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Modern Myths About Satan and Spiritual Warfare

By David Servant

MYTH #3: “When Adam Fell, Satan Got Adam’s Lease to Control the World.”

What exactly did happen to Satan at the fall of humanity? Some think that Satan gained a big promotion when Adam fell. They say Adam was originally “the god of this world,” but at his fall Satan gained that position, thus giving him the right to do whatever he wanted on the earth. Even God was powerless to stop him from then on, because Adam had the “legal right” to give his position to Satan, and God had to honor His agreement with Adam which now belonged to Satan. Satan supposedly now possesses “Adam’s lease,” and God can’t stop Satan until “Adam’s lease runs out.”

Is this theory true? Did Satan gain “Adam’s lease” at the fall of humanity? Absolutely not. Satan gained nothing at the fall of humanity except a curse from God’s own mouth and a divine promise of his total demise. He was already a supreme loser as one who previously possessed a place in heaven but was expelled. Then, at Adam’s fall, God cursed him, promising him that one day his head would be crushed by the “seed of the woman,” that is, Christ. Satan was an outcast-loser who became a cursed and doomed outcast-loser!

“Satan’s Gain Theory” Disproved

Let’s examine, in the light of scripture, the commonly-believed myth that Satan won an upper hand in controlling the world at the fall of man and even gained an authority that was outside God’s jurisdiction.

First, the Bible *never* says that Adam was the original “god of this world.” Second, the Bible *never* says that Adam had a legal right to give anyone else his supposed authority over the world. You won’t find such an idea taught by Paul, Peter, James, John, Jude, or Jesus. Third, the Bible *never* says that Adam had a lease that would one day expire. All of these ideas are unscriptural.

What authority did Adam originally possess? We read in Genesis that God told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and *subdue* it; and *rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth*” (Gen. 1:28, emphasis added).

God said nothing to Adam about being a “god” over the earth, or that he could control *everything*, such as the weather, and all the future people who would be born, and so on. He simply gave both Adam and Eve, as the first humans, dominion over the fish, birds and animals and commanded them to fill the earth and subdue it.

When God pronounced judgment upon the man, He said nothing about Adam losing his supposed position as “god of this world.” Moreover, He said nothing to Adam or Eve about losing their dominion over fish, birds and cattle! In fact, I think it is obvious that humanity is still ruling over the fish and birds and “every creeping thing.” The human race is still filling the earth and subduing it. Adam lost none of his original, God-given authority at the fall.

Isn't Satan “God of This World”?

But didn't Paul refer to Satan as the “god of this world,” and Jesus refer to him as “ruler of this world”? Yes they did, but neither made *any* intimation that Adam was formerly “the god of this world” or that Satan gained the title from Adam when he fell.

Additionally, Satan's title as “god of this world” does not prove that Satan can do anything he wants on the earth and that God is powerless to stop him. Jesus said, “*All* authority has been given to Me in heaven *and on earth*” (Matt. 28:18, emphasis added). Was He telling the truth? If He was, then that should be the end of any theory that God would like to stop Satan, but can't because Satan has “Adam's lease.” If Jesus has *all* authority on the earth, then Satan can operate only with *His* permission.

Who gave Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth? It must have been God the Father, who possessed it Himself in order to give it to Jesus. That is why Jesus spoke of His Father as “Lord of heaven *and earth*” (Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21, emphasis added). These two scriptures alone should be enough to convince us of the fallacy of thinking that Satan has authority outside of God's jurisdiction.

God has had all authority over the earth since He created it. He gave a little authority to humans at the beginning, and humanity has never lost what God originally gave. Man is still filling the earth and subduing it; he is still ruling over the animal kingdom.

When the Bible speaks of Satan being the god or ruler of this world, it simply means that the people of the world (who are not born again) are following Satan. He is the one they are serving, whether they realize it or not. He is their god.

The Bible informs us that there are only two families of people from a spiritual perspective, the children of God and the children of the devil (1 Jn. 3:10). Satan is the god and spiritual father of all unsaved people (Jn. 8:44, Eph. 2:2). He is only ruling the kingdom of darkness, and that with God's permission. Just because Satan is called “the god of this world” does not mean that he can do anything he wants to do on the earth, or that he is not under God's authority.

