

**WAGING WAR**  
**IN AN AGE OF DOUBT**



# WAGING WAR IN AN AGE OF DOUBT

*A Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Practical  
Approach to Spiritual Warfare for Today*

Robert Davis Smart



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*Waging War in an Age of Doubt*  
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## **Introduction: The Call to Engage in Warfare**

Luther once said, “The devil hates goose quills [pens],” and, doubtless, he has good reason, for ready writers, by the Holy Spirit’s blessing, have done his kingdom much damage.

—Charles Spurgeon

We are called to a battle, not to a life of ease. We are called to wage war, to wrestle, to struggle, and even to write on spiritual warfare with our computers because “goose quills” of an earlier age are passé. Although times have changed into an age of doubt, spiritual warfare hasn’t gone away. Christ and His apostles have forewarned us of the character and strategy of the Enemy. This is absolutely essential because, in one sense, the Christian forewarned is forearmed. Knowing the Enemy’s character and strategy is only half the battle. We must also ask, How should we engage in spiritual warfare in an age of doubt? It is rightly objected, however, that because Satan is such a mighty foe, Christians might ask, Who is sufficient to wage war against Satan? Thank God that the Bible is realistic in instructing us about this warfare, even if modern Christian books may appear crazy for prescribing methodologies for casting out demons.

God is a warrior in both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is filled with stories of the Israelites battling against their enemies—battles which God called them to engage in under a theocracy. The New Testament, as well, is most alarming at first, indeed even terrifying, when it shows the demonic forces that Christ and

the early Christians faced. Yet Christians are enabled by God to wage this war and to triumph. God is a warrior in command over His army, which teaches us that we are to act on the basis of whom God says we are—namely, we are more than conquerors. We are exhorted to take this warfare seriously, lest in our vulnerability and ignorance the devil will take footholds in our primary, covenantal relationships and in our minds where he seeks to rule our thoughts and imaginations to establish strongholds. Therefore, the apostolic call to the church is to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might and also to put on our armor as a united church—both are necessary.

This book is a call for Christians to actually fight, engaging in this spiritual warfare in our age of doubt and standing firm against the Evil One's attacks on our churches and missional efforts to spread the gospel in word and deed. We are called in Scripture to resist the devil as good soldiers in Christ Jesus and to end our days saying, "I have fought the good fight" (2 Tim. 4:7).

Passivity and surrender were unthinkable to the apostles, and any denial of the devil's attacks must not be addressed with some form of dead orthodoxy, unorthodox assessment, or unbiblical method. In an age of doubt, we are likely to delay warfare because the biblical narrative of war between the serpent's offspring and the woman's is contested with other secular narratives. We must ask ourselves, What narrative is ruling us? What is the secular narrative today? Has an autonomous, unbelieving commitment to strive in our own strength become our mode of operation? Is there an actual power from God in our devoted efforts to follow Christ in discipleship? Formulaic piety may be a denial of God's power, however much a form of godliness exists. To whom have we given the authority to name our identity other than Christ? Have we surrendered to the control of another, a condemning thought, or a cultural assumption that is out of alignment with God's truth? What if we encounter what appears to be manifestations of the demonic in people?

When I was a young man and an evangelist on college campuses, three Christians whom I disciplined called in a panic. A Christian friend of theirs was on all fours, growling like an animal, so they wanted my



help immediately. When I came into the dorm room, I sensed this was not a mere psychological disorder, however fallen the young man's thoughts or emotions may have been. Since I had never encountered this, I was a bit frightened. We prayed over him in the name of Jesus for some time and resisted the devil until the young man relaxed, rested on the ground, and recovered. I shared the gospel with him, and he repented of an idolatrous attachment to a former girlfriend. He trusted Christ and said he felt like "a ton of bricks had been lifted from his shoulders." He has lived a stable Christian life ever since.

