

Sermon: Is Satan Real or a Figment of our Imagination?

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Introduction

Today's message is rooted in the belief that the Bible is the word of God, inspired and accurate. This is point 1 of our Statement of Faith. Thus it is a critical piece for our time this morning. We accept it as truth since it is a pivotal doctrinal belief that we hold as a people of God. We will be looking at lots of scripture today, so keep your Bibles handy.

A. Is Satan Real or a figment of our imagination?

1. Created by God; Nehemiah 9:6, Psalm 148: 2 and 5

As we delve into the subject this morning I want to answer our question earlier rather than later. Is Satan real? The simple answer is, YES! The problem is that most of us live our lives day to day as if the answer were no. We live as though he was a legendary figure, or a myth, or that he is non-relevant to an enlightened, intelligent society.

This attitude is expressed by Elaine Pagels an "Award winning" writer for her work on "The Gnostic Gospels." She writes the following:

Certain writers of the sixth century B.C.E. took a bold step further. They used mythological imagery to characterize their struggle against some of their fellow Israelites. But when Israelite writers excoriated their fellow Jews in mythological terms, the images they chose were usually not the animalistic or monstrous ones they regularly applied to their foreign enemies. Instead of Rahab, Leviathan, or "the dragon," most often they identified their Jewish enemies with an exalted, if treacherous, member of the divine court whom they called the satan. The satan is not an animal or monster but one of God's angels, a being of superior intelligence and status; apparently the Israelites saw their intimate enemies not as beasts and monsters but as superhuman beings whose superior qualities and insider status could make them more dangerous than the alien enemy.¹

Did you catch what she said, that Biblical writers made up mythological imagery to describe their enemies? She makes her case well enough throughout her book that the New York Times endorses her book with this statement, "Pagels traces the relationship between the embattled members of a breakaway Jewish sect and the myth they invoked to explain their persecution." Basically they are saying, Satan is a myth, made up to explain undesired circumstances. I found her book problematic in that she quotes lots of historians and lots of philosophers but it does not appear that she has ever

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interviewed any Evangelical Leaders who are Godly people. That makes her work suspect as to prejudice.

But our question is, is she right? Is Satan just a myth, or at best a good Angel who has been demonized by Christians to explain persecution. The answer is no, and here are five points that will clarify for us that Satan is real physically and not just a myth.

Let's look at some scripture. Nehemiah 9:6 reads, ***You alone are the Lord, You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything and the multitudes of heaven worship you.*** Here we have a description of the Lord as magnificent, powerful, and the creator of all things. He even created the heavens, even the highest heavens and their entire starry host. This references the Angels as created creatures of the Lord Most High.

A second scripture to look at is Psalm 148 verses 2 and 5, ***Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts vs 5, Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created.*** This scripture further clarifies that the angels were created by the Lord.

But does that alone prove that Satan is real? Let's look at more scripture.

2. Satan was originally a beautiful angel on the same level as Michael the Arch Angel; Isaiah 14:12-15, refers to Satan as "O Day Star"

Isaiah 14:12-15 gives us a description of Satan. Isaiah describes in this chapter how the King of Babylon will be treated by the house of Israel; how he will be devastated and go into the grave. If you study Isaiah and the book of Revelation, you will learn of the correlation of Babylon with Satan, the Anti-Christ, and the false prophet. This is discussion of end times. In verse 12 of chapter 14, Isaiah takes a turn from describing the King of Babylon to talking very much about Satan. Here is what he says,

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.

Satan is described as the morning star, son of the dawn! This is figurative and describes his status as one of the highest of the angels of the creation. But things go terribly wrong and Satan turns from what he was created to do and strives to usurp God as the Most High.

3. Fought with Michael the Arch Angel; Revelation 12:7-9

Let's look at Revelation 12:7-9. It reads, *And there was war 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.*

We have here a description of what took place amongst the created heavenly hosts, the starry hosts. Satan as described in Isaiah started to have delusions of grandeur and sinned. Eventually he and Michael the arch angel engage in a war in the spiritual realm. Michael and his angels prevail. Satan and his angels (a third of the host of angels) are cast down out of heaven, they lose their position amongst the angels and lose the ability to carry out the function for which they were created.

