

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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What does the Bible say about Satan?

What's the picture that comes into your mind when you hear the word, Satan, or, the Devil? It's probably a picture of a creature with two horns, a forked tail and a pitchfork. That's just the picture Satan wants you to have – a harmless caricature that no-one takes too seriously and that lulls you into a false sense of security. We may be talking to someone about a mutual friend when suddenly that friend appears. "Oh, speak of the devil", we say and smile. And the Devil is happy to have it that way!

That's why it is so important that this morning we look at what the Bible has to say about him. We need to realise that, far from being harmless, he is our deadliest enemy whose one great aim is destruction. The consistent message throughout the Bible is of a great conflict going on throughout the world between the forces of God and good, on the one hand, and those forces of evil led by Satan, on the other. It is a deadly serious message!

Our English word, 'Satan' comes from the Hebrew, 'Satan' and the Greek, '*Satanas*', both meaning 'adversary'. Our word, 'Devil' comes from the Greek, '*Diabolos*' and means 'an accuser or slanderer'. Those dual functions of adversary and accuser highlight his evil work. In the Bible, the activity of Satan as the great adversary can be seen in three important areas:

1. the adversary of God and Christ
2. the adversary of God's people
3. the adversary of mankind.

It will be helpful to look at each of these areas in turn.

Satan – the adversary of God and Christ

The Bible is not very explicit as to the origin of Satan. There are two important passages which shed some light on the subject. God's condemnation of the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28 is generally considered to refer also to Satan. There we read, "Because your heart is lifted up, and you say, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods' ...Yet you are a man, and not a god...You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty...You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God...You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created till iniquity was found in you".

Similarly, God's condemnation of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14 has been understood to refer to the fall of Satan: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!...For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God'...Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit".

Satan was created by God in perfection along with all the host of angels. But his heart was lifted up with pride and he fell. Having been cast out of heaven, he has spent his time since in attempting to destroy God's purposes.

In the beginning, God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden so that there might be those upon earth with whom He could enjoy fellowship and friendship. It was probably not very long after that that Satan came along to try to spoil that relationship. The familiar story is told in Genesis 3. In that chapter, we are told only of the serpent who beguiled Adam and Eve. Nowhere is the word 'Satan' or 'the Devil' used. But the identity of that serpent is made plain in the last book of the Bible. (It is interesting how many of the themes developed in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, recur in the last book, Revelation.) Twice over we are told of "that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan" (12:9; 20:2). As a result of Satan's deadly work, Adam and Eve sinned and their relationship with God was broken. But, in pronouncing judgment on the serpent, God promised a Deliverer who would destroy him: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15).

The rest of the Old Testament story tells of Satan's efforts to nullify God's promise. There is not time to go into the details here but it is a fascinating story of Satan's efforts to destroy successive generations of the promised line. But

God's power is always greater than that of Satan's! In the fullness of time, the Lord Jesus was born of Mary, being part of the royal lineage of David through both Mary and Joseph. God's promised Deliverer had arrived!

Throughout His lifetime, the Lord Jesus was consistently under attack by Satan. King Herod sought to destroy Him as a baby. Mary and Joseph had to take Him and flee to Egypt. Before Jesus began His public ministry, He had to face Satan in the wilderness. After fasting for 40 days, Jesus was tempted by Satan three times over. But three times over, Jesus overcame those temptations! Adam and Eve, in a garden surrounded by food and all that was lovely, succumbed to Satan's temptation. The Lord Jesus, in the wilderness and weakened by hunger, chased Satan away with the word of God!

But Satan's greatest efforts to destroy the Lord Jesus are seen in the events leading up to the cross. The cross of Calvary was the supreme purpose for which the Lord Jesus had come into the world. He had come, as the Good Shepherd, to give His life for His sheep (John 10:11). As Jesus began to speak to His disciples about His forthcoming death, Peter, with the best of intentions, tried to turn Him away from such a course. But the Lord Jesus recognised Peter's well-meaning words for what they were, an undercover attack by Satan. He had to say to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offence to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23).

Judas' betrayal of the Lord Jesus is seen by Luke not as an act of greed on the part of Judas, but rather of the direct activity of Satan: "Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve" (Luke 22:3). Jesus was delivered by the chief priests to Pilate to be crucified. Their hatred, and that of the crowd, culminated in those awful cries, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" (John 19:15). But Jesus had already seen this hatred for what it really was – the opposition of Satan against Himself. As they came to arrest Him, Jesus had warned, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).

But, once again, Satan's opposition comes to nought. The Lord Jesus laid down His life at Calvary as the atoning sacrifice – and rose triumphant from the dead, the work of redemption accomplished!

Satan – the adversary of God's people.

