

Satan?

1. Warm-up question: Although Satan is a serious subject, Jeff began Sunday's sermon with a couple jokes about Satan – because the Bible says, “A cheerful heart is good medicine.” Proverbs 17:22. What's something funny that you've seen, heard, or experienced recently?
2. Isaiah 14 is a mystical passage that tells us about someone who falls from heaven. Like many prophetic passages, it appears to have two levels of meaning. On one level, the prophecy appears to refer to a powerful ancient Assyrian king, though we're not sure which one. But on an even deeper level, the prophecy has long been viewed as describing the fall of Satan – the idea is that Satan was originally a magnificent angel who turned bad and rebelled against God. Read Isaiah 14:12-19, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Modern views of Satan can be grouped into three basic categories. Some people believe in a literal Satan, *i.e.*, a powerful fallen angel who continues to seek to draw others into resistance against God. Others see Satan as a metaphor, *i.e.*, as God's way of trying to explain to us humans on a level we can understand that evil is best understood not as active, intelligent, strategic, and powerful, rather than abstract and passive. Yet others dismiss the idea of Satan altogether as quaint and antiquated. Which of those three views most resonates with you – and why?
 - b. Does it matter what we believe about Satan? What are the advantages of believing in a literal Satan? What are the disadvantages?
 - c. What are the advantages of believing is Satan as a metaphor? What are the disadvantages?
 - d. What are the advantages and disadvantages of dismissing the idea of Satan altogether?
 - e. Revelation 12:1-9 elaborates on the story of Satan as a fallen angel who still engages in active rebellion against God. Read that passage, as printed on p. 3. Why do you think destroying Jesus was such a focal point in Satan's efforts to overthrow God?
3. Jeff explained why he believes in a literal Satan as a fallen angel who still seeks to rally resistance against God. He began with the observation that everywhere we look around us, we see an infinitely creative God who delights in creating all kinds of different levels of being, ranging from simple little slugs all the way up to the complexity of octopuses and humans. This pattern suggests that in realms beyond earth God has probably also created creatures more even sophisticated than us humans. We typically refer to those creatures as angels.

- a. Jeff noted that it's not hard for most of us to believe in good angels who can sometimes interface with and impact us humans. Do you believe in good angels? Why or why not?
 - b. Have you ever known someone who encountered an angel? What happened?
 - c. If God created good angels, it doesn't take much of a stretch to imagine that some of them may go bad, just like some humans go bad. But that then raises the question why God wouldn't destroy or at least quarantine Satan and other fallen angels, so they can't have an adverse impact on us. Jeff suggested that God has not destroyed them because God loves even his enemies, wants good things for them, and hopes they will eventually see the light and come back home. For that reason Jeff suggested we should even pray for Satan's redemption. What are your thoughts about all that? Does it make sense to you? Can you imagine Satan repenting? Can you imagine God welcoming him back? Why or why not?
4. After discussing whether and why Satan and other bad angels exist, we tried to understand what great mistake caused them to fall, so we can learn from their mistake and avoid falling away from God in our lives. Isaiah 14 offers us a big clue. There Satan makes five different "I WILL" statements, e.g., "I WILL raise my throne above the stars," "I WILL make myself like the Most High." Those statements vividly contrast with what Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane when he said, "Not my will, but Your will be done." Jesus understood that he was part of something much greater than himself and set aside his own narrow self-interest for the greater good. God invites each of us to do the same – to step out of our me-focus and love the world as much as God does, investing ourselves in something much greater than our narrow self-interest. It's not about "me," it's about living in the love of God.
- a. Tell us about a time in your life when you really wanted something to happen that didn't happen and when it didn't happen, you didn't understand and you felt like rebelling against God and forcing it to happen. How did that turn out? How did that feel?
 - b. Tell us about a time in your life when you managed to sacrifice something you really wanted in order to do something for the greater good. How did that turn out? How did that feel?
 - c. Jeff said, "Life is so much better when we stop being a resistance fighter and instead simply trust God's plan even when it's so much bigger than us that we can't understand." As you look back over recent months, which mode have you been in? Have you been more in the resistance fighter mode or the trust God's plan mode?
 - d. Why is it so hard to trust when we don't understand? Why is it so important that we trust when we don't understand?

Isaiah 14:12-19

¹² How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!

¹³ You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon; ¹⁴ I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.' ¹⁵ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit. ¹⁶ Those who see you will stare at you, and ponder over you: 'Is this the one who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, ¹⁷ who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who would not let his prisoners go home?'

¹⁸ All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his own tomb;

¹⁹ but you are cast out, away from your grave, like loathsome carrion, clothed with the dead, those pierced by the sword, who go down to the stones of the Pit, like a corpse trampled underfoot.

Revelation 12:1-9

A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ²She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. ³Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. ⁴His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. ⁵And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; ⁶and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. ⁷ And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹The 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.