

The Devil and Satan: What Does the Bible Say?

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I appreciate this opportunity to present the gospel to you. Yes, I believe that the question of the Devil is an important element of the gospel message. I hope that each of you came tonight because you are truth seekers. Hopefully, you love the truth and want to know more and more truth. I love the truth that is presented in God's word, the Bible, and it is that truth that I wish to demonstrate this evening.

The Bible presents the Devil or Satan to be a personal being with supernatural power and authority, whose activity includes temptation and the distortion of God's word. Satan is not a flesh-and-blood person, but rather a spiritual being who rules over the forces of darkness in heavenly places, as Paul says in Ephesians 6:12. Jesus Christ came to destroy the devil and his works. On that we all agree. The question is: what does that mean?

By believing in a personal devil, I make no attempt to diminish our personal responsibility before God for our sin. We have all inherited a sinful nature from Adam and, outside of Christ, we are all condemned as sinners. We all have evil fleshly desires that fight against the spirit of God, but our sinful fleshly desires must not be at all confused with the very real person that the Bible presents to be the devil. Before I go further, let me just set the record straight and tell you some common misconceptions and myths, some of which Mr. Heaster alluded to. These are things that I do *not* believe, although popular Christendom may believe them. First of all, I do not believe that Satan is a man in a red suit with a pitch fork and a tail, who goes around prodding and tormenting dead human spirits in hell. That is a myth, a fallacy. I do not believe that Satan can be blamed for our sin — we are responsible.

We cannot casually throw off our sin by saying, “the Devil made me do it.” And I do not believe that we live in a dualistic universe as Mr. Heaster mentioned the Babylonians believed — where there are two equally powerful forces, or gods, one good and one evil, who are vying for power while we are left hanging in the balance waiting to see the outcome of it all. God is almighty; He is omnipotent, and any power that Satan has is still under the dominion of the Almighty, and Satan’s destruction is guaranteed through Christ.

The existence of a personal devil or satan is a prominent feature of the gospel, and let me just briefly share with you my understanding of the gospel. There is one God who is going to establish an everlasting government or kingdom on the earth. Daniel 2:44 tells us that and I think we would all agree. God will bring about this kingdom through the person and activity of His representative, His son the Messiah. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to everlasting life, and he will return to this earth in power and glory. The Son of God will bring about this kingdom by destroying the devil and his works (1 John 3:8). The kingdom of God as it relates to salvation is chiefly a struggle between the powers of the age to come and the present evil age in which we live — the kingdom of light versus the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of Satan. A proper biblical understanding of the gospel must take into account this struggle, and I believe the only way the gospel can be correctly understood is to see this battle as involving supernatural spiritual forces, both good and evil.

We live in an age of science and rationalism and ours is a generation that says that for something to be believed it must be able to be seen and be proved scientifically. We look for rational explanations for all kinds of phenomena: for the origins of the universe, for the existence of man, etc. There is no room in the modern-day world view for the existence of an eternal God, let alone such ideas as men rising from the dead and angelic beings that we can’t see or a real personal devil. However, as a Christian I believe the final word comes from God and it is in His word, the Bible. I base my beliefs on God’s word, not man’s word. The Bible tells us there is only one true God and I believe it. The Bible tells us that God created the heavens and the earth and man and I believe it. The Bible tells us that angels exist and I believe it. The Bible tells us that Satan is a personal being with supernatural power and I believe it.

To say that the devil or satan is only man’s evil nature, or the principle of evil, or sin in the flesh, as Mr. Heaster suggests, is a great distortion of God’s

word and a misunderstanding of the gospel message. It is the gospel that saves us. That is why I think this is such an important issue.

I believe my task then is to demonstrate the following from the Bible:

1. The Bible teaches that there is an individual Satan who is a personal being.
2. This Satan is presented in the Bible as possessing supernatural power.
3. Satan's activity includes tempting man and blinding man to the gospel.

