

Satan – our adversary

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In our modern era of “enlightened” man, plain teachings of the Bible are explained away more and more as the mere superstitions of ancient people. Not least of these is the character that is consistent from the Old all the way through to the New Testament – the enemy of God and man, the devil, Satan. Of course, those who do not believe in the Bible do not believe in Satan; they never have. What is amazing is the increasing amount of people who claim to be Christians who no longer believe in a real Satan or, for that matter, a real hell. It is ironic and sad that the same Bible that informs the religious liberal about the existence of God (in whom he claims to believe), is also the only book that informs us of Satan (in whom he chooses not to believe). In Matthew 12:22-26, Jesus acknowledged Satan as real and acknowledged that he has a kingdom. In John 12:31, Jesus said Satan was the ruler of this world, which is in contrast to Christ’s kingdom that is not of this world.

Peter gives the warning, “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Peter 5:8). Satan’s primary goal is to spiritually devour us as he walks the earth. In the book of Job – thought by some, possibly, to be the oldest book in the Bible – the same thing is said about the devil. “*Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. And the Lord said to Satan, “From where do you come?” So Satan answered the Lord and said, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it”* (Job 1:6-7).

What was Satan doing, going to and fro, and back and forth? He was seeking whom he may devour; and the rest of the story in the book of Job is about Satan trying to spiritually devour Job. In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Paul said: “*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God...*”

This life, whether we choose to believe it or not, is a war. For the Christian, it is a war of good vs. evil, and our adversary is a vicious one. Any good military general will tell you that it is imperative to know your enemy. If you don’t, he will surprise and defeat you.

We can learn a tremendous amount about the characteristics of Satan simply by reading the descriptions given of him by the Holy Spirit through inspired writers. The name *Satan* itself simply means “*adversary*.”

2 Corinthians 4:4	<i>the god of this world</i>
Ephesians 2:2	<i>the prince of the power of the air</i>
John 8:44	<i>the father of lies</i>
Revelation 12:9	<i>the Great Dragon</i>
Matthew 12:24	<i>the prince of demons</i>
Matthew 13:38	<i>the wicked one</i>
John 12:31	<i>the prince of this world</i>
Ephesians 6:12	<i>the ruler of darkness</i>
1 Thessalonians 3:5	<i>the tempter</i>
Revelation 12:10	<i>the accuser of the brethren</i>
John 8:44	<i>a murderer</i>
Matthew 13:39	<i>the enemy</i>
1 Peter 5:8	<i>a roaring lion</i>
2 Corinthians 11:3	<i>a serpent</i>
Revelation 9:11	<i>the angel of the bottomless pit</i>

The Hebrew term for Satan is related to an Aramaic verb that means “*to lie in wait*,” “*to oppose*,” or “*to set oneself in opposition to*.” The English word “*devil*” came through the German language from the Greek *diabolos*, meaning “*slanderer*,” “*treacherous informer*,” and “*traitor*.” In Matthew 12:27, he was called “*Beelzebub*” a term that originally meant “*lord of refuse*,” “*lord of the flies*,” or “*lord of dung*.” It was an expression of extreme contempt that signified all that was the opposite of holiness and purity (hardly a name that the Lord would use to describe some harmless, mythical character).

Lucifer is a name that is most commonly **misapplied** to the devil. The name *Lucifer* appears in the Bible only once. And most people are confused by what is said about him in Isaiah 14:12: “*How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!*” At first glance, it might appear that this *Lucifer* is the devil. Verse 12 states that he had fallen from Heaven. But, as in everything else concerning Bible study, context is most important. Most of chapter 14 is dealing with this person *Lucifer*.

Look at what all is said about him in Isaiah chapter 14:

Verse 16: *he is a man*

Verse 19: *only men have graves*

Verse 19: *thrust through (killed) with a sword*

And the most obvious one of all, verse 4, tells us exactly who Lucifer is: a **king of Babylon**. Everything after verse 4 is what the Lord instructed the prophet to say to this king of Babylon, and verse 12 gives us his name – Lucifer. The “*fallen from heaven*” in verse 12 is symbolic language describing a king of great power being toppled from his high position. Lucifer is not the devil, but was simply a wicked ruler of ancient Babylon.

We can gain some insight about Satan’s character from the different names the Bible actually does associate with him though. There are some who think Satan is an evil god, like Greek mythology with its good gods and bad gods. But we need to understand that Satan is not Deity. He, like us, is a created being. In 2 Peter 2:4 we learn that “... *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.*” Jude 6 talks about the “*angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.*” Matthew 25:41 speaks of the devil and his angels. The only possible conclusion from these verses is that the devil is the leader of a group of angels who, at one time, revolted against God, and subsequently was expelled from Heaven to eventually spend eternity in Hell.

