

Satan: What Is He Like?

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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REVIEW

I. SATAN--IS HE?

II. SATAN--WHO IS HE?

LESSON

III. SATAN--WHAT IS HE LIKE?

Here we will define the character of Satan. A clear understanding of what's going on in the world depends on knowing what the adversary is doing. Paul warned the Corinthians not to be "ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). The better we are able to anticipate his activity, the better we will be at defending ourselves.

What Satan Is Not Like

Satan is not like God.

1. He is not self-existent--Satan was created. That means he is clearly inferior to God.
2. He is not sovereign--Satan rules a domain of demons, but not beyond the bounds God established for him. Satan never rid himself of God's rule. His rebellion failed totally. Satan was exiled to the earth and the domain around it. He chafes against the chains of God's sovereign will, which allows him to operate only within its own sphere. The apostle Paul indicated that God uses Satan to accomplish His own ends: "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul asked God to remove it, but God chose not to (vv. 8-9). God allowed Satan to do something that would ultimately bring Him glory (vv. 9-10).
3. He is not omnipotent--Satan is powerful, but not all powerful. First John 4:4 says, "Greater is he that is in you [a reference to God the Holy Spirit] than he that is in the world."

4. He is not omniscient--Satan does not know everything. Many Christians wonder if Satan can read their thoughts. The Bible gives no indication that he can. Satan doesn't know everything because he is an angel, and angels don't know everything. That is evident from 1 Peter 1:12, where we find that "angels desire to look into" the mystery of salvation. There are some things angels don't understand. And if holy angels don't understand everything, there's no reason to believe a corrupted one would. While there is no indication that Satan can read our thoughts, he is good at predicting our behavior because of his knowledge of human nature. He has spent untold years observing our attitudes and actions.

5. He is not omnipresent--Angels may be fast, as Daniel 9:21 indicates, but they cannot be everywhere at the same time.

All angels, both good and evil, have limitations placed on them as created beings. That includes Satan.

A. The Titles

The titles give us information about what Satan is like.

1. Satan

He is called Satan fifty-two times in Scripture. Satan comes from a Hebrew word that means "adversary." He is primarily the adversary of God. But he is also the adversary of God's holy angels, as evidenced by his struggles against Michael and the heavenly angels (Jude 9; Rev. 12:7-9). And he is the adversary of God's people--of those who have identified themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 2:18).

2. The devil

This name is used thirty-seven times in the New Testament. It is derived from the Greek word diabolos, which means "one who slanders" or "one who trips up." He aims to maliciously slander God (Gen. 3:1), Christ (Luke 22:3-4), the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3), the church (Rev. 12:10), the Bible and true doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1), and the character of Christians (1 Tim. 3:7). He attempts to defame anything that even is associated with God. Since he controls the evil world system (1 John 5:19), the world does not tend to have much regard for Christians.

3. The old serpent

In Genesis 3:1 we see him as a serpent, and Revelation 12:9 refers to him as "that old serpent." In 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul expresses the following concern: "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." Characteristic of the serpent is his craftiness, subtlety, and deceit. In Ephesians 4:14 Paul warns "that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive."

4. The great dragon

Revelation 12:3 says, "There appeared another wonder in heaven; and, behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns on his head." Verses 7 and 9 refer to him as the dragon. That name indicates the power and destructiveness of this beast. He is pictured in Revelation 12 as the terrifying general of the demonic army of hell.

5. A roaring lion

In reading about lions I discovered that they tend to roar only when they already have their prey. They don't roar when they are stalking their prey; otherwise it would be warned of its enemy's approach. Lions are sneaky. Once the lion has cornered or killed its prey, it roars in triumph before devouring its prey. When Peter said, "The devil, like a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8), he was warning us about Satan's desire to capture us and engulf us in sin.

6. The evil one

The Greek term poneros is translated "the evil one" in John 17:15 (NASB). First John 5:18 says, "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not, but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth [holds] him not." When God has hold of a life, Satan can't hold onto that same life. Poneros refers to an intrinsic, internal evil. Satan is evil personified. And like all who are evil, he is not satisfied with his own evil, but wants to corrupt others (Rom. 1:32).

7. The destroyer

Revelation 9:11 says his "name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon." They both refer to him as destroyer. Satan tries to destroy everything God has made. He attempts to destroy people through physical death (John 8:44) as well as spiritual death (2 Cor. 4:4).

8. The tempter

Matthew 4 details Satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Verse 3 refers to him as "the tempter." Satan entices men and women to evil.