Satan's efforts in the Garden of Eden were not only directed against God, who had put Adam and Eve there, but also against Adam and Eve themselves. Through their listening to his voice and disobeying the commandment of God, Satan saw to it that they lost their place of blessing in Eden, exchanging it for an earth cursed with thorns and thistles. God's solemn word to Adam was, "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you...In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground...for dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-19).

The sentence of death was passed not only on Adam and Eve but, as Paul writes, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). Apart from the grace of God, and His promise of a coming Deliverer, all would have been lost for Adam and Eve, and for mankind. But once again, Satan's power has been overcome by the greater power of God!

The book of Job contains an interesting and important insight into the way in which Satan attempts to destroy the people of God. Satan was allowed by God to do his utmost against Job, short of taking his life. God had expressed His delight in Job, "My servant Job...there is none like him on the earth" (1:8). So, in a short space of time, Job lost his wealth, his family and was smitten by boils from head to foot. Even Job's wife derided him, "Curse God and die". But though Satan might do his worst against Job, God had purposes of blessing in view for Job through all his trials. Job went through a series of lows and highs as he questioned God's dealings with him. He might cry, "May the day perish on which I was born" (3:3) but he could also confidently declare, "But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold" (23:10).

In the end, Satan was unable to destroy Job's faith in God. God blessed Job with even greater wealth and a large family. Job lived to see his grandchildren born (42:12-17).

Satan's opposition to the people of God is as keen today as it ever was. So Peter tells us, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). His activities as a roaring lion are still seen today in those countries where governments are opposed to Christianity and believers suffer for their faith. That outright opposition is not his tactic in the West at the moment, though it may come.

Paul tells us about the armour God has provided for us so that we might be able to stand against Satan. "Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (see Ephesians 6:10-18). Today, more than ever, we need to recognise

“the wiles of the devil”. By surrounding us with all the trappings of our materialistic and technological society, he would seek to turn our hearts away from Christ and to keep us occupied with the things of this world.

Satan – the adversary of mankind.

God’s attitude towards mankind is one of love and blessing: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:3-5). By contrast, Satan’s attitude is one of destruction, however cunningly disguised. He wants to take as many as possible with himself to that same pit of destruction that he knows will be his final end. So Paul writes, “...those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Paul warned the Corinthian believers against those who would spread evil doctrine: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). Be assured that Satan is still busy in the world as an angel of light. It’s no longer fashionable to speak of sin – there are no absolute standards of right and wrong. It’s not fashionable to speak of the blood of Christ cleansing us from all sin, as God’s word plainly declares (1 John 1:7) – talk of the blood belongs to a bygone age. It’s not fashionable to speak of heaven and hell – after all, if there is a heaven, surely a loving God would receive everybody there. Where have all these ideas come from? They spring from the fact that men have turned from the word of God and accepted the lies which Satan, in his guise as an angel of light, has offered to them.

It is not for nothing that the Lord Jesus spoke of the Devil as the father of lies: “The devil...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 from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). Jesus told a parable about a sower who went forth sowing good seed. Some seed was eaten by the birds; some fell on rocky places; some was choked by thorns. Only a fraction brought forth fruit. He then explained the parable as follows: “The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:5-15).

Satan is a defeated foe.

After Jesus had healed a deaf and mute man, He was accused by the Pharisees of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub (another name for Satan). He said to them, “How can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house” (Matthew 12:22-30). Before Jesus began His public ministry, He met, and defeated, the tempter, Satan, in the wilderness. Effectively, Jesus bound the strong man before proceeding to deliver those who were under his power. But especially at the cross, Jesus broke Satan’s power.

*By weakness and defeat,
He won the meed and crown;
Trod all our foes beneath His feet
By being trodden down.*

So we read, “Inasmuch as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, [Jesus] Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

While Satan still exerts his limited power, he is a defeated foe whose end is assured. So in the book of Revelation, John was given a vision of the future, and writes, “And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever...And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:10-15). That he seems to be especially busy today attacking the children of God, whether as “a roaring lion” or as “an angel of light” is perhaps because he knows that his end is near!

Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, be absolutely sure of this – however hard Satan tries, he can never take away from you God’s gift of eternal life. Let your motto for 2006 be God’s promise, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). When you trusted Christ as your Saviour, you were given the gift of God’s Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). In the power of His indwelling Spirit, the Lord Jesus is well able to guard you from all Satan’s attack

*When I fear my faith will fail,
Christ can hold me fast!
When the tempter would prevail,
He can hold me fast!*

“Resist the devil and he will flee from you”, James promises (4:7). It has been aptly remarked, “Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees”!

But if you have never seen yourself as a sinner before a holy God, if you have never seen the Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary dying for your sins, realise that this is because Satan has blinded your eyes. What better way to start this New Year than to turn from your sins and from the power of Satan and to turn to Christ and receive God’s gift of everlasting life!

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