

Understanding Satan



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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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Understanding Satan

Lesson 1: Satan's Origin

Satan is presented as the enemy of humanity from the first time he is introduced to the Bible reader (Genesis 3:1-6; Revelation 12:9; 1 Peter 5:8). In fact, the Bible identifies that we are fighting in a war for our souls against him (Ephesians 6:10-18). Just like in a physical war, it is important to understand the enemy. The more we can understand about Satan, the better equipped we can be to defend against his attacks and emerge victorious. Thankfully, God has given us all we need to know in the Scriptures to understand Satan (2 Corinthians 2:11). Understanding Satan's origin, then, will lay some critical foundations in our fight against him.

1) Three options concerning Satan's origin. Understanding what the Bible says about the origin of Satan will help us speak according to God's words (1 Peter 4:11) and conclude he can be defeated. Options concerning his origin can be summarized by three possibilities. The first possibility is that Satan does not exist. According to this, Satan is just the personification of evil who is a myth rather than a real enemy. Yet, this view cannot be accepted by anyone who believes the Bible to be true (Genesis 3:1-6; Job 1:6-12; Matthew 4:1-11; 1 Peter 5:8-9) and it results in not treating Satan as seriously as we should. The second possibility is that Satan is eternal. According to this, Satan is elevated to possessing a characteristic only God possesses as having no beginning or end. Yet, this view cannot be accepted by anyone who believes the Bible to be true, since God is the only one who is eternal (Psalm 90:2; Revelation 4:8) and it results in believing Satan is equal to God and more capable than he really is (Job 1:12; 2:6-7; Matthew 4:11; Luke 22:31; John 10:28-29; 14:30; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 John 4:4; Revelation 20:1-3).

The third possibility is that Satan was created. According to this, Satan is a real enemy but

is not viewed as being equal to God. This view is the only one that fits with the Scriptures (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17) and recognizes Satan as a created spiritual being (Ephesians 2:2) who fails to possess the nature of God so as to be worthy of worship and service (Romans 1:18-25). Yet, how could the holy and righteous God create an evil being like Satan? This question, though, *assumes* Satan was created in his current evil condition. Instead, just as God created people as good and free from evil, we must conclude God also created Satan as being good and free from evil (Genesis 1:31; 1 Timothy 4:4). For, God is completely holy and is never the originator of evil (Deuteronomy 32:4; James 1:17; 1 John 1:5)!

2) How Satan became the enemy. The Bible does not give us every detail about Satan's fall. Therefore, we must be careful *not* to assert anything to be true that cannot be supported by the Scriptures (1 Peter 4:11; Deuteronomy 29:29)! Still, there are a few conclusions we can know that are crucial to a proper understanding. First, Satan was created with free will. Scripture shows how angels make their own choices between right and wrong (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6). This must have been true concerning Satan for him to turn from good to evil. Second, Satan chose to do evil. Many scriptures connect Satan with evil (John 8:44; 1 Timothy 3:6; 1 John 3:8). Though these passages lack details about Satan's rebellion, they clearly show it did happen. Third, Satan is now the ruler of the demons. Regardless of how Satan rebelled, we can see that he is not just one among the many angels/spiritual beings who rebelled. Instead, he is clearly the leader of this evil multitude (Mark 3:22-23; Matthew 25:41; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

3) Examining some misused passages. Although we would often like to know more details about what specifically happened for Satan to turn from good to evil, the Scriptures do not tell us. Yet,

this has not stopped many from contriving stories about his origin and even misusing some scriptures to fill in the details. A closer look at these scriptures, though, will reveal they do not teach what they are said to teach. Consider four passages.