9. The accuser

Satan accuses believers day and night (Rev. 12:10), but Jesus is our advocate (1 John 2:1). Satan falsely accused Job of a conditional faith in God--that once he no longer had wealth he would curse God (Job. 1:9-11; 2:4-5). Satan is busy accusing us before God, perhaps saying things like, "So and so hasn't fulfilled what You required--he's not worthy of Your grace, love, and salvation." But Romans 8:33 tells us that no one can "lay any thing to the charge of God's elect." Jesus Christ has already declared us righteous and God has declared us justified. As a result we have nothing to fear.

B. The Terms

The terms the Bible uses to describe Satan are more descriptive than his titles.

1. A murderer

Jesus shocked the hypocritical Pharisees, who falsely assumed they were the children of God, by saying, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). The first crime recorded after the Fall was Cain's murder of Abel (Gen. 4:8). That's how Satan began his career as a murderer. First John 3:12 says that "Cain, who was of that wicked one ... killed his brother." Murder is Satanic. Satan entices people to commit murder. He himself has tried to slaughter Israel many times so that he might thwart God's redemptive plan. If he could destroy Israel, he could eliminate the Messiah, who was to be born out of that nation.

a

) 2 Kings 11:1-3--In those days there lived an evil woman named Athaliah. Her son, king Ahaziah, had been killed. Verse 1 says, "When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal." She was Satan's emissary. As such she attempted to murder all those who had the right to reign. At that time in the history of Israel, the royal line of David rested with one person. If anything happened to him, the Messianic hope was gone. Verses 2-3 tell us what happened: "But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash, the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons who were slain; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain. And he was with her hidden in the house of the Lord six years. And Athaliah did reign over the land." God protected the one little baby that carried the thread of the Messianic hope.

b) Matthew 2:13-18--Finally the Messiah came. So Satan set out to murder the newborn child: "When they [the wise men] were departed, an angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceedingly angry, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all its borders, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah, the prophet, saying, In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." Through Herod, Satan tried to destroy the Messiah. But God protected Him.

2. A liar

John 8:44 says Satan "abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it." You can never believe Satan because he lies all the time. Revelation 12:9 says he "deceiveth the whole world." Don't think you can enter into a dialogue with Satan that will reveal truth.

a) His overt strategy

Through the world's preoccupation with witchcraft and the occult, Satan has directed peoples' attention away from what's really important. Some people have a fascination with Ouija boards. Many people want to know more about the next world. I'm sure Satan would prefer that people be

diverted into his overt activity and lose sight of his covert activity.

b

) His covert strategy

Satan's covert activity is lying. Dave Breese said, "Witchcraft ... is certainly dangerous, but it deceives only the simple-minded. Toying with Ouija boards or holding a reverence for fetishes can produce a dreadful spiritual infection. Their main appeal, however, will be to those limited intellects who feel more than they think. External phenomena may be interesting, even spectacular, but are limited in their appeal to reasonable people.... With witchcraft, orgies, seances and demon possession, he [Satan] has captured thousands. With false doctrine, he has subverted millions" (His Informal Majesty [Chicago: Moody, 1974], pp. 15-16). The real work of Satan takes place in the arena of false doctrine. Ultimately he has greater influence when false teachers deny the Word of God than he does by instigating a seance. Satan's deadliest activity is perverting the truth.

First Timothy 4:1 says, "The Spirit speaketh expressly that, in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy." "Seducing spirits" refers to Satan's overt work and "doctrines of demons" his covert work. You can see why we are commanded to study the Word of God so that we might counteract Satan's lies.

Let's look at some of Satan's most influential lies.

(1) Saying that God is a cosmic killjoy

Genesis 3:1 says, "The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Satan questioned God's concern for Eve by suggesting that God was nothing more than a tyrant who delights in making unfair laws.

(2) Saying that God is a liar

Eve replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Gen. 3:2-3). However God never said they couldn't touch it. Then the serpent said to the woman, "Ye shall not surely die" (v. 4). He was accusing God of being a liar.

Numbers 32:23 says, "Be sure your sin will find you out." But Satan says, "No it won't; go ahead and sin. Who will know?" Hebrews 12:10-11 says that if you sin, God will chastise you. The only protection we have against the wiles of the devil is the shield of faith (Eph. 6:16). You either believe God or you believe Satan. As soon as you believe Satan, your shield is down and you're vulnerable to his attacks. But as long as you believe God, you will know enough to do the right thing.

