

Nine Amazing Facts about Satan

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(Summary: This article describes a number of peculiarities relating to Satan and his relationship with mankind. The description shows that Satan is not what he thinks, or what his adherents think, he is. He is much less than that. He deceives as much himself as others. The article focuses on the following themes: Satan and Iblis; Satan did not thwart Allah's plan; Satan as the source of all, including sophisticated modern, evil; Satan as man's sworn enemy; Satan's few strengths and many weaknesses; the nature of Satan's strategies; Satan's cowardice and fear; Satan and shooting stars; Satan and mankind's time and space.)

The following are nine amazing truths about Satan, which can help us understand him and his world better. They should also make us better prepared to face him and his onslaughts.

First: Satan and Iblis

Satan is a title, or a designation. Iblis is a name. The Qur'an uses the former 88 times and the latter 11 times.

Iblis was of the Jinn and was somehow affected by Allah's command to angels to prostrate before Adam (about this we cannot say, nor speculate, more, as the only source for this knowledge is the revelation).

However, Iblis refused to follow angels and prostrate before Adam, claiming that he was better than him because he was made of fire and Adam of clay.

At this point, Iblis became Satan, which means "rebel" and "arrogant". He exercised his freedom and chose to be satan(ic). He was not created evil – indeed nothing is - but chose to be so.

Iblis was proud and self-centred. He rebelled against Allah and became of nonbelievers. He became the chief of all the Jinn that were likeminded with him.

Whoever follows Iblis in his arrogance, rebellion and wickedness is also called a satan. That is the case both among the Jinn and people (al-An'am, 112).

There are many satans, but only one Iblis. Iblis as Satan is capitalized – because of him being the epitome as well as source of all evil and mischief – whereas other satans are in lower case.

The relationship between the two is one of a leader (godfather) and followers.

It is truly enlightening to study how precisely the Qur'an uses the words Satan and Iblis, recognizing the contexts and giving each word its exact meaning and role.

For example, when a discourse is about prostration before Adam, the Qur'an uses the word Iblis, because solely in his personal capacity did he refuse to follow divine orders and to prostrate.

However, when the discourse moves to the acts of deceiving Adam and his wife and causing them to fall, the Qur'an employs the word Satan, because thus he acted in his capacity as the avowed deceiver.

In the latter scenario, Iblis was plying his trade, so to speak.

Second: Satan did not thwart Allah's plan

By refusing to prostrate before Adam and by causing Adam and his wife to be expelled from Jannah, Satan in no way disrupted Allah's heavenly plan.

Positively, nobody can upset the will and plan of Allah, even in the slightest.

He is the Creator and Master; all other beings are His creations and servants.

Whatever Satan did, and whatever Adam and his wife subsequently did, was within the framework of their God-given freedoms and powers.

Their respective actions connoted an aspect of the range of their potential choices. They chose what they chose and acted as they acted, so everybody had to live with the foreseeable consequences.

If hypothetically they did not choose what they chose, they would then have chosen something else, which again could not exceed the parameters of their assigned freedoms and competences.

Everything was part of Allah's infinite knowledge, wisdom and power. It was yet part of His design for His creation and its existence.

Absolutely nothing happens unless sanctioned by Allah. No will or action can come to pass without the authorization of His divine will and grace.

Even before the prostration and Jannah incidents, Allah declared that He was going to create man as His vicegerent on earth.

Man was temporarily placed in Jannah only to be subjected to a learning process and to undergo a test. What happened afterwards was a part of the intended learning procedure and the test.

Third: Satan as the source of all, including sophisticated modern, evil

Satan – supported by his army of satans from among the Jinn and mankind - is the source and incarnation of all sin.

He even paved the way for today's most devastating forms of evil: rampant materialism, agnosticism and pleasure-seeking.

He saw in Adam no more than matter and form, constructing his flawed judgments exclusively around those factors. So blinded by his haughtiness, jealousy and self-regard was

he that he could not see - let alone appreciate - the spiritual, cerebral and moral considerations in Adam.

Every subsequent materialistic and covetous tendency was an offshoot of this outlook of Satan.

Satan moreover pledged that he will mislead people and will arouse in them sinful desires to such an extent that they will eventually make recourse to the option of changing the creation of Allah (al-Nisa', 119).

Nothing is to stand in the way of the full gratification of human fantasies and vain desires – as a means of their self-destruction - and of Satan's realization of his dreams rooted in the former.

All the achievements, advancements and discoveries of man are to be subjected to the service of his hedonistic inclinations, and by extension, of Satan.

Today's modern man, on account of his remarkable "knowledge" and "civilizational refinement", is more than ever mischievous and immoral.

He is excited about it, believing that he is on the right track, but little does he know that everything he does plays into the hands of Satan.

