

Devils

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In LDS discourse, the term "devil" denotes anyone who promotes the cause of evil, but it is especially applied to those unembodied spirits who rebelled against God in the premortal life and were cast down from heaven to this earth. The devil, who leads them, is also known by the personal names of Lucifer in the premortal existence and Satan since being cast down.

The name Lucifer means "light bearer" in Latin and is a translation of the Hebrew *Heylel ben Shakhur*, which means "herald son of dawn" or "morning star." In the premortal life, Lucifer was an angel having authority in the presence of God. He played a prominent role in the Council in Heaven. After the Father in Heaven offered the plan of righteousness to help his children become as he is, Lucifer countered with an alternative plan.

The Father's plan was to save and exalt all of his obedient children. To be obedient, they must keep his commandments and do good. In the Father's plan, it was foreknown that many would reject exaltation and therefore would receive lesser glories.

Lucifer's plan proposed to "save" all of the Father's children by forcing each to obey the Father's law in all things. Lucifer desired that he be rewarded for this great feat of saving everyone by having the Father's honor and glory given to him personally. Because mortals can be saved only in their own freely chosen repentance, Lucifer's proposal was rejected. In the ensuing war in heaven, he gained the allegiance of a third of the Father's spirit children. Lucifer and his followers were then cast out of heaven to earth, where he became Satan and they all became devils ([Moses 4:1-3](#); [D&C 29:36-37](#); [76:25-38](#)).

The name Satan comes from a Hebrew root meaning "to oppose, be adverse," hence "to attack or to accuse" (see [Rev. 12:10](#)). On this earth the role of Satan and his fellow devils is to attack the working of righteousness and to destroy it wherever possible ([Moses 4:4](#); [D&C 10:20-23](#); [93:39](#)).

Righteousness is the condition or action of accomplishing the greatest possible happiness for all beings affected. The attainment of full righteousness is possible only with the help of an omniscient and omnipotent being. This full righteousness is the special order of the Celestial Kingdom where the Father dwells. When the Father's will is done and his order is in place, every person and every thing attains, or is attaining, the potential he, she, or it has for development and happiness. This righteousness is the good of "good and evil." It is to be contrasted with those human desires that are contrary to the Father's order and will.

A good (righteous) person is an agentive being who chooses and accomplishes only righteousness. No mortal is intrinsically and perfectly good, nor can a mortal alone rise to that standard ([Matt. 19:17](#)). But mortals can do righteous acts and become righteous through the salvation provided by Jesus Christ. Christ is the fountain of all righteousness ([Ether 12:28](#)). The children of God can achieve the Father's order of righteousness through Christ if they choose that order in explicit rejection of evil.

Evil is any order of existence that is not righteous. A state of affairs, an act, or a person not in the order of righteousness is thus evil. Letting one's neighbor languish in abject poverty while one has plenty, or stealing, or desiring harm for another person are all evils. Satan promotes evil everywhere he can, to thwart the righteousness of God (see [D&C 10:27](#)). Thus, Satan tempts people to do evil instead of the Father's will. Satan himself is not necessary to evil, but he hastens and abets evil wherever he can.

Satan's first targets on earth were Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Knowing that the Father had commanded Adam and Eve not to partake of the forbidden fruit on penalty of death, Satan sought to destroy the Father's work by enticing Adam and Eve to partake of it anyway. Satan's success marked the beginning of the world (as distinct from the creation of the earth), of Satan's kingdom on this earth (see JST, [Matt. 1:55](#)).

