

CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY

LESSON 10: SATAN

Objectives

- Consider that we may not know as much about “Lucifer’s” backstory as we think we do, and whether that matters.
- Find out what Scripture clearly teaches about the devil—and that this definitely does matter.
- Face the difficult questions about why God created Satan in the first place, and if that makes God responsible for evil.
- Recognize and accept that God has a habit of testing the loyalty of His people, and that He takes a risk each time He allows suffering to take place.

Introduction

There is much in the Bible about an enemy called Satan, or the devil.

He is the most frequently mentioned evil being of the Bible, although he is certainly not God’s only enemy. His presence in the Old Testament is minimal, but Jesus and others refer to him numerous times in the New Testament. He is presented as the evil being who is the ruler of all the other evil spirits who are in rebellion against God.

“Lucifer’s Fall from Heaven”

We must begin our investigation with the stark reality that there are some things we think we know about the devil, but which are actually built on church tradition or faulty interpretations. The Old Testament in its original Hebrew uses a title called *haSatan* (sometimes with a hyphen or space) 18 times. The “ha” in the front is the Hebrew word “the,” so we would read as “The Satan.” It means “The Adversary” or “Opposer.” This is not a proper name, although “Satan” (without the “the”) does get used as a proper name in the New Testament. It accurately describes this entity’s attitudes and actions toward God and God’s people. Whenever the term appears, you find a being who is acting in the role of a prosecuting attorney, bringing accusations before God for the purpose of finding someone guilty.

We automatically associate “the satan” of the Old Testament with Satan of the New Testament because they sound the same and there is crossover in the actions that each one takes, but I just want to point out that we don’t actually know for sure that they are the same entity. It’s possible that God uses more than one being as a prosecuting attorney. Since it is a title in the Old Testament and not a proper name, we can’t be entirely sure that the guy who torments Job is the same one we call Satan later on. There is no reason it can’t be the same, though.

This leaves us with very little that we can find out for sure from the Old Testament about Satan and his backstory. We know that he is the same entity that tempted Eve, but (surprisingly) we only know that for sure because of this reference:

⁹ 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. Revelation 12:9

You may think it's pretty obvious that Satan was cast out of heaven because of his pride at some point before creation, because that's the way most of us have been taught to interpret two passages from the Old Testament (**Isaiah 14** and **Ezekiel 28**). It's not impossible that this is what actually happened, but it's important to understand that these passages may not even be about a divine rebel at all, and if they are, they don't have to be about Satan.

Isaiah 14

The **Isaiah 14** passage is a taunt directed at the King of Babylon and fits perfectly with the idea that this king believed he would become a god (a star in the sky, in fact) when he died. It is clearly addressing a person who is not yet in heaven, and it tells him that he will die in dishonor and not even receive a proper burial. There is no strong link between this taunt and the person we know as Satan in the New Testament. We can be sure that it is erroneous to call him "Lucifer," since this is simply a later Latin term that was commandeered as a proper name.

Ezekiel 28

The **Ezekiel 28** passage is clearly a metaphor, comparing the King of Tyre with an entity that was in the Garden of Eden. Scholars are divided about whether the comparison is being made to Adam or to a cherub (a throne-guardian) who sinned, and there are textual details that can be used to support either position. But whether this passage is talking about a divine rebel or not, we simply cannot know whether it's about Satan. And the most important myth to dispel is not debatable at all. You cannot use this passage to make the case that Satan was originally the worship leader in heaven before he fell. The King James version uses the phrase "tabrets and pipes" to describe something covering the King of Tyre, and because this could make you think of tambourines and flutes, the imagery was somehow applied to Satan and an entire narrative was invented from it. The Hebrew words behind "tabrets and pipes" are better translated in the sense of settings for gemstones, so you get the imagery of a king bedecked in jewels who has become very proud.

I have included an investigation exercise in your study notes in case you want to look at these passages more closely. I used to spend a lot more time on it because I think it's a useful exercise to help you start paying attention to what is actually in the text, but for now I'm just making the case that we can't use the Old Testament to construct a backstory for the New Testament Satan. Even passages from the New Testament that are commonly claimed to speak of Satan's origins are not useful for this purpose. Let's look at two of those for a moment.

