

Satan: Is He? Who Is He?

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

A. A Critical Strategy

When I played football in college, one thing the coaches often did was use the third- or fourth-string units to run plays similar to that of the team we would face in our game on Saturday. They would practice against the first- and second-string units so the latter would get a better idea of what to expect from the next opponent. Being able to predict what your enemy will do is very important. That principle is no less true in the spiritual realm. If we want to gain victory in spiritual things, we need to know our enemy. The better we understand him, the better we will recognize his weaknesses. Only then does he become vulnerable to us. That's why it's important to do a study on Satan. We certainly don't intend to glorify him. But we do need to unmask him so we might see him as he is--a corrupt and defeated being.

B. A Cursory Study

1. The revelation about angels

Genesis 1:1-2 says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." That's the account of creation we are all familiar with. Yet that was not the first creation. Elsewhere Scripture tells us that at that time, there were already created beings in existence.

a) Job 38:4-7--God rhetorically asked Job, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding" (v. 4). That is an obvious reference to the Genesis creation. The Lord continued, "Who hath laid the measures of it, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" "The morning stars" and "the sons of God" existed before the creation of the universe. Since "morning stars" is here used synonymously with "sons of God [Heb. bene Elohim]," a clear reference to angels (Job 1:6; 2:1), we assume it too refers to angels. It obviously isn't a reference to literal stars since the universe hadn't been created yet. We don't know when angels were created, but it's safe to conclude that they were in existence before the universe was made. b) Colossians 1:16--Paul said of Christ, "By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers--all things were created by him, and for him." The Greek words translated "thrones," "dominions," "principalities," and "powers" are titles for angels and signify their ranking. The Greek verb translated "were created" is in the aorist tense implying that all the angels were created at the same time by a direct act of God in the past.

2. The responsibility of angels

Angels were created to serve and glorify God. Revelation 4 shows the angels glorifying God with their praise. Hebrews 1:14 calls them "ministering spirits." Angels serve the purposes of God by carrying out His bidding and offering Him praise.

3. The rebellion of angels with Satan

At some point between their creation and Genesis 3, something happened to some of the angels. One is seen as an evil serpent in the Garden (Gen. 3:1). A tragedy had occurred: a large group of

angels rebelled against their Creator (Rev. 12:9).

a) The incomprehensibility of the rebellion One of the most difficult questions in all theology is the problem of theodicy, which is the defense of God's goodness in view of the existence of evil. Where did sin come from? It apparently originated with the angels since they sinned first. That's about all we can deduce from the Scriptural evidence. For His own reasons, God did not choose to reveal everything to us (Deut. 29:29). Why would angels want to rebel against an absolutely holy God? They are intelligent beings; they must have recognized they had a glorious existence. They had the ability to communicate with God. Their emotional makeup is seen in their praising God. They were responsible creatures. They weren't robots; they had wills, as evidenced by their choice to rebel. We don't know why they did it or how. We don't know how that temptation manifested itself in Lucifer's mind (Ezek. 28:15), but we know that mankind's present sinful condition is a product of that rebellion.
b) The leader of the rebellion In Matthew 25:41 our Lord refers to "the devil and his angels." Satan led a group of angels in rebellion against God. How many angels followed him? Revelation 12:3 refers to Satan as the great red dragon. Verse 4 says, "His tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to earth." Since "stars" in Job 38:7 refers to angels, Revelation 12:4 apparently means that one third of the angels rebelled with Satan.

LESSON

I. SATAN: IS HE?

Some people scoff at the devil's existence, assuming he is nothing more than an evil character contrived to scare kids on Halloween. Is there any evidence that supports the existence of a devil--a personal, active being who is opposed to the plan of God?

A. The Philosophical Evidence

1. The dichotomy

From a philosophical perspective we can conclude that there must be an adversary because absolute harmony does not exist in the world. We know that God was powerful enough to create a perfect world. Yet there exists a puzzling dichotomy of happiness and sorrow, of wisdom and stupidity, of fulfillment and failure, of kindness and cruelty, of life and death. Something or someone evil has obviously messed with perfection.