(3) Saying that believers are inherently materialistic

Job 1:6-9 says, "There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, from where comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up

and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant, Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one who feareth God, and shunneth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nothing?" By that last question Satan implied that believers are inherently materialistic--that the only reason Job or anyone else serves God is to receive blessings. Many believe that lie about Christians. They accuse us of being devoted to God because we want our physical and psychological needs met.

(4) Saying that God is a patronizer

In Job 1:10-11 Satan continues his criticism of God's providence: "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." Satan accused God of patronizing Job--of holding onto His followers by giving them things.

(5) Saying that trials cause believers to defect spiritually

God allowed Satan to take everything away from Job (vv. 13-19). But Job said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God with folly" (vv. 21-22).

But Satan approached God again (2:1-2). This time the Lord said, "Hast thou considered my servant, Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and shunneth evil? And still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face" (vv. 3-5). Although Satan had to acknowledge that Job trusted in God for more than his circumstances, he thought he could get Job to turn from God if his life was made miserable through physical trials.

Verses 6-10 tell us what happened: "The Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips." Satan's lie is that trouble will bring defection because only this life matters. But the opposite is true: often when Christians face terrible physical stress, they turn to God.

(6) Saying that God performs miracles for physical satisfaction

Matthew 4:3 says, "When the tempter came to [Jesus], he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." After forty days Jesus was hungry. Satan reminded Him that as the Son of God, He could satisfy His hunger by providing Himself with food. After all, God miraculously fed Israel in the wilderness, and they were only sinful people. But Jesus said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (v. 4).

An Overlooked Miracle Worker

Today many people want miracles. They think of God as a cosmic genie--a supernatural magician who has a bag load of tricks. They claim that miracles are the evidence of their great faith. But a constant demand for miracles isn't evidence of faith; it's doubt looking for proof. People who constantly look for miracles or claim to perform miracles are probably in touch with a miracle worker who is often overlooked: Satan. He performs miracles all the time to satisfy physical desires and to deceive people into thinking that those miracles come from God.

My wife, Patricia, and I had an opportunity to meet with a couple who were new Christians. They said they had started getting together with some people who sought miracles. The wife went on to explain how her seven-year-old daughter would wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat claiming to have received wonderful revelations from God. They asked me for my reaction. I told them that not one of those revelations was from God. They were shocked. Then I told them that God already gave us His revelation--the Bible. Satan's big lie is that God isn't present unless miracles are continually being performed. Once people start looking for them, it's a simple task for Satan to perform minor miracles and captivate their minds, directing their focus away from the revelation of Scripture.

(7) Saying that you can exploit God's promises

Matthew 4:5-6 says, "The devil taketh [Jesus] up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Satan wanted Christ to exploit God's promise to take care of Him. Misrepresenting what God meant, Satan would have us believe that God will work on our behalf in spite of our unwillingness to cooperate with Him (cf. Phil. 2:12-13).

(8) Saying that you can shortcut God's plan

Satan would have us believe that we can get what we want our way--that we don't have to follow God's plan. Having shown Christ all the kingdoms of the world, Satan said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:9). Satan suggested that Christ bypass God's plan and accept his offer of all the kingdoms of the world right then. By doing so He could circumvent the cross and not pay the price. But our Lord was not fooled by that great lie. Neither should we.

3. A sinner

First John 3:8 says, "He that committeth [Gk. poieo] sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning." Satan is a habitual sinner. Poieo is in the present tense, and here refers to habitual sin that has its source in the devil. Satan is the basis of sin. Christ came into the world not only to destroy sin, but to destroy Satan as well. John said, "The Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

4. An oppressor

Satan is the oppressor of the saints. First Peter 5:8 says that he is "like a roaring lion walketh about,

seeking whom he may devour." Satan tracks down the saints and tries to trap them in sin.

5. A perverter

Satan has taken hold of every good thing God has made and perverted it. God made fruit for food and drink (Gen. 1:29-30), but Satan perverted it into alcoholism (Eph. 5:18). God designed sex for us to enjoy within marriage (Heb. 13:4), but Satan perverted it into something lewd or adulterous (Gal 5:19).

