

SATAN'S A GONER

The devil sometimes gets more than his due; here's why we can face him with confidence.

Mark Twain once famously said that reports of his death were greatly exaggerated. We could say the same thing about Satan, in reverse: Reports of his *life* have been greatly exaggerated. No matter how much havoc the devil wreaks, it comes from a doomed creature: his head has been removed because of Christ. In God's eyes, the battle is over. All Christians can rejoice in Christ's victory.

Yet the headless serpent continues to thrash about, causing fear and destruction. What are we to think and do? How do we gain perspective during this dangerous epoch? How do we respond as faithful followers to this "already and not yet" victory?

Scripture: Genesis 3:1–21; Luke 8:26–39; 10:1–20; 1 Peter 5:6–11; Revelation 12:7–12

Based on: "Satan's a Goner," by Carolyn Arends, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, February 2011



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE FOR A GROUP STUDY



This Bible study can be used for an individual or a group. If you intend to lead a group study, follow these simple suggestions.

- 1** Make enough copies of the article for everyone in the group. If you would like your group to have more information, feel free to copy the leader's guide for them as well.
- 2** Don't feel that you have to use all the material in the study. Almost all of our studies have more information than you can get through in one session, so feel free to pick and choose the teaching information and questions that will meet the needs of your group. Use the teaching content of the study in any of these ways: for your own background and information; to read aloud (or summarize) to the group; for the group to read silently.
- 3** Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting people to open up.
- 4** When working through the questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for your group to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
- 5** Begin and end the session in prayer.

Part 1 **IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE**

Note to leader: Provide each person with the article "Satan's a Goner" from CHRISTIANITY TODAY, included at the end of this study.

While about nine in ten Americans say they believe in God, popular culture sometimes makes it seem that we think more about the devil than about the Supreme Being. Movies such as *Hell-Raiser*, *The Omen*, *End of Days*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Lost Souls*, *Prince of Darkness*, and many more testify to what C. S. Lewis termed our "excessive and unhealthy" interest in the demonic.

Yet we don't need a corrupt or questioning cinema to make us think of the Adversary. The destructive things that happen in the world—man's inhumanity to man, disasters that come our way with mind-numbing frequency—remind us that all is not right with the world. In this context, the Bible's assertion that evil has a personal focus makes a lot of sense. Yet Carolyn Arends' column "Satan's a Goner" reminds us that the devil doesn't get the last word, no matter how much misery he causes now.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] Do you believe in a personal devil? Why or why not?
- [Q] Do you enjoy horror movies? Why are they so popular?
- [Q] Have you encountered evil in a way that made you afraid? What did you do?
- [Q] What effects of a thrashing, headless devil have you confronted in ministry?
- [Q] Who is stronger—God or the devil? How do you know?

Part 2 **DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES**

Teaching Point One: Evil is no accident.

Carolyn Arends was in church when a couple of missionaries presented a lurid story about a thrashing, headless snake, likening this fearsome beast to Satan. Interestingly, the Bible indicates that the devil took the form of a serpent to seduce Adam and Eve into disobeying God. The passage we are about to examine doesn't discount the responsibility of our first parents, but neither does it ignore the destructive influence of the devil.

Read Genesis 3:1–21.

[Q] The “crafty” serpent gets Eve to question God’s command (v. 1). What voices and arguments do this in our culture today?

[Q] Why is it in Satan’s interest to undermine God’s reputation?

[Q] Eve gets drawn into a discussion with the serpent about the substance and consequences of God’s command (vv. 2–5). How are God’s Word and the consequences of disobeying it under attack today?

[Q] Adam and Eve disobey, their eyes are opened, and they try to cover up (vv. 6–8). How does this progression fit the pattern of our sinful choices today?

[Q] God lovingly confronts them and pronounces judgment (vv. 9–19). The consequences of disobedience are physical and spiritual. List the consequences for the woman, the man, and the serpent.

[Q] Then God provides a covering that the man and woman could not provide for themselves (v. 21). How might God’s consequences be a mercy to his children?

Optional Activity: *Ask each group member to recount a time of willful disobedience to God and what the consequences were. After they have finished sharing, ask: Did you see evidence of Satan at work in that situation, or not? Why? In what ways does each of these incidents match the cycle described in Genesis?*

Teaching Point Two: Evil is real, but temporary.

Arends notes that the snake in the missionaries’ story, though dangerous, was all but dead. “I leaned in with the rest of the congregation, queasy and fascinated,” Arends writes. “‘Do you see it?’ asked the husband. ‘Satan is a lot like that big old snake. He’s already been defeated. He just doesn’t know it yet. In the meantime, he’s going to do some damage. But never forget that he’s a goner.’” Do we see the devil in that way, or do we give him *more* than his due?

Read Revelation 12:7–12.

