

The book cover features a central illustration of a devil with horns and horns, standing inside a large, open, brown suit jacket. The suit jacket is laid flat, showing a white shirt and a striped tie. The background is dark red with several small, glowing, circular windows. The title 'THE REAL DEVIL' is written in a large, white, serif font, and 'A Biblical Exploration' is written in a smaller, white, serif font below it.

THE REAL DEVIL
A Biblical Exploration

Duncan Heaster

The Real Devil

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By Duncan Heaster

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FOREWORD

Duncan Heaster wisely introduces his thesis on *The Real Devil* with an introductory chapter on the history of the commonly held idea (though constantly changing in form) of a legendary, mythical being, which originated in Babylonian and Persian times, influencing all who came in contact with their powerful empires. He follows the influence through Greek and Roman times, through the early Christian patristic times, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, up to the present times – a persistent, changing myth that has *no place within the pages of holy scripture*. Clearly, his own preference, as he states, is firmly focused on the word of God; but, at the same time, he is conscious of the value of history, and its *supportive* role in influencing how so many of us will come to the subject. He is aware that he needs to address his reader where he/she actually is. For many will not come to this subject without a prior cultural conditioning, shaped outside the realm of the Bible. It has been my own personal experience that my companion in discussion, even a professional clergyman, is sometimes much more familiar with what he imagines John Milton believes and says about Satan in *Paradise Lost*, than he is with what the Bible is saying. Similarly, avid fans of the great Russian classics may possibly have misread some of the metaphorical utterances of, say, Ivan Karamazov, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, or of Alyoshka in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*; preferring his/her own misconception of what he/she *thinks* the author is saying.

And so the author presents a clear historical record of this persistent, erroneous myth, with endnotes and bibliography for those interested enough to follow up, before proceeding to the basic Bible teaching on the subject. There has never been a clear and consistent teaching on the Devil in orthodox ranks during the past two millennia. Origen rejected Ethiopic Enoch's theories, Augustine did not fully follow Origen, as Abelard did not agree with Anselm that the atonement had anything to do with the Devil. And Thomas Aquinas and Calvin had their own personal views, whilst Schleiermacher, more recently, questioned the conception of a fall among good angels and said that *Jesus did not associate the Devil with the plan of salvation*; rather, Jesus and his disciples drew their demonology from the common life of the period rather than from Scripture. *Even in history, the Devil has never had a fixed role or function.* and so, I endorse the inclusion of *The History of an Idea* as a preliminary to the discussion. It has potential for meeting the actual cultural position of the reader, and by God's grace, may lead to the truer understanding and a positive response.

Certainly, when we come to the actual Bible teaching and the practical implications of these teachings we are met with a formidable case. In the examination of the specific Bible passages which might be thought to mention the Devil and Satan, from the Serpent in Eden (Genesis 3) to the binding of "Satan" in Revelation 20, "no stone is left unturned" in addressing even the most remote and unlikely text that might, to some, hold the slightest hint of a literal demonic being. The reader can be left in no doubt of the true teaching of Scripture on the subject, and that "our greatest personal Satan / adversary is (in reality) our own humanity and sinful tendency". That, certainly, was the clear perception that subsumed the great Russian classics of Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Solzhenitsyn. As Alyoshka said so pertinently in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*: "You should rejoice that you're in prison. Here you have time to think about your soul" (p.140, Penguin, 1982 edition).

But it doesn't stop there. Though that's where the problem for each of us is, it will not be solved simply by repression of our sinful desires in a kind of clinical, legalistic way. Like the Apostle Paul, long ago, mindful of the true Bible message, Duncan hits the high note. The solution is positive and is not to be found in negative repression. The "new ethic" calls for a complete submission to the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Master, baptized by immersion into Him. In Christ, with imputed righteousness, strengthened by His grace, acting as He acted, thinking as He thought ...dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ... servants to God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end – eternal life.

I commend this honest presentation by my brother in Christ to all who are earnestly seeking the truth about the nature of evil and the only way given under heaven for it to be totally overcome. May God bless your sincere and honest striving for truth.

E.J. Russell, B.A., Litt.B, M.Ed., D.P.E., T.C.

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate origin of evil and human sin is indeed a deep question; but only by engaging with it are we empowered to handle sin and evil and find a way of victory. To blame it all on a personal Devil with horns and tail and pitchfork seems to me to be a form of escapism, a dodging of the question, just quickly going for a simplistic but wrong answer. Especially once it is understood that actually this view of 'the Devil' is one nowhere found in the Bible, but is rather an accretion of centuries of speculation and adaptation of pagan myths. In Chapter 1, I seek to demonstrate that this is indeed what's happened. Throughout that chapter and those that follow, I seek to demonstrate how surrounding myths about a Satan figure were sadly accepted many of by God's people; but the Bible writers actively seek to deconstruct the myths by alluding to them and exposing their fallacy. From the account of the Fall in Genesis 1–3 to the references to Satan in Revelation, this is what's going on. The fact Holy Scripture doesn't use quotation marks and footnote sources may mask this to the uninformed reader; but the allusions and deconstructions going on in the Biblical text are powerful and bitingly relevant to both their day and ours.

But the history of the Devil as a concept doesn't solve the colossal problem of sin and evil for us on a personal level. It's not like a problem in a maths textbook – if it beats you, well you can just go to the back of the book and find the answer. It demands far more than that. Ursula LeGuin wrote powerfully of "all the pain and suffering and waste and loss and injustice we will meet all our lives long, and must face and cope with over and over, and admit, and live with, in order to live human lives at all" ⁽¹⁾. This is indeed how it is; her cancer, the tragedy of his life, the tsunami here and the repression of human rights there, the deeply hidden regrets and secret sins of every human life... over and over we have to rise each day and live with it. It seems to me that the burden of it all, the sheer pain and difficulty of the struggle to understand, has led people to simply give up, and blame it all on a personal Satan who fell off the 99th floor and came down here to mess up our nice good little lives. But simplistic one dollar answers to these million dollar questions have floated around for too long. Legitimate responses and understandings are not going to be found in a pagan myth, no matter how respectably it's been developed by bunk theology and enshrined in mainstream Christian tradition. Valid answers and true insights are, I submit, to be found in God's word of truth alone. And it's here that I turn in detail in Chapter 2, seeking to develop a true framework for understanding what the Bible itself

actually says about the Devil, sin, evil and the related issue of Angels. Yet as I see it, the whole purpose of true Biblical theology and doctrine is the radical transformation of human life in practice. This is why true understanding is important, because it impacts daily life, leading to what Paul calls “the full assurance of understanding” (Col. 2:2).

It’s this “full assurance of understanding” which I try to develop in Chapter 3, taking a break from the theory and seeing how all this impacts human life and experience in practice. Then in Chapter 4 we’re back to more theology as it were, investigating the theme of demons, deconstructing the idea that there are actual demons as spirit beings causing sin and evil. We’re then in a position to survey most of the Bible verses which speak of the Devil or Satan, and engage them within the framework of understanding we’ve developed. That’s what happens in Chapter 5, leading on finally to the summary conclusions of Chapter 6. Join me in praying that we will understand, that in our understandings we may come to a deeper faith, hope and love. And that through them we may be able to reach out further, more meaningfully and more compellingly, to others – in the days that remain as we await the return of God’s Son to provide the final resolution to all our struggles with sin and evil.

Whilst I alone must take the blame for this book, it also owes much to two fine friends, Ted and Bev Russell. Their contributions are noted in the text, and in some ways this volume is a tribute to them and to our quite extraordinary meeting of minds and experience in so many ways. I’d also like to express a word of particular thanks to my friend Paul Clifford. Having a Bible student of his calibre, intensity and depth of scholarship going through the drafts was quite the experience. He test drove the hypotheses over some demanding ground, and called me to order on quite a few matters of reasoning. For that I’m truly grateful.

But above all, thanks to the Father and Son for ‘giving us the victory’ which – albeit in a round about way – this book celebrates.

Duncan Heaster

(1) Ursula LeGuin, *The Language of the Night* (New York: Putnam’s, 1979) p. 69.

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORY OF AN IDEA

1-1 A History of the Devil and Satan in Old Testament Times

To begin at the beginning. The words Satan, Devil, demon, Lucifer, fallen angel etc. simply don't occur in the whole of the book of Genesis. Throughout the Old Testament, the one and only God is presented as all powerful, without equal and in no competition with any other cosmic force. The Old Testament makes it clear that any 'adversary' to God's people was ultimately under the control of God Himself. All Angels are spoken of as being righteous and the servants of God, even "Angels of evil / disaster", who may bring destruction upon sinners, are still *God's* Angels carrying out *His* will and judgments. God's people Israel initially held this view; but as has so often happened to God's people, they mixed their true beliefs with those of the world around them. Earlier Judaism spoke of the human tendency to evil [*yetser ha-ra*] and the tendency to good [*yetser ha-tob*]. This tendency to evil they understood as being at times personified or symbolized by "the devil": "Satan and the *yetser ha-ra* are one" (1). But earlier Judaism rejected the idea that angels had rebelled, and they specifically rejected the idea that the serpent in Genesis was satan. At that time, "the Jewish devil was little more than an allegory of the evil inclination among humans" (2). It is noted by the editor of Dent's edition of the Talmud that neither the Talmud nor the Midrash (the Jewish interpretations of the Law of Moses) even mention Satan as being a fallen angel (3). Even in the Zohar- a second century AD Jewish book that became the basis of the Kabbalah- the *sitra ahra*, the "dark side" is presented as an aspect of God, not independent of Him, which operates on earth as a result of human sin. The Zohar uses the ideas of the *Shekhinta b'galuta* [God's glory in exile] and *sitra*

ahra in order to speak of God's struggle with evil and to explain its very existence. The Zohar doesn't teach dualism, a universe split between God and Satan, but rather teaches that the struggle between good and evil occurs within God's own self.

Attention should be paid to the book of Sirach, written around 200 BC and popular in Jewish circles in New Testament times. Sirach 21:27 clearly parallels Satan with the soul or human person: "When the ungodly curseth Satan, he curseth his own soul". Sirach 15:14-17 teaches that man alone is responsible for sin, and "death comes by sin" - this passage is in fact alluded to with approval in the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:14; Rom. 5:12). Sirach 15:11 'Say not, From God is my transgression' is likewise referred to with approval in James 1:13 "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'" [we are tempted by our own evil desires]. Whilst Sirach is Apocryphal and not Divinely inspired, it upholds the traditional Jewish idea that sin is personified and comes from within, and so it's significant that the inspired New Testament writers quote and allude to it with approval.

Surrounding Canaanite Myths

It's been truly observed: "The Satan of later imagination is absent in the Hebrew Bible" (4). "The early stage of Israelite religion knows no Satan; if a power attacks a man and threatens him, it is proper to recognize YHVH in it or behind it" (5). The Old Testament teaches that God is all powerful, with no equal; sin comes from within the human mind. Never is there any indication of a battle between Angels, and Angels falling from Heaven to earth. Indeed, the Biblical record at times makes allusions to the surrounding myths about a personal Satan [or his equivalent] and deconstructs them. The ancient near East was full of stories of cosmic combat, e.g. Tiamat rebelling against Marduk, Athtar the rebel; they are summarized at length by Neil Forsyth (6). The Old Testament stands out from other local religions by *not* teaching such ideas. And further, there are a number of Biblical passages which allude to these myths and show them to be untrue. Take Psalm 104, full of allusions to the Ninurta myth. But the inspired writer stresses that it is *Yahweh* and not Ninurta who rides a chariot "on the wings of the wind";

Ninurta supposedly struggles with the Satan figure who is in the "waters", but in Ps. 104 it is shown that *Yahweh* does with the oceans or *tehom* (cognate with the Akkadian Satan figure Tiamat) just what He wishes- He's in no struggle (7). Job 26:5-14 has a whole string of allusions to popular Canaanite myths of cosmic combat; and the point of the passage is that Yahweh is so far greater than them that effectively they don't exist. Thus "The Shades writhe beneath Him [a reference to Mot, writhing as a serpent]... he strips naked Abaddon... stretches Zaphon... by his power he stilled the Sea [a reference to the god Yamm]. By his cunning he smote Rahab. By his wind the heavens are cleared [a reference to the Labbu myth, in which the dragon is cleared out of Heaven], his hand pierced the twisting serpent". Compared to Yahweh, those gods have no power, and they have been effectively 'cleared out of heaven' by Yahweh's power- they simply don't exist out there in the cosmos (8). Although the Gospel records do use the language of the day, it should be noted that implicitly, Jesus is working to correct the wrong understandings. Thus in the storm on Galilee, which would've been understood as the machinations of the Devil, Jesus tells the sea to "shut up" (Mk. 4:37-41), in the same terms as He told the demon to "shut up" in Mk. 1:25. He addressed the sea directly, rather than any dragon or Satan figure.

The well known 'Lucifer' passage in Isaiah 14 is another relevant passage, as we consider in [section 5-5](#). This passage is about the rise and fall of the King of Babylon- the words satan, Angel and devil don't occur there at all. But the likening of Babylon's king to the morning star suggests parallels with the Canaanite myths about Athtar, the "shining one, Son of Dawn", who goes up to "the reaches of Zaphon" to challenge king Baal, and is hurled down. Surely Isaiah's point was that Israel and Judah should worry more about the King of Babylon, keep their eyes on realities here on earth, rather than be involved with such cosmic speculations which were obviously familiar to them. It was the King of Babylon, and not a bunch of cosmic rebels, who were tyrannizing God's people. The Babylonian power invaded Israel from the north, down the fertile crescent. And yet "the north" was associated in pagan thinking with the origin of the gods of evil (9). The prophets were attempting to steer Israel away from such a fear by emphasizing that the literal, human enemy and

judge of Israel for their sin was to come from the literal north. They were to quit their cosmic myths and get real, facing up to actual realities in human life on earth. This is why Ezekiel speaks of the Kings of Tyre and Egypt in language very reminiscent of the myths about Tiamat, Mot etc.- they were to be caught like a dragon [*tannin*, cp. Tiamat], cut up and bled to death (Ez. 29:3-5; 32:2-31). Again, the point is to refocus Israel away from the mythical beings and onto actual realities here on earth.

Situated as it is at the crossroads of so many cultures, Israel inevitably was a state open to influence by the surrounding nations and their beliefs. Despite so many prophetic calls to keep their faith pure, they were influenced by the beliefs of those around them, especially with regard to other gods and the common idea of a god of evil. These influences are summarized in the table below.

The gods of evil in many of these ancient cultures had horns, and this would explain where the idea of a horned Devil figure came from. Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible is the Devil spoken of as having horns – clearly enough, it was an import from surrounding paganism.

Deconstruction of the Myths

The ancient Near East was full of beliefs that the sea was somehow where the Satan figure lived; the sea was nearly always identified with a personal god of evil ⁽¹¹⁾. The ancient Canaanite myths saw the sea as being in revolt against the Creator. The Ugaritic texts feature Baal in battle against the Prince of the Sea and the Judge of the River. The Old Testament has a huge number of references to Yahweh's control over the sea – it begins with Him gathering the waters together in obedience to His word. "He placed a bound for the sea which it cannot pass"; and there are is a very wide range of terms used to describe the seas / waters under His sovereign control: "the deep", "the ocean-deep", "the depth", "the mighty waters", "the majestic waters", "the many waters" etc. All these are portrayed as under His control and total manipulation at His whim – seeing He is their creator.

The Egyptians perhaps more than any believed in the waters, especially of the Nile, as the source of good and evil. God powerfully deconstructed this by enabling Moses to turn those waters into blood – i.e. to effectively slay whatever deity was supposed to live in the Nile, and then to revert the water to how it had been (Ex. 4:9). This was surely to demonstrate that whatever deities were associated with "the waters", Yahweh was greater, and could slay and revive them at

perfect ease. The record of the Red Sea destruction is instructive in

Supernatural Beings and The Common Christian View of Satan: Shared Aspects ⁽¹⁰⁾

Supernatural being	Source	Relation to Deity	Frightening appearance	Abode	Association with death	Feared by humans	Battle or trickery involved
Humbaba	Mesopotamia	Appointed by Enlil to guard Cedar Forest	Giant monster	Dar Cedar Forest	Breathes fire and death	Feared by all	Battle with Gilgamesh
Mot	Canaan	Son of El	Demon	Underworld god	God of death	Feared by all	Baal must subdue him
Habayu	Canaan	El sees Habayu in a drunken vision	Horns and tail	Underworld	Connected with cult of the dead	Feared by all	Defiles El with excrement and urine
Set	Egypt	Son of goddess Nut and god Re	Head of black jackal-like animal; forked tongue, tail	Storm god; dwells in scorching desert	Associated with desert heat and death	Feared by all	Murders Osiris through trickery

Ahriman	Persia	Uncreated	Fearsome demon	Underworld god	Causes death and destruction	Feared by all	Perpetual battle with Ahura Mazda
Hades	Greece	Son of Zeus	Odious and ugly; fearsome	Underworld god	Brings death to the land; lives in land of the dead	Feared by all	Kidnaps Persephone and takes her to underworld
Common Christian view of "Satan"		One of the sons of God	Horns, tail, ugly etc	Commander of hell	Causes death and destruction	Feared by all	Battles Jesus for the Kingdom; fought with other Angels

this regard. Later Scripture identified the Egyptians and not the sea itself as "Rahab... the dragon" (Is. 51:9; Ps. 89:9,10)- whereas the common view was that the sea itself was the Satan figure. Moses' stress was that the real adversaries / satans to Israel were people, and not some mythical dragon figure. Even if such a figure existed, then Yahweh had destroyed him at the Red Sea, in that He clearly could manipulate the Sea at His whim. The conflict was between Israel and Egypt, God and Pharaoh- and not God and some dragon in the Sea. Habbakuk, perhaps writing in a context of Israel being influenced by pagan ideas about the Sea god, stressed that at the Red Sea, God thrashed and "trampled Sea with your horses" (Hab. 3:8,12,15)- as Marduk supposedly trampled the storm god, so Israel are being told that in fact Yahweh is the one who trampled the "Sea" god- and other Scriptures confirm this- Yahweh "Trod on the back of Sea", i.e. the supposed Satan figure called "Sea" (Job 9:8; Dt. 33:29; Amos 4:13; Mic. 1:3; Is. 63:3). Even if such a being existed, he had been destroyed for good by Yahweh at the Red Sea. "You split Sea... cut Rahab in pieces... didst pierce the dragon" (Ps. 78:13; Neh. 9:11; Is. 51:9-11). Thus the splitting of the Red Sea was understood as a splitting of the Satan figure or god known as "Sea". Several scholars concur in the need to read the references to "Sea" in this way (12). All this was what Moses had in mind when he sought to explain to his people what had happened at the Red Sea- even if there were such a being as the "Sea" god of evil, Yahweh their God had totally destroyed him and split him into pieces. And the real 'satan' was Egypt, real men on a real earth who posed a danger to Israel. "Thus the best known of all ancient Near Eastern myths, the myth of the chaos-dragon, is no longer understood as the primeval conflict between the deified forces of nature, but as Yahweh's victory over Egypt in his delivering his people from slavery. In a radical sense, myth is transformed in the Old Testament... Yahweh wages war against all the forces which seek to assert their independence over against him, whether they be the evil propensities of the heart of man, or the nations' claim to sovereignty, or the pride and power of the earthly kings. The world of demons is relegated to a position of only minor importance, and in contrast to other Near Eastern religions, man is delivered from the fear and dread of its destructive power"

(13). This was and is what is so unique about the one true faith, from Genesis to Revelation. The world of demons and supernatural Satans becomes irrelevant, effectively non-existent, because of Yahweh's amazingly powerful involvement with His people. The Bible begins early on with the comment that "God created the great sea monsters" (Gen. 1:21). The sea was perceived in surrounding mythology as the habitation of 'Satan' like creatures and gods. And right at the outset of Biblical history, the point is being clarified that whatever monsters are in the sea, God created them and is in control and they are fulfilling His will. Hence Ps. 148:7 makes the point that the sea monsters in the very deepest parts of the sea actually praise God. The Hebrew Bible is as it were going out of the way to emphasize that any such sea monsters were not part of any cosmic conflict against God; created by Him, they praise Him and are as it were on His side and not against Him.

In [Digression 3](#) we'll see how one of the intentions of Moses in the Pentateuch was the deconstruction of the Egyptian and Canaanite myths about evil. The more we study the Old Testament, the more apparent it becomes that this is in fact a major theme. Contemporary ideas about Satan, demons etc. are alluded to and Israel are given the true understanding. Take the well known command to Israel to wear a phylactery as a reminder of the Passover deliverance from Egypt: "You shall have the record of it as a sign upon your hand, and upon your forehead as a phylactery, because by the strength of his hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt" (Ex. 13:16 N.E.B.). Wearing a phylactery wasn't a new concept; the idea "refers to amulets which were worn in order to protect their wearers against demons" (14). So by giving this command, Israel's God was showing His people that instead of being on the *defensive* against demons, needing good luck charms against them, they should instead replace these by a positive remembrance of how Yahweh had saved His people from all the power of evil which was symbolized by Pharaoh's Egypt. Rejoicing in His salvation and constantly remembering it was intended to totally sideline the various false beliefs about demons which were prevalent at the time.

Students from many backgrounds have likewise perceived that Genesis is deconstructing the surrounding myths. The Catholic theologian Edmund Hill puts it very clearly: "The story of creation is really one of the earliest essays in demythologization... it is a counterblast to the Babylonian creation myth *Enuma-lish* which glorifies the gods of Babylon, above all Marduk the sun god, for emerging victorious from the great cosmogonic conflict with the monster of chaos Tiamat and then creating men to be the slaves of the gods from the blood of her assistant demon Kingu. 'This is all hogwash', says [the author of Genesis] in effect... the worldview it represented was false, a view of a world emerging from the clash of cosmic forces, and of man as the fairly helpless plaything of these forces... 'No', [the author of Genesis] says, 'The world was created by God, the God of Israel, our God, the one true God. It was done in much the same way as the Babylonians construct one of their temples for their non-gods'. And so, just as the Babylonians finish this construction by putting an idol of the non-god in the sanctuary of the temple, God finishes off the work of creating His temple, the world, by putting His idol, man, in it as its crowning achievement or masterpiece. For the word translated 'image' here is in fact the Hebrew word for 'idol'" (15). What is significant here is that God's corrected view of creation purposefully had no equivalent for the monster and demon figures, and no equivalent of the supposed cosmic conflict. These things had no equivalent- because they had no real existence.

Canaanite Dualism

Exploring further, we discover that the gods of Canaan were in two broad groups- good and evil. The Canaanites were dualists; they believed in Mot as the god of the underworld, called "the angel of death" in the Ras Shamra tablets, with various supporting monsters; over against all of which was Baal as the god of the heavens. "The angel of death" is an idea picked up by Moses in his account of the Passover deliverance, to show that the Angel of death is not in fact Mot but an Angel of Yahweh, completely under His control. For it was none less than Yahweh Himself who slew the firstborn of Egypt (Ex. 12:11,12). Likewise it was Yahweh's Angel who played the role of the

'Angel of death' in smiting the Assyrian army dead (Is. 37:36). Mot was thought to have helpers, dragons such as Leviathan who lived in the sea and rivers. Ps. 74:12-15 majestically disposes of this idea, proclaiming Yahweh to be the God who has divided the sea, broken the heads of the dragons in the waters, crushed the heads of Leviathan [he was thought to be a many headed monster]. "The beasts that dwell among the reeds" of the rivers are likewise "rebuked" by God's almighty strength (Ps. 68:30). God's hand pierced the "crooked serpent", another form of the Leviathan myth (Job 26:13- the very phrase *btm brh*, the crooked serpent, appears in the Ras Shamra texts). Notice how the past tense is used- these beings, even if they ever existed, have been rendered powerless by God. And of course the allusions are to what God did at the Red Sea, as if to argue that His saving deliverance of His people is the ultimate salvation which we should find significant.

The Old Testament describes Yahweh, the one true God, as riding through the heavens on chariots to the help of His people Israel (Dt. 33:26; 2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10; 104:3; Is. 19:1; Hab. 3:8). But Baal was known as the *rkb 'rpt*, the one who rides upon the clouds (16). Clearly the language of Baal is being appropriated to Yahweh. There's another example in Ps. 102:9: "Behold your enemies, O Lord, behold your enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered". This is almost verbatim the same as a line on the Ras Shamra tablets about Baal: "Behold your enemies, O Baal, behold your enemies you destroy, you annihilate your foes". Likewise the references to Yahweh giving His voice from Heaven and His enemies fleeing before Him (Ps. 18:13,14; 68:32,33) are references to Baal supposedly being able to do the same, according to the Ras Shamra texts (17). The Canaanites believed that thunder was Baal's voice as he struggled; but it is Yahweh's voice which the Bible presents as thunders. Jer. 23:27 laments that Israel forgot God's Name for that of Baal- hence His appeal for them to realize that what they claimed for Baal they actually ought to claim for Yahweh. This explains why the Old Testament so frequently contains allusions to the Baal cult, deconstructing them and reapplying the language of Baal to Yahweh.

This appropriation of pagan language and re-application to the one true God is very common. Notice how Abraham did this; Melchizedek spoke of his deity as "God most high" and "maker of heaven and earth", and Abraham immediately picks these terms up and applies them to his God, Yahweh (Gen. 14:19-22). Abraham sought to relate to Melchizedek as far as he could in the terms and language which Melchizedek understood. And this is what God does all through; the pagan language used to describe both the good gods and the evil gods is picked up and applied to Yahweh- in order to demonstrate that He was and is the *one* and only true God, that *He* is responsible for all those things which the pagans thought the other gods were responsible for. And this includes Yahweh as source of both good and evil, blessing and disaster. Dualism was not to be Israel's religion; their one God, Yahweh, was responsible for all. But the pagan ideas were attractive; and thus all through the Old Testament, the reminders are given. It would appear that whilst in captivity in Babylon, the Jews returned to some of these myths. The Talmud records: "When R. Dimi returned to Babylon he reported in the name of R. Johanan: Gabriel will in the end of days arrange a chase of Leviathan" (18). Hence I have elsewhere suggested that Isaiah and the book of Job were rewritten, under Divine inspiration, in Babylon, along with many of the Psalms, in order to correct these false ideas of Leviathan being a real creature against whom God was somehow struggling.

All the allusions to Mot, Leviathan, Baal etc. are couched in terms of God's victory over Egypt and His ultimate conquest of Babylon. God wished to redirect attention away from these myths towards what He had concretely done and will do in the salvation of His people from sin and concrete, visible, human enemies, just as He had delivered them from their historical enemies in the past such as Egypt. "In the Canaanite myths Baal smites the Prince of the Sea and Judge of the River, the helpers of Mot, on the head and on the neck" (19). This is precisely what we have alluded to in Hab. 3:13,14, where Yahweh smites "the house of the wicked [LXX "death"]" on the head and neck. But the mythical Satan creatures are reapplied to death and "the house of the wicked"- sinful men, whom Habakkuk's hearers personally knew; or death, the fear of every man. Even through the mask of translation, the majesty of Cassuto's argument on

this point comes through well: "The Canaanite idea of the victory of the god of the sky over the forces of death is transformed among the Israelites into the concept of the triumph of the One God, the ultimate Source of absolute good, over the principle of evil....the tradition [wrongly] accepted by the Israelites regarding the defeat of the rebellious creatures became a symbol of the punishment of the wicked, the foes of the Lord and of Israel, and the delivery of the righteous" (20).

Cassuto analyzed at great length the Ugaritic poem on Baal which was found in the Ras Shamra texts. It describes the conflict between Baal and Mot; and yet the Old Testament alludes to the language of the poem and applies the characteristics of both Baal and Mot to Yahweh. Thus Ps. 68:5 speaks of Yahweh as the only Rider of the clouds, alluding to Baal, 'the rider of the clouds'. Ps. 68:6 speaks of Yahweh as "father of orphans and judge of widows" - another term applied to Baal in the Ras Shamra texts. Cassuto perceived that the Old Testament is deconstructing the pagan idea of a conflict between deities, and instead speaks of the only essential rebellion as being of creatures against their one Creator (21). Habakkuk 3 is full of allusion to the Baal-Mot conflict poem. That poem speaks of how Mot and his fellow monsters were cast into the sea by Baal, and this stanza is virtually translated into Hebrew in Hab. 3:8: "Was Your wrath against the rivers, O Yahweh, or your indignation against the sea, when You did ride upon Your horses, upon Your chariots of victory?" (22). But the verse in Habakkuk comes in the context of reflection upon Yahweh's victory over Israel's enemies at the Red Sea. Thus the focus is being moved from the legends about cosmic conflict between the gods, to Yahweh's victory over real, tangible, earthly, human enemies of His people. Cassuto comments: "In the Biblical verses the acts are attributed to the Lord, whereas in the gentile poems they are referred to pagan deities" (23).

APPENDIX: Deconstruction

Deconstruction is a term I'll be using often in these studies. The similarities between the Biblical record and the surrounding myths and legends of the contemporary peoples are being increasingly revealed. The critical school likes to see in this

evidence that the Bible is just another myth, or is repeating pre-existing myths. My approach is that the Bible is indeed alluding to the myths and legends which Israel would have encountered, and showing which parts of them are true and which aren't; and especially, showing the utter supremacy of Israel's God over the supposed gods and demigods of other religions. The gods of the underworld, whose characteristics were slowly merged into the classical but mistaken images of 'Satan', are particularly singled out for allusion and deconstruction. The point of all the allusions to them is to deconstruct them and thus demonstrate their effective non-existence, in that their function in human life is in fact in the hands of Israel's God, Yahweh. Thus the Ninevites had grown up believing in Divine heroes being swallowed alive by monsters and yet emerging alive; and God chose to subvert that belief by making *His* man, Jonah, appear alive out of the large fish in order to witness His Truth to them. Viewed this way, the Hebrew Bible can be understood as an extended appeal to reject pagan notions of 'Satan' figures. This theme continues into the New Testament, whose language often alludes to incorrect beliefs [not least in demons] precisely in order to deconstruct them.