First, consider Isaiah 14:12-15. Although many apply this text to Satan (where we get the word “Lucifer” in certain translations, simply referring to the morning star), the text is actually speaking about the downfall of the king of Babylon (vv. 3-4). Second, consider Ezekiel 28:13-17. Although this passage is commonly used to describe Satan’s fall, the chapter reveals God is using strong imagery concerning the king/ruler of Tyre (vv. 2, 12) and his pride (vv. 2, 17). Third, consider Revelation 12:7-9. Although this passage does speak about Satan (unlike the previous two), this passage pictures how God conquers Satan through Jesus and how those who follow Jesus will emerge victorious (notice how Jesus has been born and ascended to God, vv. 5, 7) rather than speaking about Satan’s origin. Fourth, consider Luke 10:18. Although this passage also specifically identifies Satan, the context is speaking about how Satan and his demons submit to Jesus’s name (v. 17) rather than speaking about Satan’s origin.

Satan is the clear enemy of every person who has ever lived. Yet, understanding his origin should encourage us that he can be defeated! For, while he is a real spiritual being who has many followers, he is far inferior to God. And, although we do not know every detail of how Satan has become evil, we can plainly see that God has provided the victory over Satan through Jesus Christ!

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?

Understanding Satan

Lesson 2: Satan's Mission

Now that we understand Satan's origin to the extent God gives us information, we should recognize his limitations in comparison to God. So, what exactly is he trying to accomplish? If you are going to be successful in fighting against Satan, it will be helpful for you to have a proper understanding of his mission. For, just as we do not have to be ignorant of his schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11), we do not have to be ignorant of his mission.

1) Satan's fate is sealed. In the first lesson, we considered the fact that Satan has sinned (John 8:44; 1 Timothy 3:6; 1 John 3:8). One of the reasons this is significant is because the Scriptures seem to paint the picture that angels/spiritual beings are ineligible to access the grace and mercy of God (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6; 1 Peter 1:10-12; Hebrews 2:14-18). So, Satan is fighting a losing war. For, the Scriptures present God as having an eternal plan to save people from sin (Ephesians 3:8-11; 1 Peter 1:20-21) – and Satan as being defeated (Genesis 3:14-15). Revelation 12 then connects with this prophecy and demonstrates the victory God provided through Jesus Christ in vivid imagery of a spiritual battle. The various pieces we see throughout this chapter are the dragon and ancient serpent (Satan, vv. 3, 9), the woman (representative of God's people, vv. 1, 5, 17 – the faithful remnant of Israel and then the church), and the Child (Jesus, vv. 4-5). Through the physical lineage of Israel, Jesus came into this world and destroyed the works of the devil (ultimately through His death, burial, and resurrection, vv. 3-5, 9-11; Hebrews 2:14-18; 1 John 3:8). Many passages demonstrate the victory God has provided over Satan for those who believe and obey Him (Romans 8:37-39; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 50-58; Ephesians 6:10-18; Colossians 1:13-14, 18-20; 1 John 5:1-4; Revelation 2:9-11). Satan is now headed for an eternity of suffering in the fires of Hell (Revelation 20:10; Matthew 25:41)!

2) Satan is waging a spiritual war. Satan has been defeated – and he is not happy about how things have turned out for him (Revelation 12:3-4, 12, 13-17)! As Satan cannot be victorious over God, he is focused today on the destruction of the zenith of God's creation on this earth – men and women, who are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27)! We see his attacks from the beginning of human history (Genesis 3:1-6) and continuing ever since (Romans 5:12). Today, Satan continues to want others to be destroyed spiritually and to influence those who are created in the Maker's image to rebel against His authority and live under his own rule (Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:13; 2 Timothy 2:26). This spiritual war between good and evil (light and darkness; flesh and spirit) is depicted in various New Testament passages (Galatians 5:16-17, 24; 1 Peter 2:11; Ephesians 6:10-18). God allows this war to be fought, perhaps, because this allows God to be glorified in an even greater way. For example, just as God used the wicked Pharaoh to glorify Himself (Exodus 9:15-16; Romans 9:17), God is glorified when people choose Him over Satan (Ephesians 1:3-12; Romans 5:12-21).

