

What Christians Believe About the Devil & Demons

Christians believe that the devil exists. That is not the same as “believing in” the devil! When someone says, “I believe in Christ,” he means not merely that he acknowledges the existence of Christ, but that he believes Christ can and will save him. Christians trust in Christ for salvation. Of course, no one should believe in the devil in that sense. Rather, followers of Christ believe that the devil and his demons are real. The devil is evil, and he does immeasurable harm to humankind. Why should anyone accept these ideas? Because the Bible teaches them!

People have strange notions about the devil. He is pictured as the proprietor of hell—dressed in a red suit, with horns and a long tail which ends in a pointed arrow, armed with a pitchfork, stoking the fire, tormenting the people who are sent there. “He has been called everything from ‘boogy man’ to ‘old scratch.’”¹ The devil even has worshipers. Some who profess Christianity are obsessed with the devil; others prefer to avoid thinking or talking about him. Those who do not accept the inspiration of the Scriptures doubt his existence. What does the Bible reveal about the devil and his helpers?

HIS REALITY

First, the Bible teaches that the devil is real. The Scriptures testify to his reality. He is not just an impersonal force; rather, he and the demons who serve with him are supernatural spiritual beings who exhibit characteristics of intelligence; they are capable of knowing, thinking, speaking, and acting.

In the Bible, the devil is referred to in a number of ways. He is called “the devil” (διάβολος, *diabolos*), which means “slanderer” (Matthew 4:1). He is also referred to as “Satan” (Σατανᾶς, *Satanas*), which means “adversary” and can be used as the devil’s personal name (see 1 Chronicles 21:1; Zechariah 3:1; Job 1:7; Matthew 4:10; Luke 10:18; 22:31). He is our adversary (1 Peter 5:8). He is “Beelzebul” (Matthew 10:25; “Beelzebub” in the KJV), the great dragon and serpent (Revelation 12:9).²

Where did the devil originate? The Bible does not say. Two possibilities exist: Either he is eternally coexistent with God, or he was created. He cannot have been eternally coexistent with God. If he were, that would make him equal to God, so that possibility must be rejected. God alone is eternal. Good and evil have not eternally coexisted as opposing forces. Therefore, the devil must have been created.

¹J. J. Turner, “The Devil Made Me Do It,” *Firm Foundation* 88 (9 November 1971): 712.

²He is also called “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 16:11; see 14:30), “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2), and “the evil one” (Matthew 13:19; 1 John 2:13). In addition, he may be “the god of this world” mentioned in 2 Corinthians 4:4.

If the devil was created, then he either was created as an evil being or was created as a good being who chose to become evil. It seems impossible that a good God would create an evil being, especially since the Bible says that “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31a). We must conclude, then, that the devil was created as a good being but became evil.

Christians have traditionally believed that the devil is a fallen angel. Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4 both refer to angels who sinned and were expelled from heaven. Revelation 12:9, which speaks of the devil’s being “thrown down to the earth,” may also relate to the devil’s origin (see also Isaiah 14:12–15). “The condemnation incurred by the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6) may refer to the punishment that resulted from the devil’s rebellion when he was an angel in heaven.

It seems likely that angels whom God had created rebelled against Him, probably because of pride. They refused to “keep their own domain” (Jude 6), but sought to usurp God’s position. Leading the rebellion was the mighty angel who became the devil. God cast him and his followers out of heaven and consigned them to eternal punishment. These fallen angels became Satan and his henchmen, the demons.

HIS NATURE AS THE EPITOME OF EVIL

John wrote, “The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning” (1 John 3:8a). Jesus said to some of His enemies,

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

People may make jokes about the devil, but in reality Satan gives us no reason to laugh. He is the most horrible, despicable, malevolent creature that has ever existed.

HIS ROLE AS OUR ADVERSARY

In the parable of the tares, Satan is pictured as the enemy of the kingdom who planted tares in the farmer’s wheat field (Matthew 13:38, 39).

