

Lesson #3

The Existence and Activity of Satan

Introduction:

A. *His Creation*

Satan is an angel. All angels were created (Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:1-3). Therefore, Satan was created. He is, therefore, *God's Devil*. Satan is *not* the equal and opposite power of God (contra *dualism*). He is not eternal. His power is not infinite. He does not possess divine attributes. In sum, he is no match for God! If anything, Satan is the equal(?) and opposite power of the archangel Michael.

B. *His Fall*

Two OT passages have been interpreted as descriptions of Satan's original fall: *Isaiah 14:12-15* and *Ezekiel 28:12-19*. As Sydney Page points out, "each is part of a funeral dirge lamenting the death of a pagan king. In both, the king is portrayed as having come to ruin because he exalted himself beyond what was appropriate. Although the form of the two texts is that of a funeral dirge, the sorrow at the passing of the monarch is not genuine. Both passages virtually drip with sarcasm. In reality, the tyrant's death is welcomed" (37). The question is, Do these laments allude to Satan and his primordial rebellion?

1. *Isaiah 14:12-15*

This text appears in a passage that is specifically identified as a taunt of judgment against the king of Babylon (vv. 3-4). The taunt may be directed at one particular king (most likely Sennacherib) or perhaps "at the whole Babylonian monarchy personified as a single individual" (Page, 38). Clearly, though, the mocking lament portrays (indeed, celebrates) the demise of an *earthly* power that both opposes and oppresses the people of God.

The language used in vv. 12-14 is certainly compatible with what we know of Satan's character, but may well be a use of poetic language to describe an earthly king. Many of the terms used here ("morning star", "dawn", and "sacred mountain") have been found in texts dealing with ancient pagan mythology. Page notes that "the mythology was probably rooted in the observation of the brilliant rise of the planet Venus (the 'morning star') in the early morning sky and its rapid fading with the rise of the sun" (39). If this is true, Isaiah would be utilizing (without endorsing) motifs common in pagan mythology to describe the downfall of an earthly ruler.

Others have argued that whereas all this may be true, we can still see in this description of an earthly opponent of God (the Babylonian king) his model and heavenly inspiration (Satan). But is that what Isaiah had in mind when he wrote it?

<p>The word "Lucifer", lit., "shining one" or "star of the morning" (v. 12), is called a "man" in v. 16 and is compared with other earthly kings in v. 18. "Lucifer" was first used in the Latin vulgate to translate the Hebrew word (<i>helel</i>) and eventually made its way into the King James Version. According to Boyd, "Isaiah is simply comparing the king of Babylon to the planet Venus, the morning star. It rises bright at dawn and climbs to the highest point in the sky, only to be quickly extinguished by the brightness of the rising sun. Thus, Isaiah says, shall be the career of the presently shining king of Babylon. He appears on the stage of world history as the brightest star, ascending higher and higher. But in the end he shall quickly disappear in the light of the sun" (158).</p>
--

2. *Ezekiel 28:11-19*

Again, vv. 1-11 refer to the "prince" or "ruler" of Tyre (a Phoenecian port city @ 125 miles northwest of Jerusalem). Vv. 2,9-10 clearly indicate that he is human, not angelic. The historical setting is the siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar from 587 to 574 b.c. The king of Tyre during this period was Ithobaal II.

Vv. 12-19 refer to the "king" of Tyre, suggesting to some that vv. 12-19 refer to a supernatural power behind the human ruler of vv. 1-11. However, this word ("king") is used elsewhere in Ezekiel of *earthly* rulers (17:12; 19:9; 21:19; 24:2; 26:7; 29:2-3,18; 30:10,21; 31:2; 32:2,11), leading most to believe that the "prince" of vv. 1-11 and the "king" of vv. 12-19 are one and the same ("prince" and "king" being synonymous). On the other hand, the "king" of vv. 12-19 seems to be portrayed in terms that go beyond what is true of any earthly king (e.g., "perfection," "in Eden," "created," "cherub," "holy mountain of God," "blameless").

The identification of this king as an "anointed cherub who covers (guards)" in v. 14 is considered the strongest evidence that the reference is to Satan. Others have pointed out, however, that the Hebrew text may just as easily be translated, "*with* a cherub." Also, it is difficult to understand how dishonest or unrighteous trade and the desecration of sanctuaries (v. 18) could have been involved in the fall of Satan. How, then, are we to understand the reference to the garden of "Eden" in v. 13? Most believe that that the king of Tyre is being compared with Adam. "Perhaps the king believed himself to be the re-embodiment of the first man, and Ezekiel is using arrogant claims made by the king himself to set his defeat in sharper relief. . . . In effect, Ezekiel would be holding the king's pretensions up to ridicule by charging that, whatever claims he might make about his relationship with the primeval period, there is at least one similarity – like Adam, he stands under divine judgment for rebelling against his Creator" (Page, 42).