Stephanie Dalley has translated a text titled "Erra and Ishum" (24), dated by its colophon to the time of the Assyrian king Asshurbanipal. Erra was a name for the god of the underworld. There are amazing similarities between this document and the Biblical prophets, especially Nahum, who wrote in an Assyrian context. Following are just a sample (page numbers refer to Dalley):

"Because they no longer fear my name... I shall overwhelm his people" (p. 290)
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"Woe to Babylon!" (p. 304)

"How could you plot evil for gods and men?" (p. 301)
--

"Nobody can stand up to you in your day of wrath!" (p. 310)

"Erra became angry and set his face towards overwhelming countries and destroying their people. His counsellor placated him so that he let a remnant." (p. 311)

"The mountains shake, the seas surge at the flashing of your sword..." (p. 302)

"Bright day will turn to darkness [before me]... I shall destroy the rays of the sun; I shall cover the middle of the night" (pp. 292, 297)

"I shall sever the life of the just man... and the wicked man" (p. 298)

The Biblical allusions to this language is to show that Israel's God, as the one and only God, is the One to be feared, and not any god of the underworld, or 'Satan' figure. Alluding in this way to contemporary writings or ideas in order to deconstruct them was often done in Bible times; and it was done without as it were soecifically referencing the material being alluded to. This is what makes all such literature, the Bible included, so hard to interpret when we read it many centuries later without full access to nor appreciation of the material being alluded to. Such literary style was "a typical enough formula of the ancient Easter... Jahwism is forever pouring entirely new wine into the old bottles, and sooner or later, in many cases, these do indeed burst" (25). This effective re-writing of texts wasn't uncommon in the Biblical world. Wilfred Lambert has observed: "...the ancient world had no proper titles, no sense of literary rights, and no aversion to what we call plagiarism. Succeeding ages often rewrote old texts" (26). And again: "The authors of ancient cosmologies were essentially compilers. Their originality was expressed in new combinations of old themes, and in new twists to old ideas. Sheer invention was not part of their craft" (27). Donald Redford puts it like this: "The nature of Ancient Near Eastern writing proves unannounced quotation to have been the rule, not the exception" (28). The Gilgamesh Epic has been analyzed as evidencing "the adaptation of earlier works of various genres, some of which are employed within their new literary context in a manner contrary to their original intent" (29). The Bible is doing the same- but under Divine inspiration. And my point throughout these studies will be that it does so particularly with reference to false, if popular, ideas about evil, sin and 'Satan' figures. These ideas are alluded to, at times the language of the myths about them is used and effectively quoted, in order to invert and deconstruct those ideas. The text of the Hebrew Bible was initially given by God for the guidance of His people Israel, a largely illiterate group of people bombarded on every side by the myths and legends of the

societies around them. And God through His word was speaking to those issues they faced, teaching them the true position, and revealing those false ideas for what they really were. And so it has been observed that "No one familiar with the mythologies of the primitive, ancient, and Oriental worlds can turn to the Bible without recognizing counterparts on every page, transformed, however, to render an argument contrary to the older faiths" (30).

Notes

- (1) Rabbi Simon ben Lakish in The Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 16a.
- (2) Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil And The Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943) p. 19.
- (3) A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (London: J.M. Dent, 1949), p. 55. The same fact is extensively noted in Roy A. Stewart, *Rabbinic Theology: An Introductory study* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), pp. 81-5, 88.
- (4) T.J. Wray and Gregory Mobley, *The Birth Of Satan: Tracing The Devil's Biblical Roots* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 52.
- (5) Martin Buber, *Moses* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1947) p. 58.
- (6) Neil Forsyth, *Satan And The Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) chapter 2.
- (7) This and other connections are developed in W.G. Lambert, *The Background Of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: Athlone Press, 1978).
- (8) This is but a brief summary of the careful research of John Day, *God's Conflict With The Dragon And The Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). See especially pp. 38,39. It is also the interpretation of Marvin Pope, *Job* (New York: Doubleday) 1965 pp. 164-167.

(9) R.J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain In Canaan And The Old Testament* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

(10) Taken from T.J. Wray and Gregory Mobley, *The Birth Of Satan: Tracing The Devil's Biblical Roots* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp. 92,93.

(11) Neil Forsyth, *Satan And The Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) chapter 4 provides ample evidence of this.

(12) B.W. Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation Of Mythical Symbolism In The Bible* (New York: Association Press, 1967) pp. 98,99; F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth And Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973) pp. 132, 140; Marvin Pope, *Job* (New York: Doubleday) 1965 pp. 67-70.

(13) James Muilenburg, *The Way Of Israel* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962) p. 45.

(14) R.E. Clements, *Exodus* [Cambridge Bible Commentary] (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1972) p. 80.

(15) Edmund Hill, *Being Human* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984) pp. 196,197.

(16) Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical And Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973) Vol. 1 p. 246.

(17) Cassuto, *ibid* pp. 251, 278.

(18) *B. Baba Batra* 74b-75a, quoted (along with other evidence to this effect) in L. Ginzberg, *Legends Of The Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909) Vol. 1 pp. 27,28; Vol. 5 pp. 43-46.

(19) Cassuto, *op cit* p. 268.

(20) Cassuto, *op cit* pp. 251,252.

- (21) Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical And Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975) Vol. 2 p. 5.
- (22) Cassuto, *ibid* p. 11.
- (23) Cassuto, *ibid* p. 72
- (24) Stephanie Dalley, *Myths From Mesopotamia, Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, And Others* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1991).
- (25) H. Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The Theology of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) p. 114.
- (26) W. G. Lambert & A. R. Millard, *Atra-Khasis, The Babylonian Story Of The Flood* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1999) p. 5.
- (27) Wilfred G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis" in Richard S. Hess and David T. Tsumura, eds., *I Studied Inscriptions From Before the Flood: Literary And Linguistic Approaches To Genesis 1 — 11* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1994) p. 107.
- (28) Donald Redford, *The Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970) p. 109.
- (29) C. L. Seow, "Qohelet's Autobiography" in Astrid B. Beck, ed., *Fortunate The Eyes That See* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) p. 285.
- (30) Joseph Campbell, *The Masks Of God: Vol. 3, Occidental Mythology* (New York: Viking Arkana, 1991) p. 9.

1-1-1 Israel in Exile: The Babylonian / Persian Influence

Of especially significant influence upon Judaism were the Persian views of Zoroastrianism. This was a philosophy which began in Persia about 600 B.C., and was growing in popularity when Judah went to Babylon / Persia in captivity. This philosophy posited that there was a good god of light (Mazda) and an evil god of darkness (Ahriman). The well known passage in Is. 45:5–7 is a clear warning to the Jews in captivity not to buy into this – Israel's God *alone* made the light and the darkness, the good and the "evil". He alone had the power to give

“the treasures of darkness” to a man (Is. 45:3), even though such “treasures” were thought to be under the control of the supposed ‘Lord of darkness’. But Isaiah is in fact full of other allusions to Zoroastrian ideas, seeking to teach Judah the true position on these things. Thus it was taught that “Saviours will come from the seed of Zoroaster, and in the end, the great Saviour”, who would be born of a virgin, resurrect the dead and give immortality ⁽¹⁾. These ideas are picked up in Is. 9:6 and applied prophetically to the ultimate Saviour, Jesus – as if to warn the Jews not to accept the prevalent Persian ideas in this area. Indeed, it appears that [under Divine inspiration] much of the Hebrew Bible was rewritten in Babylon, in order to deconstruct the ideas which Israel were meeting in Babylon ⁽²⁾. Hence we find Persian-era phrases in books like Job, which on one level were clearly very old Hebrew writings, and yet have been edited under a Persian-era hand. The Jews were also influenced by the Zoroastrian idea that somehow God Himself would never cause evil in our lives – and therefore, God is to be seen as somehow distanced from all good or evil actions, as these are under the control of the good and evil gods. Zeph. 1:12 warns against this Persian view: “I will search Jerusalem with lamps; and I will punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their heart, Jehovah will not do good, neither will he do evil”. The fact is, God personally is passionately involved with this world and with our lives; and so it *is* He who brings about the dark and the light, good and evil.

Ahriman, the Lord of Darkness, is portrayed in Persian bas reliefs as having wings – and hence Satan came to be depicted as having wings, even though the Bible is utterly silent about this. According to Zoroastrianism, Ahriman envied Jupiter / Ohrmazd, and tried to storm Heaven. This mythology was eagerly adapted by the Jews to their myth of some rebellion in Heaven, and was later picked up by writers such as Milton and made standard Christian doctrine – even though the Hebrew Bible is utterly silent about it. It has been commented by a careful, lifelong student of the history of the Devil idea: “In pre-exilic Hebrew religion, Yahweh made all that was in heaven and earth, both of good and of evil. The Devil did not exist” ⁽³⁾.

Especially during their captivity in Babylon, the Jews shifted towards understanding that there was actually a separate entity responsible for disaster. “Much of Judaism adopted a dualistic worldview, which led it to see human problems... as the result of machinations by superhuman powers opposed to the divine will. This view infiltrated Jewish thinking during the time of the exile of Israel in Babylon” ⁽⁴⁾. “The idea that demons were responsible for all moral and physical evil penetrated deeply into Jewish religious thought in the period following the Babylonian exile, no doubt as a result of the Iranian influence on Judaism” ⁽⁵⁾. Hence Isaiah 45:5–8 warns them not to adopt the views of Babylon in this area, but to remain firm in their faith that God, their God, the God of Israel, the one and only Yahweh, was the ultimate source of all things, both positive and negative, having no equal or competitor in Heaven. This becomes a frequent theme of second Isaiah and other prophets who wrote in the context of Israel in captivity. But whilst Judah were in captivity, the Jews began to speculate upon the origins of the Angels who brought calamity, and under Persian influence the idea developed that such Angels were independent of God. The Jews went further and concluded that “the destructive aspect of God’s personality broke away from the good and is known as the Devil”, going on to develop the Jewish legends of a personal Satan [or Sammael] with 12 wings, appearing like a goat, and responsible for all disease and death ⁽⁶⁾. The Jews of course were monotheists, and these ideas were developed in order to allow them to believe in both one God, and yet also the dualistic, god of evil / god of good idea of the Persians. It was in this period that the Jews fell in love with the idea of sinful Angels, even though the Old Testament knows nothing of them. They didn’t want to compromise their monotheism by saying there was more than one God; and so they set up the ‘evil god’ as in fact a very powerful, sinful Angel. And this wrong notion was picked up by early Christians equally eager to accommodate the surrounding pagan ideas about evil.

The Old Testament, along with the New Testament for that matter, personifies evil and sin. However, Edersheim outlines reasons for believing that as Rabbinic Judaism developed during the exile in Babylon, this personification of evil became extended in the Jewish writings to such a point that sin and evil began to be spoken of as independent beings. And of course, we can understand why this happened – in order to narrow the gap between Judaism and the surrounding Babylonian belief in such beings. Edersheim shows how the Biblical understanding of the *yetzer ha ‘ra*, the sinful inclination within humanity, became understood as an evil personal being called “the tempter” ⁽⁷⁾.

It needs to be understood that the Persians weren't the first to adopt a dualistic view of the cosmos – i.e. that there is a good God and who gives blessing and positive things, and an evil god who brings disaster. The Egyptians had Osiris as the good god, and Typhon as the evil god. Native Indians in Peru have Carnac as the good god, and Cupai as the evil god; the early Scandinavian peoples had Locke as the evil god and Thor as the good one; the Eskimos had Ukouna the good and Ouikan the evil ⁽⁸⁾. The Sumerian Gilgamesh epic had the same idea – Gilgamesh and Huwawa stood in opposition to each other. This thinking is totally human – it rests upon the assumption that *our* view of good and evil is ultimately true. The Biblical position that humanity is usually wrong in their judgments of moral matters, and that God's thoughts are far above ours (Isaiah 55) needs to be given its full weight. For frequently we end up realizing that what we perceived as "evil" actually resulted in our greater good – Joseph could comment to his brothers: "You thought evil against me [and they *did* evil against him!], but God meant it unto good... To save much people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

Dualism in the form which influenced Judaism and later apostate Christianity is really proposing two gods. Yet the Bible is emphatic from cover to cover that there is only one God, the Father, the God revealed in the Bible. This leaves no space for a second god or a bad god. Here we come right up hard against why this matter is important to any Bible-believing person. Helene Celmina was a non-religious Latvian imprisoned in the Soviet *gulag*. She later wrote of her fellow prisoners who were Jehovah's Witnesses – and word for word I can identify with her reflections here: "... I remember, too, another conversation I had with the Jehovah's Witnesses about the gods. They insisted that there were two gods, Jehovah and another [Satan], whom Jehovah would fight. No matter how hard they tried, using modern science, chemistry, and the newest findings in physics, they could not prove the existence of the other god to me" ⁽⁹⁾. These are the words of a woman who was incarcerated in one of history's most evil and abusive systems – but it didn't make her believe in the existence of a 'second god', but rather it brought her to believe more strongly that the one true God is the only God. Solzhenitsyn, as we shall later remark, learnt the very same lesson from the same *gulag*.

Prophets and Monsters

Time and again the Old Testament prophets refer to the chaos monster myths – and applies them to Egypt or other earthly enemies of God's people. Thus the destruction of the Egyptian army at the Red

Sea is described in terms of Rahab the dragon being cut in pieces and pierced, his heads broken in the waters, and the heads of Leviathan likewise crushed (Ps. 74:13,14 NRSV – other references in Ez. 29:3–5; 32:2–8; Ps. 87:4; Is. 30:7; Jer. 46:7,8). This is quite some emphasis – and the point of it is that the real enemy of God’s people is *not* the chaos monster, but rather human, earthly people and systems. And there ought to be great joy in the fact that God overcomes them time and again. Thus Israel so often were directed back to the historical victory over Egypt in the plagues and Exodus – for this was what they should have been thinking about, rather than myths of chaos monsters involved in cosmic battles. And all this is true for us; it is God’s victory over real, visible opponents to us which is our cause for rejoicing, His creation of us as His people, which is the ultimate reality which should grip our lives – rather than stories of cosmic conflict. For our Egypt is still all around us; as Martin Luther King observed, “Egypt symbolized evil in the form of humiliating oppression, ungodly exploitation, and crushing domination” ⁽¹⁰⁾. These earthly realities are the real ‘Satan’ / adversary with which we daily engage, rather than with a cosmic monster. And the whole glorious history of God’s dealing with ‘Egypt’ is our inspiration and encouragement. The popular contemporary idea of a cosmic dragon being trodden underfoot and thrown into the sea is picked up in Mic. 7:19 and reapplied to sin: “He will tread our iniquities under foot and cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (R.V.). Again – the prophet is refocusing our attention away from myths of cosmic dragons, and onto our sins as the real Satan / adversary.

Re-Focus Upon Earthly Realities

This re-focusing of cosmic conflict legends onto real, concrete human beings and empires upon earth is to be found throughout the Old Testament. The pagan legends are alluded to only in order to deconstruct them and re-focus Israel’s attention upon the essential conflicts – against our own human sin, and against the spiritual opposition of the unbelieving world around us. Hab. 3:8 asks: “Was Your wrath against the rivers, O Lord, was Your anger against the rivers, or Your indignation against the sea?”. Remember that sea and rivers were seen as the abode of various gods, and were even at times identified directly with them. Hab. 3:12 goes on to answer the question – that no, Yahweh’s anger wasn’t against those sea / river gods, but “You did bestride / judge *the earth* in fury; You trampled *the nations* in anger”. The real conflict of Yahweh was with the enemies of Israel, not with the pagan gods. For He was the one and only God.

Consider the following examples of what I'm calling 're-focusing':

– One of the Ras Shamra documents records the Canaanite poem about Baal's war against the Prince of the Sea: "Lo, thine enemies, O Baal, lo, thou didst smite through thine enemies, behold thou dost annihilate thy foes" ⁽¹¹⁾. This is effectively translated into Hebrew in Ps. 92:10 and applied to Yahweh's conflict with Israel's enemies and all sinners: "For, lo, thine enemies, O Lord, for, lo, Thine enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered". The myths about the supposed netherworld of Sea gods become reapplied to wicked men and nations – the true source of evil in Israel's world.

– Jer. 9:21 speaks of how "death [*Mawet* – a reference to the pagan god of the underworld, Mot] has come up into our windows, it has entered our palaces". The allusion is to how Mot, the supposed god of death and the underworld, was thought to enter people's houses by their windows and slay them. Thus the Ras Shamra texts record how in his cosmic conflict with Mot, Baal built himself a palace without windows so that Mot couldn't enter and kill him ⁽¹²⁾. But the historical reference of Jer. 9:21 is clearly to the Babylonian invasion of Judah. Thus the well known idea of cosmic conflict between Baal and Mot is re-focused upon the Babylonian armies whom the one true God had sent against the erring people of Judah.

– The Ras Shamra texts include a section on the fall and death of Baal. Although written in Ugaritic, this section has amazing similarities with the poem of Isaiah 14 about the fall of Babylon – e.g. "The death of Baal" includes lines such as "From the throne on which he sits... how hath Baal come down, how hath the mighty been cast down!". Isaiah's message was therefore: 'Forget those stories about Baal being cast down; what's relevant for us is that mighty Babylon, which tempts us to trust in her rather than Yahweh God of Israel, is to be cast down, let's apply the language of Baal's fall to the kingdoms of this world which we know and live amongst'. Another such example is to be found in Is. 47:1: "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne". This is almost quoting [albeit through translation] from the 'Death of Baal' poem ⁽¹³⁾.

– The Ras Shamra poem about King Keret speaks of how this heavenly being earnestly sought a wife through whom he could have children, so that they could receive from him the inheritance of the whole world; and he grieved that only his servant would inherit the world, and not his own children ⁽¹⁴⁾. The Biblical record of Abraham's similar lament, and the promises that in fact he would have a seed,

who would inherit the earth (Gen. 15:1–3 etc.) is so similar. Why the similarities? To re-focus Israel away from the pagan myths which they'd encountered onto a real, actual historical person in the form of Abraham.

– The Babylonian Account of Creation claims (Tablet 4, line 137) that Marduk cleft Tiamat, the ocean goddess, with his sword. The Biblical idea of Yahweh cleaving the waters clearly picks up this idea (Hab. 3:9; Ps. 74:15; 78:13,15; Ex. 14:16,21; Jud. 15:19; Is. 35:6; 48:21; 63:12; Neh. 9:11). But these passages largely refer to the miracle God did at the Red Sea, bringing about the creation of His people out of the cleft waters of the Sea. Again, pagan creation is reinterpreted with reference to a historical, actual event in the experience of God's people.

– There were many pagan myths which featured fratricide – the murder of a brother by a brother. Israel in Egypt would've encountered the Egyptian legend of Seth who slew Osiris; and on entering Canaan, they would likely have heard the Canaanite story of Mot who murdered Baal. Moses in Gen. 4 gave Israel the true story of fratricide – that Cain had slain his brother Abel. The pagan myths were re-focused on a real, historical situation which had occurred, and from which personal warning should be taken to each reader with regard to the danger of envy and unacceptable approach to God.

– The Canaanite explanation of the family of the gods was that it contained a total of 70 gods – Ugaritic Tablet II AB 6.46 speaks of the “seventy sons of Asherah”. This is re-focused by the record of Genesis 10 – which speaks of 70 nations of men. Likewise Gen. 46:27 and Ex. 1:5 speak of the 70 sons of Jacob – and Dt. 32:8 says that the number of the Gentile nations was fixed “according to the number of the sons of God” or, “Israel” (according to some texts). The belief in the 70 gods of the Canaanite pantheon is therefore re-focused down to earth – where there were 70 sons of Jacob, 70 nations in the world around Israel, and Dt. 32:8 may imply that each is cared for by a guardian Angel in Heaven.

– The heroes of the early pagan myths were hunters who hunted fearsome animals and huge monsters – e.g. as recounted in the deeds of Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu. Gen. 10:9 says that God only took notice of a mighty hunter called Nimrod (“he was a mighty hunter before the Lord”) – and he was no hero in *God's* record.

– The Mesopotamian records also feature chronological accounts just as Genesis does. But they claim that any leaders on earth came down

from Heaven, and the kings were effectively divine beings. Genesis is silent about this; there's a clear boundary between Heaven and earth, and people don't come down from Heaven to become kings on earth. The Genesis 11 genealogies are very clear that the chronologies are of ordinary, mortal men. Yet both the Genesis record and the Mesopotamian traditions tend to use the numbers six and seven, or multiples of them, in stating how many years men lived, or in the numbers of people recorded in genealogies ⁽¹⁵⁾. Moses did this in order to show that he was consciously alluding to those surrounding traditions – and yet re-focusing the understanding of Israel upon the literal, human, earthly realities to the exclusion of myth and legend.

Correction in Captivity

There's significant evidence that under inspiration, the book of Deuteronomy and some of the historical books were edited by Jewish scribes in Babylon into their current form ⁽¹⁶⁾. This so-called Deuteronomic history sought to speak specifically to the needs and weaknesses of Judah in Babylonian captivity. In our present context it's interesting to note the occurrences of the term "son / children of Belial" to describe evil people. The apostate Jewish writings speak of a figure called Beliar, a kind of personal Satan figure. However, the Hebrew Bible's use of the term Belial – note the slight difference – is significant. For according to Strong's Hebrew lexicon, "Belial" essentially means "nothing" or "failure". Wicked people were therefore sons of nothing, empty, vapid... connecting with Paul's New Testament insistence that idols / demons are in fact nothing, they are no-gods. According to the Jewish Apocryphal writings, Beliar is active in leading Israel away from obedience to the Torah. But the Hebrew Bible says nothing of this – rather does stress that Israel are themselves guilty for their disobedience and must bear full and total responsibility for this. Many of the Qumran writings mention how Belial can influence the moral centre of a human being, so that they plan evil (see 1QH-a 2[10].16, 22; 4[12].12–13; 4[12].12; 6[14].21–22; 7[15].3; 10[2].16–17; 14[6].21). Yet this is totally the opposite of what the Hebrew Bible (as well as the New Testament) emphasize – that the human heart itself is the source of temptations, and therefore human beings are totally responsible for their own sins.

A case could also be made that the whole record of Israel's rejection from entering the land of Canaan is framed to adduce a reason for this as the fact they chose to believe that the land was inhabited by an evil dragon who would consume them there. This was a slander of the good land, and the whole point was that if they had believed in the

power of God, then *whatever* 'adversary' was in the land, in whatever form, was ultimately of no real power (Num. 13:32; 14:36; Dt. 1:25). And yet it was not God's way to specifically tell the people that there was no such dragon lurking in the land of Canaan – instead He worked with them according to their fears, by making the earth literally open and swallow up the apostate amongst them (Num. 16:30) – emphasizing that by doing this, *He* was doing "a new thing", something that had never been done before – for there was no dragon lurking in any land able to swallow up people. And throughout the prophets it is emphasized that *God* and not any dragon swallowed up people – "The Lord [and not any dragon] was as an enemy; *He* has swallowed up Israel" (Lam. 2:5 and frequently in the prophets). The people of Israel who left Egypt actually failed to inherit Canaan because they believed that it was a land who swallowed up the inhabitants of the land (Num. 13:32), relating this to the presence of giants in the land (Num. 13:33). As Joshua and Caleb pleaded with them, they needed to believe that whatever myths there were going around, God was greater than whatever mythical beast was there. And because they would not believe that, they failed to enter the land, which in type symbolized those who fail to attain that great salvation which God has prepared.

Isaiah's statement that Yahweh creates both good and evil / disaster, light and darkness, is not only aimed at criticizing the Babylonian dualistic view of the cosmos. It also has relevance to the false ideas which were developing amongst the Jews in Babylon, which would later come to term in the false view of Satan which most of Christendom later adopted. According to the Jewish Apocryphal writing *The Visions of Amram*, human beings choose to live under the control of one of two angels. Amram has a vision of the two opposing angels who have been given control over humanity (4Q544 frg. 1, col. 2.10–14 [Visions of Amram-b] = 4Q547 frgs. 1–2, col. 3.9–13). The good angel supposedly has power "over all the light", whereas the evil angel has authority "over all the darkness". Thus the idea of dualism – which is so attractive to all people – was alive and well amongst the Jews; and thus Is. 45:5–7 was also aimed at the developing Jewish belief in Babylon in a dualistic cosmos.

Time and again we must remember that the classical view of Satan is simply not found in the Old Testament. "Satan makes only three appearances in the Old Testament and in none of these is he defined as a cosmic adversary who defies divine sovereignty" (17). .

Notes

(1) Paul Carus, *The History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1996) p. 58.

- (2) I have exemplified this at length in *Bible Lives* Chapter 11.
- (3) J.B. Russell, *The Devil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) p. 174.
- (4) H.C. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1986) p. 70.
- (5) Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (London: S.C.M., 1993) p. 61.
- (6) E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975) Vol. 1 pp. 471–483.
- (7) Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* Vol. 2 (London: Longmans, 1899) Appendices 13 and 16. “It was not until the second century B.C.E. that, because of outside pagan influences, the yetzer was first conceived as an independent evil force with a sinister mind of its own”- Israel Drazin, *Maimonides: The Exceptional Mind* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House Ltd, 2008) p. 233.
- (8) Kersey Graves documents these and many other examples from around the world in *The Biography of Satan* (Chicago: Frontline Books, 2000) pp. 63–66.
- (9) Helene Celmina, *Women in Soviet Prisons* (New York: Paragon House, 1985) p. 133. It’s a translation of the Latvian original *Sievietes PSRS Cietumos* (Stockholm: Latvian National Fund, 1980).
- (10) Martin Luther King, *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) p. 73.
- (11) As quoted in Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975) Vol. 2 p. 98.
- (12) Cassuto, *ibid.*, p. 134.
- (13) Cassuto, *ibid.* pp. 156, 164.
- (14) English translation in Cassuto, *ibid.* pp. 206–208.
- (15) Demonstrated in great detail by Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992) Vol. 2 pp. 255–259.
- (16) The similarities of style, language and indications of common editing are explained in detail in Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); there is a good summary in Terrence Fretheim, *Deuteronomistic History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989). See too M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).
- (17) Andrew T. Lincoln, “Liberation From the Powers: Supernatural Spirits or Societal Structures?,” in M. Daniel Carroll R, David J. A. Clines, and Philip R. Davies, eds, *The Bible in Human Society: Essays in Honour of John Rogerson*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 200 (London: Continuum, 1995), p. 350.

1-1-2 Greek Influence

The final Old Testament-era influence upon Jewish thinking about the Devil was that of the Greeks. Their idea that there was Tartarus [a place of darkness under the earth for the wicked], the Asphodel Fields [a kind of purgatory] and the Elysian Fields [a kind of heaven for the righteous] was picked up by Judaism- despite the fact that it contradicted plain Biblical revelation about the grave ["hell"] and the state of the dead, as we outline in [section 2-5](#). And the Greeks had multiple legends of cosmic combat between the gods, some of them like Ophioneus taking the form of a serpent; and often with the sequence of rebellion and being cast out [as with Prometheus and Zeus, Phaethon etc.]. This all intermeshed with the other ideas the Jews were picking up of a personal Satan. The horns and hairy features of the Greek god Pan, the trident of Poseidon and the wings of Hermes all became incorporated in the common Jewish idea of this 'Satan' being, and this in turn influenced Christian misunderstandings and images of this legendary being. No wonder Origen and the early [apostate] Christian 'fathers' were accused by their critics such as Celsus of merely adapting pagan legends in this area of the Devil. Origen and many others tried to parry this [perfectly correct] accusation by trying to read back into Old Testament passages the pagan ideas which they had picked up. But as we show throughout Chapter 5, the results of this lack integrity and often involve quite pathetic interpretation and twisting of the Biblical texts.

The uninspired, apocryphal Book of Enoch features the Jewish story of the Watcher Angels being imprisoned in the valleys of the earth after they supposedly slept with the daughters of men clearly was taken from Greek myths- this was the fate of the Titans after Zeus defeated them, and it recalls the imprisonment of the children of Ouranos in valleys as punishment. But these Jewish myths about Angels came to be absorbed into popular Christianity. The only reference to Angels as "watchers" is in the book of Daniel, which also dates from the captivity in Persia / Babylon. Daniel emphasizes that the watcher Angels are

obedient to God and not in rebellion against Him (Dan. 4:13,17,23). In each reference, Daniel stresses that the watching Angels are the "holy ones" and not *unholy*. It's as if some early form of the myths about sinful "watcher" Angels were already in existence, and Daniel sought to deconstruct them.

The period between the Old and New Testaments saw the production of a huge volume of Jewish literature advocating a personal Satan. The Book of Enoch and the story of the "watchers" became accepted as dogma amongst the Jews- i.e. that the "watcher" Angels had sinned and come to earth at the time of Genesis 6 and married beautiful women. We've commented on this specifically in [section 5-3](#). The Jewish literature seriously contradicts itself, unlike the Biblical record. Thus the Book Of Jubilees, dating from around 104 B.C., claims that God placed "over all nations and peoples, spirits in authority, to lead them astray" (15:31). Why would the righteous God place His people under the authority of those who would lead them astray- and then judge us for going astray? Other Jewish theories of the time accept that God punished the Satan figure, but the demons got around the punishment and tempt men to sin- as if God somehow was outwitted in the supposed struggle. Jubilees 5:2 blames the flood on the fact that the earth was morally corrupt, but it claims that the animal creation also sinned and brought about the state of corruptness which required the destruction of the flood- thereby taking the spotlight off human sin as the sole cause for the flood. The *Apocalypse Of Adam* likewise minimizes human sin by claiming that 'Satan' in fact raped Eve, thus leading to the fall; the *Apocalypse Of Moses* claims that because Satan appeared as such a dazzling, shining Angel, Eve was inevitably deceived by him. Note in passing that Paul alludes to this idea in 2 Cor. 11:15- not that his allusion means that he supported the idea. Again and again, the Biblical stress upon the guilt of Adam and Eve, and the fact that we would've done the same if in their position, and we do do the same day by day, in essence... is all mellowed and de-emphasized. The Bible clearly states that the suffering and disease that there is in the earth is a result of Adam's sin; but Jubilees claims that all such illnesses were a result of evil spirits, "And we explained to Noah all the medicines of their diseases, together with their seductions, how he might heal them with

herbs of the earth" (Jub. 10:12-13). Both Moses and Peter stress that God brought the flood upon "the world of the ungodly", i.e. the wicked *people*. The Jewish writings claimed that the purpose of the flood was to destroy sinful Angels, and that mankind suffered from the result of their destruction. Thus the *Testament of Naphtali* 3.5: "Likewise the Watchers departed from the order of nature; the Lord cursed them at the Flood". The Jewish writings repeatedly change the Biblical emphasis upon wicked people (especially Jews), claiming that the various Divine judgments were upon wicked Angels. Quite why people on earth should have to suffer the result of this remains a begged question.