Satanic cults are alive and kicking as never before.

And finally, Satan was as confused as he was wrong about the most fundamental things in life.

For instance, he blames Allah for sending him astray, while at the same time he promises that he himself will send people astray.

According to some commentators of the Qur'an, he wavered between fatalism and the notion of absolute free will.

This could likewise imply his solicitation of a degree of divinity, for he promised to do to people what Allah had done to him. Thus, instead of worshipping Allah, those people will end up worshipping (venerating and following) him.

Satan knew what and where the truth lay, but since he refused to comply with it, he was keen to obscure it and obscure all the avenues leading to it.

Put another way, he wanted to muddle and confuse the truth, making it neither fully known nor knowable.

Satan's case additionally shows that knowledge alone is not enough to attain faith. More than that, especially from immaterial spheres, is required.

Fourth: Satan as man's sworn enemy

Satan is what he is because he is jealous of mankind. He does not accept Allah's decrees concerning them – or him. He can't stand them and wants to destroy as many of them as possible.

Accepting man as Allah's vicegerent on earth and as an honourable being preferred over much of what Allah had created (al-Isra', 70), was not compatible with Satan's delusions and self-absorption.

He was consumed by his iniquitous qualities to the point that he worshipped them (himself). There was no room in his personality for submitting to and worshipping Allah.

Satan knows that his actions warrant him an eternal punishment in Jahannam (Hell), but as long as he fills it with multitudes of people as well, who will share with him his fate, he is fine.

Allah thus reminds man: "Verily Satan is an enemy to you, so treat him as an enemy. He only invites his adherents (his party) that they may become the dwellers of the blazing Fire" (Fatir, 6).

Fifth: Satan's few strengths and many weaknesses

As far as people are concerned, Satan is neither weak nor strong. His condition is determined by people themselves.

Concerning believers, Satan is weak and cannot do much. The stronger one's faith and piety, the weaker Satan becomes.

Everything believers do is the antidote to Satan's trickeries. He is powerless and desperate. He is a lost case.

Believers are furthermore in control of Satan. They do not worry about him, but about how to keep him at bay by intensifying their devotion and worship.

By taking care of themselves, believers know that they take care of Satan and of everything that can be associated with him.

Allah confirms: "Feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan" (al-Nisa', 76).

Allah assured Satan that he will have no authority whatsoever over His servants, "except the erring ones who follow you" (al-Hijr, 42).

Satan acknowledged that by saying: "By Your might, I will surely mislead them all, except, among them, Your chosen (sincere and purified) servants" (Sad, 82-83).

By way of illustration, there is an instance of Prophet Sulayman to whom satans were subjected as servants and workforce. But there is nothing to the effect that people were ever subjected to satans or the Jinn in general, even partially.

Moreover, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was sent to both mankind and the Jinn. He is the final messenger and exemplar for *al-thaqalayn* (mankind and the Jinn). He was sent as a mercy to the worlds (for all creatures) (al-Anbiya', 107).

Once the Prophet (pbuh) said to Umar b. al-Khattab: "By Him in Whose Hands my life is, whenever Satan sees you taking a way, he follows a way other than yours" (Sahih al-Bukhari).

Indeed, Satan's greatest nemeses are believers.

Nonbelievers, on the other hand, enjoy no immunity against Satan. Everything in their life, material or otherwise, not only attracts, but also empowers, him.

In passing, intrinsically Satan does not have any power over anybody, nor can he affect anybody's being or life.

He only lies in wait, placing traps and snares. He whispers and throws up evil suggestions into the hearts – as well as minds – of people. He can influence a person only as much as he allows him and opens the doors of his life to him.

The more permission Satan gets, and the wider the doors are opened, the more authorized he becomes to ruin a person's life. The keys are not in Satan's hands, but in people's.

Anything that is associable with whatever form and degree of non-belief and sin is an invitation to Satan to act.

If he gets full permission to enter and conquer somebody's life, Satan then becomes his owner. A person becomes a slave and Satan his deity. He becomes a satan himself.

There are no barriers between the two anymore. As a "reward", Satan yet can appear to such a person in different discernible forms: in dreams and in real life.

That explains the existence of certain hallucinations and nightmares. It additionally explains the root cause of certain mental and spiritual diseases that make people insane.

Satan appeared to the polytheists of Makkah when they were bent on committing two of the most unconceivable deeds: when they plotted to kill Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) just before his migration to Madinah, and during the battle of Badr when they also wanted to kill the Prophet and hence forever extinguish the light of Islam.

These behavioural patterns of Satan will be recapped in his response to people – mainly his followers – on the Day of Judgment, when they start blaming him for their unhappy ending.