Others, such as Lamar Cooper, contend that the description of the king of Tyre in Ezekiel simply cannot be exhausted by reference to this one earthly figure. He writes:

"Overlaid in these prophetic messages [in 28:1-19] are many elements that extend beyond the characteristics of the city or the king. . . . Ezekiel presented the king of Tyre as an evil tyrant who was animated and motivated by a more sinister, unseen tyrant, Satan. . . . The sinister character of the mastermind behind God's enemies is not always recognized. The real motivating force behind the king of Tyre was the adversary, the satan, who opposed God and his people from the beginning (28:6-19)" (*Ezekiel, The New American Commentary*, 268-69).

When did Satan fall? The Bible gives no clear answer to this question. Some have argued that it could not have been prior to the sixth day of Genesis 1, since everything in God's creation until that time is said to have been "very good" (Gen. 1:31). However, this declaration may pertain only to the *material* creation in view. Perhaps Satan's rebellion antedates Genesis 1:1. Others insist that it occurred only just before he approached Eve in the garden. We simply don't know.

C. *His Names*

1. *Satan*

Used 52x, it literally means "the adversary," the one who opposes (see Zech. 3:1-2). This is its meaning in Numbers 22:22,32; 1 Sam. 29:4; 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25. In Ps. 109:6 it has the sense of "accuser" or "prosecuting attorney". Its use in the book of Job is especially instructive.

The "sons of God" (1:6) refer to the angelic host (cf. Job 38:7). They constitute the heavenly council, God's courtiers surrounding the throne ready to obey His every command. See also 1 Kings 22:19 and Daniel 7:9-14. With them was "*the Satan*". Everywhere this word appears in Job

it has the definite article ("the"; cf. 1:6,7(2),8,9,12(2); 2:1,2(2),3,4,6,7). Hence, it is a title, descriptive of his function and character.

Job 1:9-12 - Satan was at a loss concerning Job's loyal obedience to God. Job was a complete puzzle to him. He didn't doubt that Job was obedient and upright. There was no mistaking his godliness. But the devil just couldn't bring himself to believe that anyone would want to be holy for nothing. The only thing left is to launch an assault against Job's motives. Whereas he could hardly question Job's righteousness, he did wonder about the reason for it. His diabolical conclusion was that Job served God for what he could get out of him. Job's piety, reasoned the devil, must be a calculated effort to milk God of his gifts. "Take away the pay and he'll quit the job," he thought. Satan was persuaded that worship must be fundamentally selfish, that it is nothing more than a man-made device to flatter God into generosity. If God's generosity were cut off, thought Satan, Job's praise would turn to cursing.

In sum, Satan accuses God of having bought Job's loyalty with health and wealth: "Job doesn't serve you for free. Don't flatter yourself, God! No one else does either." In effect, he says: "He doesn't love you for *who* you are but only for *what* you've given him." In other words, it isn't Job that Satan accuses, but God! The question that Job will face, the question we all face is this: "Is God worthy to be loved and deserving of our obedience for who he is, irrespective of all other considerations?" Is Job sufficiently dedicated to remain loyal if no benefits are attached? Satan says no. He accuses God of being a deceptive fraud and Job of being a selfish hypocrite.

Note also how abrupt and rude Satan is. Traditional court etiquette in the ANE avoided the use of personal pronouns when addressing a superior. Courtiers would say, "my lord" instead of "you" and "your slave" instead of "I/me." But not Satan. He also uses imperative verbs, as if to *command* God what to do.

Note in v. 12 that Satan has no power or authority beyond that which God grants or permits. Derek Kidner makes it clear, however,

"that this is indeed permission, not abdication; for in both these chapters [Job 1-2] it is God who sets the limits of the test. The conditions are all that the challenger could desire (for nothing would be proved or disproved by Job's death, 2:6), but they are of God's choosing, not his. Likewise, at the end, it will be God who calls a halt to it --- as it will be also (we may add) at the end of history" (59).

For a NT parallel to this, see Luke 22:31-32.

Notice that *when given permission by God*, Satan is able to exercise tremendous destructive influence on nature, nations, and individuals. This would also indicate that there is an on-going restraint by God put on Satan and what he can do.

