

Adversary

“And the Lord raised up an adversary to Solomon.”

1 Kings 11:14

Adversary—You may find this word surprising. It is the Hebrew word *satan*. That’s right. Our word Satan in English is really a transliterated Hebrews word that means “adversary.” The reason we connect it to the person Satan is that when the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek, this word was translated with the Greek word *daibolos*—the word we translate as “devil.” But the Hebrew word is not just a personal name. The word has all of the following meanings: divide, set at odds with, accuse, slander, reject, deceive.

Jesus is very much aware that his mission is a direct assault on the forces of evil in this world. Those evil forces have purposes that are expressed in the full meaning of this word. Their intentions are to bring separation, blame, lies, rejection and defamation against us. Every time we participate in any form of these actions, we add support to the empire of evil. No wonder Jesus exhorts us to seek unity, truth, acceptance and kindness.

The Hebrew word *satan* exposes the principal strategy of evil opposition. God triumphs through submission. His power is the power of weakness. Evil attempts to control through opposition. First, it attempts to usurp God’s graciousness by enticing us to oppose God’s claim over us. It suggests that God really does not have our best in mind that we need to stand up for ourselves. At an individual level, this means confrontation with anyone who also believes he has a right to his own way. At a social or national level, it means ethnic hatred, social distrust, power struggles, force and lies rule our behavior. Where there is opposition to God’s purposes, there is always alignment with *satan*.

How many times in my life have I unwittingly been seduced into acting as though I *had to exercise my rights*? How many times did I create opposition by claiming that my way was the right way? Conflict is part of the human condition, but it always represents a choice. Will I be sensitive to God’s whispers for reconciliation and unity, or will I shout my claims for personal justice and push opposition one step further? If I truly believe that God is the Lord of all creation, why am I so inclined to wrest control of my life from His hands and line up with the opposition?