

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Character of Satan

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-236

We continue tonight in our Bible study on the subject of origins. As you well know, we are studying now the origin of sin and its impact. This is message number four on that subject, so far based somewhat loosely, admittedly, on Genesis chapter 3. If you would like to open your Bible to Genesis chapter 3, we will begin there.

The third chapter begins with these words, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the Garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees in the Garden, we may eat. But from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the Garden, God has said you shall eat from it and touch it, lest you die.' And the serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die for God knows that in the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' And the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was desirable to make one wise. She took from its fruit and ate. And she gave also to her husband with her and he ate. And the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings."

Now with those opening seven verses of Genesis chapter 3, you have the fall of man. The bliss enjoyed by the creation ends at that point. Up to that moment, as we have learned, everything was very good. The comment in chapter 1 verse 31 is a comment that stays in force until the fall, "God saw all the He had made and behold it was very good." And we have been saying that you cannot understand the current state of the universe, and you certainly can't understand the current problems with humanity, unless you understand the third chapter in the Bible because here you have the origin of sin and its impact.

Remember now, God, the Creator, is all good and only good. And His original creation was a reflection of that goodness. God is not the author of evil, as I pointed out last week, or He would be both good and evil. And if God were both good and evil, He could not triumph over evil nor could He save sinners from evil. The Biblical revelation of the original creation then, as only and completely good, preserves and protects the goodness of God, making the source of evil outside of God. And because the source of evil is outside of God, God, through His perfect goodness, can triumph over evil and save man from it.

Evil entered the human realm; it entered the physical universe by the disobedience of Adam and Eve of which we have just read. The source of sin was the disobedience of man. When Adam and Eve disobeyed, evil became a reality. As I told you last week, evil was not created, it is not a force, it is not a being, it is not an entity; it is the absence of goodness. It is a negative. It is the absence of moral perfection. And we also said last time that God, though not the author or creator of evil, decreed evil a part of His plan. It had a place and has a place in His plan. So that He might display His grace, which can only be displayed, by its very nature, when He forgives sinners. He wanted to display His judgment, which can only be displayed when He condemns sinners. And He wanted to destroy evil forever, which can only be done when evil exists and all of these things to God's everlasting glory.

Now that's what we know about the origin of evil. It came into our world through the choice of Adam and Eve. They chose to disobey God's command. They, therefore, brought evil into this created world. There was no external cause, no deterministic cause and effect, only a choice made by intelligent, rational man. Even the tempter, the serpent, could not force such disobedience; he could only suggest it. The choice by Adam and Eve was an expression of the measure of freedom that God gave them so that the guilt belongs to them alone.

Now all of that leads us back to the serpent. And verse 1 begins, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman." We're here introduced to the tempter. And this is a serpent; we said last time the word to indicate that this is a reptile. The word "nacosh" is used interchangeably in other portions of the Old Testament with the word "taneen". Nacosh means reptile. Taneen means, or was translated, dragon, in some places. So this was some kind of animal, a real animal, some kind of reptile or dragon. No doubt to some degree, an upright creature because when cursed, was cursed to crawl on his belly either as a snake crawls or as some reptile, like an alligator, crawls with very short appendages and legs. But when this reptile appeared in the Garden, it must have been prior to the curse, which cast it down the ground, as we read in chapter 3, verse 14. And therefore we assume that this was some magnificent, beautiful reptile in an upright position at that time.

Now this is a particular animal. This particular animal is given a particular facility by an indwelling spiritual power to speak. And that is why the text says this particular serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field. This was a more wise--the word "crafty", I told you last time, means wise or cunning. It is a kind of wisdom, a kind of intelligence that is being referred to here. This is an intelligent being. And we know that because of the speech. And the level of intelligence is indicated because this personality that is in the body of this reptile, knows about conversations between God and His creatures Adam and Eve. He even purports to know God better than they do. And to know themselves better than they do and better than God does.

The question at this point: Then who is this? Who is this reptile and where did he come from? We understand how sin got into the human realm. But how did sin touch this creature? That's where it all really starts: Who is this reptile? And I told you last time, the answer is given very clearly to us in Revelation 12:9, clear at the other end of the Bible. And also Revelation chapter 20 verse 2. And I will just briefly read them to you.

Revelation 20 verse 2 refers to the dragon, the serpent of old who is the devil and Satan. So we know who this dragon/serpent is, it is the devil and Satan. Revelation 12:9, "The great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old, who is called the devil and Satan who deceives the whole world." It is this devil, this deceiver, this satan who appeared, first of all, as a serpent or a dragon in the Garden. This then is Satan, Satan who takes over the body of a reptile and uses that body as a vehicle to have a conservation that plunges the entire universe into sin.