To begin we will turn to Genesis chapter 3. This is a very well-known passage which we have not heard from yet but I think it is a very important starting point. I am surprised that Mr. Heaster has not alluded to it. In Genesis 3 beginning with verse 1 we see:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. [It does not say he was a beast of the field but it says he was more crafty than any beast of the field.] And he said to the woman, Indeed, has God said you shall not eat from any trees of the garden? The woman said to the serpent, From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden God has said, You shall not eat of it or touch it lest ye die. And the serpent said to the woman, You surely shall not die: For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good from evil.

As the story progresses we see that they did indeed violate God's word by taking the fruit. In verses 14 and 15, we see the consequences of that for the serpent: "The Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle and more than every beast of the field, and on your belly shall ye go and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise him on the heel." That is going to be a key, if you like. Mr. Heaster was talking about a key that opens the locks — that is going to be a key. Genesis 3:15 — remember that verse!

Now, I just want to review some of the things we see here. First of all, the serpent is a personal being, is it not, that comes and approaches Eve. He tempts Eve by distorting God's word. The serpent is certainly not innocent here. He is held accountable by God for his actions and he is promised punishment and destruction. The identity of the serpent is not given here. However, I believe that there are some internal clues given that support the idea that this serpent is a spiritual being, a supernatural being. The word that

is translated “serpent” here is the Hebrew word “nachash,” and it means “to hiss or to mutter, to whisper.” It also contains the idea of “to divine, or enchant.” It comes from a Chaldean root that means “brass, to be bright” and it contains the sense of “to fascinate or enchant.” Another word that is similar to “nachash” is the word “seraph.” “Seraph” in some places in the Old Testament is translated “fiery serpent.” In Isaiah 6 you will remember the heavenly beings are seraphim. In Numbers 21:8 is the account of the serpents biting the Israelites and Moses putting up the bronze serpent. In verse 8 the word for “fiery serpent” is “seraph.” When you come to 21:9, “And Moses made a bronze serpent,” the word there is “nachash.” So there is a link between the two words “seraph” and “nachash.” Serpent, “seraph” is used for a fiery serpent in some places and in other places a celestial being. “Nachash” is also used to designate both a serpent and a celestial being. Genesis 3 begins, I believe, with a fascinating celestial being. In verse 1 this “nachash” was more crafty than any beast of the field. Hence, he was far different from anything Eve had ever encountered before. So he captured her attention. Genesis 3 ends with the cherubim, which is very much the same idea as the seraphim, a celestial being guarding the way to the tree of life. Genesis 3 begins and ends with these exalted celestial beings.

What does it mean when it says that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent in Genesis 3:15? Does this mean that Jesus will one day step on a snake? No! It means that Jesus Christ, I say, will destroy the devil. This becomes absolutely clear as we investigate the New Testament. In Romans 16:20 the apostle Paul (this is the one place that Mr. Heaster mentioned where the word “Satan” is used in the book of Romans) says that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” Now I want you to know that God will crush Satan under the people of God. This echoes very loudly the promise of Genesis 3:15 that the woman’s seed would crush the serpent. Here is a link between the serpent of the Old Testament and Satan in the New Testament. 2 Corinthians 11:3, 14 is another important parallel passage. In this passage “I am afraid lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” Then, moving down to verse 14, we are told, “No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” Remember the “nachash,” the exalted celestial-type being. You see, there is definitely another link between the serpent and the individual, Satan.

Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 give us our clearest link in the New Testament to the serpent. In Revelation 12:9 we find that “the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old [the serpent of old is a Rabbinic term that was used

to describe the serpent] 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.” Notice there that the Devil is shown to have angels. And in 20:2 “he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old [that Rabbinic term again], who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for 1,000 years.” Here in the New Testament we see absolute definitions. The serpent in Genesis 3 (according to Paul in two places and according to John in Revelation) is Satan, the devil.

If the Bible makes any sense, if there is any master key, it must be understood that the serpent who appeared to Eve did so in order to deceive her with his craftiness; therefore he is not innocent. The serpent is the Devil or Satan who disguises himself as an angel of light and has servants who disguise themselves as apostles. The serpent is the devil who will one day be crushed, I am glad to say, by God under the feet of Messiah and the saints.

