

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT “SATAN”



### I. Satan is Real and Personal

1. Names applied to him argue for his personality. E.g. he is called a liar in Jn 8:44.
2. Moral evil is the product of personality. It exists in the will of personal beings, human or otherwise. The impersonal (e.g. a murderer's gun) cannot will to do moral evil.
3. Satan was both real and personal to Jesus. In Matt 4:1-11, Jesus was really tempted by a personal tempter. He was not engaged in an inner conflict. There was a real confrontation of personalities—that of Jesus and that of the devil. Jesus' victory in the wilderness assures us of the possibility of our own victory over the evil one. It also points to the ultimate defeat of Satan at the end of the age.

### II. Fall and Destiny of Satan

1. Eze 28:11-19 and Isa 14:11-15 give insights into Satan's original state, his fall and destiny.
  - Some conclusions on Satan are:
    - Satan is a created being and capable of choice (Eze 28:12, 15).
    - Satan was bestowed with great wisdom and beauty (Eze 28:12).
    - Satan's fall would appear to be the beginning of sin in the universe (Eze 28:15). The Fall in Eden was not the first sin.
    - Satan was filled with unholy ambition and sinful pride (Isa 14:13-14).

- Satan became selfish, self-conceited and he tried to be like God (Isa 14:13-14).
- Satan was expelled from his exalted position (Eze 28:15).
- The fall of evil kings and their kingdoms on earth prefigures to the ultimate fall of Satan and his kingdom of darkness.
- Satan's fall was the result of his own will ("I will" repeated 5x in Isa 14:13-14).

### **III. Implications of Satan as Created Being**

1. He is not omnipotent, not omniscient, and not omnipresent.
2. His power is merely allowed but limited by God (Job 1:12; 2:6).
3. He cannot separate us from God's love (Rom 8:38-39).
4. He cannot have complete victory over us (Jn 16:33; 1 Jn 4:4).
5. God can even use Satan to fulfil His own good purposes (Lk 22:31-32; 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20).

### **IV. Fallen Angels**

1. The angels who followed Satan in his fall and rebellion against God in heaven are identified as demons in the Bible (Matt 25:41).
  - The Bible tells of two categories of them today.
    - The first of these are the "free" fallen angels (Eph 6:11-12). They are numerous and seem to give Satan a semblance of omnipresence. They form the highly organized empire of the devil but Scripture gives us only scanty information about its exact structure.
    - The second category comprises the "bound" fallen angels (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6). They are now confined to the pits of darkness awaiting the final judgment.
  - The Nature of Demons
    - Demons are spiritual beings. This means that they are not material in nature and independent of matter.
    - Demons are personal beings (Acts 19:15-16). They have the power of thought, speech and action. They also have the power to influence human personality. Besides, they possess the power to make choices (Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4), and are capable of being violent (Matt 8:28).
    - Demons are believing beings (Ja 2:19). They believe in God, but this is not saving faith that leads to repentance. They do recognize and confess the deity of Christ, but they refuse to give Him allegiance (Mk 1:23-24). They also fear the authority of Jesus (Lk 8:28-29).

- Demons are disembodied beings (Matt 12:43-45; Mk 5:12-13). But they have a strange passion to possess living bodies, human or animal.
- Demons are powerful beings (Lk 8:29; Mk 9:17-18). They can exercise superhuman strength and impart such strength to their victims. They can also inflict physical disabilities.
- Demons are aware of their impending doom (Matt 8:29; 25:41). They know their final destiny and are desperately putting up a last fight.
- Demons possess different measures of wickedness (Matt 12:45). This may imply that some are more powerful than others.

## V. Spiritual Warfare

1. Eph 4:17-32 warns us that a believer's wilful indulgence in fleshly sins allows the enemy to quickly exploit his vulnerability. Such an indulgence can turn from a sin of the flesh into a sin controlled and dictated by satanic/demonic activity (sinful nature + demonic influence = sinful addiction; e.g. drug addiction). Spiritual wickedness has gained a foothold; power of darkness has come upon the person's life.