Now the question is where did Satan come from? And how are we to understand his character and his work? Now Satan we are very familiar with, as Bible students. He is described in the Bible in careful detail. We are glad that we know about his origin; that's very important. We're glad that we know about his character. We're glad that we know about his work because we want to understand all of that. It's important for us to know about his origin. It's important for us to know about how it was that he became a sinful creature and became the tempter. It's very important for us know that, lest we think that God was the creator of evil. If we didn't know about the origin of evil in this personality called Satan, and the other demons who fell along with him, it might contribute to some assumption that God, in fact, is the creator of evil. But the story of Satan is so well told in the Bible that it doesn't leave us with any question about where evil came from. And as just the way it is in the human realm, it came by a choice made by Adam and Even, that's how it started in Satan's case. It came by a choice that he made.

We can know this source of the supernatural tempter. We can follow him from the time of his fall to his ultimate casting into the lake of fire. We can see his wicked enterprise from the Garden, where it starts, to the end of the millennial kingdom where he brings about the final revolution which Christ puts down and then destroys the universe and casts Satan and all his hosts into the lake of fire. And so we can know the whole story from Eden to the end of the millennial kingdom, and even before Eden, because we can know where Satan came from to begin with.

The study of Satan is a wide and full revelation in Scripture because it is essential to the redemptive purpose of God, and to sustaining the glory of God, and the holiness of God, and never impugning God as a source of evil. It is also important, not only to be clear on the source of evil, but to understand Satan because he is our enemy. And we do not want to be ignorant of him or his devices, so says the Scripture in 2 Corinthians 11:2. We don't want to fall prey to the subtle deceptions of Satan, today, even as he was successful in deceiving Adam and Eve in the Garden.

So what I want to try to do is to give you, first of all, something you probably don't have, and that is an Old Testament look at Satan. I want you to see what the Old Testament teaches about Satan because it is very instructive. We get a lot more instruction in the New Testament. We see Satan working feverishly during the ministry of Jesus Christ. And his character is then expounded upon, illustrations of how he operates are given, and the power that Christ has over him is explicitly demonstrated in the gospels. We learn about Satan in the book of Acts. We learn more yet about him in the epistles. And finally, we learn about him in his final exercise against God in the time of the tribulation and his final demise in the book of Revelation.

But it is not often that we take a good look at the first explanation of Satan, which occurs in the Old Testament. He is a major personality here in the story of origins. And for us to understand this, in its clarity, we need to take a look at the early mentions of Satan. Now he's only mentioned by that name three times in the Old Testament. The English word "Satan", S-A-T-A-N, comes from the Hebrew word "Satan"; it's just transliterated. It is the word used most frequently in the Old Testament to describe this personality. It is used not always as proper name. The word "satan" can have a small "s". It is the word for adversary. It is the word for opponent. And it is used in that way. For example, in Numbers 22 and verse 22 and verse 32; in 1 Samuel 29:4; 2 Samuel 19:22; in 1 Kings, a number of places, chapter 5 verse 4 and 11, chapter 14 verses 23 and 25, and then the cognate verb appears in another couple of places; as well in the Psalms, I think it's Psalm 38 and Psalm 71. So it is a word that, simply in Hebrew, means adversary ... adversary. It can be used of any adversary of Israel or any adversary of a person who took up cause of opposition against that person.

It is also true that the word "satan" as adversary can also take on a legal meaning. In other words, it could be the word "prosecuting attorney" or "accuser". And that is a very common usage of that word as well. It is used that way Psalm 109, for example, in verse 6 and also in Ezra chapter 4 verse 6. So it is a word that means "opponent". It can be, in a very general sense, an adversary or an opponent. Or it can take on a legal sense in being a prosecuting attorney, someone who sets up a case and an indictment against someone else.

And that is precisely how Satan is defined. Satan is our adversary. He is our opponent. He is not only our adversary and our opponent, but he is the adversary and opponent of God and of all the enterprises of God and of the people of God and of the Son of God, as we well learn in the New Testament as well as the Old. He is also the prosecuting attorney. He is the one who goes before God and sets indictments before God about his own beloved people. He is the accuser of the brethren. He is the prosecutorial attorney who stands at the right hand of God, as it were, indicting us. And so, he is first and foremost, our enemy, our archenemy. And he certainly appears that way when he shows up in the Garden, doesn't he? And he wants to destroy all that man has been given in the wonder of the perfect creation because he hates God and he hates man.