Luke 10:18

Luke 10:18 is often used to "prove" that Satan was an angel that rebelled before creation.

And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven..."

But here's the whole context:

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." Luke 10:17-19

Jesus made this statement after the 72 disciples he had sent out returned to report that they had cast out demons in his name. The traditional interpretation that this is about a pre-creation event has Jesus one-upping them to say that he actually saw Satan's original rebellion. "That's nothing that you can cast out demons... I actually saw Satan's ancient fall—it was so fast it looked like lightning!"

Notice that there is no reference at all to Satan being an "angel" in this passage. Also notice that there is no other timeframe mentioned that would indicate that Jesus is talking about anything other than the present context.

The most logical timeframe that coincides with Jesus' statement is the one that matches the next thing he says. Satan looked like lightning streaking through the sky because he was angry that humans were displaying power over his kingdom. When Jesus came on the scene casting out demons, this is the first time it had ever been done. And now his *human* followers were going around casting out demons in the name of Jesus! The kingdom of Satan was being overturned. Jesus had come to establish his own Kingdom by taking the nations back, and he began by undoing the evil work of the Watchers and their demonic Nephilim sons who were tormenting people. Of course Satan reacted to this! Jesus is simply describing the panoramic view to show that something really significant was happening in the spirit realm.

Revelation 12:3-4; 7-9

This text is another that is traditionally used to fill in some details about what happened behind the scenes before creation.

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it...

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. Revelation 12:3-4; 7-9

It is this phrase alone about the red dragon sweeping away a third of the stars that has led to the common teaching that Satan rebelled against God and took a third of the angels with him, who then became demons. There is no other Biblical support for that idea. The first part of **Revelation 12** needs to be understood as an arrangement of celestial bodies. It happens to be how the stars and planets were aligned at the time of Christ's birth, and many believe it will be a heavenly sign once again before he returns.

Though many interpreters take **verses 7-9** as a description of what happened in the heavens at Christ's death and resurrection, I actually believe it hasn't happened yet. Satan still stands before God accusing the brothers day and night (**Revelation 12:10**). He is still the prince of the power of the air (**Ephesians 2:2**), not bound to Earth.

No matter how you take it, this was not a pre-creation event. There may be a lot of confusion over the book of Revelation and how the events all fit together in a timeline, but it is entirely non-sensical to suddenly refer back to something in pre-history at this point. We simply don't know if a third of the angels are loyal to Satan, and if they are, when and how that happened.

So Who Is He?

So far we have basically eliminated most of what you thought you knew about Satan's origins. We have said that we can't be sure if the references to The Satan in the Old Testament are even about him. We can't conclude with certainty that the two primary texts that are often used to set up his backstory are even about a spiritual being, let alone *this* one. We know for sure he is never depicted as the worship leader in heaven. We don't have a record of some pre-historic rebellion in which a third of the angels changed loyalties.

Instead, we ought to piece together what we *do* know about how the sons of God rebelled in **Genesis 6**, and how the later sons of God rebelled and received worship from humans after they were installed as stewards over the nations in **Genesis 11**. It seems that the rebellion in the spirit world has happened in stages and that it is intrinsically tied into what is happening in the human realm, rather than some disconnected event from long before humans came on the scene.

Apparently, getting all the details straight about when and how Satan first rebelled is not one of God's priorities for us in Scripture. Even though scant attention is given to him in the Old Testament, a dramatic shift takes place when we come to the New Testament. This is partly because Jewish scholars did a lot of thinking and writing about him during the intertestamental period, which led to a set of ideas that informed the average Jews' understanding about him, and which Jesus largely affirmed in his teachings.

But we also get more attention on him in the New Testament because God was giving a new vision to humans of what his kingdom is like. Instead of the simplicity of "if you belong to this nation, you are in God's kingdom, but if you belong to all these other nations, you are not in God's kingdom," there was a huge upheaval in the spirit realm when Jesus came on the scene. Even before his death and resurrection, rebellious spirits were put on alert and were being removed from territories they had once considered their rightful realm (specifically, demon-possessed humans). But upon Jesus' death and resurrection, they were all given their eviction notice. God began the process of taking back *all* the nations for his own inheritance. Instead of belonging to God's kingdom by nationality¹, Gentiles from all nations could belong to the kingdom without becoming Israelites. It was necessary to have more teaching about Satan and his tactics so that Christ-followers living in a world that is rebellious to God could recognize his efforts and be equipped to stand against them.

