

20: Who Is Satan?

Satan, the leader of those angels who rebelled against God, is a spiritual being: an angel created by God. He is not, as some would have us believe, an abstract personification of evil. He is referred to as a person, he has a name, and interacts with others, he has intelligence, will, and emotions, and he is morally responsible (2 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:26; Luke 22:31; Isaiah 14:12 – 14; Revelation 12:12).

His Name

Satan, is his Hebrew name. It defines him as the one who opposes God and people.

Diabolos, the word from which we get the name Devil, is the Greek translation of Satan.

Lucifer, which means shining one or morning star, may refer to Satan or to the king of Babylon who is held up as an example of what Satan is like.

"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!"

Isaiah 14:12

Beelzebul is the nickname the Pharisees used in Matthew 12:24. A closely related name Baal-zebul refers to a Canaanite god in 2 Kings 1 and Beelzebul was probably a play on that name which means lord of flies or lord of the garbage heap and dead animals around which flies swarm.

Belial, used in 2 Corinthians 6:15, means "worthlessness".

His Nature

In addition to the names he is given many words are used to describe Satan.

Tempter indicates that he entices people to sin (1 Thessalonians 3:5). *Ruler of the demons* shows that he is commander of the demons (Matthew 12:24 – 26). *Evil one* emphasizes his thoroughly wicked character (Matthew 13:38). *Murderer* is a reminder that he brought death into the world (John 8:44; Romans 5:12). *A liar and the father of lies* highlights his deceitfulness (John 8:44). *Spirit of the world* refers to the means of his influence (1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 2:2). *Prince of the power of the air* indicates the sphere of his activity (Ephesians 2:2 and 6:12). *Adversary* expresses his ferocious opposition to Christians (1 Peter 5:8). *The one who has sinned from the beginning* points to his continual rebellion (1 John 3:8). *Accuser of the brethren* reveals his quest to challenge the grace of God (Revelation 12:10).

We also have four vivid word pictures of Satan. In Revelation 12 he is portrayed as the serpent of old and as a great red dragon, dreadful, powerful and dominating world empires. In 2 Corinthians 11 he is depicted as an angel of light — a master deceiver who appears harmless to the world — and in 1 Peter 5:8 we see him described as a roaring lion preying on vulnerable believers.

His Work

Satan works from the supernatural realm.

"...according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders."

2 Thessalonians 2:9

He can use animals, natural forces, sickness, and death to achieve his ends and is served by demonic spirits but much of his power is exercised through manipulation. He entices people to follow him, he is able to oppress and in some circumstances he can possess (Genesis 3:1 – 5; Numbers 22:28 – 30; Job 1 – 2; Luke 13:11,16; Acts 10:38; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 12:7; Hebrews 2:14; Matthew 16:21 – 23; John 13:2; Acts 5:3; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 1 Timothy 5:15; 2 Timothy 2:26; John 13:27).

Satan works against the Father by contradicting His Word, seeking to steal His worship, counterfeiting His work, and opposing His servants (2 Corinthians 11:13 – 15).

Satan disputes with and wars against God's angels (Jude 9; Revelation 12:7 – 9).

Satan constantly opposes the Lord Jesus. He tried to destroy Him physically, and disqualify Him morally, he used Peter to try to dissuade Him from going to the cross, and he enticed Judas to betray Him (Matthew 2:16 – 19; John 7:1; 8:40 – 44; Revelation 12:1 – 6; Matthew 4:1 – 11; Luke 4: 1 – 13).

Satan opposes the Holy Spirit's work in believers (1 John 4:4). He works against believers through temptation to sin, he sends various afflictions to weaken and discourage them, he accuses them before the Father, he infiltrates their ranks and if possible, he would destroy them. He wages spiritual warfare against them to hinder and frustrate God's work, he ensnares leaders so that the church gains a bad reputation and he incites persecution against them (1 Thessalonians 3:5; Zechariah 3:1—2; Revelation 12:10 – 11; Matthew 13:25 – 39; 2 Timothy 2:25 – 26; Ephesians 6:10 – 12; 2 Corinthians 10:3 – 5; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 1 Timothy 3:7).

Satan works in unbelievers as their father, snatching God's Word from their hearts, blinding them spiritually and using them for his own purposes (John 8:44; Acts 13:10; 1 John 3:8, 10; Matthew 13:19; 2 Corinthians 4:4).

Satan deceives the world and its nations and will gather the nations for warfare at the final confrontation (Isaiah 14:12; Luke 4:5 – 7; John 12:3 1; Revelation 20:3;16:13 – 16).

His Rule

In John's gospel, Satan is described as the ruler of this world, Luke attributes to him the power (authority) of darkness" (Luke 22:53) and Acts 26:18 speaks of "the dominion of Satan." 1 John tells us that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."

None of these expressions can be taken to mean that Satan has been granted authority to rule over men or that he has ownership rights over the earth for the Bible leaves no doubt that he is a vanquished foe; all authority belongs to God.

On the cross Jesus won total victory over Satan and his hosts (Colossians 2: 15; John 12:32). Satan has been bound and those who have been saved have been set free from enslavement to him: enslavement which existed not because of Satan's power or authority but because of their sin. So then, Satan is the ruler of this world and has dominion only because so many within it remain in their sin enslaved to him.

Meanwhile, although bound Satan is not inactive. He still roams the earth as a roaring lion but he does so as a lion on a chain exercising no more freedom than God allows.

His Story

God created Satan, so he once was righteous.¹ Like Eve, he sinned through pride and so introduced sin into God's universe. Because God said that everything He made was very good, Satan's rebellion would seem to have come after the original creation was complete. Certainly his fall occurred before the events recorded in Genesis 3.

¹ See Ezekiel 28:12—15; although this text refers directly to the king of Tyre it is thought by most interpreters to have at least secondary reference to Satan. If it refers to Satan, it ascribes to him great wisdom and beauty in his original state.

After his rebellion, Satan was removed from his original position, though not from access to God (1 Kings 22:19 – 23; Job 1:6 – 12).

God pronounced judgment on him in the garden of Eden: a judgement that was put into effect on the cross and will be fully executed when Jesus returns to the earth (John 12:31; 16:11; Hebrews 2:14: 1 John 3:8).

He is imprisoned in the abyss during the present age — the Millennium — toward the end of which he will be released and cast down to the earth bringing in the Tribulation. Then with his human allies he will attack the saints before ultimately being cast into the lake of fire, where he will suffer eternal torment (Revelation 20:1 –10).

Question: In the light of what we know about Satan, what should be the Christian's attitude to him?

Memory Verses

- ☺ 1 Peter 5:8 – 9
- ☺ Colossians 2:15
- ☺ James 4:7