Now there are three Old Testament references, let's look at the first one. Job chapter 1 ... Job chapter 1. One of the most satisfying studies that I did in writing The MacArthur Study Bible was the work I did on Job. And I would commend to you to read that. Read it thoroughly. Read the introductory material. Read the book. Read all the notes. Because this a profound, profound, marvelous drama played out on the pages of the book of Job. But it is in the book of Job that for the first time Satan is identified. This is a book, by the way, Job, from the Genesis period. Job, no doubt, lived during the time of patriarchs in the Genesis period. So it's a very early book in terms of place in the chronology of the Old Testament and redemptive history.

Now in the book of Job, Satan is called "the satan", the adversary. It's not yet a proper name, early on. He is the opponent, the adversary. Now as the fascinating story opens, we can pick it up in chapter 1 verse 6, "There was a day when the sons of God," those would angels; that's one of the reasons I believe there are also angels in Genesis 6, where they cohabit with the daughters men. But, "There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord. And the satan also came among them." And here for the first time we're introduced, formally, to this adversary.

Now all of these beings, the sons of God and the satan, are portrayed here as subordinate to God. We are in the scene before the throne of God with angels, sons of God, and with Satan. They have an enterprise in mind. In verse 7, "The Lord said to Satan, 'From where do you come?' And Satan answered the Lord and said, 'From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.'" What's he doing? What's he doing roaming around on the earth? 1 Peter 5:8 answers that, "Satan goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

You see Satan, even early on in the book of Job, which is in the time Genesis, has been emboldened greatly. He is really emboldened in his enterprise. He believes that his enterprise can be effective. You know why? Because he had great success with unfallen Adam and unfallen Eve, how much greater success will he have with everybody else who is cast into fallenness because of their sin? If his enterprise was successful in the perfect world of Adam and Eve in the perfection of God's very good creation, how much more successful will it be in the fallen world? At least that's how Satan thinks. So he is emboldened by the success he enjoyed with the unfallen Adam and Eve in Eden. And he's confident that if the unfallen collapse before him so readily, certainly the fallen will be easy prey.

And this is the first episode we have with Satan outside the Garden. And it indicates his strategy. What Satan is doing is roaming around on the earth, trying to destroy people, trying to destroy them. He is a destroyer. And particularly, is he interested in destroying people who have faith in God. He wants to destroy their faith. Like with Peter, he wants to take Peter and sift him like wheat and have him blow away like chaff, a failure. He wants to come at Paul, like in 2 Corinthians 12, like a

messenger from Satan ramming a spear through his heart to make him resent God. He wants to come to Jesus, Matthew 4 and Luke 4, and catch Him in a moment of physical weakness after a 40-day fast in the mountains and tempt him to disobey God, and to grab His glory, and grab His earthly power, and grab His personal satisfaction, and therefore disobey God. He wants to see the fall of everybody including Jesus Christ.

He wants then, secondly, to invite God's people before God's throne. If he can't destroy their faith and cause them to be disqualified by apostasy, he wants God to reject them because the list of their sins is so long. Satan is geared to the destruction of God's people, primarily. Obviously he wants to damn the whole human race. But his particular preoccupation is with those who belong to God, i.e., Adam and Eve and Job and Peter and Paul and others. His hope is that if he can't destroy their faith, he can destroy their integrity before God by a long list of indictments. That's why Revelation 12:10 calls him the accuser of the brethren.

So that's what he's doing. He's going all over the world and he's trying to destroy people. At the same time, he's accumulating information about people, about their sins and about their failures. And he keeps his list in his supernatural mind. And he shows up at the throne of God like a prosecuting attorney. Takes his place before the throne of God, the great judge, and says, "I'd like to bring a case against So-and-so. And I have a long list of sins for which this person should be indicted, prosecuted, and executed. This person not worthy, God, to bear Your name. This person doesn't deserve to have a relationship with You. If You threw me out of Heaven for what I did, You ought to throw them out of Heaven for what they have done." And maybe that's how he makes his case. "You know, the list of sins on my part," he might say, "were so small it was just pride and for that I was thrown out. Look at this list, far longer, far longer." And so he is the accuser and he is the destroyer. Working on both fronts to destroy the faith of God's people and to destroy God's commitment to them by indicting them before Him.

God knows what he's after. So in verse 8, He responds, "And the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant, Job?'" You want to destroy somebody? Let Me take initiative in this. I like the fact that God takes initiative because He immediately establishes that He is in complete of what Satan can do. Did you get that? God is in total control of everything Satan can do. He determines what Satan can do and what Satan cannot do.