4. Speaks with man; Genesis 3

Next in Genesis 3 we have the passage where Satan first appears to man, as a crafty creature, a serpent who deceptively lies to the man and woman about what God said and what God's intentions were. He deceives them into desiring to become like God. As you read this, you see the desire of Satan's heart in this. He wanted to become like God. Actually, he wanted to become greater than God. He lost his battle, as we saw earlier, so now he has a new tactic, and that is to corrupt everything else that God created. But let's not pursue that further at this time. Let's save that for later. Let's go on to the final point in our first section.

5. Speaks with Jesus, Matthew 4:1-11

Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 4:1-11 and let's read that together. This also is a very familiar passage. Let's read "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels

concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."

As we see here, Satan comes to Christ at a time when Christ is vulnerable. He has been in the desert for 40 days and has been fasting. He's hungry, he's tired and he's physically weak. Satan attacks and Christ fights back and defeats the wiles of the devil. Again, we will return to this scripture a little later.

So, what have these five points shown us? They show us that Satan was created by God, he was beautiful and given some authority over other angels. He got power hungry and had a war with Michael and the other angels of Heaven; he lost and was cast out of heaven. He then appears physically in the form of a serpent and talks with man and finally he appears to Jesus and tempts him while he is in the desert. These Scriptures present us with evidence of who Satan is and that he exists in physical form and appearance. He is not a myth. He is not a figment of our imagination. He is a real physical creation of God who has turned from good to evil and is now the enemy of our Creator, our Lord and Savior.

With that established, let's move on quickly to other thoughts about Satan.

B. Why did God create him and other Angels?

Given what we have studied so far this morning you might be asking yourself the question, "So why did God create Satan in the first place?" That's a great question. It basically can be restated, "Why did God create Angels in the first place?" We can do this because we have established that Satan was an Angel. There are two points that we will see in regards to this; both come from Scripture in Psalms.

1. To Praise Him; Psalm 148:2

Let's first read Psalm 148:2, "*Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts.*" We see here that their first task was to give praise to God.

2. To do His bidding; Psalm 103:20-21

The second task we find in Psalm 103:20-21, *“Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his words. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.”* Again we have the term Praise, but added to this task is the wording, to do his bidding or secondarily described in the next verse as to do his will.

The Angels were created to bring God honor and glory, to praise him at all times. In the book of Revelation we read that there are angels who continually are around the throne calling out *“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.”*

Further, Angels are to do God’s bidding. Throughout Scripture we learn how Angels are the Messengers of God. They bring messages, instructions, and directions from God to people on earth. Gideon had an Angel appear to deliver the commission to him of being a mighty warrior. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was visited by an Angel who told her of the favor she had found with God and the special task that she was to be given. Zechariah was approached by an Angel while he was on duty in the temple to be told about his son John and the task John was to serve. And one final example was the Angel in the Garden to confirm that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead.

Thus Angels were created to do God’s will. To serve Him. Satan was part of that contingent as were the third of the angels who ended up following Him. But they aspired to do something other than the will of God and were defeated in their attempt and thrown out of heaven.

C. What is Satan trying to accomplish at this time?

1. The Hebrew word for Satan is defined as “Adversary”.

So, now we have an additional question to ask, *“What is Satan trying to accomplish at this time?”* I have four points that we will walk through fairly quickly. First, let’s talk about the Hebrew word for Satan. It is defined as *“Adversary”*. This gives us a great one word summary of what Satan is trying to accomplish. He is the adversary of God. He is trying to do everything he can to frustrate the Almighty.

2. To become like the Most High, Isaiah 14:13-14

Second, Satan wants to become like God, or better yet to become greater than God. Let’s look back at Isaiah 14:13-14, *“You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights*

of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”

Satan desired to become God, to rule all creation, to have the greatest of authority. Most often when you hear preachers talk about the sin of Satan, they say it ultimately was “pride.” Satan wanted to be like God, and then to actually be greater than God with his throne above the stars of God.

3. Characteristic traits ascribed to Satan demonstrate what he is trying to accomplish.

Thirdly, we can look at other Scriptures to find characteristic traits that are ascribed to Satan; they not only describe his personality but give us an idea of his activities.

- a) **John 8:44** calls Satan a murderer, a corrupter of truth, a liar (actually the father of lies)
- b) **Acts 13:10**, Paul tells Elymas that he is a child of the devil and then Paul goes on to describe what the devil is like. He states:

Satan is an enemy of everything that is right.