One night I was invited to preach at a large meeting for a prominent Christian campus ministry at Illinois State University near our church. After I delivered the message, the students sang two or three responsive songs of worship. During the singing, a student came to me because another student by him was shaking and bent over in an unusual manner. I had counseled this troubled student before and exhorted him not to use his imagination to draw strange and evil images. We prayed over the young man and resisted the devil, and this student finally went limp. He felt a huge weight, which seemed physically heavy, lifted from him. He repented and was fruitful in evangelism the next week. This book offers practical advice for such "power encounters."

Life is always a battle, but there are particular seasons or ages that are opportune times for Satan to strike—times when the Christian, like Christ, is vulnerable (Luke 4:13). These are *kairotic* moments, a transliteral phrase I will employ throughout this book. *Kairos* (καῖρός) is an ancient Greek word meaning the right or opportune moment (the supreme moment). The ancient Greeks had two words for time: *chronos* and *kairos*. While the former refers to chronological or sequential time, the latter signifies a time lapse, a moment of indeterminate time in which everything happens.<sup>1</sup> Since we live in an age of doubt and are encased in a mere chronological mind-set, I seek to persuade readers that our time is a kairotic time. It is an opportune time when significant

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1. Robert Davis Smart, *Embracing Your Identity in Christ: Renouncing Lies and Foolish Strategies* (Bloomington, Ind.: WestBow Press, 2017), 3.

spiritual warfare is taking place. Our age of doubt is opportune for the devil to battle against us because we are unaware and less awake.

In times of awakening, however, spiritual warfare is more obvious. In my studies of revivals for the last thirty years, the subject of spiritual phenomena and spiritual warfare regularly came up. Cases of demonic activity are not limited to biblical times, for other parts of the world and missionaries regularly deal with such cases. In the Great Awakening, Timothy Dwight, a merchant, lawyer, and militia colonel from Northampton's Congregational church, came face-to-face with Martha Robinson. Robinson was "supposed to be possessed by the Devil."<sup>2</sup>

Robinson had made a profession of faith, joined the Old South Church in Boston, and then began to doubt her salvation. Presbyterian evangelist Gilbert Tennent had counseled her and declared her possessed by the devil. Tennent attempted to perform a kind of exorcism ceremony but was accused of putting the devil in her. In the end, she was judged by the pastoral leadership over her to be oppressed, not possessed, by the devil. Despite her blasphemous outbursts, she was a trophy of grace. Robinson's bodily and spiritual distress was far from unique for the time.<sup>3</sup>

In our time we must engage ever more seriously in spiritual warfare, knowing the days are evil. We live in evil times, yet they are surely ripe for the kingdom of God to advance more forcefully. The conditions of faith in our culture make us doubt just how the devil is at work, although it is difficult to discern pneumatological and spiritual realities in every age. We must distinguish the spirits, yet even the Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways. As Robert Traill, one of the Puritans, wrote, "The operation of the Spirit in believers, the communion of the Holy Ghost, is a great mystery. He works more on them than they feel

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2. Kenneth P. Minkema, "'The Devil Will Roar in Me Anon': The Possession of Martha Robinson, 1741," in Elizabeth Reis, ed., *Spellbound: Women and Witchcraft in America, Worlds of Women* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1998), 99–119. See also Douglas L. Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 209–16.

3. Winiarski, *Darkness Falls*, 212.

or know; and they feel more than they can express in words; and they express more than any who have not received ‘the same Spirit of faith’ (2 Corinthians 4:13) can understand.”<sup>4</sup>

It is, however, particularly challenging in contemporary Western culture to distinguish the spirits as more than false teachings. These challenges are attributed to a lack of training in and outside the seminary classroom, unbelief and doubt in this age, unawareness of unseen forces the Bible speaks of, the strangeness of spirits to people in the West, silence on the subject of demons, the sin of omission to engage in spiritual warfare, denial and embarrassment about experiential encounters with evil, fear of the unknown and unseen spiritual realities, treatment of spirits as impersonal beings, subjectivity involved in interpreting Christian experience, and Christian controversy over the methods proposed to wage spiritual warfare. In sum, it is particularly challenging for today’s Christian leader to engage in spiritual warfare because there is mystery involved in pneumatological matters of our faith, combined with the added challenge of living in an age of doubt.