2. The teachings of Paul mention much about spiritual disciplines rather than spiritual deliverance as the norm for spiritual warfare. When the ministry of deliverance is advanced as the centre of concentration, extremism can occur. E.g. demons are seen in almost everything and everyone. Exorcising demons from people, rooms and objects is seen as the secret for spiritual progress. This overemphasis on deliverance undermines the need for personal discipleship and personal responsibility in the spiritual disciplines. Christians then become more demon-conscious than God-conscious. On the other hand, to deny the reality of demonic influence/activity is the other extreme.

3. Satan's favourite tactics:

- Deception (2 Cor 11:13-15)—Satan disguises as an “angel of light”.
  - Counterfeits (2 Thess 2:9-10)—real results but false channels, thereby misleading people to worship falsehood or even evil (e.g. healing).
  - Attacks on the mind (Eph 4:17-19; 2 Cor 11:3-4)—“The major secret of holy living is in the mind” (John Stott).
- The only nature a lost man has is the fallen nature he was born with. Though redeemed, Christians still have this fallen nature in them. Hence, Satan can still gain a foothold in the lives of a lost man and a Christian if he can exploit the fallen nature (Eph. 4:27).
  - Christians also have a new nature they received when they were born again. But this does not alter the fact that their body is yet unredeemed and their “old man” is still vulnerable to evil (Eph. 4:25-32). A Christian can still sin because the sinful nature is still in him even though the Holy Spirit is dwelling in him.

- Christians still have their free will after they have received Christ. God wants His people to choose to live for Him. And if a believer chooses to dabble in questionable spiritual powers or forces (e.g. occultism, witchcraft, practices/addiction that lead to the mind being influenced strongly by the forces of evil), God may let him face the consequences of his own choices—anything can then happen to him.

## VI. Generational Curses: Flaws in Interpreting Deut 5:9-10

Deut 5:9-10—**“You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”**

- There are flaws in interpreting this text to teach generational curses—i.e. curses on the children resulting from the sins of their forebears:
  - Whereas God’s wrath would be visited to the third and fourth generations for those who hate God, His mercy would be visited on thousands of generations for those who love God.
  - Notice the contrast. The point of this passage is not to communicate the number of generations who will be blessed versus the number who will be cursed, but rather to communicate that God’s mercy far exceeds His wrath.
  - An important point to note is that God is the active agent behind these curses. This contradicts interpretations in which it is assumed that some evil brings on these curses. But the text is clear that the originator of any curse here is God—He initiates the curse of punishment upon the next generation. Hence, to invoke God’s help in breaking His own curse is to ask God to fight against Himself.
  - Consider the kings of Judah (2 Kings 21, 22). Manasseh was Judah’s most evil king. Amon, his son who ruled after him also did evil in God’s sight. However, Manasseh’s grandson, Josiah, was a righteous king. What happened to Manasseh’s curse to the 3rd and 4th generations?
  - Deut 5:9ff is not about time limits on God’s mercies and curses, but about the surpassing greatness of God’s mercy over His wrath.
- Ezekiel 18:2-4 counters the idea that God punishes the children for the fathers’ sins—**“What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: ‘The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.”**
  - Ezekiel expands on this idea in the following vv. 14-20, declaring that if the son of an evil man does not repeat His father’s sins he will not be punished, but only the father. The soul that sins shall die. The son

shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor shall the father suffer for the iniquity of the son.

- The passages that seem to point to generational curses may be referring to the cycle of psychologically and socially influenced negative behaviour patterns that tend to be repeated from one generation to the next (e.g. alcoholism, spousal abuse, uncontrolled anger).

- According to this view, one's family upbringing or history is largely responsible for the "curse" of negative behaviour. While it is true that the human tendency is for children to repeat the sins of their parents, this is not due to the fact that an evil has cursed them so that they must repeat the same sins.

- Rather, it is a phenomenon of human nature. We learn from example and influence. We tend to do what we have learned to do by the example of significant others in our lives (e.g. our parents).

- The spiritual/supernatural dimension is that the evil one can exploit this human vulnerability, but the Holy Spirit can help us overcome in Christ. Thus, it is not about breaking the "curse" by being delivered from the ungodly behaviour, but overcoming that learnt negative behaviour by being disciplined towards maturity in Christ.