He is full of deceit and trickery.

- c) **Revelation 20:10** calls the devil a deceiver.
- d) **2 Corinthians 11:14**, Paul says that Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

4. To deceive this world and harass God’s children

Our fourth and final point in this section is that Satan wants to deceive this world and harass God’s children. I chose two scriptures that address this point.

a) **Revelation 12:9** says, “The great dragon was hurled down -- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.”

b) **I Peter 5:8** states, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Satan is attempting to lead everyone in this world down the wrong path. He wants them to go down the path of death and destruction. He also specifically is looking for the children of God that he can attack and test and turn from the ways of righteousness. Peter gave us a word picture. He says Satan is like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. That’s a scary picture. A hungry

prowling lion is not someone that you want to mess with. Yet we are told that this is what Satan is like and he is coming looking for us. No wonder we are told to be self-controlled and alert.

So, now we have established that Satan is real, that he was a creation of God who then turned to sin, and that his entire being is committed to be an adversary of God's and to take all that was created and good and turn it to evil purposes. Frankly, anytime Satan sees something good that is praising God and giving God glory, he is going to attempt to corrupt it and turn it for evil.

D. Do we as Christians really have power over him?

With all of the information that we have gathered about Satan, we now come to a fourth question for today. Do we as Christians have power over Satan? How do we resist him if he is such a powerful adversary? In this physical world I know that I would be hard pressed to defeat a hungry lion, so if that is the picture of Satan and what he is attempting, how can I possibly defeat him?

1. Luke 10:17-20, Jesus gives us authority and power over the enemy.

In Luke chapter 10 we have the account of Jesus sending the 72 followers out to the towns to do evangelism work. It says he sent them out by twos ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.

Then in verse 17 and following we read, "*The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'* Jesus replied, '*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'*"

Jesus tells us here that he gives us authority over Satan and the demons. There is a scripture requirement here. Our authority comes in using the name of Jesus. Verse 17 said that the followers reported that the demons submitted to the use of Jesus name. It's not our power and authority really; it's Jesus' power and authority. But Jesus grants that power to us. Now this is dangerous work. It is difficult work. It is not to be taken lightly. I don't expect you to run out of here this morning and start using Jesus name to try and cast demons out of everything you see. This is serious business. This authority is given us for the ministry that Jesus gives us. We are to use this authority by His direction for His purposes to bring Him honor and glory. It's a serious matter.

2. James 4:7, “submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Our second scripture is James 4:7 and it states, “Submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.” We are given a very specific instruction here. When you feel temptation coming upon you, when you feel hard pressed by the adversary, you are to submit to God, resist the devil, and then watch as the devil will flee from you.

How do you submit to God and resist the devil? Submission comes through the reading and obeying of God’s word. Resisting the devil comes from using the Word of God as a weapon against Satan. Don’t forget that in Matthew 4:1-11 we saw the devil attack Christ, but Christ used Scripture all three times to resist the devil and at the end of the story the devil left Jesus, and the angels came and ministered to him. We need to know Scripture and be able to use it to resist the devil and he will flee from us.

3. Ephesians 6:10-11, “put on the full armor of God and stand against the devil’s schemes.”

The final scripture in this section is Ephesians 6:10-11, this is the section of scripture where Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God and stand against the devil’s schemes. We don’t have time to go fully into this Scripture and talk about it, but Pastors Tom and Mike have preached on this in the past and I trust that you remember the general concept. We are told to put on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and have our feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Each of these describes our need to know scripture and be able to use it in defense against the schemes of the devil.

In conclusion of this section, we do have power over Satan. That power comes from being children of God and being granted Jesus authority over Satan. It can only be wielded, though, if we are grounded in scripture and able to use it as the weapon of choice against Satan when he comes at us with his schemes.

E. Will God ever destroy Satan completely?

This brings us to our final question for today, “Will God ever destroy Satan completely?” I have three scripture references that I want us to take a brief look at;

1. The first is Revelation 12:7-9. This is where we saw earlier Satan’s battle against Michael the Arch Angel and where he loses and is thrown down to earth. This is the start of the

demise of Satan. He is defeated in heaven and cast out of the heavenly realm. He no longer holds his position in heaven. He no longer is a messenger of God. He no longer has the sweet fellowship of the Savior. Instead he becomes the adversary of God.

