy and how he fights? Do we know ourselves and where we are weak?

There’s no need to fear in this battle. Paul encourages us:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” (Eph. 6:10–11)

We can be strong in the Lord and stand firm against Satan’s attack. But to do so we need to know how to fight.

Similarly, Peter says to Christian believers: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan, the devil, is looking for those he can catch. He wants to swallow you up.

Imagine being told, “There’s a lion on the loose in your neighbourhood.” How would you feel about going outside? What care would you take stepping round corners? You would be wary, alert and on guard. That’s how Peter wants us to think and feel about Satan: he’s like a dangerous lion, and he’s out there waiting for you, so be alert and be ready. But Peter goes on, “Resist him, standing firm in the faith” (verse 9). You don’t have to be devoured by Satan; you can resist and stand against him. But you’d better be ready to fight.

THE GREAT DECEIVER

Hundreds of years ago, battles between two armies were slow and cumbersome. The troops would gradually arrive and get themselves into position. They could usually watch the other army setting up camp; everything was out in the open. They might even set a time for the battle to commence. While they'd each have their own tactics, they'd know roughly what the other would do; there were few surprises.

Satan doesn't fight like that. His method is more like today's cyber warfare; he gets through your defences and disarms you from within. Satan is deceptive. He's the father of lies. He's the seller of half-truths and the master of smoke and mirrors. You don't see him coming.

My dad was once rung up by someone from "Microsoft Windows", who said they'd noticed his computer was running very slowly and suggested he'd spotted that too. He hadn't, but was glad of the help. They suggested giving them remote access to his computer for them to have a look, so he followed their instructions. Then a variety of alarming dialogue boxes came up on the screen, and he was told how many serious issues there were with his machine. But, they said, he could buy their new anti-virus software and disk clean-up program, which he did. He ended up £130 poorer and was left wondering what was wrong with his PC in the first place. He'd been deceived.

The con-artist gets away with something not by being coercive or violent, but by being clever. He doesn't have to

steal people's money because they give it to him willingly. He doesn't have to threaten people for information because they tell him their bank details without realising what they're doing. Only later do we realise the wool has been pulled over our eyes.

I'm gullible too. We all are. Eve said it first: "The snake [Satan] deceived me" (Gen. 3:13). However, the apostle Paul applies it to everyone:

"But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the snake's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." (2 Cor. 11:3)

Paul is worried because the serpent is cunning, and we are vulnerable. The result is we can walk away from Christ and into sin without even realising. We can repeat the same sin over and over, even when we don't want to do so. We commit to trying harder to stay loyal to Christ, but don't know how to change. It's hard to fight when you can't see what's happening; it's hard to beat Satan when he's blindfolded you.

STANDING FIRM

This book helps us know our enemy and stand firm in the fight. There's no silver bullet to fire and no magic wand to wave. Too often Christian books have offered the "key" to victory over Satan; this one doesn't. That's because our fight will continue for the rest of our lives and will remain

hard. I'm not going to overpromise here. But if we see the big picture of the war that we're in, and if we know our enemy, we'll be tripped up by him slightly less often. As the eighteenth-century minister and hymn writer John Newton put it:

“The enemy who wars against our souls, is a consummate master in his way, fertile in stratagems, and equally skilful in carrying on his assaults by sap or by storm. He studies us, if I may so say, all round to discover our weak sides ... It is great mercy to be in some measure acquainted with his devices, and aware of them. They who wait humbly upon the Lord, and consult carefully at his word and the throne of grace, are made wiser than their enemy, and enabled to escape and withstand his wiles.”¹

As Peter says, we can resist Satan and stand firm; as Paul says, we can take our stand against Satan.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

We start with the big picture in chapter 1, telling the story of the Bible as the story of a war. That will set the scene and give us perspective on our daily fight.

Then we have six chapters on tactics. Each chapter takes a slightly different look at how Satan works in this fight and so how we can stand against him. Each angle on the fight has been prompted by other writers from down the centuries (I don't have any original ideas). So at some point in each chapter, I'll introduce you to these historical

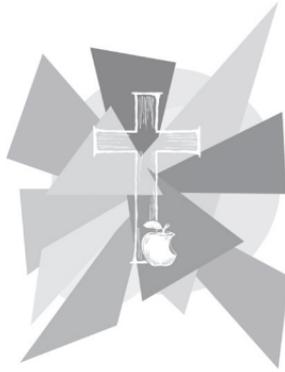
Satan-fighters from whom I've learnt. The focus, though, is less on them and more on understanding our enemy and ourselves better, so as to be better able to fight.

There's some overlap between the chapters because they are different angles on the same theme. That's both inevitable and deliberate, and should achieve several goals. First, I hope hearing from different angles will help reinforce the same point so that we grasp it better. Second, different angles work better to portray the different tactics of Satan, because he doesn't work the same way all the time. Third, different angles might resonate more with different people, so you might find one approach particularly helpful and that's fine.

At the end of each chapter is a prompt on how to fight better and so stand firm. It summarises the main points but angles them towards what you might now do. The aim here is not just to understand our enemy but to fight him more effectively.

The last chapter then looks at the armour that God provides for this battle. That will draw together all that we've seen and examine how we are equipped for this fight.

My prayer is that you will be more encouraged and equipped to stand firm.



1

THE COSMIC BATTLE

THE BATTLE BEGINS

The Bible story starts with God’s creation of the world and his specific creation of Adam and Eve to live in it and to oversee it (Gen. 1–2). It is a beginning full of order and beauty. God is in control, and everything happens just as he says. What he creates is wonderful and good. Each chapter finishes with a positive comment:

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” (Gen. 1:31)

“Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” (Gen. 2:25)

And then chapter 3 brings disaster. The serpent tempts Adam and Eve to turn against God; they are deceived and disobey. By the end of the chapter, they are out of God's presence and no longer under his blessing.

How could it all go so wrong, so quickly?

Partly that's down to us. But it all starts with Satan. He is opposed to God and his purposes, and seeks to wreck them. And by the end of round one, it looks like Satan has won – or, at least, is winning.

But wonderfully even in such seeming defeat and disaster there is the promise of a battle. We read:

“So the LORD God said to the snake, ‘Because you have done this,

*‘Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!*

*You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.*

*And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.’” (Gen. 3:14–15)*

God's words pronounce a curse on the serpent, or snake, but also promise a war. There will be “enmity” between the serpent and the offspring of the woman – that is an

ongoing fight. But it is a fight with a clear conclusion. Satan will strike the heel of this offspring – he will hurt him, but the offspring will crush Satan’s head – he will be defeated. This is known as the first gospel promise in the Bible, because this serpent-crusher will turn out to be Jesus. Jesus will be struck, but he will crush Satan.

The fight has started, but God has promised victory.

THE SOURCE OF OPPOSITION

So where did Satan come from?

In Genesis 2 he appears as part of the creation, but he is clearly not a good part of it; God wouldn’t have made him like that. We are not told a great deal here, and we must be careful of speculation. God tells us more about the reality of Satan, his work and the victory over him than he does of his origins. But we do know something.

The evidence points to Satan being one of God’s angels who then became proud and “fell”, and in doing so took other angels with him. It is worth adding that some people point to Old Testament passages that speak in these terms, but these are just as likely to be describing the pride and fall of human kings. Therefore, I don’t think we should rest too much on them (see Is. 14:12–14 and Ezek. 28:14–18). However, that there was a fall of angelic beings is very clear. For example:

“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment ...” (2 Pet. 2:4)