

2.17 Satan (Rev 12:3-4, 9, 20:2, 7)

Father and Son rule the universe, but the whole world is under the control of another power whom John calls the evil one (1 Jn 5:19) and Paul calls Satan. Paul says he is the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is active in those who are disobedient (Eph 2:2). He warns Christians that their real struggle is not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers in the darkness around us, and evil spiritual forces in the heavenly realm (Eph 6:12). The heavenly realm here must have the same meaning as 'air' in Eph 2:2. Satan is the ruler of the kingdom of the air. The evil spiritual forces Paul is talking about are evil spirits or demons. They don't have bodies unless they possess people.

From his heavenly throne, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and in heaven he intercedes with the Father for the saints. All powers in heaven are in submission to Jesus (1 Pet 3:22), he is superior to them all, but he won't rule the world until he returns as the conquering Messiah. Meanwhile, he is waiting for the day when his enemies are made his footstool (Heb 10:13). God will subdue the enemies at the climax of the Great Tribulation when Jesus returns. The major defeat will be at Armageddon when God destroys the Antichrist and his evil empire. It is only after that event that the Messiah will begin his messianic rule and reign until he puts all remaining enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:25).

At the Messiah's return, Satan will be captured and incarcerated in the Abyss (Rev 20:1-3). The prophet Isaiah predicted this event and the millennial reign that follows (Isa 24:21-22). He said that the Lord would punish the armies of the exalted ones above and the rulers on earth. They will be herded together into the Pit, shut up in prison, and *after many days* they will be punished. The armies opposing the Lord at Armageddon are defeated, whether spiritual or human, and these evil spirits and the souls of the human opponents are together thrown into the bottomless pit. These are the angels that have been cast into the lowest hell, chained in darkness until judgment day (2 Pet 2:4, Jude 6). Meanwhile, the Messiah and his elders, who represent the saints (Rev 4:4), are enthroned in glory on Mount Zion. The light emanating from New Jerusalem is such that the sun and the moon pale in comparison.

According to God's plan, when the 1000 years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will again incite the nations into rebelling against God and his people. They will march from all over the earth to Jerusalem, but they will be destroyed by fire from heaven and Satan will be cast into hell to be tormented forever (Rev 20:7-10). This will spell the end of the forces of evil that have plagued mankind from the time that Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent's cunning in the Garden of Eden. That this final battle is different from Armageddon is shown by the fact that the Antichrist and the false prophet were thrown into hell immediately after Armageddon (19:20), while now, after the millennium, Satan is thrown into hell where the beast and the false prophet had previously been thrown (20:10).

Satan gained authority over humanity and the earth in the Garden of Eden when Eve chose to listen to him rather than to God. However, his doom was immediately pronounced by God when he declared that the offspring of the woman would crush his head (Gen 3:15). His existence, and that of demons and evil spirits throughout the world is very real. Westerners may doubt his existence, because in the West his activities have become more sophisticated, but in some countries like Italy and Ireland, requests for exorcisms are on the increase, and in 2018 the Vatican held a training course for exorcists. Throughout Africa, India, and South American countries where voodoo is rife, the existence of evil supernatural forces is not in doubt. It is evidenced by the prevalence of demon possession and the effectiveness of black magic. Possessed people covet the sense of power the possessing spirit gives them. Some exhibit supernatural strength, and others speak in ancient languages they have never learned.

The Bible blames Satan for the origin of sin and suffering in the world. It was he who, in the form of a snake, tempted Adam and Eve. They disobeyed God and were driven out of the garden. In the book of Job, we see why Satan is called the 'accuser of the brethren'. He accused Job of insincerity in his worship of God but was proved wrong. In the Gospels, a large part of Jesus' ministry consisted of exorcisms and the healing of people who were afflicted by the devil. The apostle John declared that the whole world lies under the control of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19). The apostle Paul told the Ephesian Christians that they once lived according to the ways of this present world and according to the

ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now active in those who are disobedient (Eph 2:1-2).

If the devil has this enormous power and authority, how does that relate to the kingdom of God? When Jesus was tempted by the devil before he began his ministry, it was regarding kingdom authority. The devil took him to a high place and showed him *all the kingdoms of the world* in an instant. Then he told Jesus he would give him all that authority because it had been given to him to give to whoever he wanted. If only Jesus would worship him, all that glory would be his (Lk 4:5-7). Jesus rejected the offer because the Father had his own plan and way of giving him the kingdom.

During the last week before the crucifixion, Jesus said it was now time for the judgment of this world to begin. *The ruler of this world will be thrown out* (Jn 12:31). Jesus' triumph over Satan at the cross was decisive, but not immediate. As we have seen above, the apostles still regarded Satan as being very active in the world. He has suffered a fatal blow, but from where has he been cast out? Certainly not from the world. Jesus told the 72 he had sent out to preach and heal that he had seen Satan fall like lightning from *heaven* (Lk 10:18). Jesus disabled the rulers and the authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in the cross (Col 2:15). Because of his death he will destroy the devil who has the power of death (Heb 2:14), but the devil is still prowling around looking for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8), and we still need to resist him.

It is not until Rev 12:9 that we read that Satan and his angels will be defeated by Michael and his angels and thrown down to the earth. His time on earth will be short, the last three and a half years of the Great Tribulation (Rev 12:12-14). He will come down in great anger, intent on destroying God's plan for Israel and the church and preventing the Messianic kingdom from taking place. The martyrs at that time will conquer Satan by their reliance on the blood of the Lamb and by the confession of their faith. They will not cling to their lives even in the face of death (Rev 12:11).