So far then we have shown from simply reading the Bible that Satan is a personal being. Nowhere is there even a hint that Satan is simply a parable, or a representative of sin, as has been suggested. Satan and the serpent are one and the same, just as Jesus has many names and many titles throughout the Bible: Jesus, Son of God, Messiah, Lamb of God, Lion of Judah, Prince of Peace, the Lord’s servant, the seed of the woman. So, too, Satan has a number of names and descriptive titles. He is called Satan, the Devil, the serpent, the evil one, the god of this age, the prince of the power of the air. Mr. Heaster would clearly understand that the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 is literally Christ. Why can’t he see that the serpent is literally Satan, as much a person and as much a part of the drama of salvation as Jesus is? Satan is a personal being; on that the Bible is clear.

The next point — Satan possesses supernatural power. Let’s have a look at Job chapters 1 and 2. In Job 1 and 2 Satan appears before God along with the Sons of God, which we know are angels from the book of Job, and he makes accusations against Job before God and is permitted by God to test Job. In Job 1:12 Satan is told, “All that he has is in your power.” Satan can only act here with God’s permission. God is still omnipotent. But Satan, acting with God’s permission, is able to cause violence, fire from heaven and great destructive wind. This is certainly supernatural power! In chapter 2 we see again the same situation, Satan standing before God. God gives permission to Satan to physically afflict Job this time, but within limits. His life must be spared. Satan responds by afflicting Job with boils from head to toe. There is no way of getting around the fact that Satan had the power to cause boils over Job’s entire body.

In the New Testament (this is one of the many references I will be making to the temptation of Christ), we see that “the devil led Jesus up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world” (Luke 4:5). This, I submit to you, is exceptional supernatural power. There is no reason to doubt that this really happened. You will remember that God told Moses that he would not be able to enter the land, so in Deuteronomy 34 He allows Moses to go up Mount Nebo, from where Moses is somehow able to see for miles and miles, far beyond what might normally be expected. How is he able to see so far, this man who is 120 years old, who is about to die? How can his aged eyes see that far? Certainly God miraculously extended Moses’ vision beyond that which is normal. The same is true with Christ and the Devil. The Devil, either in vision or in some other way, had the supernatural power to show Christ all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

In Luke 4:6 “he said to him, I will give you all the authority and splendour, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.” Here, the devil had within his power and authority the ability to hand over the kingdoms of the world to Christ, then and there. It had been handed to the devil, for him to do whatever he wished. Now, how was this possible? The devil was in fact given that power. God in His sovereignty has given Satan that power for a time, just as He will give that power to Christ at the end of this age for a time, but then Christ will turn the kingdom back over to God, as 1 Corinthians 15:28 tells us. If Satan does not possess this authority, then the whole meaning of the text is lost. If it is simply Christ sort of imagining this within His own mind, then it doesn’t make sense. In fact, Christ is tempted here in the same manner as Adam and Eve were tempted — just as Satan’s offer of the forbidden fruit was real, so too was Satan’s offer to give Christ rulership then and there without going through the pain, the agony of the suffering of the cross. Here was Christ’s opportunity to lay that aside and grab for the power, but he didn’t do it.

That Satan possesses this worldwide power and authority should come as no surprise, for the Bible is filled with passages which attribute rulership to a wicked and evil ruler. I’ll just survey a few of them. In John 12:31 Jesus refers to the “ruler of this age” who will be cast out — the ruler of this world. 2 Corinthians 4:4 speaks of the “god (*theos*) of this age who is able to blind the minds of the unbelieving so that they may not see the light of the gospel.” He has veiled the eyes of those who are perishing. Ephesians 2:2 speaks of one who is the “prince of the power of the air,” a spirit, mind you, that is working in the sons of disobedience. These are terms of power and royalty. In Ephesians 6:12 we are told that the believer’s struggle is not against flesh

and blood but against “rulers, powers, world forces of darkness and spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places.” Now I am going to submit to you later that there is no way that this means simply worldly governments. This is talking about forces of wickedness in heavenly places.

In Acts 26:18 Paul mentions that Satan has dominion over an area over which he exerts rulership. In Matthew 12:26 Satan has a kingdom over which he rules. Christ told the Pharisees that his casting out of demons was a sign of the coming kingdom of God. If we are to believe in a literal kingdom of God that will come on this earth, we must also believe in literal demons and a literal Satan who rules over them.