¹ Of course, loyalty was always essential for truly being a part of God's kingdom, even if you were an Israelite!

What this means is that in contrast to the little we are given in the Old Testament, the New Testament provides us with a wealth of detail about the things we really need to know—not so much who Satan *is*, but what he *does*. He is mentioned in almost all of the New Testament books, and he is given a large variety of descriptive titles that speak to his character and roles. He is called the dragon, the evil one, the angel of the abyss, the ruler of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the god of this world, Apollyon, Abaddon, Belial, and Beelzebub. In one historical work (in reference to the serpent in the garden) he is called “Gadreal.”² A case can be made for associating him with the name “Azazel,” as well.³ He is often called the “devil,” which is a general word for a very evil person or being. By calling this being “*the* devil,” we recognize that he is the most evil of all and/or that he is at the top of the hierarchy of evil beings. And let’s not forget that “satan” itself means “adversary” or “opposer.”

What the Devil is Like

Let’s take some time to explore a brief systematic theology of the topic of Satan. What this means is that we’ll pull out the New Testament passages that relate to him and organize them topically so we can form as complete a picture as possible of what we know about him. We’ll start with his identifying characteristics and then move on to his specific actions.

He is a person.

He has all three aspects of personality: intellect, emotions and will.

We will look at just one Scriptural example for each aspect, with that aspect underlined within each passage.

1. Intellect

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:3

2. Emotions

Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. Revelation 12:17

3. Will (also called “volition”)

God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:26

Personhood does not equal being human. God is a Person. In theological terms, we are speaking of an actual being that has the components that define personality (intellect, emotions, and will). To say that the devil is a person is to reject the idea that he is an impersonal evil force or even a mere poetic personification of evil.

² 1 Enoch 69:6

³ Think about that when you read about the scapegoat from the Day of Atonement ceremony!

He has a kingdom.

But [Jesus], knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Luke 11:17-18

His kingdom is made up of demonic spirits, so it exists in the spiritual realm.

Paul told us even more:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12

These are the beings that Satan commands in his kingdom:

- Rulers
- World rulers of this darkness (authorities)
- Cosmic powers
- Spiritual forces of evil in the heavens

Fascinatingly, when you study these terms, you find that they all contained the nuance of geography. Paul understood that God’s enemies were organized according to geographical territories, taking us back to **Deuteronomy 32:7-8**, where God divided the borders of the earth according to the number of the sons of God.

He is a supernatural being.

Some think Satan is specifically a cherub because they believe Ezekiel 28 is about him. I think a serpent is different from a cherub, so I don’t prefer to be locked into that identification. No matter what, we know that he is some kind of a spiritual being.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Ephesians 2:1-2

BUT ...

He clearly has a physical form.

He is always referred to with male pronouns.

Revelation 20:2 directly connects him to the serpent of **Genesis 3**.

And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. Revelation 20:2

Incidentally, this is the only passage that explicitly identifies Satan as the same individual who tempted Eve in the Garden. It can be demonstrated through implicit arguments, but this is the only clear statement that we have.

I suspect that Satan's literal form, at least when he appeared to people, is that of a dragon (not a cherub), based on the prevalence of dragons in art and mythology all over the globe.⁴ I think it's worth noticing that dragon lore tends to present these creatures as clever and powerful, with a natural bent towards deception and evil.

He is powerful.

The devil has tremendous influence over vast numbers of people.

**The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
2 Corinthians 4:4**

**We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 1
John 5:19**

He has the ability to transform himself to look better than he is.

**And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.
2 Corinthians 11:14**

He holds the power of death.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil... This is because he deceived humanity and caused them to disobey God, and the payment due for sin is death. Hebrews 2:14

He clearly is powerful ... yet he is limited.

We see that the accuser in Job 1:12⁵ can't do anything without God's permission.