2. The second scripture is Revelation 20:2-3, it states, *“He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the abyss and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended.”* This shows the second step in Satan’s defeat. God will bind him and throw him into prison for 1,000 years. No longer will Satan be able to deceive those on earth, at least during those 1,000 years. He will be released after that time for a short period and will pick up where he left off doing his best to deceive the world.

3. Then we come to the third scripture, Revelation 20:7-10, it tells us, *“When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog – to gather them for battle. . . but fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”* This describes the final defeat of Satan and his final place of imprisonment. He will be totally defeated. He will sulfur torment day and night for eternity.

God will have the ultimate victory over Satan and his followers.

F. Application

Let’s summarize our lesson for today. Satan is real. He was created by God to serve Him, but pride grew in him and he sinned. He became the adversary of God and is trying to deceive the nations, corrupt what God created and turn us, man, away from God. But we as Christians do have power over him. Jesus has given us authority over Satan. We can resist him if we will study God’s Word and hide it in our hearts. And finally, God will destroy Satan and throw him into the lake of burning sulfur for all of eternity.

What about us today? What can we take away from this lesson? What are our application points? I want to tell you a short story to help finish off our lesson.

Back in 1993, a bus load of men from First Free went to Promise Keepers in Boulder Colorado. It was a great adventure and we all learned a great deal. One of the speakers was truly amazing. God used him in a special way to teach us about the devil. Dr. E.V. Hill from Mt. Zion

Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles was that speaker. I had the privilege of knowing Dr. Hill from my early ministry days with World Impact. I sat in his church on several occasions and heard him speak. God always used E.V. to drive home the application of scripture. E.V. was truly a Godly man who now enjoys his reward with our Savior in Heaven.

Anyway, on that crisp day in the football stadium of the University of Colorado, Dr. Hill delivered a great message. He got up and started to speak on our adversary the devil. As he got into the talk he came to the Scripture we read earlier, Matthew 4:1-11. He talked about the temptation of Christ by the devil. He shared how Christ, even in his weakened physical state was able to withstand the fiery darts of Satan by using Scripture to restate truth and show how Satan was just a deceiver.

As Dr. Hill finished this section, he told us, “The point here is this, men — when Satan attacks, hit him with Scripture. That’s right; hit him with the word of God. Dr. Hill held high his Bible and asked, what do we do to Satan?” The men responded, “Hit him.” This continued for a few more moments; Dr. Hill thrusting his Bible in the air and the men shouting, “Hit him”.

As Dr. Hill again thrust the Bible in the air the men started to chant, “Hit him; hit him; hit him.” This chant grew and grew. It got louder and louder. Imagine 50,000 men all chanting the same thing.

It was apparent that Dr. Hill still had about 20 minutes left in his time slot. But he looked at his Bible and his notes, gathered up his things and started to walk off the platform. As he started, the men started to quiet down. But E.V. held his Bible up and the men started the chant again, “Hit him; hit him; hit him.” As E.V. walked across the field the chant grew. As he started to exit the field by way of the players tunnel the men changed the chant to E.V., E.V., E.V., but Dr. Hill would have none of that.

He stopped walking, turned around, took two steps back down the ramp and thrust his Bible in the air and the men went wild, they started again, “Hit him; hit him; hit him.”

And then with the trademark huge white smile showing on his face Dr. Hill turn and walked out of the stadium and was done.

Later when interviewed by a local Christian radio station he was asked, it seemed that you left early. You still had lots of time left from what was allocated for your sermon. Why did you leave early? Dr. Hill’s response, “By the halfway point of my message, they had gotten the point! They knew what to do; I didn’t need to say anything else, God had spoken and they had heard.”

I hope that when someone asks you about today's sermon you will remember that it pretty basically boils down to two words, "Hit him."

But you see three slots for application points on your outline. So here are my three choices, but I left the slots blank on your outline because you might just have three different application points that God spoke to you today. But here are mine.

- 1. Put on the full armor of God**
- 2. Study and memorize the Word of God**
- 3. When the devil attacks, Hit him with the Word of God.**

Let's pray.

¹ The Origin of Satan, by Elaine Pagels. Copyright © 1995 by Elaine Pagels, First Published by Vintage Books, May 1996, a Division of Random House, Inc. New York.