[Q] The aged apostle John sees “war in heaven” between the angels and the demons, and the evil spirits are cast out (vv. 7–9). Who are the leaders in this war and why is the dragon thrown out?

- How is this fact a source of comfort?

[Q] Where do they end up (v. 9)?

- What are Satan's names?
- How does John characterize his activity?
- How does this track with the passage in Genesis we just looked at?

[Q] A voice from heaven cries out, describing the consequences of Satan's defeat (v. 10). How is Satan described?

- Have you experienced his accusations? If so, how do you deal with them?

[Q] How do God's people participate in Christ's victory (vv. 11–12)?

- Is Christ's victory a promise of peace and safety for his followers?
- Why do we not experience the full victory now?

[Q] Satan's time is "short." How does this promise encourage us to hold on?

Teaching Point Three: Jesus has authority over Satan and his hosts.

Arends notes the reason Satan's days are numbered: "We are in the thrashing time, a season characterized by our pervasive capacity to do violence to each other and ourselves. The temptation is to despair. We have to remember, though, that it won't last forever. Jesus has already crushed the serpent's head." Satan is dead, in a sense, because of Jesus, whom the demons fear. Let's observe the Lord's authority.

Read Luke 8:26–39.

[Q] Jesus is confronted by a demon-afflicted man (vv. 26–28). While the man initiated the confrontation, he was clearly on the defensive, fearing the power and authority of the Lord. What did he fear Jesus would do? Why was this fear rational on the part of the demons who inhabited him (v. 29)? How does the demons' fear encourage Christ's followers not to fear them?

[Q] Jesus takes authority over the demons, and his authority is acknowledged (vv. 30–31). How does this fact strengthen your resolve to stand up against evil?

[Q] Jesus allows the fearful demons to enter a herd of pigs after they leave the man, and the pigs drown (vv. 32–33). While we don't know why Jesus allowed the pigs to die, it is easy to see that defeating evil in this world is a messy business, and sometimes we are left with as many questions as answers. Sometimes even the innocent get hurt. Describe a painful time when you experienced victory over sin or the devil. Was the victory worth the pain?

[Q] The man is restored, and yet the people fear (vv. 34–39). Was the people's fear rational? Would you have felt that same fear? Contrast their response with the man's. What made the difference? How can you tell others about Jesus' power in your own life? What's stopping you?

Teaching Point Four: Jesus' followers have Jesus' authority over the evil one.

Arends notes that we live in Satan's thrashing-around time, and the temptation to stand back and wait until it is safe is strong. "In linear, human time, perhaps the safest thing to do is batten down the hatches and wait somewhere secure till the thrashing is over." Yet she notes that we have a higher calling, one that participates in Christ's victory. "But one of the mysteries of living in God's time rather than our own is that, although the end of the story has already been determined, somehow he is still using us to write it. Because Jesus lives in us through his Spirit, we are called not just to anticipate the overcoming but also to be part of bringing it to fruition."

Read Luke 10:1–20.

[Q] Jesus sends 72 of his disciples to prepare cities to receive him. He urges them to depend on him and to expect a mixed reception (vv. 1–16). What evidence do you have that you are depending on Christ in your ministries? What have been the responses to your work?

- Does a particular response indicate faithfulness or unfaithfulness? Explain.

[Q] The disciples report back, thrilled by their power over demons (v. 17). Should we expect to wield that same authority? Why or why not?

[Q] Jesus ties the defeat of Satan to the authority of the disciples (vv. 18–19). Are you experiencing Christ's victory over Satan in your own life? Why or why not?

[Q] Jesus says that as important as this victory is, eternal life is even more important (v. 20). How can you put that truth into practice in your own life?

Teaching Point Five: We must resist the devil.

Our victory over Satan, though obtained by Christ, does not mean we have no role to play, or that the Christian life will be easy. To the contrary, the apostle Peter warns that we must be ready for battle, knowing that victory is the eventual result. Arends says the same: "Thus, though we wrestle with the brokenness that plagues the world, and ourselves, we do so not with grim resignation but with hopeful defiance. We face both our addictions and afflictions not with a faint, white-knuckled hope that someday we will be healed, but rather with an assurance that we are living slowly but surely into the healing already obtained on the Cross."

Read 1 Peter 5:6–11.

[Q] Peter calls for humility in Christ's followers (v. 6). Why is humility important when we are confronted with the devil? What is the promised result of humility? What does this have to do with Christ's victory?

- What would humility look like in your life if you were to take this command seriously?

[Q] Peter does not tell us to overcome our anxiety, but to give it to God (v. 7). How does Satan use our anxiety? Give examples from your life.

- How can you confidently give your fears to God?

[Q] The apostle tells us to "be alert and of sober mind" (v. 8a). What are the opposite characteristics of this two-pronged command, and why might they be a bad idea for the Christian who is facing demonic opposition?

