

The best lies have a lot of truth in them.” And trust me, I know. I’ve stood in front of God himself, ears ringing with incriminating accusations about me by the capital-A Adversary himself, Satan, which, truth be told, contained a lot of truth.

Joshua...the one who led the Israelites into the Promised Land, destroyed the walls of Jericho. Joshua...Yeah, I’m not him. I’m Joshua the Priest, a thousand years later, a Jewish exile who returned from Babylon to rebuild the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Same name, different cities and different walls. I’m here to talk about the Adversary...the Father of Lies, Son of Perdition, Prince of the Power of the Air, dragon, serpent, leviathan, beast, aka Satan, The Accuser.

In the Old Testament, Satan appears *by the name* Satan in only three places. In the book of *Job*: Satan makes his accusations about Job directly to God.¹ In the book of *First Chronicles*; Satan incites David to take a census of his fighting men.² And the third time; the book of *Zechariah* where Satan makes accusations about a priest to God. That priest is...me.

The first two of these three stories concerning Satan have to do with him making accusations against servants of God. No surprise there. His main mission is to accuse the people of God to God’s face. And Satan doesn’t play by the rule that accusations have to be completely true. And you thought it was only humans. Satan is more on the “misrepresent, distort, spin” side of things.

Fudging the truth is, well, not “the truth.” Clearly not “the whole truth,” and definitely not “nothing but the truth” – familiar? The exact words used in sworn testimony in the justice system. When it comes to truth, you have to cut out wiggle room. That oath you have in your justice system? It underscores how important 100% truth is. And further underscores the observation of Jesus that “the devil is a liar and the father of lies.”³

Here's my story: The Jews were attacked by the Babylonians. The Temple was completely destroyed, and the people were captured and taken to Babylon and Persia. After 70 years of captivity, God moved the heart of the king of Persia. King Cyrus. King Cyrus decided to send the Jews back to Israel and, get this, to foot the bill to rebuild the Temple. Uh, wow. So more than 40,000 Jews returned to Judah, led by me, and Zerubbabel a governing leader. Home, at last. Though not much was left of it. The war destroyed almost everything. Lots of work in the very near future. Still, home, and we were thrilled.

¹ Job 1-2

² 1 Chronicles 21:1

³ John 8:44

Our assignment? Rebuild the altar and the temple.⁴ There was a ton of work to be done. The people were busting their backsides and you can bet all the priests joined in.⁵ How could the priests not work just as hard...carrying rocks, or sweeping dirt, or any other of the thousands of menial tasks the people were doing. We were *all* trying to obey God, by the way. And that takes us to the third time Satan is mentioned by name in the Old Testament.

The book of Zechariah, Chapter 3, there I am, standing before the Lord...in dirty clothes. A vision, real life... Bible doesn't say. Moving on.

Backstory about dirty clothes: Are you familiar with the wandering in the wilderness years? After Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, we were in the wilderness and instead of a temple we had a portable temple, a tabernacle. Priests were commanded to be clean before entering the tabernacle. It was a commandment given to Moses and Aaron by God. Very serious. A life and death matter. We've followed it since the day it was given. We still follow it now that we have a permanent temple. It's a big deal, and we follow it. You don't mess around with commandments. You follow them. Or else.

So, there I am in dirty clothes, Satan is accusing me. Accurately, I might add. So, I'm at the "or else" moment. I mean, anyone can see, my clothes are filthy. Violation of the commandment. Satan's accusation is true. But *more* accurately, Satan's accusation has an *element* of truth. But *most* accurately, Satan's accusation isn't *the* truth, the *whole* truth and nothing *but* the truth. I know this, but I'm still a little on eggshells, ya feelin' me?

God, basically, tells Satan to shut up. God understands the reasons for my dirty clothes. I am being obedient in rebuilding the Temple... at God's request. The Lord forgives my breaking of the having clean clothes commandment. He puts me in clean clothes, and tells me to walk in obedience to him.

Let's break it down. It'll be quick but helpful. To you. The accuser stated an action that I admittedly did, but he interpreted my action incorrectly. This is one of the most likely ways for servants of God to be unjustly accused. Actions and interpretations.