Time and again, the Jewish apocryphal literature sought to distance God from doing anything negative in human life. Gen. 22:1 clearly states that it was *God* who put Abraham to the test by asking him to kill his son Isaac; Jubilees retells the story with "Prince Mastema", the Satan figure, telling Abraham to do this (Jub. 17:15-18). Likewise Ex. 4:24 recounts how "the Lord", presumably as an Angel, met Moses and tried to kill him for not circumcising his son; but Jubilees again claims that Mastema / Satan did this (Jub. 48:1-3). Pseudo-Jonathan (The Targum Of Palestine) minimizes Aaron's sin by claiming that Satan turned the gold which Aaron threw into the fire into a golden calf; and excuses the peoples' sin by saying that Satan danced amongst the people (1). The Biblical record highlights the sin of Aaron and the people; the Jewish myths excuse it by blaming it on Satan. Indeed, several times the Hebrew word *mastema* ['hostility, enmity'] occurs, it is in the context of urging Israel to see that *they* and their internal desires to sin are the true *mastema*. Hosea 9:7 is an example: "Because your sins are so many and your hostility [*mastema*] so great".

Apart from seeking to justify themselves, the Jewish authors were struggling with the issue we all do- how can a good and kind God do negative things? But they took the easy way out, presuming to rewrite His word in order to pass blame into a Satan figure of their own imaginations. These uninspired Jewish writings from between the Testaments repeatedly seek to rewrite Biblical history and statements in order to accommodate the Persian ideas. Is. 45:5-7 is clear: "I am the Lord, and there is

none else. I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things". But 4 Ezra 2:14 changes this to: "I have left out evil and created good, because I live, says the Lord". We have a stark choice- the inspired text of the Bible, or uninspired Jewish interpretations seeking to justify the adoption of pagan myths about Satan.

The Essenes

The Essenes, a group of zealot Jews who separated themselves from what they perceived to be an apostate Jewish society, became very attached to the personal Satan myth. They had a bunker mentality, critical of and feeling persecuted by Jewish society as a whole, and bitterly resentful of the nation's domination by pagan Romans. They developed the ideas of the Book of Enoch in their *Damascus Covenant* and later in their *Rule Of The Community* and *War Scroll*. They felt that all their "moments of tribulation are due to this being's hostility [i.e. *mastema*, the Satan figure]. all of the spirits that attend upon him are bent on causing the sons of light [i.e. themselves] to stumble" (2). Thus they demonized all their opponents as somehow in league with Satan, thereby justifying them in preparing to violently and heroically fight the Romans with the belief that God was on their side. Tragically they failed to realize that their theology on this point was shaped and influenced by the pagan dualistic ideas which in other contexts they so vehemently criticized. They condemned the rabbis for claiming [correctly, and in line with Bible teaching] that there were only two tendencies in man, to evil [the *yetser-hara*] and to good [the *yetser-tob*]. Sadly they missed the point- that life before God is all about controlling the evil tendency and developing the good; and thus they minimized the need for personal spirituality, externalizing it all into caustic language and literal warfare against their enemies. As an aside, it's noteworthy that Yigael Yadin, an Israeli Defence Force General and also an archaeologist and academic, edited the *War Scroll* and used it as justification for Israel's 20th century conflicts with the Arabs (3).

It's been pointed out and exemplified beyond cavil that Paul uses much Essene terminology (4). I suggest he does this in order to

deconstruct it. When he urges the Roman Jews to "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light" (Rom. 13:12), calling his converts "the children of the light and children of the day" (1 Thess. 5:5), Paul is alluding to the Essene ideas. But he's saying that the children of light are to wage spiritual warfare against themselves, their own hearts, quit the things and habits of the flesh etc.- rather than charge off into literal battle with physical armour against the Romans. Likewise when Paul insists that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Rom. 9:14-18), he is not only repeating the Biblical record (Ex. 9:12,16; 33:19), but he is alluding to the way that the Jewish *Book of Jubilees* claimed that Mastema [the personal Satan] and not God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Likewise John's Gospel is full of reference to Essence concepts. It's been widely argued that John's language alludes to the threat of incipient Gnosticism, and this may be true. But it's likely that John was written quite early, even before AD70 (5). In this case, when John speaks of light and darkness, children of light and darkness, the Jewish 'Satan' / adversary to Christianity as "the ruler of this world" [see [section 2-4](#)], he would also be alluding to these common Essene ideas. For John, following the light means following Jesus as Lord; the darkness refers to the flesh, the desires within us to conform to the surrounding world and its thinking. His point, therefore, is that instead of fantasizing about some cosmic battle going on, true Christians are to understand that the essential struggle is within the mind of each of us.

Paul And Jewish Writings

Much of Paul's writing is understandable on various levels. In some places he makes allusions to contemporary Jewish writings and ideas- with which he was obviously very familiar given his background- in order to correct or deconstruct them. This is especially true with reference to Jewish ideas about Satan and supposedly sinful Angels ruling over this present world (6). As more and more Jewish writings of the time become more widely available, it becomes increasingly apparent that this is a major feature of Paul's writing. The Jewish writings all held to the teaching of the two ages, whereby this current age was supposed to be under the control of Satan and his angels, who would be

destroyed in the future age, when Messiah would reign and Paradise would be restored on earth (see 1 Enoch 16.1; 18.16; 21.6; Jubilees 1.29; T. Moses 1.18; 12.4). Paul frequently uses terms used in the Jewish writings concerning the Kingdom age, the eschatological age, and applies them to the experience of Christian believers *right now*. When Heb. 2:14 states that Christ killed the Devil in His death on the cross, this is effectively saying that the future age has come. For the Jews expected the Devil to be destroyed only at the changeover to the future Kingdom age. In 4 Ezra, "This age" (4.27; 6.9; 7.12), also known as the "corrupt age" (4.11) stands in contrast to the "future age" (6.9; 8.1), the "greater age", the "immortal time" (7.119), the future time (8.52). 4 Enoch even claims that the changeover from this age to the future age occurs at the time of the final judgment, following the death of the Messiah and seven days of silence (7.29-44, 113). So we can see why Paul would plug in to these ideas. He taught that Christ died "in order to rescue us from this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4; Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 3:22). Therefore if the old age has finished, that means Satan is no longer controlling things as the Jews believed. For they believed that Satan's spirits "will corrupt until the day of the great conclusion, until the great age is consummated, until everything is concluded (upon) the Watchers and the wicked ones" (1 Enoch 16:1, cf. 72:1). And Paul was pronouncing that the great age had been consummated in Christ, that the first century believers were those upon whom the end of the *aion* had come (1 Cor. 10:11).

The Jews strongly believed that Satan had authority over the old / current age. Their writings speak of the rulers, powers, authorities, dominions etc. of this present age as all being within the supposed system of Satan and his various demons / Angels in Heaven. In Eph. 1:20-22 Paul says that Christ is now "above every ruler (*archê*), authority (*exousia*), power (*dunamis*) and dominion (*kuriotês*) and any name that can be named not only in this age but the age to come... All things have been put in subjection under his feet". Paul's teaching that no spiritual being can oppose the exalted Christ. He's using the very terms used in the Jewish writings for the rulers, powers etc. of Satan's supposed system (7). So when in 2 Cor 4:4 Paul speaks of Satan as "the god of this age", he's not necessarily claiming that this is

now the case- rather is he merely quoting from the well known Jewish belief about this. This approach also sheds light on Paul's statement that God has made public display for ridicule (*edeigmatisen en parrêsia*) of the "rulers and authorities"- for this phrase also occurred in the Jewish writings about the supposed Satanic rulers of this present world. But Paul says that God displays them for what they are and thereby holds them up to ridicule (Col. 2:17), rather like Elijah mocking the non-existence of Baal. In Col 2:8,20 and Gal 4:3, 8-10, Paul says that believers are no longer subject to the "elements of the cosmos" (*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*)- again, a term the Jews used to describe supposed sinful Angels ruling the cosmos. Paul says that the Galatians formerly lived as enslaved to the "elements of the cosmos" (Gal. 4:3), also a phrase used in the Jewish apostate writings (8); "what by nature are not gods" (*tois phusei mê ousin theois*; Gal. 4:8,9). They are "weak and powerless elements" (*ta asthenê kai ptocha stoicheia*; Gal. 4:9). The system of Satan, sinful Angels, demons etc. which the Jews believed in, Paul is showing to now be non-existent and at the best powerless.

Paul says that we are now at the "ends" of the "ages" (1 Cor. 10:11). J. Milik argues that Paul's language here is alluding to Apocryphal Jewish writings, which speak of the "ages" as coming to an end in Satan's destruction at the last day (9). Paul's argument is that Christ's death has brought about the termination of the "ages" as the Jews understood them. Satan and his hordes- in the way the Jews understood them- are right *now* rendered powerless and non-existent. As ever, Paul's approach seems to be not to baldly state that a personal Satan doesn't exist, but rather to show that even if he once did, he is now powerless and dead. The way the Lord Jesus dealt with the demons issue is identical.

Once we understand this background, we see Paul's writings are packed with allusions to the Jewish ideas about the "ages" ending in the Messianic Kingdom and the destruction of Satan. Paul was correcting their interpretations- by saying that the "ages" had ended in Christ's death, and the things the Jewish writings claimed for the future Messianic Kingdom were in fact already possible for those in Christ. Thus when 1 Enoch 5:7,8 speaks of 'freedom from sin' coming then, Paul applies that

phrase to the experience of the Christian believer *now* (Rom. 6:18-22; 8:2) (10).

Notes

(1) As quoted in John Bowker, *The Targums And Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1969).

(2) *Rule Of The Community* 3.13 - 4.26, as quoted in T.H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1964) p. 50.

(3) Yigael Yadin, *The Scroll Of The War Of The Sons Of Light Against The Sons Of Darkness* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1962).

(4) J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul And Qumran* (London: Chapman, 1968) is a good summary.

(5) John Robinson's huge research in this area is hard to ignore, even if some details may be questionable. See his *Redating The New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) and *The Priority Of John* (London: S.C.M., 1985). Robinson gives reason after reason for his case- e.g. "there *is* at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool" (Jn. 5:2) certainly would've been inappropriate if written after A.D.70.

(6) See Oscar Cullman, *Christ And Time: The Primitive Christian Conception Of Time And History* (London: SCM, 1951); G. B. Caird, *Principalities And Powers: A Study In Pauline Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956); J. C. Beker, *Paul The Apostle. The Triumph Of God In Life And Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) pp. 135-181.

(7) See H. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) pp. 305-339; P. T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) pp. 153-173.

(8) H. D. Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) pp. 213-217.

(9) J. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments from Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) pp. 248-259. The same phrase occurs with the same meaning in the Testament of Levi 14.1.

(10) For more examples, see D. C. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) p. 8; J. J. Collins, "The Expectation of the End in the Dead Sea Scrolls" in C. A. Evans and P. W. Flint, eds., *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) p. 62.

1-2 The Devil After the New Testament

The New Testament reveals the same God as in the Old Testament. God is still presented as the source of our trials, of judgment, and the origin of sin is even more repeatedly located in the human mind. God's supremacy is emphasized just as it was in the Old Testament. Even the beast of Rev. 17:17 'fulfils His will'. Those persecuted by it "suffer according to the will of God" (1 Pet. 4:19). But the history we're now going to consider reflects yet once again how God's people have an endless desire to add to and change the most basic teachings of God's word.

It's been observed about the pagan deities that "their characters and properties were retained but were now understood and subsumed in the Christian context" ⁽¹⁾. This happened in many ways. Consider the following:

Christ = Apollo [sun god]
 God the Father = Zeus, Kronos

Virgin Mary = Magna Mater, Aphrodite, Artemis
 Holy Spirit = Dionysus [the spirit of ecstatic possession.], Orpheus
 Satan = Pan, Hades, Prometheus
 Saints = Hosts of angels
 Michael the Archangel = Mars
 St. Christopher = Atlas.

In our context, let's note how Pan and Hades were imported into apostate Christianity as "Satan".

Christian art is a valid reflection of the dominant ideas going on within popular Christianity. "The earliest known Christian depiction of the Devil is in the Rabbula Gospels, which date from AD586... why Christian art does not portray the Devil before the sixth century is not known". Perhaps the answer is simple – because the idea was still developing. A survey of the Apostolic fathers shows how the idea of the Devil as a personal being and fallen Angel began to develop. Writing at the end of the 1st century, Clement of Rome wrote to the Corinthians as if Satan was a personal being responsible for urging Christians to sin (Clement 51:1). Ignatius about the same time started writing of how there are good and sinful Angels in Heaven, and the sinful ones follow a being called the Devil (Trallians 5:2; Smyrneans 6:1; Ephesians 13:1). As Christianity encountered opposition and persecution, the language of the Devil came to be applied to them – Jews, heretics, pagans etc. were seen as on the side of Satan, playing out on earth a reflection of some cosmic battle between Christ and Satan which was supposed to be going on in Heaven. Polycarp's letter to the Philippians around AD150 develops this idea – he sees those who don't agree with him as not merely holding a different opinion, but therefore as followers of Satan. He and so many others started to 'play God' as countless have done since, and use the idea of a cosmic battle being played out on earth [with them as the

righteous heroes, of course] as a good excuse for demonizing their opposition. These ideas were used to justify the crusades, just as they are used to justify war today. The other side are the bad guys, reflective of Satan in Heaven; and 'our' side are the good guys, with God on our side. We've shown that Biblically, there is no cosmic battle going on in Heaven; even the symbolic description of a power struggle in Revelation 12 as a "war in heaven" was prophetic of the situation which would exist immediately prior to the second coming of Christ. Hence the common pagan idea of cosmic conflict was imported into Christianity, and used to justify the demonization of anyone seen as opposed to the Christians. It enabled 'Christians' to use the foulest and bitterest of language against their opponents, on the basis that in so doing they were reflecting the supposed cosmic war which Jesus was waging against Satan 'up there'. All this was a far cry from the gentle and non-violent witness of Jesus in the face of evil. It may seem of merely academic interest as to whether or not there's a cosmic battle being waged up in Heaven; but the reality is that those who believe this tend to see themselves as fighting on the side of God here on earth, and therefore that end [as in any war] justifying whatever means they chose to use ⁽²⁾.

As time went on, the basic questions thrown up by the ideal of a personal, fallen Satan began to be grappled with. I have listed some of them in Section 3–2. One of these was quite simply, where is Satan? Is he on earth, in mid air, or under the earth? The need to find a location for Satan was one of the reasons why Christian thought departed from the Biblical notion that 'hell' is simply the grave, and turned it into a place of awesome horror, inhabited by the fallen Satan. I've discussed the nature of hell at more depth in Section 2–5. The "Odes of Solomon", a Jewish-Christian work of the second or third centuries AD, was the first to claim the Devil is located in the dead centre of the earth, in the lowest point of hell ⁽³⁾. Later Dante would develop this idea graphically and popularize it. However, it was Greek philosophy, especially Platonism and Gnosticism, which had an even deeper impact upon Christian thought. Platonists believed that there were intermediaries between the gods and humans, called demons [*daimon*]. This idea became confused in the minds of many Christians with the Angels of which the Bible speaks. Yet there's no doubt about it that this is *not* how the Bible itself defined demons – see Section 4-2 for more on this. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, always translated the Hebrew *mal'ak* as *angelos* ["angel"] rather than *daimon* ["demon"]. But amidst the general trend of mixing pagan ideas with Christian doctrine, it was easy for the association to be made – and thus the idea of demons as fallen Angels began to enter Christendom. Philo had equated the demons of the Greeks with

the Angels believed in by the Jews; and additionally, the Persian idea that there are some good demons and some wicked ones lent itself so easily to the idea that there are some good angels and some evil ones. But in our context the point we wish to note is that all this was an admixture of Biblical doctrine with extra-Biblical and pagan traditions and philosophies.

There can be no doubt that Gnosticism influenced early Christian thought – the letters of John especially are full of warning against incipient Gnosticism, redefining as John does the terms ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ in contradistinction to the false ideas which would later become Gnosticism. The Gnostics were dualists, i.e. they saw everything in opposing terms. For them, if God were good, then evil cannot come from Him but rather from some other, opposed, independent source or principle. This was a tidier and more sophisticated form of what the Persians had earlier believed, with their god of light and god of darkness, a god of peace and a god of disaster. It was this Persian belief which Is. 45:5–7 specifically challenges, warning the Jews in Persian captivity that the God of Israel *alone* is the source of light and darkness, peace and disaster. The Gnostics held that this world is irredeemably evil, and therefore the God of good is far from it. They argued, especially through their leading advocate Marcion, that God cannot be all good, all powerful, and yet have created and allowed to exist a wicked world. Of course they missed the entire point of Christianity – that sinners and this wicked world are indeed loved by the one and only God of all goodness, to the extent that He gave His Son, who was “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3), so that not only could He enter in to this wicked world and the savage humanity that exists here, but also save it. The Gnostics rejected this, and decided that this sin stricken world is created and sustained by another god, Satan. R.M. Grant has pointed out that the major challenge of Gnosticism to Christianity led Christian leaders to define more carefully the understanding of the Devil which they wished to preach – and thus came another stage in the development of the dogma of the Devil ⁽⁴⁾. Increasingly over time, the Devil was used as a threat – if you don’t support the church, pay your dues, back the leadership, then the idea developed that there awaited an awful future of torment by the Devil in a fiery hell. This idea has always seemed strange to in the light of the Lord’s very clear statement that the wicked will be punished in the [figurative] fire “prepared for the Devil and his angels [followers]” (Mt. 25:41). It is the Angels of Jesus, and not of the Devil, who punish the wicked (Mt. 13:42–50). A wresting of Scripture to make out that the Devil is the tormentor of the wicked simply runs in straight contradiction to these plain statements of the Lord Jesus.

Notes

(1) Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our Worldview* (London: Pimlico / Random House, 2000) p. 110.

(2) The desire to demonize others in a spiritually respectable manner seems to me to be one of the largest psychological reasons for the development of the personal Satan idea. This theme is explored and exemplified at length in M.E. Hills, *Human Agents of Cosmic Power* (Sheffield: S.U.P., 1990), especially chapter 5.

(3) *Odes of Solomon* 42 in J.H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon* (Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1977).

(4) R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966) pp. 128–131; see too Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979).

1-2-1 Satan in the Thought of Justin Martyr

The response of the “Church fathers” was to claim that whilst indeed the world is in the hands of Satan, baptism frees a person from the power of the Devil. Hence baptism formulae started to speak of how demons were being expelled from a person⁽¹⁾. This contrasted sharply with the repeated New Testament evidence that baptism is for the forgiveness of personal sins, a becoming “in Christ”, covered against sin by His sacrifice (Acts 2:37,38; Col. 2:12–14). None of the New Testament baptism passages, notably the exposition of baptism in Romans 6 and the institution of baptism in the great commission, ever mentioned it as being in order to exorcise demons or free us from the power of a personal being called the Devil. Produced around 180 AD, the Apocryphal “Acts of Peter” consciously attempted to blend Gnosticism and Christianity by claiming that the negative aspects of this world are the fault of a personal Satan who snared Adam and “bound him... by the chain of the [human, sinful] body”. The Genesis record remains silent – and it’s a deafening silence – about any ‘Satan’ tempting Adam. The New Testament likewise states simply that sin entered the world by Adam – not by anyone or anything else (Rom. 5:12).

Justin Martyr was one of the leading lights in trying to defend Christianity against Gnostic criticisms. Writing in the mid 2nd century, he spoke much of how the whole universe is indeed infested with

demons and the power of the Devil. He came to this conclusion through the need to answer the question 'Where did Satan and his angels fall to?'. He devised a scheme of various levels of atmosphere, populated, he claimed, by various types of fallen angels. Those who fell furthest went down into the centre of the earth, to hell, whilst others remained on earth and others were in the atmosphere. He likewise took on board the false idea of an 'immortal soul' that goes to Heaven after death, and therefore he supposed that the demons in the atmosphere would seek to stop the soul's progress to Heaven. This is quite without Biblical support. The Bible speaks clearly of the resurrection of the body and literal reward of the righteous in God's Kingdom upon earth at the time of Christ's second coming. Further, it is how a person lives and believes which decides their ultimate destiny – this can't be impeded by beings suspended in mid air (2).

Justin Martyr quite clearly was desperate for Biblical evidence for his views ⁽³⁾. His whole cosmology as described above was totally lacking in Biblical support. The best he could do was to reference the idea of the sons of God marrying the daughters of men in Genesis 6. This passage, however it is understood, certainly doesn't provide a basis for the detailed cosmology he outlined in such detail. In Section 5-3 I look at the meaning of the Genesis 6 passage; suffice it to say for the moment that it simply doesn't support what Justin built upon it. Justin's Biblical and intellectual desperation is highlighted by the *faux pas* he makes in his *Dialogue with Trypho* 103, where he claims that the word "Satan" derives from the Hebrew *sata* ["apostate"] and *nas* [which he claimed meant "serpent"]. Even though this etymology is patently false ⁽⁴⁾, seeing that the Hebrew for serpent is *nachash*, and *Satan* clearly means simply "adversary", it was followed by Irenaeus. This kind of intellectual desperation, academic dishonesty and cavalier twisting of Hebrew root meanings is and was only necessitated by having to defend the indefensible – that the serpent in Eden wasn't the literal animal which Gen. 3:1 says it was, but rather an apostate personal being called Satan. It's significant that Gregory likewise has been observed as claiming knowingly false derivations for Hebrew and Greek words in order to support his case – e.g. claiming that *diabolus* comes from a Hebrew root meaning 'to slip down from Heaven' ⁽⁵⁾. It means nothing of the sort! But perhaps most significant of all was Justin's falling back for support on the writings of other "fathers" rather than the Bible itself. Thus: "For among us the prince of the wicked spirits is called the serpent, and Satan, and the Devil, as you can learn by looking into our writings" (The First Apology of Justin, Chap. 28). How Satan was defined "among us" became important, and that definition was appealed to on the basis of "looking into our writings". A Bible based faith, a concern to root all Christian understanding in

God's terms and in God's word, was now not of paramount importance.

A review of this period reveals how the "fathers" struggled with the logical implications of the theories they devised about Satan. A parade example is the way in which they change their ideas about what exactly Satan's sin was. Theophilus took the Jewish idea [from Wisdom 2:24] that envy was Satan's sin; Irenaeus and Cyprian differed as to whether it was envy of God or of [a supposedly pre-existent] Jesus, or of Adam; but then Origen decided that Satan's sin wasn't envy but actually pride. Again and again they refused to face up to the simple facts of the Genesis record, summarized by Paul when he said that "by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world" (Rom. 5:12). Irenaeus struggled with the chronology of Satan's fall. Having decided that Satan fell because he was envious of Adam, he had to place Satan's sin *after* Adam's creation. Faced with the problem of when Satan's angels fell, he fitted that in with the sons of God marrying the daughters of men in Genesis 6, just prior to the flood. Of course, that begs, in turn, a host of other questions. Why was Satan thrown out but not the other Angels? How did they get to stay in Heaven for many centuries longer? How to reconcile this with the misinterpretation of Revelation 12 that states that the Devil and his angels got thrown out of Heaven together? Did Satan and his angels commit the same sin?

Notes

(1) See J.B. Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987) p. 61.

(2) For Justin's understanding on this point, see J.B. Russell, *ibid* p. 65.

(3) Justin Martyr's views are well summarized in L. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1967).

(4) See Barnard *ibid* p. 108.

(5) This is discussed and exemplified at length in J.F. O'Donnell, *The Vocabulary of the Letters of Saint Gregory the Great* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1934) p. 142.

1-2-2 Satan in the Thought of Irenaeus and Tertullian

Wrestling yet further with the problem they'd created, the "fathers" then had to deal with the issue of how the death of Christ could destroy or damage Satan. Origen, Irenaeus and Tertullian created the idea that was developed and popularized later in novels and art – that God somehow tricked Satan. The reasoning went that Satan demanded the blood of Jesus, and so he made Jesus die – but unknown to Satan, Jesus was [supposedly] God, and He rose from the grave. Not only is Jesus never defined as 'God' in a Trinitarian sense in the Bible; but the whole suggestion is purely fictional. The blood of Jesus was not "paid" to anyone. And an almighty God doesn't need to trick Satan in order to win a game. Again we see that our view of God affects our view of Satan, and vice versa. And we see too that a forced, unnatural and unBiblical view of the atonement affects our view of Satan too. Gnostic and other criticism of 'Christianity' focused easily and powerfully on these contradictions and begged questions; and the "fathers" had to dig themselves yet deeper into a tortuous and contradictory theology. They were pushed on the point of whether Satan and his angels sinned at the same time and got thrown out of Heaven together; and whether in fact Satan and his angels committed the same sin, or different ones. Tertullian's answer was that Satan sinned by envy, and was thrown out of Heaven for this. He then adjusted his view to say that Satan was given some period of grace between his sin and his expulsion, during which he corrupted some of the angels, and then they were thrown out after him. Clement, by contrast, insisted Satan and the angels fell together, at the same time. The answers of the "fathers" were totally fictional and not tied in at all to any actual Biblical statements. And yet these desperate men insisted they were guided to their views by God, and many generations of Christendom has blindly followed them. Tertullian likewise was pushed on the issue of whether Satan was an Angel, or another kind of being – as the earlier church fathers had claimed. Tertullian amended the party line to claim that actually, Satan was an Angel after all. He was then pushed on the issue of how exactly Satan and the angels got down to earth from Heaven. Seeing they had to travel through the air, Tertullian claimed [Apol. 22] that the Devil and his angels had wings.

Irenaeus especially was influenced by the Jewish myths of the 'Watcher angels' from the Book of Enoch. He even calls Satan 'Azazel' in his *Against Heretics* just as Enoch does, showing how influenced he was by the Jewish myths which Paul, Jude and Peter had warned so fervently against accepting. Irenaeus also termed his opponents "angels of the Devil" (*Against Heretics* 1.15.6), showing

how convenient it is to apply the myths of cosmic conflict to one's own enemies on earth.

Instead of recognizing that these were all merely speculations, Irenaeus and Tertullian went on to insist that belief in Satan was a core doctrine of Christianity. Tertullian *insisted* that at baptism, the candidate must rebuke Satan ⁽¹⁾. Effectively, Tertullian [later supported in this by Hippolytus] were making their view of Satan a fundamental part of the Christian faith; without accepting it, a person couldn't be baptized into the Christian faith. The candidate *had* to state: "I renounce you, Satan, and your angels". This was a far cry to the New Testament accounts of men and women confessing *their sins* and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of them. This kind of thinking was taken to its ultimate term when much later, in 1668, Joseph Glanvill (a Fellow of the Royal Society) claimed that to deny belief in a personal Devil was logically to deny a belief in God, and was thus tantamount to atheism ⁽²⁾. This is how far dualism leads – if the God of love is matched by a god of evil, then to deny the god of evil is to deny the existence of the God of love, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus. The Calvinist John Edwards, in his 1695 publication *Some thoughts concerning the several causes and occasions of atheism*, claimed that denying of the Devil and demons' existence is a cause of atheism. This is all so sad, and such a tragic perversion of Biblical Christianity – those of us who deny the existence of a personal Satan as a result of careful Biblical and historical research, those who believe in the ultimate almightiness of the one God, believing this to such an extent that we see no room left for a personal Devil to exist – are framed as effective atheists. And this isn't a thing of the past – we hear of contemporary Christian leaders claiming that those who deny the existence of a personal Devil are denying the very essence of the Christian faith, and must be considered cult members rather than Christians ⁽³⁾. This was just the kind of scaremongering demonization of the theological opposition that began with the church fathers, and continued through to Lutherans like August Pfeiffer, who in 1695 claimed that a growing disbelief in the Devil would lead to the moral breakdown of society ⁽⁴⁾. Yet a purely Biblical understanding of the Devil surely *promotes* spirituality in morality – for the New Testament idea that the real 'enemy' is our own internal human thinking and temptation leads to a far fiercer private struggle against immorality in the deepest heart of those who know what the Christian's real enemy actually is.

Tertullian and the Lord's Prayer

The Lord's prayer "deliver us from evil" began to be quite arbitrarily translated by Tertullian as "deliver us from the evil one", as if referring to a personal Satan. But the Greek text certainly doesn't require this translation. In Greek, the phrase "from evil" can be understood as either neuter ("the [abstract] evil") or masculine, "the evil one", personifying the evil. God does lead men and women to the time of evil / testing – Abraham commanded to offer Isaac, and the testing of Israel by God in the desert are obvious examples. It's observable that the Lord Jesus Himself prayed most parts of His model prayer in His own life situations. "Your will be done... Deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13; Lk. 11:4) were repeated by Him in Gethsemane, when He asked for God's will to be done and not His, and yet He prayed that *the disciples* would be delivered from evil (Jn. 17:15). Paul's letters are full of allusion to the Gospel records, and those allusions enable us to correctly interpret the passages alluded to. He uses the same Greek words for "deliver" and "evil" when he expresses his confidence that "the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:18). Paul likewise had his inspired mind on this phrase of the Lord's prayer when he commented that the Lord Jesus died in order "that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God" (Gal. 1:4; 2 Thess. 3:3). Clearly enough, Paul didn't understand "the evil" to be a personal Satan, but rather the "evil" of this world and those who seek to persecute believers. Perhaps the Lord Jesus Himself based this part of His prayer on Old Testament passages like 1 Chron. 4:10; Ps. 25:22; 26:11; 31:8; 34:22; 69:18; 78:35,42; 140:1 and Prov. 2:12; 6:24, which ask for 'deliverance' from evil *people*, sin, distress, tribulation etc. here on earth. Not one of those passages speaks of deliverance from a personal, superhuman Satan. Esther's prayer in Es. 4:19 LXX is very similar – "Deliver us from the hand of the evildoer", but that 'evildoer' was Haman, not any personal, superhuman Satan. Even if we insist upon reading 'the evil one', "the evil one" in the Old Testament was always "the evil man in Israel" (Dt. 17:12; 19:19; 22:21–24 cp. 1 Cor. 5:13) – never a superhuman being. And there may be another allusion by the Lord to Gen. 48:16, where God is called the One "who has redeemed me from all evil". As the Old Testament 'word made flesh', the thinking of the Lord Jesus was constantly reflective of Old Testament passages; but in every case here, the passages He alluded to were *not* concerning a superhuman Devil figure. God 'delivers from' "every trouble" (Ps. 54:7), persecutors and enemies (Ps. 142:6; 69:14) – but as Ernst Lohmeyer notes, "There is no instance of the [orthodox understanding of the] Devil

being called 'the evil one' in the Old Testament or in the Jewish writings" ⁽⁵⁾.