A couple of weeks ago, remember I talked to you about people who come to our church out of the Pentecostal, charismatic movement where they lived under the sovereignty of Satan? If you get sick, it's the devil that did it. If you have a problem in life, it's the devil that did it. If you lose your job, the devil did it. If your child gets sick, the devil did it. And if things go wrong in the country or around you, it's the devil who's doing it all. And they live under the fearful attitude that Satan is sovereign. Well, that is a great lie and produces needless fear. And Satan is not sovereign. As Martin Luther said, "The devil is God's devil." God is sovereign.

And the initiative here comes from God. In verse 9, Satan answered the Lord after the Lord said there's nobody like Job, a blameless man, an upright man, fears God, turning away from evil. I mean God's giving him the very best He's got. And we're going to find out what kind of power Satan has. That's going to make the point pretty well because if the best man collapses under Satan's power, everybody under him is going to go too. So I'm sure Satan really wanted this supreme test.

Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Come on! Sure he's loyal to you. Of course he's loyal to you; it's obvious. "Have you not made a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side? You've blessed the work of his hands. His possessions have increased in the land." Well, what do You expect? Of course he's loyal to you. Look at him; You've made him rich. "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has and he'll curse You to Your face." I mean I can understand why Satan might think that is true. I mean Adam and Eve were willing to disobey God and turn on God when they had everything. Wouldn't it be a logical assumption that Job would bail out if you took everything he had away from him? So the Lord said to Satan, in verse 12, "All that he has is in your power." The Lord puts limits on the devil, always. "All that he has is in your power only don't put forth your hand on him." You can't touch him; you can just touch what he has. "So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord."

Now, what's going on here is quite interesting. Satan is saying to God, "Job's loyalty to You is grounded in self-interest. Job's to loyalty to You is grounded in prosperity; it is prosperity that has made him loyal; it is prosperity that's made him faithful." So let me tell you what Satan's saying. This is amazing. Satan is insinuating that God is naïve. Did you pick that up? That God is naïve. "You're really naïve; You really don't know this guy's heart. I know him. You are," Satan in impugning God, saying, "You are blessing Job in ignorance." That is a brash thing to come before the throne of God and say. "If You really knew Job like I know Job," Satan's saying, "You would know that he wasn't righteous because he really cared about You; he was only righteous because You gave him all the things You gave him." He's saying, "God, I hate to tell this but You're not omniscient. You don't know Job. And You don't know his motive. And You don't know why he is the way he is. You are really ignorant and naïve. And I'm here to tell You the truth. Not only are You naïve, God, You're wrong. You're wrong. You are unwittingly blessing Job and therefore You are unwittingly pandering to his selfishness, to his shallowness, and to his hypocritical faithfulness. God, You are messing big time. Let me show you the truth about Job. Let me at him. I'll show You how naïve, how ignorant, how wrong You are."

You think Satan was bold? Can't imagine being any bolder than that. Satan won't hesitate to indict you if he'll stand in the throne of God and indict God. And so Satan says, "Let me reverse those conditions. Let me reverse the circumstances. And I tell You right now, his faith will fail. His faith will fail. He'll turn on You. And when he does that, I'll come right back as the prosecuting attorney and bring up all his crimes against You and lay them right before You. If You'll let me work on Job and

reverse the circumstances, then You will learn the truth about him. Again, You're just not omniscient, God."

And God gives him the most righteous man on earth and says, "Okay, go prove your point at the maximum level. If Job fails surely all the lesser ones would as well. So go make your point. I'll give you the premier opportunity. If you can knock off the best one, surely the lessers will tumble after. But you can't touch him." I love that. You know why He says that? Because Satan is a murderer, right? From the beginning, he is a destroyer. And he would like to do everything possible, probably ultimately including the destruction of Job. But God says, "You can't touch him."

Now the scene shifts then in verse 13. "It happened on a day when," now meanwhile back on earth, "that Job's having a meal, eating and drinking wine in the house of the oldest brother." Job doesn't know what's gone on in Heaven. Never, in this whole book, does he know about the conversation between God and Satan. He has no clue why things happened. God never tells him, tremendous story of trust when you don't have answers. "A messenger comes in and says, 'The oxen were plowing, the donkeys feeding beside them and Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword. And I, alone, have escaped to tell you.' While he was still speaking, another also came and said, 'The fire of God fell from Heaven,'" assuming it was the fire of God, "'and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them. And I, alone, have escaped to tell you.' And while he was speaking another came and said, 'The Caldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels, took them; slew the servants with the edge of the sword. I, alone, have escaped to tell you.' While he was still speaking another also came and said, 'Your sons, your daughters were eating and drinking wine in your oldest brother's house. And behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness, struck the four corners of the house, it fell on the young people and they all died. And I, alone, have escaped to tell you.'" Everybody's dead, everything's gone.