⁴ The description of "Leviathan" in Job 41 certainly seems to fit that of familiar dragon imagery. Verse 34 says, "He sees everything that is high; he is king over the sons of pride." Since I have been particular about not wanting to stretch texts to be about the devil when they are not, I cannot hold too tightly to the notion that the description of this creature is the same as Satan's physical form! It is curious, though, that Leviathan is associated with pride. When you examine the other three places Leviathan is mentioned in the Bible (Psalm 74:14, Psalm 104:26, and especially Isaiah 27:1) you see that people knew of him over a long span of time, and that his destruction is reserved for the Day of the Lord. Another consideration is Habakkuk 3:13b, which states in the ESV, "You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck." Head-crushing in the Bible should always remind us of the curse on the serpent, and it's interesting that it mentions body parts that a snake does not have. Ralph L. Smith says "'From tail to neck' (v 13) appears to be a reference to the enemy in the form of a dragon.'" (Smith, Ralph L. *Word Biblical Commentary, Micah—Malachi*, Thomas Nelson, Chicago. 1984. 116.)

⁵ Whether the accuser in Job 1:12 is the same being as the New Testament Satan doesn't matter for the discussion. We clearly get a picture here of God setting the boundaries for what evil entities can and cannot do in the human realm.

And the LORD said to [ha satan], “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” Job 1:12

God is greater than he is.

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. I John 4:4

Believers can resist him.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7

The evil one cannot touch those who are born of God.⁶

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. I John 5:18

Satan is not omnipresent like God is. He is a creature. He has limitations.

He is a murderer and liar by nature.

Although we don't know the particulars about when in time this became true of him, we know that at the time of "the beginning" (God's creative activity in Genesis 1-2), he was in opposition to God. The desire to kill and tell lies is in the fabric of his being.

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44

He is an Accuser

The role of the satan in the Old Testament frequently has him bringing accusations before God in an attempt to condemn humans. We see this presented as a negative thing that will be judged.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.” Revelation 12:10

He is Predatory

Satan actively seeks opportunities to destroy.

⁶ Touch" (*apto* in Greek) can be translated "take hold of" or "grasp" with the idea of injuring or even owning. Satan can still affect us and deceive us, but he cannot ultimately destroy those who have been born of God.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

He is Demanding

It seems preposterous in light of what we know about God's sovereignty, but he even attempts to make demands of God.

**Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat ...
Luke 22:31**

What the Devil Does

We have looked at what Satan is like, so now we'll turn our attention to what Scripture says about the way he behaves.

Sometimes he works directly.

- He tempted Christ: Matthew 4
- He tried to hinder Christ

**But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."
Matthew 16:23**

- He possessed Judas to try to end Christ's ministry

Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." John 13:27

- He tries to hinder the effect of hearing the Word

**The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.
Luke 8:12**

- He puts people in bondage through physical infirmity

And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? Luke 13:16

- He deceives people through his clever lies

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:3

- He persecutes believers

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10

- He tempts believers to pride

Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. 1 Chronicles 21:1-8

- He tempts believers to immorality

Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 1 Corinthians 7:5

- He tempts people to lie

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? Acts 5:3

- He seeks to devour believers

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

- He tempts people to be unforgiving

Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs. 2 Corinthians 2:10-11

- He can stop people from doing what they try to do for God

... because we wanted to come to you – I, Paul, again and again – but Satan hindered us. 1 Thessalonians 2:18

- He promotes anger and division

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Ephesians 4:26-27

Other times Satan's work is more indirect, through the world's systems

He is called "the ruler of this world."

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. John 12:31

Whenever we do the works of sinful flesh, we are acting in opposition to God's kingdom, just like Satan is.

