

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

41 Is the Devil a Reality or a Myth?

Scripture: Genesis 3:1,5; Ezekiel 28:12-19; Isaiah 14:12-14

It is Halloween time again and devil costumes are being seen throughout the land.. As an aside, Halloween traditions have never been connected with Christian religious celebrations of any kind. The name only has been lifted from a religious feast within professing Christendom known as All Hallows Eve. The practice of Halloween dates from pre-Christian times and has up to this day retained some of its original form. The ancient Druids believed that during the night of November 1 demons, witches, and evil spirits roamed the earth in wild delight in welcoming “their season,” that time of the year when dusk comes early and the nights are long. These spirits found their greatest joy in frightening poor mortals and in playing all manner of mean tricks on them. With the Halloween event upon us once again I thought it might be worth our while to turn our attention to the Biblical perspective concerning Satan and to say a word about witches and the occult.

A flamboyant preacher of another era once introduced his sermon with these words. “I am going to speak about the devil, and my subject has four divisions: Who the devil is he? What the devil does he do? Why the devil does he do it? How the devil are we to deal with him?”. Whatever the preacher may have lacked in good taste, he has at least provided us with a workable and perhaps memorable outline in broaching the subject.

I. WHO IS THE DEVIL?

Again and again it has been suggested that the devil is a myth, the personification of evil, or merely a legend drafted by simple people in their desire to explain the presence of temptation and evil in the world. Others have felt that he is only a type or a symbol of evil. People who take the devil seriously today are bound to be met with the words, “Well, you really don't believe in a personal devil, do you?” Other statements are common. “Nobody believes in Satan anymore.” Or, perhaps, “That's so old fashioned. No educated or thoughtful person believes in a real devil.” Yet, it is the plain teaching of Scripture as well as human experience which compels belief in the old-fashioned doctrine of the devil. Anyone who

takes the Bible seriously is forced to conclude that the devil exists and that he does so as a personality as opposed to an evil influence only.

The devil is described as *"the father of lies,"* and *"a murderer from the beginning."* (John 8:44) He is called Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12), the devil (I Peter 5:8), Satan (Luke 10:18), the deceiver (Rev.20:10), the dragon (Revelation 12:7), the accuser (Revelation 12:10), the prince of this world (John 12:31), the prince of darkness (Ephesians 6:12), the god of this world (II Corinthians 4:4), Beelzebub (Matthew 12:24) Belial (II Corinthians 6:15), Leviathan (Isaiah 27:1) and Apollyon (Revelation 9:11). These titles suggest that which goes much beyond an impersonal influence of evil in the world.

Personality has to do in this case with separateness of being, or what might be referred to as individuality. Personal activities are assigned to the devil in Scripture. In John 8:44 we have the acts of murder and lying. In Matthew 4:1, 11 he tempted Christ. He caused Judas in some way to want to betray Christ as taught in John 13:2. In Acts 15:3 he filled, the heart of Ananias to lie. He also sows tares where good seed has been sown. (Matthew 13:19, 29) He stalks people to destroy them. (I Peter 5:8) These abilities of the devil to reason and initiate action, to pursue a particular purpose, to possess knowledge, and to relate to people in a personal way, indicate individuality and personality. There are other references in Scripture. Strong's, Analytical Concordance, lists thirty eight references to "the devil." At least fifty three such references name Satan with a capital "S" signifying personality.

It is true that the origin of the devil is somewhat of a mystery to us. We do know that God did not create evil. Nor did the devil create himself. Satan was not created as an evil being else God could not have pronounced that His creation was all very good. (Genesis 1:31) James 1:13 declares clearly that God is neither tempted by evil nor does He tempt anyone. There are a few passages which give some insight into the problem of the devil's origin. II Peter 2:4 reads, *"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment."* The same thought is found in Jude 6, *"And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, God hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."*

If God created all things good and the angels were included but fell from their first estate, it seems very logical to assume that the devil was among those

angels. We might go on to assume that the devil was the leader of those angels in their revolt against God. But what was it that caused such an angelic being to do such a thing? I believe the answer can be found in I Timothy 3:6 where Paul is teaching that an elder in the church could not be a novice or one who is inexperienced. The reason being that or *“lest being lifted up with pride, he should commit the same sin which the devil committed, or fall into the condemnation of the devil.”* This was the sin of pride which led to a revolt against the authority of God. Some scholars believe that Satan's unfallen state is described in Ezekiel 28:12-17. Here the Prince of Tyre is described as a supernatural personality full of wisdom and beauty, given a place on God's mountain, sinless, but lifted up with pride. Satan's fall is described in Isaiah 14:2-15. There is reference here to the King of Babylon, but behind the Babylonian king there is evidence of a supernatural person. It was through the vanity of his ambition that Lucifer fell.

II. WHAT DOES THE DEVIL DO?

Whatever information is lacking concerning the origin of the devil is made up for when it comes to his activities. Here we would speak about the over all strategy of the devil as revealed in Scripture. Genesis 3 is of great interest. The same ambitions which were delineated in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 find expression in this chapter, and they form the plan of the devil today.