It has been suggested by some that when Jesus spoke of demons, he was simply using the language or world view common to the people of the day. They suggest that Jesus didn't really believe in demons or that they were responsible for the problems, but the people did, so Jesus went along with them and their false beliefs in order to be able to teach them in the long run. Even if that were true, can we really imagine that Jesus would not have taught his disciples the truth? In Luke 10:17 and following, the seventy returned from their mission of preaching and healing and reported that even the demons were subject to them. Now that would have been a perfect time for Jesus to say, “Well, that's just a bunch of malarkey, the point is that those demons aren't responsible at all.” But Jesus doesn't say that. Instead he says, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning.” In Jesus' mind, Satan's power was active in demon possession. In verse 19, Jesus speaks of giving them power over the enemy. In verse 20 he speaks of spirits being subject to them. It is very strange to think that, in talking with his disciples, Jesus would have perpetuated a myth that demons and Satan are responsible for physical illness. One has to stop and wonder, what other things did Jesus tell his disciples that were not true? That he is the Messiah? About the future kingdom of God? We must accept that Jesus is here telling his disciples the truth. They have power over demons and demons are spirits associated with Satan, the enemy. 1 John 5:19 tells us that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

We earlier established the fact that Satan is a personal being. We have now seen that Satan possesses supernatural power which includes power over nature and power to inflict physical disease — remember poor Job. We have also seen that Satan has a governmental power over the earth which includes the prerogative of giving worldly rulership to whomever he chooses. The Bible clearly shows that there is an evil system of supernatural government which includes a being who is in various places referred to as a ruler, god of

this age, prince of the air and a spirit who leads a world force of darkness and wickedness in heavenly places. It must be clearly understood, however, that although the Devil has supernatural power, it in no way threatens the complete authority and sovereignty of God. Satan only possesses the power that God allows him to have in order to carry out God's purposes.

Now let's look briefly at the activity of Satan as described in the Bible. First of all, temptation. Remember that in Genesis 3 Satan tempted Eve by distorting the word of God and casting doubt upon what God had said. Adam and Eve saw the chance for them to become like gods, so they gave in to the temptation. In Matthew 4 we see Satan coming up to Jesus, just as he did to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and tempting Christ by distorting the word of God. Jesus is tempted to use supernatural power to satisfy his own hunger; Jesus is tempted to test God by throwing himself from the pinnacle of the temple; and Jesus is offered rulership over all the kingdoms of this world. In each case, Jesus resisted the temptation by quoting the Word of God. Now some have suggested that the Devil here is not a person but rather Christ's ungodly and human desires, and I think Mr. Heaster made a reference to that — his sin in the flesh. However, I must point out that the language used here speaks of the tempter coming up to Christ. In the Bible, a number of people come up to Jesus, including the Pharisees. Now, why is it that the Pharisees can literally come up to Jesus, but with Satan it's only figurative? Why should the Pharisees speaking and Satan speaking be different? Jesus quoted Scripture and so did Satan. Why is Jesus a person and Satan not? Can we not just say that Jesus is only a sort of figure of speech here as well? No! Jesus' temptation by the Devil came no more strictly from within than did Adam's. They were both given the same basic choice — obey God or obey Satan. The first Adam gave in to the temptations of Satan and introduced death to all men. The last Adam — Christ — obeyed God and went on obeying God to the point of dying on the cross for our sins. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that through Christ's death, he is able to render powerless him who had the power over death, the Devil. The Devil gained that power when man first obeyed him over God. As the seed of the woman Christ fulfills Genesis 3:15 in crushing the head of the serpent. Through Christ's sacrificial death and in his future return to this planet Satan will be completely destroyed.

