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God's Tests

By David Servant

ELEVEN

The God of This World

There is one final objection that we must cover on this subject of God's sovereignty over Satan. Someone will say, "But what about the scripture that says 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?"

The answer is that we must consider that scripture within the context of what the rest of the Bible says on the subject.

We have already adequately proved that Satan does not have *complete control* over the whole world, according to numerous other scriptures. Just because both Jesus and Paul refer to him as "god of this world" does not prove that Satan is ruling *everything* on the earth. We could just as easily take Jesus' title of "Lamb of God," and say that He must have a fleece of wool and walk on all four. So let's be careful that we don't take Satan's title of "god of this world" to an extreme that contradicts the majority of the Bible.

In what capacity is Satan "god of this world"? The answer is that Satan is reigning in the hearts and lives of the people who are submitted to him, which are those people who are not submitted to Jesus. They are yielding to his temptations and are his slaves. He is their god, and he is ruling them.

Jesus taught us that if a person isn't born again, he is, spiritually speaking, a child of Satan (see John 8:44). Paul indicated that Satan's spirit works in those who are unsaved (see Eph. 2:1-3). Satan is ruling only the kingdom of darkness, of which we are no longer part. In Ephesians 6, one of the rankings of demons that falls under the headship of Satan is "the rulers of the *darkness* of this world" (Eph. 6:12, KJV, emphasis added). Satan is ruling only where people are serving him. That is why he is called in Scripture, "the god of this world."

Satan's Claim: Truth or Lie?

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

And he [Satan] led Him [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 want to be extremely careful about building our theology on the words of someone whom Jesus called “the father of lies” (John 8:44). I think we’d be foolish not to question the veracity 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 us read 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 between what Satan said and what Daniel said? 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 stick with Daniel the prophet.

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. Satan was not offering Jesus an earthly, human, governmental position of authority because, according to the Bible, only God has that authority. Rather, Satan was offering Jesus a position of authority over a spiritual kingdom—the kingdom of darkness—if He would submit to him. Such a position Satan *could* offer. Why? Because the Bible is clear that Satan is ruling over several rankings of evil spirits, through which he administrates his entire dark kingdom as together they 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 (whether knowingly or unknowingly). Satan, however, is *not* 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 our country, including government leaders, would repent and submit to the lordship of Christ? Would Satan have *any* control over our nation? He would have none at all. Satan only has authority over nations inhabited by people who are serving him.

The fact that Satan exercises power in 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 proved from other scriptures that God is sovereign over the earth, and He is sovereign over Satan’s kingdom as well.

If we are to believe Satan’s offer to Jesus, apparently this wicked ruler was willing to delegate a large portion of his authority to Him as long as Jesus would submit Himself to Satan. If Jesus were to become ruler over the kingdom of darkness, He would have had to become another Satan. Praise God that Jesus didn’t yield to Satan’s offer!

God’s Sovereignty Over Earth and Nature

From all the evidence of Scripture, we must admit that some have given Satan all kinds of power that he doesn’t have. They’ve given him sovereignty over the whole world when the only rule he actually possesses is over those who have chosen to follow him.

Some have even given Satan total power over all of nature. The Bible, however, makes it clear who is ruling nature. Referring to God, not Satan, we read:

He [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).

We also read in Psalm 147:

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, we find examples of God using the forces of nature as a means of judgment. For example, God is the one who flooded the earth during Noah's time.

Do you recall the ten plagues that came upon Egypt? God clearly demonstrated then that He is Lord over nature (see Ps. 78:45-49).

When Jonah was running from his mission, sleeping on a Tarshish-bound ship, the Bible says that "*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 will claim that surely the Hebrew says (although it doesn't) that God *permitted* the great wind, and, therefore, the storm was from Satan.

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.

In the tenth chapter of Joshua, when Israel defeated five kings, we read these words:

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 are clearly evident in the Bible, and God never changes. 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?

When the Bible says that Satan is "the god of this world," it means that he is the god of this *world's system*, but not "god of the *earth*." In the Greek, the word for "earth" is *ge*. The Greek word translated "world" in these instances (i.e. "the god of this world" in John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 and 2 Cor. 4:4) is either the word *kosmos* meaning "order or arrangement," or *aion*, meaning "age."

Yes, Satan is ruling the kingdom of darkness, but God is still sovereign over Satan and this world. Our God is, as Jesus said, "Lord of heaven *and earth*" (Matt. 11:25, emphasis added). Satan can only do that which God permits.

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 say 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, about which we have just been reading. There Satan claimed that his dominion had been handed over to him. Some have thus assumed that it was *Adam* who handed that dominion over to Satan. That is, however, only a theory.

Actually, *every* person has handed Satan personal dominion over his life, and thus Satan is his god, which, as we have already said, is why Satan is called "the god of this world." Adam was the first person to yield to Satan, and all others after him have followed suit. 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.