[Q] How does Peter describe the devil (v. 8b)?

- What personal experience might be informing Peter's warning (see, for example, John 18:15–27)?

[Q] What are we told to do when under satanic attack (v. 9)? How do we do this?

- How does an awareness of the sufferings of other Christians give us strength?

[Q] What does Peter promise to the believer who stands firm (v. 10)?

- How might Peter's experience of God's grace have informed this promise?
- How can you bank on God's restoration and strengthening, while preparing to suffer "a little while"?

Part 3 **APPLY YOUR FINDINGS**

“There is an immeasurable amount of evil in our world,” Carolyn Arends acknowledges. “But compared with God’s love and power, all the evil in the universe doesn’t cover the head of a pin. Love wins. Satan doesn’t stand a chance.” Yes, Satan will thrash in this world, but we can survive his ugly death-throes because we stand in the light of Christ’s victory.

But we can do more than that. Faithfully sticking close to the Lord, we can exercise his authority over Satan and in a sense make that victory more and more visible in this world. We will draw the devil’s ire when we stand for Christ, of course, but God will never abandon us.

Action Point: *Choose a book to read about Christian martyrs. Ask yourself why you have been spared this treatment, and resolve to pray for persecuted brothers and sisters and to speak up for their rights.*

— *Stan Guthrie is author of All That Jesus Asks: How His Questions Can Teach and Transform Us (Baker Books). A CT editor at large, he writes monthly for BreakPoint.org and Crosswalk.com. Stan blogs at stanguthrie.com.*

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

ChristianBibleStudies.com

- **Spiritual Warfare:** (6-session Bible study) All believers are caught up in a great war between God and Satan, and have been given full armor—the spiritual equipment needed to defeat the enemy. If God would just give us a glimpse of the enemy, if we could just for a moment see Lucifer and his legions of demonic forces, we would forever give up fighting him in our own strength. We would run to God’s armory and take up the “whole armor of God” so that we might stand and fight in the evil day. This study looks at how to do that.
- **Who Is the Devil?:** (Single-session Bible study) Before Christians face spiritual battle, they should know something about the Enemy. Who is the Devil, and how should we think about him? Though more power is sometimes attributed to him than he actually possesses, more often he is not taken seriously enough. The truth is that the more we understand our enemy, the better equipped we are to fight him and defend ourselves against his schemes.



📖 **Defeating Dark Angels**, by Charles H. Kraft (Gospel Light, n.d.). Exposing how demons operate, methods for minimizing their influence, and how to cast them out, Kraft offers a manual covering many aspects of demonic contact. With practical and spiritual insight, *Defeating Dark Angels* can assist Christians in confronting personal spiritual attacks as well as ministering to others. Issues of deliverance, comparative strengths and weaknesses of demons, healing, and the demonization of Christians are addressed in a comprehensive and authoritative manner.

📖 **What Demons Can Do to Saints**, by Merrill F. Unger (Moody, 1991). With his trademark candor and insight, Merrill Unger attempts to answer a common question (perhaps the most common one) pertaining to demons: “Can a Christian be indwelt by a demon? Can a child of God be demon possessed?” The answers to this question run the gamut from a definitive no! (with an implied statement of the inability of demons to afflict Christians) to an equally definitive yes! (with the implication that a Christian can be totally controlled by demonic forces). Unger favors an answer that lies somewhere in the middle, and accepts that even Christians can be afflicted by demons, if they, through sin, allow the devil a foothold.

📖 **Foxe's Book of Martyrs**, edited by W. Grinton Berry (Baker, 2002). With millions of copies in print, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* has become a classic of magnificent courage and faith. This unparalleled volume chronicles the tragic yet triumphant stories of men and women who faced torture and martyrdom rather than deny their vision of truth and of God. Beginning with Jesus Christ, this exceptional historical record traces the roots of religious persecution through the sixteenth century. It examines the heroic lives of great men and women such as John Hus, John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, Anne Askew, Lady Jane Grey, and Martin Luther. John Foxe also knew persecution. Forced to flee from his native England to Europe during Queen Mary's severe persecution of those holding Reformed views, he carefully compiled records of martyred Christians. His writings possess a sense of immediacy and insight into suffering that few “objective” church historians can match. This edition has been streamlined and reorganized by W. Grinton Berry to present the work in today's language.

📖 **Open Doors USA** informs you about the persecuted church and how you can speak up for its members: <http://www.opendoorsusa.org>.



Satan's a Goner

A lesson from a headless snake.

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AS A KID, I loved Mission Sundays, when missionaries on furlough brought special reports in place of a sermon. Sometimes they wore exotic, foreign clothing;

they almost always showed a tray of slides documenting their adventures. If they were from a dangerous enough land, the youth in our congregation would emerge from our Sunday stupor and listen intently.