2. *Devil*

Used 35x, it literally means "slanderer" or "accuser" (*diabolos*). See 1 Sam. 29:4; 1 Kings 11:14. In Luke 4:2,13; Rev. 12:9,12 it is the devil's aim to defame. He is a constant source of false and malicious reports:

- a. to God, about you (Rev. 12:10; but cf. 1 John 2:2; Rom. 8:33-39)
- b. to you, about God (Gen. 3; Mt. 4)
- c. to you, about yourself (Eph. 6:16; he seeks to undermine and subvert your knowledge of who you are in Christ)

3. *Lucifer*

See discussion above.

4. *Old Serpent*

Rev. 12:9,15, an obvious allusion to Genesis 3. Cf. 2 Cor. 11:3; Rom. 16:20.

5. *Great Dragon*

Rev. 12:3,7,9,17. He is a terrifying, destructive beast.

6. *Ruler/Prince of this world*

John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11. John does not make clear how it is that Satan came to exercise such authority over the world, although it is likely that he became such as people, through their sin, granted him power.

7. *Ruler/Prince of the power of the air*

Eph. 2:2. Satan rules over a spiritual kingdom that centers and operates in the earth's atmosphere. Here "air" is probably synonymous with "the heavenly places/realms" of Eph. 6:12. "The picture of the air as Satan's abode points to the pervasiveness of his influence and his proximity to the humans over whom he exercises his wicked rule" (Page, 186). It should be noted that a few have argued that "air" denotes the *spiritual climate* that exercises an evil influence over how people think and behave.

This text has led some to speculate concerning the nature of alleged UFOs: (1) they quickly materialize and just as quickly vanish; (2) they display random flight patterns; (3) they display great speed; (4) some report communication with UFOs, the information almost always contradicting Scriptures; (5) reports of "possession" by UFO "beings" subsequent to contact. ???

8. *The god of this age*

2 Cor. 4:4 (but see Ps. 24:1; 89:11).

9. *The evil one*

Mt. 6:13; 13:38; John 17:15; 1 John 2:14; 5:18.

There are several reasons to conclude that the final petition in the Lord's prayer is a reference to Satan: (1) The use of the adjective "evil" (*poneros*) with the definite article "the" in Mt. 13:19,38; John 17:15; Eph. 6:16; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 John 2:13-14; 3:12 and 5:18 clearly refers to Satan. (2) This petition is probably an allusion to Jesus' own encounter with Satan in the wilderness. Jesus' point is that we can expect to encounter the tempter in much the same way he did. (3) The word translated "from" is *apo*, used predominantly with persons, not things.

10. *Prince/Ruler of demons*

Mt. 10:25; 12:26-27; Luke 11:15; 2 Cor. 6:15.

The name or title "Beelzebul" has been taken to mean "lord of dung" (i.e., god of filth), "enemy," "lord of the dwelling" (i.e., the dwelling of demons), and "lord of the flies," a title given to one of the pagan gods of the Philistines, brought over into Judaism as a name for Satan.

11. *The Destroyer*

Rev. 9:11. "Abaddon" (Hebrew = ruin or destruction); "Apollyon" (Greek = exterminator or destroyer).

12. *The Tempter*

Mt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5.

13. *The Accuser*

Rev. 12:10

14. *The Deceiver*

Rev. 12:9; 20:3.

D. *His Characteristics*

1. He is a liar and a murderer (John 8:44; either an allusion to the murder of Abel by Cain or to the fall in Genesis 3; cf. 1 John 3:11-12). Satan is a master of misrepresentation (2 Thess. 2:9; 2 Cor. 11:14-15).
2. He is powerful, but not omnipotent. See Mt. 4:5,8.
3. He is intelligent, but not omniscient.
4. He is active, but not omnipresent.

E. *His Activities*

Satan has a plan. Although sinful, he is not stupid. He does not act haphazardly or without a goal in view.

2 Cor. 2:10-11 - "outwit" (NIV), "to take advantage of" (NASB), in the sense of to cheat or defraud by deception. Satan has "designs" (NASB), i.e., plans, an agenda (e.g., the situation in Corinth).

Eph. 6:11 - "schemes" (lit., *methodia* = method), i.e., cunning and wily stratagems (cf. Eph. 4:14); e.g., value systems, institutions, organizations, philosophical movements, political, social, economic systems, etc. Satan sets his goal and then utilizes and exploits the most effective means, while avoiding all obstacles, to reach his diabolical end.

