



## Lesson 2 | That Old Serpent, the Devil

*“And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world” – Revelation 12:9a*

One of the greatest dangers in war is underestimating your opponent. For example, during WW2 one top Nazi leader quipped that Americans could “only make refrigerators and razor blades.” He was confident that the American industrial factories would not be able to churn out the military weapons necessary to defeat the Axis powers. He was totally wrong. One article notes, “By the time the Japanese surrendered in 1945, the United States had fulfilled President Roosevelt’s admonition to become the great arsenal of democracy. American manufacturers had turned out more than 96,000 bombers, 86,000 tanks, 2.4 million trucks, 6.5 million rifles, and billions of dollars’ worth of supplies.”<sup>1</sup> Underestimating the enemy can have disastrous consequences.

When it comes to our faith, there is an ancient foe we must all reckon with. Some Christians give Satan too much credit, living in perpetual fear as if he is just as powerful as God. But far too many Christians go to the opposite extreme and don’t think about him enough. While there are many unanswered questions about how exactly spiritual warfare works, what we can know from God’s Word is sufficient. The Bible tells us that Satan is real, that he wants to destroy us, and it shows us Satan’s plans and tactics so that we can be ready for the attack.

***What tactics does Satan use to try to destroy people?***

***What happens if we have an unhealthy fear of Satan? What happens if we ignore him instead?***

## The Origin of Satan

We aren’t told a lot about the initial fallout between God and Satan. Throughout the OT there are a few passages that describe Satan’s efforts to undo what God is doing through his people (Job 1-2; 1 Chronicles 21, Zechariah 3) and at least two Old Testament passages (Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28) seem to give us some

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<sup>1</sup> “Becoming the Arsenal of Democracy,” The National World War 2 Museum.  
<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/becoming-arsenal-democracy#:~:text=American%20manufacturers%20had%20turned%20out,robust%20Home%20Front%20as%20well.>

indication about what happened. Beyond this, we read about Satan's first interaction with humanity which gives us more information about who he is and what he is up to.

### **Satan's Fall from Heaven (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:11-19)**

The information we have concerning Satan's fall is sparse. Jesus says that Satan fell from heaven (Luke 10:17-18), and Revelation describes him as being cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:7-12), although it is unclear if Revelation is discussing something in the past or future. In the OT, two passages are often cited as giving fuller insight into Satan's initial fall – Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.<sup>2</sup> From these sparse details we can get a general idea of what happened.

First, Satan was originally created good.

#### ***How do we know that Satan was originally created good?***

Don't forget, God created everything and after creating the universe he said that everything was very good (Genesis 1:31). God would not have called a universe with a rebel roaming free "very good." This means that Satan was initially good, and must have rebelled at some point.

So what kind of angel was Satan? Ezekiel twice calls Satan a "covering Cherub" or a "guardian Cherub" (28:14, 16).

#### ***Where else do we see Cherubim in the OT?***

Cherubim (the plural of Cherub) often show up in Scripture as guardians for God. Cherubim protected the garden of Eden after man was expelled (Genesis 3:24), they were on the ark of the covenant and the curtain in front of the ark of the covenant, and they were part of the divine chariot that Ezekiel saw in his vision (Ezekiel 10). These passages also describe Satan as being extraordinarily beautiful. He is described as covered in gems (Eze 28:13), as being a shining one, or Lucifer (Isa 14:12),<sup>3</sup> and as a being accompanied by music (Isaiah 14:11, KJV "vials" = "harps"). The NT says that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) and seeing the beginning of Satan this isn't surprising.

#### ***How could such beauty and perfection been twisted into such horrifying evil?***

So what happened to this magnificent creature? Pride. We see this in Isaiah 14:12-14, where Satan says in his heart, "I will be like the Most High." Satan saw all that God had given him and it wasn't enough; he

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<sup>2</sup> Some question whether these passages are really referring to Satan at all. Isaiah 14:4 begins by describing the following passage as "a proverb [or taunt] against the king of Babylon" and Ezekiel 28:11-19 is addressed to the ruler of Tyre. Ezekiel seems to be more clearly referring to Satan, as it makes a distinction between the prince of Tyre (28:1-10) and the king of Tyre (28:11-19). Daniel makes it clear that supernatural forces are behind the rulers of the kingdoms of the world, and the elevated, Edenic language for the King of Tyre sounds like someone more than human is being addressed. It's also possible to see Isaiah 14 as having a dual referent, seeing the passage as a description the human Babylonian king but also of the ultimate super power behind him.

<sup>3</sup> The KJV translates the Hebrew word *hela* as "Lucifer." This translation is actually a transliteration from the Latin word "Lucifer," which means "light-bearer." Probably this is an allusion to the morning star, i.e., Venus, which shone brighter than all the stars. This is either referring to the fact that Satan was the brightest among the angels, or it is being used ironically because that is how Satan thought of himself.

wanted more. In his pride he tried to become God himself, and in the process he fell and became so much less than what God is.

***What warnings can we take from Satan's example of pride?***

### **Satan's Attack in the Garden (Genesis 3:1-7)**

The first introduction we have to Satan is when he shows up in the garden of Eden. This attack gives us our first look at Satan's tactics, and helps us understand how he operates. First, notice that Satan comes as a friend. He tries to make it look like he has Adam and Eve's best interest in mind. Also notice that he seeks to subvert God's created order by going to Eve rather than Adam, who was supposed to be the leader (1 Timothy 2:13). He then questions God's goodness by asking, "Did God really say you can't eat from any of these trees?" Of course God didn't say that, but Satan is trying plant a seed of doubt about the goodness of God in the mind of Eve.

