

## Examining Christian Doctrine

### Lesson 34: Satan

The doctrine of Satan explores the identity, origin, and role of the being known as Satan, often referred to as the "adversary" or "accuser" in Scripture. As a created being who fell from grace due to rebellion against God, Satan is portrayed as the leader of spiritual opposition, a deceiver, tempter, and accuser of humanity. This doctrine examines his presence throughout the Bible—from his subtle influence in the Garden of Eden to his ultimate defeat in Revelation—and considers his ongoing role in spiritual warfare. Understanding the doctrine of Satan helps Christians recognize his strategies, affirm God's sovereignty, and rely on Christ's victory for overcoming evil.

#### Meaning, Names, and Titles of Satan

The word, '**Satan**' is a Hebrew word derived from the root word meaning: "to oppose" or "to act as an adversary." The word was not originally thought of as a 'name' but was commonly translated as "adversary" or "accuser." However, this word is both as a title and a proper name throughout the whole of the Bible.

In the New Testament, the Greek word *Diabolos* is used, which is translated as "slanderer" or "devil." This word emphasizes Satan's role as one who spreads lies and accusations. It is found throughout the New Testament, including in Jesus' wilderness temptation (Matthew 4:1).

There are other names, titles, and descriptions given throughout scripture referring to Satan. These also provide us with the functions of Satan.

1. **The Accuser (of the Brethren)** Zechariah 3:1-2 and Revelation 12:10. Satan stands as the one accusing believers before God.
2. **The Tempter** Genesis 3:1-6; Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5. Actively seeks to lead people into sin.
3. **The Evil One** Matthew 13:19; John 17:15; 1 John 5:19. This title underscores Satan's fundamental opposition to all that is good, holy, and righteous.
4. **The Wicked One** Matthew 13:19; 1 John 2:13-14. This title emphasizes Satan's inherently evil nature and opposition to righteousness.
5. **The Serpent** Genesis 3:1 and Revelation 12:9. Represents his subtle, deceptive nature.
6. **The Dragon** Revelation 12:3-9. Portrays Satan as a powerful, chaotic, and destructive force.
7. **The Prince (God) of this World** John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4. Reflects his influence over worldly systems.
8. **The Prince of the Power of the Air** Ephesians 2:2 This title signifies Satan's authority over the realm of the unseen or spiritual forces in the world.
9. **The Father of Lies** John 8:44. Indicates his character as the originator of falsehood and deceit.
10. **Beelzebub** Matthew 12:24; Mark 3:22. A name that likely originates from "Baal-Zebub," and means "lord of the flies" or "lord of dung." It symbolizes Satan's association with false worship and evil.

#### The Nature of Satan

What do we know about the nature of Satan? First of all we know that Satan is a **Created Being**. Satan is not an eternal or self-existent being; he is a creature made by God. This is implied in passages like Ezekiel 28:13-15.

Satan is also a **Personal Being**. Satan is not a vague force or impersonal evil but an actual personal entity with intelligence, will, and emotions. We can tell this from his dialogue with God in Job 1:7 and in the temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11).

However, we also know that Satan's power and knowledge is limited. Therefore, unlike God, Satan is not omnipresent (everywhere at all times), omnipotent (all powerful), or omniscient (all knowing).

## The Origin of Satan

When discussing the origins of Satan, there are two aspects that we normally examine: his creation and his fall. Christianity teaches that Satan was originally an angel named Lucifer, who was filled with pride, rebelled against God, and fell from heaven, taking a host of fallen angels with him. He showed up in the Garden of Eden as a serpent to tempt Eve and now is the chief adversary of God leading his demons against God's plan and people.