He will tell them: "Indeed, Allah had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves. I cannot be called to your aid, nor can you be called to my aid. Indeed, I deny your association of me (with Allah) before. Indeed, for the wrongdoers is a painful punishment" (Ibrahim, 22).

Sixth: the nature of Satan's strategies

Since Satan has no power, nor authority, over people, his strategies revolve around seducing, tricking and misleading people via his endless *waswas* (whispers and incitements).

As to how he hoodwinked Adam and his wife, for example, the Qur'an uses the words *dalla-huma bi ghurur*, which is normally translated as "he caused them to fall by deceit (through deception)" (al-A'raf, 22).

However, the word *dalla* means to "let, hang or haul down", "to lower" and "to suspend". *Dalw* likewise means "(water well) bucket", which is let down or lowered into a well.

This means that Satan “hangs down” or “suspends” his deceptions, choosing strategic locations, conducive environments and attractive “baits”, and waits for people to “bite” and get caught.

He ceaselessly conspires to ambush and “hook”, as it were, people. He has all the time in the world to wait and adjust his tactics whenever necessary.

Satan does not get what he wants easily and instantaneously. He must strategize, make arrangements and wait. It is not easy to neutralize people’s intelligence and their inborn disposition (*fitrah*).

In essence, it is people who destroy themselves, not Satan. Satan merely tries to present good and beautiful things as ugly and disgusting, while ugly and disgusting (evil) things he tries to make seem good and attractive in the eye of the beholder.

People need to be so hooked on Satan’s fake promises and boons that even if they wanted to unhook and free themselves therefrom, they will find very difficult to do so.

The Qur’an calls this operation - and determines at the same time Satan’s jurisdiction - *tazyin*, which means (false) adornment and beautification.

Undeniably, there is nothing quintessential concerning Satan, his life and his *modi operandi*. Everything is a deception and a mirage. He as such can operate only in milieus where there are no values, no truth, no virtue, no beauty, no hope, no meaning, and no nothing.

What is more, Satan in Arabic is *shaytan*. The word is derived from *shatn*, which means “rope” used to control something, like a horse, or to attach something in order to get something else thereby, like fastening a bucket to a rope and casting it into a well to get water.

This meaning, too, brings to mind the ways Satan works. The message is yet akin to the example of suspending “baits”.

In fact, the two complement each other, because for “baits” and the whole exercises of “hooking” and “catching” to function properly they must be attached to sufficiently long and strong ropes (*shatn*). They must be *mashtun* (firmly connected and easily controlled).

It could also be that the word *shaytan* is derived from *shatn* (rope) because once he gains full control of a person, Satan manipulates him as if by placing a noose around his neck.

Or because such a person becomes like a marionette worked by strings or ropes. He has no action of his own. Whatever he does is by Satan’s command. He becomes *mashtun* by *shaytan*.

Seventh: Satan’s cowardice and fear

Satan is a coward. He pretends to be somebody and strong only when things go his way. However, when the tables are turned on him, he falters. He cracks under real pressure.

For example, the Prophet (pbuh) said: “When the son of Adam recites a verse of prostration and he prostrates, Satan withdraws and he weeps and he says: ‘Woe to me! The son of Adam was commanded to prostrate and he prostrated, so he will go to Paradise. I was commanded to prostrate and I refused, so I will go to Hellfire’” (Sahih Muslim).

On the eve of the battle of Badr, furthermore, Satan was with the polytheists making their actions pleasing to them. He motivated them by insisting that no one could overcome them on that day from among the people. Above all, he guaranteed them that he was with them and was their protector (al-Anfal, 48).

Satan could sense that the destruction of either party was imminent. Whichever way and outcome, he was set to win.

He wanted to make sure that especially the polytheists did not waver, for if the Muslims were to lose, that would signify his double victory. But if the Muslims were to win, he would have at least one victory: annihilation of the polytheists.

However, when the battle was about to start, Satan displayed his true colours. Having brought his polytheistic “allies” to the point of no return on the path of utter obliteration, he happily betrayed them and left them in the lurch.

The Qur’an describes the reaction of Satan as follows: “But when the two armies sighted each other, he turned on his heels and said: ‘Indeed, I am disassociated from you. Indeed, I see what you do not see; indeed I fear Allah. And Allah is severe in penalty’” (al-Anfal, 48).

The above two examples typify the substance of Satan’s life and dealings. The kernel of people’s relationships with him is also on show.

According to the Qur’an, in addition, Satan admitted twice that he fears Allah, the Lord of the worlds, even though he incites people to the opposite (al-Anfal, 48; al-Hashr, 16).

However, that is not the authentic or faith-driven fear. It is a fear caused by Satan’s inherent feebleness and cowardice, in that he knows what awaits him as a result of a deal he had struck with Allah.

