

# *Truth for Today*

## **The Bible Explained**

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**Broadcast:** 25/26 September 2021

**No.:** T1217

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## **What does the Bible teach about Satan?**

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station. English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

### **Introduction – taking Satan seriously**

On September the first, 1939, Hitler's forces stormed across the border into Poland, triggering the onset of the Second World War. Whilst this invasion had been widely expected, what had shocked the world just a week earlier was the news that the Nazi dictator, who bitterly opposed communism, had entered into a non-aggression pact with Stalin, the Soviet dictator. In reality, this publicly announced agreement concealed a secret behind-the-scenes deal covering the details of how Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were going to carve up Poland between them, which was what they then proceeded to do.

Less than 2 years later, having by then subjugated much of western and central Europe, Hitler turned on his new ally and attacked the Soviet Union. This brought Soviet Russia into the war alongside Britain, since the two countries now faced a common enemy. It was then that Winston Churchill famously remarked that if Hitler were to invade Hell, he would at least make a favourable reference to the devil in the House of Commons.

I have always had enormous respect for Britain's legendary wartime Prime Minister, viewing him as a man raised up by God at that time to inspire the nation and to be instrumental in its deliverance from a great evil. But I do have to take issue with this instance of his celebrated wit.

This is in part because Churchill's remark betrays a common misconception, of which we will say more later, which is the idea that Hell is the domain where Satan reigns. This is a long way from what the Bible actually teaches about it. But secondly, I have to say that the subject of today's talk, Satan, is really just not one I feel we can ever be light hearted about.

The unspeakable tragedy of his involvement in the history of the human race, and its fearful consequences, are too solemn for words. His every action is an affront to God, and he has wrought terrible devastation in countless human lives. I wonder, do we appreciate just how easy it is for us to allow him a foothold in our own?

### **Terminology – who exactly is Satan?**

Let's begin with the terminology. The utterly malevolent being we are going to speak about today is referred to in Scripture under several names. I've already used interchangeably the terms "Satan" and "the devil." In the book of Revelation, where we come across him symbolised as a dragon, there are two verses which confirm that these names do indeed refer to the same person and which also link them with the name by which he is first introduced to us in the scriptures, that is, the serpent or snake. Revelation 12 verses 7 to 9 read:

“Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

Chapter 20 verse 2 links these names in the same way.

The name “Satan” means “the adversary.” He is God’s adversary, and also, therefore, the adversary of all of God’s servants and of all that is good and wholesome. “The devil” means “the accuser.” We live today in what is often called a blame culture. When something goes wrong, when some terrible disaster occurs, one of the first thoughts people have is to ask who is responsible. Who is to be blamed for this? There is, it seems, a knee jerk reaction today to look for someone to accuse, of incompetence, or negligence, or dereliction of duty. In my view this is evidence of just how far our culture today has allowed itself to come under the influence of the great Accuser himself, namely the devil.

Satan has at his command an army of helpers. These are often popularly called “devils” but actually a different word (demons) is used for them in Scripture. They are mentioned numerous times in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospels<sup>1</sup>. Occasionally, as in the passage just quoted, they are described as the devil’s angels.

In the rest of this talk we will look in detail at some of the things we can learn from Scripture about what we might call the career of this terrible person. We will follow his rise and his fall. We will consider his origin, insofar as we are told anything about it, and his catastrophic encounter with our first parents in the Garden of Eden. Then we will look at the One of whom Scripture says that He came to destroy the devil’s works<sup>2</sup>, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ, and finally we will see how on account of the gloriously completed work of Christ on the cross, Satan’s fate is sealed and his ultimate destruction is a certainty.

## **Satan’s origin**

As far as I know, the Bible nowhere explicitly tells us when Satan was created, or how he came to be Satan, but there are a number of scriptures which provide what we might call hints about these questions.

C. S. Lewis, in the Preface to his classic work *The Screwtape Letters*, says:

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”

Surely these are wise words, and therefore we should be content with what Scripture does tell us, and not try to probe into areas where it appears to be silent.

One definite statement in Scripture about Satan’s history comes in Luke chapter 10 verses 17 to 20. The Lord had just sent out seventy-two of His disciples on a preaching and healing mission. When they returned from this, the scripture records:

“The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’ And he said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing

shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Clearly, the recent experience of these disciples had affected them greatly. They lived in a world where the demons were not at pains to conceal their existence and where there were plenty of people around whose lives had been so completely dominated by them that they were now the helpless victims of Satanic power. You don't need to read very far through any of the first three gospels to come across examples of this.