It's also been observed that every aspect of the Lord's prayer can be interpreted with reference to the future coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. Prayer for deliverance from evil, the time of testing (Gk.), would then tally well with the Lord's exhortation to pray that we may be delivered from the final time of evil coming on the earth (Lk. 21:36). Another insight into this petition is that God does in fact lead men in a downward spiral as well as in an upward spiral of relationship with Him – Pharaoh would be the classic example. "Why do you make us err from your ways?" was the lament of Israel to their God in Is. 63:17. It is perhaps this situation more than any which we should fear – being hardened in sin, drawing ever closer to the waterfall of destruction, until we come to the point that the forces behind us are now too strong to resist... Saul lying face down in the dirt of ancient Palestine the night before his death would be the classic visual image of it. And the Lord would be urging us to pray earnestly that we are not led in that downward spiral ⁽⁶⁾. His conversation in Gethsemane, both with the disciples and with His Father, had many points of contact with the text of the Lord's Prayer. "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation" (Mt. 26:41) would perhaps be His equivalent of "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil".

Tertullian went further in glossing the Lord's prayer to make it support his ideas. He retranslated "Lead us not into temptation" (which clearly implies *God* can lead us into the way of testing) as "Suffer us not to be led [by Satan]". This is an interpretation rather than a translation – the Scriptures didn't fit in with his ideas about Satan, and so he twisted the translation to suit his views [as countless churchmen have done since]. Dionysius of Alexandria likewise followed suite, adding as a footnote to the text: "That means, let us not fall into temptation". The desire to 'save' God from being the one who leads into temptation was pathetic. C.F. Evans was a theologian who supports our understanding of this passage. He observed: "St. Cyprian in his commentary on the Lord's Prayer repeats Tertullian's gloss, "suffer us not to be led", only not now as an explanation, but as part of the text of the prayer itself, and two centuries later St. Augustine in his commentary on the Prayer could write that many in his day prayed the petition in this form, and that he had found it so in some Latin manuscripts... nevertheless [Evans continues] in some of the great temptations of the Old Testament God is himself said to be the tempter, and this is the plain meaning of the words here" ⁽⁷⁾. This history of interpretation provides a window into how false doctrine has entered the church. Tertullian failed to be able to square the Lord's

Prayer with his view of God and Satan. And so he twisted the interpretation and the translation to imply that God cannot lead men to the test, but Satan does. And then subsequent church 'fathers' made out this interpretation to actually be the text itself – quite an easy thing to do with illiterate congregations. The miracle is that God has preserved His word faithfully so that even the amateur Bible student can discover how these 'fathers' misled the church. Any serious student of primary evidence from ancient times will be aware that so many histories, biographies, accounts etc. have had parts of them lost in transmission, whole volumes have disappeared, and often we are left with mere fragments of original texts⁽⁸⁾. The way the Bible quotes from within itself and has no indication of 'lost' segments from the books is quite amazing – it's been miraculously preserved by God because it is His word to us. It is therefore for us to gratefully search it for truth rather than accepting human tradition and interpretations as the word of God – for they are but the word of men.

T.S. Eliot apparently quipped: "Christianity is always adapting itself into something which can be believed"⁽⁹⁾. And this is so true. Especially in the difficult area of human suffering, God's justice, responsibility for human sin... standard Christianity as a religion has indeed adapted itself on the basis that its popularity will be increased if it adopts views and beliefs which the world thinks are popular, acceptable or simply 'cool'. This is how the pagan myths of a personal Satan got entangled with Christianity. The only way out of the mess is surely to read the Bible for ourselves, realizing that true, Biblical Christianity isn't the same as the "mere Christianity" which exists as a religion, one amongst many choices, in the world around us.

Notes

(1) J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, 1972) pp. 31–38, 44, 399–409. See too H.A. Kelly, *The Devil At Baptism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

(2) Joseph Glanvill's paper, *A Blow At Modern Sadducism*, is reviewed in Moody E. Prior, "Joseph Glanvill, witchcraft, and seventeenth-century science", *Modern Philology* Vol. 30 pp. 167–193.

(3) See, e.g., statements from the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, widespread on the internet. The Baptist position at the end of the 20th century was just as extreme: "Any system of religious belief that denies the literal reality and actual personality of Satan is radically unChristian and unBiblical in nature and clearly under the dominion of the very Devil whom it denies" – from "Does Satan Really Exist?", *Our Baptist Heritage*, March / April 1993. Text published at: www.worldmissions.org/Clipper/Doctrine.

(4) As quoted in Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 395.

(5) Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer*, translated by John Bowden (London: Collins, 1965) p. 214. Lohmeyer was an East German pastor, detained and then murdered by the Communist authorities in 1946, after spending years before that in suffering at the hands of the Nazis. Like Solzhenitsyn, he saw evil up close in his own life, and his theological reflections upon it are significant. He concurred with our own theses that belief in one God precludes belief in a personal Satan, and that the root of human evil is within the human heart. He bears quoting in this connection at some length: "As long as this age lasts, in which good and evil are mixed together, it can be said that evil reigns on earth. The manifold kinds of evil action and evil happenings are manifestations of the one evil which produces them [i.e.] men's hearts... The more strongly faith in one God... The more dispensable becomes the thought and the more tenuous the form of the [orthodox understanding of] the Devil" (pp. 216,218).

(6) I have exemplified the theme of the 'downward spiral' at length in the chapter of that title in *Beyond Bible Basics* (South Croydon: C.A.T., 1999)

(7) C.F. Evans, *The Lord's Prayer* (London: S.C.M., 1997) p. 64.

(8) To give a few examples, documented in Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (London: S.C.M., 1979) pp. 6,7. The Greek historians Polybius and Diodore each wrote histories of the world, coming to about 40 volumes each – according to references to and quotations from the other volumes within their own extant writings. But only about one third of Polybius' 40 volumes have survived, and only 16 of Diodore's volumes. Tacitus' *Annals* comprised 16 volumes, but volumes 7–10 are missing. Likewise only four books of his 16 volume *Histories* survive. Contrast this with the way the five books of Moses have been preserved intact, as can be shown from an analysis of their structure, and the way they are quoted from by later Scripture, whereas later Scripture doesn't claim to quote any unknown works of Moses.

(9) Quoted in John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: S.C.M., 1977) ix.

1-2-3 Satan in the Thought of Clement and Origen

One of the most gaping problems for those who believe in a personal Devil relates to what actually happened when Christ died. Heb. 2:14 clearly states that in His death, Christ "destroyed him that has the power of death, that is the Devil". As I'll explain later, I find the only meaningful and Biblically consistent approach here is to understand

that the Devil is used here as a personification for sin – for it is *sin* which brings death (Rom. 6:23). The entire curse on earth as a result of human sin is described in Genesis as being brought *by God* and not by any personal Satan. Sin and death are very frequently connected together in the Bible (Rom. 5:12,21; 6:16,23; 7:13; 8:2; 1 Cor. 15:56; James 1:15). In none of those passages is there the slightest hint that it is a personal Satan who brings about our death; the cause of death is ultimately human sin. Yet Origen insisted that “the Devil controls the ultimate evil, death” (*Against Celsus* 4.92,93). The early “fathers”, having committed themselves to belief in a personal Satan, had to face the music from the Gnostics and other critics over these issues – seeing sin and evil continued and even increase daily in the world, how can it be that Christ destroyed the Devil? A purely Biblical position would have had no problem answering that objection – Christ destroyed the power of sin, in that we can now be forgiven and be counted as “in Christ” by baptism. He as our representative has enabled us to become in a position whereby all that is true of Him now stands true for us; and thereby our resurrection from the dead and receipt of eternal life is assured by His grace.

But this wasn't the position of the “fathers”. Both they and all who have come after them have struggled to explain how Christ could “destroy” a personal being called the Devil on the cross, and yet that Devil is still apparently alive and active, and has been for the past 2000 years. The sheer variety of explanations indicate the deep problem which this poses for standard Christendom. Tertullian and Clement were some of the first to try to wriggle out of it. Tertullian wrote of how Jesus broke the bolts of hell and went around smashing the place up. Clement took it further and claimed that after His death, the Lord Jesus descended into “hell” and released the souls of the righteous who had been previously kept captive by the Devil. Hippolytus went on to teach that therefore Christ's descent into hell was as important a part of His redemptive work as His death on the cross ⁽¹⁾. All this was based around the acceptance into Christianity of the pagan ideas of hell as a place of punishment and immortal souls – both of which were imports from paganism and Platonism. The word “hell” was actually derived from the Teutonic goddess of the underworld. The Biblical, original Christian position was that hell is simply the grave, which is how the Hebrew *sheol* is usually translated; and the soul refers to the person or body, which ceases conscious existence at death. I discuss hell in section 2-5. The new position adopted was out of step with the huge insistence of the New Testament that the death and resurrection of Christ were to be understood as the final, crowning apex of God's plan which of itself

destroyed the Devil and enabled human salvation (Rom. 5:5–8; 6:3–9; 1 Pet. 3:18). It was because Christ “both died and rose and revived” that He became Lord of all (Rom. 14:9) – never is there any mention of His ‘harrowing of hell’ during His three days in the grave. And He of course was silent about any such activity during His appearances to the disciples after the resurrection. Paul’s summary of the basic Gospel in 1 Cor. 15:3,4 simply stated that Christ “died... was buried...and rose again”. Peter likewise drew a contrast with David, who died, was buried and was still dead – whereas Christ died and was buried, but His body didn’t remain in the grave but was resurrected (Acts 2:29–32). The only passage which Clement clung on to was the reference in 1 Peter 3 to Christ’s preaching to those imprisoned – and we consider this in Digression 5.

Having turned up a blind alley, the “fathers” didn’t have the courage to turn back. Debates went on about what exactly the Lord Jesus did there in ‘hell’. But despite that, Hippolytus went so far as to say that belief in the ‘harrowing of hell’ was a vital part of the Gospel which must be believed for salvation (see his tractate on *The Antichrist*). There then arose the problem that if good people could be saved out of hell as a place of torment and punishment, then there must be a difference between that place and the final place of unalterable condemnation. And so the idea of purgatory was born ⁽²⁾. Protestants may groan and comment that that’s only what Roman Catholics believe in; but their own theology ultimately derives from the very same “fathers” who were driven to invent the idea. But then, wasn’t Satan cast down to this same “hell”, according to the thinking of the earlier “fathers”? Indeed. And so Origen devised a story of how at the crucifixion and supposed descent of Christ to “hell”, Satan was bound and imprisoned in hell... and again there arose much debate as to whether therefore Satan has a chance of ultimate salvation, and which form of “hell” he was imprisoned in. For if he was in the one where good people were and yet were saved out of, then why hadn’t he been put in the “lowest hell”? And so the explanations had to continue, and the tradition of Satan was embellished and added to.

Again, these logical, intellectual and ethical problems were picked up by Christianity’s critics. Celsus eagerly pushed Origen on these very issues. Celsus pointed out that Origen’s teaching was really saying that the Devil was an absurdly powerful being if he could actually kill God’s own son; and Celsus wasn’t slow to point out that Origen and the Christian movement were now into a position that contradicted the Bible text. This drove Origen to scour Scripture for any support he could muster. Origen was the first to use the Isaiah 14 passage about the King of Babylon in support of Christianity’s Devil doctrine. This

passage, considered in more detail in section 5-5 later, speaks of the human King of Babylon as the brightest of the stars, the morning star [Latin “Lucifer”] who metaphorically ‘fell’. Significantly, “morning star” was a title of Christ, and had been used in the first century as a ‘Christian name’ by those who converted to Christianity. But now, Origen sought to give “Lucifer” a negative connotation. Likewise Origen pressed into use a similar passage about the fall of the Prince of Tyre in Ezekiel 28, considered later in section 5-6. He even used Job’s reference to the huge beast Leviathan (Job 41:1,2). The words ‘Satan’ or ‘Devil’ didn’t occur in any of these passages – but they were pressed into use by Origen as superficially similar to some of the images of the Devil which he sought to defend. During all the discussion, Origen abandoned the idea that the Genesis 6 passage about sons of God marrying daughters of men referred to fallen Angels – for this logically messed up his idea that the Devil’s angels all fell down to hell after their initial sin⁽³⁾. Thus the “fathers” had to chop and change their position on these matters, just as Christian leaders have had to ever since whenever forced to seriously answer the hard questions which arise from their positions. I’ve summarized those hard questions in section 3-2. Inevitably, given the heat of the battle and their desperation, they made some *faux pas*. Celsus pushed Origen as to whether humanity would sin if the Devil didn’t exist, and Origen admitted that humanity would indeed still sin. Celsus drove home the obvious point – that the Christian “fathers” therefore had no logical need for a personal Devil, they’d simply picked up the idea from pagan sources. Celsus’ question is valid today. The official answer seems to be that we sin *more* because the Devil exists – which raises a whole plethora of questions about the nature of judgment and the justice of God in judging us for sin. There are several Medieval representations of the last judgment which show the righteous weighed on the scales of judgment, with the Devil trying to push down the scale towards his side. There should be no raised eyebrows nor shrugged shoulders nor laughing it off amongst those who believe in a personal Devil who influences us to sin – for that is the bizarre position which they have signed up to.

Jaroslav Pelikan documents a great length the logical impasses which Origen was driven into⁽⁴⁾. Origen was concerned to prove that God’s justice was always upheld – as this was a frequent criticism made of the personal Devil doctrine. Origen was pushed on the question of whether all the fallen angels are in hell, bound up now due to Christ’s sacrifice – and if they are, why are they supposedly active? His response was to formulate theories about demons being able to move in and out of hell to tempt people on earth, and some fallen angels still being active in the air etc. All this was quite without the slightest

Biblical support. Origen developed further the idea that God paid the Devil a ransom for our salvation, and that ransom was the blood of His Son Jesus. But since Christ was God [according to Origen, who had adopted what I would consider to be another false understanding in that area too], Christ rose from the dead – and thus the Devil was made a fool of and cheated out of his power. This attempt to preserve God’s justice appears to me to achieve the very opposite. Not only is all this a studied disregard of New Testament teaching about the atonement, but the idea of God having to resort to trickery and deceit of Satan is quite out of harmony with Biblical revelation about God. It seems to me that the power of a personal Devil had grown so large in Origen’s mind that he was driven to conclude that even God Almighty had a problem with the Devil and had to resort to desperate measures. The New Testament revelation is that Christ was as it were the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8) – i.e. the purpose of God through Christ was established at the beginning, and not made up *ad hoc* in the face of the Devil’s extreme power.

For me, the most significant admission of Origen was that the Bible simply didn’t support his ideas, and the whole Christian doctrine of Satan [as he believed it and advocated it] was held up solely by the tradition of men. That admission should lead us to reject his teachings and demote him in our minds from being any kind of ‘founding father’ of true Christianity: “The scriptures do not explain the nature of the Devil and his angels, and the adverse powers. The most widespread opinion in the church, however, is that the Devil was an angel...” (*De Principiis*, Preface).

Notes

(1) All this is documented in J.A. McCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930).

(2) For more on this, see Jaques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

(3) References to Origen’s writings relating to all this are to be found in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper, 1980) pp. 180–1; J. Danielou, *The Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973) pp. 418–9.

(4) Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) Vol. 1 pp. 148–151.

1-2-4 Satan in the Thought of Lactantius and Athanasius

In the third and fourth centuries, Lactantius and Athanasius appeared as the leading Christian thinkers about the Devil. They continued the struggle to justify belief in a personal, fallen angel Devil against the obvious holes in the argument. In doing so they succeeded in accreting yet more to the Devil idea, at times backtracking to or contradicting the arguments of previous “fathers”, as well as adding their own variations on the theme.

Lactantius especially developed the idea of dualism towards its logical conclusions. Dualism was the error picked up by the Jews in captivity which influenced the first significant corruption of the Biblical concept of the Devil and Satan. They had been influenced by the old Persian idea that there is a god of evil who somehow mirrors and stands in independent opposition to the God of love. This idea remained embedded in Judaism and eventually crept into early Christianity ⁽¹⁾. Lactantius really became obsessed with the idea, and concluded that Christ and Lucifer were originally both Angels, sharing the same nature, but Lucifer fell “for he was jealous of his elder brother [Jesus]” (*Divine Institutes* 3.5). This idea meshed in with the growing departure from the Biblical position that Jesus was the begotten Son of God and as such had no personal existence in Heaven before His birth. The whole of Hebrews 1 and 2 are devoted to emphasizing the superiority of Christ over the Angels, and how He had to be human in order to save us; and that He was a human and not an Angel precisely because He came to save humans and not Angels. But that was overlooked due to the pressing need to explain how Christ and Lucifer were somehow parallel with each other. And of course Lactantius created another problem for Christianity by claiming that Christ was of the same nature with Lucifer – for if that nature was capable of sinning and falling, then what guarantee is there that one day Christ may not likewise fall, and the whole basis of our salvation come crashing down? The Persians believed that the good god would always win out over the evil god; but that was their assumption. If there are indeed these two gods, why assume one is bound to win? Not only does the Bible insist this theology is untrue (e.g. Is. 45:5–7); but if there are indeed two gods, why make the *a priori* assumption that the good god has to win out? What concrete evidence is there for that, beyond blind hope?

Struggling with the problem of explaining how Christ's death "destroyed" the Devil, and yet he appears alive and active, Lactantius taught that the fallen Devil had indeed been badly smitten by Christ's death, but he and his angels were gathering their forces for another assault. That runs directly against the finality with which New Testament Christianity speaks of the victory of Christ and the 'destruction' of the Devil in Heb. 2:14. The Greek *katargeo* translated "destroy" there means strictly 'to render useless', and is elsewhere translated in the New Testament as "make void", "abolish", "do away", "make of no effect" etc. Thus Christ will "destroy" the man of sin at His return (2 Thess. 2:8), death itself will be "destroyed" at the second coming (1 Cor. 15:26), God will "destroy" the wicked at that day (1 Cor. 6:13). Lactantius argued that the 'destruction' of the Devil at Christ's death was a temporary wound, and that he would be finally destroyed at Christ's second coming. And yet the Biblical evidence is clear that "destroy" means to render powerless. Yet Lactantius wanted to understand that when Christ 'destroyed' the Devil on the cross, that was a temporary binding; whereas at His return, the Devil would be permanently 'destroyed'. And yet the Bible uses the same Greek word to describe both destructions! The destruction of the Devil is explained by Paul, using that same Greek word *katargeo*, in Rom. 6:6 when he speaks of how that in the crucifixion of Jesus, and in our sharing in this by the 'death' of baptism, "the body of sin is destroyed". Yet Lactantius was following a tradition which refused to budge from the idea that the Devil exists as a personal being; and so he was forced to ignore this.

Athanasius is best known for what became known as the Athanasian Creed, a statement of the trinity. I've elsewhere argued for the deconstruction of this idea, along similar lines as I am deconstructing the personal Devil myth⁽²⁾. Athanasius followed Lactantius' ideas of Jesus being in Heaven with Lucifer at the creation as part of the huge dualism which they felt existed in the cosmos – and so this meshed together with his push towards the [unBiblical] idea of a personally pre-existent Jesus who somehow became God. As with so many who've gone down blind alleys theologically, Athanasius pushed logic to an inappropriate extent rather than being guided by basic Biblical truths. He argued that the death of Jesus cleansed the air where the demons / fallen angels now live, and therefore physically opened up a way for [supposed] immortal souls to find a way into Heaven⁽³⁾. Not only was all this unBiblical, it reflects a literalism which reduces God to a being hopelessly bound by physicality. In short, this kind of thinking arose from a basic lack of faith in God as the Almighty, who doesn't need to build bridges over problems which men have created for Him

in their own minds. It should be noted that the idea of saying “Bless you!” when someone sneezes derives from Athanasius’ idea that demons can become so small that they enter a person from the literal air. I consider Athanasius’ misuse of Paul’s reference to “the prince on the power of the air” in section 5-23. It should be noted that in the 17th century, Isaac Newton rejected the popular idea of the Devil and demons, and in his “Paradoxical questions concerning Athanasius”, Newton blames Athanasius as being especially responsible for introducing this false idea into popular Christianity.

Athanasius was led by his views on Satan to de-emphasize human sinfulness. He placed the blame for Adam’s sin so fully upon Satan that he concluded that we can live entirely sinlessly – he claims Jeremiah and John the Baptist did so, even though they lived before the death of Christ ⁽⁴⁾. So one error lead to another; by de-emphasizing the weight and seriousness of human sin, he de-emphasized the meaning and crucial achievement of the cross. Perfection was *not* possible for those under the Old Covenant; if it had been, then there would have been no need for the priesthood of Jesus – so reasons Heb. 7:11. In his zeal to excuse human sin and blame it all on Satan, Athanasius missed this point – and it just happens that this point is the very crux of Christianity. And this de-emphasis of human sin continued in the thinking of the later ‘church fathers’. Pelagius insisted that Christians could become without sin: “A Christian is he who imitates and follows Christ *in everything*, who is holy, innocent, unsoiled, blameless, in whose heart there is no malice... he is a Christian who can justly say ‘I have injured no one, I have lived righteously with all’” ⁽⁵⁾. Whilst these are all Biblical ideals, this sickening self-righteousness is a far cry from the desperation of Paul in Romans 7, where perhaps the greatest of Christians admitted he constantly did the things he hated doing. It was this de-emphasis upon sin which resulted in the image of Christianity being developed as white-faced, pious, hypocritical, self-righteous, self-commending etc. and I submit this tragically deformed version of Christianity all began with a de-emphasis of human sin, and the misunderstanding of the nature of being human which goes with faulty belief about Satan.

Notes

(1) There is a wide literature on how Persian dualism influenced Judaism and thence entered Christian thought. See, e.g., Abraham Malamat, *History of the Jewish People* (London: Weidenfeld, 1976) and John R. Hinnells, *Persian Mythology* (New York: Bedrick Books, 1985).

(2) See my *The Real Christ*.

(3) This and other Athanasius references from Nathan K. Ng, *The Spirituality of Athanasius* (Bern: Lang, 2001).

(4) Quotations in J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A.C. Black, 1968) p. 348.

(5) Quotations in Kelly, *ibid* p. 360.

1-2-5 Satan in the Thought of Augustine

The great adversary / Satan to the early Christians was the Roman and Jewish systems. The Jewish system passed away in AD70, and Roman opposition ceased once the empire converted to Christianity under Constantine. Visible persecution of Christians ceased, for the most part. The lack of visible adversaries perhaps encouraged mainstream Christianity to conclude that the adversary / Satan was therefore invisible and cosmic. It was against this background that Augustine came onto the scene.

The logical and analytical mind of Augustine probably had the greatest influence in codifying Christian thought on the Devil, and setting the tradition in stone for future generations. He realized the weakness of the common Christian position on the Devil, and more than any others, scoured Scripture for support of the idea. He focused upon the symbolic prophecy of Revelation 12, that immediately prior to Christ's return there would be a battle between Michael and his angels / followers, and the system symbolized by "the dragon". I discuss the actual meaning of this passage later, in section 5-32. What Augustine surely wilfully ignored was the basic context of Revelation 12 – that this is a prophecy of the future, rather than a description of events in the past, at the beginning of Biblical history. The obvious objection, of course, is that God's people were informed nothing in the Genesis record of any battle in Heaven, a Satan figure, fallen angels etc. Why would they have to wait until the very end of Biblical revelation in order to be told what happened? And in this case, how could knowledge of these supposed events be made so fundamental to Christianity, when for so long God's people had lived in ignorance of them? Undeterred, Augustine pushed his point insistently, consciously or unconsciously. He pushed it to the point that the impression was given that it was the Angel Michael, rather than Christ personally, who overcame the Devil – thus devaluing the huge Biblical emphasis upon the fact that it was

the human Christ and not an Angel who overcame the Devil, sin, death etc. – the whole of Hebrews 1 and 2 emphasizes this. Augustine's idea got to such a point that later a whole cult of Michael worship developed, in studied ignorance of Paul's warning not to worship Angels (Col. 2:18). Indeed in that passage, Paul speaks of Angel worship as the result of being "vainly puffed up by [the] fleshly mind" and not holding on to an understanding of Christ as the supreme "head" of all things. Perhaps it was exactly because Augustine and others missed the Biblical definition of the Devil as "the fleshly mind" that they came to their wrong conclusions. Paul even seems to hint that he saw this matter as a salvation issue – for he speaks of Angel worship as 'robbing you of your prize' (Col. 2:18 ASV). And yet, fed by Augustine's *City of God* and other writings, the cult of worshipping Michael and his "angels" spread throughout the Christian church, as witnessed by the building of Mont St. Michel in France and countless expressions of the cult in Christian art, building and culture.

Augustine's version of dualism was that humanity belongs to the Devil, and we are manipulated by the Devil and demons: "The human race is the Devil's fruit tree, his own property, from which he may pick his fruit. It is a plaything of demons" ⁽¹⁾. The Biblical position was radically different. "All souls are mine", God says (Ez. 18:4). Repeatedly, the implication of God as humanity's creator is stressed – we are therefore *His* – not the Devil's: "Know that Jehovah, he is God: it is he that hath made us, and we are his; We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Ps. 100:3 ASV); "He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Ps. 95:7 ASV – quoted in Hebrews 3:7 as applicable to the Christian church). Humanity is God's, as is the whole of His creation – this was the message taught to Job in the final chapters of the book, and the theme of so many of the Psalms. R.A. Markus pointed out that Augustine's view of humanity, the cosmos, the world... was all influenced by the fall of Rome in 410 AD ⁽²⁾. For Augustine, his world had become dark and sinister, the forces of evil were victorious – and thus his theology came to reflect his own feelings and experience, rather than accepting truth from the Bible however hard it might be to square with our present life experience.

Augustine was aware of the 'hard question' about the ultimate origin of evil and the concept of sin. But as with other attempts to tackle this, he only pushed the question a stage further back. He blamed sin on the fact that humanity has freewill; and covered himself by saying that "The first evil will must be incomprehensible", the whole issue is an inexplicable mystery, and all created beings must inevitably sin (*City*

of God 12.15). Whilst there is some truth of course to the fact that the ultimate origins of sin as a concept are indeed hard to articulate, Augustine's idea of 'inevitable sin' debased humanity and led on through Calvinism to the idea that we are merely miserable sinners who should feel awful about ourselves – thus setting up the flock of the mainstream church for the spiritual and psychological abuse practiced upon them ever since. And the idea that any created being *must* sin is of course a logical problem for those who believe that *all* Angels were created by God, but only *some* of them sinned. Why didn't they *all* sin, if all created beings must sin? And of course there is absolutely no *a priori* evidence, in Scripture or elsewhere, for the idea that all created things *have to* sin. What about the animals – do they too inevitably sin?

Commentators upon Augustine haven't been slow to pick up the fact that his reasoning about the Devil is deeply contradictory – as is so much mainline Christian thought on the subject. Even within the 11th chapter of *City of God* we read that the Devil was originally a sinner, and yet also that the Devil was originally good – “he was once in the truth but did not persevere” (*City of God* 11.13 cp. 11.15). Despite claiming that the Angels and all created beings must inevitably sin, Augustine assures us that “no new Devil will ever arise from among the good angels” (11.13). J.B. Russell appropriately comments: “Some of his [Augustine's] arguments were weak, even incoherent. This weakness raises an enormously important question about the validity of the process of formation of the [Devil] concept. If Augustine, being incoherent on a given point, fixed the tradition on that point, how valid can the tradition be? No concept resting upon shifting ground can endure”⁽³⁾ – and indeed it cannot.

Augustine got himself in these [and other] intellectual messes by being wedded to the idea that “God shall do only good”. He went so far as to reason that since all things are of God but God can create no evil, therefore, evil doesn't really exist – it's simply a state of “nonbeing”, a lack of good: “Evil is nothing, since God makes everything that is, and God did not make evil”⁽⁴⁾. Augustine simply couldn't hack the simple Biblical statements that God is ultimately the author of disaster / “evil” in this world. Moreover, who is man to tell God what He may or may not do? Further, our understanding of “good” is so very limited. We're no more than very small children, who struggle with the problem that their view of good and their father's simply aren't the same. I suggest that our problem in accepting that God can and does bring about evil in the sense of disaster is because we seek to judge Him as we would judge a man. There is no question that there is evil in this world, allowed by an all powerful God, within

whose power it is to not allow it. And the Bible also teaches that when there is calamity in a city, then the Lord has surely done it (Am. 3:7). All the cancer, persecution, murder, destruction... could be ended by Him in a moment. But, He doesn't do that. And we are intentionally left to struggle with the fact that this God is the God of love and all grace. If we were to judge a man who willingly allowed rape, murder, destruction, ethnic cleansing to go on in his country, when it was well within his power to stop it, we would feel quite justified in condemning him. Time and again, war crimes trials have easily and unanimously come to this conclusion. And so we tend to judge God as we would a man, with the assumption that *our* understanding of evil and the purpose of it is somehow on a par with God's. But God is God, and in that sense, He is not a man. The challenge of faith is to struggle with how He articulates Himself to us, to have the humility to accept the smallness of our understanding, to believe in Him, and through the process of those struggles to come to know, love and trust Him yet the more as we await the final coming of His Kingdom upon this earth.

