

# Satan

## Commonly Held Beliefs

### **Deception: Satan's Only Weapon**

Satan is not omnipresent, omnipotent, nor omniscient. The devil cannot be everywhere at all times. He possesses limited power and doesn't know all things. If he did he would not have killed Christ; he would have known something that even the angels in heaven could not fathom. (1 Pet 1:10-12) If he had all power and authority, he would be equal with God. He would not have needed God's permission to hassle Job (Job 1:12; 2:6, 7), or to tempt Peter (Luke 22:31). Most importantly, he cannot be everywhere at all times, tempting people into sin, as many believe.

Because Satan has limits, his toolbox is also limited. The primary means by which Satan interfaces with man is through deception. Part of the reason is that deception masks hatred.

[Satan] disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit. Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart. His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. (Prov 26:24-26) NIV

Although Solomon was referring to "the malicious man," the same principle can be applied to the devil. Beneath the gloss and decoration lies pure hatred. Those who work for the devil—the ministers of righteousness Paul refers to—are equally deceived. They believe they are working for God, and they believe that what they're doing is right. This is what it means to be 'deceived.'

Just as good has its source in God (James 1:17), so too does evil have its source in whom the bible calls 'Satan.' It's easy to theorize and put forth arguments to contrive a scholarly dissertation on the issue. But the horror and tragedy of losing a loved one who was without Christ, knowing they are in eternal darkness, forever separated from God, the academics pale in comparison to the reality.

Contrary to popular belief, Satan does not "possess" anyone. Although demon possession was rampant in Jesus' day, nowhere does scripture indicate teach that Satan possesses people except in the case where he "entered into Judas Iscariot." (Luke 22:3)

Note Paul's words concerning deception:

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. NIV (2 Thess 2:9-12)

According to Paul, the "work of Satan" is made up of false wonders, miracles and signs in which people believe. Images of the Virgin Mary in windows, miraculous "healings," and even feelings

of ecstasy borne of emotion deceive many. To be sure, these things de-emphasize Jesus Christ and lead none to salvation. They cause many to place their hope in things rather than in the cross.

The bible leaves no doubt as to how Satan carries forth his work: *through false workers*:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. NIV (2 Cor 11:13-15)

Satan doesn't appear as some Hollywood apparition of horror, but as a smooth-talker, with manicured nails, wearing a suit, speaking words of assurance in a comfortable office.

### **Does Satan Exist?**

Most Christians may find this question ludicrous, but there is a school of thought that Satan is merely a representation of many things—sin, death, disease, evil, or our own evil thoughts. Evil, they say, is a byproduct of free will; its origin lies within the decision-making process dealing with sin. “Do I choose good, or do I choose evil?” If evil is chosen, as in Eve’s case, we can then suggest that Satan is “born.” Is this a scriptural interpretation? Does the bible teach that Satan finds his genesis within our free will process? Is the devil only an abstract concept?

Jesus told His apostles, “When (the Holy Spirit) comes, He will convict the world...in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.” (John 16:8, 11) The “prince of this world” refers to a person, not a concept. He is compared to the Holy Spirit, also a person.

“Since the children have flesh and blood, (Christ) too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—*that is, the devil.*” (Heb 2:14) The context suggests a being, not just an idea.

Concerning the Great Day of Judgment, Jesus spoke of certain people who would be cast “into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.” (Matt 25:41) This “fire”—a symbol of great agony—had been designed for both human and supernatural personalities.

St. Augustine, a 3rd Century Christian philosopher, denied the existence of Satan, saying that evil was merely the absence of good. Using that same logic, one can claim that God doesn't exist, that good is merely the absence of evil.

[Dr. Hal Cauthron](#), chair of Southern Nazarene University's School of Theology and Ministry writes, “...denying Satan's existence would be to claim a level of knowledge and insight that human beings do not have. It would be a very arrogant claim to a kind of all-knowing that finite creatures do not possess.” In other words, we can speak with some authority regarding earthly matters. We cannot, however, speak with the same assurance on spiritual issues *except what God has already revealed in His Word*. The truth of whom and what Satan is can only be ascertained from the bible, not some movie director's imagination. Yet God's word has been so distorted by unlearned preachers and authors that understanding becomes difficult. We spend useless time trying to undo the damage done by these folks.