First of all, the devil denies the revelation of God, or raises certain questions concerning it. He is continually saying, “Yea, hath God said?” Surely today people question whether God has spoken to man in a meaningful way. They do so because the prince of this world has duped them into believing that God has not. There is an interesting progression here and certainly one which is terrifying. Satan questions the fact of one true and living God with the words, *“Ye shall be as God.”* We are not quite sure if the Devil means gods here, as the Authorized Version translates *“Elohim”* here. Along the line, Satan has multiplied gods, so to speak, for men to worship. Coming to the New Testament we find the devil asserting that God is evil. On several occasions the blind leaders of Israel accused our Lord of being the devil. This lie culminates with Satan saying and affirming that he is God.

All of this is not just a play on words. The devil denies that God has spoken, he denies the fact of one true and living God, and he says that God is really the devil. All of these things people are saying today. There are not a few people in the world who have raised a clinched fist to God, feeling that He is evil because of

some tragedy that has touched their lives or because of the situation which exists in the world. The first step in the method of the devil is to deny the unique and solitary deity of God. This was also evident in the temptation of Jesus. The word came, *"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him **only** shalt thou serve."* Perhaps there is someone here this day who harbors these feelings about God. What has happened is that you have also denied the grace of God; the thought that God is withholding some good from you. The authority of God has been denied; God's right to put certain prohibitions upon you. Also, the judgment of God has been denied; Satan said, *"Ye shall not surely die."* How can we combat this ugly method of the devil being employed in the lives of people all around us and in our own lives? It is to be met with a strong dependence upon God, and a subjection to God.

The second part of the devil's delusion was that God like attributes were promised in Genesis 3:5. *"Your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods (or as God), knowing good and evil."* There are two aspects of Godlikeness which were promised.

First, there was Godlike wisdom. This is wisdom which is underived and independent. It can be noted from Romans 11:34-36 that God is the source of all wisdom with Christ as the treasure house of that wisdom. But Satan says, *"Ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil."* If there is anything which is characteristic of our time, it is the conviction that man can know apart from God. This matter of Godlike wisdom is of great importance. It assumes, among other things, that man can make independent moral judgments.

Secondly, there was Godlike power. This was implied in the expression, *"Ye shall be as Elohim."* Elohim is that name of God which distinguishes the possession and putting forth of power. Man longs for power and the promise of the devil here is that an independent power, power apart from God, can be possessed. God's plan for the life of the believer is to be found in the realization of the truth Jesus expressed. *"Without me, ye can do nothing."* Oh, this understanding is so important for the Christian. It is so easy to come to the place where we think that in our own ingenuity, in our own persuasive powers, in our own talents, we can serve God effectively. How we need to come to the place Paul was when he said, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,"* and *"When I am weak, then am I strong."*

How successful has the devil been in the realization of his plan? It appears he has been very successful. One area has to do with the occult, which is growing in popularity in an explosive way. Thirteenth century Transylvania had its many

witches, but twentieth century America has two hundred thousand registered witches. The well know witch, Sybil Leek, who now resides in Melbourne Beach, Florida, reports that there are eight million witches in the world today. In Europe there are now more people earning their living in the occult than there are ministers of the Gospel. Anton Szandor La Vey is the name of the high priest of the First Church of Satan, located in a large, black Victorian house on California Street in San Francisco. The walls inside are black and the ceiling red. In the center of the room is a large coffin. There is an altar, a wide eyed owl stares from above. During the celebration of the black mass a nude priestess reclines. There is catechetical training in Sunday School classes. Available subjects are vampires and werewolves, ghosts and hauntings, ritual magic, the black mass, witchcraft, demonology, ESP, monsters and telepathic communication. Satanism is rebellion against God in its most obvious and blatant form.

The devil is indeed active in the world in which we live. He is not omnipotent, he is not as mighty as God. He is not omniscient, he does not possess infinite knowledge. He is not omnipresent, he cannot be everywhere at one time as can God. But he is powerfully active. His purpose is to mar the creation of God and to destroy the work of God in the lives of .people. He prevents people from coming to the faith (II Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2), and is in fierce combat with the Christian. (Ephesians 6:11) He would spoil our simple faith in Christ, cause us to trust in the arm of the flesh, lead us into temptation, and ruin our lives in terms of them being profitable to God. He is a real person. We are no match for him in our own strength.

III. HOW ARE WE TO DEAL WITH THE DEVIL?

First: I believe we should take him seriously. Many people have seen Albert Duree's famous painting of "Satan." It portrays a swine like face, horns, a tail, a pitchfork, hooped feet, and an overall impression of that which is ugly and repulsive. Thus, the devil has become ridiculous and laughable. The whole concept of the devil for many is a silly one. Satan would love to project such an image. Furthermore, he employs his most masterful stroke of genius in getting people to think that he does not exist at all. We would be intelligent and informed believers and take him seriously.

Secondly: We should realize that the devil is limited by Christ, Matthew 12:28-29 describes the work of Jesus in casting out devils. He. says, *"But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. For how*

else can one enter a strong man's house and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man, and then he will spoil his house." The limits of Satan's power are prescribed. Though Satan now has authority in the world (Ephesians 2:2), he is under the control of the risen, ascended and exalted Christ. (John 12:31; Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 1:21).

Thirdly: The devil should be resisted and the armor of God put on. Because the devil is limited he can be resisted. (James 4:7) We need to remember that Jesus did not only conquer the devil for Himself, but for us also. It is foolish to underestimate the power of Satan, it may be equally as foolish to overestimate it. In the Book of Job he bowed to God's permissive will so in Christ we today can become stronger than the strong through the defenses and weapons God has made available to us. (Ephesians 6:13)

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October 29, 1978