

Knowing the Tactics of Our Enemy

Being aware of the enemy's tactics can help disciples of Jesus Christ draw upon His power and strength to defeat Satan and his followers in the battles that lie ahead.



By Joseph G. Richardson

When I served in the military, one of the first things I learned was the importance of knowing about the enemy in order to effectively fight against them. I spent time studying the tactics and strategies of enemies so that I would be able to develop plans to out-smart and defeat them in case we met in battle.

Because our spiritual enemies, Satan and his followers, are invisible to us, we tend to forget that they are watching us and trying to tempt us. President George Q. Cannon (1827–1901) of the First Presidency cautioned: “I have come to the conclusion that if our eyes were open to see the spirit world around us, . . . we would not be so unguarded and careless and so indifferent whether we had the spirit and power of God with us or not; but we would be continually watchful and prayerful to our Heavenly Father for His Holy Spirit and His holy angels to be around about us to strengthen us to overcome every evil influence.”¹

Understanding the power and abilities of the devil can help us recognize the potential damage and destruction that he and his followers seek to inflict upon us. We must constantly be aware and prepare our defensive and offensive tactics to avoid falling victim to temptations and enticements.





The battle began in the premortal life.

When we fought in the War in Heaven, we did not fight with rifles and bombs but with testimony and conviction. President Russell M. Nelson taught: “This war in heaven was not a war of bloodshed. It was a war of conflicting ideas—the beginning of contention.”²

The followers of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ came to earth with mortal bodies. Satan and his followers are also on earth but as spirits.³ The war that began in the premortal existence did not end. Since the time of Adam, Satan and his vast army have continued to battle against those who supported the Father and His plan of salvation. Elder Ulisses Soares of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles stated: “The war of good against evil will continue throughout our lives since the adversary’s purpose is to make all people as miserable as he is. Satan and his angels will try to shroud our thoughts and assert control

by tempting us to sin. If they can, they will corrupt all that is good. Nevertheless, it is essential to understand that they will have power over us only if we allow it.”⁴

The forces of evil are not small in number. With “a third part of the hosts of heaven” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:36) being cast out of heaven along with Satan, numerous spirits are under his command. “We are surrounded by demons, yea, we are encircled about by the angels of him who hath sought to destroy our souls” (Helaman 13:37).

Just as with war on earth, by learning what we can about opposing spiritual forces—their capabilities, strengths and weaknesses, and motivations—we can prepare to effectively fight against them. We can learn a few key tactics Satan uses by studying scriptures and words of modern prophets.

1. The enemy places emphasis on attacking the strongest opponents.

President George A. Smith (1817–75) of the First Presidency illustrated this when he told this Chinese fable:

“A man, traveling through the country, came to a large city, very rich and splendid; he looked at it and said to his guide, ‘This must be a very righteous people, for I can only see but one little devil in this great city.’

“The guide replied, ‘You do not understand, sir; this city is so perfectly given up to wickedness . . . that it only requires one devil to keep them all in subjection.’

“Traveling on a little farther he came to a rugged path and saw an old man trying to get up the hill side, surrounded by seven great, big, coarse looking devils.

“‘Why,’ says the traveler, ‘this must be a tremendously wicked old man, only see how many devils there are around him.’

“‘This,’ replied the guide, ‘is the only righteous man in the country and there are seven of the biggest devils trying to turn him out of his path and they all cannot do it.’”⁵

If Satan can lead away a member of the Church, he

gains a greater victory than he does over one who has never made any covenants with God. Elder Larry R. Lawrence, an emeritus member of the Seventy, taught: “The devil targets all men, but especially those who have the most potential for eternal happiness. He is clearly jealous of anyone who is on the pathway to exaltation.”⁶

An even more decisive battle is won by the enemy if a leader of the Church is overcome by the adversary. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) wrote: “Satan wants all men, but especially is he anxious for the leading men who have influence. Perhaps he might try much harder to claim men who are likely to be his greatest opposition, men in high places who could persuade many others not to become servants to Satan.”⁷

Knowing that Satan will put his forces on his strongest opponents can help us prepare to face battles throughout life. We can be motivated to continually put up defenses against our spiritual enemy.

