

What does the Bible teach about the Devil?

Jesus was tempted by the Devil in the desert at the end of his forty day fast (Matthew chapter 4). He used to speak of the devil by name (Matthew 13:39, 25:41; John 6:70, 8:44) and also as the evil one (Matthew 5:37, 6:13; John 17:15). He also cast out demons from afflicted people, showing that in the same way as it is possible to be filled with the Holy Spirit, it is also possible to be demonised.

There are also pictures of the Devil in the Bible. It was a serpent who tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden (Genesis chapter 3). Note that a snake is apt to wriggle into a place through a small opening and inflict pain and suffering. In Revelation, he is presented as a dragon causing havoc and destruction, sharing his authority with the Beast who was a world ruler (Revelation 12:3, 13:2). This chimes in with Jesus' teaching about the Prince of this world. It seems that by rebelling against God, humanity has placed itself under the authority of the Devil.

When his death on the cross was imminent, Jesus said "the prince of this world is coming, but he has no hold on me (John 14:30)." This was another phrase he used to describe the Devil, along with 'the evil one'. Jesus' comment is revealing: we grasp that the devil can get a grip on us if we allow him to. An evil desire can give birth to sin, which when it is full-grown gives birth to death (James 1:14-15).

We are thus in charge of our own destiny. As Paul put it, "God is not mocked. A man reaps what he sows. If he sows in the field of his lower nature, he will reap from it a harvest of corruption, but if he sows in the field of the Spirit, he will reap from it a harvest of eternal life (Galatians 6:7-8).

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