3) Satan's goal. Consider three basic things Satan is trying to accomplish. First, he is trying to deceive. This is what we see him doing with Eve in Genesis 3:1-6 – manipulating her to disregard what God has said and to believe that something harmful is actually pleasant and useful! He continues to do the same today (John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 4:4). Second, he is trying to destroy. As Satan is successful in deceiving, the result is spiritual destruction (as sin separates people from God, Romans 1:18; 6:23). He is even pictured as a roaring lion prowling around this earth looking for anyone he can devour (1 Peter 5:8). Third, he is trying to deploy. Satan is not just content with deceiving some so they are destroyed. Rather, he

is pictured as reigning over his own kingdom and now working in those who are disobedient (Ephesians 2:1-2; Colossians 1:13) to deceive, destroy, and deploy others (Matthew 16:21-23).

4) Those in Satan's sights. Satan would like to turn every person in this world away from God. And, Satan accomplishes this (Romans 3:9-18, 23). He has many traps set for people throughout this world (1 Timothy 6:9; 2 Timothy 2:26). As his influences result in every person sinning against God, he then works to fight against the gospel that God uses to make the way of salvation known (Matthew 13:4, 19, 24-26, 37-39; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Then, Satan is not content to just have most people in this world worshipping him. Instead, he is also trying influence those who have been rescued from his traps so they will return to him (Matthew 13:5-8, 20-23; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Hebrews 10:26-39). Sometimes these attacks against Jesus's church come internally (Acts 20:28-31) and other times externally (Revelation 2:9-11).

Satan knows his fate is sealed and he is furiously trying to bring spiritual destruction to as many as possible before this day comes. Recognizing this mission of Satan should create both a great awareness of what Satan is doing as well as a desire to better understand how he is trying to accomplish it. For, now that we better understand what he is trying to do and why he is trying to do it, we can better equip ourselves and others against him.

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?

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) Beelzebub (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?

Understanding Satan

Lesson 4: Satan's Tactics

Having seen that Satan desires to destroy us, we now must consider how he is trying to do this. For, the Bible makes it clear that Satan is trying to attack, entrap, and destroy you (Ephesians 6:16; 2 Timothy 2:26; 1 Peter 5:8). Fortunately, God has revealed Satan's strategies for attacking us (Ephesians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 2:11). If you want to be successful in overcoming Satan, you must be able to identify these tactics.

1) Deception (John 8:44). Consider how Satan uses doubt. Satan works to undermine the trust people would have in God. For example, this was at the heart of how Satan tempted Eve (Genesis 3:1-6) – to get her to doubt what God said (v. 1), that the consequences were real (v. 4), and that God was looking out for her best interests (v. 5). Satan knows that doubt will lead people to disobeying God (Hebrews 11:1, 6)!

Consider how Satan uses the distortion of reality. Like a master magician, Satan wants to create false illusions about how people see things related to this life so they do not please God. For example, Satan worked so Eve would have a distorted perspective of the tree (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:2-3, 6). Satan works to harden/blind people's hearts to the truth of God's word so they do not believe and obey God (Luke 8:5, 12; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 3:12-13)!

Consider how Satan uses religious lies. Although Satan would like people not to believe in God or think about having a spiritual nature at all, he can still attack those who do choose to be religious. For example, Satan worked to deceive Eve (Genesis 3:1, 4-5) and Jesus (Matthew 4:5-7) even though both believed God is real. Satan continues to spread religious lies by even disguising himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Timothy 4:1-2)!

2) Worldly desires (1 John 2:15-17).

Consider how Satan uses the lust of the flesh. He knows we are spiritual beings in physical bodies and attacks us by appealing to the desires of our physical bodies (Romans 7:14; Hebrews 11:24-26). For example, Eve saw the tree as good for food (Genesis 3:6) and Jesus was tempted both with desire for food (Matthew 4:3) and to have the kingdoms of the world without suffering (vv. 8-9). Satan works to entice us to do many works of the flesh today (James 1:14-15; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 7:2-5)!

Consider how Satan uses the lust of the eyes. Satan wants to make worldly things look as enticing as possible. For example, Eve saw the tree as something delightful to look at (Genesis 3:6) and Jesus was tempted to look at the kingdoms of the world (Matthew 4:8-9). Satan knows how to make sin (which creates destruction, suffering, and pain) look enticing – such as the appearance of someone sexually (Proverbs 6:25), intoxicating drink (Proverbs 23:31), another's possessions (Exodus 20:17), etc.!