All too often, the popular concept of the Devil has been created and developed in order to protect God from the blame for the origin of evil and disaster in our lives. Why is there the need for this? Because this is perhaps the greatest practical challenge of faith in God. If we accept this, we have to sink our own desire for a God in our image, who acts how we think He should act; and to accept Him and His word over and above our own understandings. God's declaration in Isaiah 55, that His ways are above our ways, His thoughts are infinitely above ours, needs to be given its full weight – His concept of good and evil is simply different and far above ours, or even our ability to comprehend it. Job struggled with the whole issue, and God's response in Job 38 was simply: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?... where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have understanding". For me, the ramblings of the "fathers" considered so far in this chapter are indeed a darkening of God's counsel by "words without knowledge". The lesson I take from Augustine's failures, and those of all the early "fathers", is that we simply have to face the problem of sin and evil right in the face; for every attempt to dodge it, deflect it, avoid it, results in yet further complications which are ultimately destructive of a true faith. For me, no religion, set of doctrines, theology, call it what we will, is worth much unless the ultimate issues of sin and evil are faced up to. The commonly held mainstream Christian view, as set in stone by Augustine, simply doesn't do it.

Notes

(1) Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London: Faber, 2000) p. 245.

(2) R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of Augustine* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1970).

(3) J.B. Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994 ed.) p. 218.

(4) Quoted in G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1982) p. 91.

1-3 Satan in the Middle Ages

The Growing Accommodation to Paganism

As Christianity met with Paganism over the centuries, it picked up some of the local pagan ideas. J.B. Russell summarizes the situation in this period: “The Christian concept of the Devil was influenced by folklore elements, some from the older, Mediterranean cultures and others from the Celtic, Teutonic and Slavic religions of the north. Pagan ideas penetrated Christianity while Christian ideas penetrated paganism”⁽¹⁾. Thus the Celtic god of the underworld, Cernunnos, “the horned god”, was easily assimilated into Christianity, just as the pagan feast of December 25th was adopted as ‘Christmas’. The horned gods of the Scandinavians were easily compared to the Devil – and hence the idea that the Devil has horns became more popular in Christian art [although there is absolutely no Biblical association of the Devil with horns]. Hilda Davidson carefully researched Scandinavian views of the Devil figure and showed at great length how these ideas were accommodated into Christianity – rather than the radical call of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God being presented as it is, a fundamentally different worldview⁽²⁾. Once the Devil was associated with Pan, he became presented as having hooves, goat hair and a large nose⁽³⁾. No longer was Satan pictured with long dark hair, but rather spiky hair like the Northern European gods of evil. Thus ‘converts’ to Christianity were allowed to keep some of their existing ideas, and these soon became part of the core fabric of popular ‘Christianity’. For example, the northern European fear of demons entering a person led them to cover their mouths when they yawned, and to fear sneezing as the intake of air could allow demons to rush in to the person. Christianity adopted these practices, adding the phrase “God bless you” whenever someone sneezed, in an attempt to Christianize the practice.

The Influence of Islam

It's evident that the Qu'ran was heavily influenced by both Hebrew and surrounding Middle Eastern myths. The Islamic view of the Devil is very similar to the common Christian view, albeit expressed under different names. The Qu'ran teaches that Iblis [Satan] fell because he refused to bow before the newly created Adam. This is at variance with the Biblical account, which says nothing of any Satan in Eden nor the whole of the book of Genesis. But the Qu'ranic teaching is so very similar to the way the Christian 'fathers' decided that Satan envied Adam and 'fell' because of his envy and wounded pride. This in turn was a view evidently influenced by the apocryphal Jewish "Books of Adam and Eve". My point from all this is that the popular Christian views of the Devil have stronger similarities with Jewish myths and Islamic / pagan concepts than they do with the Biblical record.

Medieval Theology

Gregory "the Great" and others continued to grapple with the contradictions and theological problems inherent within the belief in a personal Satan. Gregory especially developed the idea that Satan has power over humanity because God gave this to him in order to punish us for our sins. Again, this begs many questions. How can someone be punished for their sin by giving them into the hands of a being who wishes to make us sin yet more – and how can this be done by a God whose stated aim is to redeem humanity from sin? And why, then, did God supposedly have to buy us back from the Devil with the blood of His Son? And if this happened at the cross, then how is it that humanity is still under the power of "Satan" just as much after the crucifixion as before it? Seeing God has ultimate foreknowledge, why would He have allowed Satan to get away with all this? It seems to me that all this misses the point – God's heart is broken by *our* sin, by our freewill turning away from Him; and not because some rival god temporarily got the better of Him.

Anselm continued the tortuous arguments. Desperate to avoid accepting God as the author of evil, He continued to blame the Devil for it, but struggled with why God allowed the Devil to sin. Anselm claimed that God offered the Devil grace, but he refused it. And yet, given the ultimate foreknowledge of God, this again only drives the question of origins a stage further back – why did God allow that to happen, and from where did the Devil get the impulse to refuse grace?

Thomas Aquinas struggled with the origins of sin and evil by teaching that sin and evil are only in action, and therefore God wasn't the source of sin by providing freewill to people. Whilst it is the human mind which exercising God-given freewill which is indeed the Biblical source of sin, Aquinas' zeal to distance God from anything negative led him to deny the ABC of Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5–7). For there, clearly enough, the whole manifesto of Jesus was based around the theme that sin does *not* only occur in actions but also in thoughts. Again, Aquinas followed the usual Christian tendency to ignore the huge Biblical emphasis upon sin occurring in the heart, and therefore the need for mind control rather than merely cheering on God's side in some cosmic conflict which we observe from earth.

Christian Art

The Middle Ages contributed to the development of the Satan image by the widespread depiction of him in art forms, making the idea visual and thus more widespread. The difficulty and awkwardness faced by mainstream Christians in dealing with the idea of the Devil is reflected in how Christian writing and art has depicted Satan, Lucifer etc. For example, as the Roman empire disintegrated, mainstream Christian literature came to present the Devil as increasingly sinister and evil, perhaps in reflection of the growing sense of evil and disaster engulfing the empire. It's been pointed out that whenever there were famines and plagues in Medieval Europe, the images of Satan and hell became all the more terrifying in Christian literature and art ⁽⁴⁾. J. Zandee further observes how in Egypt, Coptic Christianity introduced surrounding religious ideas into the Christian image of the Devil – e.g. demons came to have “the heads of wild animals, with tongues of fire sticking out of their mouths, with teeth of iron” ⁽⁵⁾. Other research has shown that the same admixture of pagan ideas of the Devil occurred in European Christianity. And as time progressed further, the Devil came to be spoken of not so much as a physical being but as a less well defined, ghostly, “spirit” being. J.B. Russell in similar vein summarizes how visual depictions of demons changed over time – again indicating that they ‘exist’ in the changing perceptions of people, rather than as direct reflections of what the Bible says: “In Byzantine art, demons are generally anthropomorphic, looking like angels... black, occasionally having horns or a tail... In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a radical shift from the humanoid to the monstrous occurred in Greece, Rumania and Russia, when the demons took on increasingly bestial forms... sheep, dogs... pigs” ⁽⁶⁾. He also observes that “The serpent with a human face appears in the art of many

cultures; such representation seems to have become common in Christian art in the thirteenth century”⁽⁷⁾. The point of all this is that the history of art reflects how ‘Christian’ conceptions of the Devil were influenced by paganism and by surrounding social events, rather than by Biblical study.

Dante’s illustrated works were perhaps the most influential in visually fixing the idea of a personal Satan in peoples’ minds. Having departed from the simple Biblical equation of hell with the grave, Dante decided that if there are degrees of sinful Angels, therefore there must be degrees of hell with which to punish them. Satan, of course, was located at the very centre of hell, imprisoned in darkness and ice. Of course, to any thoughtful mind, hell being a place of darkness and ice contradicts the popular idea that it was a place of fire. The contradictions within Dante’s images of hell and Satan really do stack up – he decided that Satan must have landed somewhere when he came to earth, and he suggested that craters and depressions in the earth’s surface were where the fallen Angels had landed. The monstrosities of Dante’s *Inferno* are likely rejected by most people today, including those who believe in a personal Satan. And yet they cling to the same basic misconceptions about fallen Angels, a Satan literally cast from Heaven to earth etc. which he did. So why, then, would they think that Dante’s conceptions are so wrong? Do they have any better answers to the questions he tried to address – e.g. where did Satan and the Angels land on earth, where did they go etc...?

Demonization

The Middle Ages saw the continued harnessing of the personal Satan, cosmic combat myth in order to demonize people – Jews and Moslems were demonized as in league with Satan; anti-Semitism, crusades and wars against Moslems etc. were all justified with the idea that they were of ‘Satan’ – and so any abuse of them was somehow justified. It was claimed that Satan killed Jesus, yet the Jews killed Jesus, therefore, Jews = Satan and should be destroyed. There was a convenient connection made between the stereotype of Jews having large noses, and the pagan gods of evil having large noses (see fig. 4). This is where bunk theology leads in practice. The Biblical emphasis is that Jesus destroyed Satan on the cross (Heb. 2:14), and not the other way around; and that nobody took His life from Him, He laid it down in love for us (Jn. 10:18). This use of the cosmic combat myth to demonize people led to the murders of a few hundred thousand people in the Middle Ages in the craze of witch

hunting which broke out in Europe. Any catastrophe was blamed on Satan, and therefore his agents on earth had to be found and slain. And anyone who was physically or theologically a bit 'different' to the crowd was assumed to be one of Satan's representative on earth.

It seems to me that nothing has essentially changed; our race seems to incurably transfer guilt and evil onto our opponents. Some Moslems demonize America as "the great Satan", Western Christians do the same to Moslems. Rather than face up to our own personal sin, humanity so earnestly seeks to project evil onto others – Jews, Catholics, Communists, Russians, Arabs, blacks, whites... when the root of all cruelty, the ultimate flaw, is within the human hearts of every one of us (Mk. 7:15–23).

Notes

(1) J.B. Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) p. 62.

(2) H.R.E. Davidson, *Scandinavian Mythology* (London: Hamlyn, 1982) pp. 94–96; H.R.E. Davidson, *The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993).

(3) The merging of the pagan Pan with the popular concept of the Devil is traced in great detail in P. Merivale, *Pan the Goat-God* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

(4) See R. Emmerson, *The Antichrist in the Middle Ages* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981) chapter 4.

(5) J. Zandee, *Death as an Enemy* (Leiden: Brill, 1960) p. 329.

(6) J.B. Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) p. 49.

(7) *ibid* p. 211.

1-4 Satan From the Reformation Onwards

The Reformation led to the divide between Protestant and Catholic Christianity. This divide was bitter, and both sides eagerly demonized the other as in league with a superhuman Devil, because they were convinced that God was on their side, and their enemies therefore were of the Devil. This justified all manner of war, persecution and demonization. Protestants

insisted that the Pope was Antichrist, whilst Catholics spoke of exorcising the demons of Protestantism. Martin Luther, leader of the Reformation, was obsessed with the theme of the Devil, throwing ink at him, breaking wind to scare him away, and ever eager to vent his obsession about the Devil in terms of his demonization of the Catholics (1). Significantly, even Luther recognized that the passage about "war in heaven" in Rev. 12 didn't refer to anything that happened in Eden, but rather was a description of Christian persecution at the hands of their enemies. Luther believed the common idea about Satan being hurled out of Heaven in Eden, but he recognized that Rev. 12 couldn't be used to support the idea (2). We discuss Revelation 12 in more detail in [section 5-32](#). Catholic response was no less obsessive; the catechism of Canisius, a Catholic response to Luther's *Greater Catechism* of 1529, mentions Satan more often than it does Jesus (67 times compared to 63 times) (3). The Council of Trent blamed Protestantism on the Devil.

Calvin and the later Protestant reformers continued Luther's obsession with the Devil. Like the apocryphal Jewish writings discussed in [section 1-1-2](#), Calvin re-interpreted basic Bible passages as referring to the Devil when the Biblical text itself says nothing about the Devil. Thus Ex. 10:27; Rom. 9:17 etc. make it clear that *God* hardened Pharaoh's heart; but Calvin claimed that "Satan confirmed [Pharaoh] in the obstinacy of his breast" (*Institutes Of The Christian Religion* 2.4.2-5, Commentary on Matthew 6:13). So obsessive was the belief in the Devil that it became utterly fundamental doctrine for both Catholics and Protestants. But as always, a minority protested and held to the original teaching of Scripture. In 1642, Joseph Mede concluded that the language of 'demons' refers to mental illnesses rather than evil beings controlled by a personal Satan: "Joseph Mede denied that the demons of the New Testament should be equated with Satan, writing: "I am perswaded (till I shall heare better reason to the contrary) that these Daemoniacks were no other than such as we call mad-men and lunaticks; at least that we comprehend them under those names" (*Diatribae. Discourses on divers texts of Scripture, delivered upon severall occasions*). The claim has even been made that as a result of his Bible translation work, William Tyndale was led to reject the idea that Satan is a personal being, seeing the word means

simply 'an adversary'. Nick Stephens suggests that Tyndale's 1530 book *The Man Of Sin* rejects the orthodox view of Satan as a fallen Angel. G.H. Williams documents the united Catholic and Protestant persecution of the Italian Anabaptists around Venice because they denied both the existence of a superhuman Devil and the Trinity (4). It's significant that these two false doctrines tend to hang together- we will see later that Isaac Newton ended up denying both of them. We discuss the logical connections between them in Chapter 6. The Italian Anabaptists were forerunners of the protestors against the orthodox Devil doctrine which we discuss in [section 1-5](#). One of the Anabaptists' critics, Urbanus Rhegius, complained that they "denied the existence of the Devil" (5).

The rise of the nation state led to a spirit of conflict and war, often between nominally Christian nations; the evidence reflected in art and iconography from the period demonstrates how popular was the use of the Devil image in order to demonize the opposition. This spirit of the age led to the witch craze, during which over 100,000 people were murdered during the 16th and 17th centuries. Anyone seen as differing from society was demonized. The huge interest in the Devil in this period is reflected in the many plays and novels about him at the time- not least the popular legends and stories about Faust and Mephistopheles.

Eventually the period known as the Enlightenment dawned, along with the recognition that the blood letting of the "witch craze" really had to stop. The Catholics began to stress their view that human nature is good and perfectible- again, minimizing sin and the struggle of the individual against evil. German Protestants like Schliermacher became caught up in a desire for rational explanation, doubtless influenced by the scientific revolution going on. He concluded that shifting blame from humanity to Satan explains nothing, stressing that it is illogical to believe that a Devil can somehow thwart God's plans; and hence he came to reject the notion of a superhuman Devil (*The Christian Faith* 1.1.1.2). Soren Kierkegaard followed suite, arguing that the idea of a superhuman Devil trivializes the personal import of the problem of sin and evil. Shelley likewise

came close to the truth when he asked: "What need have we of a Devil, when we have humanity?" (6).

The Russian classical authors, Dostoevsky especially, were deeply concerned with the question of evil and sin. Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, or *The Devils*, is all about the struggle within Nikolaj Stavrogin between doing evil, and taking guilt, at the same time battling with self-deception. This was Dostoevsky's understanding of Satan. When asked whether the Devil really exists, Stavrogin replies: "I see him just as plainly as I see you... And sometimes I do not know who is real, he or I" (7). The same theme is developed in Dostoevsky's magnum opus, *The Brothers Karamazov*. In book 5, Ivan explains to Alyosha that man has "created [the Devil], he has created him in his own image and likeness" (8). Ivan comes to the conclusion that the Devil is he himself, "but only one side of me" (p. 775). In other words, the true Devil is merely a projection of Ivan's unconscious.

All this said, however comforting it is to know that other minds have concluded as I have, it's apparent that belief in a personal Satan persisted; and that in practice, society refused to take serious responsibility for their behaviour and sinfulness. The two world wars of the 20th century and the path of global self-destruction upon which humanity is now firmly embarked indicate clearly enough that the *Biblical* view of Satan, sin and evil was not grasped nor accepted, even if in some minds the pagan myth of a superhuman personal Satan was indeed rejected. Good and evil have been reduced to psychological phenomena, "sin" is virtually no more than a historical concept. Western intellectual circles are very prone to being gripped by endless intellectual and theological fads; and the rejection of the superhuman Satan myth, whilst correct and welcome, is no more than a passing fad. It's not enough to deconstruct a wrong view; the true understanding must be grasped and lived by.

Notes

(1) This is all documented in detail in J.M. Todd, *Luther: A Life* (New York: Crossroads, 1982).

(2) References in S.P. Revard, *The War In Heaven* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980) p. 109.

(3) J. Delumeau, *Catholics Between Luther And Voltaire* (London: Burns & Oates, 1977) p. 173.

(4) G.H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962) pp. 202,562.

(5) As recorded in the summary of opposition to the Anabaptists in Alfred Coutts, *Hans Dencl 1495-1527: Humanist and Heretic* (Edinburgh: MacNiven & Wallace, 1927).

(6) Shelley, *Defence Of Poetry* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965) p. 60.

(7) Feodyor Dostoevsky, *The Possessed* , translated by R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky (London: Random House / Vintage, 2005) p. 697.

(8) Feodyor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, translated by R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990) p. 283.

1-4-1 Satan in *Paradise Lost*

John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, with its graphic depictions of a rebellious satan being hurled from Heaven to earth, greatly popularized the image of a personal satan. The visual images conjured up by Milton's poem remain significant in the minds of many to this day, even if they themselves haven't read his epic poem. But its influence has been such over the last few hundred years that many have come to assume that this actually is a reflection of Bible teaching. Let's face it- people adopt their religious ideas more from popular culture, what they see in art, what they hear on the street, how others talk... rather than by reading books by theologians and Bible students. There's no doubt that art played a highly significant role in fixing the idea

of a personal satan in peoples' minds- and *Paradise Lost* played a huge part in this (1). Milton himself admitted that he wrote the poem [among other reasons] in order to "justifie the wayes of God to men" (1.26). And this is a repeated theme we find throughout the whole history of the personal satan idea. It's as if men feel they have to apologize for God, as well as seeking to somehow avoid the difficult fact that the Bible teaches that it is God alone who ultimately allows evil in human life.

But there's another take on Milton. It needs to be remembered that Milton rejected very many standard 'Christian' doctrines- e.g. the trinity, infant baptism, and the immortality of the soul- and despised paid clergy (2). As we note in [section 1-5](#), Isaac Newton came to identical conclusions- and his rejection of those very same mainstream dogmas led him to likewise reject the popular idea of a personal devil, and rediscover the Biblical definition of satan as simply an 'adversary', with especial reference to the adversary of human temptation and sin. We can therefore reasonably speculate that Milton did the same. John Rumrich has developed this possibility at great length, leading to the suggestion that in fact the whole of *Paradise Lost* is Milton poking fun at the bizarre requirements of the personal Devil myth, taking the whole idea to its logical conclusions. Hence Rumrich calls for a radical reinterpretation of what *Paradise Lost* is really all about (3). After all, there is a huge contrast between the enormous power and intelligence of the supposed Devil- and his very dumb behaviour, in [supposedly] committing the sins of envy and pride, thus leading to his downfall. Surely such a highly intelligent creature wouldn't have fallen into such a simple sin?

Milton's theological treatise *De Doctrina Christiana* cites Isaiah 45:6,7 ("I am the Lord and there is no other; I make the light, I create darkness...") as evidence against both a trinity of gods, and a personal devil. Milton concluded: "These words preclude the possibility, not only of there being any other God, but also of there being any person, of any kind, equal to him... it is intolerable and incredible that an evil power should be stronger than good and should prove the supreme power" (4). In that treatise, Milton also commends George Herbert's statement that "devils are our sins in perspective", and throughout his whole

attempt at a systematic theology in the book, Milton never actually says that he agrees with the popular view of Satan. We have shown elsewhere in this book that the common Christian view of Satan derived from a mistaken Jewish view of Satan, which in turn had been influenced by the surrounding cultures with which they mixed. One wonders whether Milton recognized that by the way in which he names Satan's cabinet after the titles of the gods believed in by the nations which so influenced Israel- Moloch, Chemosh, Baalim, Astaroth, Asorteth, Astarte, Thammuz, Dagon, Rimmon, Osiris, Isis, Horus, Belial etc. As a Bible student, Milton was surely fully aware that the Bible mentions these gods and defines them as 'no-gods', as non-existent.

All these points pale into insignificance before the simple fact that in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, and as commented in by the scholars in footnote (2) below, Milton rejects the idea of immortal souls and understands hell as the grave, as we do in [section 2-5](#). Yet the first two books of *Paradise Lost* are all about the popular concept of hell as a place of torment. Milton gives us a guided tour as it were through nine supposed circles of hell. How are we to square this difference between his poetry and his personal theological beliefs? The obvious conclusion would surely be that he is over painting the popular conception of hell in a sarcastic way, as if to say: "If this place really exists, well, is *this* what it's supposed to be like?". He's thus cocking a snook at the popular idea by taking it to its logical conclusions- and it's likely that he does the same with the related issue of Satan.

It must be understood that departure from the doctrinal position of the popular church in those times was a risky business- it had to be done discreetly, especially by people of any standing in society like Milton and Newton. This fact, to me at least, makes it more likely that Milton was exaggerating and developing the bizarre implications of God as it were getting into a fight with an Angel, in order to reveal to the thoughtful reader how wrong the idea was. Stanley Fish argues that it was a feature of Milton to write in a highly deceptive way, using his skill as an author to show how the meaning he has set up for some phrases is actually the very opposite (5). An example is the way Milton

promotes one of the 'hard questions' about the devil myth: If Adam sinned but could repent, why could not satan and the supposed fallen angels also repent? Thus Milton observes: "Man therefore shall find grace / The other [i.e. satan] none" (3.131). This is one of the many contradictions I've listed in [section 3-2](#) as examples of the mass of logical and Biblical problems created by the personal satan idea. At times, Milton appears almost sarcastic about the existence of Satan as the "Leviathan" sea monster of the book of Job- Book 1.192-212 presents this beast as a myth believed in by sailors, who at times bumped into him, assuming he was an island, and cast their anchor "in his scaly rind"- "in bulk as huge as whom the fables name of monstrous size" (1.196,197). But this may be beyond sarcasm- Milton posits here that Satan is "as huge" as the *fables* paint him to be. Milton could be saying: "Is this, then, the creature your fables lead you to believe in?". In line with this, consider the connections between Milton and Dante which have been traced and analyzed by many scholars. The similarities between Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *The Divine Comedy* are apparent. Perhaps research waits to be done on whether Dante too wasn't using an element of sarcasm in his presentation of Satan- he does, after all, title his work "The Divine Comedy", as if he didn't intend the images he painted to be taken literally.

In more recent times, Soviet writers who wished to criticize the system, or those living in any repressive regime, always wrote in such a way that it appeared on the surface that they were towing the party line- only the reflective would grasp that actually the subtext of their work was a violent denial of it all. It seems likely that Milton was doing the same. And yet, the fact is that most people read literature and indeed receive any art form on a surface level; they so often 'don't get' what the artist is *really* trying to convey. And so images of satan being hurled over the battlements of Heaven remain in the popular consciousness as a result of Milton's epic and graphic story about 'satan'. As Neil Forsyth concludes: "So compelling is the character of Satan in *Paradise Lost* that generations of English speakers, knowing their Milton better than their Bible, have assumed that Christianity teaches an elaborate story about the fall of the angels after a war in heaven, and have been surprised to find no mention of Satan in the Book of Genesis" (6). G.B. Caird

concludes likewise: "The Bible knows nothing of the fall of Satan familiar to readers of *Paradise Lost*" (7). Whether these authorities agree or not isn't of course the point; but I reference them to show that the thesis developed throughout this book is not original, and that many respected scholars and thinkers have come to similar conclusions.

Milton, Goethe And Mary Shelley

I see a similarity between Milton's approach and that of J.W. von Goethe in his *Faust*. Goethe's Devil, Mephistopheles, has become a highly influential image in the minds of many who believe in a personal Satan. But Goethe "always vehemently denied the literal existence of the Christian Devil" (8). He brings out the tension between the ideas of God's will always being done, and the supposed existence of Satan- "he is an invitation to the reader to face the multiplicity of reality" (9). But as with Milton, I submit, Goethe's presentation of a personal Devil is too convincing for the surface reader and those who never read the book but are influenced by the associated images associated with it.

The same goes for Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Her husband Percy Shelley had openly mocked the idea of a supernatural Devil, as we commented upon in [section 3-2](#) and [section 1-4](#). And Mary Shelley clearly has an ironic intention in her novel- the source of evil is presented as being in the humans who created the Frankenstein monster, rather than in the monster himself. Significantly, she pictures her Frankenstein as teaching himself to read from *Paradise Lost*- as if she recognized the extent to which Milton's epic had influenced the perception of the Devil as a grotesque monster; *Paradise Lost*, according to Mary Shelley, had even influenced Satan's own self-perception.

Milton, T.S. Elliot And The Christadelphians

The Christadelphians, along with their adjunct Carelinks Ministries, are the only significant sized denomination to formally reject the existence of a superhuman Satan as an article of faith. Their beliefs are summarized in their booklet, *The Declaration*. The following personal anecdote from Ted Russell,

former lecturer in English at the University of Western Sydney, Australia, is interesting confirmation of what we have suggested above: "There is something interesting about John Milton which concerns Christadelphians. When we were in Birmingham in 1956 we asked John Carter [late editor of *The Christadelphian* magazine] a question. We had been to visit John Milton's cottage in Buckinghamshire: "Why does the mantle shelf over the fireplace in John Milton's cottage have a brass plate on it, on which are the words "John Milton... A kind of Christadelphian", attributed to T. S. Elliot? There were no Christadelphians around at the time he was writing". "Ah, we know about that," John Carter said, "We are aware that John Milton had the same ideas as we have about Satan and many other things. Milton was a kind of Christadelphian, for he believed as we believe, and in fact there is mention of him and that fact on the inside back cover of *The Declaration*". The point is not so much that we recognize Milton, or not, but that T.S. Elliot recognized the connection between Milton and the Christadelphians... This is why T.S. Eliot in studying and understanding Milton's poetry as being figure, and not literal, became aware of Milton's real religious beliefs on the subject in "Paradise Lost" and realized that he was "a kind of Christadelphian" although Milton lived 200 years before Christadelphians were formed" (10).

Notes

(1) See Luther Link, *The Devil: The Archfiend In Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995).

(2) As documented in Stephen Dobranski and John Rumrich, *Milton And Heresy* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1998). For Milton's non-trinitarian views, see Michael Bauman, *Milton's Arianism* (Bern: Lang, 1987) and W.B. Hunter, C.A. Patrides and J.H. Adamson, *Bright Essence: Studies In Milton's Theology* (Salt Lake City: University Of Utah Press, 1971).

(3) John Rumrich, *Milton Unbound: Controversy And Reinterpretation* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1996).

(4) From *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton* edited by Maurice Kelley (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982) Vol. 6 pp. 300, 131.

(5) Stanley Fish, *Surprised By Sin* (London: Macmillan, 1997) p. 215.

(6) Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) p. 66.

(7) G.B. Caird, *The Revelation* (London: A. & C. Black, 1984) p. 153.

(8) J.B Russell, *The Devil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1977) p. 158.

(9) See J.K. Brown, *Goethe's Faust: The German Tragedy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

(10) Email received from Ted Russell, 1/1/2007.

1-5 The Protestors: Resistance to the Popular Concept of the Devil

The Biblical conclusions of my next chapter are that the words 'Satan' [adversary] and 'Devil' [false accuser] are simply words which can be used in Scripture with no negative connotation; and that at times they essentially refer to the greatest 'adversary' we face, namely sin. Further, the idea of a personal Satan, a fallen angel, is simply not found in the Bible text. It is Scriptural study alone which is the basis for my conclusions, and I hope I would stand by them even with the whole world against me. For many readers these conclusions will be startling and concerning. But it should be appreciated that I am far from alone in having come to these understandings. Well known Christian writers and thinkers have come to just the same conclusions.

In fact, there has always been protest at the popular view. David Joris in the 16th century was a noted example of rejecting belief in a personal Devil, along with others, especially amongst the Anabaptists ⁽¹⁾. There were a whole group of such thinkers in the 17th century –

Jacob Bauthumley, Lodowick Muggleton, Anthonie van Dale, Thomas Hobbes [in *Leviathan*, 1651], Balthassar Bekker [in *The World Bewitched*, 1693] and others. Isaac Newton began with the standard view of the Devil, but over time [along with his rejection of the trinity, infant sprinkling and the immortal soul] he came to reject it. Frank Manuel comments: “the Devil seems to have been metamorphosed into a symbol for lusts of the flesh and his reality becomes far more questionable” ⁽²⁾. Noted Newton scholar Stephen Snobelen has since confirmed this in numerous articles, based on the more recent release of more of Newton’s theological manuscripts. He also has brought to light that Newton came to understand demons not as literal beings, but rather as an example of how the language of the day is used in the New Testament – in this case, to describe those afflicted with mental illness. Joseph Mede, in his *Apostasy of the Latter Times* advocated the same conclusion. I referenced in section 1-4-1 that perhaps even John Milton himself didn’t actually hold the orthodox view, and was [when properly interpreted] actually ridiculing the whole idea as absurd. The 18th century saw similar protests – e.g. from Arthur Ashley Sykes and Richard Mead. The 19th century likewise, with John Simpson [*The Meaning of Satan*, 1804 ⁽³⁾], John Epps [*The Devil*, 1842], John Thomas [*Elpis Israel*, 1848], Robert Roberts [*The Evil One*, 1882] and others.

Separated from the dogmas and traditions of the old world, and yet maintaining a fervent faith in Biblical Christianity, there were many 19th century immigrants to America who started to search the Scriptures for truth. After the first edition of this book was published, a Canadian friend drew my attention to a book by Walter Balfour, published in Charlestown in 1827 ⁽⁴⁾. This lengthy study comes to the same conclusions as I do throughout this book. Balfour came to identical positions regarding basic Bible teaching about Satan, demons and the nature of sin and evil; and interpreted passages like Job 1 in the same way as I do. There’s an uncanny similarity at times in our style and phrasing; I can only take comfort from the fact that independent minds, separated by time, background, geography and circumstance, have come to the same understanding. As I’ve laboured before, it’s no unbearably hard thing for me to stand with my back to the world over the Satan issue; but to not have to stand *totally* alone is indeed some degree of comfort and confirmation.