***How does Satan attempt to get believers today to doubt God's goodness?***

After planting this doubt, Satan comes right out and denies what God said. "Ye will not surely die." He then tries to get Adam and Eve to believe that God is holding something back from them. Satan follows the same pattern today – convince people that God is holding out and that the warnings He gives are exaggerated. Essentially, Satan makes the same promise today that he has been since the beginning: you can be your own god and decide what is right and what is wrong.

***Why do you think Satan has been so successful in getting people to doubt God's goodness and His warnings?***

## **The Strategies of Satan**

In the first Geneva convention, held in 1864, international rules governing war were enacted. The idea was that even during war, there were certain lines that should not be crossed. These laws include things like avoiding civilian casualties, allowing care for the wounded, and treating prisoners of war with dignity. While these laws may not always be followed, there is at least an attempt by the nations of the world to make sure that war does not become unnecessarily brutal. But there are no international laws governing Satan. While the book of Job shows that God does limit what Satan can do, we must realize that Satan plays dirty. He will do anything and everything he is allowed to do in order to wreck the faith of Christians and keep unbelievers from trusting Christ. He is brilliant, he is conniving, and he is pure hatred and evil.

### **Satan Lies (John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:3, Revelation 12:9)**

"The devil made me do it!" An old comedian made this line popular, and many people today say it somewhat tongue in cheek. But the truth, of course, is that Satan doesn't make you do anything. You choose to do it. So if Satan can't make you rebel against God, and if rebelling against God is the most foolish thing a person could do (and it is), then how will Satan ever convince people to sin against God? He does this by lying. Jesus calls Satan a liar from the beginning and the father of lies. Revelation 12:9 says that Satan deceives the entire world. The Bible teaches that God is a God of truth, and Satan is the father of lies.

***What kinds of lies does Satan tell to get believers (and unbelievers) to sin?***

***Jesus goes so far as to say that those who tell lies belong to their Father the devil. Why does the truth matter so much to God?***

***If Satan's tactic is to lie to us, how can we fight back against him?***

#### **Satan Destroys (John 8:44; Job 1-2)**

God is a God of life, and Satan is the lord of death. Jesus says that Satan was a murderer from the beginning, because from the very beginning his lies have led to death and destruction. Satan wants to do anything and everything he can to destroy God's work. From the beginning of the book of Job we can see the speed and ease with which Satan brings physical devastation when allowed. But while Satan does delight in destruction, he wants more than anything to cause spiritual devastation. If he can prevent an eternal soul from being saved, or to cause a believer to spiral and be of no effect for the Master, then he has succeeded in that which matters most.

***Why do you think Satan loves to destroy and kill?***

***How should our knowledge that Satan seeks to bring death and destruction impact us?***

#### **Satan Harasses (2 Corinthians 12:7, 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18)**

Satan wants to destroy, and to do that he normally lies. But if he can't destroy a believer outright and if a believer will not accept his lies, then he will do everything he can to frustrate the one trying to follow God. Paul describes having a "thorn in the flesh," which he calls a "messenger of Satan to buffet [beat] me." We don't know exactly what the thorn in the flesh was, but somehow Satan was discouraging Paul. We also know that when Paul tried to get back to see the Thessalonians after being ripped away from them far sooner than he had intended, Satan prevented him. As with the thorn in the flesh, we don't know the exact details, but we know that somehow Satan was making it impossible for him to get back and see these believers.

In both instances the specifics aren't spelled out, probably on purpose. The details may be different in every case, but we too can see Satan at work trying to stop us from following God. Our enemy is not omnipotent, and he is not sovereign over everything that happens. But he is powerful, and he can manipulate quite a lot to try and get us to quit, as he did Job and Paul.

***If Satan is trying to frustrate us living for God, how should we respond?***

Everything good that we seek to do for God is going to be resisted by Satan. Some believers are surprised by this and become discouraged. They don't realize that when they decide they will follow God they just made a declaration of war, and there will likely be retaliation by the enemy. If you are going to do right, be ready for a counterattack.

***Can you think of times when you tried to do the right thing or serve God in some way and it became inexplicably hard or there were unforeseen difficulties?***

### **Satan Accuses (Zechariah 3:1-; Revelation 12:10)**

Finally, Satan accuses God's people. The name "Satan" means adversary, and the name "Devil" means slanderer. Sometimes Satan's accusations are false, as with Job. Sometimes his accusations are fair, as with Joshua the high priest in Zechariah 3:1-5. But through the forgiveness of Christ, the accusations of Satan are silenced. We may be guilty, but like Joshua the high priest our filthy garments can be replaced with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Satan can continue to accuse, and he will, but we can have confidence in the shed blood of Jesus.

***What about believers who know they have been forgiven but continue to struggle with guilt afterwards? How would you help a believer who continues to believe the accusations of Satan that they are still guilty?***

When we think about Satan, we should think carefully and wisely. Satan is a powerful foe. Jude tells us that not even the archangel Michael brought a railing accusation against him, that is, not even Michael took it upon himself to speak out arrogantly against Satan. Instead he responded with the bold yet humble, "The Lord rebuke thee" (Jude 9; cf Zechariah 3:2). In a similar way, we stand up to Satan, not in our own power, but in the power and grace of God. We resist the devil, James tells us, by submitting to God (James 4:7). And we walk into this battle with our eyes wide open, realizing that Satan is real, and that by joining God we are opposing him and he will oppose us. But we do so in faith, realizing that "greater is he who is in [us] than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4)