By obeying Satan, Adam and Eve opened the way for him to have partial dominion over them, over the earth, and over all of their children (see [Fall of Adam](#)). Examples of his partial dominion over the earth granted by the Father are his ability to possess the bodies of animals ([Matt. 8:28-32](#)) and to use water to destroy people ([D&C 61:14-19](#)). Satan gained the power to tempt those who are accountable to do evil ([D&C 29:39](#)), to communicate with individuals to teach them things (usually but not always lies), to possess their bodies, to foster illness and disease, and to cause mortal death. He promotes sin, the doing of evil, which brings spiritual death to the sinner and misery to all those affected. In each of these opportunities, Satan's power is limited: He can do only what he has specific permission from God to do ([D&C 121:4](#); [Luke 8:30-33](#)). His power may be taken away by individuals as they hearken to God and as they correctly use the holy priesthood to limit his operations ([D&C 50:13-35](#)).

What Satan did not realize in Eden was that what he did in attempting to destroy the Father's work was actually the very thing needed to fulfill the Father's plan ([Moses 4:6](#)). People could not demonstrate their love of God and their willingness to do the work of righteousness sufficiently to qualify them for exaltation unless they were subject to, and able to overcome, evil *and* devil adversaries, such as Satan and his hosts ([2 Ne. 2:11-22](#)).

On earth Satan is thus the father of deception, lies, and sin-of all evils-for he promotes them with vigor. He may appear as a counterfeit angel of light or as the prince of darkness, but his usual manifestations to mortals come as either evil revelation to one's heart and mind or indirectly through other persons. His mission is to tempt everyone to choose evil so that each accountable human being's choices can serve as an adequate basis for a final judgment.

This earth life is a mortal probation for all those who have the opportunity to accept and live by the new and everlasting covenant while in the mortal flesh. Those who do not have a full opportunity in this earth life will have their probation extended through the spirit world existence that follows it. By the time of resurrection, each of the Father's children will have made a final choice between good and evil, and each will be rewarded with the good or the evil chosen during the probation ([Alma 41:10-15](#)).

When Satan tempts a person to do evil, there are limits to what Satan can accomplish. He can put before a person any kind of evil opportunity, but that evil is enticing only if the person tempted already desires that thing. When people are tempted, it is actually by their own lusts ([James 1:12-15](#)).

Satan has power on earth only as individual persons give it to him by succumbing to his temptations (*TPJS*, p. 187). The agency of human beings is to choose righteousness through the Holy Spirit of God or to choose selfishness through the flesh by succumbing to Satan's temptations ([2 Ne. 2:26-29](#)). (Human flesh is not evil, but Satan may tempt humans through their flesh.) Individuals who repent in this life are nevertheless tempted by Satan until their death; then Satan has no power over them ever again. Those who die unrepentant are still in Satan's power in the spirit prison ([Alma 34:34-35](#)). All except the sons of perdition will eventually accept Christ and obey him, and thereby escape the dominion of Satan ([D&C 76:110](#)). Thus is the Father's plan of agency fulfilled.

Satan's three temptations of the Savior may be seen as paradigmatic of all human temptation (see David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals*, p. 154, Salt Lake City, 1953). The temptation to create bread and eat it when he should not represents the human temptation of the flesh, to sate the senses unrighteously. The temptation to cast himself down from the temple and to be saved by angels when he should not represents the human temptation of social acclaim. The temptation to receive the kingdoms of this world when he should not represents the temptation to have unrighteous dominion or power over others. The Savior did not yield to any of these temptations because his heart was pure and he knew that the way of righteousness lay only in doing the Father's will in all things.

All accountable mortals are tempted, even as our Savior was tempted. As mortals succumb, Satan gains power and earth life becomes a hell. Every person may resist temptation by choosing good over evil. But misinformation, evil cultural traditions ([D&C 93:39](#)), despair, and desperate human need all make the choosing of good difficult, even if the person does not particularly desire a given evil (cf. 2 Ne. 28 for an extensive description of the ploys of Satan).

Through Jesus Christ and the partaking of his new and everlasting covenant, mortals have the opportunity to gain power to choose good over evil unerringly and always. As they do so, they are able to establish the righteousness of God and thus heaven on earth ([Moses 7:18](#); [D&C 50:34-35](#); see also [Zion](#)).

