

Objective: Who or what is Satan, and why do Christians need to beware of him?

Satan is not divine

The Bible makes it clear that there is only one God (Malachi 2:10; Ephesians 4:6), and He is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (see Study 5).

Satan does not possess the distinguishing characteristics of the Godhead. He is not the Creator, omnipresent, all-knowing, full of grace and compassion, “the only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (2 Timothy 6:15), etc.

Scripture suggests that Satan in his original state was among the created angels. Angels are created ministering spirits (Nehemiah 9:6; Hebrews 1:13-14), endowed with free will.

Angels perform God’s commands and are more powerful than humans (Psalm 103:20; 2 Peter 2:11). It is also recorded that they protect believers (Psalm 91:11), and sing praises to God (Luke 2:13-14; Revelation 4, etc).

Satan, whose name means “adversary” and who is also called the devil, led away possibly as many as one third of the angels in a rebellion against the one God (Revelation 12:4). Despite this defection God retains “an innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22).

Demons are the angels who “did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode” (Jude 6) and joined Satan. “God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into

chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4). The activity of the demons is limited by these spiritual or metaphorical chains.

The typology of OT passages such as Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 indicate that Satan was a special angelic being, some speculate an archangel, in good standing before the Lord.

Satan was “perfect” from the day he was created until iniquity was found in him. He walked in God’s presence, and was “full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (Ezekiel 28:12-15).

However, he became “filled with violence within”, his heart was arrogant because of his beauty, and his wisdom was corrupted because of his splendor. He forsook his holiness and his ability to cover in mercy, and become a “horror”, destined to be destroyed (28:16-19).

Satan changed from being the bringer of light (Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12 means “light bringer”) to the “power of darkness” (Ephesians 2:2; Colossians 1:13) when he decided that his angelic status was insufficient and he wanted to become divine “like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:13-14).

Contrast this to the reaction of the angel that John tried to worship: “See that you do not do that!” (Revelation 19:10). Angels are not to be worshipped because they are not God.

Because society has made idols out of the negative values espoused by Satan, scriptures call him the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), and “the prince of the power of the air” whose corrupting influence is pervasive (Ephesians 2:2). However, Satan is not divine, and is not on the same spiritual level as God.

Reflection

What values underpin your day to day living?

Do any of them reflect “the god of this age” and his values?

What Satan does

“The devil has sinned from the beginning” of his rebellion (1 John 3:8). “He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks it from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). With his lies he accuses believers “before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:10).

He is evil, just as he seduced humankind into being evil in the days of Noah: the intents of the thoughts of his heart are only evil continually (Genesis 6:5).

His desire is to exert his evil influence on believers and potential believers in order to deflect them from “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” so that they will not be “partakers of the divine nature” (1 Peter 1:4).

To that end he tempts the Christian to sin, as he did Christ (Matthew 4:1-11), and uses deceptive cunning as he did with Eve to detract them “from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). Sometimes in order to do so he “transforms himself into an angel of light” (11:14), pretending to be something he isn’t.

Satan seeks, through temptation and through the sway of society under his control, to get Christians to alienate themselves from God. A believer separates himself or herself from God through choosing, out of his or her own free will, to sin by giving into sinful human nature, thus following Satan’s degenerate ways and accepting his considerable deceitful influence (Matthew 4:1-10, 1 John

2:16-17, 3:8, 5:19, Ephesians 2:2, Colossians 1: 21, I Peter 5:8, James 3:15).

However, it is important to remember that Satan and his demons, including all of Satan’s temptations, are subject to God’s authority. God allows such activity to happen because God’s will is that believers have the freedom (free will) to make spiritual choices. (Job 1:6-12, Mark 1:27, Luke 4:41, Colossians 1:16-17, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Luke 22:42, I Corinthians 14:32).

Reflection

How are you tempted, and how do you seek to overcome temptations?

How do you exercise your free will to follow Jesus Christ?

How should the believer respond to Satan?

The principal biblically-prescribed response for the believer to Satan and to his tempting us to sin is to “resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7; Matthew 4:1-10), thus giving “no place” or opportunity to him (Ephesians 4:27).

Resisting Satan involves praying for protection, submitting to God in obedience to Christ, being aware of how evil can attract us, acquiring spiritual attributes (which Paul calls putting on the whole armor of God), and having faith in Christ who looks after us through the Holy Spirit (Matthew 6:31, James 4:7, 2 Corinthians 2:11, 10:4-5, Ephesians 6:10-18, 2 Thessalonians 3:3).

Resisting also implies being spiritually alert “because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Above all, we place our trust in Christ. 2 Thessalonians 3:3 informs us that “the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one”. We rely on the faithfulness of Christ, being “steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:9), and commit ourselves wholly to Him in prayer that He will deliver us from the evil one (Matthew 6:13).