Now, as the disciples travelled around preaching in the name of Jesus, they were witnessing first hand that there was a greater power than that of Satan and his servants! They had seen with their own eyes that it was only necessary for them to invoke the name of Jesus, their Master, and the demons were defeated. In response to their excitement about this, the Lord exhorts them to rejoice in their salvation rather than to be carried away with the wonder of the authority He has given them. “After all”, He seems to be saying, “I have seen Satan defeated in a far more spectacular way than this.”

From the passing reference which the Lord makes here, we might conclude that at some unknown point in the past, Satan fell from heaven. An idea which is widely held is that Satan was once a mighty angel who was thrown out of heaven because he had aspired to usurp God's authority and had led a kind of mutiny against Him. This idea is based on putting together these verses in Luke with two Old Testament passages, which speak about ancient potentates in such terms as to suggest that a meaning beyond the immediate and obvious one is intended.

One of these passages is in Ezekiel chapter 28. This is introduced as a lamentation for the king of Tyre but it says things which go beyond anything which could possibly be true of him, except as extremely poetic language, for example:

“You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering.... You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.... you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.”

Those are excerpts from verses 13,14 and 16.

The other is Isaiah chapter 14 verses 3 to 21, which, in its immediate application, is talking about the king of Babylon. But, like the passage in Ezekiel, it contains things which seem to go beyond anything which could be strictly applied to him, such as these words in verses 12 to 14:

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn....  
You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; ....I will make myself like the Most High.’”

Whether or not these verses do describe Satan's attempt to usurp God's authority and his forcible removal from his original position, it is clear from other scriptures, such as the remarkable references in the books of Job<sup>3</sup> and Zechariah<sup>4</sup>, that Satan still has access to appear before God and there to fulfil his characteristic role of accusing God's servants and seeking their downfall.

The verses in Revelation 12, which we quoted earlier, and which appear to refer to events which are still future, seem to describe a much more complete and final exclusion of Satan and his servants from the courts of Heaven.

## Satan's encounter with Adam and Eve

Whatever the detail of Satan's origin and history, we first come across him, as we read through the Bible from the beginning, in Genesis chapter 3, and he makes his appearance here as the serpent. The narrative reads as though he were in some way part of the animal creation, albeit with the gift of speech and reason. I suspect however, that another interpretation is more reasonable. We are told later in the Bible that Satan has the ability to transform himself into an angel of light<sup>5</sup>. No doubt therefore he could also choose to appear as a very beautiful and eye-catching creature, and not necessarily as what we today would recognise as a serpent.

Let's read verses 1 to 6 of that chapter:

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman ‘Did God actually say, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden”?’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.”’ But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

The brief narrative we've just read, records the most terrible tragedy in all of human history. It's because of these events that every form of suffering which afflicts the human race, including death itself, came into the world. As the songwriter Don Francisco so powerfully puts it in the song 'Adam, where are you?':

“...the master of deception now begins with his dissection of the Word  
And with all of his craft and subtlety the serpent twists the simple truths  
they've heard  
While hanging in the balance is a world that has been placed at their  
command,  
And all their unborn children die as both of them bow down to Satan's hand.”

We could say a great deal about what these verses, taken with those a little further on in which God deals in turn with the serpent, then Eve and then Adam, teach us about the human predicament. They explain why mankind constantly turns away from God and yet cannot live without Him, or without something to take His place. They explain why there is a battle of the sexes. They explain why we inhabit a world which is running down, and why our bodies are subject to decline and decay and why eventually we all die.

But today our subject is Satan, and these verses are full of insights into how he operates. Let's look very carefully at the conversation which is recorded here, because the better we appreciate his methods, the better equipped we will be to discern his influence in the world, and the more on our guard we will be when he directs his evil designs towards us.

How does he begin the conversation? What's his opening line? He asks “Did God really say...?” This is so important! Do you see what is happening here? He begins by questioning what God has actually said. At this stage he doesn't flatly contradict God. That comes a little later. At first he just sneaks into Eve's mind the tiniest element of doubt – did God really say that?

I do wonder if, as you listen to this, you find any of it vaguely familiar. Have you experienced those stirrings of doubt about what God has said in the Bible? Satan's absolute number one priority is to destroy faith in the Bible. He'll do anything to stop you reading it in the first place, but if you do read it, he has, with spectacular success in recent generations, flooded the world with an abundance of highly convincing scholarship and supposed knowledge which tells you the Bible cannot be trusted.

Having begun with doubt, he moves on to denial. "God is lying to you, Eve" is what he is basically saying, "You see, God has a hidden agenda in forbidding you to eat this fruit. He knows something that He doesn't want you to know." So Satan slanders God, and attributes to Him the deviousness which is really the hallmark of his own dealings, but not of God's. He tells her that God doesn't really have her best interests at heart.

