

Aim of lesson

For students to understand what the Bible means when it speaks of the devil and Satan

Bible background

Numbers 22; Matthew 4:1-11

Outline of lesson

There is enough material here for several lessons, so you will need to be selective in what you include. If you have a large class you could share the work among individuals or groups.

In the Old Testament – ‘satan’ means ‘adversary

In all these passages the Hebrew word ‘satan’ is used. It simply means someone, or something, that prevents you doing what you want to do.

- Numbers 22:22,32 The angel stood in Balaam’s way. In verse 22 the Hebrew word translated ‘adversary’ – or ‘to oppose him’ (NIV) – is ‘satan’. Same in verse 32, where it’s translated ‘to withstand’ or ‘to oppose’. So it’s possible for a satan to be good.
- 1 Kings 11:14-15, 23-25. Hadad and Rezon were adversaries (Heb ‘satan’) to Solomon – but they were only ordinary men.
- Psalm 38:20. Probably written by David at the time of Absalom’s rebellion, and speaking of his many adversaries.

Use as many of the references as you have time for, and the students have the stamina for.

In the New Testament

Matthew 16:23 – refers to Peter.

In these passages the Greek word ‘diabolos’ is used. It means someone who is a false accuser or slanderer.

- John 6:70 – Judas Iscariot.
- 1 Timothy 3:11 Deacons’ wives’. Similar point in Titus 2:3.
- 2 Timothy 3:3 In the last days people will be ‘slanderers’ or ‘slandorous’.

The temptations of Jesus

Described in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4: 1-13, and mentioned in Mark 1:12-13.

Some useful points:

- It is the Holy Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness ‘to be tempted’. So whatever happened, it was the will of God.
- Jesus speaks to the tempter in Matthew 4:10 in very similar language to Matthew 16:23, which refers to Peter.
- Jesus knew that ‘the Most High rules the kingdom of men’ (Daniel 4:17), so there was no other being who could make him ruler over all the earth.
- Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days (Mark 1:13), so the visit to the temple in Jerusalem must have been in his mind. Similarly, there is no mountain from which it is possible to see all the kingdoms of the world, so that also must have been in Jesus’ imagination.
- Jesus had just received the power of the Holy Spirit. What more natural than that he should wrestle with his conscience in thinking how he would use this power. For his own ends? To work miracles that were so dramatic that people had no choice but to believe in him? To take a shortcut and seize the kingdom now?

Demons and idols

The word ‘devil’ never occurs in the Old Testament. There are references to ‘devils’ in the AV, which modern translations clarify by making clear that the passages are referring to the offering of sacrifices to images of goats. In other places they simply refer to false gods.

Personification

The scriptures often refer to impersonal things as though they were people. Proverbs 8 speaks of wisdom in this way. Look in particular at these verses:

- :1-3 Wisdom is described as a woman who stands at a crossroads and calls to people who are passing by.
- :15-19 Wisdom enables kings to reign and rewards those who follow ‘her’.
- :22-24 Wisdom was born before the earth existed

Job 28 also speaks of wisdom as something that can be searched for, like gold in a mine. In Job 28:22 death speaks, as though it were a person.

Digging deeper

Temptation, sin and death

This section looks at the New Testament teaching about sin and death. Temptations come from inside us (James 1:14-15). When we follow these desires, we sin, and sin in the end brings death.

We are enslaved to sin, and to our own desires, but the Lord Jesus came to set us free from the control of sin and from the death that it brings.

Relevance to our lives

We have looked at several examples of times when God speaks of our human nature as an enemy that sets out to destroy us. We should learn from this that our temptations are a real problem that needs to be overcome, because otherwise they will bring death.

Prayer

The young people may like to compose a prayer that asks for help in resisting temptation, and that thanks God for the example of the Lord Jesus.

Other suggestions for activities

- The class could act out a drama in which an 'adversary' tried to stop someone carrying out their plan.
- The students could consider how they would respond to someone who is convinced that the devil is a fallen angel. For instance, a Seventh Day Adventist web site describes the devil as follows:

'As to Satan, or the devil, we hold the uniform teaching of the Word to be that he is definitely a personal being—the supreme adversary of God and man. Christ called him the "wicked one" (Matt. 13:19). He was, however, once an angel of light, the highest of the angels. He was named "Lucifer, son of the morning" (Isa. 14:12-14). But he fell from his high estate (Eze. 28: 13-18; Luke 10:18; John 8:44), and drew down with him a host of angels, first into disaffection and then into open rebellion against God and His government (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). He is now the prince of devils (Matt. 12:24), and heads an opposing kingdom, with legions of evil angels, in deadly conflict with the kingdom of God and Christ (Rev. 12:7-10).