

The Existence of Satan

A. What does the Old Testament say about Satan?

Satan is the name given to the leader of the fallen angels. The name comes from the Hebrew word “*sātān*” which means “an adversary, one who resists.” Liberal theologians, including modern Jews, argue that the term should not be taken as a proper name or merely as a title, namely, “the accuser.” They argue that Satan in the Old Testament is not an evil principle. The argument goes something like this: “In Job, ‘the Satan’ is not God’s adversary, but Job’s. He acts as one of God’s subordinates/courtiers to follow his directives. (This view is premised on the idea that there is a difference in this being while he is still in heaven, rather than being cast out and being assigned to the realm of earth.)” (Dunnett)

We know that Satan exists because the Bible tells us so. We find him in the very beginning of Scripture as he makes his presence known with Eve in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3). If there is any doubt that the serpent of Genesis 3 is not Satan, this doubt is proven void of substance by passages like 2 Corinthians 11:3 and Revelation 12:9.

In the Old Testament we see the term “Satan” used several times. In 1 Chronicles 21:1 he tempts David to boast about the power of his army. In Job (1:6-9, 12, 2:1-7) we see Satan having access to God’s presence and being Job’s accuser and God’s tool in testing and molding Job. In Zechariah 3:1-2 we see him again as an accuser whom the angel of the Lord (the preincarnate Christ) does not Himself rebuke but requests the Father’s authority in the matter.

B. What does the New Testament say about Satan?

The New Testament strongly demonstrates Satan's existence. He is mentioned in 19 of the 27 books by name and in the 8 books that he is not mentioned by name, 4 imply his existence by making references to demons.

In Matthew 4:4 (cf. Mark 1:13) Satan unsuccessfully tries to tempt Jesus, but in Matthew 16:23 (cf. Mark 8:33) he successfully tempts Peter. In Matthew 12:26 (cf. Mark 3:23,26; Luke 11:18; Acts 26:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:9) Satan is depicted as the leader of the demons. In Mark 4:15 Satan deceives those who hear the word and do not take it to heart. In Luke 10:18, 13:16, 22:31 (cf. John 13:27) Jesus makes direct reference to Satan as falling from heaven, as the one possessing a woman for years, and as one asking permission to tempt Peter. In Luke 22:3 we see Satan possessing Judas before betraying Jesus. In Acts 5:3 we see Satan as the one who "filled" Ananias' heart, or tempted him into lying about his giving. In Romans 16:20 we are reassured of God's future complete victory over Satan. In 1 Corinthians 5:13 (cf. 1 Timothy 1:20) we see God using Satan as His tool in helping reform believers who go astray. In 1 Corinthians 7:5 (cf. 1 Timothy 5:15) Satan is ready to tempt us in our weaknesses. In 2 Corinthians 2:11 (and 11:14) Paul points out his awareness of Satan's desire to deceive and slander God's people. In 2 Corinthians 12:7 we see Satan being used as God's tool for Paul's spiritual growth. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul makes it clear that Satan is against him and the progress of the gospel.

Satan is a person, a created being with intellect and emotions that are evident as he schemes to deceive and desires to oppose God's will. Satan has volition, or will, as we see in his desire to rebel against God. Therefore, Satan is a supernatural spiritual being who is incorporeal, invisible, and immortal. Satan is an angelic being.