

Satan's Rebellion

What is the true nature of what Satan proposed in the premortal council?

By Mark A. Mathews

Seminaries and Institutes

When I was a young man, I began noticing a curious tendency among some Church members. When they saw a situation where rules were agreed upon and consequences for disobedience were applied (for example, in Church discipline, parental discipline, or enforcing mission rules or standards of conduct at Church schools), they would often say, “But isn’t that like Satan’s approach? Aren’t they forcing people to be righteous?”

This response was surprising to me at first—how could someone think that practices approved of by the Lord and His Church could be part of “Satan’s plan”? I have since come to realize that misunderstandings like this about Satan’s rebellion and the War in Heaven are actually quite common, as are hasty accusations of what looks like that plan today. Unfortunately, these doctrinal misunderstandings can lead to damaging results.

For example, these misunderstandings could lead some parents to think they cannot encourage their children to attend church. They can lead Church members to support the legalization of serious moral sin. And these misunderstandings can even lead some Church members to think that making and keeping covenants and commitments of obedience is somehow contrary to God’s plan when, ironically, such covenant obedience is central to God’s true plan of salvation.

What the Scriptures Say

Some ideas about what Satan proposed in the premortal world appear to come more from tradition than from actual

revelation on the subject. As a result, it is helpful to return to the scriptures themselves to find out what the Lord has actually revealed on this important matter. In the scriptures, the primary source on what Satan proposed is in the first verses of the fourth chapter of Moses:

“And I, the Lord God, spake unto Moses, saying: That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying—Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor.

“But, behold, my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.

“Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man, which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down;

“And he became Satan, yea, even the devil, the father of all lies, to deceive and to blind men, and to lead them captive at his will, even as many as would not hearken unto my voice” (Moses 4:1–4).

The Father of All Lies

From these verses it is clear that our Heavenly Father did not ask for volunteers to invent and present different and competing plans of salvation, as some have assumed.

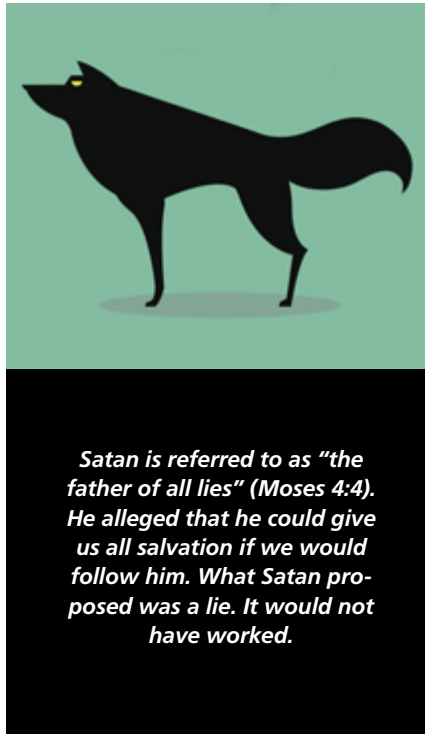
Rather, it was our Heavenly Father's plan, and He presented it to His spirit children who were gathered in the Grand Council in Heaven. Jesus Christ, who was "chosen from the beginning" to be the Savior in that plan, humbly proposed that Heavenly Father's plan be sustained, saying "Father, thy will [i.e., plan] be done." It was in this setting that Satan made an unwelcome and arrogant proposal to change Heavenly Father's plan so that it provided universal salvation for everyone (see Moses 4:1). Before we discuss how he claimed to accomplish this, it is important to note that Satan is referred to in these verses as "the father of all lies" (Moses 4:4). On another occasion he is called "a liar from the beginning" (D&C 93:25). We would be absurdly naïve to assume that Satan was telling the truth when he made this exaggerated claim of universal salvation.

If we understand Satan's character and history, it would be more appropriate to view him as the first con man trying to sell us a product that he knew he could never provide. He alleged that he could give us all salvation if we would follow him rather than the plan our Heavenly Father had created for our salvation and which was upheld by our Savior Jesus Christ.

What Satan proposed was a lie. It would not have worked. It was not a viable alternative to Heavenly Father's already perfect plan, but rather it was a trap set to ensnare and deceive people into following Satan. It was, in the end, a plan of damnation, not a plan of salvation.

