

The Great Lie

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Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. Genesis 3:1-7

A correct understanding of Genesis 1-3 is an important part of the foundation of the Christian faith. It gives us answers to key questions about God and our situation on this earth that we would not have otherwise.

We are told that sin entered the human race in the Garden of Eden. Satan, a mighty angel who had rebelled against God and become evil, launched an attack against mankind's first couple by questioning God's Word and leading Adam and Eve to doubt it. It is obvious that Satan's purpose was to bring disorder to God's creation of humans by leading them away from God.

He opened the conversation cleverly by asking a question that he already knew was not true. He said to Eve, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" Eve replied, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

Then Satan responded with a great lie. He said, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So here Satan cleverly attempted to hide his great lie by mixing it with a little bit of truth. Adam and Eve did gain knowledge of good and evil, but they gained it only by disobeying God and becoming evil.

This lie of Satan has led to severe consequences. Adam and Eve failed to trust God's words and yielded to Satan's temptation. God punished them for their rebellion against him by bringing a curse on them and all of their offspring. The curse resulted in both physical and spiritual death. It brought about alienation and separation from their creator and also led to alienation among God's human creation. Adam and Eve and their descendants found it was impossible to escape the inherited corruption received and to save themselves.

What did not change was that God still cared about his creation. He could have destroyed them or let them destroy themselves, but he did not do that. He provided a way by which they could be saved. He was determined to save many of the human race and bring out of it persons who were righteous and would live with him forever. They could not save themselves, but God could save them.

This plan actually is referred to for the first time in Genesis 3. In speaking to Satan after his deception led to the corruption and downfall of the human race, God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." We (the LCMS) consider this to be the first announcement of the Gospel, here all the way back in Genesis 3. We believe that by using the words "he" and the "his" in his words to Satan, God had one particular offspring in mind. The defeat of Satan is implied by his being bruised in the head, which of course is much more serious than woman's offspring being bruised in the heel. This prophecy eventually came to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who is clearly presented in the New Testament as the promised Messiah who has defeated Satan.

Yes, Satan has been defeated. Christ has delivered those who believe in him from sin, death, and Satan's hope that we would wind up with him in hell. But he is not in hell yet, and there is much evidence that Satan is still at work and deceiving people today.

Keep in mind that Satan was so bold he even tempted Jesus in the wilderness. (Luke 4) He tried to lure Peter away from Jesus. Luke 22:31 tells us that our Lord told Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." Satan even entered into Judas (Luke 22:3) and thus had greater influence over him as he went to plot with the chief priests and scribes how to kill Jesus.

There are other places in the Holy Scriptures that confirm that Satan is still active. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he wrote, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you might be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Eph. 6:12) Jesus sums up the character of Satan in John 8 where he is quoted, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

So what does this have to do with us today? Plenty. There are a lot of reasons to believe that Satan is active in the world today and manipulating things behind the scene. What is really scary, is that an increasing number of people do not believe he even exists. That suits him well. Polls by such organizations as Barna Research Center, Gallup Poll, and Harris show that about 90% of people believe there is a God, down 5% from a number of years ago, and that far less, at least 20-25 percent less, believe that Satan or the devil really exists.

We, as Christians, should have no reservations that he exists. We have the word of the top expert in the history of the world, Jesus Christ, the One who existed even before the worlds formed. He said that he has talked to him. That should end all doubts for a Christian.

That leads us to an important and relevant question. What is Satan doing today? Keep in mind the name Satan means "adversary". He is the arch-enemy of God and wants to take as many people to hell with him as he can. There is no evidence that Satan can directly make us do what he wants us to do. But he is an "evil spirit" who can influence others who can wage war on Christ's church. In John 12:31, Jesus calls him "the ruler of this world".

Many people suspect that Satan is behind the "pseudo-science" or false science being taught today concerning the origin of human beings and the universe. Many young people are taught at their churches and at home that God is the creator of all things, and then they go to schools and are bombarded with the theory of evolution and given naturalistic explanations for the origin of life and the origin of the universe. The main problem is not that this idea is taught, but that it is taught as fact, even though it has not been demonstrated or proved to be fact. Not only that, but the pro-evolutionary activists do everything they can to keep the theory from being challenged or questioned or other explanations explored. It is obvious why so many young people come away confused. It is equally obvious that this has damaged the faith in God of many young people.

I am not a scientist but have been in contact with many scientists who strongly oppose the theory of evolution. For those interested in the scientific arguments against the theory of evolution, I have put a summary of many of the points against it by the main exit from the sanctuary. There is also an address of an organization from which you can get more information and publications and books on the subject. I would encourage you to do so, and if you do, you will be well prepared to defend the truth of God's revelation as recorded in Genesis.

It is interesting to note that we as Christians face the same kind of test as Adam and Eve, whether to believe God's clear testimony or to trust in the words of someone else. Adam and Eve made their choice and the results were disastrous. Let us not make the same mistake.

We are in a great spiritual war today, which has lasted practically as long as the history of mankind. In a sense, it reminds me of another great war that was fought, World War II, that lasted six years. When the Japanese surrendered on Sept. 2, 1945, that ended World War II. But note this: many Allies and Japanese died from fighting after the war was over. Why? Because there were numerous islands throughout the Pacific Ocean where the Allies and Japanese were fighting, and they did not have the communications available to tell that the war was over. Many soldiers on both sides died, when their lives could have been spared.

And so it is today. On the cross at Calvary Jesus Christ died to pay for our sins and free us from the consequences of them, from eternal death, and from the power of Satan. He rose three days later and proved that he had the power over death and that there is life beyond the grave. Yet, in this war also, there are people who are needlessly dying with no hope for the future. That's because they have not heard the great news: that the Messiah has come, what the Messiah has done, and that the victory over death has been won. Let's do all that we can to let them know. Amen.