



The Devil Made Me Do It

Part 16: Satanic Influence through Temptation

We have been looking at the various ways in which Satan and his forces can affect man's actions and are currently focusing on the least binding way, which I am calling "Satanic influence." In this case no long-term, binding connection exists with the evil beings involved, but they are nevertheless able to affect man in various ways as he lives in a fallen world. We have examined this influence as it comes through the flesh, the world, riches, and false teachers. While these are all agents through which Satan exerts his influence to lure, or "tempt," man away from his devotion to God, we will look more closely in this issue at times when Satan's temptation occurs in a more direct and targeted manner.

The two primary examples of this in Scripture are his temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden and of Jesus in the wilderness before the beginning of His earthly ministry. In these instances his tactics included challenging the Word of God and appealing to the allurements of the senses, physical appetite, and desire for personal gain, power, or glory. Eve, of course, succumbed while Jesus did not falter, countering Satan's futile efforts with His own astute use of Scripture.

While operating more behind the scenes, Satan also deliberately targeted Job in an effort to lure him away from his devotion to God. This time Satan's tactics were totally different as he inflicted great suffering on Job by stripping his life of every aspect of pleasure and fulfillment he once enjoyed, including his health. Much to Satan's dismay, Job's faith triumphed and Satan was handed a humiliating defeat.

Satan's efforts of temptation were also seen in a more direct way as Jesus moved towards His last days on earth. Not only did he enter Judas and bring about his betrayal of Jesus (Luke 22:3), but he also received permission to put Peter through great temptation, "sifting him as wheat" (Luke 22:31). While we don't know how he exerted this temptation or however else it may have affected Peter, we do know that his faith and loyalty to God faltered to the point of denying three times that he even knew Jesus after Jesus was taken into custody (Luke 22:31-34). Peter was also among the whole group of disciples that yielded to temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane. After being warned by Jesus to watch and pray with Him during these crucial hours, Satan was able to draw them into sleep, stripping Jesus of the support He desired at this most critical juncture of His life (Luke 22:40-46).

Satan undoubtedly has many other tactics to use in his behind-the-scenes efforts to test our devotion to God, and we are all susceptible to his devious schemes at virtually any time (1 Peter 5:8). Scripture points out certain situations, however, when one's ability to withstand temptation may be weakened. These include going through times of affliction (1 Thes. 3:1-5) or incidents in which anger, pride, or jealousy is incited (Gen. 4:6-7; 1 Cor. 10:12; Eph. 4:26-27); becoming caught up with the desire for wealth (1 Tim. 6:9); abstaining from marital intimacy for too long a period (1 Cor. 7:5); and confronting a fellow-believer regarding a sin in his life (Gal. 6:1). Scripture also indicates that those who have recently come to faith in Christ (Luke 8:13; 1 Tim. 3:6) and those who are leaders in the church (1 Tim. 3:7) may be particular targets of Satan in his desire to halt the growth of God's Kingdom.

God has not left us defenseless against Satan's temptations. Our primary means of protection is undoubtedly meant to come through consistent prayer and the diligent application of the character traits represented by the spiritual armor (Luke 11:4; Eph. 6:10-18). We also have the security of knowing that God, at least in some cases, requires Satan to seek permission from Him before unleashing extraordinary temptation on man (Job 1:8-12; 2:3-6; Luke 22:31). He also sets limits on the extent to which Satan is allowed to go and promises in every situation to provide a way of escape for us (as He did quite remarkably with Lot). His absolute faithfulness in these regards leaves us with no excuse for yielding to temptation in any situation (Job 1:12; 2:6; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Peter 2:7-9).