"Job rose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell to the ground and," amazingly, what did he do? He worshipped. Worshipped? Aren't you supposed to shake your fist and curse God? He worshipped. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave. The Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Through all of this Job didn't sin nor did he blame God. Wow! Sorry, Satan. Can't break saving faith because it's supernatural. And God is, after all, omniscient. He did know Job, didn't He? He did know Job and He knew that Job's faith was real and that it would be the same whether he had all those things or had none of them because true faith is a Divine gift. It's supernatural. It's not subject to human circumstances. It's a gift of God.

Satan is pretty relentless and he wasn't done trying to prove the Arminian theory of apostasy. He is the original Arminian. Chapter 2, another day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord. Satan shows up. He's going to try to again. And the Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "from roaming about on the earth and

walking around on it." Just going around doing harm. Just making trouble. Creating chaos. Trying to destroy people. And the Lord said, "Have you considered my servant, Job." A little tongue in cheek; want to take another whack? Giving him full opportunity. And if you're ever going to prove that you can destroy a person's salvation, if you're ever going to prove the doctrine or the theory of Arminian apostasy, here's where you have to go see if it can happen. So God says, "There's nobody like him on earth." They have the same speech over again, "Blameless and upright man fearing God, turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." He hasn't changed; he hasn't wavered. His faith is still real.

And Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin!" You didn't let me touch him. Now you let him touch him. And I'll tell you right now, he'll prove the Arminian theory of apostasy; he'll defect. Just let me get at his personal life. "Yes, it's for all that a man has he'll give for his life. You put forth Your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, he'll curse you face to face." He still insists, "God, You're naïve. God, You're ignorant. God, You're wrong. You don't know this guy. You're not omniscient. I'm telling You, if You let me touch his flesh he will curse You to the face." And the Lord knows that he is a killer, looks at him again, in verse 6, and says, "Behold he's in your power; only spare his life." Again, God is sovereign over Satan.

What we're seeing here, follow this. You see in the character of Satan is evil personified. This is a malevolent, sinister, wicked, destructive, murderous personality. That is this person called Satan. All he wants is to kill and destroy, Scripture says. And he wants either to destroy the faith of those who are God's or to destroy God's commitment to them by accusing them before Him.

So, in verse 7, "Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and he smote Job with sore boils from the sole of the foot to the crown of his head." Now some translations, I think it's the New King James, says painful boils. We don't know the nature of this. We do know--if you study the book of Job chapter 2, 3, chapter 7, chapter 13, chapter 16, chapter 19, I think even into chapter 30--this was very traumatic suffering, extraordinary physical distress, and getting the broken pieces of pottery just scraping at his scabs trying to get some relief. No medicine. No pain relief. Perhaps his boils were similar to those of the Egyptians in Exodus chapter 9 and those of Hezekiah in 2 Kings chapter 20, tremendous suffering.

And there he is, in verse 8, scraping himself, sitting in a pile of ashes. And his wife, who is no help--I've often thought there must have been days when he wished the Lord had just taken her with everybody else. And she says, in verse 9, "Do you still hold fast your integrity. Why don't you curse and die?" That kind of tells you whether she was a believer or not, doesn't it. "Why don't you just curse God and die?" Are you going to hang onto this deal? But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall you indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" In all this, Job did not sin with his lips. Aren't you glad? That has tremendous implications for you because the devil would want to do to you the very same thing he wanted to do to Job. He'd want to destroy

and your faith and then go to God and indict you and have God damn you. But saving faith can't be broken.

What do we learn from this about Satan? He is the adversary. He is the opponent. And here is a model, here is a picture, here is an illustration of what he wants to do to everyone who belongs to God. He is the adversary of God. He is the adversary of God's people. He works to incite disloyalty to God because he hates God and he hates humanity and, most particularly, he hates redeemed humanity. He is however, controlled by God though he blasphemes God and by calling into question God's omniscience. That's the first picture we have of the satan. And that's an illustration of how he works today, going around like a roaring lion seeking to devour.

The second Old Testament mention comes in Zechariah chapter 3. The prophet Zechariah, next to the last Old Testament book, chapter 3. And this again is another interesting picture. As I said there are only three Old Testament texts that deal with Satan by name. And here in Zechariah chapter 3 we read in the first couple of verses, "He showed Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at His right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?' Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel and he spoke and said to those who were standing before him saying, 'Remove the filthy garments from him.' And he said to him, 'See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.' And put a clean turban on his head and did that and clothed him with garments while the angel of the Lord was standing by."