Christians should abide in Christ (John 15:4) and avoid being preoccupied with the activities of Satan. They should meditate on the things that are noble, just, pure, lovely and of good report (Philippians 4:8) instead of exploring ‘the depths of Satan’ (Revelation 2:24).

Also, believers need to accept responsibility for their own personal sin and not blame Satan. Satan may be the originator of evil but he and the demons are not alone in perpetuating it, because men and women out of their own volition have fashioned their own evil and continued in it. Human beings, not Satan and his demons, bear the responsibility for their own sin (Ezekiel 18:20; James 1:14-15).

Reflection

Do you sometimes blame Satan for your life situation? What is the problem with doing so?

How does the faith of Jesus Christ protect you from the evil one?

Jesus has the victory already

The view is sometimes expressed that God is the greater god and Satan the lesser god, and that somehow they are locked in everlasting conflict. This idea is called dualism.

Such a view is not biblical. There is not an ongoing struggle for universal supremacy between the forces of darkness, led by

Satan, and the forces of good, led by God. Satan is only a created being, completely subject to God, and God is supreme over all things. Jesus has triumphed over any and all claims of Satan. We have already victory through faith in Christ, and God is sovereign over everything (Colossians 1:13, 2:15, I John 5:4, Psalm 93:1, 97:1, 1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 19:6).

Therefore Christians need not be unduly anxious about the effectiveness of Satan’s attack on them. Neither angels nor principalities nor spiritual powers “shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

From time to time in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts Jesus and those whom He authorizes specifically to do so cast out demons from some who are physically and/or mentally afflicted. This illustrates the victory of Christ over the forces of darkness. The motivation includes both compassion for the afflicted and attestation to the authority of Christ, the Son of God. The casting out of demons was related to the relief of mental and/or physical affliction, not to the spiritual issue of the removal of personal sin and its consequences. (Matthew 17:14-18, Mark 1: 21-27, Mark 9:22, Luke 8:26-29, Luke 9:1, Acts 16: 1-18).

Satan will no longer make the earth tremble, and shake kingdoms, and make the world into a wilderness, and destroy the cities, and keep humankind locked up in a house of spiritual prisoners (Isaiah 14:16-17).

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Through enticing the believer to sin, Satan had the power to lead him or her to spiritual death, that is, alienation from God. However, Jesus sacrificed Himself that “He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

After Christ returns He will remove the influence of Satan and his demons, in addition to those humans who adhere unrepentantly to Satan's influence, once and for all by casting them into the Gehenna lake of fire (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 20).

Reflection

What are the spiritual implications of Jesus' having the victory already?

How does the victory of Christ give the Christian comfort?

Conclusion

Satan is a fallen angel who seeks to corrupt God's will and prevent the believer from achieving his or her spiritual potential. It is important that the believer be aware of Satan's devices, without becoming preoccupied with Satan or demons, lest Satan take advantage (2 Corinthians 2:11).

From the WCG website:

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/booklets/oftenasked.htm>

Who is Satan?

Satan is a fallen angel who heads the evil forces in the spirit realm. The Bible refers to him with such terms as the devil, adversary, evil one, murderer, liar, thief, tempter, accuser of the brethren, prince of demons, and god of this world. He is in constant rebellion against God. Through his influence, Satan generates discord, deception, and disobedience among human beings. In Christ, Satan is already defeated, and his dominion and influence as god of this world will cease at Christ's return (Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:9; 1 Peter 5:8; John 8:44; Job 1:6-12; Zechariah 3:1-2;

Revelation 12:10; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 20:1-3; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8)

What is hell?

Hell is the spiritual alienation from God chosen by incorrigible sinners. In the New Testament, hell is referred to by the terms "lake of fire," "darkness," and *Gehenna* (a gorge outside Jerusalem where garbage was burned). Hell is characterized by punishment, torment, anguish, weeping and gnashing of teeth, and eternal destruction. The biblical terms Sheol and Hades, often translated "hell" or "the grave," refer to the realm of the dead (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Matthew 10:28; 25:41, 46; Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8; Matthew 13:42; Psalm 49:14-15)

What are angels?

Angels are created ministering spirits who serve God as messengers and agents. They are appointed to attend to those who will obtain salvation, and will accompany Christ at his return. The disobedient angels are called demons, evil spirits, and unclean spirits (Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 1:1; 22:6; Matthew 25:31; 2 Peter 2:4; Mark 1:23; Matthew 10:1).

Bibliography

See WCG literature on:

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/spiritual/trials/satan.htm>