Perhaps an even more challenging condition among evangelicals is the split between what is spiritual and what is natural. Gnostic tendencies immediately seem plausible when addressing this subject. The word *spiritual* often means, in the Bible, things related to the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit has a great interest in our bodies and health just as the demonic spirits do in suffering. Waging war against the unseen forces and Satan’s army requires a recovery of an embodied spirituality and a return to Scripture to remind us of what it means to be spiritual.

Notice how Paul employed the term *spiritual* in his epistles. The apostle Paul longed to impart spiritual gifts to the Christians, and he viewed the law as spiritual (Rom. 1:11; 7:14). Only spiritual people can discern the things of the Spirit. In a letter to the Corinthians, he wrote, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). Some readers were not able to comprehend Paul’s teaching because they were “babes in Christ” and

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4. Robert Traill, *The Works of Robert Traill* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 2:44.

were not spiritual in the way they were relating to others in their local church (3:1–4). Paul combined the spiritual and the material when he taught that a pastor casts spiritual seed and receives material support for his labor (9:11). Paul interpreted the people of God in the wilderness as those who received spiritual food and drink from the spiritual Rock, which is Christ (10:4).

Warfare against evil's influences, therefore, requires leaders who discern pneumatological matters in their service to others. Paul thought it presumptuous for some people to think they were spiritual when they had not received the Lord's commands (1 Cor. 14:37). He counseled the Galatian church to select a spiritual Christian who would be able to restore a Christian caught in sin (Gal. 6:1). Since Christians are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ for the praise of God's glorious grace through spiritual songs (Eph. 1:3; 5:19; Col. 3:16), spiritual leadership and service are necessary to make sure the Spirit's fillings are taking place.

The church militant is called to engage in the war together against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12). To this end and more, Paul's prayer was that believers would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (Col. 1:9). This was why Peter exhorted believers born of the Word of God to long for spiritual wisdom all the more. As babies cry for milk, so should believers thirst for the spiritual milk of the word (1 Peter 2:2). It is in this way that Christians would be progressively built up as a spiritual house (v. 5). This book is a call to spiritual leaders who have been posted in particular militant communities by Christ to wage spiritual warfare.

Spiritual leaders engage well in spiritual warfare by using the God-ordained spiritual weapons, which are divinely powerful for the destruction of every imagination and thought that is contrary to, disobedient to, and out of alignment with the mind of Christ (2 Cor. 10:4–5). Therefore, a call to engage in spiritual warfare requires a biblical understanding and practice of it in the lives of spiritual soldiers in Christ's army.

Today's spiritual leader's challenge is that we live in an age of doubt, different from the ancient and medieval ages; the Reformation, Puritan, and Great Awakening periods; and the twentieth century. A call to spiritual warfare in an age of doubt sounds strange to present-day ears, like a trumpet blast (Josh. 6:20). Such a sound might make people today smile or laugh because it is old-fashioned. Christians in the West today prefer a somewhat cool approach that is more intellectual and casual about spiritual matters than the feisty way a warrior engages in a conflict that threatens to harm his people.

The Christian life, however, remains a struggle, a battle, and a life of war in every age. Today's problem is that we may not perceive it. How shall we engage in spiritual warfare today? We ought not to seek to live a life free from it, yet, if we are not aware of it, we will not take seriously the trumpet sound. Once spiritual leaders become aware of Satan's strategies in our age of doubt, then they will be more likely to appreciate the words of C. T. Studd, a famous missionary, who wrote, "Let us not glide through this world and then slip quietly into heaven, without having blown the trumpet loud and long for our Redeemer, Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup>

Just as military science is an interdisciplinary field combining knowledge of humanities, natural sciences, applied sciences, and engineering, so this "military textbook" is an interdisciplinary field combining knowledge of the Bible, historical theology, contemporary culture, apologetics, practical theology, and biblical counseling.