Knowing this can also help us as we share the gospel with our friends and family. Elder Ronald A. Rasband of the Quorum of the Twelve

Apostles said: “We are at war with Satan for the souls of men. The battle lines were drawn in our pre-earth life. Satan and a third of our Father in Heaven’s children turned away from His promises of exaltation. Since that time, the adversary’s minions have been fighting the faithful who choose the Father’s plan.”⁸





As we share the gospel knowing that everyone will also likely be experiencing their own battles against Satan, we can be better prepared to recognize those battles and to join others in fighting against him regardless of their beliefs.

2. Satan and his evil forces will try to stop events of spiritual significance.

Consider these examples from the scriptures:

- Satan exerted great pressure on Adam and Eve to partake of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, believing that in doing so, he could destroy the plan of salvation before it could progress any further (see Moses 4:6–12).
- Just after Moses saw God face to face, “Satan cried with a loud voice, and ranted upon the earth, and commanded” Moses to worship him (Moses 1:19).
- After Christ had fasted for 40 days and communed with Heavenly Father, Satan tried to tempt Christ to misuse His power (see Matthew 4:2–11; Luke 4:1–13).
- Joseph Smith was overcome by darkness just before Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ appeared to him to begin the Restoration of the gospel on the earth (see Joseph Smith—History 1:15–17).

Many others throughout the scriptures and throughout time have had compelling evil pressures placed upon them to stop their part in Heavenly Father’s plan.

In our lives, we should be aware that Satan or his followers will place emphasis on gaining control in order to

stop a sacred event or the results of that event. How many of us have fallen to those temptations, experienced personal trials, or come up against a roadblock just before a spiritual event in our lives? Receiving a new calling, preparing to go to the temple, or participating in any other spiritual event rarely goes smoothly.

President Brigham Young (1801–77) once said, “When individuals are blessed with visions, revelations and great manifestations, look out, then the devil is nigh you, and you will be tempted in proportion to the vision, revelation, or manifestation you have received.”⁹

3. The devil’s motivation is pride.

In the premortal life, Satan said to Heavenly Father, “I will redeem all mankind . . . ; wherefore given me thine honor” (Moses 4:1). That pride led to his downfall and caused him to be cast out. Isaiah wrote:

“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! . . .



“For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: . . .
“ . . . I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:12–14).

We must be careful of our own pride and avoid allowing Satan to use it to tempt us. For example, Satan could use our pride to tempt us to be so offended by something someone says that we don’t return to church. Or he might use our pride to encourage us to focus more on being right than on listening and loving someone else.

Knowing Satan’s strategies can help us defeat him.

Satan and his followers are trying to defeat us. We are surrounded by these enemies and are susceptible to their efforts every day of our lives. We should not underestimate their power or consider their cause too lightly.

Yet we have been prepared for this very battle since before our birth. President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) once had a vision in which he learned that many choice spirits “received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth in the due time of the

Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men” (Doctrine and Covenants 138:56). Every person on this earth chose to follow Heavenly Father’s plan in the premortal life and can do so again.

Our Heavenly Father knew that these last days would be full of danger, corruption, and treachery. To defeat Satan and his experienced, powerful forces in the final conflicts prior to the Savior’s Second Coming, we must strive to be some of God’s strongest and most faithful daughters and sons. ■

The author lives in Arizona, USA.

NOTES

1. George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth*, sel. Jerreld L. Newquist (1987), 64–65.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “The Canker of Contention,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 69.
3. See Gospel Topics, “War in Heaven,” topics.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
4. Ulisses Soares, “Yes, We Can and Will Win!” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2015, 75.
5. George A. Smith, “Discourse,” *Deseret News*, Nov. 11, 1857, 287.
6. Larry R. Lawrence, “The War Goes On,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2017, 35; *Liahona*, Apr. 2017, 33.
7. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (1969), 175.
8. Ronald A. Rasband, “Build a Fortress of Spirituality and Protection,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2019, 108.
9. Brigham Young, “Discourse,” *Deseret News*, Feb. 27, 1856, 402.