Peter wrote, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

The devil tempts people in order to influence them to sin. He tempted Jesus in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1–13). He “put into the heart of Judas Iscariot” the idea of betraying Jesus (John 13:2; see Luke 22:3), and he sought to capture Peter for his purposes by tempting him to deny Christ (see Luke 22:31, 32). To harbor anger in the heart is to “give the devil an opportunity” to cause us to sin (Ephesians 4:27). When people are unreceptive to the gospel, it is the devil who “comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12).

HIS USE OF DECEIT TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES

The devil is not ignorant. He knows how to present sin in the most attractive way. He can lie in such a way as to make sinning seem delightful. In the Garden of Eden, the devil changed just one word in God’s message. God had said, “You will die,” but the devil said, “You . . . will not die” (Genesis 3:3, 4). Then he enticed Eve by questioning God’s motives; he implied that God was jealous and did not want to share His power and wisdom with humanity (Genesis 3:5). He also pointed out advantages of eating the forbidden fruit. (It was “good for food,” a “delight to the eyes,” and “desirable to make one wise”; Genesis 3:5, 6a.) Eve was deceived by the devil (2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:14), ate the fruit, and encouraged Adam to do the same (Genesis 3:6b), with disastrous consequences.

Satan continues to use deceit today; he “disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14) and teaches “doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1) to win disciples for himself. Therefore, the New Testament warns Christians against the “schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11) and the “snare of the devil” (2 Timothy 2:26).

If the devil appeared as he really is and asked us to sin, we would probably not succumb to the temptation. Instead, the devil uses attractive people and methods to present temptations to sin in the most appealing ways possible. That is how he deceives us and ensnares us in his trap.

HIS FINITE POWER

The devil is powerful. In the Book of Job, he was able to use natural forces, evil men, and disease in trying to accomplish his goal. The devil's power is attested by the Bible's statement that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:18, 19). Revelation 12:9 confirms that view by saying that Satan "deceives the whole world."

However, the devil's power is finite. God is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (present everywhere); the devil is not. He does not know the future, for instance, nor can he read people's thoughts.³ God allows Satan to tempt individuals, but He limits his power to do so. Paul wrote that God "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able" (1 Corinthians 10:13). The story of Job shows us an example of God's limiting the devil's power to tempt someone. Christians, therefore, have the resources to resist the devil's temptations. Paul told the brethren not to stay angry so that they might not "give the devil an opportunity" (Ephesians 4:27) and urged them "to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). James said, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

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People sometimes say, in jest, "The devil made me do it!" In truth, the devil cannot make us do anything! He tries to convince people to sin; he tempts us and uses every trick conceivable to deceive us and influence us to sin—but he does not and cannot *make* us sin. When we sin, it is because we ourselves choose to give in to the devil's temptations in order to satisfy our

³Wayne Grudem, "Satan and Demons," *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 415–16.

own lusts (James 1:13, 14).

How can Christians keep from being overcome by the devil's influence? First, by recognizing his power, we can be aware of his presence in the things and people that tempt us. We must remember that we are always in danger of giving in to temptation. Second, we need to keep God's Word in our hearts and minds so that, like Jesus, we can say, "It is written," when we are tempted. Third, we can "put on the full armor of God" for protection (see Ephesians 6:10–17). Doing so will enable us to "stand firm against the schemes of the devil." Fourth, we are to remember that the devil is deceitful and learn to distinguish truth from his lies. Fifth, through prayer, we can seek the help of the Lord. With His assistance we can overcome, for God is "greater . . . than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4b). Finally, we can prepare ourselves to "resist the devil" (James 4:7). Let us steel ourselves against his advances. May our resolve to do God's will never falter! We can be strong, knowing that, with God's help, we will defeat our adversary!

HIS MANY DEMONS

The devil is assisted by a host of "demons" (δαίμόνια, *daimōnia*),⁴ who are also spoken of as "unclean spirits," "evil spirits," and the devil's "angels" (meaning "messengers" or "agents"; Matthew 25:41). The New Testament frequently speaks of these demons. Jesus cast out demons (Mark 1:34; Luke 4:33–35) and was accused by His enemies of casting them out by the power of Beelzebul (Matthew 12:24). Jesus promised His disciples that they would perform the same type of miracle (Matthew 10:1; Mark 3:15; 16:17), and they did (Luke 10:17; Acts 8:7; 16:18; 19:12). James wrote, "The demons also believe, and shudder" (James 2:19).