To this end, chapter 1 begins with biblical and theological foundations for spiritual warfare, which includes showing the continuity of the holy war theme in the Old and New Testaments, despite the obvious discontinuity. Chapter 2 offers a historical overview of Christian theologians on angels and warfare from ancient to modern times. Chapter 3 analyzes this present age of doubt in order to understand the context and relevance for spiritual warfare today and why it is even more urgently needed. Chapter 4 identifies Satan's strategies by listing nine occasions when Christians are vulnerable to being outwitted by

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5. C. T. Studd, "Sayings of C. T. Studd," accessed May 21, 2009, [http://www.nathan.co.za/ct\\_studd.asp](http://www.nathan.co.za/ct_studd.asp).

the devil. It also includes three insights about the crafty ways of Satan, which Jonathan Edwards observed in a season of revivals.

Chapter 5 takes the reader on a tour through the Lord's armory of spiritual weaponry that He equips the saints with so that they may stand against Satan's strategic assaults and malicious attacks. Chapter 6 zooms in to the individual Christian's war—namely, interpreting one's Christian identity—and addresses Satan's lies and the foolish strategies to renounce so that the gospel may be embraced. Chapter 7 teaches that the Christian need not fear curses and power encounters. Finally, the conclusion offers practical insights for believers to engage in warfare, encouraging believers to engage in active warfare with the militant disposition and triumphant assurance that marked the Lord Jesus and His chosen leaders in the Bible.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Have you ever encountered a strong sense that the Evil One was attacking? What was it like? Did you have doubts? Was there anything unusual?
2. How does the call to battle and wage war strike you? What emotions or thoughts do you have?
3. What impact did the quote from C. T. Studd at the end of the introduction have on you?

## *Chapter 1*

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# **God Is a Warrior**

Eowyn Stoddard is a Mission to the World (MTW) church-planting missionary who has served in Berlin, Germany, for the last seventeen years alongside her husband, David. She described the conditions of our age of doubt and the demonic opposition she had sensed there and expressed a longing for more biblical and practical training to know how to face, fight, and triumph over the dark forces and spirits that seek to cause us woe. She recalled their shock of “coming face to face with demonic forces beyond [their] comprehension.” She explained the strange events that occurred, including liters of urine poured in their stroller, blood splattered on their apartment door, a planned break-in, as well as much sickness, poor sleep, sensing an evil presence in their bedroom. Then all of this hit their climax with the X-rated nightmares tormenting their two-year-old son. She said,

Satan was not playing fair. Now the shock turned to anger. I scanned the recesses of my brain. What had seminary taught me about demonic activity? I couldn’t recall any class where we had discussed anything remotely similar to what we were experiencing. “Demonology 101” wasn’t even offered! But seminary did teach me not to panic in the face of theological conundrums. It gave me a lens through which I could see everything from the perspective of God’s sovereignty.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Eowyn Stoddard, “Dealing with Demons,” The Gospel Coalition, December 9, 2013, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/dealing-with-demons/>.

How do we interpret strange events in an age of doubt? Are we imagining things, or are such manifestations demonic? Are the odd circumstances that bespeak of Satan's assaults real? Have you ever come to the point that Eowyn and David did? When they acknowledged that the devil was behind these strange events and nightmares, their former sense of shock turned to anger and a search for biblical answers.

Before we give credence to people's interpretation that adverse circumstances are demonic, we must remember the doctrine of providence—namely, that God created, sustains, and governs all things for the good of believers. God is sovereign, and whatever the demons may be up to, the doctrine of providence is sounder than our interpretations of experiences that seem mostly demonic. It is wise for pastors to take the reports as they come and to work on interpretation from there, lest we dismiss every report as foolish because it is strange.

We simply must have basic biblical convictions that will build our faith for strange encounters and dangerous threats that will come to oppose our efforts to spread the gospel in these postmodern times. Ever since Satan first attacked the woman in Eden, he has turned his attention to another woman, the bride of Christ.