In my lifetime, I saw many servants of God unjustly accused for their actions. Honestly, it's something servants of God should come to expect. Sorry, but that's whole truth, and I have stories to prove it

First story...Up for some history? Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel. You remember the Assyrians, the capital was Nineveh where Jonah was sent before he was... aquatically delayed) The people there repented, but Jonah didn't stay to solidify further conversion, so a few centuries later, the Assyrians are back at it again, more evil than ever. When Assyrians conquer, they take the brain trust and the wealth back to Assyria, and leave the less educated and poorer people behind. But before they go, they relocate smatterings of all the other people's they've conquered, so the Northern Kingdom of Israel becomes a smorgasbord of cultures, no wealth, very little education. In other words, not a threat.

⁴ Ezra 1-3

⁵ Ezra 3:2, 3:9

Several years on, the Southern Kingdom is conquered by the Babylonians. They brain drain as well, and take the wealth back to Babylon. The remaining people forge ahead as best they can, intermarrying with other cultures. Jerusalem is on the border of the northern and southern kingdoms, so lots of cultural blending. It's been 70 years, they've established their way of doing things, social structures, religion, who's in charge, etc. And no one wants to be ousted when the old guard living in exile rolls back into town...see where I'm going with this? Re-engage the pure Jewish culture and religion? Not having it.

The 40,000 exiles returned, and there were people in Jerusalem who opposed us being back in town, and opposed our very important directive from God, and King Cyrus, to rebuild the Temple.⁶ Maybe they were mad because we refused their help when they offered, whatever, but we followed God's laws completely, and couldn't risk their intentions being good but their actions not being in line with what we knew God required from us.

They wrote a letter, a petition, to a new king of Babylon and stated, correctly, what we were doing, but incorrectly interpreted our intentions. We were not there in rebellion, breaking the law. This accusation stopped our work in its tracks. Do you know how long it took to convince the officials in Persia that our actions were entirely legal? And had been legitimized by King Cyrus?! Way too long, I'll tell you that.

Early Christians ran into a similar type of problem. They were accused of cannibalism... drinking the blood of babies. It was communion. They were taking communion. Symbolic blood? Yes. Cannibal cocktails, no. Heavens, no! See how that got twisted? Unjust accusation.

In the first three centuries after Christ, Christian workers did not want to join local trade guilds. Basically, the trade guild meetings sometimes included worshipping local gods, oh and drunken orgies. Not exactly Christian pursuits. The guilds interpreted their refusal to participate in them as working against the good of society by not participating in culturally appropriate and approved activities.

Christians have beliefs based on obeying God. True. Sometimes these beliefs can come into conflict with societal norms of the day. True. Society can interpret these conflicting beliefs as anti-social and even immoral to society at large, true - it's how they interpret it, but it's not 100% true, is it? Using these "not 100% true" accusations, society often pressures Christians to give up their beliefs. Anyway, you can see why it leads to unjust accusations.

Here's another way that servants of God get unjustly accused: when they incorrectly get lumped together with wayward Christians or others who profess Christian beliefs but are way off base in true Christian beliefs. Since there are always wayward Christians and professing Christians who are making stuff up, true servants of God should expect to suffer unjust accusations. Comes with the territory.

None of this should come as a surprise. Hundreds of years after my time, Jesus said that he was persecuted, so his followers should expect to be persecuted as well.⁷ He told his closest

⁶ Ezra 4

⁷ John 15:20

followers that a time would even come when people would think they are offering a service to God when they kill the followers of Jesus.⁸ That's twisted and scary but there's a plan.

What are the servants of God to do when they are unjustly accused? I know what we did. And it didn't have anything to do with social media. We closely examined our actions, we closely examined our words. We wanted to verify that we were being faithful servants of God. Humbly. Anything that needed to be corrected was corrected. In an instant. We laid the groundwork ahead of time about what was expected by God, we were clear about what actions needed to be taken by us. We were only concerned about obeying God, not obeying the changing norms of society.

You have two huge advantages over us. You do. And these should give you great comfort, and also great courage to step out and do the work of a servant of God. The advantages? You have the New Testament to give you examples of the actions of Jesus and the first Christians. Follow their examples. And, you have the Holy Spirit, the one sent by God to give you wisdom and clarity about how to be a true servant of God. Follow the Holy Spirit. And about those accusations by Satan, or anyone for that matter? Bring 'em on.

⁸ John 16:2