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God's Tests

By David Servant

ELEVEN

The God of This World

There is one final objection that should be addressed as we conclude several chapters studying the topic of God's sovereignty over Satan. That objection is often expressed by two questions: "But what about the scripture that tells us that Satan offered Jesus 'all the kingdoms of the world' during His temptation in the wilderness? Doesn't that prove that Satan, as 'god of this world,' is running everything on the earth?"

Those are good questions, and to arrive at the correct answers, we must consider all the relevant scriptures. By ignoring context, the Bible can be made to say just about anything.

Of course, from considering other Bible passages, we've already proven that Satan does not have *complete control* over the entire world. So in what capacity is Satan "god of this world"?

The answer is that Satan is ruling those who are submitted to him, which is everyone who is not submitted to Jesus. They are yielding, to a greater or lesser degree, to his temptations. They are his slaves. So in that sense, he is their god.

Jesus taught that if a person isn't born again, he is spiritually a child of Satan (see John 8:44). Paul also indicated that Satan's spirit is at work in those who are unsaved (see Eph. 2:1-3). Satan is ruling only the kingdom of darkness. That is why, for example, we are told by Paul that some of the evil spirits whom Satan leads are called "the rulers of the *darkness* of this world" (Eph. 6:12, KJV, emphasis added).

Satan rules only those who choose to remain in darkness by rejecting the truth. For that reason, he is "the god of this world."

Satan's Claim: Truth or Lie?

What about the claim Satan made to Jesus during His temptation? How are we to interpret the following verses?

And [Satan] led [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” (Luke 4:5-6).

First of all, we should be extremely careful building our theology on the words of someone whom Jesus called “the father of lies” (John 8:44). We would be foolish not to question the truthfulness of Satan’s claim.

Notice Satan claimed that *he* could give the domain and glory of the world’s kingdoms to whomever he wished. Is that true? Let’s compare Satan’s claim with what the prophet Daniel once said to proud King Nebuchadnezzar:

You will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field...until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and He *bestows it on whomever He wishes* (Dan. 4:25, emphasis added).

Did you notice any contradiction? Satan claimed that *he* could give the domain and the glory of the world’s kingdoms to whomever *he* wished. Daniel, however, claimed that God was the ruler of mankind and that *He* bestowed earthly positions upon whomever *He* wished. So who are you going to believe? Personally, I’m going to choose Daniel over the devil.

There is one possible way, however, that these two scriptures can be reconciled, if, in fact, Satan was actually telling the truth. God—the sovereign ruler of the universe, humanity, and all earthly governments—has permitted Satan to rule over *one* kingdom, and that is the kingdom of darkness. That being so, Satan was not offering Jesus an earthly, human, governmental position of authority. Rather, Satan was offering Jesus a position of authority over a spiritual kingdom—the kingdom of darkness—if Jesus would submit to him. Such a position Satan *could* offer, because the Bible is clear that Satan is ruling over several rankings of evil spirits, through which he administrates his entire dark kingdom. Together, Satan and his minions hold human rebels in their captivity (see Eph. 6:12).

Satan, to a certain degree, *is* ruling the kingdoms of this world, but only because the *people* of the kingdoms of this world are submitted to him. *Kingdoms* are made up of *people*.

Satan is ruling *governments* to a certain degree because many governmental leaders are submitted to him, knowingly or unknowingly. He is not, however, ruling those who are not serving him—those who have been freed from his power by Jesus Christ.

Stop and think for a moment: What would happen if every person in your country, including government leaders, would repent and submit to the lordship of Christ? Would Satan have *any* control over your nation? No, he would have none at all. Satan only has authority over nations inhabited by people who are serving him.

The fact that Satan exercises authority over the kingdom of darkness provides no proof that God is not sovereign, or that “God’s hands are tied” from doing anything He wants to do. We have already proven from other scriptures that God is sovereign over the earth, and He is sovereign over Satan’s kingdom as well.

Apparently, the devil was willing to delegate a large portion of his authority to Jesus as long as he (Satan) remained the top dog. Of course, that would have required that Jesus commit high treason against His Father, joining Satan’s rebellion. He would have become vice-devil. Praise God that Jesus didn’t yield to Satan’s offer!

God's Sovereignty Over Earth and Nature

Despite all the evidence of Scripture, it is clear that some Christians still believe that Satan possesses much more power than he actually does possess. Some have even given him complete power over all of the forces of nature, whereas Scripture says otherwise:

[God] changes rivers into a wilderness, and springs of water into a thirsty ground; a fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it. He changes a wilderness into a pool of water, and a dry land into springs of water; and there He makes the hungry to dwell, so that they may establish a city, and sow fields, and plant vineyards, and gather a fruitful harvest (Ps. 107:33-37).

Sing to the Lord...who covers the heavens with clouds, who provides rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains.... He sends forth His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool; he scatters the hoarfrost like ashes. He casts forth His ice as fragments; who can stand before His cold? He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow (Ps. 147: 7-8, 15-18).

In both the Old and New Testaments, there are plenty of examples of God using the forces of nature as a means of judgment. He is the one, for example, who flooded the earth during Noah's time and sent the ten plagues upon Egypt (see Ps. 78:45-49).

When Jonah was running from his calling, sleeping on a Tarshish-bound ship, the Bible declares, "*the Lord* hurled a great wind on the sea so that the ship was about to break up" (Jonah 1:4, emphasis added). It was God who did it. Some may claim that surely the original Hebrew text states—although it doesn't—that God *permitted* the great wind and, therefore, the storm was from Satan. But what difference does it make? If God "permitted" Satan to send a storm, then that proves it couldn't have happened unless God had permitted it. God is sovereign over Satan. And God is sovereign over nature.

God is apparently also in the hailstone business. We read in the tenth chapter of Joshua, when the Israelites defeated five kings:

And it came about as they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, that the Lord threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword (Josh. 10:11).

For even more proof of God's sovereignty over nature, see Job 38:22-38; Jer. 5:24; 10:13; 31:35; Ps. 105:16; 135:6-7; Matt. 5:45 and Acts 14:7. God's judgment through the forces of nature is clearly evident in the Bible. Why then have some come up with the idea that, when a hurricane or earthquake or flood strikes, it is the work of the devil, and God would like to stop it but He can't?

Take note that when the Bible refers to Satan as "the god of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 and 2 Cor. 4:4), the Greek word translated *world* in these instances is either *kosmos*, meaning "order or arrangement," or *aion*, meaning "age." By contrast, the Greek word for "earth," our physical planet, is *ge*. Our God is, as Jesus said, "Lord of heaven *and earth*" (Matt. 11:25, emphasis added).

One More Thought

I must address one final misconception about Satan that has been accepted by some Christians. Is it true that Satan received Adam's authority when Adam sinned?

The plain fact is that there are no references in the Bible that make such a claim or imply it. Nowhere does the Bible state that Satan got Adam's authority when Adam sinned. The theory that he did is usually based upon Jesus' encounter with Satan during His temptation in the wilderness. There Satan claimed that his dominion had been handed over to him. Some have assumed that it was Adam who handed that dominion over to Satan. That, however, is only a theory.

Actually, every unbeliever has handed Satan personal dominion over his life, and thus Satan is his god, which, as I have already said, is why Satan is called "the god of this world." Adam and Eve were the first persons to yield to Satan, and all since them have followed in their footsteps. Consequently, Satan's domain has been handed over to him by the entire human race, with God's permission.

Furthermore, the Bible never says that Adam lost his authority when he sinned. Man is still subduing the earth, and ruling the fish, fowl, and beasts, which is all the authority Adam ever received in the first place.