Satan's Real-Estate Offer?

Much of the Satan-Gained theory is built upon the story of Satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, recorded by Matthew and Luke. Let's examine Luke's account to see what we can learn:

And he [Satan] led Him [Jesus] up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, “I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.”
And Jesus answered and said to him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only’” (Luke 4:5-8).

Does this incident prove that Satan has control over *everything* in the world, or that Adam handed it over to him, or that God is powerless to stop the devil? No, it does not, for a number of good reasons.

First of all, we should be careful about basing our theology upon a statement made by someone whom Jesus called “the father of lies” (John 8:44). Satan sometimes does tell

the truth, but in this case, our warning flag should be waving furiously, because what Satan said apparently contradicts something that God has said.

In the fourth chapter of the book of Daniel, we find the story of King Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation. Nebuchadnezzar, full of pride over his position and accomplishments, was told by the prophet Daniel that he would be given the mind of an animal until he recognized that "*the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes*" (Dan. 4:25, emphasis added). Four times this same declaration is made in connection with this story, underscoring its importance (see Dan. 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21). God wanted Nebuchadnezzar to know that he was a ruler *only* because God had exalted him, and thus he had no valid reason to be proud.

Notice that Daniel said that "*the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind.*" That indicates God has some control on the earth, doesn't it?

Notice also that Daniel's claim seems to be a direct contradiction of what Satan said to Jesus. Daniel said God "bestows it on whomever He wishes," and Satan said, "I give it to whomever I wish" (Luke 4:6).

So who are you going to believe? Personally, I'm going to believe Daniel.

There is, however, a possibility that Satan was telling the truth—if we look at what he said from a different angle.

Satan is "the god of this world," which, as I have already stated, means that he is ruling over the kingdom of darkness, which includes people in every nation who are in rebellion against God. The Bible states that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). When Satan claimed he could give authority over the kingdoms of the earth to whomever he wished, he could very well have been speaking *only of his own domain, the kingdom of darkness*, which is made up of sub-kingdoms that roughly correspond to geopolitical kingdoms. We are informed by Scripture that Satan has several ranks of evil spirits through which he rules his kingdom (see Eph. 6:12), and could assume that he is the one who promotes or demotes those spirits within his ranks, as he is the top dog. In that case, Satan was legitimately offering Jesus the position of number two evil spirit—after himself—to help him rule his dark kingdom. All Jesus had to do was fall before Satan and worship him. Thankfully, Jesus passed that opportunity for "advancement."

Who Gave Satan His Authority?

But what about Satan's claim that the authority of those kingdoms had been "handed over" to him?

Again, there is the very real possibility that Satan was lying. But let's give him the benefit of the doubt and assume he was telling the truth.

Notice Satan did not say that *Adam* had handed it over to him. As we have already seen, Adam couldn't have handed it over to Satan because Adam never had it to give. Adam ruled fish, birds, and cattle, not kingdoms. (There were, in fact, no kingdoms of people to rule when Adam fell.) Additionally, if, as I have described, Satan was offering Jesus rule over the kingdom of darkness, which consisted of all evil spirits and unsaved people, then there is *absolutely* no way that Adam could have handed that jurisdiction over to Satan. Satan was ruling over fallen angels before Adam was created.

Satan *may* have meant that all the people of the world had handed him authority over them, as they were not submitted to God and thus were, knowingly or unknowingly, submitted to him.

An even better possibility, which may seem strange to you at this point, but which will make much more sense when we later learn why God permits Satan to do anything on the earth, is that *God* handed it over to him. It is very possible, in the light of Scripture, that God said to Satan, "You and your evil spirits have My permission to rule over everyone who is not submitted to Me." Again, that may seem hard for you to swallow now, but you will see later that is probably the best explanation of Satan's claim that his authority had

been handed over to him. If God truly is “ruler over the realm of mankind” (Dan. 4:25), then any authority Satan has over mankind *must* have been granted by God.