In examining these claims of the origins of Satan, there are two main passages that are usually referenced:

- **Ezekiel 28:11-19** *The word of the Lord came to me: <sup>12</sup> "Son of man, take up a lament concerning **the king of Tyre** and say to him: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. <sup>13</sup> **You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: carnelian, chrysolite and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings [or Pipes and Tabrets KJV] were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. <sup>14</sup> You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. <sup>15</sup> You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created **till wickedness was found in you. <sup>16</sup> Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. <sup>17</sup> Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. **So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. <sup>18</sup> By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. <sup>19</sup> All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more."*******
- **Isaiah 14:12-15** *How you have fallen from heaven, **morning star** [or Lucifer], **son of the dawn!** You have been **cast down to the earth**, you who once laid low the nations! <sup>13</sup> You said in your heart, "**I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. <sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.**" <sup>15</sup> But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit. <sup>16</sup> Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate: "Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble*

While Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 were initially understood as prophecies about human rulers (the king of Tyre and the king of Babylon), the interpretation of these passages as referring to Satan began to emerge in Second Temple Judaism and became more pronounced in early Christian theology. By the 3rd to 4th century AD, the connection between these Old Testament texts and the figure of Satan was widely accepted in Christian thought, with Church Fathers like Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, and Augustine helping to solidify this interpretation.

The New Testament also sheds light on Satan and his fall:

- **Luke 10:18** *"He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.'"*
- **1 Timothy 3:6** *"He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil."*
- **Revelation 12:7-9** *"Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him."*

There are also some other extra-Biblical accounts of Satan's fall:

- The Apocalypse of Abraham highlights the role of Azazel (a fallen angel figure, later conflated with Satan) in leading humanity astray and describes his punishment
- The Apocalypse of Moses suggests that Satan was once an honored angel who rebelled due to his pride, refusing to bow to Adam. His refusal to honor God's creation, Adam, led to his downfall.
- John Milton's "Paradise Lost" (published in 1667) became one of the most influential literary works in shaping the modern understanding of the fall of Satan. Milton portrays Satan as a once-glorious archangel who rebels against God and is cast out of heaven, famously stating, "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven."

## Development of the Doctrine of Satan

1. **Ancient Judaism (Old Testament Judaism):** In early Judaism, "Satan" (from the Hebrew *śāṭān*, meaning "adversary" or "accuser") is not a fully personified figure of evil but rather a role, often serving as a divine agent to challenge or test humans under God's sovereignty (e.g., Job 1–2; Zechariah 3:1–2). There is little focus on a singular, malevolent being opposing God.
2. **Second Temple Judaism:** During this period (516 BC–70 AD), the concept of Satan evolved, influenced by Persian thought and Jewish apocalyptic literature like *1 Enoch*. Satan became more personified as a distinct, malevolent being leading fallen angels in rebellion against God. He was seen as an adversary working against God's purposes, fostering sin and chaos in the world.
3. **New Testament Times:** By the time of the New Testament, Satan is depicted as the personification of evil, actively opposing God's kingdom. He tempts Jesus (Matthew 4:1–11), accuses believers (Revelation 12:10), and blinds unbelievers to the truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). The New Testament also highlights Satan's defeat through Christ's death and resurrection, though his final judgment is yet to come (Revelation 20:10).
4. **Early Christianity:** The early church fathers further developed the doctrine of Satan, viewing him as a fallen angel who rebelled against God and continues to influence the world through sin and deception. Writers emphasized Satan's pride and envy as the cause of his fall. Satan's power was seen as ultimately subordinate to Christ's victory, providing a foundation for Christian hope in spiritual warfare.

## Satan in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word Satan is found 27 times in the Old Testament. It is translated as 'satan' 19 times, 'adversary' 7 times, and 'withstand' 1 time. Although we first find Satan appearing in the Garden of Eden as a serpent, we're not told this serpent is Satan until the New Testament writings.