2. The denial

That opposition to God exists is evidence of some other personal being actively engaged in trying to stifle God's plans. Is it logical to assume that God would create good and then create its opposite--evil--to fight against His efforts? No. That's like asking, "Can God make a rock so big He can't lift it?" In The King of the Earth Erich Sauer quotes Dr. von Gerdteil as saying, "On the one hand it [the universe] shows too much intelligence, wisdom and happiness to justify a denial of God; on the other hand it shows too much lack of intelligence, malignity and unhappiness to make belief in God probable. It gives the impression of a magnificent temple in ruins in which its inscriptions expressing profound truth have been maliciously and skilfully caricatured by some unknown person" ([Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962], p. 61).

3. The defense

Sauer himself said, "The existence of sorrow and evil throughout the world proves the existence of a transcendental, real, dynamic, hostile power, not willed by God" (p. 62). God wouldn't create something perfect and then stand in opposition to it. Sauer then said, "The fact is that the devil is a spiritual being ... whose existence cannot in any way be assailed by philosophy nor natural science. Since it is just in our world and in our universe immediately surrounding us that we observe disharmony, death, and destruction, even a purely speculative contemplation of nature focuses on us the conclusion that this world, and presumably the solar system connected with it, are the domain of this world-ruler and potentate" (p. 63). Obviously a being exists who fights the purposes of God.

B. The Biblical Evidence

1. The acknowledgment of Satan

a) By Jesus Christ obviously believed that the devil exists. (1) Matthew 4:1-4--"Then was Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward hungry. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Our Lord was convinced of the reality of Satan. Throughout His ministry He countered the deeds of Satan. (2) John 12:31--Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world [Satan] be cast out." The Lord was in conflict with Satan, and would soon triumph over him at the cross. Christ knew He was in conflict with a real adversary because He created him (Col. 1:16). (3) John 14:30--Jesus said to His disciples, "Hereafter I will not talk much with you; for the prince of this world cometh." (4) John 16:11--Jesus said, "The prince of this world is judged." (5) John 8:44--Jesus said to the religious leaders, "Ye are of your father the devil." b) By Paul Ephesians 2:2 says all unbelievers are led by "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience." c) By John First John 3:8 says, "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." To believe in Christ but not in the devil makes a mockery out of what Christ did and said. Understanding their conflict is basic to understanding the New Testament. First John 5:19 says, "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (NASB). d) By James James 4:7 says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." e) By Peter First Peter 5:8 says, "Your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." The New Testament writers clearly understood that God's purpose was to send Christ to defeat the devil.

2. The activity of Satan

a) He tempted Eve (Gen. 3:1-6). b) He tempted Christ (Matt. 4:1-11). c) He perverts God's Word (Gen. 3:1; Matt. 4:6). d) He opposes God's work (Zech. 3:1). e) He hinders God's servants (1 Thess. 2:18). f) He hinders the gospel (Matt. 13:19, 38-39; 2 Cor. 4:4). g) He ensnares the wicked (1 Tim. 3:7; 2 Tim. 2:26). h) He deceives the nations (1 Kings 22:6-7, 19-23; Rev. 16:14; 20:7-8). i) He disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:3, 14). j) He contended with the angel Michael (Jude 9). k) He instigated the fall of the human race (Gen. 3:13-24). l) He seeks to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). m) He accuses God's people (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Rev. 12:10). n) He once had the power of death (Heb. 2:14). o) The whole world lies in his power (1 John 5:19).

A Guarded Garden

According to Genesis 2:15, God told Adam he was placed "into the garden of Eden to till it and to keep it." The Hebrew word translated "keep" means "to guard." By implication there existed a potential danger that required Adam to be on guard. In Genesis 3 the adversary revealed himself. So the very beginning of Scripture hints of the conflict to come.

C. The Experiential Evidence

The devil has manifested himself in many ways in our world today. Some are so obviously assured of his existence that they overtly and openly worship him. Also there are strange reports of healings and wonders associated with ungodly persons or activities that can only be attributed to satanic activity (cf. Ex. 7:11-12; 2 Tim. 3:8). They, too, give evidence of his existence.

II. SATAN: WHO IS HE?

A. He Is a Person

We have seen that Satan is a fallen angel. As an angel he possesses a personality. Angels also have proper names. They have all the properties of personhood: a mind, emotion, and will. Their praise of God is an emotional expression. They will to defend God and fight demons.