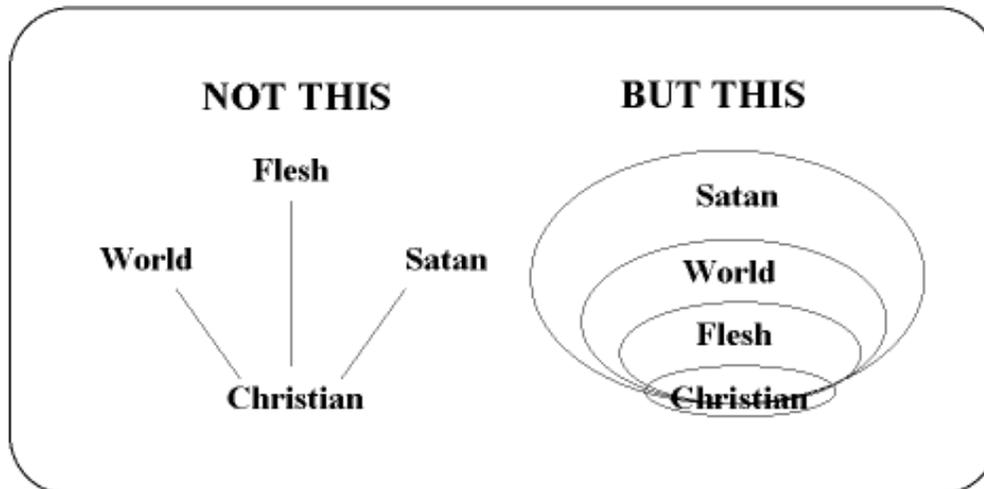
Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21

It helps to see how Satan works through the world and the flesh to accomplish his purposes. It's not as though the world, the flesh, and the devil are three separate enemies of God working independently. Our flesh (the human sinful nature) is predisposed to be against God.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. Romans 7:18

Then the pull of the world around us draws us away from God. Satan is exploiting both of those things in an effort to take us prisoner to sin and make us ineffective for God.

The Activity of Satan Diagram ⁷



When we put all this together, we get the idea that Satan moves all about earth—as do his demonic forces.

The earthly elements that hold us in check do not affect him. Being supernatural, he can move instantly from Asia to America. He could leave Australia and be at the North Pole in a split second. When Satan says, 'I've been roaming about on the earth [Job 1:7],' he means that, literally.⁸

⁷ This diagram by Norm Geisler is widely distributed in various articles. Here is one source. Litke, Th.M., Sid. *Survey of Bible Doctrine: Angels, Satan, Demons*. Bible.org, 2004. <https://bible.org/seriespage/6-survey-bible-doctrine-angels-satan-demons>

⁸ Swindoll, Charles. *Job: A Man of Heroic Endurance*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2004. 9.

He is truly a formidable enemy who is bent on our destruction.

The Big Questions

It was important to do a thorough job of exploring what the Bible does and does not say about Satan, but we can't leave our discussion about him until we consider a few questions that are naturally raised in our minds (and often verbalized) when we think about a powerful, spiritual entity that is in opposition to God.

- Why was Satan created?
- Was he evil when he was created?
- Is God responsible for evil?

All of these have to do with the origin of Satan and God's purposes for him. None of them have clear proof texts that make it easy to explain with one verse, yet we can use our biblically-informed worldview to come to some satisfying conclusions. What we are really seeking is some way to account for Satan's activity without being forced to conclude that God himself is evil for allowing it.

Since we've undermined so much of what we thought the Bible was telling us about Satan's beginnings, we're really left with very little on that front. But we can take the things the Scripture does say and make some observations.

In the Beginning

John tells us twice (once in Jesus' own words) that the devil was a murderer from the beginning.

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. I John 3:8

There can be more than one beginning. (The beginning of a day is different than the beginning of a year, but both are beginnings.) God started the six days of creation with an earth that was without form and void in a dark universe. Obviously, *something* happened before God said, "Let there be light" in **Genesis 1:3**, because the earth was already there. The stuff of earth and the water had a beginning that came sometime before what we know as "In the beginning." God is light, in Him there is no darkness at all. The darkness and water covering the earth give hints that something happened.

I consider it a possibility that the earth was judged for something before we come to the point of "In the beginning" as specified in **Genesis 1**. I have to accept that we were not given all of history in our Bibles because it's not all our story. God has left this part unexplained, and some people go wild with speculations and deductions about what may have happened to

cause the earth to be in this condition—anything from “Lucifer’s Fall” to a pre-Adamic race of humanlike creatures. The Bible is a record of *this* age—the time from the creation of the human race until its restoration. The parts that remain mysterious don’t directly affect us or the story that God is choosing to tell us for the purpose of our salvation and communion with Him. It is not as though I never wonder about what may have happened before the six days of creation, but I am content to leave it in the realm of things God did not make clear. Remember that the Bible is not a science manual and that Genesis 1-2 are making a powerful theological claim about who the Creator is and how he feels about humanity. Leaving the scientific facts ambiguous allows us to have fellowship within the Body of Christ, whether we prefer a Young Earth model or a creation-evolution combination or anything in between.

