



## THE DEVIL AND SIN

**Reading:** Hebrews 2:9-18

### Sin and temptation

Sin comes from our minds. We are tempted to sin by our own natural desires. But the temptation itself is not sin – it is part of human nature. It is when we give in to our wrong desires and allow them to become evil thoughts or actions that we sin:

*“But each person is tempted when he is **lured and enticed by his own desire**. Then **desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin**, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James.1:14,15).*

Jesus himself spoke of sin and also showed that it comes from the mind:

*“For **from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts**, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. **All these evil things come from within**, and they defile a person” (Mark 7:21-23).*

Jesus also showed that the evil thought can be as wrong as the action itself:

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27,28).*

Because sin is caused by failure to control our wrong desires, James shows the importance of keeping our desires under control:

*“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that **your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel ...**” (James 4:1,2).*

Even the best of us fail to control our human desires. Paul found it hard to do good and easy to do wrong (Romans 7:18,19). Our minds are naturally self-centred rather than God-centred. We sin by seeking our own desires rather than God’s will.

### Overcoming sin

Jesus had human nature like us and was tempted as we are. He had desires that would have grown into sin if had he not kept them under control. He was sinless because he never gave in to those desires. His temptations in the wilderness show that Jesus immediately recognised that these desires were wrong. He chose to cut them from his thinking straight away, before they had time to grow into sinful thoughts or actions. His example shows us what the Bible means by overcoming sin – to overcome the desires of our own nature.

The verses quoted above clearly show that sin comes “*from within*” – from our minds. There is no supernatural being that makes people do evil. When we sin it is our fault, because we have failed to control our wrong desires. But none of us likes to be told, “You are wrong!” It is much easier to blame someone else! To do this is to deceive ourselves:

*“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick ...” (Jeremiah 17:9).*

False teaching about the devil and satan come from wanting to blame someone else.

When God called Adam out of hiding (Genesis 3) and asked him if he had eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam answered,

*“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate”.*

Adam was trying to blame God for giving him the woman, and blame the woman for giving him the fruit. But it was his own fault – he made the wrong choice. Eve blamed the serpent. Adam and Eve did not want to take the blame for disobeying God. The first step to overcoming sin is to accept that the problem lies within our selves.





### The meaning of the word ‘devil’

It surprises many people to find that the first time the devil is mentioned in the Bible is in the New Testament, when we are told about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. If the devil is an all-powerful wicked being, where was it in Old Testament times?

The words ‘devil’ and ‘satan’ are both used in the temptation of Jesus. In Lesson 17 we saw that the tempter of Jesus could not have been an all-powerful evil being. The world belongs to God and no one else was able to offer it to Jesus. Also, Jesus would not have followed such a being, knowing him to be evil, to Jerusalem or anywhere else!

The word ‘devil’ is an ordinary Greek word (diabolos) which means ‘slanderer’ or ‘false accuser’. It is occasionally used about people who say wrong things about others:

*“Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour, not **slanderers** or slaves to much wine” (Titus 2:3).*

See also 1 Timothy 3:11 and 2 Timothy 3:3. The word is used of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus:

*“Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a **devil**.’ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him” (John 6:70,71).*

But this same word ‘devil’ is used in the New Testament to represent human sinfulness.

### ‘Devil’ is used in the Bible to describe sin

1 John 3:4-7 and 1 John 3:8-10 contain many very similar ideas. The following comparison helps us to understand the way the Bible uses the term ‘devil’:

1 JOHN 3:5	1 JOHN 3:8
You know that he ( <i>Jesus</i> ) <b>appeared to take away sins</b> , and in him there is no sin.	The reason the Son of God <b>appeared</b> was <b>to destroy the works of the devil</b> .

We see that “*to destroy the works of the devil*” is the same as “*to take away sins*”.

Hebrews 2:14 says that the devil “*has the power of death*”. It is **sin** that leads to death:

*“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and **death through sin**, and so **death spread to all men because all sinned** ...” (Romans 5:12)*

*“For the **wages of sin is death** ...” (Romans 6:23).*

Therefore, the devil represents sin. The following verses show that what the Bible says about the devil, it says about sin. This shows sin and the devil are the same.

The devil is the enemy of God (James 4:7)	... so is sin (Romans 6:13).
The devil is the tempter of man (Matthew 4:1)	... so are sinful desires (James 1:13-15).
The devil is deceitful (Revelation 12:9)	... so is sin (Romans 7:11).
The devil causes death (Hebrews 2:14)	... so does sin (Romans 5:12).
The devil was destroyed by Christ’s death (Hebrews 2:14)	... so was sin (Romans 6:6).

**The devil is used in the New Testament to represent sin.**

### A closer look at Hebrews 2:14

1 John 3 told us that Jesus came to destroy the “*works of the devil*”. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that Jesus came to destroy the devil, as well as his works:





HEBREWS 2:14	MEANING
<p><i>Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that <b>through death</b> he might <b>destroy</b> the one who has <b>the power of death, that is, the devil</b> ...</i></p>	<p>Believers share human nature, and so Jesus himself also had human nature so that through his death he would destroy sin.</p>

This verse says that Jesus was born as a human being so that he could destroy the devil through his death. This means that Jesus overcame his natural desires and so conquered sin for himself.