To see the effectiveness of Satan's perversions, let's examine one area where he has been particularly effective: food. You can't get drunk on food, but you sure can be a glutton.

a

) The asceticism of legalism

First Timothy 4:1 refers to Satan's doctrine of demons taught by men who departed from the faith. One of the things they taught was "to abstain from foods, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving by them who believe and know the truth" (v. 3). Satan took the idea of a diet and perverted it so that in certain systems of religion, spirituality is based on diet. When the New Testament church was established, many Jewish Christians believed their spirituality was still based on their diet. Paul had to address that problem in 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14-15. Satan would love for people to think that their spirituality is dependent on what they eat. I'm sure some people think that spirituality is dependent on being a vegetarian.

b

) The abuse of liberty

First Timothy 4:4 says, "Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused, if it is received with thanksgiving." That's just what some people do--they refuse nothing and eat everything in sight. Realizing that abstinence is a false sign of spirituality, some overcompensate in the opposite direction and sin in the area of gluttony.

(1) Its condemnation

First Peter 4:3 says, "The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, carousings [banqueting]." Gluttony is inherent in revelings and carousings.

(2) Its consequence

Deuteronomy 21:20 tells us that Israel stoned children who were so out of control that, among other things, they became gluttons. God is serious about balance in peoples' lives. We are to be temperate and moderate in this area.

(3) Its caution

(a) Proverbs 23:1-2--"When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee,

and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite." What a great diet that would be! Overeating is a serious problem in our society, especially since so many people labor behind desks and not in a physical way.

(b) Proverbs 23:20-21--"Be not among winebibbers, among gluttonous eaters of flesh; for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags." Those who eat or drink too much tend to become lazy and not work. When you don't make any money, it's difficult to clothe yourself with anything but rags.

Gluttony is serious. God has given us the wonderful creation of food to fuel our bodies, but Satan has perverted it to be a false sign of spirituality or a license to overindulge. There is nothing that Satan can't pervert in some way.

6. An imitator

The only original thought Satan ever had was to sin. In his desire to be worshiped as God, he strives to be an imitator of his Creator.

a

) His servants

Second Corinthians 11:13-15 says, "Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as ministers of righteousness." Drunkards and criminals are not the kind of people Satan can use on a long-term basis. He wants respected religious leaders who teach false doctrine under the guise of true religion.

b

) His synonyms

The Hebrew word nachash, translated "serpent" in Genesis 3:1, means "to hiss" or "to whisper." But it can also mean "to shine." Satan is the hissing, shining one. Even as a serpent, his beauty must have made quite an impression on Eve. Nachash and Lucifer are synonyms since Lucifer means "the shining one." Satan has always been an angel of light. He is a deceiver who masks himself as a messenger of God.

Focusing on the Facts

1. In what ways is Satan unlike God?
2. Cite and explain each of the names and titles given to Satan. Explain each one.
3. What does the devil attempt to do?
4. Whose advocacy is greater than Satan's accusations?

5. How has Satan sought to thwart the redemptive plan of God?
6. Although Satan isn't mentioned explicitly in the crime, why did he incite Herod to kill all the children in Bethlehem that were under two years of age?
7. Why can't we believe anything we might hear from Satan and his demons?
8. What does Satan's overt strategy of diversion accomplish?
9. Explain the intent of Satan's covert strategy.
10. List the various lies Satan is guilty of. Briefly explain each one.
11. What did Satan accuse Job of in Job 1:9 and 2:4-5?
12. What has Satan done to the good things God has provided?
13. In what two ways has Satan perverted God's provision of food?
14. What do Satan and his servants disguise themselves as (2 Cor. 11:13-15)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Satan attempts to slander God and believers by damaging their reputations. Evaluate your reputation. Look up the following verses, which stress how important our lifestyle is to the watching world: Proverbs 22:1; John 13:34-35; Romans 13:1-7; Colossians 4:5-6; 1 Peter 2:12-17. Ask God for His guidance on how you might improve in areas where you are weak. Seek to reflect God's truth in your life so that He may be glorified (Matt. 5:16).
2. Have you succumbed to Satan's temptation to doubt God's good intentions? If so meditate on Psalm 34; 84; Romans 8:28, 31-32; and Ephesians 1:3-12. Have you believed Satan's lie that there are no consequences to disobedience? If so meditate on Psalm 32, Romans 1:18; 2:16, 6:15-23, and Hebrews 12:1-11.
3. Christ could have aborted God's plan of redemption by exercising His right to rule as King. Instead He paid for the sins of humanity (Col. 2:13-14) and became the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Read Philippians 2:5-11 and Hebrews 2:5-18. What truths in those passages do you need to apply to follow the principle of humiliation before exaltation? Look to the life of Christ as a model of what you should be like.

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