1. **He works in active opposition to the gospel.**

2 Cor. 4:4 - There are two factors in spiritual blindness: a) fleshly, sinful, self-resistance to the truth; and b) satanic/demonic hardening or blinding. Before we ever arrive on the scene with the gospel, Satan is exerting a stupefying influence on the mind of the unbeliever. In other words, we face more than merely intellectual obstacles. We face supernatural opposition. How does Satan do it?

- He distracts them when an opportunity to hear the gospel is at hand (interruptions, day-dreaming, the phone rings, an emergency of some sort, the sudden remembrance of a job or other responsibility that needs immediate attention, the intrusion of a friend [cf. Acts 13:7b-8], etc.).
- He stirs up hostility and suspicion in the person's mind concerning the competency and integrity of the person presenting the gospel. The unbeliever suddenly imputes sinister motives to the Christian: "He's in it for the money," or "She only wants to gain control over

me," or "He's just looking for another notch on his Bible so he can boast to others of one more convert," etc. Sometimes the unbeliever will excuse his/her unbelief by questioning the educational and academic credentials of the believer ("he/she is so uneducated; what does he/she know anyway").

- He stirs up the non-Christian to distort what is being said into something the speaker never intended. Cf. Jesus and the Pharisees (John 2:19-21; 6:48-52; 7:33-36; 8:51-53).
- He stirs up their minds to draw false conclusions or implications from the gospel that make it seem absurd (e.g., doctrine of Trinity = 3 gods; doctrine of grace = you can believe and live like hell).
- He inclines their minds to link the Christian with people who've disgraced Christianity in the past, giving him an excuse to reject what is being said (i.e., guilt by association). "All you Christians are just like those hucksters on TV! You're in it for the gold and the glory!"
- He puts in their minds all sorts of questions and convinces them that if they can't get completely satisfying answers, Christianity can't be true. Right in the middle of witnessing to someone, he/she suddenly blurts out questions like: "What about evil?" "What about all the hypocrites in the church?" "What about the heathen in Africa?" "Why is there only one way? It seems egotistical." "Why are there so many denominations?"
- Just as the gospel is beginning to make sense, Satan stirs up pride or produces feelings of independence and self-sufficiency: "I don't need a religious crutch. I'm my own man!"
- Before serious consideration is given, Satan snatches the seed of the gospel (Mt. 13:4,18-19) from their mind: on the way home from church the car breaks down, or the conversation turns to politics or sports, or a sexy billboard diverts attention, or something on the radio captivates his mind.
- Satan might suddenly prompt him/her to place a higher value on things he/she might lose if one were to become a Christian: friends, fame, money, fleshly pleasures, approval of others. Cf. John 9.
- Satan stirs up feelings of hopelessness: "Not even this will work. There's no hope. My life is a lost cause. Not even Jesus can help."

1 Thess. 2:18 - By what means does Satan oppose and disrupt missionary endeavors? He disrupts travel plans, works on the minds of state officials to delay or deny the issuing of visas, inflicts illness, provokes military conflict, etc. How was Paul able to discern whether it was God or Satan who was responsible for a change in plans? Cf. Acts 16:6-7. Perhaps we shouldn't try, simply acknowledging that God can even use Satan's schemes to accomplish His purposes. See 1 Cor. 5:5 as well as 2 Cor. 12 and Paul's "thorn in the flesh".

2. **He is often the source of sickness.**

Acts 10:38 (Mt. 8:16; Mark 9:17-18; Luke 13:10-17)

3. **He can inflict death as well as provoke the paralyzing fear of it.**

Hebrews 2:14 (see Job 1:13-19; John 10:10)

4. **He plants sinful plans and purposes in the minds of men.**

Acts 5:3; John 13:2; Mt. 16:21-23

"It is not through some act of terrible depravity, but through an act of religious devotion, that Satan brings about the downfall of Ananias and Sapphira. . . . It is sobering to think that the very good that God's people attempt to do can be their undoing" (Page, 132).

5. **On occasion, Satan will himself indwell a person.**

John 13:27 - By speaking of Satan as "entering" Judas, John uses language reminiscent of demonization (Lk. 8:30,32-33). It is important to note, however, that Judas's motive was also greed and nowhere is he exonerated from his action simply because he was indwelt by the devil.