Consider how Satan uses the pride of life. As Satan is filled with pride (1 Timothy 3:6), he knows the more we inflate our estimation of self and worldly things, the less opportunity we give God to influence our lives. For example, Eve sought wisdom that was different from God's (Genesis 3:6) and Jesus was tempted to prove He was the Son of God (Matthew 4:5-6). Satan wants us to think of things related to our earthly lives in a pride-filled way (i.e. knowledge, wisdom, possessions, abilities, wealth, etc., James 4:6; Proverbs 16:18; Daniel 4:28-37)!

3) Suffering (2 Corinthians 12:6-10).

Consider how Satan uses trials. Satan has some power to inflict people with trials of various sorts to cause suffering and test one's faith. For example, this was the case regarding Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians

12:7) and Job's many tests (Job 1:6-19; 2:1-8). Satan continues to use physical pain, financial loss, relationship loss, etc. to attack our faith and defeat us (James 1:13)!

Consider how Satan uses persecutions. Persecutions allow Satan to bring physical and emotional consequences to those who follow Jesus. For example, Satan was going to test the Christians in Smyrna with persecution (Revelation 2:10) and Jesus's disciples are often warned of such attacks (Matthew 5:10-12; 10:34-39; 16:24-27; 2 Timothy 3:12). Satan uses various types of persecution to try and destroy the faith of those he was unsuccessful in convincing to reject the Lord initially (Luke 8:12-13; Revelation 12:13-17)!

Consider how Satan uses death. Satan is the one who was behind the introduction of death into this world (both physically and spiritually, Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-6), so people will fear death (Hebrews 2:14-15). For example, Satan can use the fear of death to deter people from faith (Matthew 10:28; Revelation 2:10) and to encourage the pursuit of earthly enjoyments (1 Corinthians 15:12-19, 32). Satan is happy to continue using the leverage of death over those who fear this experience (though death has no power over those in Christ, Matthew 16:18)!

Although there may be other tactics Satan uses to defeat us besides these, we must carefully identify his tactics through a study of Scripture. Then, we should also recognize that he can use multiple tactics in conjunction with each other (as he did with Eve and Jesus). Knowing that he attacks us in these ways should cause us to put the appropriate defenses in place (Ephesians 6:10-18)!

Thought Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What are some key lessons learned 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 teaching to be trained in righteousness and equipped for every good work?

Understanding Satan

Lesson 5: Satan's Kingdom

Satan is not working alone to accomplish all that he does (i.e. carrying out the various tactics against us). Remember that Satan is *not* God and so he cannot be everywhere at all times, doing whatever he wants, with full knowledge of everything that happens. So, he does not directly do everything connected with evil. Instead, he is ruler over a kingdom of those who are helping him accomplish his mission (Matthew 12:26; Acts 26:17-18; Colossians 1:13). Recognizing these who work with Satan will help you be better prepared for his attacks.

1) Spiritual beings. Satan is described as the ruler of spiritual forces (associated with being in the air, Ephesians 2:2) and the Christian's warfare is said to be against spiritual forces rather than human ones (Ephesians 6:10-12). This is why God's people must be equipped with spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:13, 10-18). Though we do not have many details about how the spiritual beings who are aligned with Satan are organized and function, we do know they exist and work within Satan's kingdom against us (Ephesians 6:12; Matthew 25:41; Matthew 12:24-27; Luke 7:21; Revelation 12:7-9, 17; 1 Timothy 4:1-3)! Then, while we are not told much about how Satan's spiritual forces work against us today, we do know they are limited and can be defeated in whatever ways they can work (1 Corinthians 10:13; Ephesians 6:10-18). Furthermore, I believe the Scriptures lead us to the conclusion that demon possession (as occurred in New Testament times) ended with the cessation of miraculous gifts given to people (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). So, Satan and his forces must continue their work through other means (i.e. temptations, trials, influencing other people to teach falsely, etc.).