Note that in Matthew 12:24, Satan is also called “*the ruler of the demons.*” Many think that demons were the angels that rebelled against God with Satan, but the evidence seems to suggest otherwise. We understand from the Bible that there are three types of spirit beings that exist outside of this life – Deity, angels and departed spirits of the deceased. I believe that it is from this last category (the departed spirits of deceased humans) that we get the demons of the first century.

Unfortunately, many times the King James Version translates “devils” instead of the more correct word “demons,” which contributes to some of the misunderstanding. Alexander Campbell wrote on a principle of Bible interpretation: “*Every word specially explained or defined in a particular sense, by any standard writer of any particular age and country, is to be taken and applied in the current or commonly received signification of that country and age in which the writer lived and wrote.*”

What he said is this: If an author writes a letter and doesn't give a new definition for a word that he uses, then the meaning of that word is exactly the same as it was commonly used when he wrote it. The ancient Greek writer Hesiod, quoted by Plutarch, said this: "*The spirits of mortals became demons when separated from their earthly bodies.*" All pagan writers of note from this time period affirm that demons were the spirits of dead men. The Jewish historians Josephus and Philo also agree on this. An early Christian named Ignatius, who was a disciple of John, in a letter that he wrote to Smyrna, quoted the words that Jesus said after his resurrection, "*Handle Me and see, for I am not (daimoon asomaton) a disembodied demon.*" The way they understood it at that time was "*a spirit without a body.*" Here are some contrasts between angels and demons to keep in mind:

ANGELS

DEMONS

Were never said to enter anyone

The only time we hear about demons is when they had entered into human bodies

Have no affection for bodies, either as habitations or vehicles of action

Show a peculiar affection for human bodies and to desire them, both as vehicles of action and places of habitation

Remember when Jesus cast out the legion of demons from the one man (Mark 5:1-13)? Remember their request to be cast into the swine? They desired at least some kind of body, even though it was inferior to a human. Think about it. Why would an angel make such a request? Though Satan is the ruler of demons, demons are not the devil's angels. From the evidence that the New Testament gives us, demons were the departed spirits of wicked men who were allowed, for a time, to come back and possess the living so that Jesus could display His ability to cast them out, as one more proof of Him being the Son of God. This would serve as a powerful illustration (to the living) that Jesus' authority was over all creation, which includes not just the realm of the living, but the realm of the dead as well. When that unique time of miracles ceased and Jesus' deity had been fully proven, then that unique time of demon possession ceased, too (there are no demon possessions today). What's interesting is that the demon possessions that occurred during the first century was prophesied in the Old Testament in Zechariah 13:1-2.

Satan is not a demon, but rather a wicked angel – an angel that was created by God. "*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him*" (Colossians 1:16). This would include Satan. All things that are created were created at the beginning of time. The angels must have been created at the very beginning of the first day of creation, for Job 38:6-7 tells

of their singing and their shout for joy at the creation of the earth.

There is something very important we need to remember: God did not create Satan as evil, but rather, he chose to become evil. We can know for a fact that Satan and his angels did not rebel against God until after the creation week was complete because of what is said in Genesis 1:31. On the sixth day, “... *God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good.*” “*Everything*” includes all of the seen and unseen things. And remember what Jesus said about the word good? “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God*” (Mark 10:18). The Lord does not use the word “good” lightly, but at the end of that first week, He looked around at everything and said it was “*very good.*” Therefore, we can conclude that the rebellion had not yet taken place.

What does the devil look like? Most people would give a description something like this: horns, tail, the pitch-fork, sharp teeth, hoofed feet. I do understand why in all the old illustrations we’ve seen of him that he was depicted this way. It’s because the artists were trying to portray, physically, the ugliness of his attitude. But none of this is what Satan looks like. He is much too clever of an enemy to appear like this.

2 Corinthians 11:14 says that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light. Matthew 7:15 says, “*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.*” Satan is the master of disguise; he appears to us, at first, as something good. He can even approach us as a trusted friend.

The Bible reveals a pattern that Satan has used from the very beginning to get us to succumb to sin, and this tactic has been so tremendously successful for him, that he has never changed it. He operates the same today as he did in the garden of Eden. He will come to us directly (one on one), and if that doesn’t work, he will come to us through a trusted friend.

For example: In Genesis 3, we learn that Satan came to Eve directly (one on one) and deceived her to sin. However, it was not Eve that he was after. He was using Eve to get to Adam (the head of the human race). He didn’t come to Adam directly; rather, he used Adam’s trusted companion to get him to sin.

Another example: in Exodus 32, Moses had lead the nation of Israel out of Egypt, and they were camped at the base of Mt. Sinai. While Moses was on the mountain speaking with God, the devil used Aaron to cause the nation of Israel to sin by making a golden calf for them to worship. Aaron,

Moses' very own brother, his personal spokesman to Pharaoh, the devil used to make the Israelites sin, and he was trying to get to Moses. But Moses would have nothing of it. In fact, he had about 3,000 killed as punishment for their wickedness. But the devil doesn't give up. In Numbers 20, the devil approached Moses directly when God told Moses to speak to the rock so that it would bring forth water for the people. In his frustration, Moses disobeyed God by striking the rock with his rod instead. In verse 12, God said that it was because of this that Moses would not be allowed to enter into the promised land.