Satan is only ruling the kingdom of darkness, which could also be called the “kingdom of rebellion.” He was ruling over that kingdom since the day he was expelled from heaven, which was prior to Adam’s fall. Up until Adam’s fall, the kingdom of darkness consisted only of angelic rebels. But when Adam sinned, he joined the kingdom of rebellion, and Satan’s kingdom ever since then has included not just rebellious angels, but rebellious humans.

Satan had rule over his dark domain before Adam was even created, and so let us not think that when Adam fell, Satan gained something that Adam previously possessed. No, when Adam sinned, he joined a kingdom of rebellion that had existed for some time, a kingdom ruled by Satan.

Was God Surprised by the Fall?

Another flaw in the “Satan’s-Gain theory” is that it makes God look rather stupid, as if He was caught off-guard by the events of the fall and as a result found Himself in a sad predicament. Did God not know that Satan would tempt Adam and Eve and that the fall of man would result? If God is all-knowing, and He is, then He must have known what was going to happen. That is why the Bible informs us that He made plans to redeem humanity even before He created humanity (see Matt. 25:34; Acts 2:2-23; 4:27-28; 1 Cor. 2:7-8; Eph. 3:8-11; 2 Tim. 1:8-10; Rev. 13:8).

God created the devil knowing he would fall, and He created Adam and Eve knowing they would fall. There is absolutely *no way* that Satan could have tricked God and gained something that God would rather he not have!

Am I saying that God *wants* Satan to be “the god of this world?” Yes, for as long as it suits His divine purposes. If God didn’t want Satan to operate, He would simply stop him, as we are told in Revelation 20:1-2 He will one day do.

I am not saying, however, that God wants *anyone* to remain under Satan’s rule. God wants *everyone* to be saved and escape the domain of Satan (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13; 1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:9). Yet God permits Satan to rule over everyone who loves darkness (see Jn. 3:19)—those who continue in their rebellion against Him.

But isn’t there anything we can do to help people escape Satan’s dark kingdom? Yes, we can intercede for them and tell them the good news of Jesus Christ (as Jesus has commanded us). If they believe the gospel, they’ll be delivered from Satan’s authority. But to think that we can “pull down” the wicked spirits that hold people in their grasp is erroneous. If people want to stay in darkness, God will let them. Jesus told His disciples that if people in certain cities did not receive their message, they should shake the dust off their feet and go to another city (Matt 10:14). He did not tell them to stay and pull down the strongholds over the city so that the people would become more receptive. God allows wicked spirits to hold in bondage those who refuse to repent and turn to Him.

Further Proof of God’s Supreme Authority Over Satan

There are many other scriptures which abundantly prove that God did not lose *any* control over Satan at the fall of man. The Bible repeatedly affirms that God always has had and always will have complete control over Satan. The devil can do only what God permits. Let’s first examine some Old Testament illustrations of this fact.

The first two chapters of the book of Job include a classic example of God’s authority over Satan. There we read of Satan, before the throne of God, accusing Job. Job was obeying God more than any other person on the earth at the time, and so naturally, Satan targeted him. God knew Satan had “set his heart” on Job (Job 1:8, see note in margin of

NASB), and listened as Satan accused Job of serving God only because of all the blessings he enjoyed:

Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face.” Then the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord (Job 1:9-12).

Satan said that God had put a hedge around Job and requested that He take away Job’s blessings. God then permitted Satan to afflict Job *to a limited degree*. Initially, Satan could not touch Job’s body. Later, however, God did allow Satan to afflict Job’s body, yet forbade Satan to kill him (Job 2:5-6).

This one passage of scripture clearly proves that Satan cannot do anything he wants. He couldn’t touch Job’s possessions until God permitted him. He couldn’t steal Job’s health until God permitted him. And he couldn’t kill Job because God would not allow it.¹ God has control over Satan, even since the fall of Adam.