## **The Devil Made Me Do It—Analyzing Temptation**

Flip Wilson, a popular television comedian of the 1960s coined the catchy phrase, “The devil made me do it!” He was using a parody to reflect what many believe: the devil lures us into temptation, speaking into our inner “ear” to do evil. This is unscriptural and excuses us from personal accountability.

The bible says, “each person is *tempted when they are carried away and enticed by their own lust*. Then, when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” (James 1:14-15) Eve and Jesus were the only two people to ever be directly tempted by Satan. Satan also tested Job and Peter’s faith, but only as he was permitted by God. (Job 1:12; 2:6; Luke 22:31)

Temptation has a sinister meaning to us today, but the word simply means ‘trial’ or ‘testing.’ Jesus was tried in the wilderness. Israel “tested and tried (God) for 40 years.” (Heb 3:9) Abraham was “tempted” to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering (Gen 22:1). There is no evil in the context of these scriptures, but an opportunity to achieve holiness. Failing in temptation is not the same as being tempted. Surviving the trial proves our faith. (1 Peter 1:6, 7) Failing a trial results in sin.

Jesus told Peter, “Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:31-32) Jesus knew that surviving a temptation made a person stronger, able to help others in time of need.

When the temptation to sin crosses our path, it is not the devil doing the sales pitch, it’s our own evil desire. Adam Clarke wrote, “Lust is the mother of sin, and sin the mother of death, and the sinner the parent of both.”

The word ‘tempter’ is used twice in scripture, the first concerning Jesus’ wilderness temptation (Matt 4), the second, in 1 Thessalonians 3:5. Correct understanding of scripture demands that the latter reference be understood from the former. Jesus was first hungry, and Satan used that intense desire to tempt Him. The Thessalonians—former Gentile pagans—were susceptible to idol feasts and the debauchery present at those events. Satan can then be said to be behind these activities because Paul said, “the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.” (1 Cor 10:20)

### **What Is Satan?**

In ancient times, a name included title and authority, summarizing the sum total of ownership. The word ‘Satan’ is Hebrew (saw-TAN) translated in many scriptures as ‘adversary.’ It is not the devil’s name, but his job title, if you will. John is a farmer, but ‘farmer’ is not John’s name, it’s his occupation. That said, however, the bible does ascribe ‘Satan’ as the devil’s proper name due to his relentless opposition of everything good. (Job 1:6-12; Zech 3:1, 2; Matt 4:10; Rev 12:9) Since Satan’s sole purpose has been to oppose God, he is rightly called ‘the adversary,’ or ‘Satan.’

The first biblical occurrence of ‘satan’ is used to describe “the angel of the Lord,” whom many scholars interpret to be the pre-incarnate Christ:

God was very angry when (Balaam) went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose (satan) him. (Num 22:22)

‘Satan’ is used also of men: David (1 Sam 29:4); Hadad the Edomite (1 Kgs 11:14); Rezon, son of Eliadah (1 Kgs 11:23); Hamon (Ester 7:6); and Peter (Matt 16:23). It’s also used to describe the Persian monarchy and enemies who resisted the Jews’ resettlement of the land after their captivity. (Zech 3:1, 2; cf. Dan 10:13) It is probably the Philistines to which Chronicles refers when it says “Satan stood up against Israel,” provoking David to number the armies. (1 Chron 21:1; cf. 2 Sam 24:1)<sup>1</sup>

In all of these references, ‘satan’ was translated into ‘adversary,’ ‘opponent,’ etc. They don’t always refer to the devil. In his book, *The Consummation of the Ages*, Kurt Simmons writes:

The English word “devil” generally signifies a demonic being. However, the Greek term whence our English word is derived has a different meaning entirely. The Greek term translated devil is *diabolos*, meaning an accuser, a slanderer. It is derived from the word *diabolo*, “to accuse or malign.” For maligning God and saying, “you shall not surely die” (Gen 3:4) the serpent is thus called a devil. Numerous times *diabolos* is used of men who are slanderers and false accusers. Jesus called Judas Iscariot a “devil.” (John 6:70) In a similar manner, the high priests and elders of the Jews are probably in contemplation when it says that the “devil” put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ for money. (John 13:2) Paul warns that an elder’s wife must not be a “*diabolos*,” or a “slanderer.” (1 Tim 3:11) In the latter days, Paul said men would be *diabolo*i—false accusers. (2 Tim 3:3; Titus 2:3) Elders must be above reproach lest they fall into the snare of the devil—provide occasion to evil men and Jews who were maligners of the church. (1 Tim. 3:7) Although the term can describe demons and unclean spirits, in all these cases *diabolos* refers strictly to men and governments. This is how it is used in Revelation. “The accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night.” (Rev 12:10) The Jews spread venomous lies against the church throughout the ancient world, seeking its destruction. For their slanders and accusations the Jews are described as the devil and his angels waging war with Christ and his disciples.