2) Governmental authorities. Throughout history, there have been both good and wicked rulers. As every person functions as part of an earthly nation/kingdom, we are all subject to the laws and regulations of those in positions of authority. When these rulers are wicked and oppose what God desires

and requires, they can work to influence people not to obey God (Acts 4:17; Daniel 3, 6). Satan and his allies deceive and manipulate people in positions of authority so they can be used to bring about negative influences on a broader scale for Satan's cause than most people can. For example, this is how Satan used the Roman empire against Christians in the first centuries (Revelation 13:1-2, 6-7). Although not all governmental authorities are evil (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17), these can be used by Satan so as to work against what is good and right (i.e. through persecutions, the formations of law contrary to God's laws, pressure to conform to ungodly standards and beliefs, etc.). Therefore, while we are to respectfully obey these rulers, we must always be prepared to obey God above them (Acts 5:27-32)!

3) False teachers. The Bible often warns about false prophets and false teachers as being real threats to serving God (Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 1:7-11; Jude 1:3-4). In fact, Jesus describes those who would teach such perversions of God's word as wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15-20; Acts 20:28-31). For, they distort the truth and mislead others while disguised as servants of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). These who teach false messages disguised as the true gospel, then, are not true servants of Jesus Christ; but are servants of Satan (Romans 16:17-18, though many of these may also have been deceived themselves). Satan has been working to pervert the word of God since the first recorded temptation (Genesis 3:1-6; Matthew 4:5-6). Then, since the time the gospel was first preached, Satan has been trying to influence people to distort it in some way. Now, there have been nearly 2,000 years of distortions to the truth and tens of thousands of different types of churches established that all believe, teach, and practice different versions of the "Christian faith." So, there are many perversions of truth religious people

often encounter that hinder them from finding God (2 Peter 3:14-18).

4) Various human servants. Notice carefully how Satan worked through people in the Scriptures in various ways to influence others to sin. These include: Eve (Genesis 3:6, 11-13), Cain (1 John 3:11-12; Genesis 4:1-8), some Jews (John 8:44), Peter (Matthew 16:21-23), Judas (Luke 22:2-6; John 13:27), etc. Today, Satan has many servants on earth cooperating with him (whether knowingly or unknowingly), as he is the god most people worship and serve (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19; 2 Timothy 2:26; 1 John 3:8-10)! While this certainly applies to those who are obviously wicked, he can even use those who are generally committed to what is good and right (i.e. Peter). So, as you live around and interact with people regularly, these present Satan with excellent opportunities to influence you (Ephesians 2:2). Particularly, Satan can use those he has been successful influencing to pressure you to conform to the world's standard of beliefs and conduct that are under his sway (1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 1:10-19; Isaiah 5:20). In this way, Satan has people all over this world influencing others for his cause. Yet, God urges those people to be transformed and provides the escape for those who want to turn from darkness to light (Romans 12:1-2; Acts 26:17-18; Colossians 1:13)!

Satan is not alone in the mission he is trying to accomplish. Instead, he has an entire kingdom of those who are helping him (whether they do so knowingly or unknowingly). Although we do not have a complete knowledge of how those in this kingdom operate, we know they are leveraging the same tactics against us that Satan uses. Therefore, the same armor God gives us to defeat Satan is also successful against them (Ephesians 6:10-18)!

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?

Understanding Satan

Lesson 6: Satan's Limitations

Throughout this study, we have seen much about the power and influence Satan is using to defeat us. However, it is a great mistake to see Satan as having unlimited power. For, if Satan is not limited, then there is no assurance that we can be victorious over him (contrary to passages like 1 Corinthians 15:57). While Satan does not want us to recognize his limitations, these are key to finding the path to victory!

1) Satan cannot do what only God can do.