Today, Satan and his cohorts are judicially defeated but obviously still very active in the world, trying to thwart God's purposes. That is something to remember when we, as God's children, are being tempted or persecuted. There is no evidence that the activities of these

evil forces have changed since the crucifixion. Satan is still as active as he ever was, he is not yet bound.

G. Eldon Ladd (A Commentary on the Rev of John p. 173) says that the martyrdom of the martyrs is their victory over Satan. It is proof that his accusations against them are empty. They follow in the steps of their master. Since God's children are made of flesh and blood, God the Son also took on flesh and blood, so that by his death he might destroy the devil who had the power of death and might free those who were in slavery during their lives to the fear of death (Heb 2:14-15).

The Messiah's death on the cross has far-reaching benefits. Through Jesus' shed blood on the cross, God reconciled all things to himself, making peace with things on earth and things in heaven (Col 1:20). Jesus' death on the cross has made possible a reconciliation between God and creation. Because of Jesus' redemptive work on the cross, he will be able to set creation free from its bondage to decay during the millennium. In addition, those who are redeemed and empowered by the Holy Spirit can overcome sin and evil forces. Christians are far less likely than unbelievers to be possessed by evil spirits or affected by black magic. Even Muslims seek refuge from these evil powers in church communities. The devil has been bound to some degree as far as the righteous are concerned, but he is still ruling over the world of unbelievers. He will continue to do evil, sow tares, and hinder Christian workers until the Messiah comes. Then he will be put out of action and cast into the Abyss for 1000 years.

His last strategy will be to empower the last world empire and ultimately, the Antichrist. He will not only give him great power and authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation but also his kingship (Rev 13:2b). This final world dictator will be the most powerful and evil dictator that the world has ever known. The ensuing persecution and defeat of the saints will be the final suffering the Church will endure before Christ's return, and it will be extensive; there will be many martyrs all over the world in those last days. Christians are called not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him.

Satan in Revelation

1. John's vision of Satan in heaven is of an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns (12:3). He is dangerous and bloodthirsty. Seven heads represent seven world empires he has founded, and ten horns represent his claim to total sovereignty.
2. This powerful angel leads the whole world astray (12:9). He opposes God's plan to set up the Messiah as the world's future king. Man failed in his responsibility to rule the earth on God's behalf, so Satan usurped that power and wants to maintain his exalted position.
3. The dragon swept one-third of the stars (angels) from the sky and flung them to earth (12:4) to do his work. There they roam as evil spirits and territorial spirits.
4. Historically, Satan sought to kill the Christ child through King Herod but failed (12:4). He tempted Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days and offered him all the kingdoms of the earth, but Jesus refused to worship him. He did not succumb to Satan's temptation as Adam did.
5. Shortly before Christ's return, war will break out in heaven between Satan and Michael, the protector of Israel, maybe all God's people (Dan 12:1). Satan and his angels lose their right to be in heaven and are hurled to earth. "Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury because he knows his time is short" (12:12).
6. He immediately pursues Israel (12:13) and seeks to destroy them, but Israel is rescued by the earth (12:16).
7. He then wages war against Christians for 3 ½ years and defeats them (Dan 7:21), after which God takes away his power and destroys it forever (Dan 7:17, 25-26).
8. Satan is the power behind the last world empire (13:1) and its leader the Antichrist (the small horn). The evil empire also has seven heads and ten horns which are interpreted as kings.

This beast seen by Daniel (7:2, 7) is a terrifying and frightening empire with ten kings. It devours the whole earth, trampling and crushing its victims (Dan 7:23).

9. The seven heads are interpreted as seven hills/mountains, and also seven kings (17:9). This probably refers to seven world empires and their emperors. Five have fallen (Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, and Greece), one is (Rome) and one is yet to come (a revived Rome?)
10. The ten kings of the evil empire surrender their authority to the Antichrist.
11. The immoral woman (Babylon) is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth. She is also described as sitting on many waters. The kings commit adultery with her (idolatry, immorality, corruption) and the earth's inhabitants are intoxicated with her wine. She is either the world leader's city or the network of worldwide cities that he rules over and which collapse when the seventh bowl of God's wrath is poured out.
12. God is sovereign over the universe, but in this fallen world where many, especially people in authority, have turned their back on God, Satan has found a foothold. Politicians are deceived by corruption and false ideologies. The rich are deceived by the love of money. False religions are deceived by idolatrous gods. Tribal groups are deceived by occult power and traditional animistic religion. Individuals surrender themselves to be possessed or influenced by demons. Immorality and corruption open the way for demonic influence.
13. The Christian's spiritual battle is not against flesh and blood but against these powers of darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.
14. Satan is defeated initially and judicially at the cross (Heb 2:14). Jesus demonstrated this by casting out demons and delivering people from Satanic oppression. But it is not until the beginning of the millennium after Christ's return that Satan is arrested and imprisoned in the Abyss (Rev 20:2), and

not until after the millennium that he is finally thrown into hell (20:10).

15. So Satan is not yet bound. Christians can get victory over him by surrendering their lives to Jesus, but unbelievers have no such recourse. I have seen hundreds of Muslims in West Africa, suffering under curses or the result of black magic, released through the prayers of Christian pastors. Countless others are bound by Satan and his minions.
16. He who sins is of the devil (1 John 3:8) and is more likely to be tempted and harmed by him. Missionaries and evangelists are sent to open people's eyes and turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God.

Integrate what has been omitted.

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