1. His traits

a) The ability to plan Animals don't make plans; people do. The New Testament often discusses Satan's attempts to deceive people and lead them astray. In 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul says, "I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his craftiness, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."b) The ability to communicate Satan held a conversation with Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11) and with Eve in the Garden (Gen. 3:1-6).c) The ability to will something Satan has certain desires and wills to accomplish those objectives. For example he took Jesus to the top of a mountain and offered Him all the kingdoms of the world if He did what he told Him (Matt. 4:8-9).

2. His accountability

Satan is held personally accountable by God for his actions. Animals are not accountable--they have no biblical standard for moral behavior. But God has established biblical standards for man's behavior. That God said He would judge Satan (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 16:20) implies he knowingly violated God's standards. Thus he is held personally accountable for his violations.

3. His names

Satan is designated not only by personal pronouns such as you and he (Ezek. 28; 2 Cor. 11:14-15), but also by proper names and descriptive titles.

a) The anointed cherub (Ezek. 28:14) That title designates Satan as one of the highest-ranking angels before his fall.b) The prince of this world (John 16:11) Satan rules an evil world system of angels and unbelieving people.c) The prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2) That means he has dominion in the atmospheric realm.d) The god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4) Satan is the god of this present world system. He propagates false religions, humanism, materialism, and preoccupation with sex.e) Beelzebub, the chief of demons (Luke 11:15) Beelzebub is a derogatory title meaning "Lord of the flies" that the Jewish people ascribed to a Philistine god. It came to be a synonym for Satan. All those personal titles refer to Satan's rule, authority, and power. He is a person who establishes and directs a plan.

B. He Is a Spirit

1. His immaterial composition

Angels are spirits--they are immaterial beings. Angels are called "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14). Demons are called "evil spirits" (Luke 8:2) and "unclean spirits" (Luke 4:36).

2. His spatial limitation

Satan is not omnipresent like God. The book of Daniel gives evidence that when angels or demons are in one location they must travel to get somewhere else (e.g., 9:21; 10:12-14, 20-21). When our Lord cast demons out of the demoniac near Gerasa, He sent them into a herd of swine (Luke 8:33). Demons and angels cannot be everywhere at the same time. Satan has the same limitations.

3. His visual manifestation

Satan has the capability to materialize in a human form. So do the angels. When two angels entered Sodom to rescue Lot, they were in the form of men (Gen. 19:1). They may have been uniquely handsome, for when the homosexual population saw them, they sought to sexually abuse them (v. 5). That's why God destroyed the city.

Before that, demons apparently materialized and cohabitated with women, creating a demonic-human race (Gen. 6:1-7; Jude 6). Consequently, one reason for the Flood was to destroy that perverse race, thus eliminating the possibility of their impeding God's redemptive plan.

4. His immortal status

Angels are immortal--they never die. They live forever from the moment of their creation. Thus Satan is immortal. After death, humans will live forever as well, either with God or without Him.

C. He Is a Fallen Angel

The Bible records the existence of different ranks of angels. The highest-ranking angels God created are cherubim. They possess indescribable beauty and power beyond anything the human mind can

conceive. It is their duty to protect God's holiness. They always appear surrounding God's presence (Ex. 25:18-22; Ezek. 1:4-28; Rev. 4:6-8). Sometimes they are seen proclaiming God's grace.

The Bible names three of the cherubim: Gabriel, whose specific task is to reveal and interpret God's purpose and program for His kingdom; Michael, who is seen as the general of the angelic army and the champion of Israel; and Lucifer, the most glorious creature God ever made. Lucifer (Heb. helel) means "son of the dawn," "shining one," and "star of the morning."

1. Satan's rise and fall (Ezekiel 28)

As a prophet of God, Ezekiel gave messages of judgment. One such judgment fell on the king of Tyre. He was evil, ruthless, and cruel. The pronouncement of judgment culminates in God's saying, "Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am a god? But thou shalt be a man, and not God, in the hand of him that slayeth thee. Thou shalt die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of foreigners; for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God" (Ezek. 28:9-10). The king of Tyre was claiming to be God, and that's the grossest manifestation of pride.

