

Studying the Enemy

David Flatt

We have an enemy. Satan seeks our eternal destruction. He is wise and fierce. If we are not careful, he will destroy us. Peter warned, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). To be victorious over Satan, we must be wise to how he works.

But, what is the origin of Satan? Many origin stories abound regarding Satan. Some of the stories stem from misrepresentations of the Bible. For example, Satan is commonly thought to be an angel who rebelled against God. God expelled Satan from Heaven and sent him into the earth.

Passages Commonly Used to Explain the Origin of Satan

1. Isaiah 14:12-14. This passage says, “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’” (Isa. 14:12-14).

The context of this statement in Isaiah is not about the origin of Satan. The translators of the 1611 AD King James Version of the Bible translated the Hebrew word “helel” as “Lucifer” (Isa. 14:12). “Lucifer” is a Latin word meaning, “light bearer.” This was the name people of 1611 AD gave to the planet Venus. Due to misrepresentation of this passage, Lucifer has come to be known as a name for Satan. Regardless of how the Hebrew word “helel” is translated, the name is a reference to the Babylonian empire, not Satan.

In this text, Isaiah was writing about the future demise of the nation of Babylon. God was assuring Judah that they would live to see the day when Babylon would be destroyed. This text has nothing to do with giving an origin account of Satan.

2. Ezekiel 28:12-16. In this passage, God makes a pronouncement against the king of Tyre. The prophecy invokes the symbolism of the Garden of Eden to illustrate the good relationship the king had with God. Their relationship changed when the king sinned. He became inflated with pride, thinking he was special and above reproach. Yet, just like the Isaiah’s prophecy against Babylon, God was going to destroy the king of Tyre for his pride. The text has nothing to do with the origin of Satan.

3. Luke 10:18. In the New Testament, there are references to Satan that are often used to create an origin story. In this verse, Jesus said, “...I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” This must mean that Jesus witnessed God expel Satan from Heaven to the earth like lightning from Heaven, right? What is the context of Luke chapter ten?

In this chapter, Jesus sent seventy disciples on a mission. They were to accomplish two tasks: 1). Preach the Gospel. 2). Heal the sick (Luke 10:1-16). When the disciples returned to Jesus, they gave Jesus an amazing report. They told Jesus that “even the demons are subject to us in your name!” (Luke 10:17). Then, Jesus said, “...I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18).

The life and ministry of Jesus represented warfare against Satan. The Gospel was how “captives” would be set free. Miracles, including casting out demons, defeated the oppression, decay, and death brought to the world by Satan. When the disciples returned from the mission, Jesus acknowledge a victory against Satan and his powers. Victory in this small battle was a prelude to victory in the greater war that would be won at the cross of Jesus.

4. Revelation 12. In this chapter, Satan is portrayed as a dragon. The dragon is opposed to the pregnant woman in the wilderness. The child delivered is the Messiah. The dragon is unable to destroy the child. The child is taken into Heaven and the woman seeks safety in the wilderness.

The dragon is defeated by Michael the archangel. He is cast to earth from Heaven. While the dragon is defeated, he pursues the woman in the wilderness and inundates the earth with lies, deception, and temptation. Instead of trying to destroy Christ, Satan seeks to harm the people of God.

This chapter is not describing the origin of Satan. The chapter describes how Satan would seek to harm saints of the earth. The entire letter is about warning the Church of persecution and assuring them of God’s victory through Christ.

What We Can Conclude about Satan’s Origin

As the above-cited passages demonstrate, context is critically important to understanding Biblical information. We might be interested to know Satan’s origin; however, the Bible does not give us an origin account of Satan. Yet, based on Biblical documentation, there are conclusions we can reach about Satan’s origin and nature.

1. Satan is a created being with limitations. The Bible only presents God as an uncreated being. God is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. Therefore, we can conclude that Satan was a created being. This does not mean that God created evil. He did not create evil (Jas. 1:13). This point shows a major difference between God and Satan. Satan is powerful, but he is not omnipotent (1 Cor. 10:13; Job 1-2). Satan is subject to the constraints of God (Rev. 20).

2. Created spiritual beings can make choices. The limited information we have about spiritual beings, including Satan, demonstrates their ability to make choices. Jude describes the punishment of rebellious angels (Jude 6). Peter writes about angels who sinned (2 Pet. 2:4). There are created spiritual beings that have chosen to rebel against the Creator.

3. There are beings who were made and exist above the human level. This is difficult for us to understand. The Bible identifies angels. God and Satan have angels. The Bible also identifies heavenly beings which may be in addition to angels (Eph. 3:10, 6:12; Rev. 4-5). These heavenly beings mediated the Law of Moses, announced the birth and resurrection of Christ, witnessed and ministered to Christ, and desired to see the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan (Gal. 3:19; Luke 2:10; Matt. 4:17, 28:5; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:12).

Conclusion

As humans, we are curious. We want to know everything. Yet, we would be wise to heed the wisdom of Moses: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

The Bible does not fully disclose the origin of Satan; however, the Bible does reveal Satan's relationship to us. He is against us. He seeks to destroy us through deception. He only brings death. We are to avoid him and his ways. We are to seek our safety and salvation in Christ.

When the human experience comes to an end, Satan, satanic angels, and humans who have rebelled against the Creator will be punished. They will be consigned to what is described as a lake of fire and brimstone, void of the presence of the Creator. Whereas, humans who have been obedient to the Creator will be united with Him and His Heavenly host.