These and other independent Christian thinkers stood against the huge weight of tradition and combined Protestant and Catholic dogma. In more recent times, both academics and thoughtful Christians have bravely followed in their line of thinking. Sadly, the view is widely held that thinking about religious matters is for the

experts, the priest, the pastor, the academic theologian; and no amateur Bible student, as it were, can have a valid opinion. This, however, misses the whole point of the Biblical revelation – that the Bible is God’s word to *all* His people, and it is for us each and every one to study and reflect upon it, and draw conclusions which we hold in absolute personal integrity. Thus Gregory of Nyssa, one of the founding fathers of the popular Christian view of the Devil, actually lamented that ordinary working people within the Christian congregation had an active interest in theological issues. He wrote: “Everywhere in the city is full of it, the alleyways, the streets... if you ask about the rate of exchange, you get a lecture on the Created and the Uncreated. You ask the price of a loaf of bread, and you are told by way of reply that the Father is superior, the Son subordinate. You inquire whether the public bath is a convenient one, and he replies that the Son was made out of nothing” ⁽⁵⁾. The spirit of “Every man a Bible student” was far from the early fathers. They wished [as many pastors and religious leaders do today] to confine the study of God, the formulation of doctrinal understanding, to their own small elite. They were over confident of their own abilities and authority. Which leaves us with a hard job of clearing away the mess they’ve left, and getting down to the real message of the Bible. Thank God that He preserved the actual text of the Bible for us, and that we have it in our own languages now to study.

Conclusions

Our survey of the history of the Satan idea hasn’t been pure history – I’ve added my comments as we’ve gone through. But the general pattern of that history, the development, changes and accretions to the idea, are clear in outline to the most phlegmatic and disengaged historian. The Bible speaks of “the faith”, “the Gospel”, as a set of doctrines, a deposit of truth which has been delivered to the believer (Eph. 4:4–6) – “the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3 ASV). That truth cannot be added to nor subtracted from, as the Bible itself makes clear – especially in the appeals of Paul and Peter to maintain the purity of the one faith. This means that a vitally true doctrine cannot become ‘added’ to that body of truth. Jaroslav Pelikan correctly reflected: “What can it mean for a doctrine to ‘become’ part of the Catholic faith, which is, by definition, universal both in space and in time?” ⁽⁶⁾. And yet it’s apparent that the doctrine of a personal Devil is something which has been created, *ex-nihilo* so far as the Bible is concerned; and then has been added to and developed over time into something quite unrecognizable in the actual Biblical text. It therefore has to be rejected as a Christian doctrine. If it

was unknown to Abraham, Jesus, Paul, it should be unacceptable to us.

Notes

(1) Documented in Auke Jelsma, *Frontiers of the Reformation: Dissidence and Orthodoxy in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 25–39. Point 4 of the Anabaptist Confession of Faith in Venice in around 1550 was that “There is no other Devil than human prudence, for no creature of God is hostile to him but this”. The entire document can be seen in Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952) Vol. 2 p. 98.

(2) Frank E. Manuel, *The Religion of Isaac Newton* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), p. 64. Elsewhere, Manuel shows how Newton rejected the idea that demons were literal beings – rather he interpreted the references to them as the language of the day to describe mental illness – see Frank E. Manuel. *Isaac Newton: Historian* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963) p. 149.

(3) More recently reprinted in 1999 by Grammata Press (B.C., Canada).

(4) Walter Balfour, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Doctrine Concerning the Devil and Satan* (Charlestown, MS: Davidson, 1827), digitized on Google books.

(5) As quoted in G. Bowersock, P. Brown, O. Grabar *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 69.

(6) Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Development of Christian Doctrine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969) p. 39.

1-6 The Devil and Satan in Recent Thought

Even with my back to the world, I hope I’d stand for Bible truth regardless of what anyone else thought. We must do and believe what is right before God, rather than what is smart and trendy before our surrounding society. But I realize that for many, the rejection of the idea of a superhuman Satan is a major issue, and for some this may be their first encounter with any alternative idea. To provide somewhat of a human cushion for the changeover of thinking, a slightly softer landing, I’ve referenced throughout this book the views of many who have made this rejection of pagan superstition in favour of Bible truth. And in this section I wish to give some more recent examples. But name dropping of supporting voices is irrelevant in the final analysis –

for we must each unflinchingly set our face to understand the problem of sin and evil in accordance with God's truth, as revealed in the Bible.

Stephen Mitchell

Stephen Mitchell, in a much acclaimed and well publicized book published by none other than Harper Collins, observes that throughout Job, "there is no attempt to deflect ultimate responsibility by blaming a Devil or an original sin" ⁽¹⁾. And Mitchell says this in the context of commenting upon Job 9:24, where having spoken of the problem of calamity, Job concludes: "Who does it, if not he [God]?". And of course at the end of the book, God confirms Job as having spoken truly about Him. Mitchell observes that Job ends "with a detailed presentation of two creatures, the Beast and the Serpent... both creatures are, in fact, central figures in ancient near-eastern eschatology, the embodiments of evil that the sky-god battles and conquers... this final section of the Voice from the Whirlwind is a criticism of conventional, dualistic theology. *What is all this foolish chatter about good and evil, the Voice says, about battles between a hero-god and some cosmic opponent? Don't you understand that there is no one else in here?* These huge symbols of evil, so terrifying to humans... are presented as God's playthings". And so Mitchell comes to the very same conclusions as we have outlined here – there is in the end only God, and He is not in struggle with any super-human 'Devil' in Heaven. And this is in fact the whole lesson of the book of Job. Even if such a mythical being is thought to exist, as it was in Job's time, the essential point is that God is so much greater than such a puny 'Devil' that He can play games with him. John Robinson, one time Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, came to some similar conclusions, albeit less clearly expressed, in his classic in *The End God* ⁽²⁾. The Christian psychotherapist Paul Tournier also came to the same view about the Devil which we've outlined elsewhere. He expresses what we've said Biblically in more modern jargon: "[We must] unmask the hidden enemy, which the Bible calls a Devil, and which the psychoanalyst calls the superego: the false moral code, the secret and all-powerful veto which spoils and sabotages all that is best in a person's life, despite the sincerest aspirations of his conscious mind"⁽³⁾.

Elaine Pagels

Others have come to the same conclusions by different paths. Students of the history of ideas have found that the idea of a personal

Satan just isn't there in the Old Testament; and yet they've traced the development of the idea through the centuries, noting how various non-Christian ideas have become mixed in, a tradition developed and then picked up more and more accretions as time went on.

Elaine Pagels, Professor of Religion at Princeton University, is perhaps the highest profile writer and thinker to express agreement with our position about the Devil. Her bestselling book *The Origin of Satan* is well worth a read if you're interested in this theme⁽⁴⁾. She begins where we have done – that Christianity and Judaism taught only one God, and this left no place for a Devil / Satan in the orthodox sense. We have said time and again that one true doctrine leads to another, and Pagels grasps that clearly. One God means no Devil. Simple as that. And so she comments: "Conversion from paganism to Judaism or Christianity, I realized, meant, above all, transforming one's perception of the invisible world". And this had a radically practical outworking – as does belief in any true Bible doctrine: "Becoming either a Jew or a Christian polarized a pagan's view of the universe, and moralized it". The pagan worldview would've felt that anything like a volcano or earthquake was a result of demonic activity. But instead, the Bible clearly describes the volcanoes that destroyed Sodom as coming from the one God, as judgment for their sins (Gen. 19:4). People were not just victims of huge cosmic forces; they had responsibility for their actions and met those consequences. We can easily miss the radical implications of the moral way the Bible describes such things which were otherwise attributed to demons /pagan gods. There was a huge political price attached to rejecting belief in 'demons'. Rusticus, prefect of Rome, persecuted Christians because they refused "to obey the gods and submit to the rulers". The Romans considered that their leaders were agents of the gods; and if the gods didn't exist, then the Roman leadership lost its power and authority. For this reason, the Romans called the Christians 'atheists'.

The following quotations from Pagels exactly reflect our own conclusions: "In the Hebrew Bible...Satan never appears as Western Christendom has come to know him, as the leader of an "evil empire", an army of hostile spirits who make war on God...in the Hebrew Bible, Satan is not necessarily evil, much less opposed to God. On the contrary, he appears in the book of Numbers and in Job as one of God's obedient servants – a messenger, or *angel*, a word that translates the Hebrew term for messenger (*mal'ak*) into Greek (*angelos*)... in biblical sources the Hebrew term the *Satan* describes an adversarial role. It is not the name of a particular character... the root *stn* means "one who opposes, obstructs, or acts as an adversary"... But this messenger is not necessarily malevolent... John

dismisses the device of the Devil as an independent supernatural character... Paul holds a perception that Satan acts as God's agent not to corrupt people but to test them" (pp. 111, 183)".

But Elaine Pagels isn't just out there on her own. Neil Forsyth comments likewise: "In... the Old Testament, the word [Satan] never appears as the name of the adversary... rather, when the Satan appears in the Old Testament, he is a member of the heavenly court, albeit with unusual tasks"⁽⁵⁾. Several respected commentators have pointed out the same, especially when commenting upon the 'Satan' in the book of Job – concluding that the term there simply speaks of an obedient Divine Angel acting the role of an adversary, without being the evil spirit being accepted by many in Christendom ⁽⁶⁾. Commenting on the 'Satan' of Job and Zechariah, the respected Anchor Bible notes: "Neither in Job nor in Zechariah is the Accuser an independent entity with real power, except that which Yahweh consents to give him" ⁽⁷⁾. A.L. Oppenheim carefully studied how the figure of a personal Satan entered into Hebrew thought; he concludes that it was originally absent. He considers that their view of a Divine court, or council, such as is hinted at in the Hebrew Bible, was significant for them; but they noted that in some Mesopotamian bureaucracies there was a similar understanding, but always there was an "accuser" present, a 'Satan' figure ⁽⁸⁾. And the Jews adopted this idea and thus came to believe in a personal Satan.

How Did Christianity Adopt Pagan Beliefs?

Pagels and other writers tackle the obvious question: Where, then, did the present idea of a literal evil being called Satan come from, seeing it's not in the Bible? They trace the idea back to pagan sources that entered Judaism before the time of Christ – and then worked their way into Christian thought in the early centuries after Christ, as mainstream Christianity moved away from purely Biblical beliefs⁽⁹⁾. But pushing the question back a stage further, *why* and *how* did Judaism and later Christianity pick up pagan myths about a personal Devil and sinful Angels and mix them in with their belief system? Pagels quotes sources such as the Jewish *Book of the Watchers* to show how there was a clear belief that each person has a 'guardian Angel', and when conflicts arose, people judged as 'wicked' or 'evil' came to be charged with therefore having a 'wicked' or 'evil' Angel controlling them. And it was an easy step to assume that these 'wicked Angels' were all under the control of a personal, superhuman Devil as widely believed in by surrounding pagans. The book of Jubilees (e.g. 15:31) made the association between pagan gods and demons. Jewish apostates who

believed in the pagan gods, or who were accused of believing in them, were then seen as being somehow in league with them. And thereby those 'demons' were felt to be real beings, because the people they supposedly controlled were real people.

The Essenes were a Jewish sect who were in conflict with the rest of the Jews, whom they believed were condemned to damnation. They expressed this conflict between them and others in terms of a cosmic conflict between God – who they believed was on *their* side – and a personal Satan, whose followers they believed their enemies on earth were supporting. The more bitter the political conflict within Israel, the stronger was the appeal made to a supposed cosmic battle between good and evil, God and Satan. The result of this false doctrine was a demonizing of one's' opposition. And the same can easily happen today. The value of the human person is forgotten about, if we believe they are condemned, evil people who are the Devil incarnate. The orthodox 'Devil' can't be reconciled with. He can only be destroyed. And if we demonize people, we can never reconcile with them, only seek to destroy them. Here is where doctrine is important in practice. If there is no personal Satan up there, and *all* people, our enemies included, are simply struggling against their own nature... then we can reach out to them, as fellow strugglers, understand them, seek to reconcile with them and seek their salvation. And so it seems to me that the personal Satan myth became popular because it lent itself so conveniently to the demonization of others, by making out that they are actually in league with some cosmic force of evil, whereas we [of course!] are on the side of the good. And so Christians demonized their enemies and then even those within their religion who differed from them, just as the Jews and later the Essenes had done. This all suggests that false doctrine nearly always has a moral dimension to it, or an [im]moral justification, a making of the way easier, a pandering to our natural inclination rather than that of God.

Many scholars have pointed out that the Old Testament is silent about a 'Satan' figure as widely believed in by Christendom. The Genesis record says nothing at all about sinful angels, a Lucifer, Satan being cast out of Heaven etc. There seems significant evidence for believing that the idea of a personal Devil first entered Judaism through their contact with the Persian religions whilst in captivity there. Rabbinic writings don't mention a personal Satan until the Jews were in Babylon, and the references become more frequent as Persian influence upon Judaism deepened. This is why the monumental passages in Isaiah [e.g. Is. 45:5–7], addressed to the captive Jews, point out the error of the Persian idea that there is a good God in tension with an evil god. Classically, the Devil is understood to be a

being with horns and a pitchfork. If we research *why* this should be the case, we soon find that the Bible itself is absolutely without any such images of Satan or the Devil. But we do find these images in pagan mythology – Pan, Dionysius and other pagan gods were depicted as having horns, long tails etc. In the British isles, let alone ancient Rome and Greece, there were traditions of ‘horned gods’ being the source of evil – e.g. the Cernunnos amongst the Celts, Caerwiden in Wales, etc. In so many ways, apostate Christianity adopted pagan ideas and brought them into its theology. These horned gods, with forks and long tails, became adopted into a false Christianity as ‘the Devil’. But the Bible itself is absolutely silent about this – nowhere is there any indication that Satan or the Devil is a personal being with horns etc.

Other studies in the history and developments of religion have shown that religious systems usually begin without a specific ‘Satan’ figure; but as people struggle with the huge incidence of evil in the world, they end up creating such a figure in their theologies. It seems many people have a deeply psychological need to blame their sin, and the sin of others, on something outside of them; and so the idea of a personal Satan has become popular. It’s somewhere to simplistically dump all our struggles and disappointments and fears of ourselves and of the world in which we live. The struggle to understand, believe and love a God who portrays Himself in His word as the ultimate and only force, in a world of tsunamis, earthquakes, mass catastrophe – is indeed difficult. It’s something all His children have to wrestle with, as children struggle with their parents’ decisions and actions towards them which seem to them so unloving, unreasonable and pointless. It’s surely a cop out to give up, and simplistically decide that our God isn’t actually the only force and power around, but actually there is an evil god out there too. But this is indeed a cop out, as well as reflecting our own lack of faith and acceptance of the one true God simply because we don’t ultimately understand Him, and because He doesn’t act how we think He should act.

The Devil in John’s Gospel

Students of John have also at times been driven to the understanding that actually, John’s writings do not at all support the common idea of the Devil. John’s Gospel seeks to correct the false idea of a huge cosmic conflict. John frequently alludes to the ideas of light versus darkness, righteousness versus evil. But he correctly defines darkness and evil as the unbelief which exists within the human heart. Again, from this distance, we may read John’s words and not perceive the radical, corrective commentary which he was really making

against the common ideas of a personal Satan existing in Heaven, involved in some cosmic conflict up there. The real arena of the conflict, the essential struggle, according to John, is within the human heart, and it is between belief and unbelief in Jesus as the Son of God, with all that entails.

In the same way as the concept of 'demons' somewhat recedes throughout the Gospels, and the point is made that God's power is so great that effectively they don't exist – so it is with the 'Devil'. Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal 'Satan'. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the "strong man" – the Devil – was really to show that the "Devil" as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn't use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called "the Devil" as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial ['satanic'] position to Jesus. My point in this context is that various respected and widely published scholars have concluded likewise: "John never pictures Satan.. as a disembodied being... John dismisses the device of the Devil as an independent supernatural character"⁽¹⁰⁾ ... "In John, the idea of the Devil [as a personal supernatural being] is completely absent"⁽¹¹⁾. Raymond Brown – one of the most well known Roman Catholic expositors of the 20th Century – concludes that 'Satan' doesn't refer to a character in 'his' own right, but rather is a title referring to groups of *people* who play the role of adversaries or tempters⁽¹²⁾.

Other Writers

20th century theologian Jim Garrison gave a lifetime to analyzing the relationship between God, the Devil and evil. He finally concluded that there is no Devil, and that God creates real evil, and uses it somehow for the ultimate good in the 'bigger picture'⁽¹³⁾. Petru Dumitriu likewise concluded that Satan is "a needful symbol of radical evil", and that humanity is the ultimate source of much of the evil we experience: "In all creation there is nothing as cruel as human malice... evil is a refusal of the very notion of guilty intent, of culpability, of sin"⁽¹⁴⁾. Flannery O'Connor's novels and writings expressed all this in popular form. Her last novel, *The Violent Bear it Away*, really plays on this theme deeply⁽¹⁵⁾. "There ain't no such thing as a Devil... I can tell you that from my own self-experience. I know that for a fact. It ain't Jesus or the Devil. It's Jesus or *you*" (p. 39).

Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Satan (Reflections by Ted Russell)

The Brothers Karamazov by the great nineteenth-century Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky is one of the gravest and most absorbing novels ever written; *yet it in no way promotes a belief in an immortal Devil*. In a book of impressionistic realism, Dostoyevsky is concerned with the anguish caused by the dual nature of man, in which a mythical Satan has absolutely no role, function or place, and therefore does not intrude. In fact, the only time Satan *is* introduced at all, is, late in the series, when Ivan hears that Smerdyakov's murder of Fyodor was the result of his (Ivan's) nihilistic words and actions, suggesting that the father's murder would be a blessing to the whole household. He returns to his rooms, falls ill with fever and delirium, during which he is haunted by a *realistic spectre of the Devil* which suddenly emerges from his soul, revealing his true nature to himself. Up till now, Ivan's nihilism had no room for conscience, at all. Belatedly, and long overdue, that latent conscience is born in him by the sudden awareness of the evil consequences of his overtly professed philosophy. Significantly, Ivan's feverish vision of awareness is lost on his audience; it is not believed in by any in the court to whom he confesses it. It is, actually, a message from Dostoyevsky to his readers.

If Dostoyevsky had wanted to bring in a real, external Satan, he would have introduced him earlier, in the most famous section of the book (*The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*) where, in an inn, Ivan disclosed to Alyosha that he believed in God, *but that he could not accept God's world*. What the two discussed *there* was the dual nature of man, which has been the continuing theme of the whole novel. There, Ivan's account of another of his delusional dreams, this time in poetical form, spells out his case against Christ, and his anger at a God who permits innocent children to suffer. But it is not through the mouth of a Satan, but of a worldly wise old Inquisitor during an *auto-da-fe* – an execution by burning of heretics – in 16th century Seville. A stranger appears in the village, and performs a miracle. The people identify him as Christ. The Grand Inquisitor appears, and arrests the stranger, intending to burn him at the stake next day. He reproaches the stranger: "Is it Thou?", he asks, "You had no right to come. We have corrected thy work." Ivan's implication is that Christ's message is far too hard for any to follow, no one can ever reach His impossibly high standards. No one wants freedom; all they need is security. So, the Church has changed the standards, to an achievable norm – and so who needs Christ now? The Inquisitor offers Christ liberty if He will go and "come no more." According to Ivan, his poetical dream has

Christ accepting the Inquisitor's offer. He silently kisses the old man's lips as He leaves, disappearing forever.

But it doesn't end there. The *dream* is all in the mind of Ivan. No place there, at all, for Satan. Christ has come with impossible requirements for man. The Church, realizing the impossibility of Christ's requirements, has changed it all, and kissed Christ off. That's all we need, Ivan the nihilistic Intellectual argues. Alyosha, however, knows better. Zossimar has taught him that *the true Christian faith, if not that which the Church has tampered with, is not as helpless as Ivan would have it*. The standard it demands is certainly attainable, and does work. Active love is far more important than anything that Ivan's totalitarian system could ever reach. Had not Zossimar said:

"... love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams. Love in dreams is greedy for immediate action, rapidly performed and in the sight of all. Men will even give their lives if only the ordeal does not last long but is soon over, with all looking on and applauding as though on the stage. But active love is labour and fortitude, and for some people too, perhaps, a complete science".

The theme of the novel is that of a father and his four sons (born of three different mothers) and the effect of sensuality and inherited sensuality on them and on all with whom they come in contact. The father is murdered, and in the course of the consequent investigation the reader is led to consider all the possible paths for mankind.

Dimitre, the sensuous oldest son, depicts the way of the senses; Ivan, the atheistic, intellectual son, represents Western intellectualism, arguing that all things are permissible; Alexey (called Alyosha), the third son, is a gentle boy influenced by Zossimar, an elder in the nearby monastery (whose positive teachings are central to the novel); and Smerdyakov (the actual murderer), the illegitimate son representing the debased way of scepticism and secularism.

Dostoyevsky prefaces his novel with a quotation from the Gospel of John, that relates to the underlying theme of the book: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit". Throughout the novel, each brother must learn this truth in his own experience: "Fall to the earth, die, and, then be reborn".

There is no Satan in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Zossimar's unassuming but firm Christian teachings continue to be central to the whole of the novel, and constitute a complete rebuttal to Ivan's *Grand*

Inquisitor mythical legend – a poetic, *invented* dream that meets its catharsis in the final, self-revelation to Ivan, in his moment of truth. For his later dream's self-revelation that his other half is a "private Devil" – the bad side of his dual nature ("the real spectre in his soul") – is consistent with what he had, himself, initially and tentatively postured to his brother Alyosha in the preamble to *The Grand Inquisitor*: "I think the Devil doesn't exist and, consequently, man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness".

Notes

- (1) Stephen Mitchell, *The Book of Job* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).
- (2) John Robinson, *In The End God* (London: James Clarke, 1950).
- (3) Paul Tournier, *The Person Reborn* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) p. 6.
- (4) Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane / The Penguin Press, 1996).
- (5) Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) p. 107.
- (6) See P. Day, *An Adversary in Heaven: Satan in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, 1988) pp 69–106.
- (7) C.L. Meyers and E.M. Meyers, *The Anchor Bible: Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (New York: Doubleday, 2004 ed.) p. 184.
- (8) A.L. Oppenheim, "The eyes of the Lord", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol. 88 (1968) pp. 173–180.
- (9) In addition to Pagels *op cit*, see Knut Schaferdick, "Satan in the Post Apostolic Fathers" in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) Vol. 7 pp. 163–165 and George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927) Vol. 1.
- (10) Elaine Pagels, *op cit* pp. 100,111.
- (11) Gustave Hoennecke, *New Testament Studies* (Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1912) p. 208.
- (12) Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1966) pp. 364–376.
- (13) J. Garrison, *The Darkness of God: Theology After Hiroshima* (London: S.C.M., 1982), especially pp. 8,173,174.

(14) P. Dumitriu, *To an Unknown God* (New York: The Seabury Press, 2005) p. 59.

(15) Flannery O'Connor, *The Violent Bear it Away* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

CHAPTER 2

SOME BASIC BIBLE TEACHING

2-1 Angels

I submit that the Bible teaches that Angels are:

- * real, personal beings
- * carrying God's name
- * beings in whom God's Spirit works to execute His will
- * in accordance with His character and purpose
- * and thereby manifesting Him.

One of the most common of the Hebrew words translated 'God' is 'Elohim', which strictly means 'mighty ones'. The word can at times refer to the Angels who, as God's 'mighty ones', carry this name and can effectively be called 'God' because they represent God. Ps. 8:5 speaks of how God created humanity "a little lower than the Angels"- the Hebrew *elohim* is translated *aggelous* ['Angels'] in the Septuagint; and that's confirmed by the verse being quoted in Heb. 2:7 as "Angels". The record of the creation of the world in Gen. 1 tells us that God spoke certain commands concerning creation, "and it was done". It was the Angels who carried out these commands. "Angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word" (Ps. 103:20). It is therefore reasonable to assume that when we read of 'God' creating the world, this work was actually performed by the angels. Job 38:4-7 hints this way too. Man was created on the sixth day. "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Note

that “God” here is not just referring to God Himself in person - “Let us make man” shows that ‘God’ is referring to more than one person. The Hebrew word translated ‘God’ here is ‘Elohim’, meaning ‘Mighty Ones’, with reference to the Angels. They are very real beings, sharing the same nature as God.

In the Bible there are two ‘natures’; by the very meaning of the word it is not possible to have both these natures simultaneously.

God’s nature (‘divine nature’)

* He cannot sin (perfect) (Rom. 9:14; 6:23 cf. Ps. 90:2; Mt. 5:48; James 1:13)

* He cannot die, i.e. immortal (1 Tim. 6:16)

* He is full of power and energy (Is. 40:28)

This is the nature of God and the Angels, and the nature which was given to Jesus after his resurrection (Acts 13:34; Rev. 1:18; Heb. 1:3). This is the nature which the faithful are promised (Lk. 20:35,36; 2 Pet. 1:4; Is. 40:28 cf. v 31).

Human nature

* We are tempted to sin (James 1:13-15) by a corrupt natural mind (Jer. 17:9; Mk. 7:21-23)

* We are doomed to death, i.e. mortal (Rom. 5:12,17; 1 Cor. 15:22)

* We are of very limited strength, both physically (Is. 40:30) and mentally (Jer.10:23)

This is the nature which all men, good and bad, now possess. The end of that nature is death (Rom. 6:23). It was the nature which Jesus had during His mortal life (Heb. 2:14-18; Rom. 8:3; Jn. 2:25; Mk. 10:18).

It is unfortunate that the English word 'nature' is rather vague: we can use it in various ways, e.g. 'John is of a generous nature - it just isn't in his nature to be mean; but he can be rather proud of his car, which is just human nature, I suppose'. This is not how we will be using the word 'nature' in these studies.

Angelic Appearances

The Angels, being of God's nature, must therefore be sinless and unable to die - seeing that sin brings death (Rom. 6:23). Often when angels appeared on earth they looked like ordinary men.

* Angels came to Abraham to speak God's words to him; they are described as "three men", whom Abraham initially treated as human beings, since that was their appearance: "Let a little water, I beg you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree" (Gen. 18:4).

* Two of those angels then went to Lot in the city of Sodom. Again, they were recognized only as men by both Lot and the people of Sodom. "There came two angels to Sodom", whom Lot invited to spend the night with him. But the men of Sodom came to his house, asking in a threatening way: "Where are the men which came in to you this night?". Lot pleaded: "Unto these men do nothing". The inspired record also calls them 'men': "The men (angels) put forth their hand" and rescued Lot... And the men said unto Lot...The Lord has sent us to destroy" Sodom (Gen. 19:1,5,8,10,12,13).

* The New Testament comment on these incidents confirms that Angels appear in the form of men: "Remember to entertain strangers; for some (e.g. Abraham and Lot) have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2).

* Jacob wrestled all night with a strange man (Gen. 32:24), which we are later specifically told was an Angel (Hos. 12:4).

* Two men in shining white clothes were present at the resurrection (Lk. 24:4) and ascension (Acts 1:10) of Jesus. These were clearly Angels.

* Consider the implications of “the measure of a man, that is, of the angel” (Rev. 21:17).

Angels Do Not Sin

As Angels share God’s nature they cannot die. Seeing that sin brings death, it follows therefore that they cannot sin. The original Greek and Hebrew words translated ‘angel’ mean ‘messenger’; the Angels are the messengers or servants of God, obedient to Him, therefore it is impossible to think of them as being sinful. The Greek word *aggelos* which is translated ‘angels’ is also translated ‘messengers’ when speaking of human beings - e.g. John the Baptist (Mt. 11:10) and his messengers (Lk. 7:24); the messengers of Jesus (Lk. 9:52) and the men who spied out Jericho (James 2:25). The ‘angels of the churches’ to whom the Lord Jesus wrote in Rev. 2 and 3 were presumably human beings too- for why would He need to communicate with supernatural beings through writing letters to them? The Greek word *an-aggelo* is frequently used in the New Testament regarding human beings ‘messaging’ or ‘messengering’ the news of the Gospel. It is, of course, possible that ‘angels’ in this sense of human messengers can sin.

The following passages clearly show that all the angels (not just some of them!) are by nature obedient to God, and therefore cannot sin:

“The Lord has prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom rules over all (i.e. there can be no rebellion against God in heaven). Praise the Lord, you His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Praise the Lord, all you His hosts; you ministers of His, that do His pleasure” (Ps. 103:19-21).

“Praise him, *all* His angels... His hosts” (Ps. 148:2)

“The angels...are they not *all* ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them (the believers) who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb. 1:13,14).

The repetition of the word “all” shows that the Angels are not divided into two groups, one good and the other sinful. The importance of clearly understanding the nature of the Angels is that the reward of the faithful is to share their nature: “They which shall be accounted worthy... neither marry... neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels” (Lk. 20:35,36). This is a vital point to grasp. Angels cannot die: “Death... does not lay hold of angels” (Heb. 2:16 Diaglott margin). If Angels could sin, then those who are found worthy of reward at Christ’s return will also still be able to sin. And seeing that sin brings death (Rom. 6:23), they will therefore not have eternal life; if we have a possibility of sinning, we have the capability of dying. Thus to say Angels can sin makes God’s promise of eternal life meaningless, seeing that our reward is to share the nature of the Angels. The reference to “the angels” (Lk. 20:35,36) shows that there is no categorization of angels as good or sinful; there is only one category of Angels. Dan. 12:3 says that the faithful will shine as the stars; and stars are associated with the Angels (Job 38:7). We will be made like Angels; and yet we will be given immortal, sinless nature. Therefore, Angels can’t sin. Our hope is to enter into the wonderful freedom of nature which the “Sons of God”, i.e. the Angels, now share (Rom. 8:19).

If Angels could sin, then God is left impotent to act in our lives and the affairs of the world, seeing that He has declared that He works through His Angels (Ps. 103:19-21). God achieves all things by His spirit power acting through the Angels (Ps. 104:4). That they should be disobedient to Him is an impossibility. Christians should daily pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth, that His will should be done here as it is now done in heaven (Mt. 6:10). If God’s obedient Angels have to compete with sinful angels in heaven, then His will could not be fully executed there, and therefore the same situation would obtain in God’s future kingdom. To spend eternity in a world which would be a perpetual battlefield between sin and obedience is hardly an encouraging prospect, but that, of course, is not the case. It also needs to be noted that the idea of angels who sinned is actually pagan - the Persian myths of a good god and an evil one also involved the idea of fallen angels; and the early Hindu vedas, dating from around 1000 BC, likewise had this idea.

