

Satan's Limitations

Satan: The Adversary · Spirits & Demons

While Satan possesses formidable power and intelligence, it is crucial to understand his limitations lest believers either dismiss him with dangerous presumption or fear him with paralyzing exaggeration. He is powerful but not omnipotent; cunning but not omniscient; pervasive in influence but not omnipresent in person. Only God possesses the incommunicable attributes of deity. Satan remains a creature, subject to creaturely limitations, operating only within boundaries the sovereign God permits.

The book of Job provides the clearest demonstration of Satan's subordination to divine authority. Satan appears before God among the sons of God, suggesting he retains some form of access to the heavenly court (though Revelation 12 indicates this access will be terminated). When Satan accuses Job and requests permission to afflict him, God grants limited authority: 'Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.' Satan can do nothing beyond what God permits. When Job's integrity survives the first test, Satan returns for permission to afflict Job's body, and again God sets boundaries: 'Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.' Satan must operate within divine restrictions; he is on a leash, however long that leash may sometimes appear.

The New Testament confirms this pattern. Satan 'desired to have' Peter, that he might 'sift him as wheat,' but this was a request requiring permission, not an autonomous action. Jesus, having granted that permission for purposes of testing and strengthening Peter's faith, prayed that Peter's faith would not fail—and it did not ultimately fail, though Peter stumbled grievously. The devil's power to tempt and test is real but circumscribed by Christ's

intercession and God's faithful preservation of His elect. James provides the great promise and principle: 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.' Satan is formidable but not invincible; he advances when unopposed but retreats when resisted through faith.

John assures believers: 'Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.' The Holy Spirit indwelling the believer possesses infinitely greater power than all demonic forces combined. Satan's power, though supernatural from a human perspective, is created power—finite and defeatable. Though he prowls as a roaring lion seeking prey, his roar is that of a defeated foe. Colossians declares that Christ 'spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them' at the cross. Satan's doom is certain, his sentence passed, his execution merely awaiting the appointed time. He is dangerous but defeated; threatening but doomed. Believers face a real enemy but serve an infinitely greater King who has already secured the victory.

Key Verses

Job 1:12

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.

Job 2:6

And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.

Luke 22:31-32

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

James 4:7

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

1 John 4:4

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

Colossians 2:15

And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

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