However beginning in verse 11, Ezekiel goes beyond the king of Tyre to the source of his evil, Satan himself. That is not an uncommon pattern in Scripture. Often the Messianic psalms present David talking about himself, but underlying that is a reference to the Messiah. On one occasion our Lord said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:23). Jesus physically addressed Peter, but in reality He was talking to the source that inspired Peter's evil remark. The same is true in Ezekiel 28. God takes us behind the scene so we see who caused the king of Tyre to behave as he did.

a) His beautyIn verse 12 God says to Ezekiel, "Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyre, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God: Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty." This supernatural king was the sum of all God's creation. He was "full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty." If you wanted to know what God thinks is beautiful, you would have had to behold this particular angel in his original essence.b) His preexistenceVerse 13 says, "Thou hast been in Eden, the garden of God." Obviously the king of Tyre had never been there, but Satan had (Gen. 3:1; Rev. 12:9). It is probable that this particular Eden is not an allusion to the Garden of Eden on earth, but to the paradise or Eden of heaven in the presence of God.c) His talentThen God described him: "Every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold; the workmanship of thy timbrels and of thy flutes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created" (v. 13). In addition to being adorned by a plethora of glittering jewels, he is seen as the supreme musician in heaven. That will give you some idea of how God values music--He loves it!d) His positionVerse 14 says, "Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth, and I have set thee so; thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire." Satan originally may have occupied a place of honor about the throne of God. "Stones of fire" perhaps refers to the blazing Shekinah of God.e) His sinBut sadly, that glorious creature fell: "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned; therefore, I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God, and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.... Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy merchandise" (vv. 15-16, 18). Satan propagated his sin and took one third of the angels with him (Rev. 12:4, 9). God concluded, "Therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee; it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee" (v. 18).

2. Satan's pride and punishment (Isaiah 14)

Isaiah 14:12 says, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" You can almost sense God's pity over the great fall Lucifer suffered. How could such a thing have happened? The following verses make it clear that pride was Lucifer's downfall.

a) The expression of his pride(1) "I will ascend into heaven" (v. 13a)--Since Lucifer already had

access to God as the leading cherub, he was not simply saying, "I'll go visit God." There was only one place he could ascend--he was planning to take over God's throne.(2) "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God" (v. 13b)--He was intending to usurp God's authority over the angels and take over as the ruler of heaven.(3) "I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation [assembly]" (v. 13c)--According to Isaiah 2:2 and Psalm 48:1-2, the mount of the assembly is the center of God's kingdom rule. Satan was aiming to take the place of Messiah.(4) "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds" (v. 14a)--Most commentators think that refers to the glory of God, not to the clouds in the sky. Satan wanted to ascend above the glory of God.(5) "I will be like the Most High [Heb. ?]" (v. 14b)--? is God's title as possessor of heaven and earth. Satan wanted to seize possession of heaven and earth. What unbelievable manifestations of egoism and pride! Jesus said, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18). When he fell, he fell fast. His beauty was immediately corrupted. Every angelic being who followed after him was doomed with him to hell forever--to a hell specifically created for the devil and his demons (Matt. 25:41).b) The execution of his punishmentIsaiah 14:15-17 says, "Thou shalt be brought down to sheol, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man who made the earth to tremble, who did shake kingdoms, who made the world like a wilderness, and destroyed its cities, who opened not the house of his prisoners?" Satan is not only damned to the pit, but also will become despised. His weakness will be obvious to all who behold him."He will be brought to the pit" will be fulfilled according to Revelation 20:3. At the end of the Great Tribulation, Satan will be cast into the pit for the duration of the millennial kingdom. After being loosed for a short time, he ultimately will be cast into the lake of fire forever (Rev. 20:10).

Why Did God Allow Satan's Rebellion to Continue?

When Satan fell, mankind had not yet fallen. However we don't know when his fall took place or if the world was yet created. God could have destroyed Satan and his demons immediately and ended the rebellion or He could have suppressed the rebellion until another one occurred. But God chose to do something else.