## Who Is Lucifer?

‘Lucifer’ is a Latin word found only in the King James Bible in Isaiah 14:12. It means ‘light-bringer’ or ‘shining one.’ Assigning Lucifer to the devil has been around since the 3rd Century, and is based on the assumption that Luke 10:18<sup>2</sup> is an explanation of Isaiah 14:12. Most commentators disagree with this conclusion. ‘Lucifer,’ or, *light-bringer*, is the Latin equivalent of the Greek word *phosphoros*, used as a title of Christ in 2 Peter 1:19. It corresponds to Jesus’ name, “Bright Morning Star” in Rev 22:16.

Although Isaiah 14:12ff seems to be a reference to Satan, verse 3 clearly assigns ‘morning star’ to the king of Babylon, not the devil. The context easily bears out that it’s speaking of a man, not a demonic spirit being. The idea of a rebellion in heaven, where Satan gathered his followers and were later thrown out, came from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Yet “scholars” have stubbornly clung to the story, using Isaiah 14 as their proof text.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Consummation of the Ages*, p. 44 —Kurt Simmons, ISBN 0-9728063-0-X

<sup>2</sup> Where Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

## Where Did Satan Come From?

The bible—God’s revealed will to humanity—deals with man’s rebellion, not Satan’s, and how we, not Satan, can be reconciled back to God. As such, it gives no clue as to Satan’s origin or fall from heaven. Again, Isaiah 14 is noted:

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” (Isa 14:12-14)

We have all heard the story of Satan’s fall from heaven, based on Isaiah 14. But they are taken out of context. Verse 15 goes on to say, “But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.” Angels are not put into graves, only flesh returns to the earth. Verse 16 clearly defines it as being a person, not a spirit being: “Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate: ‘Is this *the man* who shook the earth?’”

In verse 3, Isaiah writes, “On the day the Lord gives you relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage, you will take up this taunt against the *king of Babylon*.” Thus, all of this is ascribed to the king specifically and to the Babylonian Empire in general. Claiming the “dual-prophecy” argument has no basis in scripture.<sup>3</sup> Certain Messianic prophecies had both immediate and future fulfillment, but we can’t arbitrarily apply such interpretation to all of prophecy.

Scripture gives us no clue as to how Satan came to be. Jude speaks of “angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home.” (Jude 6) Yet even this verse may be in reference to matters I’ll discuss shortly. The bible wasn’t written to satisfy our curiosity on matters beyond the pale.

## Is God Ultimately Responsible for Evil, Since He Created Satan?

As far as the bible tells us, God created intelligent beings with free will. It’s impossible to have free will and no possibility of moral evil. God chose to create humans with free will, so it would not have been consistent with His holy character to create Satan strictly as an evil being.

In defining free will, it was up to men rather than to God, whether or not there was sin. Can we then call God the Creator of evil? He created the playground, so to speak, but people *actualized* the potentiality of evil. Therefore, the source of evil is not found in God’s creative power, but in man’s freedom.

An all-powerful God could not have created a world in which people had genuine freedom and yet no potential for sin. The reason is, our freedom includes the possibility of sin within its own meaning. It is impossible to have a world where there’s real choice while at the same time no possibility of choosing evil.

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<sup>3</sup> Dual prophecy means that a prediction has both a local (immediate) fulfillment and a distant (unconfined) one.

Laying the blame at God's feet will do little good in justifying ourselves for all the wrong done in the world. All that God created was very good (Gen 1:31). Our first parents chose to follow the devil's advice. Adam then tried to blame God—"The woman which You gave me made me do it." Eve followed suit: "The devil made me do it!" This is the same sort of reasoning we see today when people try and blame God for creating evil. The Creator did not create evil—in Him there is no darkness (1 John 1:5). Evil came about because of free choice—our choices.