Destroying Agency

Importantly, these verses of scripture do not clearly state *how* Satan proposed to carry out this lie. All that the scriptures state is that it would "destroy the agency of man" (Moses 4:3). President J. Reuben Clark (1871–1961), First



Counselor in the First Presidency, suggested two main possibilities for what Satan proposed to do and reminded us that neither would have worked. He explained: "As I read the scriptures, Satan's plan required one of two things: Either the compulsion of . . . man, or else saving men in sin. I question whether the intelligence of man can be compelled. Certainly men cannot be saved in sin" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1949, 193; quoted in *Doctrines of the Gospel Student Manual* [2010], 15).

Although neither of these possibilities would have worked, we see elements of each in Satan's efforts and tactics today. For example, compulsion and force are used today by tyrants seeking power over nations and by political activists who seek to limit religious freedom and compel society to accept sinful behavior. The Lord has specifically condemned the exercise of "control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness" (D&C 121:37).

However, the Lord also explained that power and influence can be used to encourage righteousness by loving persuasion, righteous reproof, and appropriate consequences (see D&C 121:41–43). This important clarification shows that carrying out proper Church and parental discipline, enforcing rules and standards in missions and Church schools, and establishing righteous laws in society are all practices approved of the Lord and not part of "Satan's plan." Honoring agency does not mean embracing anarchy.

The second possibility for how Satan proposed to save everyone is described in the Bible Dictionary: "Lucifer and his followers wanted salvation to come automatically to all who passed through mortality, without regard to individual preference, agency, or voluntary dedication" ("War in Heaven"). In other words, another interpretation is that Satan proposed to save us all, no matter what we did. This

would destroy agency by rendering it useless. If consequences of our choices were all removed and everyone received the same reward, our choices become meaningless and our agency is destroyed.

This interpretation of how Satan proposed to save us is also seen in many of his efforts and tactics that we are familiar with today. Satan is constantly promising people that they can live a life of sin and still be saved or that they can find happiness in wickedness. This seductive message of easy salvation and a lifestyle of sin is very popular today, as was Satan's proposal in the War in Heaven, when "many followed after him" (Abraham 3:28).

We can see by these examples that Satan's approach has not changed much since premortality. Satan continues to lie to people by promising them that if they follow him they will be saved or be happy or whatever else they want to hear. He also continues to use compulsion to try to force his unrighteous views and practices on others. Thus, "the warfare is continued in mortality. . . . The same issues are doing battle, and the same salvation is at stake" (Bible Dictionary, "War in Heaven").

A Plan of Rebellion

Perhaps the simplest way to describe Satan's plan is not based on speculative theories about what Satan proposed to do but on what his plan led him and his followers to actually do—that is, rebel. The scriptures repeatedly state that Satan openly rebelled against God. For example, the Lord declared that "Satan rebelled against me" (Moses 4:3); "an angel of God who was in authority in the presence of God . . . rebelled against the Only Begotten Son" (D&C 76:25); and "he rebelled against me, saying, Give me thine honor, which is my power" (D&C 29:36).

From these verses it is clear that Satan's proposal was not an innocent suggestion to amend God's plan. It was a rebellion, a revolt, an attempted mutiny to dethrone God and take over heaven. Those who followed Satan declared war in heaven and made themselves enemies to God. Their agency was destroyed because they refused to choose

"liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator," and instead chose "captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself" (2 Nephi 2:27). As a result, "a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from [God] because of their agency" (D&C 29:36).

In other words, the simplest way to view Satan's plan is as a plan of rebellion and disobedience to God. In contrast, God summarized His plan in these words: "And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" (Abraham 3:25). In addition, "We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel" (Articles of Faith 1:3). Thus, God's plan is a plan of obedience and righteousness, while Satan's plan is one of disobedience and rebellion.

Recognizing the Plan

Properly understanding the difference between God's plan and Satan's goals will help us more clearly discern who is and who is not *really* following Satan. It will help us avoid accusing those who encourage righteousness and advocate obedience of following Satan's plan when they are actually following God's plan. It will also expose the true followers of Satan's plan today.

Those who protest and rebel against God and His prophets, those who seek to change God's plan, those who demand a lowering of the standards of righteousness and seek to compel others to accept immoral behavior, and those who seek to deceive people into believing that wickedness is happiness and that we can find salvation in sin, all support different elements of Satan's rebellious strategy.

May we follow Heavenly Father's true plan, a plan of salvation "through the Atonement of Christ" and by "obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel" (Article of Faith 1:3). ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

To give feedback about this article or any article in the Liahona, please email liahona@ldschurch.org.