Heb. 2:16-18 repays closer reflection in this context of Angels and possibility to sin. It speaks of the reasons why the Lord Jesus had to be of human nature: "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the [nature of the] seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted". Exactly because the Lord Jesus had to be tempted to sin, He did not have Angelic nature but human nature. His mission was to save humanity from human sin, not the Angels. So, He had to have human nature so that He could be tempted to sin; and the Hebrew writer labours the point that therefore He did not have Angels' nature. Which, by inference, is *not* able to be tempted to sin. Note again how the Bible speaks of "Angels" as if there is only one category of Angel- obedient Heavenly beings.

Even some of those who believe in a personal Satan figure have been driven to admit this basic truth: Angels don't sin. Take Augustine in *Contra Faustum* Book 22 section 28: "And again, angels do not sin, because their heavenly nature is so in possession of the eternal law that God is the only object of its desire, and they obey His will without any experience of temptation. But man, whose life on this earth is a trial on account of sin, subdues to himself what he has in common with beasts, and subdues to God what he has in common with angels; till, when righteousness is perfected and immortality attained, he shall be raised from among beasts and ranked with angels". In his *Commentary on Genesis* section 11 he wrote: "There is in the holy angels that nature which cannot sin". His views of Satan and his interpretation of Genesis 6 [whereby Angelic beings sinned with women on earth] contradict this position, however- one of the many contradictions in the orthodox views of Satan and evil which we will consider in [section 3-2](#).

Angels And Believers

There is good reason to believe that each true believer has Angels - perhaps one special one - helping them in their lives.

* “The Angel of the Lord camps round about those that fear him, and delivers them” (Ps. 34:7).

* “...these little ones which believe in me (i.e. weak disciples - Zech. 13:7 cf. Mt. 26:31)... in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father” (Mt. 18:6,10).

* The early Christians clearly believed that Peter had a guardian Angel (Acts 12:14,15).

* The people of Israel went through the Red Sea, and were led by an Angel through the wilderness towards the promised land. Going through the Red Sea represents our baptism in water (1 Cor. 10:1), and so it isn't unreasonable to assume that afterwards we, too, are led and helped by an Angel as we journey through the wilderness of life towards the promised land of God's Kingdom.

If the Angels could be evil in the sense of being sinful, then such promises of Angelic control and influence in our lives would become a curse instead of a blessing.

We have seen, then, that Angels are beings...

* with God's eternal nature

* who cannot sin

* who always do God's commands

* and who are the beings through whom God's spirit-power speaks and works (Ps. 104:4).

But...?

Many Christian groups have the idea that Angels can sin, and that sinful angels now exist who are responsible for sin and problems on the earth. Some of the Bible passages misunderstood that way are considered in more detail in [section 5](#). For the present, let's note the following points.

* It's not unreasonable to suppose that there was a creation previous to our own, i.e. to that recorded in Gen. 1. It is also conceivable that the present Angels came to have an awareness of "good and evil" (Gen. 3:5) through having been in a similar situation to what we are in this life. That some of the beings who lived in that age did sin is not to be ruled out; but all this is the kind of speculation which men love to indulge in. The Bible does not tell us of these things but tells us clearly what we need to know about the present situation, which is that there are no sinful Angels; all Angels are totally obedient to God.

* There can be no sinful beings in heaven, seeing that God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. 1:13). In similar vein, Ps. 5:4,5 explains: "Neither shall evil dwell with you. The foolish shall not stand" in God's heavenly dwelling place. The idea of there being rebellion against God in heaven by sinful Angels quite contradicts the impression given by these passages.

* The Greek word translated "angel" means "messenger" and can refer to human beings, as we have shown. Such human "messengers" can, of course, sin.

* That there are evil, sinful beings upon whom all the negative aspects of life can be blamed is one of the most commonly held beliefs in paganism. In the same way that pagan ideas concerning Christmas have entered what passes for 'Christianity', so, too, have those pagan notions.

* There is only a handful of Biblical passages which can be misunderstood to support this idea of sinful angels now being in existence. These are considered in Section 5. Such passages cannot be allowed to contradict the wealth of Bible teaching to the contrary which has been presented.

Digression 2: Jude and the Book of Enoch

A rather more detailed argument – and yet a very powerful one – that Angels don't sin is actually provided by considering the passages in 2 Peter 2 and Jude which are used by some to prove that Angels sin. We have here what we meet many times in Holy Scripture – a series

of allusions to a contemporary, uninspired, popular piece of literature in order to show that it is in fact wrong. This point may easily be lost on us, reading as we do from our distance from the original context. It's been observed that there are "more than thirty" allusions to the popular first century BC 'Book of Enoch' in 2 Peter and Jude ⁽¹⁾. This book claimed that 200 Angels were expelled from Heaven and then married beautiful women on earth. Peter and Jude allude to it in order to show how wrong it is. In the table below are some of the allusions:

In the Book of Enoch, it is claimed that the righteous Angel Michael brings accusation against the 200 supposedly rebellious Angels But

Jude	Book of Enoch
"Enoch the Seventh from Adam prophesied" Jude 14	Enoch 60:8
"dry springs" Jude 12	Enoch 48:1,96:6 dried up fountains
"waterless clouds" Jude 12	Enoch 18:5,41:4–5,100:11–12
"reserved for blackest darkness" Jude 13	Enoch 21:3 "darkness shall be their dwelling" Enoch 46:6
"trees without fruit" Jude 12	Enoch 80:3
"plucked up" Jude 13	Enoch 83:4
"raging waves" Jude 12	Enoch 101:3–5
'See the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone and convict the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done'." (Jude 14–15)	"See the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone and convict the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done" (Enoch 1:9)
"reserved unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6)	Reserved unto the day of sorrow Enoch 45:2

Peter consciously contradicts this by stressing that "angels do *not* bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord" (2 Pet. 2:11), and Jude is even more specific by saying that this is true of Michael the Archangel (Jude 9). According to the Book of Enoch, the man Enoch judges the sinful Angels, but 2 Peter 3 warns that actually Angels will come with Lord Jesus in order to judge *men*. We can now understand why Peter claims that "bold and arrogant these men (the false teachers) are not afraid to slander celestial beings" (2 Pet. 2:10) – i.e. the Angels. The Book of Enoch slandered Angels by claiming 200 of them sinned. As Jude 8 puts it, the false teachers "reject authority and slander celestial beings". The idea that the 200 Angels had sexual encounters with enticing women was therefore a slander. We need to reflect on the implications of all this – for claiming that Angels sin is actually spoken of by Peter and Jude as if it is serious blasphemy. Those early Christians were returning to their earlier Jewish and Pagan beliefs, which according to 2 Pet. 2:22 is to be seen as a dog returning to its vomit. This is how serious the issue is.

It should be noted that the Book of Enoch and other such writings are frequently alluded to in the Apocalypse – again, to deconstruct them and show a first century readership the *real* meaning of the terms

used in the popular uninspired literature of the time. Thus the descriptions of the Heavenly “Son of man” in Enoch 47:3–7 are alluded to in the description of the Lord Jesus in Rev. 1:15–17⁽²⁾.

Notes

(1) Steven Cox, *The Angels that Sinned* (Hyderabad: Printland, 2000).

(2) This and many other such allusions are to be found tabulated in Hugh Schonfield, *The Original New Testament: Revelation* (London: Firethorn Press, 1985).

2-2 The Origin of Sin and Evil

Many believe that there is a being or monster called the Devil or Satan who is the originator of the problems which are in the world and in our own lives, and who is responsible for the sin which we commit. The Bible clearly teaches that God is all-powerful. We have seen in [Study 2-1](#) that the Angels cannot sin. If we truly believe these things, then it is impossible that there is any supernatural being at work in this universe that is opposed to Almighty God. If we believe that such a being does exist, then surely we are questioning the supremacy of God Almighty. Hence the importance of the matter. We are told in Heb. 2:14 that Jesus destroyed the Devil by His death; therefore unless we have a correct understanding of the Devil, we are likely to misunderstand the work and nature of Jesus.

Good and Evil

In the world generally, especially in the Christian world, there is the idea that the good things in life come from God and the bad things from the Devil or Satan. This is not a new idea; we saw in chapter 1 how the Persians believed there were two gods, a god of good and light (Ahura Mazda), and a god of evil and darkness (Ahriman), and that those two were locked in mortal combat (1). Cyrus, the great King of Persia, believed just this. Therefore God told him, “I am the Lord, and there is no other; there is no God besides me... I form the light, and create darkness, I make peace, and create calamity (‘evil’

KJV, 'disaster' NIV); I the Lord do all these things" (Is. 45:5-7,22). God creates peace and He creates evil, or disaster. In this sense there is a difference between evil and sin, which is man's fault; sin entered the world as a result of man, not God (Rom. 5:12). The Is. 45:5-7 passage is highly significant, in that it is one of the many allusions in Isaiah to creation. God created the light and darkness in Genesis 1; it was the same God who separated light from darkness. The fact God created literally all things means that any 'darkness' is ultimately from God and under His control. The record of creation in Genesis is framed to deconstruct popular views of evil, personal Satans, etc. For example, the sea was understood by the ancients as a source of radical, uncontrollable evil. Yet the Genesis record stresses that the sea was created by God, and He gathered it together and set bounds for it (Gen. 1:9; Job 26:10; 38:11). It was been observed that "The creation account of Genesis 1 is best understood as a piece of anti-mythological polemic" (2). And perhaps this is why it is alluded to so strongly by Isaiah, in his demonstration that there is no god of evil and god of darkness- there is only the one all-powerful God of Israel. Let's note that the Isaiah 45 passage occurs in a section of Isaiah full of reference back to the record of creation. God labelled *all* of His creation "very good", and that included both the darkness and the light (in contradistinction to the surrounding myths of creation). We don't read that the light was good and the darkness was evil. All that there was in the whole cosmos was initially "very good"- it was human sin, not any Satan figure, which spoilt that. Indeed, in relation to all of existence being "very good", it has been observed on linguistic grounds: "To pronounce them "good" is a value judgment that goes beyond physical description and attributes some intangible quality to created entities" (3).

God told Cyrus and the people of Babylon that "there is no (other) God besides me". The Hebrew word 'el' translated 'God' fundamentally means strength, or source of power. God was saying that there is no source of power in existence apart from Him. This is the reason why a true believer in God should not accept the idea of a supernatural Devil or demons. Indeed, it could be inferred from Is. 41:23 that what is unique about the one true God, Yahweh of Israel, is that He is responsible for

both good *and* evil. As today, false and mistaken religious systems suggest a good God or gods, and an evil one or demons. The idea of "good and evil" being created by God of course goes back to the simple statement in Gen. 2:9 that it was *God* who created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Likewise it is only the one true God of Israel who is Biblically revealed, e.g. in the experiences of Joseph, as having the ability to 'weave together' good and evil so that good is brought out of evil (Gen. 50:20 Heb.; AV "You thought evil against me, but God meant /weaved it together for / with good"). Only a God who ultimately creates both good and evil would have the ability to do this; and only He could offer to Israel and the nations a choice of good or evil from Him, according to their behaviour (Josh. 23:15). This was especially relevant in the context of Isaiah 45, which spoke of Judah's sufferings in Babylon. So often, God reminds them that He has the power to orchestrate both good and evil for them at that time: Jer. 21:10; 32:42; 39:16; 44:27; Lam. 3:38; Amos 9:4. The fact there was only one God who brought both good and evil is cited as encouragement and comfort for Israel, a reason to "fear not"- i.e. the supposed gods of evil. Job perceived all this, far more than most people do today, in his statement that we shall receive both good and evil from God's hand (Job 2:10). His understanding of this principle was sorely tested; for like so many, he looked to God expecting only good, and received evil (Job 30:26).

The Biblical record seems to very frequently seek to deconstruct popular ideas about sin and evil. One of the most widespread notions was the "evil eye", whereby it was believed that some people had an "evil eye" which could bring distress into the eyes of those upon whom they looked in jealousy or anger. This concept is alive and well in many areas to this day. The idea entered Judaism very strongly after the Babylonian captivity; the Babylonian Talmud is full of references to it. The sage Rav attributed many illnesses to the evil eye, and the Talmud even claimed that 99 out of 100 people died prematurely from this (Bava Metzia 107b). The Biblical deconstruction of this is through stressing that *God's* eye is all powerful in the destiny of His people (Dt. 11:12; Ps. 33:18); and that "an evil eye" refers to an *internal* attitude of mean spiritedness *within* people- e.g. an "evil eye" is understood as an ungenerous spirit in Dt. 15:9; Mt.

6:23; 20:15; or pure selfishness in Dt. 28:54,56; Prov. 23:6; 28:22. We must remember that the people of Biblical times understood an "evil eye" as an *external* ability to look at someone and bring curses upon them. But the Bible redefines an "evil eye" as a purely *internal* attitude; and cosmic evil, even if it were to exist, need hold no fear for us- seeing the eyes of the only true God are running around the earth *for* us and not against us (2 Chron. 16:9).

God: The Creator Of Disaster

The Bible abounds with examples of God bringing evil into people's lives and into this world. Am. 3:6 says that if there is calamity in a city, God has done it. If, for example, there is an earthquake in a city, it is often felt that 'the Devil' had designs on that city, and had brought about the calamity. But the true believer must understand that it is *God* who is responsible for this. Thus Mic. 1:12 says that "disaster came down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem", in fulfillment of God's own prediction that "Behold, I will bring evil upon this people" (Jer. 6:19). Sickness likewise is from God and not a personal Satan. "*The Lord* will bring upon you all the diseases of Egypt" (Dt. 28:60); "an evil spirit *from the Lord* troubled [Saul]" (1 Sam. 16:14); "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord?" (Ex. 4:11). In the book of Job we read how Job, a righteous man, lost the things which he had in this life. The book teaches that the experience of 'evil' in a person's life is not directly proportional to their obedience or disobedience to God. Job recognized that "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away" (Job 1:21). He does not say 'The Lord gave and Satan took away'. He commented to his wife: "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not (also) accept adversity?" (Job 2:10). At the end of the book, Job's friends comforted him over "all the adversity that *the Lord* had brought upon him" (Job 42:11 cp. 19:21; 8:4).

Thus God, who is in control of all things, uses wicked people to bring evil as a chastisement or punishment on His people. "For whom the Lord loves he chastens... If you endure chastening... afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:6-11). This shows that the trials which God gives us lead eventually to our spiritual growth.

It is setting the Word of God against itself to say that the Devil is a being which forces us to sin and be unrighteous, whilst at the same time he supposedly brings problems into our lives which lead to our developing “the peaceable fruit of righteousness”. The orthodox idea of the Devil runs into serious problems here. Especially serious for it are passages which speak of delivering a man to Satan “that his spirit may be saved”, or “that (they) may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20). If Satan is really a being bent on causing men to sin and having a negative spiritual effect upon people, why do these passages speak of ‘Satan’ in a positive light? The answer lies in the fact that an adversary, a “Satan” or difficulty in life, can often result in positive spiritual effects in a believer’s life.

If we accept that evil comes from God, then we can pray to God to do something about the problems which we have, e.g. to take them away. If He doesn’t, then we know that they are sent from God for our spiritual good. Now if we believe that there is some evil being called the Devil or Satan causing our problems, then there is no way of coming to terms with them. Disability, illness, sudden death or calamity have to be taken as just bad luck. If the Devil is some powerful, sinful angel, then he will be much more powerful than us, and we will have no choice but to suffer at his hand. By contrast, we are comforted that under God’s control, “all things work together for good” to the believers (Rom. 8:28). There is therefore no such thing as ‘luck’ in the life of a believer.

If we unflinchingly set our faces to get to the bottom of the question of where evil / disaster comes from in this world, and if we accept the Bible as the ultimate source of truth and God’s revelation to us, then we are left with the sober conclusion- that God is ultimately the cause of it. This is so hard for many to accept, and we saw in Chapter 1 how pagans and orthodox Christians alike have struggled and wriggled to get out of it. Basil the Great [so called] even wrote a book entitled *That God Is Not The Author Of Evil* (4). Such is the stubborn refusal to accept Biblical testimony, even amongst the so called ‘fathers’ of the wider Christian church. The idea that God could not possibly create evil arises from the view of Plato and other philosophers. They reasoned that if God is good, therefore He cannot

be the author of “evil”. This reflected a lack of acceptance of Bible teaching about God and evil. Plato taught that “we must think of God as perfectly good and therefore never the author of evil” (*Republic* 379-85; *Laws* 900-902; *Phaedo* 63c). The Bible teaching presented above clearly presents God as the ‘author of evil’ in a judicial sense. Once again, human philosophy goes seriously astray once it ceases to be underpinned by Bible teaching. And yet Christendom generally has exhibited a preference for the word of men rather than that of God- and thus the monstrous conception of a personal Satan has developed. A greater attention to the actual text of Scripture would’ve kept the influence of pagan philosophers well out of the development of Christendom’s doctrinal positions.

The Origin Of Sin

The theologian Edmund Hill also noted the significant absence of any cosmic Satan figure in Genesis. He described Genesis 1-11 as “a sin history... which goes on getting steadily worse and worse until God intervenes... to set the remedial salvation process going” (5). Sin is judged, sinful people are destroyed or punished (Cain, the people at Noah’s time, at the tower of Babel etc.), but never is there any hint that any Satan figure is the real cause of it, nor is there any reference to his punishment. The Old Testament never presents sin as some kind of virus which enters us from outside, or from ‘Satan’. The Greek and Hebrew words for sin [*hamartia* and *hata*] have the primary meaning of missing a mark. Jud. 20:16 speaks of slingers who could shoot a stone “and not miss” (RSV)- but the Hebrew word could just as well be translated “and not sin”. Sin is a missing of the mark as a result of human failure- as simple as that. There is no implication that an external figure is present somehow guiding man to miss that mark. The metaphor of missing the mark is continued in modern English- think of English words with the prefix ‘mis-’, e.g. misconduct, misbehaviour, mischief. The bad slinger misses the mark because he aimed at the wrong one; misplaced aims and ideals is our problem, lack of spiritual discernment or wisdom- not the influence of some external being that causes our good shot to waver from the true course. The extraordinary value attached to the individual within Bible teaching surely reflects the significance of individual human

action. Sin is significant, as is individual obedience; but this would surely not be the case if there is some 'other' factor in human sin which is too powerful for us to resist. Group consciousness was so strong in Biblical times that there was very little sense of individual personal value or the significance of individual thoughts; but these are the very things which the Bible presents as of eternal moment. Thus Jer. 31:29 and all of Ez. 18 labour the point that individuals die because of their personal sins and not as judgment upon them for their association with a sinful community.

It must be stressed that sin comes from inside us. It is our fault that we sin. Of course, it would be nice to believe that it was not our fault that we sin. We could freely sin and then excuse ourselves with the thought that it was really the Devil's fault, and that the blame for our sin should be completely laid upon him. It is not uncommon that in cases of grossly wicked behaviour, the guilty person has begged for mercy because he says that he was possessed by the Devil at the time and was therefore not responsible for himself. But, quite rightly, such feeble excuses are judged to hold no water at all, and the person has sentence passed upon him.

We need to remember that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23); sin leads to death. If it is not our fault that we sin, but that of the Devil, then a just God ought to punish the Devil rather than us. But the fact that we are judged for our own sins shows that we are responsible for our sins. "There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him...For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders... pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man" (Mk. 7:15-23). The idea that there is something sinful outside of us which enters us and causes us to sin is incompatible with the plain teaching of Jesus here. From within, out of the heart of man, come all these evil things. This is why, at the time of the flood, God considered that "the imagination [Heb. 'impulse'] of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21).

James 1:14 tells us how we are tempted: "Each one (it is the same process for each human being) is tempted, when he is

drawn away by *his own* desires and enticed". We are tempted by *our own* evil desires; not by anything outside of us. "Where do wars and fights come from among you?", James asks; "Do they not come from your desires for pleasure?" (James 4:1). Each of us has specific, personal temptations. They therefore have to be generated by our own evil desires, because they are personal to us. Truly we are our own worst enemies. Ps. 4:5 locates the key to overcoming sin as being within the human mind: "Sin not-commune with your own heart". James 1:13-15 uses a family analogy- a man and "his own lust" beget a child, called sin; and sin, in due time, gives birth to death. Strange, surely, how James makes no mention of a personal Devil or demons as having any part at all to play in this process. It's quite possible that James' language is alluding to a classic example of the thought-lust-temptation-sin-death process which we have in the record of Achan in Josh. 7:20,21: "I *saw* two hundred shekels of silver, I *coveted* them, and *took* them... I *sinned*"- and so he was executed.

The book of Romans is largely concerned with sin, its origin, and how to overcome it. It is highly significant that there is no mention of the Devil and just one of Satan in the book; in the context of speaking about the origin of sin, Paul does not mention the Devil or Satan at all. In fact, [Digression 2](#) explains how Romans is actually a case of Paul deconstructing the popular ideas about the Devil. Paul's silence about the Devil in the Romans passages which speak of sin's origin has been commented upon by others: "Paul never goes beyond the realm of history, nor does he speculate on man's origins or on the mythic-cosmic reasons for his fallen state, be they the devil or fate. Instead he keeps to Adam's sin, the characteristic sin of all men, that is to say, man's desire to assert his own will against God, the desire that brought Adam under the curse of death. Thus [for Paul] man's will is the cause of sin" (6).

If there is an external being who makes us sin, surely he would have been mentioned extensively in the Old Testament? But there is a very profound and significant silence about this. The record of the Judges period, or Israel in the wilderness, show that at those times Israel were sinning a great deal. But God did not warn them about some powerful supernatural being or force

which could enter them and make them sin. Instead, He encouraged them to apply themselves to His word, so that they would not fall away to the ways of their own flesh (e.g. Dt. 27:9,10; Josh. 22:5). Num. 15:39 is especially clear about our innate sinful tendencies: "Do not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to go after wantonly" (Heschel's translation). In some Orthodox Jewish liturgies, this verse is to be repeated twice each day. And so it should be by us all. For this is the heart of the matter, the essence of the believer's struggle against sin within. The book of Ecclesiastes addresses the problem of life's unfairness and the essential suffering of every person, rich or poor- and again, the words Satan, Devil, fallen Angel, Lucifer etc. simply don't occur there.

Paul laments: "nothing good dwells in me – my unspiritual self, I mean - ... for though the will to do good is there, the ability to effect it is not... if what I do is against my will, clearly it is no longer I who am the agent, but sin that has its dwelling in me" (Rom. 7:18-21 REB). Now he does not blame his sin on an external being called the Devil. He located his own evil nature as the real source of sin: it is not I that do it, "but sin that has its dwelling in me. I discover this principle, then; that when I want to do right, only wrong is within my reach." So he says that the opposition to being spiritual comes from something that he calls "sin... dwelling in me". Sin is "the way of [man's] heart" (Is. 57:17). Every thoughtful, spiritually minded person will come to the same kind of self-knowledge. It should be noted that even a supreme Christian like Paul did not experience a change of nature after conversion, nor was he placed in a position whereby he did not and could not sin. David, another undoubtedly righteous man, likewise commented upon the pervasive nature of sin: "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5).

The Bible is quite explicit about the sinful tendencies within man. If this is appreciated, there is no need to invent an imaginary person outside our human natures who is responsible for our sins. Jer. 17:9 says that the heart of man is so desperately wicked and deceitful that we cannot actually appreciate the gross extent of its sinfulness. Ecc. 9:3 could not be plainer: "The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil". Eph. 4:18 gives the

reason for man's alienation from God as being "because of the ignorance that is *within* them, because of the hardening of their heart". It is because of our spiritually blind and ignorant hearts, our way of thinking that is within us, that we are distanced from God. In line with this, Gal. 5:19 speaks of our sins as "the works of the flesh"; it is our own flesh ("unspiritual nature", R.E.B.), which causes us to commit sin. None of these passages explain the origin of sin within us as being because the Devil put it there; sinful tendencies are something which we all naturally have from birth; it is a fundamental part of the human make-up.

And yet although the heart is indeed a source of wickedness, we must seek to control it. Quite simply, "Depart from evil and do good" (Ps. 34:15). We cannot blame our moral failures on the perversity of our nature. "A heart that devises wicked plans" is something God hates to see in men (Prov. 6:18). A reprobate Israel excused themselves by saying: "That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart" (Jer. 18:12). The heart is a source of human evil, we are reminded in this very context (Jer. 17:9). But sin lies in assuming that therefore we have no need to strive for self-mastery, and that the weakness of our heart will excuse our committing of sin. We must recognize and even analyze the weakness of our natures [as this chapter seeks to] and in the strength of that knowledge, seek to do something to limit them. "Keep your heart with all diligence [Heb. 'above anything else'], for out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Ananias could control whether or not 'Satan' filled his heart, and was condemned for not doing so (Acts 5:3). If we think that a being called 'Satan' irresistibly influences us to sin, filling us with the desire to sin against our will, then we are making the same fatal mistake as Israel and Ananias.

Orthodox Judaism calls our sinful inclination the *yetzer ha'ra*. But God isn't unaware of it. In fact He's intensely aware of it. "For He knows our *yetzer* / inclination, He remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14). And in His perfect way, He made a way of escape through His Son having that same nature, those same sinful inclinations; and yet He never sinned. And the representative nature of His sacrifice opens the way for us to

identify with Him through baptism into His death, so that we might share in His eternal life.

Practical Observation

Sin occurs as a major theme in Paul's writings- not just in Romans, where he speaks so much about sin without hinting that a supernatural 'Satan' figure is involved with it. He sees sin as playing an almost positive, creative role in the formation of the true Christian, both individually and in terms of salvation history. He speaks of how the Mosaic law was given to us to highlight the power of sin; but through this it leads us to Christ, through our desperation and failure to obey, "that (Gk. *hina*, a purpose clause) we might be righteous by faith" (Gal. 3:24-26). The curses for disobedience were "*in order that* (Gk. *hina*) the blessing of Abraham would come upon the Gentiles" (Gal. 3:10-14); "the Scripture consigned all things to sin, *in order that* (Gk. *hina*) what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who have faith" (Gal. 3:22). Note that it was the Law, "the Scripture", which consigned things to sin- not a personal Satan. My point is that sin was used by God, *hina*, 'in order that', there would be an ultimately positive spiritual outcome. Indeed this appears to be the genius of God, to work through human failure to His glory. This view of sin, which any mature believer will surely concur with from his or her life experience, is impossible to square with the ideas of dualism, whereby God and 'sin' are radically opposed, fighting a pitched battle ranging between Heaven and earth, with no common ground. No- God is truly Almighty in every sense, and this includes His power over sin. The life, death and resurrection of His Son were His way of dealing with it- to His glory.

I have sought to share Bible teaching that sin comes from within the human mind and therefore we are responsible for our sin. Yet these conclusions surely coincide with our experience and observations of human life. Freud analyzed our great capacity for self-deception; Marx clearly saw how the whole world is structured around human self-interest and the micro and macro level decisions which our innate selfishness dictate. And it is these which sculpture life and the world as we know it. These observations of Freud and Marx are correct, even if their

extrapolations from them are wrong. And surely our own experience confirms that this is indeed how things are in this world and in our own lives; and this is exactly what the Bible teaches. Yet we also seek, madly, to justify ourselves, just as strongly as we are able to deceive ourselves. We don't like to admit that inhumanity, e.g. the horrors of Nazi or Stalinist death camps, could really come from the very human nature which we also share; we struggle with inhumanity being part of our humanity, exactly because we share that same humanity. We possess a "tendency to identify evil pure and simple with the Other, and good with ourselves" (7). The Bible's teaching is quite clear- sin comes from within us, we are not wholly evil and yet we are not thoroughly "good" either. Even the Lord Jesus Himself objected to being called "good" in that sense- for He too was human (Mk. 10:18). The true picture of our humanity, human nature, is more complex than simply saying 'We are good' or 'We are evil'. I submit the Biblical explanation of ourselves as outlined above is the only accurate and workable one. Truly, "To see the serpent as the representative of a power of evil, a personal devil from beyond this world, does nothing to solve the problem of the origins of evil; it merely pushes the problem one stage further back" (8).

Let me repeat again- yet again: the call to separate from sin *within us* is writ large on every page of Scripture. The real battle, the struggle at its most essential level, is within the human mind, and not between us and some evil entity in Heaven or out in the ether. The fundamental separation between light and darkness which began at creation is to be lived out in every human mind. It's the failure to do this which leads to so much human grief. Holocaust survivor Abraham Heschel gets to the nub of the matter: "The ego is a powerful rival of the good... the tragedies in human history, the cruelties and fanaticisms, have not been caused by the criminals but by the good people... who did not understand the strange mixture of self-interest and ideals which is compounded in all human motives. The great contest is not between God-fearing believers and unrighteous believers... the fate of mankind depends upon the realization that the distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, is superior to all other distinctions... to teach humanity the primacy of that distinction is of the essence to the Biblical message" (9). The

things of which we're writing couldn't be more important. This fundamental separation between good and evil, right and wrong, spirit and flesh, has to be made within our minds. The idea of an external Satan figure fudges the issue. For true religion, correct Christianity, is all about our very personal being and transformation. The evil we see in the world, the crass evil that repulses us and provokes our outrage, is in essence what's going on within us. We are not so divided from it as we may like to think. As Heschel again profoundly put it: "Evil is indivisible. It is the same in thought and in speech, in private and in social life" (10). The hard thought is of the same essence as the hard word- as the Lord Jesus so strongly emphasized throughout His Sermon on the Mount. The thought is as the act. And likewise the murder of millions is part and parcel with the quiet thought or act of unkindness. We can press this yet further: if evil is indeed indivisible, then we must be aware that it can even surface within religion. I refer not simply to all the evil done in the name of religion, Christian, Moslem or otherwise. More piercingly I ask us as 'religious' people to realize that flesh and spirit likewise mix within us, right within our hearts, when we formulate our beliefs, act upon them, seek to interpret the Bible, do acts of kindness etc. Our motives are so often impure and tangled; and only before the higher and ultimate authority of God's word can we untangle them.