Boy, this is so dramatic! Again, the scene is an interesting scene. It is a courtroom scene, it's using that adversary that word "satan". Here again, it has the definite article, the satan. The adversary. And in this case Joshua--not the Joshua that you're familiar with who seceded Moses--but Joshua, the high priest of the restoration which, post-Babylonian captivity the people have come back in the first group led by Zerubbabel. And this man, Joshua, was the high priest of that restoration group. That group that come back to rebuild Jerusalem. And he is accused by Satan. And you can see the picture, he is pointing to Joshua and he's accusing him. And what's the source of that accusation? It's in the imagery of verse 3, "Joshua was clothed with filthy garments." And so what he's doing is pointing out that this is a sinful man. And he's saying, "You know, God, You've got Your high priest down there and he's representing You and he's a filthy person. He's sinful."

And furthermore, the imagery here is of Joshua, not only as a man, but Joshua--follow--as a representative of Jerusalem which is a representative of the people of God, Israel. So Satan is indicting a man; and behind that man, the city; and behind that city, the people of Israel. We know that because the rebuke in verse 2 is, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! Indeed the Lord has chosen Jerusalem." So Joshua sort of stands for the people. "Look," Satan is saying, "God, look at this. Here is your best man. Here is Your high priest, the man who makes the connection between the

people and You. This man is a filthy sinner representing a country, or a nation, of filthy sinners. You just need to destroy them all. You just need to destroy them all."

So here is the malicious adversary standing in the presence of the Lord, as evidenced by the angel of the Lord, to pronounce upon Israel divine judgment for their sins and their unworthiness of God's favor. And Satan is saying, "You just need to damn them all, God. Look how filthy they are." If God rejects Joshua, who's the high priest, in effect He rejects Jerusalem, which means He rejects the nation. Now nothing would satisfy Satan more than the destruction of an individual unless it's the destruction of the whole people of God. One of the interesting studies that you can engage in, in the Bible, is to follow the pattern of Satan's attempt to destroy the people of God. And it goes through the whole of redemptive history. Old Testament and New Testament.

So how did the Lord respond to this? In verse 2, the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan!" The angel of the Lord is, here, identified as the Lord thus verifying this messenger is deity. And the message is crucial: God has not cast off the Jews. He will keep the Abrahamic covenant. He will keep the Davidic covenant. He will keep His people because He has chosen Jerusalem. I love that. He has chosen Jerusalem; they are the elect. "This is a brand plucked from the fire." Thus, Satan again is pictured. He comes to accuse an individual, in the case of Job; to indict an individual, in the case of Job; to destroy an individual believer, in the case of Job; and he comes, in this scenario, to destroy all the people of God. And God protects His own because He keeps His covenant.

God confirmed here His purposes for Israel, sweeping from Zechariah's time all the way to the consummation of human history. And God shows by illustration how He did it. Yes, Joshua did have filthy garments, verse 3. But the Lord removed them and gave him clean garments. What's that a picture of? The doctrine of the work of justification, forgiveness. So what do we learn then? We learn that the adversary, the opponent, the prosecuting attorney is Satan. He hates God. He hates God's people. He hates God's nation. He is a promoter of apostasy. He opposes God's purpose. If he can't get the believer to turn against God, he'll work to get God to turn against the believer.

There's one more mention of the name Satan. Turn back to 1 Chronicles chapter 21. This chronologically, the account we're going to read about in 1 Chronicles 21, obviously doesn't fit into the flow that we're in. But it's helpful for us because it turns a bit of a corner that I think is informative. Satan, then Satan, and I just want to comment. The definite article disappears here. Now it's no longer the adversary but the proper name that is used. So we can conclude that sometimes he is the adversary. And sometimes he's just adversary and it becomes a proper name. And we're not surprised, in verse 1 he stood up against whom? Against Israel. I mean why would he be so concerned to destroy Israel? Because Israel is the people of promise. Israel is the witness nation for the gospel to go to the world. Israel has been the law and the prophets and the promises and the covenants and all of that. Israel is the key to the transmission of the salvation message to the world.

And even though they're unfaithful today there is going to be a day when they turn and repent and are cleansed and proclaim the gospel to the world. We know that's going to happen. It's going to start in the time of the tribulation and extend through the 1,000-year millennial kingdom. And they will receive the blessing God promised to them when they are cleansed, when they do believe, and they will become that nation.