Satan also operates in distorting and blinding people to the truth. I think that we might all agree here that much of the Christianity that we see out in the world is very foreign to the teaching of the Bible. There are very many false teachings that are totally foreign to the Bible. I believe that a main reason for this is that Satan operates in the area of religion. That is where he

loves to be the most — casting doubt on the word of God. In Genesis 3 Satan deceives Eve by misquoting God, casting doubt on what God has said, and lying. In Matthew 4 Satan comes to Christ quoting Scripture out of context and trying to provoke Christ to act in ways contrary to God's will and plan. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 we see that the god of this age — the present evil age — is blinding the minds of unbelievers to the truth of the gospel. Satan's activity involves a massive campaign of temptation and distortion. He knows who God is; he knows the word of God and twists it to suit his own purposes. In passing Mr. Heaster mentioned that we don't see much of Satan in the Old Testament — not until the New. But, you see, the Old Testament really begins with the whole world falling under the power of the evil one. Then in the entire Old Testament we see idolatry and the worship of idols, which Paul tells us in Corinthians is the same idolatry as the idolatry of worshipping a devil. We see that sort of world system throughout the Old Testament, but it is in the New Testament that the conflict that was introduced in Genesis 3:15 comes to a head when the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent clash. That is why we see massive demonic activity and all the references to Satan in the New Testament.

Lest we become afraid of this being, the Devil, we need to realize that the Devil is not someone of whom we need to live in mortal fear. The Devil can be resisted. James 4:7 says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." As Christians we don't need to fear the Devil. The Devil can exert no control over our lives that we do not surrender to him. If we resist the Devil, he will leave us, just as he left Christ in the wilderness. 1 Peter 5:8, 9 says that the Devil roams around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Christians are to resist him with a firm faith.

Now Mr. Heaster has suggested that in some places the word "Devil" or "Satan" is used to describe human government, which at that time would have been Rome. If this is the case and the Devil is human government, then we are presented with a terrible contradiction in the Scriptures. James and Peter tell us that we have to resist the Devil, which would mean that we are to resist the government, which at that time was Rome. However, Paul in Romans 13:1 told Roman believers to be in subjection to the governing authority. He went on to say that they are ministers of God. Also, Paul says that to resist the governing authority (Rome) is to, in effect, resist God. If the Devil is a person then we can resist him without violating or contradicting the word of God. If he is not a person, then we are left with biblical writers, namely Peter and Paul and James, who contradict themselves.

Ephesians chapter 6 is the most powerful passage that we have about our resistance to the Devil. “Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms.” We are able to stand firm and to resist the Devil’s evil schemes by putting on the armour of God. Christians in the New Testament are not to engage in war in this world and I think we would all agree on that. We are not to fight our enemies because our real enemy is not other flesh and blood human beings but rather rulers, powers, spiritual forces of wickedness. These cannot be defeated by conventional weapons, no matter how powerful our bombs. These are forces of evil in *heavenly places*, Paul tells us. We have an enemy in a heavenly place. This seems to contradict perfectly what Mr. Heaster said earlier — that there is not an enemy in heavenly places. But Paul tells us that there is and that he is leading a spiritual force of wickedness. Now that word is different from the word for “evil.” The word there for “wickedness” is the word “*ponereas*” and it means “depraved, with malice.” It is not just a word for calamity, the kind of calamity that God might cause, as Mr. Heaster rightly pointed out from the Old Testament. So what is this wickedness in heavenly places? It is certainly not God or His holy angels — the ones that Mr. Heaster pointed out obey God. God is not the enemy. It is certainly not our human nature, for we are not physically in heavenly places. However, the Bible reveals that there is one called a god, a ruler, a prince or evil one who possesses power over the earth and who is able to approach God’s heavenly court — the very real spirit in heavenly places — Satan. Satan’s continued assault can only be defeated through faith, truth, righteousness and the gospel of peace.

So what have we seen so far that the Bible teaches? The Devil is indeed a very real personal being with supernatural power. The serpent in the Old Testament is Satan in the New, who is waging a campaign of temptation and deception. However, true believers do not need to run around in fear of the Devil, for as part of the body of Christ, in Romans 16:20 we are guaranteed that we are on the winning team, that we will crush the Devil. God is going to crush him under our feet. Jesus came to destroy the Devil and his works and all believers will one day participate in crushing the Devil. Our victory is guaranteed, so we do not need to live our lives in fear of the Devil.