

Understanding Satan

Lesson 3: Satan's Nature

Understanding Satan's origin and mission will help us better understand what his nature has come to be (though this was *not* the nature he was created to possess). Remember that God created Satan as a pure being with free will (as He has with all spiritual beings, including people). But, Satan has corrupted his nature to become what it is (John 8:44). Specifically, I want to focus on the ways the Bible identifies and describes him so as to observe what these teach us about Satan's nature and help us be better prepared to face him.

1) Satan. The Hebrew and Greek words for "Satan" both have the meaning of him being the adversary. That is, he opposes God and the good purposes of those trying to serve God. The English word "Satan" is found in many Scriptures and is used as a name for this evil being (Job 1:6-12; Matthew 4:10; 12:25-27; Acts 5:3; 1 Corinthians 7:5). Satan is pictured as being one who snatches away the word about God's kingdom from people's hearts so they will not be saved (Matthew 13:4, 19) and as being an enemy who influences evil in the world (Matthew 13:24-25, 37-39). In fact, what he is doing is so contrary to what is good and helpful that he is described as a murderer (John 8:44) and our enemy (1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:11-12, 16).

2) The devil. The main idea of the term "devil" is that of being a slanderer and false accuser. That is, he is trying to mislead and position those who should be on the same side against each other (i.e. you and God). In the New Testament, this term is applied to the opponent of God and humankind almost as often as the term "Satan" (Matthew 4:1, 5, 8, 11; Luke 4:1-13; 8:12; Matthew 13:37-39; Ephesians 4:26-27; 2 Timothy 2:26; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Jude 1:9). This identification of Satan helps us learn the primary way he works: Lies and deceptions (whether subtle or blatant) in attacking the character, reputation, and credibility of others.

We can see Satan attempting to falsely accuse people to God (Job 1:6-12; Revelation 12:10), attempting to falsely accuse God to people (Genesis 3:1-6; Matthew 4:5-7), and attempting to falsely accuse people to other people (Acts 5:1-4; 2 Timothy 3:1-5). In fact, he is the father of lies who has no truth in him (John 8:44) and the deceiver of the world (Revelation 12:9; 20:10), who even disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

3) The tempter. This term refers to one who puts another to the test. Particularly, in the case of Satan, he works to test people by luring them away from God in hopes they will choose to do evil (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; Mark 1:13; 1 Corinthians 7:5). Tempting is clearly designated as Satan's work/desire to do what he can to influence people to sin and lure people from God (James 1:13-15).

4) Belial. The main idea of this word appears to refer one who is worthless and wicked. The Old Testament contains various references to "Belial" in the *King James Version* of the Bible (i.e. Judges 19:22; 20:13; 1 Samuel 1:16). In the New Testament, it is only used once – and is seemingly applied to Satan (2 Corinthians 6:15). Similarly, Satan is often referred to as the "wicked/evil one" (Matthew 5:37; 6:13; 13:38-39; John 17:15; Ephesians 6:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 John 2:13-14; 3:12), who is full of sin and evil (1 John 3:8).

5) Beelzebul (Beelzebub). The main idea of this word appears to refer to the ruler over wickedness. Jesus used this term in a clear reference to Satan in Matthew 12:22-27 (compare with Mark 3:20-26; Luke 11:14-19). So, he is not *just* one of many who are wicked; but the ruler over those who are wicked (Matthew 25:41; 2 Corinthians 4:4; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Ephesians 2:2).

6) Abaddon and Apollyon. "Abaddon" is a Hebrew word for "Destruction" and "Apollyon" is a

Greek word for “Destroyer.” Both terms are used in Revelation 9:11 and appear to be a reference to Satan (also called “the angel of the abyss”). In context, the Revelation is picturing God’s judgment that would be brought upon the wicked world (particularly the Roman Empire, 9:4) that had been persecuting God’s people (the church). The fifth trumpet blast is pictured here with the destruction Satan would unleash on the wicked. Certainly, Satan always leaves destruction behind in whatever he influences.

7) The ancient serpent and great dragon.

These terms picture Satan as being creatures that bring certain ideas to the human mind. He is identified as the ancient serpent (Revelation 12:9, 14-15), harkening back to Satan’s use of the serpent in Genesis 3:1-6 in his deception of Adam and Eve (which was the most cunning of all wild animals, v. 1). Then, he is identified as a fierce and great dragon (Revelation 12:3-4, 9, 13-17). Certainly, God’s choices to describe Satan in these ways (also as a roaring lion, 1 Peter 5:8) present the clear message that Satan is vicious and trying to destroy people spiritually.

Satan is identified in many ways throughout the pages of Scripture. As we have seen, they are useful in describing his nature. The clear and consistent message in all of these is that Satan is evil and working against God and all that is good and right. So, as you remind yourself of these identifications, Satan should always be viewed as the enemy working to destroy you!

Discipleship Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correcting: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God’s service?