Our key text in this chapter is Genesis 3:15—the *protoevangelion* (the first gospel)—a declaration of war by God the warrior, who promised to send Christ as the victor through the work of the cross. There God announced that the seed of the woman (believers) will always be at war with the seed of the serpent (the divergent branch of humanity under Satan's dominion). This chapter is a brief study of Scripture concerning Satan's identity, ways, and power. In addition to examining Genesis 3:15, this chapter also seeks to reconcile the nature of holy war in the Old Testament with spiritual warfare in the New Testament, showing both the discontinuity and the continuity. First, however, God's enemy must be identified.

### **The Enemy's Identity, Ways, and Power**

The Bible teaches demonology—Satan's identity, ways, and power. What does the Bible call him? What are his ways with nonbelievers and believers? How does the Bible describe his great but limited power?



### *Satan's Identity*

*Satan*, which means adversary and accuser, is referred to in Scripture by the names Abaddon and Apollyon (Rev. 9:11), Beelzebub (Matt. 12:24; Luke 11:15), Belial (2 Cor. 6:15), and Lucifer (Isa. 14:12).

Satan is called the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10; see Job 1–2, Zech. 3:1), the serpent of old (Rev. 12:9), the angel of the bottomless pit (Rev. 9:11), the devil (Rev. 12:9 and other passages), our enemy (Matt. 13:25, 28, 39), our adversary (1 Peter 5:8), the evil one (Matt. 5:37; 6:13; 2 Thess. 3:3), the wicked one (Matt. 13:19, 38; Eph. 6:16; 1 John 2:13–14; 3:12; 5:18–19), the Father of Lies and a murderer (John 8:44), the ruler of demons (Matt. 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15), the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), and the tempter (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5).

### *Satan's Ways*

Satan does not exercise complete free reign over people because of divinely imposed limitations and restraints (Job 1:12; 2:6; Matt. 12:29; Rev. 20:2–3), yet Satan is said nonetheless to rage against God's people (Rev. 12:12). Scripture reveals Satan's ways toward both non-believers and believers, which I will address at length in a subsequent chapter.

*Satan's ways with nonbelievers.* He prowls about like a roaring lion to threaten Christians, and he is looking for ways to devour people in general (1 Peter 5:8). Satan is working in people who are not saved, "the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). He is keeping people "blind" so they cannot see the light of the glory revealed in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4–6). He blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

Satan has a partial role in causing the oppression of people with physical and mental illness whom Jesus healed and set free (Acts 10:38). Satan is solely blamed, however, for crippling a woman for eighteen years (Luke 13:11, 16).

Satan is always attempting to get people to turn away from God's service, to take them captive to his will, and to deceive every ethnicity of the earth in every race and culture. Scripture says that some in Timothy and Paul's time strayed after Satan (1 Tim. 5:15) and that the devil has a degree of power to take men captive to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26), as he put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ when he entered into Judas (John 13:2, 27). His larger influence is meant to deceive the nations (Rev. 12:9; 20:3).

*Satan's ways with Christians.* Christians may not have noticed much in the way of Satan's attacks prior to their conversion, but the level of awareness of our failures and warfare often intensifies after becoming a Christian. Every Christian is engaged in an interpretation war (see chapter 6). Satan works alongside Christian evangelism to sow tares in the field of the world (Matt. 13:25) and to obstruct world missions (1 Thess. 2:18). He offers a counterfeit and attractive gospel by masquerading as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). From the beginning of time, Satan picked a fight with Christians, an all-out war against them. And one day, he will make war against the saints in the end (Rev. 12:17). For now, he persecutes in order to throw Christians in prison and make life difficult (Rev. 2:10).

Satan is a liar and a murderer. So Jesus and the apostles warned about how he seeks to keep people under his rule through lies and fear. By suggesting his interpretations as truth, he holds sway over people, all the while seeking to murder them (John 8:44). He attempts to hold believers under the power of death through fear (Heb. 2:14).