Satan is a created spiritual being who does not possess the nature of being God. Satan is *not* eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present. For example, compare how God's presence is everywhere (Psalm 139:7-12), while Satan is pictured as roaming around specific places on the earth (Job 1:6-7). Also, compare how God can do anything (Job 42:2), while Satan is seen as being bound (Revelation 20:1-3). Therefore, Satan is always inferior to God and simply unable to match up with God! Notice how Satan was not even able to prevail when fighting Michael and his angels (Revelation 12:7-12) and was seized and bound by an angel (Revelation 20:1-3). If an angel (who is inferior to God) can do this, then God is far greater than Satan! While Satan is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4), he did not come to this position because he defeated God. Rather, it was because God allowed him to exercise his free will and tempt others to do the same. So, God is greater than Satan in every respect (1 John 4:4)!

2) Satan cannot do whatever he wants to do. There is an interesting scene in Job 1:6, as spiritual beings present themselves before God. Interestingly, Satan is also there to present himself before God (also 2:1). Despite not knowing all the details of how this works, it demonstrates that Satan is accountable to God and limited by God in what he does! He is not, therefore, some rogue enemy of God

who God has no control over or knowledge about. Similarly, consider Luke 22:31-34, which pictures Satan as having asked/demanded of God to sift Peter and the other apostles as wheat. Therefore, we can see that God imposes limits on Satan he cannot cross. In the Job 1-2 account, God is seen limiting Satan on two different occasions. In the first (Job 1:12), God allowed Satan to touch Job's possessions and children, but not touch Job himself (Job 1:13-19). In the second, (Job 2:6), God allowed Satan to touch Job's health, but not take his life (Job 2:7). Satan had to abide by the limitations God put in place! The same thing can also be inferred from Revelation 20:1-3.

3) Satan cannot make anyone sin. God being able to limit Satan means that Satan cannot attack us in relentless ways that are greater than we can endure (1 Corinthians 10:13)! We are always able to choose the right path, despite Satan's temptations. For, he is only the tempter and whether we sin is our own decision (James 1:14-15). Notice how Adam and Eve's attempt to blame others (including Satan) failed to justify their sin (Genesis 3:11-13) and they were individually held accountable (Genesis 3:14-19). Just as Jesus resisted Satan's temptation (Matthew 4:1-11), God promises those who submit to His will and resist the devil will have Satan flee from them (James 4:7). For, Satan has no weapon or tactic in his arsenal that can penetrate the armor God has provided for people to overcome him (Ephesians 6:10-18). Furthermore, as Satan cannot make anyone sin, he is incapable of stealing anyone away from God without their consent (John 10:28-29; Romans 8:31-39). While Satan tempts us through various means so that we choose to leave the safety of God's love, he cannot rip us away from God contrary to our consent!

4) Satan cannot escape his fate. God is fully aware of the sin Satan has committed (John 8:44; 1 Timothy 3:6; 1 John 3:8) and he will suffer the

consequences for them. God knows how Satan is trying to work against the people God has created in His image – and Satan’s deeds will not go unpunished. The end of Satan’s attempts to destroy people are pictured in Revelation 20:7-10. While this passage is *not* speaking of a literal thousand years or an earthly battle that will take place, it does depict Satan’s attempt to fight against God’s people before Jesus comes again. Yet, despite all Satan’s efforts, God wins – and Satan and those with him are defeated to spend eternity in Hell (Matthew 25:41)! Therefore, Satan cannot be saved. The Bible never depicts Satan or any other angelic being as having access to the grace and mercy of God, having seen God but rebelled anyways. Satan and his entire kingdom *will be* defeated (Revelation 20:10, 11-15; 21:8, 27). Those who serve God faithfully will be forever delivered from Satan’s attacks eternally in Heaven, while Satan and his allies will suffer eternally in Hell!

While Satan is a powerful spiritual being, he is no match for God – and it’s not close! Although God allows Satan to work in various ways to provide tests for people today, Satan has no chance of emerging victorious over God and those who faithfully serve God. Therefore, as you consider how you can prepare your defenses against Satan, you can use all these lessons to know Satan is greatly limited in what he can do and determine to follow the blueprint God has given you in the Scriptures to defeat him (i.e. Matthew 4:1-11; Ephesians 6:10-18; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9)! For, in the end, you must realize that God wins and will deliver victory to His kingdom, while the devil and his kingdom will be defeated (Colossians 1:13-14)!

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?