

When Satan Takes Over

Satan cannot force his way into our lives against our will. But sometimes we make his job much easier by the careless way we respond to his trickery.

“Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them” (Lk. 22:3-4).

“And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him” (Jn. 13:26-27).



The Bible attributes the treachery of Judas to Satan having “entered” him. Satan’s intrusion into Judas’ heart not only resulted in the execution of Jesus but culminated in the suicide of Judas himself a short time later. For Satan, it was a twofer.

This is not the only time we read of Satan sneaking into someone’s inner life to create mayhem. Satan “filled the heart” of Ananias, leading him to lie to God (Ac. 5:3). Satan likewise “moved David” to conduct a census of Israel, contrary to God’s law (1 Chron. 21:1).

This is scary stuff! Can Satan really take over people’s hearts against their will? Can he take over *my* thinking? Could I wake up one morning as a pawn of Satan, with a sudden urge to go out and commit some random act of evil?

This sounds ominous, but there’s more to the picture than these simple descriptions suggest. Satan influences humans through agents, and never against their will. (Demon possession is a topic for another occasion.) Consider the story of Eve in the garden of Eden. Satan approached Eve through the agency of a serpent. He did not twist Eve’s arm to get her to eat the forbidden fruit; rather, he deceived her by telling a convincing lie. Satan “entered” Eve’s heart, not through a forced takeover, but by a gradual breakdown of her spiritual defenses. Satan achieved his aim, but Eve was a willing participant in the rebellion.

Satan weasels his way into the hearts of all of us via the same devious strategy. We are surrounded by countless evil influences that chip away at our allegiance to God. If we relax our guard just a little, the day will eventually come when we no longer care—and Satan will have us in his grip. We can do the unthinkable, not because Satan seized control of the steering wheel, but because we meekly let him have it. It was by this process that David, “a man after God’s own heart,” came to commit adultery and murder. It’s how Judas reached a point where he was willing to betray his Master for thirty pieces of silver. These collapses of faith take a while, but Satan is a patient manipulator.

Ironically, Satan can even gain access to our hearts through a misguided sense of loyalty to God. When Simon Peter tried to correct Jesus’ prediction of His coming death, Jesus responded with a harsh rebuke: “Get behind me Satan!” (Matt. 16:22-23). Peter’s devotion to the Master was strong but uninformed, and his ignorance unwittingly played into Satan’s desire to discourage Jesus. Some of Satan’s greatest victories are won with the help of over-zealous disciples who lack the wisdom to know how to do the Lord’s work with prudence.

How can we prevent Satan from getting a toehold in our hearts? James lays out the strategy for us: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (Jas. 4:7-8). There must be a conscious commitment to *resist Satan* and *draw near to God*. When that directional intent guides all our thinking and conduct, Satan cannot take over our lives. He may throw us a curveball now and then, but we can survive that. What we cannot survive is a weak, sloppy faith that doesn’t care.

— David King