Saul’s Evil Spirit “From God”

There are several examples of God using Satan’s evil spirits as agents of His wrath in the Old Testament. We read in 1 Samuel 16:14: “Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him.” This situation obviously occurred because of God’s discipline upon disobedient King Saul.

The question is, what is meant by the phrase “an evil spirit from God”? Does it mean that God sent an evil spirit who lived with Him in heaven, or does it mean that God sovereignly permitted one of Satan’s evil spirits to afflict Saul? I think that most Christians would tend to accept the second possibility in light of the rest of what the Bible teaches. The reason the scripture says that the evil spirit was “from God” was because that evil spirit’s harassment was a direct result of God’s divine discipline of Saul. Thus we see that evil spirits are under God’s sovereign control.

In Judges 9:23 we read that “God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem,” in order that divine judgment might come upon them for their wicked deeds. Again, this evil spirit was not from God’s heaven, but from Satan’s realm, and was divinely permitted to work evil plans against certain deserving persons. Evil spirits cannot successfully work their evil plans against anyone without God’s permission. If that is not true, then God is not all-powerful. Thus we can once more safely conclude that when Adam fell, Satan did not gain authority that was beyond God’s control.

The Devourer of Malachi

In the final book of the Old Testament, God rebuked Israel for withholding their tithes and offerings, but promised that if they would repent, He would “rebuke the devourer” so that “it may not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes” (Mal. 3:11).

¹ This entire passage is also proof that Job did not “open the door to Satan through his fear” a myth believed by some. God Himself said to Satan concerning Job in 2:3: “And he [Job] still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him *without cause*” (emphasis added). I discuss this in detail in my book, *God’s Tests*, pp. 175-181.

Apparently, the Israelites were suffering crop failure as a result of “the devourer.” Who was the devourer? No one can say with certainty. Some think the devourer was a swarm of locusts or something similar. Others suspect that the devourer was the devil or an evil spirit. If it was Satan or an evil spirit, then this indicates that God had the ability to put a stop to Satan’s evil workings.

New Testament Examples of God’s Power Over Satan

The New Testament provides additional evidence that refutes the Satan-Gained theory. For example, we read in Luke 9:1 that Jesus gave His twelve disciples “authority over all the demons.” Additionally, in Luke 10:19, Jesus told them, “Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over *all the power of the enemy*, and nothing shall injure you” (emphasis added).

If Jesus gave them authority over *all the power* of Satan, then He first must have had that authority Himself. Satan is under God’s authority.

Later in Luke’s gospel we read of Jesus saying to Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat” (Luke 22:33). According to a note in the margin of my Bible, an alternate translation of the original Greek would read, “Satan has *obtained by asking* to sift you like wheat.” Either way the text indicates that Satan could not sift Peter without first obtaining permission from God. Again, Satan is under God’s control.

God Controls Temptations

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:13,

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

Here we are promised that God will not *allow* us to be tempted beyond what we are able. God controls the degree of temptation that we face. Therefore, He must have control over the tempter, Satan.

Satan’s Thousand-Year Prison Term

When we read of the binding of Satan by one angel in Revelation 20, there is no mention of Adam’s lease expiring. The reason given for his incarceration is simply “that he should not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev. 20:3).

Interestingly, after Satan is imprisoned for 1,000 years, he will be released and “will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth” (Rev. 20:8). Those deceived nations will then muster their armies to attack Jerusalem, where Jesus will be ruling. When they have surrounded the city, fire will come down from heaven and “devour them” (Rev. 20:9).

Would anyone be so foolish as to say that Adam’s lease included one more short period of time after those 1,000 years, and so God was obligated to release Satan for that reason? Such an idea is absurd.

No, what we learn once more from this section of Scripture is that God has complete control of the devil and permits him to work his deception only to fulfill His own divine purposes.

During the future 1,000 year rule of Jesus, Satan will be out of operation, unable to deceive anyone. There will be, however, people on the earth who are only outwardly obedient to Christ’s rule, but who inwardly would love to see Him overthrown. Yet they

will not attempt a coup knowing that they have no chance to overthrow the one who will “rule with a rod of iron” (Rev. 19:15).

