

Sabotaged by Satan?

One cool South Australian afternoon in 1990, my wife Vanessa and I were driving back to Adelaide from a trip to the popular ocean town of Victor Harbor. We were cruising nicely along the motorway, enjoying our relaxed time together. It was chilly outside but in the car it was warm and comfortable. We were at peace with God, with each other and with the world. Or so we thought.

As we passed under an overpass, suddenly we were startled by a loud, sharp crack like a gun recoiling right beside us and the windscreen in front of Vanessa exploded like a bursting star. The glass was shattered. A large rock went bouncing from the bonnet of the car off to the side of the road.

For a few seconds, we lurched from side to side as I momentarily lost control, but fortunately I could still see through my side of the windscreen and I was able to steer us safely to the shoulder of the motorway. I scrambled out and looked back to see what had happened. There, high above us on the overpass, were two lads about eleven or twelve years old. At first I thought they were laughing but then I realized they were actually scared. Clearly, it was they who had dropped the rock and it had done more damage than they had expected. They grabbed their bicycles and rode off like frightened rabbits.

The embankments on either side of the road were too steep and too high to climb. So I clambered back into the driving seat and drove on as carefully as I could, looking for an exit. Eventually we found our way up, back and on to the overpass. By this time, of course, the boys were no where to be seen. I hoped they were scared enough not only to run away from me but not to do such a dangerous thing again. Had it been my side of the pane that was smashed, and my visibility obscured, who knows what might have happened?

I had the windscreen repaired the next day. 'But don't be in a hurry to drive the car,' said the repair man. 'The glass will need time to settle in.'

'We are planning to go to Melbourne tomorrow,' I explained. 'I have to be at a conference there.' Melbourne is roughly a day's drive from Adelaide.

'Well, ' he said, 'You'd better avoid any bumps. But if it works loose, I won't accept responsibility. Don't say I didn't warn you.'

Staying in our home at the time was April, a pretty dark-haired American sixteen-year-old who was in Australia as an exchange student. We set off to Melbourne as planned, taking April with us. There were no apparent problems with the windscreen.

A few days later we were heading home again. We had planned our trip so we would arrive back in Adelaide well before dark. The day was cold and overcast and there were frequent gusty rain showers, the kind that make you shiver just to look at them. Nevertheless, it was warm in the car, we were cruising well and making good time. But about half way back, on the open road, the motor stopped. Just like that. No warning. No choking or stuttering. No clouds of smoke or strange rattles. No shuddering or shaking. Just quietness. It was as though the ignition had simply been switched off. I eased the car

silently to the side of the road and tried to see what was wrong. But with my mechanical repair skills basically limited to changing tyres and filling the petrol tank, this was a forlorn hope.

A helpful passer-by offered to send a mechanic from the nearest town, about ten kilometres back. I thanked him and we settled down to wait. It was an open road and a cold, damp, slicing wind was skating viciously over the paddocks. There was little to do but sit in the car and try to keep warm. Vanessa took the opportunity to continue reading Frank Perretti's *This Present Darkness*, a novel about angels and demons and spiritual encounters, which she had nearly completed. Eventually, over an hour later, a tow truck appeared and a half an hour after that the car was in the workshop.

'It's the computer,' said the mechanic. 'Somehow or other, it has got water in it. Bothered if I know how.'

'Could it be a leaking windscreen?' I asked, tentatively, not wanting to appear more ignorant than I actually was.

But I had guessed right. The glass had sprung a leak and water had dribbled down on to the computer. Apparently it was only a matter of drying it out and within half an hour we were on our way. As a result, it was well after dark when we finally reached the Mount Lofty Ranges, the last part of the journey before we descended to the plain city of Adelaide, resting comfortably as it does between mountains and sea.

I was driving. Vanessa was dozing. April had fallen asleep in the back seat. Suddenly, to my astonishment, we hit a patch of road covered with ice. In all my fifty years of living in Adelaide, I had never seen ice on the road, not even in the hills. But here it was. Without warning, the car spun wildly out of control. Round and round we went, two or three times, the tyres sliding like ice cubes on a kitchen bench. Had there been another car travelling in the opposite direction, a crash would have been inevitable. But the road was empty.

We spun around again. On one side was a steep drop; on the other, behind a safety fence, a row of large trees. I wrenched desperately on the steering wheel in what was a vain attempt to steer the car. April sat up with a look of panic on her face and screamed out loud. Vanessa stared straight ahead and cried, 'Jesus! Jesus!' not as an ignorant Aussie act of blasphemy, but as a heartfelt cry of desperate faith, and began to pray in tongues.

I felt a ray of hope as we slid away from the steep drop to the right. At least we would not go tumbling and rolling down the hill, bouncing and jerking like a dislodged boulder, until we crashed with a sudden jolting impact into the rocks below, to lie there still and quiet, possibly in the cold embrace of death. But my alarm increased just as quickly as we skidded towards the steel safety fence to the left, behind which was a large eucalyptus tree. In a flash, I had visions of a major crash, of a crumpled, ruined car, of my wife being thrown against the windscreen and suffering dreadful lacerations, of April sustaining serious injury, her pretty face spoiled forever, of trapped limbs and twisted bodies and spinning wheels and maybe even of the everlasting silence of extinction.

But the car turned slightly to the right, our speed dropped steadily and gradually we slowed to a gentle stop on the side of the road in an almost perfect parking position. I could not have placed it better if I had tried.

It had all happened in seconds. We sat quietly for a few moments and then relief and gratitude overcame us.

'Whoh, I thought we were gone then,' I gasped, still rather amazed.

'So did I,' whispered Vanessa.

'Me, too,' added April.

'Well,' I continued, 'praise the Lord that we are all OK.'

'Thank God there were no other cars on the road,' Vanessa added, and as she did a vehicle passed by swerving and sliding wildly until it slowed down to a safe speed. Had it been a few seconds earlier, it could have ended all our lives. Not long after that a police car appeared, with signs to warn travelers of the danger.

We drove slowly on until the risk was over and within an hour we were safely home.

One of the advantages of teaching is that students often come up with refreshing and thought-provoking questions. One day a blond-haired young man who had been a Christian believer for just over two years asked, 'How much does the devil know? Can he predict the future? And how does he steal, kill and destroy?'

What happened to us over that wintry weekend in 1990 brought those questions back to mind again. Could Satan have predicted such a turn of events? Was it all a plan on his part to cut us off and hence to discontinue our important work for the Kingdom of God? Was it he who put into the hearts of two lads the foolish idea of dropping a rock on our car? Who knows?

But one thing we do know is that whether Satan attacks us or whether we simply face the common dangers of living in a fallen world, our heavenly Father does watch over us and care for us. He protects us in this life and he prepares us for the next. As Paul puts it, whether we live or die we are the Lord's. And that's good to know.

(1526 words)

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Dr Barry Chant is a regular speaker at church services, seminars, conferences and conventions. Hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold around the world. He has degrees in arts, theology and ministry, a diploma in education and a PhD in history. He is Senior Pastor of the Wesley International Congregation in Sydney, Australia. He is an ordained minister in the CRC Churches International and was the founding president of Tabor College, Australia. He is married (to Vanessa) and they have three adult children and twelve grand-children.