6. **He sets a snare or trap for people (perhaps with a view to exploiting and intensifying their sinful inclinations).**

1 Timothy 3:6-7; 2 Timothy 2:25-26 - In the former verse (v. 6), the phrase is literally, "the judgment/condemnation of the devil," most likely a reference to the judgment to which Satan himself has been subjected. According to 1 Tim. 3:7, Satan is able to exploit any blemish on the reputation of a Christian leader. In 2 Tim. 2, Paul appears to speak of believers who have been led astray through false teaching. Satan thus strives to hold people captive to do his will by deceiving them to believe what is false and misleading. [*If nothing else, this text emphasizes how crucial sound doctrine is.*] The good news is that there is hope for restoration.

7. **He infiltrates the church and plants within it his own people.**

Mt. 13:39

8. **He tests or tries Christians.**

Luke 22:31 (cf. Job) - Clearly, Satan is unable to act outside the parameters established by the will of God. He must first ask permission of God.

Satan's intent in "sifting" Peter was obviously malicious. [It should be noted that Satan evidently obtained permission to test all of the disciples. Observe Jesus' use of the plural "you" (meaning, all the disciples) in 22:31). He wanted to destroy Peter by inciting him to deny Jesus. But God's intent in permitting Satan to do it was altogether different. God's purposes with Peter were to instruct him, humble him, perhaps discipline him, and certainly to use him as an example to others of both human arrogance and the possibility of forgiveness and restoration. ***The point is simply that often we cannot easily say "Satan did it" or "God did it". In cases such as this, both are true (with the understanding that God's will is sovereign, supreme, and overriding), but their respective goals are clearly opposite.*** What practical lessons do we learn from this concerning the nature of spiritual warfare?

Page's comments concerning this incident are important:

"Luke 22:31-32 reveals that Satan can subject the loyalty of the followers of Jesus to severe tests that are designed to produce failure. So intense are the pressures to which Satan is able to subject believers that the faith of even the most courageous may be found wanting. Satan is, however, limited in what he can do by what God permits and by the intercession of Jesus on behalf of his own [cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1]. Furthermore, those who temporarily falter can be restored and, like Peter, can even resume positions of leadership. It is implied that Satan cannot gain ultimate victory over those for whom Jesus intercedes" (124).

9. **He incites persecution, imprisonment, and the political oppression of believers.**

1 Peter 5:8-9; Rev. 2:10

10. **He is the accuser of the Christian.**

Rev. 12:10 (see also *Zech. 3:1-2*)

11. **He performs signs and wonders to deceive the nations.**

Exodus; 2 Thess. 2:9-11 (see also *Mt. 4:8*)

12. **He seeks to silence the witness of the church.**

Rev. 12:10-12 - If one of the primary ways Satan is defeated is by our witness, he will go to any lengths necessary to silence us.

13. **He seeks to incite disunity and division.**

2 Cor. 2:10-11 - Here is another instance in which Satan seeks to exploit the otherwise good intentions of the church. Certain people in Corinth, ostensibly to maintain the purity of the church, were reluctant to forgive and restore the wayward, but now repentant, brother. This harshness would give Satan an opportunity to crush the spirit of the repentant sinner and drive him to despair, most likely resulting in his being forever cut off from the church.

14. **He promotes false doctrine.**

1 Tim. 4:1-3; Rev. 2:24; 2 Cor. 11:1ff.

15. **He can manipulate the weather.**

Job 1:18-19 (and perhaps *Mk. 4:37-39*)

16. **He influences the thoughts and actions of unbelievers.**

Eph. 2:1-2 - It is a stunning thought, similar to that in *1 John 5:18*, that Satan is at work in and energizes the disobedience of all unbelievers. This does not mean that all non-Christians are demonized, but it does imply that their unbelief and unrighteous behavior is stimulated and sustained by the enemy. Yet, they remain morally culpable for their actions.

17. **He attacks married believers in regard to their sexual relationship.**

1 Cor. 7:5 - Paul approves of the decision by married couples to refrain from sexual relations to devote themselves to prayer, but only for a season. To abstain entirely for a prolonged period of time exposes oneself to unnecessary temptation (i.e., lust and the satisfaction of one's sexual desires outside the bonds of marriage). Again, we see here an example of how the enemy takes an otherwise godly intention and exploits it for his own nefarious purposes.

18. **He exploits our sinful decisions, most likely by intensifying the course of action we have already chosen.**

Eph. 4:26-27 - Note that Satan is not credited with nor blamed for creating the anger in the first place. We are responsible for it. Satan's response is to use this and other such sins to gain access to our lives and to expand and intensify our chosen course of behavior.

19. **He confronts us with various temptations.**

1 Chron. 21:1 (*2 Sam. 24:1*); *1 Thess. 3:5*