The verse presents problems to those who believe that the devil is a powerful evil being.

- It says Jesus has already destroyed the devil. So why do people wrongly believe that the devil exists today as a supernatural evil spirit?
- If the devil is an all-powerful evil being, then why does this verse emphasise that Jesus had to have human nature to destroy the devil?
- How could Jesus **by his death** destroy the devil if it was a supernatural evil being? Surely it would have been better for Jesus to be immortal like the angels. A dying person is very unlikely to win such a battle!

**The devil which Jesus destroyed was really the desire to sin which was in him**, as it is in all human beings. Jesus inherited human nature with this tendency from his mother. It was essential that he had our nature so that he could experience temptations to sin and overcome these temptations. This is why the verse emphasises the fact that Jesus had the same nature as we have. The final temptation Jesus needed to overcome was the temptation to avoid death on the cross. Having overcome this, he had completely conquered – or destroyed – sin. This is why the verse tells us that Jesus destroyed the devil by his death, and why 1 John 3:8 says he appeared *“to destroy the works of the devil”*. Jesus completely destroyed sin **for himself** because when he died he destroyed the very nature that could be tempted. He can no longer be tempted now!

*“... he (Jesus) has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself”* (Hebrews 9:26).

**Jesus destroyed the devil by his death  
 Jesus put away – or overcame – sin**

Jesus lived a perfect life. He *“in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15). By conquering sin for himself Jesus has made it possible for our sins to be forgiven.

### Why does the Bible use the term ‘the devil’?

The word ‘devil’ is used in the Bible to represent sin. It is an example of personification – speaking of something as if it were a person. But why is it that the Bible so often uses the word ‘devil’ instead of just saying ‘sin’? And why does it speak of this devil as if it were describing someone with tremendous power? It is surely so that we can understand just how powerful and deceitful sin is, to make us realise how much we need to fight against it each day. In the temptation of Jesus, the devil is used as picture language to describe the battle that took place in Jesus’ mind.

This battle against his own desires required all the strength he possessed. This is why the temptations to sin are described as a great power – the devil. It shows us how much we need to fight against sin each day and helps us to appreciate what the Lord did for us in overcoming sin.

### One all-powerful Creator

God is all-powerful and created all things. There is no supernatural being at work in the universe to oppose Him. God would not have created such a being. However, people





throughout the ages have thought that there is a great power opposed to God. The ancient Persians believed in two great powers. The first was thought to be the creator of light and goodness, and the second the creator of darkness and evil. In answer to this wrong belief, God sent this message:

*“I am the LORD, and **there is no other, besides me there is no God**; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; **I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things**” (Isaiah 45:5,7).*

The great Creator is the only great power in the universe, and controls everything. **The only opposition to God is from sin in the minds and lives of men and women. There is no all-powerful evil being which some call the devil and others call satan.**

The idea of an evil being – a devil or satan – that has existed through the centuries does not fit with the teaching of Scripture that God alone has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16). God would not give immortality to a being that challenged His great purpose! Some wrongly believe that an angel sinned and became the devil or satan, but angels cannot sin or die (Lesson 28) – and we are told the devil was destroyed when Jesus died!

### **Symbols for sin**

The serpent was an animal (Genesis 3:1,14). God allowed it to speak, just as He allowed Balaam’s donkey to speak (Numbers 22:28). God used the serpent to test Adam and Eve – and they failed. The serpent did not make them eat the fruit – it just provided the test. Adam and Eve decided for themselves.

After this the serpent became a symbol for sin, just as the devil is a symbol for sin. In the last lesson we saw that ‘satan’ means ‘adversary’ or ‘opposer’, but it can also be used as a symbol – for anything that opposes God, including sin. This is why ‘satan’ is used (as well as ‘devil’) in the temptations of Jesus, because Jesus’ desires were opposing God’s will. Revelation is a book full of symbols, and the serpent, satan and the devil are all brought together in Revelation 12:9 to show, in picture language, the final removal of sin from the earth.

### **We cannot help ourselves, so what are we to do?**

It is very important to understand that sin is unacceptable to God. It comes from our minds and so the problem lies within us. We are responsible for our own sins and cannot blame anyone else. It is only when we accept this that we can begin to understand our need of forgiveness and God’s grace and mercy to us. Then we will be ready to turn to God and repent (be truly sorry for our sins and seek forgiveness), and make a new start in life through baptism. It is only through repentance and baptism that our sins can be completely forgiven. This is discussed in the next lesson.

### **Summary**

1. Sin comes from our minds. We are tempted to sin by our own natural desires.
2. The word 'devil' means 'slanderer' or 'false accuser'. It is used in the Bible as a symbol for sin. There is no supernatural evil being.
3. Jesus overcame sin in himself – he destroyed the devil through his death.
4. Our sins can be forgiven if we repent and are baptized.

### **Verses to learn: James 1:14,15**

*But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

**Passages to read: Psalm 14:2,3; James 1:12-27; Romans 6; Romans 7:14-25; Galatians 5:16-24**