### **Satan, Sin & Death—The Unholy Trinity**

One of the great misunderstandings surrounding Satan involves the book of Revelation:

There was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. NAS (Rev 12:7-9)

Although we see heaven as a place of future happiness, it has other meanings in scripture. The "war" was spiritual, won by Christ's resurrection. It was "through death that Christ rendered powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." (Heb 2:14) The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8) When we get to Revelation, it speaks of war and the fact that Satan and his angels "were not strong enough." Strong enough to resist what? The power of Christ's resurrection! His conquering of death and the grave! The idea of angels battling each other in heaven with lightning bolts and swords of fire sounds fascinating, but is completely bogus.

Christ was "in heaven" even while He walked the earth. (John 3:13) During His earthly ministry, He battled the principality and powers "in heavenly places," overcoming them in the cross. (Col 2:13, 15) Where were the angels in all of this? Battling each other in heaven? Christians are in heaven even while living on earth. (Eph 2:6, 13; Phil 3:20) Therefore, when we read of a war in heaven in Revelation, it must be interpreted in light of other scriptures, not our personal interpretation.

Satan came among the angels, but he had also been "roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." (Job 1:7) Once we begin to understand what being "in heaven" means, we can then begin to see what Revelation is talking about.

When the 70 disciples returned and told Jesus that demons were subject to them through His name, Jesus replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." (Luke 10:18) What the Lord meant must be understood in light of scripture, not whimsical interpretation:

How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He has cast from heaven to earth the glory of Israel, and has not remembered His footstool in the day of His anger. (Lam 2:1)

Babylon and its king were "cast out of heaven" (Isa 14:12), as previously discussed. The "casting out" or removal was actually done through the invasion of the Medes and Persians.

Paul refers to a war in heaven when he says, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Eph 6:12) We reign with Christ in heaven, helping Him in a spiritual battle against evil.

By His resurrection and ascension, Jesus vanquished sin and death and assumed the government over Israel—seen in the church—deposing the principality of Rome and the Jews, casting down to earth the power and dominion of the enemy. This is essentially the theme of the book of Revelation, and is further understood in light of Jesus’ words:

“Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.” (John 12:31-32)

Notice that the Lord said *now* is the world being judged; *now* the world’s ruler would be cast out. How? What caused it? Context, context, context. Notice:

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” (John 12:20-22)

While Christ came initially to preach to the Lost Sheep of Israel, the Good News had reached the Gentiles and they wanted in. Satan was losing his “place” in heaven. It trigger and bullet that ended his reign was Christ’s death and resurrection. Once Jesus rose from the grave, the war was over Satan. Once that was done, the next phase could be implemented:

Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)

Satan’s influence in this world is evident. But he has no authority. Claiming otherwise implies that Christ’s death and resurrection was not decisive, that there still must be some future battle to be fought. This denies the very efficacy of the cross and must be rejected as false.

Part of the confusion lies in understanding who the “prince of the world” was. Most take it to be Satan. But was Satan truly reigning over the earth? *Death* reigned from Adam to Moses. (Rom 5:14) *Death* reigned through Adam. (Rom 5:17) Nowhere does the bible say that Satan reigned over mankind.

That said, Satan held the power of death. “The whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” (1 John 5:19) That doesn’t mean he ruled the world. By His death, burial, and resurrection, Christ destroyed the principality and power of sin and death, triumphing over them in the cross. (Col 2:14, 15; Heb 2:14) The prince of this world came for Christ, but had nothing in Him. (John 14:30) Jesus’ sinless state meant that death could not hold Him. Neither sin nor death had dominion over Christ. When we are baptized into Christ’s death, we partake of that victory—sin and death has no more dominion over us. (Rom 6:3-14)

Death has never been in Satan, but in sin. God told Adam, “In the day you eat, you shall surely die.” (Gen 2:17) It was sin that caused Adam’s death, not Satan. “The sting of death is sin,” (1 Cor 15:56) not Satan. “The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh (not from Satan) reap corruption.” (Gal 6:8)

### **Fallen Angels & Demon Possession**

There is a lot of hoopla today about fallen angels and demon possession. The books written on the topic are mostly unscriptural, designed to extract money from those who are more fascinated with demonology rather than salvation.

