

## The Fall Of Satan

I'm a big fan of *The Lord of the Rings*.

I have loved the story ever since I first read it almost forty years ago and I couldn't wait to see the movies they made of it.

The author of *The Lord of the Rings* was a man by the name of J. R. R. Tolkien.

He was an Oxford Don and a devout Christian and his story is a Christian allegory.

It tells of two separate kingdoms: one is called Mordor and it's ruled by a Satanic figure named Sauron.

All the inhabitants of Mordor are either demons or slaves to Sauron.

The plot concerns a small group of pilgrims who are sent on a journey to infiltrate Sauron's kingdom and bring it down.

The story is filled with Christian symbols and imagery.

For example, on three separate occasions the pilgrims are saved from certain destruction by escaping across bodies of water which symbolize baptism.

On another occasion, Sauron fashions his chief warrior out of mud, just like Satan raises up his spiritual antichrist out of the earth in the *Book of Revelation*.

The most dramatic Christian symbol of all is the ring itself, which gives those who wear it extraordinary powers.

Sauron uses these powers to tempt and corrupt whoever wears the ring so the pilgrims' task is to carry the ring—without ever putting it on—into the heart of Mordor where it can be destroyed by being cast into a volcano.

When this is accomplished, Sauron's kingdom sinks into the earth and he vanishes in a puff of smoke.

Like *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Bible* describes two kingdoms at war with each other: one of these is called the kingdom of this world which God allows Satan to rule in the same way as Sauron ruled the kingdom of Mordor.

The other is called the Kingdom of God, and Satan is not allowed to set foot in it.

Unbelievers are imprisoned in the kingdom of this world; they can't see the kingdom of heaven because they're under Satan's spell in the same way as the legions of Mordor were under Sauron's spell.

Only believers are given "eyes to see" and "ears to hear" the Kingdom of God.

These eyes and ears are called "faith," which enables those who possess it to distinguish between the two kingdoms.

The faithful are sent into the Kingdom of the world, like the pilgrims are sent into Mordor, to proclaim the Gospel which has the power to destroy the works of Satan.

One problem that besets the faithful is that they have to pass through the kingdom of this world—Satan's kingdom—and are continually drawn to its attractions like the pilgrims in *Lord of the Rings* are continually tempted to put the ring on and use its powers.

Paul calls Satan's kingdom the "kingdom of the air" and he calls Satan "the prince of the power of the air" in order to indicate their lack of spiritual substance.

But their lack of substance doesn't keep them from attracting us.

If Satan appeared to us in his true identity, we would flee from him as fast as we could.

But he's far too clever for that; he doesn't show us his fangs and claws and try to cow our spirits with terror and mayhem.

He tried that approach with Job and all it did was drive Job to a stronger faith in the end.

He knows that we have to be wooed away from our faith so he uses honeyed lies to charm and bedazzle us.

Lies like: *"You're never gonna die!"*

Lies like: *"You can be like God and know what God knows!"*

Lies like: *"O come on! You don't actually believe all that stuff in the Bible do you! It's a fairy tale!"*

The reason these absurd lies work with us is that in our fallen condition we have a strong tendency to believe what we want to believe rather than what God tells us.

And that makes us vulnerable to attractive lies—as any good con man knows.

Or any good advertising expert knows.

*“This product will make you look ten years younger!!”*

How many times have you heard *that*? And has it ever worked? But you still plunk down your money because you WANT to believe it. Satan’s most effective weapon is deception.

That’s why Jesus says of him: *“There is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”*

And just as all of Sauron’s power sprang from the attraction of the powers of the ring, all of Satan’s lies spring from the attraction of one basic lie: *“You will be happier in my kingdom than you can ever be in God’s kingdom.”*

And since our faith is weak and we see *“...through a glass darkly,”* and since we would rather believe what we want to believe rather than what we ought to believe, we’re often taken in by this lie—especially since the kingdom of this world is here and we can see it and feel it and touch it, while the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of faith.

Jesus said: “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the Kingdom of God is within you.”

But does that make the Kingdom of God any less real?

Not according to Jesus.

The first words Jesus spoke when he launched his ministry were: *“The time has come; the kingdom of God is **at hand!**”*

In today’s Gospel lesson he instructs his disciples to go out and tell people *“The Kingdom of God is **near you,**”*

In Matthew’s account, Jesus uses even stronger words, saying in effect *“The Kingdom of God is **staring you in the face!**”*

Far from being “remote,” God’s kingdom is here and now; His armies are invading this world and the gates of hell cannot possibly stop them!

In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus lays out the battle plan for His invasion of Satan’s kingdom to seventy-two of his foot soldiers—his infantry.

And His way of launching an invasion is the opposite of what ours would likely be.

When we invade enemy territory, the first thing we do is to shell them with bombs and heavy artillery to shock and stun and demoralize them.

Then we send in the infantry to attack them like wolves attack a flock of sheep.

By way of contrast, Jesus says to his troops: *“I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.”*

We deploy troops who are well supplied and fully armed, while Jesus says to his soldiers: *“Do not take a purse or bag or sandals.”*

We rush into battle with trumpets, bonzais, bagpipes and bloodcurdling screams to intimidate and terrify our enemy.

Jesus instructs his troops to say *“Peace to this house”* when they enter a home in enemy territory.

Our soldiers are instructed to commandeer food from civilians and to bivouac in their homes if need be; this is permitted by the Geneva Convention.

But Jesus instructs his troops to rely for food and shelter upon the generosity of inhabitants of enemy territory.

Our troops are sent to wound and destroy; Jesus instructs his disciples to heal and to save.

It seems like an odd way to wage a war—doesn't it?

But consider the results: *“The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’ He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy....’”*

And what power, what authority does he give them that enables them to trample down all the power of the enemy?

The good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The Gospel—the song of the angels to the shepherds outside Bethlehem.

Like the massive gates of Sauron's castle in *The Lord of the Rings*, the gates of hell cave in before the message of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Jesus summed up his soldiers' victorious return by saying: *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven!"*

Do you realize what this means?

***When disciples speak the Gospel and those who hear it believe: Satan is cast out of heaven!***

The heavenly choir repeats this message in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Book of Revelation*: *"For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb **and by the word of their testimony.**"*

Do you see what incredible power we have been given?

The power to vanquish the devil and all his demons by the simple act of sharing the Gospel!

It's that easy—and that difficult.

We know we ought to do it—but we're afraid.        here's a reason for that.

*Satan uses all his power and craft to keep people from sharing the Gospel and to keep his prisoners of war from hearing it.*

He is perfectly content to have people believe anything they want—as long as it isn't the Gospel, because the Gospel is the only thing that can set them free from his power.

So he uses every trick at his disposal to convince us not to share the Gospel.

He persuades us that we will drive away our friends, that people will think we are fools, that our families will turn against us, that it's not polite to bring up religion in public, that we can leave it to others because we don't have the gift of evangelism, etc. etc. *ad nauseum*.

If we spent half as much time and energy sharing the Gospel as we do figuring out ways to avoid sharing it, there would be great rejoicing in heaven.

Little children have no problem telling their friends about Jesus Christ.

They have stronger and purer faiths than we adults do.

That's why Jesus urged adults to imitate the faith of children, not the other way around.

After the seventy-two return Jesus says: *“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.”*

When I entered the business world a long time ago, I worked for a man who gave me some advice I have never forgotten.

He said: *“It’s not so much what you learn that counts as what you don’t forget.”*

And that applies to the Gospel in spades.

All we have to remember is that our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake, we are soldiers of God’s kingdom, and we have eternal life.

All God asks of us is that we believe it, speak it, and never ever forget it.

Amen.