These have ever been Satan's techniques. He calls into question, very cleverly of course, the reliability of God's word, and the purity of God's motives.

Finally, he uses what I am going to call the Template of Temptation. This is a three-pronged attack to which Eve finally succumbs. It consists of an appeal to the human heart along three different routes which are described in John's first letter chapter 2 verse 16 as:

"The desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life."

Eve gave in on account of these three things. She saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that it was to be desired to make one wise.

I'm now going to read the verses a little further on, after all the business of Adam and Eve realising for the first time that they were naked, feeling ashamed because of it, making a very feeble attempt to make themselves clothes, and then trying to hide from God when He comes looking for them. God questions each of them in turn, and then spells out to each in turn the consequences of what they have done. To the serpent He says, in verses 14 and 15:

"Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

One way of looking at this is just to see it as God pronouncing a straightforward judgment on the serpent as a beast of the field, up to this point having some other physical form from what we would normally recognise as that of a serpent. From now on, whatever shape it may have had before, the serpent would slide along in the dust on its belly, and would be liable to be trodden on by humans, having its head bruised whilst being able in return to bruise someone's heel.

However, as I suggested earlier, I rather think that Satan was never part of the animal creation, but was and is a spirit being. Perhaps mankind has named the creatures we call serpents precisely because their means of locomotion corresponds to what is described here.

Be that as it may, this scripture surely has a prophetic meaning in addition to any natural one it may have. It is the standard usage in Scripture that human descent is spoken of in terms of the male line, and yet here the scripture speaks of the offspring of the woman. Of all men ever born, surely it is the Lord Jesus, born of a virgin, who could most accurately be called "the offspring of the woman." Satan was allowed to stir up hatred against Him, so that He endured terrible things at the hands of his creature Man. This is what I suggest is meant by Satan bruising His heel. But the victory the Lord Jesus won, by His death and rising again, struck such a blow against Satan as to

guarantee his final destruction. Surely this is the fulfilment of that prophetic word “he shall bruise your head.”

### **The triumph of ‘the stronger than he’**

Three of the four gospels relate how, at the very commencement of the Lord’s public ministry, he spent forty days alone in the desert, being tempted by the devil.<sup>6</sup> At the end of this period, during which the Lord Jesus had been fasting and would clearly therefore be extremely hungry, Satan again used his “Template of Temptation.” First he tried to arouse the desires of the flesh, by urging the Lord to miraculously turn stones into bread in order to satisfy His hunger. He tried to arouse the desire of the eyes by showing Him a vision of all the kingdoms of the world, and he appealed to the pride of life by suggesting that the Lord should “show off” in a spectacular way by throwing Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple and demonstrating that He was indeed the Son of God. But the Lord Jesus was unmoved by Satan’s subtlety, and Satan eventually had to retire from the confrontation. At the hands of this Man, alone amongst all who have ever lived, Satan suffered a spectacular defeat.

As the Lord said later, in John chapter 14 verse 30:

“...the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me.”

In Luke’s Gospel chapter 11, verses 21 and 22, the Lord said:

“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armour in which he trusted and divides his spoil.”

From the context of these verses it is clear that the strong man the Lord is speaking about is Satan, and the one stronger than he, who overcomes him, is none other than the Lord Himself.

But it was on the cross that Christ’s victory over Satan was won. The letter to the Hebrews, chapter 2, speaks of it in the following wonderful words, taken from verses 8, 9, 14 and 15:

“At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone....that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

### **Satan’s end**

Finally we will look at Satan’s ultimate destruction. I mentioned earlier that the popular idea that Satan reigns in Hell does not come from the Bible. Hell, the place of eternal punishment, described as a place of unquenchable fire, is specifically said to have been prepared for the devil and his angels<sup>7</sup>. Far from being Satan’s domain, where he reigns supreme, it is rather the place of his final judgement at the hand of God.

The closing chapter in the Bible’s account of Satan’s history is found in the Book of Revelation chapter 20 verse 10, where we read:

“...and the devil who had deceived them [that is, the rebellious nations] was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on “What does the Bible teach about Satan”, talk T1217, Scriptures were quoted from the English Standard Version.

<sup>1</sup>Luke 4:41 <sup>1</sup> Cor. 10:20 <sup>2</sup>1 John 3:8 <sup>3</sup>Job 1:6-12, 2:1-7 <sup>4</sup>Zech. 3:1-2 <sup>5</sup>2 Cor. 11:14 <sup>6</sup>Matt. 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13 <sup>7</sup>Matt. 25:41

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