

# Is Satan Still Doing His Thing?

BY DAVID POSEY

The question in the title assumes a belief in a being whose name is Satan (or “the adversary”). Yet, this being has been systematically erased from the conscience of most Americans, even most of those who call themselves Christians. So, the question is a big deal. If Satan is still “doing his thing” then we are at war, or we should be. And this war is a more significant battle than the war against Isis. If Satan is still active, he is invisible but horrific; his aim is not to take your physical life, but to strip you of your spiritual life. He wants you to enter the wide gate that leads to destruction and sets up a formidable blockade to the narrow gate, that leads to eternal life.

But does he even exist? There are opinions on both sides of that question, but let’s get something out of the way at the outset: Satan, if he exists and is active, is never an excuse for sin. In the 1970s, comedian Flip Wilson (1933-1998) made the line “the devil made me do it” famous. But let’s be clear: the devil never *makes* anyone do anything. He does not have that kind of power. When we sin, it’s because we were deceived or deceived ourselves, not because some outside source forced us to sin. When the devil spoke to Eve, he tempted her with a false promise that she could be like God. She was tempted by her own desire, and sinned.

But that begs the question of whether Satan is a real force today. The Bible mentions him several times: 49 times in total, 34 times in the New Testament. “Devil” (*diabolos*) is used 33 times, all in the New Testament. That’s 82 references to the Satan/devil.

The most famous reference to Satan is probably the one found in I Peter 5:8, Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Clearly, in Peter’s day, Satan was a force to be reckoned with. Did something happen since Peter’s time to de-fang Satan? The only passage that suggests that Satan’s role in the world has been reduced is Revelation 20:3-4, a notoriously difficult passage to interpret. Here is the significant language from that text:

And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. *Revelation 20:2-3*

There is some sense in which Satan has been or is being bound. The purpose of the binding was to keep him from “deceiving the nations.” The “thousand years” and the “little while” may have nothing to do with time, per se, — they may just be relative terms.

I can easily see this as a reference to Christ’s effect on Satan. Christ’s coming, “with grace and truth” (John 1:17), has twisted Satan’s weapon out of his hand. Our commitment to Christ binds Satan, absolutely, as Jesus predicted:

...how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. *Matthew 12:29*

Jesus has plundered the house of Satan. He bound him at the cross. Satan has no power over those who live by faith in Christ. But Satan is still around, doing his thing to those who live by some other principle than faith in Christ.

I cannot say, given the large number of references to him, that the devil is not active today. One of the most compelling passages is found in Revelation 12:9-11, And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death...

Notice that this passage defines the role of Satan — he is a *deceiver*. Why? His aim is to accuse us before God. Yet, our defender is Christ himself, our “Advocate” (see I John 1:9 - 2:10). That fits nicely with Paul’s argument in Romans 8:31-33, What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.

But the devil will do all he can to take our faith away so that we have no grace to rely on any longer. He will tempt us, hoping we will give in and begin to question God’s existence or his goodness, so that he can accuse us to the Father. He is a prowling, hungry lion, seeking someone to devour.

To ignore this threat is to ignore his power; Paul referred to him as “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2) and warned us to “put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). He is not omnipotent, like God, but he is strong.

So, yes, Satan is still doing his thing. And his “thing” is to destroy you.