There is one visit I've never forgotten. The missionaries were a married couple stationed in what appeared to be a particularly steamy jungle. I'm sure they gave a full report on churches planted or commitments made or translations begun. I don't remember much of that. What has always stayed with me is the story they shared about a snake.

One day, they told us, an enormous snake—much longer than a man—slithered its way right through their front door and into the kitchen of their simple home. Terrified, they ran outside and searched frantically for a local who might know what to do. A machete-wielding neighbor came to the rescue, calmly marching into their house and decapitating the snake with one clean chop.

The neighbor reemerged triumphant and assured the missionaries that the reptile had been defeated. But there was a catch, he warned: It was going to take a while for the snake to realize it was dead.

A snake's neurology and blood flow are such that it can take considerable time for it to stop moving even after decapitation. For the next several hours, the missionaries were forced to wait outside while the snake thrashed about, smashing furniture and flailing against walls and windows, wreaking havoc until its body finally understood that it no longer had a head.

Sweating in the heat, they had felt frustrated and a little sickened but also grateful that the snake's rampage wouldn't

last forever. And at some point in their waiting, they told us, they had a mutual epiphany.

I leaned in with the rest of the congregation, queasy and fascinated. "Do you see it?" asked the husband. "Satan is a lot like that big old snake. He's already been defeated. He just doesn't know it yet. In the meantime, he's going to do some damage. But never forget that he's a goner."

The story captured our imaginations then because it was graphic and gory—a stark contrast to the normally genteel sermonizing



we were used to receiving. But the story haunts me because I have come to believe it is an accurate picture of the universe. We are in the thrashing time, a season characterized by our pervasive capacity to do violence to each other and ourselves. The temptation is to despair. We have to remember, though, that it won't last forever. Jesus has already crushed the serpent's head.

Recently I heard a message from theologian Gary Deddo that got me thinking about that snake. Deddo challenges the tendency many of us have to be dualists—imagining God and Satan as equal foes deadlocked in mortal combat. To be certain, Deddo acknowledges,


there is an immeasurable amount of evil in our world. But compared with God's love and power, all the evil in the universe doesn't cover the head of a pin. Love wins. Satan doesn't stand a chance.

Thus, though we wrestle with the brokenness that plagues the world, and ourselves, we do so not with grim resignation but with hopeful defiance. We face both our addictions and afflictions not with a faint, white-knuckled hope that someday we will be healed, but rather with an assurance that

we are living slowly but surely into the healing already obtained on the Cross. There is still a waiting. In some cases the healing may not come in fullness until we are face-to-face with our Victor—but come it will. Guaranteed.

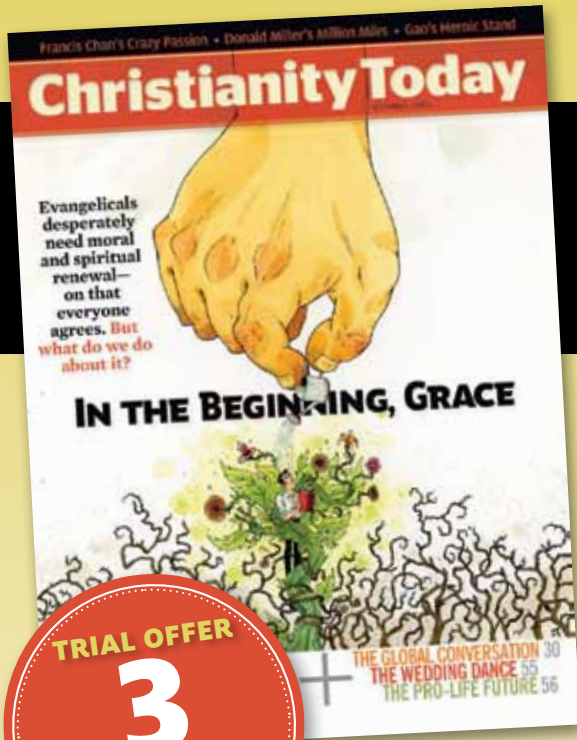
I've been trying to figure out what all of this means with respect to the way we deal with evil and injustice in our world. In linear, human time, perhaps the safest thing to do is batten down the hatches and wait somewhere secure till the thrashing is over. But one of the mysteries of living in God's time rather

than our own is that, although the end of the story has already been determined, somehow he is still using us to write it. Because Jesus lives in us through his Spirit, we are called not just to anticipate the overcoming but also to be part of bringing it to fruition.

And so we are called to fight poverty, oppression, greed, and malice—in the world and in our own spirits. We are invited to live in light of the reality that greater by far is the living God who is within us than the dead snake thrashing about in this world. 

Go to ChristianBibleStudies.com for "Satan's a Goner," a Bible study based on this article.

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