In the meantime, the Lord has cut a new channel, a new people, the people who we knew as the church. And Satan is as viciously against the church, the true church, as he was against the people of God Israel because the church now stands as the witness nation in the world. And he works to destroy the church as he works to destroy Israel. Satan's still up against Israel, it's what he had in mind.

How did he do it in this case? He moved David to number Israel. The word "moved" is the same word used in Job chapter 2, verse 3, it translated "incited". There was a census in Moses' time but God authorized it. And this is census that David did, prompted by Satan. And David did it because he wanted to exalt his pride. He wanted to count all the people in order to demonstrate the great strength and the great power and the great force. He wanted to take credit for building a great army. "So David said to Joab and the princes of the people, 'Go number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan and bring me word that I may know their number.' Joab said, 'May the lord add to his people 100 times as many as they are, but my lord, the king, are they not all the lord's servants, why does my lord seek this thing? Why should he be a curse of guilt to Israel?'" He knew that this was forbidden by God. But David was proud. And they did it.

And verse 7 says, "God was displeased with this thing so He struck Israel. And David said to God, 'I have sinned greatly in that I have done thing. But now please take away the iniquity of thy servant for I have done very foolishly.' And the Lord spoke to Gad, David's seer, saying, 'Go and speak to David saying, 'Thus says the Lord, I will offer you three things, choose for yourself one of them that I may do it to you.' And Gad came to David and said to him, 'Thus says the Lord, take for yourself either three years of famine, or three months to be swept away before your foes while the sword of your enemies overtakes you, or else three days the sword of the Lord even pestilence in the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel. Now therefore, consider what answer I shall return to Him who sent me.' And David said to Gad, 'I'm in great distress please let me fall unto the hand of the Lord for His mercies are very great but do not let me fall unto the hand of men.' So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel. 70 thousand men of Israel fell."

David knew that if he allowed anything to go on for three years or three months, the people would rise up and kill him. So he said give me the short punishment. "God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he was about to destroy it, the Lord the saw it, was sorry over the calamity, that He said to the destroying angel, 'It's enough, relax your hand.'" Wow! This really angered God. David wasn't acting only for himself. Imagine, one man sins and 70 thousand people die. Now that sounds

like what happened in the Garden, doesn't it? One man sinned and the guilt is imputed to the whole of humanity.

So this is what Satan does. He wants to do things that are massively destructive. And he knows that God is a holy God who has holy reaction against evil. And Satan works his work of temptation to bring about destruction. And here, because of God's own holiness, God, Himself, in the protection and exaltation of that holiness, through the temptation and sin, executes His own people. But there's another side to this.

Turn to 2 Samuel 24 ... 2 Samuel 24. This is interesting. Here is the parallel passage ... the parallel passage. Verse 1, "Now again, the anger of the Lord burned against Israel. And it," it? What's it? "The anger of the Lord burned against Israel and it incited David against them to say 'Go number Israel and Judah.'" Wow! Let me get to the picture here. 1 Chronicles 21 says Satan incited David to number Israel. Here, it says the anger of God incited David to number Israel. That's not a contradiction, is it? Didn't I say before, the devil is God's devil? There's no contradiction here. Satan was the instrument to do the will of God. You say, "Well, why in the world would God want to incite Israel? To incite David to do this, to number Israel?"

The answer, I think, can be simply understood. It says in verse 1 of this chapter, first of all, the anger of the Lord burned against Israel. Before there was any numbering, God was furious with His people for their wickedness and for their sin. He was furious with them. And so God, within the framework of His purposes, allows Satan to go and incite David to do this numbering. And it's really like taking some great infection that already exists under the skin, and popping it through the surface so that it can be revealed for what it truly is and surgically excised. The infection was already there. God was angry. And God allowed Satan to step in to that which was festering under the surface, just under the hypocritical religion. And to bring temptation against David, who, in his pride, which already was in his heart, and self-centeredness already in his heart, would cause him to do something that would show the corruption and bring it the surface and allow God to move in. So that when God destroyed those 70 thousand people, it wasn't that they were not guilty and perished because of the sin of David. It was that they were actually guilty of sins against God, as a people.

So what are we saying? We're saying that the satan, the adversary Satan, sets himself against the purposes of God, against the people of God but always operates only within the framework of God's purposes, right? He's not sovereign. God is sovereign. And God will allow Satan to bring about temptation that surfaces corruption below the surface. He will also allow Satan to bring about powerful tests to prove the unbreakable nature of saving faith. He will also allow Satan to come before His throne and bring his long list of indictments, only to be sent away with the statement, "No indictment stands," because that sinner has had his filthy garments removed and he's been clothed in a clean garment, right?

