

Aim of lesson

For the young people to realise that many other people believe in a literal fallen angel who is the source of the evil in the world, and so to appreciate the teaching of the Bible and to be prepared to respond when they meet those of other persuasions.

Bible background

There are many passages listed in these and in the students' notes.

Preparation required

You need to have looked at all the references referred to and to be clear in your own mind what they mean, so that you can discuss them in an open and relaxed way with the young people.

Suggested outline of lesson

A fallen angel?

Get the young people to look at the set of passages as they have been printed in their notes. The obvious conclusion, if they are taken literally, is that

- Satan was cast out from heaven once in the time of Isaiah, and ...
- ... again when the disciples were travelling from town to town.
- When Christ was crucified he was cast out a third time, and killed, ...
- ... only to come to life again, so that Roman believers needed to crush him under their feet.
- Later he reappears in heaven, so that Michael has to do battle with him.

It seems obvious that these passages should not be taken literally.

A closer look

There may not be time to look in detail at each of these passages, and you run the risk of getting rather bogged down if you try, since they are not easy to understand or explain. However, you may like to make some or all of the following points:

Isaiah 14:12

The chapter demonstrates clearly that this refers to the king of Babylon. The NIV, and most modern translations, do not use the word 'Lucifer'. The Hebrew word means something like 'light-bearer', 'shining one', or 'morning star'.

Luke 10:17-19

This passage could read 'I saw Satan fall, like lightning, from heaven'. Equally well, it could read 'I saw Satan fall - like lightning from heaven'. Given that lightning does actually travel between heaven and earth the latter reading is more likely. In this case the analogy could be between the speed of lightning and of the fall of Satan; not literally from heaven to earth but in the extent to which the disciples had been able to overcome the curse of sin by their healing.

John 12:31

If you already believe in an angel being cast out from heaven you can use this verse to justify it, but actually that is not what it says. Passages like Galatians 3:22 'But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe', use similar language of human nature. It was this that Christ overcame.

Hebrews 2:14

If the devil were a fallen angel then there would be no relevance in Christ sharing our nature. It is because our

humanity is the real enemy that he had to share it.

Romans 16:17-20

Sinful men still rule the world, and our sinful nature still, in practice, governs much of what we do. But not for long.

Revelation 12:7-9

How you interpret this passage may depend on your understanding of the book of Revelation as a whole. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Michael is the Lord Jesus Christ, and these verses represent something that happened in 1914. In a sense they are right; the most satisfactory explanation is that it does indeed speak of Christ, but of the battle fought and won in his life and death.

'Reasoning from the Scriptures'

Deal with the quotations a section at a time, and discuss the questions that follow, together with any other points that the young people may raise.

Satan the Devil - Definition

There is, of course, no disagreement over whether the devil exists: only whether or not there is 'a spirit person'. Luke 22:31. In the previous lesson you should already have covered the point that the Bible describes sin (the things we do), and sinfulness (our human natures) as an enemy - for good reason, since they are the things that threaten our salvation. This is an example.

Luke 10:18. Jehovah's Witnesses interpret Revelation 12:7 as predicting something that happened in 1914, but it is hard to see how this could be taken literally. It surely refers to the effect of Christ's ministry, 'that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil' (Hebrews 2:14).

Matthew 25:41. The lesson about Gehenna in Part 1 makes clear that this is one of Christ's allusions to the burning of rubbish in the valley of Hinnom.

Is Satan perhaps only the evil within people?

Nobody, of course, would suggest that Satan in Job was God himself. These are difficult passages, and it seems clear that the book refers to a being to whom God was able to give power to hurt Job. But everything in Job is under the control of God, as is clear from the record, and as Job himself indicates (Job 1:21, 2:10).

The reference to the temptation of Christ reveals a complete misunderstanding of the difference between temptation and sin. Look at Hebrews 2:14-18 and 4:15

From where did Satan come?

It is, of course, hard for us to understand how evil came into a world that was 'very good', and to appreciate how the creation could contain a creature that would tempt Eve. But it does not get round the problem to push the origin of evil back one step and say that before the fall of man, 'an angel fell first'. We simply have to accept that God wanted a world in which men and women chose to obey him, and therefore allowed the possibility of disobedience.

In John 8:44 the word translated 'abode not' is variously rendered stand (nearly always), set, establish, stand still, and stand by. It does not justify the interpretation put upon it in the New World (the JW's own) translation. The full text reads (in the NIV - the AV says the same): 'You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him'. That does not support the statement that he was 'originally perfect'

Relevance to our lives

Belief in a supernatural devil is common, and we need to be prepared both to explain our faith patiently and kindly, as well as understanding the fears of those who really believe in a being 'out there' who is trying to lead us to sin.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, who has taught us that temptations come from within us all, give us strength to resist them, and faith to believe that you will deliver us from evil. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Other suggestions for activities

Write a letter to some imaginary (or for that matter real) Jehovah's Witness explaining why you think they have misunderstood the Bible teaching about the devil, and trying gently to correct them.