

Study 14

THE DEVIL

The devil, also known as Satan, can exert power and influence over human beings, but only as far as God permits. He was formerly one of God's angels who rebelled against God. He will ultimately be cast into the Lake of Fire and will be condemned there forever (Isa. 14:12-15; Job 1:12; John 16:11; Eph. 6:12; Rev. 12:9; 19:20).

It was C.S. Lewis who wrote in "The Screwtape Letters"-

"There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."

C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

I can't help but feel that Mr Lewis is correct. On the one hand we have Christians who deny that there even is a Devil, and on the other there are Christians who believe that the Devil is responsible for every wrong, injustice, calamity, or illness and that he can attack them freely at any time.

1. If we could draw some advice from Second Corinthians 2:11 about how we should regard the Devil, what might that advice be-

2. If we could draw a warning from First Peter 5:8 about we should regard the Devil, what would that warning be?

3. Based on Second Corinthians 11:14, why does the believer need discernment? (And, what is “discernment”?)

4. What do we learn about the Devil from what Jesus said in John 8:44?

SATAN

The term “Satan” means *Adversary* (note 1Tim5:14; 1Peter 5:8). It is believed that he was once an angel who rebelled against God. This is based partly on Ezekiel 28 (particularly verses 14 to 16) and Revelation 12. Some regard Isaiah 14:12-14 as also referring to the fall of the once angelic Satan.

Under the Old Covenant, Satan had access to God’s presence (refer to Job 1-2), was able to accuse God’s people before God (refer to Zechariah 3:1), could tempt people to sin (Matthew 4), and could hinder/persecute the church (1Thess. 2:18).

5. Consider Second Corinthians 12:7. Who orchestrated the Apostle Paul’s spiritual harassment?

6. Consider Job chapters 1 and 2. From this passage, does it appear that Satan could do as he pleased? Discuss.

What is quite remarkable about the Bible's treatment of Satan, is how little it tells us about him. For believers who lived under the Old Testament, it seems that early part of the Old Testament attributed absolute sovereignty to God even when the Devil was active. God wanted His Old Covenant people to be grounded in the knowledge that *He* was in control. After Judah returned from exile in Babylon (refer to books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi, Zechariah) God exposed them to a broader understanding of Satan. After they returned from this exile among a people who were very aware that there was a good God and an evil Devil, we see the Jews rewriting their history to reflect this new understanding.

7. How do these Scriptures of the same event illustrate this point? Second Samuel 24:1ff & First Chronicles 21:1ff -

We too need to understand that although the Devil may be active, it is ultimately God Who is in control. Added to this, when Christ died on the Cross He defeated the Devil - something has changed for how the Devil can interfere with believers. While the Old Covenant was made "obsolete" at the Cross of Christ, it wasn't done away with until God sent the Romans to destroy it in 70AD (it was then that the Temple, Priesthood and Sacrifices were brought to an end). This is why Revelation 12 says that Devil knew his "time was short" (Rev. 12:12) because he only had the time between the Cross and the destruction of the Temple to attempt to wipe out Christianity (around 40 years). When the Temple was destroyed the Old Covenant was brought to an end and Satan's unfettered access to God's presence was removed. He was then "bound" - restricted - because of this massive change of events (Rev. 20:2). What should give New Testament believers even more confidence are some of these Scriptures...

8. According to First John 3:8, how much power does Satan have compared to Christ?

9. Based on Revelation 20:10 what will be the ultimate fate of the Devil?

SPIRITUAL WARFARE TODAY

In the Gospel of Mark, the “Great Commission” (which Christ gave His followers just prior to ascending into Heaven) is recorded as including - “*in my Name they will cast out demons*” (Mark 16:18; refer also to Matt. 10:1). *Demons* are generally considered to be the fallen angels who sided with Lucifer (Satan’s name before he fell, Isaiah 14:12). Demons only ever oppress those who invite them to do so. Where people toy with temptation and allow it to lead them into sin and then allow that sin to become an obsession, they are placing themselves in a very vulnerable place for demonic possession. In nearly every instance where this happens it was because of demonic deception. These demons are referred to as “unclean spirits” in the New Testament.

10. How did the early church respond to those who were possessed by unclean spirits? (Acts 5:16; 8:7)
-

Some scholars of Missions and Church History have noted that where there has been an absence of the Gospel there is more likely to be higher levels of demonic activity. But, when the Gospel is introduced it is nearly always accompanied by signs and wonders including deliverance from demonic possession.

11. Read Ephesians 6:10-18. Tick which statements are true based on this passage-
 - We should yell/speak/shout at the Devil and his demons
 - We should keep up godly spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading and prayer
 - We should ‘bind the Devil’ every day through ‘warfare’ praying
 - We should keep our focus on God and His will for our lives without being distracted by Devilish distractions

One day, Christ will do away with the Devil forever. In the meantime we should not be ignorant about the Devil’s schemes, yet we should do so by continually submitting to God through prayer and devotion to His Scriptures (James 4:7).

This is what we believe.

Amen.