- One of the main Old Testament texts that we find Satan is in **Job 1-2**. The word 'satan' is mentioned 14 times in the first two chapters. Here Satan appears among the 'Sons of God' to accuse Job. While Christians would interpret this as Satan appearing in Heaven among the Angels before God, Jews would have viewed this being as a member of the Divine Council whose role was to act as an adversary against Job.
- Elsewhere in the Old Testament in **Numbers 22:22, 32** we actually see that it is the Angel of the Lord that acts as a 'satan' or 'adversary' to 'withstand' the prophet Balaam. In **1 Samuel 29:4** the Philistines called David a potential 'satan' or 'adversary' in battle against them. In **2 Samuel 19:22** David references Zeruiah's sons as 'satans' against him. In **1 Kings 11:14, 23, and 25** we find that God raised up 'satans' or human 'adversaries' against Solomon. In **Psalms 109:6** David asks God to send a 'satan' to stand against his enemies.
- We find two interesting verses in 1 Chronicles and 2 Samuel, which are parallel verses but in English can create much confusion.

**2 Samuel 24:1** *And again the **anger of the LORD** was kindled against Israel, **and he** moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.*

**1 Chronicles 21:1** *And **Satan** stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.*

Apologists have come up with several ways to explain this seeming contradiction. The most popular explanation is that God permitted Satan to tempt David; Satan did the tempting, but God allowed it.

- The most often used (yet debated) Old Testament scripture referencing a singular being named 'Satan' is in **Zechariah 3:1-2**, "*Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and [the] Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. <sup>2</sup>The Lord said to [the] Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"*

So from these verses, we can almost confidently conclude that most of the Old Testament knew of no single, personal, spiritual foe named Satan in the way that later Christian theology conceptualizes Satan.

## Satan in the New Testament

1. **The Gospels**, Satan is portrayed as the adversary of God and humanity, actively working to oppose Jesus and His mission. He tempts Jesus in the wilderness, seeking to divert Him from His divine purpose (Matthew 4:1–11, Luke 4:1–13). Satan is also associated with the source of sin and demonic activity, such as possessing individuals (Luke 13:16) and being the "father of lies" (John 8:44). Jesus acknowledges Satan's role in influencing human hearts, such as in Judas's betrayal (Luke 22:3) and Peter's denial (Luke 22:31–32). Despite Satan's activity, the Gospels affirm Jesus' authority over him, demonstrated through exorcisms and proclamations of his ultimate defeat (Luke 10:18).
2. In **Acts**, Satan is primarily seen as an antagonist to the growth of the early church. He incites deception, as with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:3), and seeks to hinder the work of the apostles. Opposition to the gospel—whether through sorcery, persecution, or deception—is often attributed to Satanic influence. However, the emphasis in Acts is on the unstoppable advance of God's kingdom, which triumphs over all opposition, including Satan's schemes.
3. In **the Epistles**, Satan is described as a cosmic adversary who seeks to undermine believers and their faith. Paul identifies him as "the god of this age" who blinds unbelievers to the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4) and warns of his schemes in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10–18). He is also seen as a tempter (1 Thessalonians 3:5), deceiver (2 Corinthians 11:14), and accuser (Romans 16:20). While his influence is significant, the Epistles stress that believers can resist him through faith, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the victory of Christ, who disarmed Satan through His death and resurrection (Colossians 2:15).
4. In **Revelation**, Satan is presented as the ultimate enemy of God, symbolized as the great dragon, the serpent, and the deceiver of nations (Revelation 12:9). He is the instigator of cosmic rebellion, waging war against God's people and working through earthly powers. Revelation vividly portrays his defeat: he is cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:7–9), bound during Christ's reign (Revelation 20:1–3), and ultimately thrown into the lake of fire for eternal judgment (Revelation 20:10). The book underscores the certainty of Satan's defeat and the triumph of God's kingdom, offering hope and assurance to believers enduring his opposition.

## Satan and Spiritual Warfare in the Life of the Believer

Satan plays a significant role in **spiritual warfare** in the life of the believer, constantly seeking to undermine faith and hinder spiritual growth. His uses varied and relentless tactics to attack the believer, however you will find in this list that Satan has, not unlimited power, but subtle schemes:

- **He deceives:** Genesis 3:1-5, Revelation 12:9, 2 Corinthians 11:3
- **He lies:** John 8:44, Genesis 3:4
- **He blinds the minds of people:** 2 Corinthians 4:4
- **He accuses:** Job 1:6-12, Revelation 12:10, Zechariah 3:1-2
- **He tempts:** Matthew 4:1-11, 1 Thessalonians 3:5, 1 Corinthians 7:5
- **He throws fiery darts:** Ephesians 6:16
- **He sets traps (or snares):** 1 Timothy 3:7, 2 Timothy 2:26
- **He seeks to devour:** 1 Peter 5:8
- **He tries to hinder:** 1 Thessalonians 2:18
- **He masquerades as an angel of light:** 2 Corinthians 11:14
- **He uses fear of death to enslave people:** Hebrews 2:14-15

## Victory Over Satan

According to Jesus (Matthew 28:18) all power (or authority) is given to Him in heaven and earth. Therefore it's safe to conclude that if Jesus has all authority, then Satan has none. Satan has no legal right or authority in a believer's life. However, from New Testament teaching, the only authority or place that he has in a believer's life is only that which the believer gives him or gives into his schemes.

The power of Satan in the believer's life is significantly limited by several key truths from Scripture, grounded in the work of Christ and the believer's relationship with Him. Despite Satan's active role in spiritual warfare, his ability to harm believers is restricted by God's sovereignty, Christ's victory, and the believer's position in Christ. Here are several ways Satan's power is limited in the believer's life:

1. **Christ's Victory Over Satan:** The ultimate source of Satan's limitation is **Jesus Christ's victory** on the cross. Through His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus triumphed over Satan and the powers of darkness. Colossians 2:15 says, "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." Satan's power was decisively broken, and believers now stand in the victory that Christ has won. Though Satan continues to operate, he does so as a defeated foe. 1 John 3:8 declares that Jesus was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."
2. **The Believer's Union with Christ:** When a believer places faith in Jesus Christ, they are **united with Him** (Romans 6:5, Ephesians 2:6). This union means that they share in Christ's victory and are no longer under the dominion of sin or Satan. Satan no longer has control over the believer's life; they have been transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son (Colossians 1:13). The believer's identity in Christ is secure, and Satan cannot alter that reality.
3. **Indwelling of the Holy Spirit:** Believers are indwelt by the **Holy Spirit**, which is a powerful means by which Satan's influence is limited. 1 John 4:4 declares, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." The presence of the Holy Spirit empowers the believer to resist Satan and live victoriously over sin. The Spirit not only provides strength to resist temptation but also leads believers into truth, reminding them of God's promises and equipping them with spiritual discernment (John 14:26, Romans 8:11).
4. **Authority of the Believer:** In Christ, believers are given **authority** to resist Satan's temptations and attacks. We are told to 'give no place to the devil' (Ephesians 4:27), meaning the only 'place' he has in our lives is the place we give him. James 4:7 commands, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." This implies that while Satan may try to influence, tempt, or attack, believers have the ability to stand firm and say no to him. Through prayer, the Word of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit, the believer can actively resist Satan's schemes. Jesus also granted His followers authority over demonic forces (Luke 10:19), allowing them to command evil spirits to flee.
5. **The Armor of God:** In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul encourages believers to put on the **full armor of God** to stand against Satan's schemes. This armor includes truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. When believers are spiritually equipped, they are protected from Satan's attacks and are able to resist his advances. The armor is a defensive and offensive tool to fight against his lies, accusations, and temptations. Through the shield of faith we can quench *all* the fiery darts of the wicked.
6. **God's Sovereignty and Protection:** Satan's power is also limited by God's **sovereign will** and protection over the believer. While God allows trials and spiritual battles for the purpose of strengthening the believer's faith, He always provides a way of escape and does not allow believers to be tempted beyond what they can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). This means that Satan cannot have free reign in the believer's life; God is always in control, working everything for good (Romans 8:28).
7. **Christ's Intercession:** Finally, Satan's ability to accuse and condemn the believer is limited by the **intercession of Christ**. Romans 8:34 says, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." When Satan accuses believers, Jesus stands as their advocate, reminding the Father of His finished work on the cross and declaring them righteous. No accusation of Satan can stand before the intercession of Christ.