What we know from the John passages is that Satan was a murderer by the time God began working on this creation.

We do not have a record of when he committed his very first sin, or how long he had personally been in existence before that happened. Is it possible that God made Satan evil from the start of his existence? If this were the case, we would have to conclude that God was the one who thought of the evil ideas that He programmed into Satan’s nature. This would violate what we know of God’s character as revealed in the Bible.

Yet God made a being that He *knew* would do the things Satan does, so God is ultimately responsible for the devil no matter how you look at it. If God is omniscient, then He knew what He was doing and He could have prevented it. Or he could have just immediately destroyed Satan the first time he ever sinned. The fact that God did not choose to do this does not make Him evil or implicate Him as the one who caused sin to happen. It was Satan who chose to sin, not God. Our blame is misplaced when we direct it at the One who is holy and righteous instead of at the one who purposely deviated from the goodness of the Creator. If we want to be angry with God for allowing Satan to continue to exist after he sinned, we should expect Him to annihilate *every* person when they first sin. He still has a use for Satan, just as He still has a use for us. The more we learn of His character through His Word, the more we will be able to trust that He has the wisdom and ability to bring beautiful things out of the ashes of sin.

We must contend with the fact that God is sovereign, and He has purposes that we can’t understand sometimes.

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of

mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory... Romans 9:14-23

So we know that God has purposes we don't always understand, and we also know something important about how God creates things: they are *good*. One hundred percent of the things He made in **Genesis 1** are called good. Even if you conclude that Satan was made at a time before **Genesis 1** begins (so is therefore not included in the "good creation"), we have no indication from anywhere in Scripture that God would make something that is not good.

When it comes to moral beings like Adam and Eve, we would say that they were created *innocent*. Because they were given free will and had the option set before them to disobey, there was always the potential that their innocence would be lost. In Adam and Eve's case, there was a distinct turning point for them when they chose to sin, and thus their descendants inherited an inclination toward sin instead of true free will.

Even though I have made the case that the main passages used to describe Satan's "back story" do not actually give a narrative version of this information, we must conclude that Satan also had a turning point. God made a good (innocent) creature, but by the time Satan was found as a serpent in the Garden, he was lying and tempting the humans to sin. This is something that God does not do (**James 1:13**). Satan is clearly in a state of rebellion.

God does not tell us why He allowed Satan to continue to exist after his turning point, but we know from the way God behaves in the rest of Scripture that He doesn't normally destroy His creation and start over with something else. He works with what He made. When Adam and Eve sinned, God worked through the situation to reveal the things about His nature and character that humans never could have known if there had been no sin: His wrath and His grace. God knew when He chose to create the world and to give His creatures free will that He would be allowing evil to corrupt His creation and that this would be an avenue to make Himself known to His creatures. In fact, He knew every single possible scenario that could ever happen, and He chose THIS reality as the way to achieve His eternal purpose. Knowing that this is the best way to achieve a meaningful love-relationship between himself and his creatures, he allows Satan, sin, and suffering to have their way for a time.

When it comes to Satan, God did not *make* him evil or program him to do evil things, but He knew the actions of this agent would result in an opportunity for Him to bring about His ultimate purpose: to indwell His human creatures in permanent relationship with them. This was made possible when God became a son of Adam and offered Himself as a substitution for the sins of all humans. It's the great mystery that was hidden for ages past and has now been revealed (**Ephesians 3**). God has the ability and desire to take the evil choices of his creatures and turn them into something beautiful and useful.

So in a nutshell, God has a use for Satan, and that's why He allows him to exist.

God Tests His People

The most common and specific thing that Scripture reveals Satan doing (besides accusing) is testing people. He frequently presents to humans the option to disobey God. It's no wonder that he is called "The Adversary!" Yet God makes use of this testing nature, just as He makes use of evil and suffering in so many other ways. In fact, it is part of God's revealed character to test His people.