The word ‘angel’ means ‘messenger,’ not necessarily an angelic being. It is the flesh that lusts after the spirit. (Gal 5:17) Lust is confined to fleshly beings, not spiritual ones. There is no scripture that says spirits “lusted after” other spirits. The reason I bring this up is because many believe that Genesis speaks of angels communing with human females:

When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose... The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown. NIV (Gen 6:1-4)

The bogus supposition is that angels came down from heaven, saw that women were beautiful, had children by them, and created a super race called the Nephilim. Jude is also used to support this notion, where the Genesis account is forcibly wedged in between the phrases:

Angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, (God) has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. (Jude 6)

Peter also speaks of God, who “did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.” (2 Peter 2:4)

The “angels” Peter and Jude refer to were the “sons of God” who abandoned their faith in God to marry into nearby unbelieving nations. (Gen 6:1-4) The sons of God were the “angels” (or messengers) who were cast into “everlasting chains of darkness” for their apostasy. If angelic beings were placed under everlasting chains in hell, they would not have been on earth during Jesus’ time, where He exorcised them from their human victims.

Nowhere are angels referred to as “sons of God,” unless one mishandles Genesis 6. Secondly, Jesus said, “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” (John 3:6) Based on the Savior’s words, the idea of angels conjoining with human females is unscriptural and biologically wanting. When asked by the religious leaders how husbands and wives would be united in heaven, Jesus told them, “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” (Matt 22:30)

When Jesus walked the earth, both He and His disciples cast out many demons from people. Unlike what is depicted in movies, where tedious (and typically unsuccessful) rituals are

involved, Jesus “cast out the spirits with a word.” The “word” was not ritualistic but authoritative. This is especially seen in the book of Acts:

Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. (One day) the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. NIV (Acts 19:13-16)

These guys thought that “the name of Jesus” was a magical incantation. The demon admits to knowing Jesus and the apostle Paul, but these Jews lacked faith in the living Christ by whose power such miracles of healing were wrought. Although they were letter-perfect in the use of the formula, it did them no good because they lacked faith.

After Christ’s resurrection, demon possession gradually faded away. Satan had lost his power at the open tomb. Those possessed by demons were eventually “cleaned up” in the aftermath of that defeat by the early church. Today, those “afflicted” with demons are confined to countries where ignorance and superstition runs rampant.

### **Satan and Law**

Without God’s commandment of “do not eat” in the Garden of Eden, Satan could not have tempted Adam and Eve. This is seen in the New Testament, where Paul writes, “through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.” (Rom 3:20)

In Genesis, the devil was a simple serpent and there was a simple law. By the time we get to the book of Revelation, he has changed into a great multi-headed beast. How did this happen?

Paul wrote that the “law was added so that the trespass might increase.” (Rom 5:20) The beast grew more heads. Sin increased. Thus, one of Jesus’ primary goals was to fulfill the law’s requirements in order to justify man before a Holy God. That justification is carried out by faith apart from works of the Law. (Rom 3:28)

The law was Satan’s *modus operandi*, and without it, he could no longer accuse believers of breaking it. Christ had paid the price in blood and nailed the law to the cross. (Col 2:14)

We have “been justified by faith, and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand.” (Rom 5:1-2)

In Christ we were made complete. In Christ we “were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which we were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” (Col 2:10-12)

These principles of faith and justification have removed us from any power Satan held over us, be it through law, the power of sin, or of death and the grave. Although the “flaming darts of the evil one” (Eph 6:16) test the Christian, it is through the armor of God and the sword of His word that we may survive.

Many Christians who are ignorant of these principles believe that Satan is still in heaven accusing us as he did with Job. Revelation 12:10 and the verses mentioned above all debunk that notion.

This brings up a point: is the devil still active, or have we been left only with his legacy of evil that continues to this day?

### **Where Is Satan Today?**

This section is the most difficult for Christians to accept due to popular doctrines that have permeated the modern church. Rather than investigate the delicate complexity of certain scriptures, most choose to accept them at face value, disregarding any other interpretation as false. Too long have we sat in the pews “amen-ing” the preacher instead of being like the Bereans, who “examined the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:11)

The Old Testament may provide a clue as to how Satan operates today. Concerning many of Israel’s kings, a phrase crops up over and over, which illustrates a certain principle:

He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin which he made Israel sin. (1 Kings 15:34)

The “way of Jeroboam” was descriptive of rebellion against Jehovah. After Jeroboam’s death, other kings followed in his rebellion, the wicked following in the steps of the wicked. Even centuries after his death, Jeroboam was still considered to be the source of Israel’s idolatry. Don’t miss this. Jeroboam had been long dead, but he was being labeled the architect of rebellion against God.