Eighth: Satan and shooting stars

Satan and his army try to eavesdrop on Allah’s commands that are transmitted from one group of angels to another throughout the seven heavens.

They snatch what they manage to overhear and carry it to their friends (non-believers, sorcerers, fortune-teller and astrologers) to con people.

And when angels see the Jinn doing so, they attack them with meteors.

Once on seeing a meteor shot (shooting star) giving a dazzling light, the Prophet (pbuh) asked his companions what the people used to say in the pre-Islamic days when there was such a shot of meteor.

The companions replied that they used to say that that very night either a great man had been born or a great man had died.

However, the Prophet (pbuh) said that those meteors were shot neither at the death of anyone nor on the birth of anyone.

Rather, they were shot because of satans the snatchers of Allah’s commandments and revelations.

The Prophet concluded: “If they (the Jinn) narrate only which they manage to snatch that is correct, but they alloy it with lies and make additions to it” (Sahih Muslim).

The same truth is referred to at different places in the Qur’an. The process is called *rajm* (“stoning” or “pelting someone or something with stones”). *Rajm* also means “missile” and “meteor”.

Hence, the main attribute of Satan is *al-rajim*, which is normally translated as “expelled” and “accursed”. However, the root of the word is *rajm* (stoning).

Believers persistently seek Allah’s protection against Satan who is *al-rajim* (both the “accursed” and “stoned” one).

Ninth: Satan and mankind’s time and space

When Allah cursed and expelled Satan from Jannah, Satan, now an outcast, asked for a respite until the Day of Resurrection. He wanted to have more than enough time to excel in his ungodly mission.

However, there was something else in his request.

He asked to be reprieved until the Day people are resurrected, that is, after everybody has died and has been brought back to life, after which there will be no more death (al-Hijr, 36).

In other words, Satan wanted to cheat Allah by deviously seeking His permission not to die. He asked for eternity. He schemed to be at least in that particular regard somehow equal with Allah.

He was a mischievous fool. If he was ready yet to trick Allah, one can imagine how far he is ready to go to trick and ruin man.

Allah told him that his request was granted, but only until the Day of the time well-known, which is the time appointed for the end of days and for his own death (al-Hijr, 38).

Be that as it may, Satan still got all the time that mankind and life on earth in general will have.

Having secured time as an existential dimension, Satan then proceeded to attempt and secure the space dimension as well. With that, he thought, his domination over man will be complete.

He said, outlining his plans: “I will surely sit in wait for them on Your straight path. Then I will come to them from before them and from behind them and on their right and on their left, and You will not find most of them grateful (to You)” (al-A’raf, 16-17).

In a nutshell, Satan swore that he will try every possible course of action, leaving no opportunity unexplored, in his pursuit of people’s lives (their souls, bodies and minds).

He did not mention that he will come to people from above them. That is so because he has no access to that direction. Allah’s mercy descends from above, and being most exalted and most high are the attributes of Allah alone.

Satan is not qualified to be in correlation with highness and sublimity.

Nor did he say that he will come to people from under them. That is so because it was humiliating for him to say such a thing and to act accordingly.

Didn't he just a while ago refuse to fall to the ground and prostrate before Adam? Why should he later do something like that, even if it be most remotely so?

Here, too, Satan was wrong. Certainly, it is by means of humility and obedience – personified by believers' recurring prostration to Allah – that one rises and prospers.

As a result of their regular “going down”, believers constantly keep rising and keep going up. Their truest lives unfold on a vertical axis that connects the terrestrial bases of theirs with the highest points in Heaven.

Owing to this, the Qur'an mentions simultaneously the notion of prostration (*sajdah*) and the notion of drawing near to Allah (*iqtirab*). Believers are explicitly instructed to firstly embrace the former as the cause, then the latter as the effect (al-‘Alaq, 19).

The Prophet (pbuh) said that whoever humbles himself for the sake of Allah, Allah will raise him (in status in both worlds). Similarly, whoever is arrogant to Allah, Allah will lower (and humiliate) him (in both worlds) (Sunan Ibn Majah).

Trapped in matter and blinded by sheer worldly concerns, Satan could not see all that.

Operating on a plain horizontal axis, he cannot even get close to believers, much less influence or dictate their lives.

Satan and believers reside on dissimilar ontological planes. He can mislead and get hold only of such as debase themselves and as such, exchange excellence and sublimity for vice and absurdity.

Allah declares: “Go, for whoever of them follows you, indeed Hell will be the recompense of you - an ample recompense. And incite (to senselessness) whoever you can among them with your voice and assault them with your horses and foot soldiers and become a partner in their wealth and their children and promise them. But Satan does not promise them except delusion. Indeed, over My (believing) servants there is for you no authority. And sufficient is your Lord as Disposer of affairs” (al-Isra' 63-65).