

Beware the Devil!

There is no salvation for the evil angels and no possibility of repentance for them (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). It was for them that hell was prepared (Matthew 25:41). We do not know why God did not give this fallen host an opportunity for repentance; it is part of His hidden will. The Scriptures simply state the fact without any discussion of the why.

Though cast out of heaven and eternally miserable, Satan and his hosts are still very powerful. They still have a limited amount of freedom, but they are none the happier for it. Indeed their whole aim in the use of their limited freedom is to increase misery in the world. St. Peter describes the devil and by implication his cohorts as a “roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Satan is the author of evil in the world. He lies. He murders. He is capable of no good, but only of evil and destruction (John 8:44). He uses a perverted reason in his attempts to deceive people and drive them either to arrogance or to despair (Matthew 4:5-6; 27:3-5). Even so, he is himself ultimately irrational in all that he says and does. His legions ask permission, for example, as we heard in our Gospel for today, to go into the pigs, as though they will somehow be better off for it. Perhaps to show us the ultimate irrationality of the fallen angels and their capacity only for destruction, death, and evil, Jesus grants their request. And so, after they enter the pigs, the pigs simply plunge into the water and drown in a demon-induced frenzy (Luke 8:26-33). In his rage and misery Satan bends his every effort to destroy the church by sowing false doctrine and hypocrisy wherever and whenever people take their eyes off of Christ and their attention away from the Word of God (Matthew 13:1-43; John 13:2; Ephesians 2:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:9).

So powerful and clever is Satan that he is able to seduce and rule in the hearts of most people in spite of the always ruinous consequences of his influence and rule (Ephesians 2:2). The astonishing thing for Christians is that they know the wrath and rage of Satan; they know his cunning; they know his goal. And still too often in their own weakness Christians also toy with his temptations as though Satan were really their friend, or at least harmless. That is how Satan presented himself to Eve in the Garden of Eden, as a harmless advisor, even a friend. The truth however is that he is a liar, a murderer, a destroyer, one bent on dragging us into hell, and one tragically successful with many in the endeavour. That should serve as a warning to Christians who do not take him seriously and who accordingly play with his temptations - they act as though he were a pet kitten to be played with, instead of the roaring lion bent on their destruction.

We may wish that God would simply destroy Satan and his entire host now so that he would no longer tempt us. But God has not chosen to do that. Instead, God gives us in His Word the powerful defence against Satan's seduction attempts and the weapons necessary to defeat him (Romans 13:11-14; Ephesians 5:1-20; 1 Peter 5:6-11). God shows us His own superiority and power over Satan (Matthew 12:22-29). He limits Satan's sphere of action (Job 1:6-12). He even promises us that He will not allow Satan to tempt us beyond our ability to withstand him (1 Corinthians 10:11-13). That ability to withstand is linked inseparably to the Word of God. Jesus Himself demonstrated that for us perfectly in His battle with Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). Those not content with these weapons have already lost the battle. Despising God's own armour, they invite the ultimate delusion of the devil and fall into the waiting arms of the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12) or into other great shame and vice (2 Peter 2; Jude 3-11).

Once again the Scriptures are not going to answer every question we may raise on the subject of the devil and his angels. The Bible tells us enough for our warning. It tells us enough for our encouragement so that we cling to the Word of God for our defence. It tells us enough! Those who want to know more should be warned solemnly against Satanism, witchcraft, fortune telling, horoscopes, and such other manifestations of the occult among those not satisfied with the Word of God. We should not be surprised at people's interest in such things - it is a mark of a society headed for destruction (Romans 1:18-32; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; 4:3,4). The Christian should shun all such things with a horror altogether appropriate for the hellish. It is quite bad enough that we must contend with the devil day and night without going out of our way to look for him, as though his misery could be our delight!