In the same way, Satan has left this earth with a legacy of evil. Evil is present in this world because sin is still in the hearts and minds of men. The idea that the devil is actively at work today may sound flamboyant in a Sunday sermon, but it excuses us from a certain amount of accountability. We can no more blame Satan for our own sin anymore than Eve could blame the serpent for hers. We are tempted by our own lust (James 1:14), not by any direct influence by Satan.

Some will argue that 1 Peter 5:8 is proof that Satan is still a force to be reckoned with: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” Is this proof that Satan is still alive and well?

As we have already seen, “the devil” doesn’t always refer to Satan. The context of Peter’s exhortation must be examined for a better interpretation. Peter goes on to say, “after you have suffered a little while, (God) Himself will restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” (1 Peter 5:10) After they achieved that position, would Satan never bother them again? The

apostle wasn't referring to their future restoration in heaven, but on earth. The context is speaking of the general persecution under Nero at that time. They were to resist, knowing that their "brothers throughout the world were undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

It was the Jews who were "prowling about," looking to exterminate the Christians, not some demonic angel. But Peter uses figurative language to portray the source of this persecution. This descriptive language is also seen in Revelation, where the terms, "synagogue of Satan," and "Satan's throne," clearly refer to Jewish persecution.

Why did Jesus tell Peter, "Get behind me, Satan!"? Jesus called Peter 'Satan' because the disciple rebuked the Lord's testimony (Matt 16:21-23). Was Peter somehow Satan suddenly made incarnate? The better view is that he was viewing things from a perspective opposed to the Father's will. He was adversarial—the meaning of Satan.

In God's eyes, the unbelieving Jews were children of Satan (John 8:33–44). They held their physical pedigree from Abraham in high esteem. If I claim Satan is literally tempting me to sin, then the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking were literal descendants of a spirit being. Spiritually, however, they were of the devil's seed, by principle, which Jesus claimed was their true descent. A person's desire to commit sin finds its roots in Satan. We are dealing with spiritual concepts, not literal ones. Satan doesn't have any authority to invade a Christian's mind and prod them to do evil. Otherwise, the whole of Romans 8 for the Christian rests on quicksand.

In both Peter's and the Jews' case, it was an attitude of rebellion against God's will that caused them to be "related" to Satan. This relationship was not actual, but provisional. It was borne out of attitude and free choice. If the relationship to Satan was actual, they would not have had a choice in the matter and they could not have removed themselves from it. But because it was provisional, they could cut the connection from Satan by repentance and obedience to God's will. Yet their stubborn wills justly condemned them as being the devil's seed.

This is an important principle that must be grasped to properly understand how Satan operates in our world. Although most cry out, "Satan is at work!" it's actually the spirit of disobedient human beings who follow in the devil's footsteps. Just as Israel's kings following in the way of Jeroboam, mankind follows in the way of Adam, who followed Satan. This is Paul's point:

You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. (Eph 2:1-2)

Thus, whenever someone follows the world and Satan's ways, they are of that same spirit. Because of their spiritual attitude, they are "born" into this world as the devil's children, whom the bible calls "the sons of disobedience."

Certain notions regarding the devil have been around for 2,000 years. The teachings are so old as to be regarded as biblical truth. There are respected scholars who hold to the same beliefs I've put forth here. However, they are so contrary to popular theology, that mainstream teachers and preachers reject them as patently false. What they learned in seminary training blinds them to any other viewpoint.

For some reason, we think that Satan has to be running around in the world in order for sin to thrive and for eschatology to arrive at a foreseen and particular conclusion. The bible says, however, that sin is the result of our own lust (James 1:14). Neither does the devil tempt us into sin. The same verse says that our own evil desire tempts us. We don't need Satan to help keep the world evil; we're doing an outstanding job on our own and without his help.

If you can understand and accept that, then perhaps you can read the rest of this section without getting too alarmed.