God cursed the serpent for what he had done, so it is clear that his method of testing was not in line with God's intention. It's not logical to say that God made Satan and gave him all his evil thoughts and then punished him and will eventually throw him into the Lake of Fire for carrying out the only option he was given to do.

Yet God has revealed Himself as one who regularly presents choices. In fact, God is the one who brought Job to Satan's attention for "consideration!"

**And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?"
Job 2:3**

We can't let God off the hook for wanting people to be tested. He seems to be passionate and determined about wanting to put the choice before us about whom we will serve. God doesn't let *Himself* off the hook for allowing evil to exist for a purpose and for a limited time.

**The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.
Proverbs 16:4**

God has a use for everything, and He clearly has a use for Satan, otherwise He wouldn't have made him.

Here's a very clear statement in which God communicates that He wants people to be tested.

**If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.
Deuteronomy 13:1-3**

Testing the loyalty of His people is part of His design for humanity. He sovereignly chose to create Satan as an agent who introduces the option of disobedience to people, but He is not the one who does the evil acts that result from the choice to disobey. He risks the possibility that His creatures will disobey because it is the only way He can attain a real relationship with them! He also tests us because He wants us to come face to face with whether or not we are choosing obedience. He wants to give us opportunities to address the condition of our own hearts so we know what needs to change.

To further make the case that one of the primary ways God uses Satan (and thus allows him to exist) is to test people, here are a few other times we see this happening.

- He took advantage of David's pride to get him to sin.

Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. 1 Chronicles 21:1

- He accused the high priest, Joshua.

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan

standing at his right hand to accuse him. Zechariah 3:1-2

- He tempted Jesus to sin in the wilderness.

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. Luke 4:1-2

- He demanded to sift the disciples like wheat before Jesus' death. He can't demand something from God that he doesn't believe rightfully belongs to him.

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat," Luke 22:31

- He incited Ananias and Sapphira to lie about the money they received for their land.

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?" Acts 5:3

From the Devil's Perspective

God loves and prizes humanity, and the devil hates us because he is opposed to God. At this point, it seems he has no choice. It is his hardened nature, as demonstrated by the enmity that exists between himself and humanity. But while we see him being deceptive and adversarial to individuals in the Old Testament, the depth of his animosity doesn't become revealed until the New Testament, in which he declares war on believers. Why this increased measure of hatred toward believers?

One way to look at it is that Satan did not know about God's plan for the Church until God revealed it through Christ. Clearly, the spirit realm did not know about what God was doing all along until it was accomplished.

...and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Ephesians 3:9-10

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 1 Corinthians 2:7-8

The rulers and authorities were humiliated by what Jesus did.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Colossians 2:15

At the point of the cross, their future condemnation was secured and God made "a public display of them" as it says in the NASB. Now Satan is embarrassed and furious about it—not just hardened! This explains why he wants to destroy us.

How does he think he can win?

I often hear this question asked, especially in the context of end-times prophecy. My thought on the matter is that the devil can only know what God has revealed to him. It is possible that Satan just doesn't really know how powerful God is. You and I know about God's power because the Spirit within us teaches us through His Word, in the context of our experiences within the Body. Satan can know the Bible text by heart, but still not have illumination and insight into what it all really means, like we can. We all marvel at the blindness of unbelievers who can't connect the dots that are obvious to us about creation and redemption. These people are behaving just like their father, the devil.

In practical terms, Satan knows that God has connected the final judgment of all evil and rebellious entities to the "fullness of the Gentiles," which means that when the full number of people come to faith and enter the Body, the end will come. It is likely that Satan and his forces are seeking to postpone their day of judgment by deceiving the nations away from belief in the true God. Perhaps beyond that, he even believes that he could avoid judgment altogether if he can succeed in wiping out the human race by destroying the planet or deceiving people into changing their DNA (a subject we will look at in a future lesson). If he were to do so, he would have prevented God from keeping his promises, and this would be his victory.

The Bottom Line: Satan won't win

We will conclude with the really good news, and we'll keep it extremely simple by looking at the conclusion of a verse we've already seen a couple of times:

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

1 John 3:8

Do you believe God is able to finish the thing he started?