Human beings resist Satan and evil by controlling their desires—that is, (1) by not desiring the evil that Satan proffers; (2) by gaining more knowledge so that they will be able to see that Satan's temptations are not what they really want; and (3) by having their hearts purified by Jesus Christ so that they will no longer desire any evil but desire instead to do the Father's will in all things ([Moro. 7:48](#); cf. the Savior's answers in [Matt. 4:1-10](#)).

The great help in resisting temptation is the Holy Spirit. It is Satan's business to dwell in and with all individuals who do not have the Holy Spirit with them, sometimes even gaining total possession of a person's body, so that he or she loses agency for a time. Partial possession may also occur, for whenever a human being becomes angry, he or she is at least partially possessed by Satan ([James 1:20](#)).

In his role as the destroyer, Satan can cause illness and death, but only with permission from God. He cannot take people before their time unless they disobey God and thus forfeit their mission ([Job 1:6-12](#)).

As the father of lies, Satan has a disinformation campaign. He spreads false notions about himself, about God, about people,

about salvation—all for the purpose of defeating acts of faith in Jesus Christ. Mortals believe his lies because the lies are pleasing to the carnal mind and because they promote or support the selfish desires of the individual who believes them. About himself, Satan tells people that there is no devil, that such an idea is wild imagination ([2 Ne. 28:22](#)). About God, Satan desires human beings to believe either that he does not exist or that he is some distant, unknowable, or forbidding being. He tells people that they are to conquer in this world according to their strength and that whatever anyone does is no crime ([Alma 30:17](#)). Favorite lies about salvation are either that it comes to everyone in spite of anything one does ([Alma 21:6](#)) or that it is reserved only for a special few insiders ([Alma 31:17](#)). These erroneous creeds of the fathers, fastened upon their children in the form of false creeds, are called in the scriptures "the chains of hell" ([Alma 12:11](#); [D&C 123:7-8](#)).

Secret combinations are another devilish device for spreading misery and obstructing the cause of righteousness ([Ether 8:16-26](#); [Hel. 6:16-32](#)). Satan tempts selfish individuals to use others to their own oppressive advantage. Secrecy is essential to prevent retaliation by the victims and just execution of the laws against such combinations. Secret combinations involve personal, economic, educational, political, or military power that controls or enslaves some persons for the pleasure and profit of others.

Satan also has influence over the spirits of wicked persons who have passed from mortality by death and who inhabit the spirit prison (sometimes called Hades). The inhabitants of this prison do not yet suffer cleansing pain, which will later come, but continue to be subject to Satan's lies and temptations ([Alma 40-41](#)). They also have the opportunity to hear the servants of Christ ([D&C 138:28-37](#)), and if they did not have the opportunity on earth, they now may repent unto exaltation. If they did have the opportunity on earth but did not use it, the spirit prison opportunity again allows them to reject Satan and his lies and temptations, but with the reward of a lesser glory ([D&C 76:71-79](#)).

During the Millennium, Satan will be bound ([Rev. 20:2](#)). He will still be on earth, attempting to tempt every person, as he has since the Fall of Adam, but he will be bound because no one will hearken to his temptations ([1 Ne. 22:26](#)).

Toward the end of the Millennium, Satan will be loosed ([D&C 88:110-115](#)) because people will again hearken to him. But he will be vanquished and sent from this earth to outer darkness, where he and his followers, both spirits and resurrected sons of perdition (Satan is Perdition, "the lost one"), will dwell in the misery and darkness of selfishness and isolation forever.

[\[edit\]](#) Bibliography

For a more complete treatment of the concept of the devil from an LDS point of view, see LaMar E. Garrard, "A Study of the Problem of a Personal Devil and Its Relationship to Latter-day Saint Beliefs" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1955). *EspThe Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977), *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981), *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), and *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1986) constitute a comprehensive history of the concept of the devil traced through literature, art, and philosophy from ancient times to the modern day. The

presentation is a thorough and scholarly treatment but does not
derive from an LD

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