Jesus Christ – God who became a man, walked the earth, and subjected Himself to the same temptations of the devil that we are confronted with – gave Satan direct access to Deity like he had never had before. How did Satan respond? The same way that he has always dealt with mankind. In Luke chapter four, Jesus went into the wilderness and fasted for forty days. Then, Satan came and spoke to Him directly (one on one) and laid before Him temptations that could only appeal to God in the flesh. Have you ever been tempted to turn a stone into bread? No, because you don't have that ability. But the way in which the devil approached Jesus was exactly the same as he approaches us. When tempting Jesus directly was unsuccessful, the text says that the devil departed. But there's a little detail that a lot of times I think we overlook and miss. In verse 13 of Luke 4, it says, "*Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.*"

James 4:7 tells us that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us. Does that mean that we only have to resist him one time in our life, and he will flee from us forever? No. When the opportunity is right he returns, and we have to resist him again – it's a life-long struggle. This is what happened to Jesus, too. In Luke 22:42, we see that Jesus was not particularly looking forward to going to the cross because of the words in His fervent prayer to the Father: "*Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.*"

In Matthew 16:22-23, Satan found his opportunity and tempted Jesus again, this time through a trusted friend – Peter. Speaking of Jesus' death, Peter said (paraphrasing), "*No, Lord. You don't have to do this.*" Do you think Jesus knew what was going on? In the very next verse, He looked straight at Peter and said, "*Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.*" Satan approached Jesus directly and through a trusted friend. 1 Corinthians 15:33 warns that "*evil companionships corrupt good morals.*" If Satan can get to us, at certain times, through those whom we should be able to trust, think of the damage he can do if we associate ourselves with those whom we know we shouldn't trust. We constantly have to keep up our guard.

Why did Satan rebel against God? He was already in Heaven. What more could he want except,

possibly, more power than what he was given? Perhaps he harboured bitter envy and selfish ambition in his heart. James said such wisdom as this is of the devil (James 3:14-15). When Satan's rebellion so miserably failed against God and he was expelled from Heaven, he spends the rest of his existence (as far as time allows) seeking vengeance against his Creator. Since he cannot attack God directly, who better to serve as recipients of his vengeance than God's master creation, the only creatures in the universe made in the image and likeness of God – you and me? But God did not just throw us to the wolf and leave us defenceless. Way back in the garden, while sin was still fresh in the world, God gave the very first prophecy of a Savior (Genesis 3:15). The seed of woman (a person of virgin birth) would be bruised by the devil, but, in turn, He would deliver the fatal blow to Satan's head that would destroy his power over mankind.

By killing the Christ, the devil did not realize what he had done because, on the third day, Jesus was resurrected from the grave, afflicting the fatal blow to Satan's head that was prophesied in Genesis 3:15. Jesus established His church so that all who would be saved would be added to it. If Satan's one goal is to destroy all that is pure and holy, and the church of Christ on earth is the home of the pure and holy, what do you suppose is going to be the object of Satan's focus?

When the book of Revelation was written, the church was already beginning to undergo severe persecution. Satan was attacking it directly (one on one). If he couldn't destroy the Christ, then he would destroy His church, and he would do it by killing off every last member. However, history shows us that as Satan persecuted the church of the first century in one place, another strong group was established elsewhere. The more fiercely he persecuted Christians, the more determined they made themselves to stand fast and be faithful to God – and the church grew.

So, Satan changed his tactic. He approached the church as a trusted friend; he stood behind the pulpit of many congregations and brought all of his false prophets in sheep's clothing with him. The devil is more creative than the ice cream company, Baskin Robbins, because he has given "Christianity" much more than just 31 flavors. There are so many denominations in the world now that call themselves "Christian" that I'm not sure they can all be accurately numbered anymore.

Satan is willing to let us have as much truth as we desire, as long as we accept just a few of his lies. That's why Satan has been so successful through false teachers, because a lie, when it is sandwiched between two truths, is more difficult to recognize and much easier to digest.

From the very first moment that we are capable of making the decision of choosing right or wrong,

we are thrust in the midst of a spiritual war played out on the battlefield of this physical life. It is a fight for who will have our souls. Paul said in Ephesians 6:11 (speaking of the Christian as a soldier), *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”*

Christianity is not a religion for the weak-kneed. The church of Christ is an institution established by the Creator of the universe for those who would stand fast and stand up for righteousness in the face of adversity. When you make the decision to become a Christian, you make the decision to become a soldier of the cross, to join in the fight for what is good and right until the final trumpet sounds, the war ends, and the final reward for the faithful is realized in Heaven.