He gave the rebels full opportunity to exploit every avenue of their power to its limits--from the time of Genesis 3:1 until the establishment of God's kingdom. Why did God decide to allow that? The Bible doesn't say, but I believe He had at least one good reason: to let the rebellion run its course as an illustration to all creation that nothing can ever dethrone God. When Satan's rebellion is finally put to rest, no one will ever wonder if God's authority can be usurped. Perhaps that is the basis of the magnificent heavenly praise we read about in Revelation 4:1; 5:11. While the rebellion continues, our holy God shows His hatred of sin. But because He's a loving God, He redeems those who don't want to be a part of the rebellion.

CONCLUSION

A. The Reality of Spiritual Conflict

The conflict continues on every level in the universe. It's active at the throne of God because Satan has access to God (Job 1:6-12; Rev. 12:10). Demonic and angelic armies do battle (Dan. 10:10-13; Rev. 12:7-9). And of course there's also a war at the human level. Jesus said to the ungodly Pharisees, "Ye are of your father the devil" (John 8:44). The children of God and the children of Satan fight each other (2 Tim. 3:12-13). I wonder how many Christians realize that the entire universe is a battleground and that they are in the middle of it. Satan is contending for the souls of men and women, and so is God. We are to be on God's team contending with Him and equipped with His armor (Eph. 6:10-17).

Is there a devil? You better believe there is! Who is he? He is a person, a spirit, and a fallen angel. He's an active aggressor in a war against God and His purposes in the world.

B. The Response to Christ's Call

Every person in the world is either a child of God or a child of Satan. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30). If you want to align yourself with a fallen creature who is damned, that's your choice. Jesus said, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life" (John 5:40). You can be on God's side only by coming to Christ.

If you are a Christian, I trust this study has given you new impetus to fight the battle, resist the devil, and not let him have a foothold in your life or gain an advantage over you. God deserves all your praise and service. Satan's power over death has been defeated at the cross (Heb. 2:14), but he continues to tempt us to sin. We must "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph. 6:10).

Focusing on the Facts

1. What does Job 38:4-7 tell us about when the angels were created?
2. Who created the different angelic powers (Col. 1:16)?
3. Why were angels created?
4. What is one of the most difficult theological questions?
5. How many angels rebelled with Satan (Rev. 12:4)?
6. What is the philosophical evidence for the existence of a personal, active adversary against God?
7. What did Jesus think about the devil?
8. According to 1 John 3:8, why was the Son of God manifested?
9. List some of the activities of Satan as recorded in Scripture.
10. What abilities of Satan are important evidences of his personality?
11. Cite and explain some of Satan's names.
12. Why can't Satan be everywhere at the same time?
13. What kind of angel was Lucifer? What was his duty?
14. Who was the source behind the evil of the king of Tyre?
15. What phrases in Ezekiel 28:12-16 show that a supernatural ruler is in view and not an historical king?
16. Cite the details of Satan's fall (Ezek. 28:15-18).
17. According to Isaiah 14:13-14, what did Satan want?
18. What is the place of Satan's ultimate punishment (Rev. 20:10)?
19. What is God showing creation by allowing Satan's rebellion to continue?
20. Where was Satan's power over death defeated (Heb. 2:14)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Since Lucifer, glorious as he once was, was susceptible to leading a rebellion against God, how much more are we frail humans capable of it! What can you learn from Satan's example to prevent yourself from rebelling against God? Satan's lust for power set him on a course for self-destruction. Read the following verses to discover how you can debilitate whatever tempts it gets out of control: Proverbs 2:10-11; 4:14-18; Luke 22:46; Romans 6:12-13; 13:14; 1 Corinthians 6:18; Galatians 5:16; 1 John 2:15-17.
2. James 4:6 says, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." Many times we are guilty of pride. Read Luke 18:9-17, John 5:40, and Romans 1:21-22, 28-32. What makes pride so disastrous to an unbeliever? Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-12; 3:3-5. What does pride do to believers? What does Philippians 2:1-4 tell us should characterize our attitudes and actions? Because of pride have you been unable to forgive someone for his or her mistake, or admit that you made a mistake and are in need of someone's forgiveness? If such a problem remains unresolved, follow Christ's instruction in Matthew 5:23-24 and that of Paul in Ephesians 4:31-32.

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