### **Satan in the Book of Revelation**

The duplicity of man's actions—and Satan as their source—is seen in the book of Revelation. (cf. Rev 11:18; 12:17) On one hand, nations become enraged because of Christ assuming control. On the other hand, Satan becomes enraged after Jesus' ascension, going after the church in persecution. They are parts of the same whole, viewed from two perspectives. One is an earthly viewpoint, the other spiritual. This is how Revelation tells its story—repeating itself from different angles. Once we understand this, particular care must be taken to notice the sequence of events:

- ⌚ Jerusalem (apostate Israel) is judged and destroyed (18:21-24)
- ⌚ Praise goes to God for defeating the gospel's enemies, the Jews (19:1-6)
- ⌚ The New Covenant is ushered in (19:7-10)
- ⌚ Christ begins to reign over the nations on His throne (19:11-19)
- ⌚ The civil and ecclesiastical powers are judged (19:20-21)

In his book, *The Consummation of the Ages*, Kurt Simmons writes:

A problem immediately arises when we move into chapter 20 and interpret Satan's binding and loosing, and the Great Judgment as sequential to the events in chapter 19. They are not. Adding to the difficulty is the popular notion that the book's final chapters speak of heaven, when in fact, they describe the kingdom of Christ as seen in the church.

Christ defeated Satan at the cross and at the grave. He lost his heavenly place, and could no longer "accuse the brethren." There is now no longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom 8:1) Satan no longer stands before the throne, accusing God's people, as he did in Job's case. To claim that he is, is to deny our justification found in Christ's blood. Some, such as William Bell, pastor of the Raines Road Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee believe that Satan is already in the Lake of Fire:

Satan is destroyed, having his power crushed through the death of Christ, (Heb 2:14) and later having been banished to the lake of fire...he was cast into the lake of fire, (Rev 20:10; 22:6,10,12) an event imminent in the first century...These passages are indicative of Satan's demise through Jesus' death and *parousia*, at which time he suffered ultimate defeat when the Old Covenant was fulfilled.

In light of Revelation 20, where Satan is unloosed, this viewpoint doesn't seem correct. In truth, it doesn't matter if Satan has already been judged or is yet to be judged. Neither condition should

be reason for rejoicing, nor should they be a stumbling block. This is why many Christians are confused; they think Satan is always harassing and tempting them.

I'm reminded of a woman in a small church of Christ I once attended, who was always asking for prayers, due to "Satan's constant attacks and evil counsel." She was a miserable creature. However, she rarely attended church services. When she did show up, she typically left halfway through the service. Satan didn't need to do anything; she was doing it all herself! She eventually stopped going to church altogether.<sup>4</sup>

The problem is not from some demonic being—it is from a struggle in our own hearts. Satan merely provides us an easy excuse, blaming him for our misery. When we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, are we going to be like Eve and point a finger at the serpent for what we did?

Some may wonder if Satan is bound or not. Paul wrote, "our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in high places." If Satan is bound why is there still evil in the world? The scripture is quite clear: Satan was bound—not permitted—to deceive the nations. It says nothing about sin being removed from the world. We have this idea that if Satan was removed from the world sin would disappear. The devil's *influence* remains because there are many of his children running loose in the world. Those who rebel against God are "sons of disobedience," and can be rightly called descendants of the devil. This is how his spirit remains in the world, just as Christ's spirit is in the world—through the heart.

Preachers still rant and rave about "the accuser of the brethren." They claim that Satan stands before God, as he did in Job, accusing Christians. This is error. You can't take a verse from the book of Job and make application today. You may as well claim God still sits on Mount Sinai.

The term, "accuser of the brethren," comes from Revelation 12, and deals specifically with the "dragon" being thrown out of heaven (spiritual high places). The verse says,

Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. (Rev 12:10-11)

Note the phrase, "has been thrown down." In other words, this "beast" no longer stands before God, accusing anyone. While there are other problems that would take us beyond the scope of this study, the point is, once we understand the concepts, we don't have to worry Satan's status. Our worry is to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling." Accountability lies with each and every person. Standing before the throne and claiming the devil made me do it will not mitigate any guilt.

Satan doesn't somehow pull us away from God and cause us to sin; we choose our path and make our decision. We are what we are because of the decisions we've made, not what some

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<sup>4</sup> Actually, she was being careful to complete the "5 acts of worship" mandated by the church of Christ: pray, sing, take the Lord's Supper, give money, and listen to the sermon. Once the offering was made, she'd heard enough of the sermon to "punch" her weekly ticket, she would slip away quietly to her car. This was her consistent behavior. She was a victim of legalism, not Satan.

demonic being tricked us into doing. Leaving God is done one step at a time, and sin is a matter of choice. We face the test and fail. If our spiritual strength is lacking, it's because of laziness on our part, not because God is letting the devil lure us out of His hand. Jesus told His disciples, "Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him." (Luke 12:5)

When the Account Books are opened on that Day, it is not Satan we need to fear.