

Sabbath School Lesson #2 – The Great Controversy – 1-7 October 2016

Christ is our refuge in the great controversy. To Satan, He says: “And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: *is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?*” (Zechariah 3:2). In this Lesson we study the work of Satan and how to resist him in this great controversy.

Tuesday section of the Lesson refers to the Bible testimony pointing the existence of ‘a literal devil, a supernatural being with malicious intentions’ and then cautions: ‘Though many people view the idea of Satan as a primitive myth, with such clear Bible testimony we should not fall for this deception.’ This is indeed an important caution, and intensely practical, – one that personally concerns every one. Ignorance of the reality of the tempter, and of his methods, and consequently of how to resist him, has been the rule of many; but it is not necessary for us to be ignorant of his devices. The Bible amply gives us full information concerning him, plainly teaching that there is an evil spirit, a real personality, called Satan.

Let us begin with the temptation of our first parents. True, the record in Genesis, being very brief, does not describe the person of the tempter; but it does clearly teach us that a real, visible creature, having the form of a serpent, addressed Eve, and beguiled her with lies. Read the whole of the third chapter of Genesis. Now with that read Revelation 12:7-9: “And there was war in heaven; Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was there place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels with him.”

Here we find that the one who tempted Eve was Satan in the form of a serpent. This shows not only that he is a real being, but as the Lesson on Tuesday says, he is also ‘a supernatural being.’ Satan is a spirit, as the heavenly angels, of whom he once was one. Being a spirit, he can assume various forms, making himself visible or invisible at will. As the Spirit of God manifested Himself in the form of a dove, so this evil spirit revealed himself as a serpent. Satan beguiles; does that which the Spirit of Truth will not do – he often assumes the forms of other intelligent beings, not only of angels of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), but of men, making people believe that they see and communicate with their dead friends.

In Revelation 12, we find that Satan is the accuser of the brethren, “which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony;” and great trouble is brought to the earth, because the devil is come to its inhabitants “having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.”

This agrees with what we read in 1 Peter 5:8, which is a warning against a real tempter: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” This cannot apply to ‘the idea of Satan as a primitive myth.’

With the two texts – the one which speaks of Satan as the accuser of the brethren, and this which says that he walks about as a roaring lion, seeking to devour whomsoever he can, read the story of Job in the first and second chapters of that book. “There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.” Then when God called Satan’s attention to Job, he began to accuse him, saying that he served God only for gain. “And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.”

Again we read that after coming to another assembly of the sons of God, and accusing Job, “Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils.” Here we have something besides ‘the idea of Satan as a primitive myth.’ We see that Satan is as real a being as are the sons of God. In keeping with his character Satan accused Job before God, and tried to kill him. From this we should learn that our only safety lies in God’s protecting care. If we take ourselves out of His hand, our lives are not for a moment secure against the attack of Satan. Thus we see how significant is that just before the Apostle Peter warns us that our adversary, the devil, goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, he tells us to cast all our care upon God, saying, “He careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Take the case of the temptation of Christ. The tempter was not ‘a primitive myth.’ It is impossible to deny that Satan is a real being, without denying the reality of the temptation of

Jesus. We read that after trying to get Jesus to make bread of stones, “the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a high pinnacle of the temple” (Matthew 4:5). Again, “the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then said Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth Him” (Matthew 4:8-11), but only “for a season” (Luke 4:13). That Satan was not ‘a primitive myth,’ often he sought to seduce and destroy the Saviour, but was unsuccessful.

No one who believes this account of the temptation of Jesus can avoid believing that Satan is a real being, with wonderful power. No one can reduce Satan to ‘a primitive myth’ – an evil disposition. Jesus had no evil disposition; but even if He had, an evil disposition could not carry Him from the wilderness to the top of the temple in Jerusalem, or to the top of a high mountain, and show Him the kingdoms of the earth, and beg to be worshipped.

One more out of the multitude of references to Satan must suffice for the present. In the twentieth chapter of Revelation we read these words of John in the prophetic vision he had:

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season.” And again we read: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle; the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city; and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.”

Here we have the account of the final disposition of Satan; but from first to last we see that he is described as a person – an evil spirit, as real as are any of the angels who are sent forth to do service for those who shall inherit salvation; only his purpose is to destroy instead of to save. But one may point to the statement that “every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14) to dismiss the idea of a personal tempter and argue that we are tempted by our “own lust” or by an evil disposition. But Jesus “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15); He “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Hence, to be tempted is not a sin. But the possession of an evil mind is sin; therefore it is effectually settled that Jesus was not tempted by an evil disposition.

Not till lust has conceived does it bring forth sin. It is true we often desire evil things. But such desire is sin itself, not a temptation to sin. “The thought of foolishness is sin” (Proverbs 24:9). “The law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14) and “exceeding broad” (Psalm 119:96), it covers the outward act of transgression and the desire to transgress. Such desire Jesus never had.

In the wilderness, Satan tempted Jesus on the side of appetite. “Command that the stones be made bread.” Jesus had a desire for bread, and that desire was perfectly lawful. He also had the power to produce bread even from stones. But He would not use His power for the gratification of even His own lawful desires. He waited for His hunger to be satisfied, till the devil had left Him, and the angels of God came and ministered unto Him. The same angels are sent to serve us. “Christ pleased not Himself” (Romans 15:3). He thought not of Himself, but “emptied Himself” (Philippians 2:4) and He “gave Himself for us” (Titus 2:14).

Satan fell because he cherished an unlawful desire; and his purpose is to induce everybody to think only of himself. Christ, on the other hand, resisted the desire to please Himself, even in the gratification of lawful desires, thus showing how much greater is His power than Satan’s. This is the power He offers us, and the possession of it marks one as ‘every inch a king.’ Instead “of serving divers lusts and pleasures” (Titus 3:3), as the slave of his desires, he is the ruler of them. He makes pleasure wait upon him, instead of waiting on pleasure. He who can deny himself even a lawful pleasure, patiently waiting till he receives it at God’s hands, no matter how long the time of waiting, is safe from all evil. The man who can say to his body when it clamours for lawful food and drink, ‘You must wait my time, for I am master, and I am not to be driven,’ will have no difficulty in abstaining from evil things.