

Enemy at the Gates — by Pastor Larry Hoskins

Pastor Larry Hoskins, Th. M.

"Don't go there," the missionary warned. I was a youth pastor with several colleagues on reconnaissance for a potential youth missions trip to a London suburb. Our missionary host was giving us a guided tour, and we were ambling by an ornate Hindu temple within a short distance of his home. Walking past the temple's gilded doors, he looked at me earnestly and asked, "Are you dabbling in the occult in any way?" "No," I replied. "If you are," he continued, "don't go in there." The man was not given to sensationalism, but the seriousness in his eyes and in the tone of his voice gave me a sense of foreboding. The evil one lurked there, and while I never learned the details of the missionary's experience that led to such caution, it was clear that Satan was alive and well. Well over twenty years later, I see his face, and his words still ring in my ear.

The Apostle Peter described the devil as our "adversary." The Greek word means someone who has taken us to court and who is against us in a lawsuit. Sometimes it is a synonym for an enemy. In the West, we are less aware of the spiritual battle in which we are engaged. We deal in "immutable facts" and "scientific proofs" and "rational arguments," but our adversary does not so easily fit into such categories. We are so used to "natural laws" and "hard figures" and "individual accomplishment" that we rarely venture into the more elusive arena of the unseen spirit being and his minions. Yet the fact that we rarely venture into that mental landscape does not mean that he is any less there.

Before 9/11, terrorists had long before tried to take down the World Trade Center. American technology prevailed against that sinister attack, and we could sit smugly with a certain air of superiority, enjoying their failure. Caution gave way to complacency which yielded to the casual comfort of everyday normalcy. Life went on. It seemed the enemy was gone.

But the enemy did not roll over and die. No, he had the same goal of bringing down those gigantic towers. He chose a different tactic. He blended in, patiently, for years. He held a job, paid his bills and looked like your average American. Eventually, he went to flight training classes, bought a ticket to a destination, and boarded a plane like any other passenger. Only he was not any other passenger, and he had others, equally "normal," with him to accomplish the same sinister plot. This time, his plan succeeded, most victims were caught unaware, and his menacing ideologues who survived him danced in the streets. After careful study afterwards, clues of their larger deception evidenced years of planning. He was our adversary, and he had many names and faces.

Our adversary has many names and faces — the evil one, the accuser of the brethren, the god of this world, the one who disguises himself as an angel of light, and the serpent of old — to name a few. Years ago, he raised a question in the heavenlies as to who had the right to rule — God or him! Lucifer was so magnificent that one third of the angels in heaven, having seen both, opted for Satan. And so the stage was set on earth to answer the question. Whom will the human race follow? When Christ was crucified, demonically inspired hoards danced in the streets at the success of their plot. Years earlier, a satanically inspired king was moved to kill babies in Bethlehem, and like the terrorists, that first attempt failed. But this time, success! Or so they thought. But the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. The ground trembled, and the stone rolled away, and the resurrected Messiah appeared. The dancers, drop jawed, stood still. The enemy's days were numbered. The embers are glowing in the lake fire, and a certain judgment awaited.

Still, today, the enemy lurks in the darkness, and much like Germany near the end of World War II, though his final defeat awaits him, he is still very much alive, and even more dangerous.

When I was little, I used to sing a song: "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart!" "Where?" "Down in my heart." I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Down in my heart to stay." But a light-hearted, cavalier verse followed: "And if the devil doesn't like, it, he can sit on a tack!" "Where?" "Sit on a tack!" "Where?" "Sit on a tack." "And if the devil doesn't like it he can sit on a tack! Sit on a tack to stay." As my mother learned more of God's Word, she cautioned me against singing that verse. "Why?" I asked. My godly mentor pointed me to few verses in the oft-overlooked book of Jude. It speaks of false teachers who "revile angelic majesties" (verse 8) and whose actions are sharply contrasted with those of another angel in the next verse, "But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, **'The Lord rebuke you!'**" Michael had a tremendous respect for his enemy, but a recognition of his own limitations coupled with a trust and admiration for the greater power God. He did not treat his nemesis lightly, nor did he engage him on his own, but asked God to fight his battle for him. Dare we fight him on our own?

Sometimes, we have conflicts with our family, our friends, our neighbors, our coworkers, and even with those in our church. It can be incredibly painful, and often it feels deeply personal. But remember the question of "who has the right to rule?" We, or those closest to us, are just as susceptible to the terrorist's attacks as were the passengers of the airplanes and the mighty Twin Towers. He may not have succeeded the first time, but he keeps trying. If those conflicts wear my face or the face of a friend, we have to remember that ultimately, we are not each others' enemies. Our real enemy is not those closest to us. Our enemy is the gates, covertly vying for our allegiance, but he is unseen and consequently, often ill-considered. That is why we so desperately need God's power and protection:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. **Put on the full armor of God**, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places [i.e., it's against demonic forces]. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH **TRUTH**, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF **RIGHTEOUSNESS**, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF **THE GOSPEL OF PEACE**; in addition to all, taking up the shield of **faith** with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take THE HELMET OF **SALVATION**, and the sword of **the Spirit**, which is the [spoken] word of God. With all **prayer** and **petition** pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all **perseverance** and **petition** for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:10-18 NASB)

May God grant us the grace to not succumb to the enemy in the gates, but to stand by His strength fully armed in His truth, in faithfulness, in right living by His power.