Specifically, Satan casts doubt on God's goodness and the sincerity of believers, while seeking to inflict harm on Christians' very bodies. For it was Satan who tempted Adam to sin (Gen. 3:1–5) and who accused Job of serving God for profit (Job 1–2) while afflicting him with physical and mental anguish (Job 2:7, 13). Satan appears to have intended evil for Moses's dead body because he desired the body of Moses (Jude 9), and he also requested permission to sift Peter as wheat (Luke 22:31) and tormented Paul with a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7).

During sincere times of worship, believers are vulnerable to his accusations, like Joshua the high priest (Zech. 3:1) and like Ananias when Satan gave him a heart to lie against the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3) in the offering time of corporate worship.

Scripture warns Christians to check their motives in service to God. Believers may be stirred up and kindled to sin, even to oppose Jesus's plans of salvation. Satan incited David to sin (1 Chron. 21:1), and he instigated Peter to oppose Jesus's approaching death (Matt. 16:23; Mark 8:33).

As the later chapters in this book will mention, Satan primarily attacks Christians' identity in the way he tempted Jesus to doubt that He was the beloved Son of God (Matt. 4:3, 6; Luke 4:3, 9). Scripture is quite clear concerning the names, representations, and ways of Satan and also his power to perform them.

### *Satan's Power*

In addition to the many references in Scripture to demons, particularly in the four Gospels, Scripture speaks of definite powerful aspects of Satan's kingdom of darkness, referring to the reign of darkness (Luke 4:6; 22:53; Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13) and the hour of darkness (Luke 22:53), to principalities and powers of this dark world (Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:15), and to spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm against which the believers who lack the whole armor of God cannot possibly stand (Eph. 6:12–13).

Satan devises powerful schemes (Eph. 6:11) and "traps" people in need of repentance and escape from his snares (2 Tim. 2:26). Satan has a powerful rule over others that he appoints as junior subjects to oversee his interests among the nations (Dan. 10:11–11:1). He has a fatherly influence over unbelievers used to attack believers. Satan is the "father" of many men who are viewed as his children (John 8:44; Acts 13:10) and sees that pagan sacrifices are offered to demons and not to God (1 Cor. 10:20). Satan has opposed the church by inspiring false religions and idolatry within visible churches (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

With a general knowledge of Satan's identity, ways, and powerful influence, believers are comforted with the promise and triumphant

knowledge that God immediately waged war on Satan for our salvation. This promise of ultimate defeat was accomplished in the cross of Jesus, His ascension, and His ongoing victory until the consummation. At the very moment of Satan's first attack on people, God cursed Satan, declared war between Satan's offspring and the woman's, and promised that Satan's head would be crushed in defeat through Jesus Christ's death on the cross.

### **God Is a Warrior: The Serpent Cursed and Victory in Christ Promised**

Humanity would be rescued from Satan's rule only through Christ's redemptive and destructive work in order that Satan's evil kingdom of power would be nullified. John Murray observed, "It is most significant that the work of Christ, which is so central in our Christian faith, is essentially a work of destruction that terminates upon the power and work of Satan. This is not a peripheral or incidental feature of redemption. It is an integral aspect of its accomplishment."<sup>2</sup> Murray wrote elsewhere, "It is surely significant...that the first promise of redemptive grace, the first beam of redemptive light that fell upon our fallen first parents, was in terms of the destruction of the tempter."<sup>3</sup>

In Genesis 3:1 we are immediately confronted with the presence of the serpent as the tempter, who is working at purposes contrary to God's. This satanic presence in the serpent has consistently been regarded as a literal creature under the control of Satan. Geerhardus Vos makes an interesting observation: "So far from there being anything impossible in [Satan speaking through the serpent], it finds a close analogy in the demoniacs of the Gospels, through whose mouth demons speak."<sup>4</sup>

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2. John Murray, "Fall of Man," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:68.

3. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 49.

4. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 44.