But when Satan is released, he will be able to deceive those who, in their hearts, hate Christ, and they will foolishly attempt the impossible. As Satan is allowed to deceive potential rebels, the condition of people’s hearts will be revealed, and then God can righteously judge those who are unfit to live in His kingdom.

That, of course, is one of the reasons God permits Satan to deceive people today. We will investigate God’s full purposes for Satan in a later chapter, but suffice it for now to say that God does not want anyone to *remain* deceived. He does, however, want to know what is in people’s hearts. Satan can’t deceive those who know and believe the truth. But God allows the devil to deceive those who, because of their callous hearts, reject the truth.

Speaking of the time of the anti-Christ, Paul wrote;

And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and *with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness* (2 Thes. 2:8-12, emphasis added).

Notice that *God* is the one given the credit for sending a “deluding influence so that they might believe what is false.” But also notice that these people who will be deluded are people who “did not believe the truth,” indicating they had an opportunity, but still rejected the gospel. God will allow Satan to empower the anti-Christ with false signs and wonders so that Christ-rejecters will be deceived, and God’s ultimate purpose is that “they may all be judged.” For that same reason, God permits Satan to deceive people today.

If God had no reason to permit Satan to operate upon the earth, He could have easily banished him to some other place in the universe when he fell. We are told in 2 Peter 2:4 that there are certain sinful angels whom God has *already* cast into hell and committed “to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.” Our omnipotent God could have done the same thing to Satan and to any of his angels if it suited His divine purposes. But, for a while longer, God has good reasons to permit Satan and his angels to operate on the earth.²

The Demons’ Fear of Torment

As we close our study of this particular myth, one final scriptural example to consider is the story of the Gadarene demoniacs:

² Additional proof of God’s sovereignty over Satan is found in Matthew 18:23-35, the parable of the unforgiving servant. Jesus concluded the parable by saying the unforgiving servant was handed over to the torturers by his master until he should repay his debt. Then Christ warned, “So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart” (Matt. 18:35). Who are “the torturers”? It seems reasonable to conclude that they are evil spirits. We read in 1 Corinthians 5:5 Paul’s instructions for disciplining a church-member by delivering him to “Satan for the destruction of his flesh.” Here is another example of divine discipline through the agency of Satan.

And when He [Jesus] had come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs; they were so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road. And behold, they cried out, saying, "What do we have to do with You, Son of God? *Have You come here to torment us before the time?*" (Matt. 8:28-29, emphasis added).

This story is often used by the proponents of the Satan-Gained theory to support their ideas. They say, "You see, those demons appealed to Jesus' justice. They knew He had no right to torment them before the time when Adam's lease expires, the time when they and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented day and night forever."

But actually just the opposite is true. They knew Jesus had the power and every right to torment them any time He desired, which is why they begged Him for mercy. They obviously were very afraid that the Son of God might send them to be tormented much sooner. Luke tells us they entreated Him "not to command them to depart to the abyss" (Luke 8:31). If Jesus didn't have that right because of some supposed legal right of the devil, they wouldn't have been concerned at all.

Those demons knew they were completely at the mercy of Jesus, as illustrated by their plea not to be sent out of the country (Mark 5:10), their entreaty to be permitted to enter the nearby herd of pigs (Mark 5:12), their begging to not be cast into "the abyss" (Luke 8:31), and their imploring Christ not to be tormented before "the time."

Myth #3: "When Adam fell, Satan got Adam's lease to control the world."

No, Adam never had a lease to control the world. All he had was the authority to rule the animal kingdom. When he fell he didn't lose that authority. Satan gained nothing at the fall of Adam except a curse from God and a promise of his ultimate, complete demise. Satan was ruling over the kingdom of darkness before Adam was created, and when Adam sinned, he enrolled himself in Satan's already-existing kingdom. God always has and always will have total and complete authority over the devil. Jesus referred to His Father as "Lord of heaven and earth" (Matt. 11:25). Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18). He is, as Paul said, "the head over all rule and authority" (Col. 2:10).