Are demons active today? Yes, but not in the same way they were in New Testament times. In the first century, they possessed people against their will. The apostles were given the power to cast out such demons. However, when Christ died on the cross, He "disarmed the rulers and authorities . . . having triumphed over them"

⁴The KJV frequently uses the word "devil" or "devils" to translate the Greek word *daimōnia*; see, for example, Matthew 7:22; 9:33, 34; 10:8. "Demon" or "demons, as in the NASB," is a more accurate translation. Only one devil exists, but there are many demons.

(Colossians 2:14, 15; see Hebrews 2:14). The devil sought the crucifixion of Christ (Acts 2:23), believing that by doing so he would at last triumph over God, his ancient enemy. Instead, in the very deed that Satan thought would signal His victory, Christ defeated Satan. Through Christ's death, the power of the demons to possess people was broken!

Today demons do not possess people, and no one has the power to cast out such demons. Nevertheless, demons still exist and continue to serve their master by helping him accomplish his aims. They *teach* and *influence* people to do wrong, but they cannot *force* them to be evil.

People can also serve the devil's cause. For example, when Peter said that Jesus should not go to the cross, he was tempting Jesus not to finish His redemptive work. Since he was aiding the work of the devil, Jesus said, to him, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (Matthew 16:23). When a person persists in doing the devil's work and following in his footsteps, he may be called a "devil" or spoken of as a child of the devil (John 6:70; 8:44; see 1 John 3:8, 10). When people encourage us to do wrong, they—like Peter, in the time of Christ—are doing the devil's work.

HIS ULTIMATE DESTINY IN HELL

Jesus said that hell was prepared for "the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). At the conclusion of the great conflict pictured in the Book of Revelation—the war between the forces of God and those of evil—we read that "the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10). Rather than being the one who torments others in hell, the devil will be one of those who is tormented there! *Rather than being the proprietor of hell, the devil will be a prisoner of hell for all eternity!*

CONCLUSION

How should the Christian react to these biblical teachings about the devil and his demons? We should believe that the devil exists, be knowledgeable of his schemes, and do our best to keep him from leading us astray.

We can take comfort in two facts. First, we need not be overcome by the devil. He has no

power over us if we never succumb to his temptations. When we become discouraged by the power of the devil and the vast array of weapons at his disposal, we can remember that we have powerful assets as well. God is our loving Father, Jesus Christ is our High Priest, the Holy Spirit indwells and strengthens us, and God's angels exist to serve us (Hebrews 1:14). We can be encouraged by Scriptures like 1 John 4:4: "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."

Second, the devil will ultimately be defeated by God and cast into hell forever. Let us rejoice in the certainty of Satan's coming defeat, but let us also make sure that we are not with him in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone for all eternity.

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Thoughts on the Devil

"It was a real Devil who tempted Eve to sin in Eden; it was a real Devil who ravaged Job of old, it was a real Devil who attacked Jesus; it was a real Devil who entered Judas; it is a real Devil Peter was warned about! To deny the Devil is to deny both sense and scripture."

"Satan has had some victories; man has sinned and death belonged to the Devil. In this sense many have underestimated the Devil. He is our enemy, our adversary (1 Peter 5:8). He held powers and principalities. Man needed not only forgiveness but deliverance!"

"The Devil is a remorseless, cruel, and mighty foe—don't ever underestimate your enemy!"

"Peter in Acts 2 revealed how Jesus in death entered into the Hadean world (a territory the Devil considered his own) rendering the Devil harmless and helpless. The Devil may appear to be still in business, but he is bankrupt!"¹

¹Charles B. Hodge, Jr., *A Biblical Study of Satan*, Gospel Teachers Adult Series (Dallas: Gospel Teachers Publications, 1973), 5, 16.