So Satan is the accuser. He's trying to destroy faith. He's trying to destroy the faith of God's people, trying to get them to turn against God. Can't do that with true believers. Then he tries to get God to turn against them. Can't do that either. Satan is one frustrated personality. And all he can do is function within the confines of God's sovereign purpose. And whether it's the purging and cleansing of Israel, or the purging and cleansing of Job to bring Job to a higher level of worship and devotion.

If you study the Bible you will find that God uses Satan to judge sinners: Mark 4:15, 2 Corinthians 4:4. God uses Satan to refine saints: Job 42:6, Luke 22:31 and 32, and 2 Corinthians 12 in the case of Paul. God also uses Satan to discipline believers. We see that in that same passage. It's also indicated in 1 Timothy 1:20 and 1 Corinthians chapter 5. It really was neither God nor Satan that forced David to sin here. Certainly God doesn't tempt anybody to sin, the Bible makes that clear. Satan can't make you sin. The devil doesn't make you do anything it's your choice. Your fallenness is the problem. So God didn't force David to sin, he had a choice. Obviously Satan didn't force David to sin. But God did allow Satan to tempt David and God knew that David would choose to sin because He knew his heart. And that would allow God to have reason enough, having surfaced their wickedness, to move toward that infection and clean it out.

And, by the way, David took complete responsibility for his sin. He really did. He didn't blame Satan. 1 Chronicles 21:8, David said to God, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing. Please take away the iniquity of thy servant for I have done very foolishly." Three times, "I've sinned greatly; I've done this thing; I've done very foolishly." David never passed the guilt off. Never blamed Satan. It's not Satan. He certainly, didn't blame God.

Down in verse 17, further, 1 Chronicles 21:17, David said to God, "Is it not I who commanded to count the people? Indeed, I am the one who has sinned and done very wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? O Lord, my God, please let Thy hand be against me and my father's household but not against Thy people that they should be plagued." But David didn't know the sins of the people as well as God did. But David wants to take full responsibility. The devil doesn't make you do it. Sin is of your volition. And the judgment that fell on David, demonstrates that God held David accountable for his actions.

So those are the three Old Testament passages. And they give us a picture of how Satan operates. So we've answered some basic questions: Who was that serpent in Eden? And who is this adversary, this satan, this opponent of God and angels and men? We've answered that. We've now met him. Now that leads us to a second and really fascinating question: In the perfection of original creation, where did he come from, right? Where'd he come from? All of a sudden he appears in the Garden, this wicked, malevolent hater of God and hater of God's people, and hater of humanity, this liar, this destroyer, this murderer, this wicked being. Where did he come from? Well, I'm going to answer that question but not tonight. Let me tell you this: sin originated with him. It originated in the

created physical world with Adam and Eve. It originated first of all with this personality. And next Sunday night we're going to see how it originated.

Well, let's close in prayer. When we realize the cosmic nature of this great warfare and Father, we're a little overwhelmed by it all. We tend to think in such provincial and such narrow and small patterns, we can't even conceive of this great conflict that goes on before Your throne in Heaven in which we get swept up and caught up. And the purposes that You have, and that Satan has, within Your sovereignty for people like Job and people like David and like Israel. Purposes that You have even for those great apostles, Peter and Paul. Purposes that You have for us in which You, the sovereign God, have the forces of darkness working for our purging and our purification and Your ultimate glory. Father, such insights are so profound the world doesn't know about this. They only know what they can see and hear, smell, touch, and taste. They know nothing of the other world for it can only be known as You reveal it to us. And how we rejoice that though Satan is a supernatural and powerful being, and though he has millions of demons, millions upon millions, hundreds of millions, aiding his enterprises, he never steps one inch beyond Your sovereign purpose. And he can never destroy Your own beloved people. Nor can he successfully bring an accusation against us.

We thank You for the great confidence expressed by the apostle Paul when he said, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" God is the one who justifies. He's the One who took off the filthy robes and put on a clean garment, even His own righteousness to cover us. Who is the one condemns? Not Christ Jesus for He is the One who died and was raised, who is at the right hand of God, interceding for us. Therefore no matter what Satan does, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, not tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword. Not death or life or angels or principalities or things present or things to come or powers or height or depth or anything other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, Our Lord. We thank You for that confidence. And we thank You that even with all of Satan's maneuverings in the end You will accomplish Your glorious purpose. And he will be cast forever into the lake of fire, having been used only to achieve what You desired. For Your glory, we praise You and thank You for this great confidence. In Christ's name, Amen.

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