Sin And Evil

I have drawn a distinction between moral evil, i.e. human sin, and 'evil' in the sense of disaster, which is ultimately allowed and even created by God. The terms 'sin' and 'evil' are often used interchangeably and the distinction which I've drawn needs to be recognized- for I believe it is clearly taught in the Bible. This division, which is so clear in the Bible, is not so clear in most other religions. "Most ancient religions traced even moral evil to the matter of the physical creation" (11), i.e. there was the assumption that the very fabric of the world is somehow physically tainted if not 'evil' as a result of the 'fall events' at the 'beginning'. The Bible emphasizes that God created the world "very good", "the earth is the Lord's", and God so loved the world that He gave His Son to die for our redemption. The Bible likewise teaches that sin is always the result of the human will-

it is never blamed upon something material. Nothing from outside a person can enter them and defile them, the Lord Jesus taught (Mk. 7:15-23). He certainly didn't teach that we can blame sin on 'Satan'. Insistently, He urges that the human heart, the lustful thought, the destructive impulses of anger, are what lead to sin in practice (Mt. 5:22,28). The apparently small surrenders made to sin within the human heart are what lead to evil actions; the teaching of Jesus is really very clear about this. Whilst the natural creation is in a fallen state as the result of human sin, it is not evil in itself, and human sin cannot be blamed upon its influence. It's surprising how many religions, in seeking to explain sin and evil, fail to make this distinction- as they seek to minimize human sin and by doing so sidestep the fundamental focus of God's demand- to change the way that we think to His way.

Notes

- (1) Well documented in Edwin M. Yamachi, *Persia And The Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) p. 438 ff.
- (2) John McKenzie, *Second Isaiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1968) p. LIX.
- (3) David Levin, *The Creation Text* (Livonia, MI: The Christadelphian Tidings, 2011) p. 84.
- (4) Quoted at length in J. Martin Evans, *"Paradise Lost" And The Genesis Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) p. 88.
- (5) Edmund Hill, *Being Human* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984) p. 21.
- (6) Günther Bornkamm, *Paul* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975) p. 124.
- (7) Tzvetan Todorov, in Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower* (New York: Schocken Books, 1998 ed.) p. 266.
- (8) Mark Robertson, *The Legacy Of Eden: The Meaning Of The Fall In Human Life* (Grimsby: Endeavour, 2002) p. 15.

(9) Abraham Heschel, *Between God And Man: A Philosophy Of Judaism* (London: The Free Press, 1975) pp. 192,193.

(10) *Ibid* p. 257.

(11) G.P. Gilmour, *The Memoirs Called Gospels* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1959) p. 115.

Digression 3: Romans and the *Wisdom of Solomon*

Seeing Romans 1-8 is Paul's inspired exposition of the nature of sin and the Gospel, it's surely surprising that he makes no mention of the words Satan or Devil, let alone 'fallen Angel'. He lays the blame for sin quite clearly upon us and our weakness in the face of internal temptation. And Paul speaks of the Genesis account of the fall of Adam and Eve as if he accepted it just as it is written – he makes no attempt to say that the serpent was a Lucifer or fallen Angel. In fact, closer analysis shows that Paul is consciously rebutting the contemporary Jewish ideas about these things as found in *The Wisdom of Solomon* and other writings. We must remember that in the first century, there was no canonized list of books comprising the "Old Testament" as we now know it. There was therefore a great need to deconstruct the uninspired Jewish writings which were then circulating – hence the many allusions to them in the inspired New Testament writings, in order to help the Jewish believers understand that these writings were uninspired and to be rejected.

The flood of apostate Jewish literature in the first century and just before it all have much to say about Adam's sin (e.g. the *Apocalypse of Baruch* and *Apocalypse of Abraham*), and I submit that Paul writes of Adam's sin in order to deconstruct these wrong interpretations. Wisdom 2:24 claimed: "Through the Devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it". This is actually the first reference to the idea that a being called 'the Devil' envied Adam and Eve and therefore this brought about their temptation and fall. Paul rebuts this by saying that "By one man [Adam – not 'the Devil'] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). This is evidently an allusion by Paul to this wrong idea – and he corrects it. The allusion becomes all the more legitimate when we appreciate that actually Paul is alluding to the *Wisdom of Solomon* throughout his letter to the Romans. This book glorified the Jewish people, making them out to be righteous, blaming sin on the Devil and the Gentiles. By way of allusion to it, Paul shows how the Jews are de-emphasizing sin, not facing up to the fact that all of humanity are under the curse of sin and death, and all therefore need salvation in

Christ. This same basic emphasis upon personal responsibility, not blaming others for our sins, not seeing ourselves as pure and everyone else as the problem, is just as relevant today – surrounded as we are by false theologies that make us out to be basically pure, shifting all blame onto a 'Devil' of their own fabrication. It should be noted that this way of alluding to contemporary writings and correcting them is common throughout Scripture – I've elsewhere given

Allusions From Paul's Letter to The Romans to The Wisdom of Solomon

The Wisdom of Solomon	Romans	Comment
Wisdom 4:5 The imperfect branches shall be broken off, their fruit unprofitable, not ripe to eat, yea, meet for nothing [concerning the Gentiles and those in Israel who sinned].	Romans w11:17–20	Israel as an entire nation were the broken off branches; Gentile believers through faith in Christ could become ingrafted branches.
Wisdom 1:13 For God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living.	Romans 1:32; Romans 5,7	Death is “the judgment of God” – death does come from God. It doesn't come from “the Devil”. It was God in Genesis who ‘made’ death. Death comes from our sin, that's Paul's repeated message – death isn't something made by the ‘Devil’ just for the wicked.
Wisdom 1:14 For he created all things, that they might have their being: and the generations of the world were healthful; and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor the kingdom of death upon the earth: [in the context of the earth / land of Israel]	Romans 1,5,7	Paul makes many allusions to these words. He shows that all humanity, including Israel, the dwellers upon the earth / land of Israel, are subject to sin and death. Paul argues against the position that God made man good but the Devil messed things up – rather does he place the blame upon individual human sin.
Wisdom 8:20 I was a witty child, and had a good spirit. Yea rather, being good, I came into a body undefiled.	Romans 3,7	As a result of Adam's sin, our bodies aren't “undefiled” – we will die, we are born with death sentences in us. “There is none good” (Rom. 3:12); “in my flesh dwells no good thing” (Rom. 7:18)
Wisdom 10:15 She delivered the righteous people and blameless seed from the nation that oppressed them.	Romans 9–11	Israel were <i>not</i> blameless; “there is none righteous, not one” (Rom. 3:10).

Wisdom 12:10 But executing thy judgments upon them by little and little, thou gavest them place of repentance	Romans 2:4	“ Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). Paul’s argument is that it is God’s grace in not immediately punishing us as we deserve which should lead us to repentance.
Wisdom 12 raves against the Canaanite nations in the land, saying how wicked they were and stressing Israel’s righteousness – e.g. Wisdom 12:11 For it was a cursed seed from the beginning; neither didst thou for fear of any man give them pardon for those things wherein they sinned.	Romans 1,2,9–11	Paul uses the very same language about the wickedness of Israel
Wisdom 12:12 For who shall say, What hast thou done? or who shall withstand thy judgment? or who shall accuse thee for the nations that perish, whom thou made? or who shall come to stand against thee, to be revenged for the unrighteous men?	Romans 8:30–39; 9:19	<i>Wisdom</i> marvels at how God judged the wicked Canaanites. But Paul reapplies this language to marvel at God’s mercy in saving the faithful remnant of Israel by grace. Paul’s answer to “Who shall accuse thee [Israel]?” is that only those in Christ have now no accuser (Rom. 8:34).
Wisdom 12:13 uses the phrase “condemned at the day of the righteous judgment of God” about the condemnation of the Canaanite tribes.	Romans 2:5	Paul stresses that <i>Israel</i> will be condemned at the “day of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5)

<p>Wisdom 12:22 Therefore, whereas thou dost chasten us, thou scourgest our enemies a thousand times more, to the intent that, when we judge, we should carefully think of thy goodness, and when we ourselves are judged, we should look for mercy.</p>	<p>Romans 2:1–4; 11:28; 14:4</p>	<p>Paul says that Israel are the “enemies” (Rom. 11:28); and that judging is outlawed for those who are themselves sinners. Paul’s case is that we receive mercy at the judgment because we have shown mercy rather than judgment to others.</p>
<p>Wisdom 13:1 Surely vain are all men by nature, who are ignorant of God, and could not out of the good things that are seen know him that is.</p>	<p>Romans 1,10</p>	<p><i>Wisdom’s</i> implication is that the Gentiles are vain by nature, but Israel aren’t, because they aren’t ignorant of God, and see Him reflected in the “good things” of His creation. Paul contradicts this. He says that <i>all</i> humanity is “vain... by nature”; Israel are “ignorant of God” (Rom. 10:3); and it is believers in Christ who perceive God from the things which He has made. Indeed, it is Israel who are now “without excuse” because they refuse to see “the goodness of God” [cp. “good things”] in the things which He has created (Rom. 1:20–30).</p>
<p>Wisdom 12:26 But they that would not be reformed by that correction, wherein he dallied with them, shall feel a judgment worthy of God.</p>	<p>Romans 1</p>	<p>It is <i>Israel</i> and all who continue in sin who are worthy of judgment (Rom. 1:32). It was <i>Israel</i> who changed the true God into what they claimed to be gods (Rom. 1:20–26).</p>
<p>Wisdom 12:27 For, look, for what things they grudged, when they were punished, that is, for them whom they thought to be gods; now being punished in them, when they saw it, they acknowledged him to be the true God, whom before they denied to know: and therefore came extreme damnation upon them.</p>		

<p>Wisdom 13:5–8: For by the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionably the maker of them is seen. But yet for this they are the less to be blamed: for they peradventure err, seeking God, and desirous to find him. For being conversant in his works they search him diligently, and believe their sight: because the things are beautiful that are seen. Howbeit neither are they to be pardoned.</p>	<p>Romans 1,2</p>	<p>It is Gentile Christians who 'found' God (Rom. 10:20). It was they who were led by the beauty of God's creation to be obedient to Him in truth (Rom. 2:14,15). It was Israel who failed to 'clearly see' the truth of God from the things which He created (Rom. 1:20).</p>
<p>Wisdom 14:8 But that which is made with hands is cursed, as well it, as he that made it: he, because he made it; and it, because, being corruptible, it was called god.</p>	<p>Romans 1:23</p>	<p>It was Israel who changed the glory of the true God into images made by their hands and called them gods (Rom. 1:23)</p>
<p>Wisdom 14:9 For the ungodly and his ungodliness are both alike hateful unto God.</p>	<p>Romans 4:5; 5:6</p>	<p>Paul argues that Christ died for the ungodly before they knew Him (Rom. 5:6); God justifies the ungodly not by their works but by their faith (Rom. 4:5)</p>
<p>Wisdom 14:31 For it is not the power of them by whom they swear: but it is the just vengeance of sinners, that punisheth always the offence of the ungodly.</p>	<p>Romans 5</p>	<p>Paul argues that the offence of man is met by God's grace in Christ, and not dealt with by God through taking out vengeance against sinners. It was the "offence" of Adam which was used by God's grace to forge a path to human salvation (Rom. 5:15–20). As "the offence" abounded, so therefore did God's grace (Rom. 5:20).</p>

<p>Wisdom 15:2 For if we [Israel] sin, we are thine, knowing thy power: but we will not sin, knowing that we are counted thine.</p>	<p>Romans 3</p>	<p>Paul argues that we <i>all</i> sin – it’s not a case of ‘we don’t sin, because we are God’s people’ (Rom. 3:23). And knowledge isn’t the basis for immortality, rather this is the gift of God by grace (Rom. 6:23). Paul leaves us in no doubt that there’s no question of “<i>if</i> we sin”; for we are all desperate sinners, Jew and Gentile alike (Rom. 3:23). And our sin really does separate us from God and from His Son; we are “none of His” if we sin (Rom. 8:9 – cp. “we are thine”). We are not automatically “His... even if we sin”. Paul speaks of how both Jew and Gentile are equally under sin; whereas <i>Wisdom</i> claims that there’s a difference: “While therefore thou dost chasten us, thou scourgest our enemies [i.e. the Gentiles] ten thousand times more” (12:22).</p>
<p>Wisdom 15:3 For to know thee is perfect righteousness: yea, to know thy power is the root of immortality.</p>		
<p>Wisdom 15:7 For the potter, tempering soft earth, fashioneth every vessel with much labour for our service: yea, of the same clay he maketh both the vessels that serve for clean uses, and likewise also all such as serve to the contrary: but what is the use of either sort, the potter himself is the judge.</p>	<p>Romans 9:21–30</p>	<p><i>Wisdom</i> mocks the potter for making idols – Paul shows that God is the potter and Israel the clay, and they will be discarded like an idol. For they became like that which they worshipped. Paul uses the same language as <i>Wisdom</i> here – he speaks of how the Divine potter uses “the same clay to make different types of vessels.</p>
<p>Wisdom 15 often laments that the Gentiles worship the created more than the creator</p>	<p>Romans 1 and 2</p>	<p>Romans 1 and 2 make the point, using this same language, that Israel as well as the Gentiles are guilty of worshipping the created more than creator</p>

Wisdom 18:8 For wherewith thou didst punish our adversaries, by the same thou didst glorify us, whom thou hadst called.	cp. Romans 8:30	The “us” who have been “called” and are to be “glorified” are those in Christ – not those merely born Jews.
Wisdom 18:13 For whereas they would not believe anything by reason of the enchantments; upon the destruction of the firstborn, they acknowledged this people to be the sons of God.	cp. Romans 8:14	The true “sons of God” are those in Christ, the Son of God; for not those who merely call themselves “Israel” are the children of God, as <i>Wisdom</i> wrongly argues (Rom. 9:6)
As for the ungodly, wrath came upon them without mercy unto the end: for he knew before what they would do... For the destiny, whereof they were worthy, drew them unto this end, and made them forget the things that had already happened, that they might fulfil the punishment which was wanting to their torments” (Wisdom 19:1,4)		What <i>Wisdom</i> says about the Gentile world and Egypt, Paul applies to Israel in their sinfulness. And he stresses many times that the result of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), not “torments” in the way the Jews understood them. “Wrath... without mercy” is a phrase Paul uses about the coming condemnation of those Jews who refused to accept Christ (Rom. 1:18; 2:5,8). Paul uses the idea of foreknowledge which occurs here in <i>Wisdom</i> , but uses it in Romans 9 and 11 to show that foreknowledge is part of the grace of God’s predestination of His true people to salvation. It is the Jews who reject Christ who are “worthy” of death (Rom. 1:32) – not the Gentile world. No wonder the Jews so hated Paul!

examples of where Jude and Peter do this in relation to the Book of Enoch, and how Genesis 1–3 does this with the views of creation and origins which were common at the time the book of Genesis was compiled.

Wisdom of Solomon 13–14 criticizes the Gentiles for idolatry and sexual immorality. And Paul criticizes the Gentiles for just the same things in Rom. 1:19–27 – in language which clearly alludes to the

Wisdom of Solomon. It's as if Paul is reviewing the Wisdom of Solomon and placing a tick by what is right (e.g., that Gentiles are indeed guilty of idolatry and immorality), and a cross by what is wrong in the book. E.P. Sanders has observed: "Romans 1:18–32 is very close to the Wisdom of Solomon, a Jewish book written in Egypt. Paul's reference to 'images representing... birds, animals or reptiles' (Rom. 1:23) points to... Egypt. Birds, animals and reptiles were idolized in Egypt, but not commonly in the rest of the Graeco-Roman world" ⁽¹⁾. The point of the reference to these things would therefore simply be because Paul is alluding to, almost quoting, the Wisdom of Solomon.

Paul's Other Allusions to the Wisdom of Solomon

Having spoken of how "the destroyer" destroyed the Egyptian firstborn, Wisdom 18 goes on to speak of how this same "destroyer" tried to kill Israel in the wilderness, but the evil "destroyer" was stopped by Moses: "For then the blameless man made haste, and stood forth to defend them; and bringing the shield of his proper ministry, even prayer, and the propitiation of incense, set himself against the wrath, and so brought the calamity to an end, declaring that he was thy servant. So he overcame the destroyer, not with strength of body, nor force of arms, but with a word subdued him that punished, alleging the oaths and covenants made with the fathers (Wisdom 18:21,22). Paul in 1 Cor. 10 alludes to this – showing that "the destroyer" was sent by God to punish Israel's sins. The author of Wisdom speaks as if "the destroyer" is some evil being victimizing Israel – and Paul appears to correct that, showing that it was the same "Destroyer" Angel who protected Israel in Egypt who later slew the wicked amongst them. Wisdom 19 makes out that all sins of Israel in the wilderness were committed by Gentiles travelling with them – but Paul's account of Israel's history in 1 Cor. 10 makes it clear that *Israel* sinned and were punished.

It should be noted in passing that 1 Cor. 10:1–4 also alludes to the Jewish legend that the rock which gave water in Num. 21:16–18 somehow followed along behind the people of Israel in the wilderness to provide them with water. Paul is not at all shy to allude to or quote Jewish legends, regardless of their factual truth, in order to make a point [as well as to deconstruct them]. God Himself is not so primitive as to seek to 'cover Himself' as it were by only alluding to true factual history in His word; He so wishes dialogue with people that He appears quite happy for His word to refer to their mistaken ideas, in order to enter into dialogue and engagement with them in terms which

they are comfortable with. Another example of allusion to Jewish legend is in Rev. 2:17, where the Lord Jesus speaks of giving His people “of the hidden manna” – referring to the myth that Jeremiah had hidden a golden jar of manna in the Holy of Holies at the destruction of the temple in 586 BC, which then ascended to Heaven and is to return with Messiah. Jesus doesn’t correct that myth – He as it were runs with it and uses it as a symbol to describe the reward He will bring. He adds no footnote to the effect ‘Now do understand, this is myth, that jar never really ascended to Heaven nor will it come floating back through the skies one day’. Perhaps this is why the New Testament often quotes the Septuagint text, even where it incorrectly renders the Hebrew original – because God is not so paranoid as to feel bound to only deal in the language of strictly literal truths. If first century people were familiar with the Septuagint, even if it is a poor translation of the Hebrew original in places – well OK, God was willing to run with that *in order to engage with people in their language*. And this approach is very helpful in seeking to understand some of the Biblical references to incorrect ideas about Satan and demons – but more of this in chapters 4 and 5.

It seems to me that Paul’s allusion to wrong Jewish ideas in order to deconstruct them is actually a hallmark of his inspired writing. Ecclesiasticus is another such Jewish writing which he targets in Romans; Rom. 4:1–8 labours the point that Abraham was declared righteous by faith and not by the Law, which was given after Abraham’s time; the covenant promises to Abraham were an expression of grace, and the ‘work’ of circumcision was done *after* receiving them. All this appears to be in purposeful allusion to the words of Eccles. 44:21: “Abraham kept the law of the Most High, and was taken into covenant with Him”.

Note

(1) E.P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1996) p. 113.

Digression 4 The Intention and Context of Genesis 1–3

Moses' Intention In Genesis

Let’s remember that under inspiration, Moses wrote Genesis, presumably during the 40 years wandering. He therefore wrote it in a context- of explaining things to Israel as they stumbled through that wilderness, wondering who they were, where they

came from, where they were headed- and which of the myths about 'beginnings' they heard from the surrounding peoples were in fact true. The Israelites, for example, encountered the Kenites [Heb. *Qeni*], a wandering, nomadic tribe whom nobody wanted much to do with as they were perceived to be cursed (Gen. 15:19; Num. 24:21,22). Gen. 4 explains *why* they were like this- they were the descendants of Cain [Heb. *Qayin*], who was punished with an unsettled existence because of his sin. Having recently left Egypt, the Israelites had been exposed for 400 years to the idea that Ra, the sun God of Egypt, was ruling the world. But Gen. 1:16 teaches that *the God of Israel* created the sun, the sun was not uncreate as the Israelites had been taught, and he ruled by God's fiat and allowance. Even if people wanted to believe in a sun God who ruled- the point being made was that the God of Israel was far above that sun god, had created the sun, and given it power to 'rule'. The Son of God seems to have in essence employed a similar approach in dealing with belief in demons at His time.

This approach explains why there are so many links within the Pentateuch- e.g. the Spirit “flutters” over the waters in Gen. 1:2, just as God like an eagle [a symbol of the Spirit] “flutters” over Israel in bringing about their creation as a nation (Dt. 32:1). The point is, what God did at creation, He can do at any time. As He made the waters “swarm” in Gen. 1:20, so He made the waters of the Nile “swarm” with frogs (Ex. 7:28) in order to save His people from a no-hope, chaotic, disordered, hopeless situation. The lights were to be for signs, for fixed times (seasons AV), for days and for years. The Hebrew word for ‘seasons’ doesn't refer to the climate or the weather. It is the word used for the religious festivals which God commanded Israel in the wilderness - therefore the creation record was in the context of Israel understanding that the lights in Heaven are there for Israel to know when to keep the feasts which Moses had commanded them. The command to subject the animals in Eden [the land promised to Abraham?] corresponds to later commands to subject the tribes living in the land (Gen. 1:28 = Num. 32:22,29; Josh. 18:1). The “fear and dread” of humans which fell on the animals after the flood is clearly linkable with the “fear and dread” which was to come upon the inhabitants of Canaan due to the Israelites (Gen. 9:2 = Dt. 1:21; 3:8; 11:25). When Moses

“finished the work” of the tabernacle (Ex. 40:33), there is clear allusion to God ‘finishing the work’ of creation (Gen. 2:2). As God walked in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8), so He would walk in the midst of the camp of Israel in the wilderness (Dt. 23:15). The whole phrase “Behold I have given you...” (Gen. 1:28) occurs later when the Priests are told what God has given them (Ex. 31:6; Lev. 6:10; Num. 18:8,21; Dt. 11:14). The reference to Cain as the builder of cities in Canaan (Gen. 4:17) was to pave the way for Moses’ later commands to Israel to destroy those cities. Moses records the braggart song of Lamech, uttered in the presence of his wives, as a warning as to what had happened as civilization developed in the very same area that Israel were now to colonize and build a society within- the warning being that as any society develops, there arises increased temptation to demand retribution for the slightest offence, and to assert oneself rather than trust in God (Gen. 4:17-26). And obviously the sanctification of the 7th day was based upon God’s ‘resting’ on the 7th day in the Genesis record. The later command not to covet what looks good is very much rooted in a warning not to commit Eve’s sin of seeing the fruit and yielding to temptation (Ex. 20:17 = Gen. 3:6).

The repeated references to the “journeys” of the people in the wilderness had as their basis the description of Abraham taking his journey through the desert to the promised land (Gen. 13:3); the very same two Hebrew words in italics recur in the command to Israel to now ‘take their journey’ (Dt. 10:11), following in the steps of their father Abraham. As Abraham was commanded to “be perfect” (Gen. 17:1), so Israel were told: “*You* [after the pattern of father Abraham] shall be perfect with the Lord” (Dt. 19:13). Moses’ books were helping the wilderness generation to see where they were coming from historically. Passages like Gen. 12:6 now take on special relevance: “The Canaanites were then in the land”. Moses was saying this as his people were about to enter a Canaan likewise occupied by Canaanites. He was bidding the people see their connection with their father Abraham, who then lived with Canaanites also in the same land. Gen. 15:1 introduces us to Abraham as a man who had God as his “shield”; and Dt. 33:29 concludes the Pentateuch by saying that Israel as a nation should be happy because *they* have Yahweh as their “shield”.

The Flood

The flood myths give basically two reasons for the cause of the flood- the world was overpopulating [especially according to the *Enuma Elis*], and there was a battle between the gods which resulted in earth being flooded. Moses' explanation was radically different- the population growth was a result of God's blessing, and the flood came because of human sin. And, no cosmic battle which resulted in earth's inhabitants suffering because of it. Time and again, the surrounding myths sought to minimize sin, whereas Moses' record highlights it. Sadly, Jewish interpretations went the same way as the flood myths, with the Book of Enoch likewise attributing the flood and all human suffering to an Angelic revolt. Time and again, the difference between Moses' account of history and the surrounding myths is seen in the fact that Moses emphasizes human sin. There was a common ancient Near East belief in Azazel as a desert demon who looked like a goat. Perhaps Moses wished to address this idea when he called the scapegoat of the day of Atonement ritual "Azazel" and sent the goat into the desert (Lev. 16:21)- as if to say 'Now for you, Israel, no belief in that Azazel- the Azazel for us is simply a literal goat, bearing our sins in symbol, which we let loose into the desert' (1). Again and again, Moses sought to refocus his people on the practical, the literal, the concrete, and away from the myths which surrounded them. And yet he does this by alluding to those myths, so as to alert Israel to the fact that the new, inspired record which he was writing was fully aware of the myths God's people were being assailed with. This would explain the similarity of expressions between some of the myths and the Genesis record- e.g. "The Lord smelled the pleasing odour" (Gen. 8:21) is very similar to the Gilgamesh Epic, 9.159-160: "The gods smelled the odour, the sweet odour". The Biblical record is one of hard human reality, undiluted with the fantastic or mythical: "The central figures of the Bible saga are not, as in so many hero-tales, merged in or amalgamated with persons belonging to mere mythology; the data regarding their lives have not been interwoven with stories of the gods. Here all the glorification is dedicated solely to the God who brings about the events. The human being... is portrayed in all his untransfigured humanity" (2). The whole account of Moses in the bulrushes- Moses' history of himself, his autobiography-

is full of reference to the story of how King Sargon of Akkad was born in hiding, placed in a stream in a reed box sealed with pitch, found and raised by a gardener, and then noticed by the goddess Ishtar who loved him and enthroned him (3). The parallels with Moses are clear, but note the mythical element in the pagan tale- the baby was found by a goddess. The Biblical record replaces that with a real, concrete, human situation- the daughter of Pharaoh king of Egypt noticed Moses and adopted him.

The people were frightened by the "giants" they met in the land of Canaan (Num. 13:33), likely connecting them with superhuman beings. These *nephilim* [LXX *gigantes*] had their origin explained by Moses in Genesis 6- the righteous seed intermarried with the wicked, and their offspring were these *nephilim*, mighty men of the world. Note in passing how Ez. 32:27 LXX uses this same word *gigantes* to describe pagan warriors who died- no hint that they were superhuman or Angels. We speak more of this in [section 5-3](#). According to Jewish traditions (as reflected in 1 Enoch and the *Book of Jubilees*), the supposedly sinful Angels ("the Watchers") morally corrupted human beings in the lead up to the flood by teaching them to do evil, astrology, weapon making and the use of cosmetics (1 Enoch 7-8, 69; 10; 21.7-10; 64-65; 69; Jub. 5:16-11; 8:3). Yet the Genesis record simply states that the descendants of Cain started to do all those things, their wickedness increased, and so they were punished through the flood (Gen. 4:20-22). Constantly in the Jewish Apocryphal writings there is a shifting of blame from humanity to Angelic beings. Umberto Cassuto was one of 20th century Judaism's most erudite and painstakingly detailed Bible students. He demonstrated at length that the Canaanites believed there were various gods and demons responsible for the various events on earth, and that the Torah picks up these terms and applies them to God and His [all righteous] Angels. The examples he cites include the term "the most high God" (Gen. 14:18-20), "creator of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:19,22), and the idea of supernatural demons coming to earth and wrestling with men (Gen. 32:29,31). These ideas and terms are used in the Torah and applied by Moses to God's Angels, and to God Himself. Cassuto went on to show that this kind of deconstruction of

pagan myths about demons and 'Satan' is common throughout the Bible- e.g. the references to Israel's God Yahweh 'riding on the clouds' (Ps. 104:3; 147:8; Is. 5:6; Joel 2:2) are an allusion to how the surrounding peoples thought that Baal rode upon the clouds; the "morning stars" were understood as independent deities, but Job 38:7 stresses that they are in fact Yahweh's ministers. He pays special attention to the reference to the sons of God and daughters of men in Gen. 6, demonstrating that the "giants" are *mortal*, they were to die at best after 120 years; and they were on *earth* not in Heaven. Thus the Canaanite myths, which ironically later Judaism re-adopted, were deconstructed by Moses. He summarizes Moses' intention in the Genesis 6 passage as being to teach Israel: "Do not believe the gentile myths concerning men of divine origin who became immortal. This is untrue, for in the end all men must die, because they, too, are flesh... you must realize that they were only "on earth", and "on earth" they remained, and did not become gods, and they did not ascend to Heaven, but remained among those who dwell below, upon earth... the intention of the section is to contradict the pagan legends regarding the giants" (4).

It's significant that the various Mesopotamian legends about a flood all speak of there being conflict between the divinities before the decision to flood the earth was taken; and then quarrels and recriminations between them after it. The Biblical record has none of this- the one true God brought the flood upon the earth by His sovereign will, and He lifted the flood. In the legends, the hero of the flood [cp. Noah] is exalted to Divine status, whereas in the Biblical record Noah not only remains human, but is described as going off and getting drunk. Throughout pagan legends, the Divine-human boundary is often blurred- gods get cast down to earth and become men, whilst men get exalted to 'Heaven' and godhood. This gave rise to the idea of 'angels that sinned' and were cast down to earth. But in the Biblical record, the Divine-human boundary is set very clearly- the one God of Israel is *so* far exalted above humanity, His ways are not ours etc. (Is. 55:8), that there can be no possibility of this happening. The exception of course was in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ- but even He was born as a genuine human upon earth, and [contrary to Trinitarian theology] He was no Divine comet who landed upon earth for

33 years. The whole idea of the Divinity and personal pre-existence of Jesus Christ is simply not Biblical.

The Mesopotamian legends speak of the flood being sent to stop man destroying Enlil's "rest" by his noise. The Mesopotamian gods sought for a "ceasing from toil", "rest from labour"- identical ideas to the Hebrew concept of *shabbat*. This was why, it was claimed, the gods first created man and put him to work in their garden- so that they could "rest" (5). This background is alluded to in the way that Genesis speaks of man being *cast out* of tending the garden of Eden as a punishment- scarcely something the gods would wish if man was there to save them working there. God speaks of Him giving *man a shabbat* as a rest for man from his labour. And the flood, although it was Divine judgment, ultimately worked out as a blessing of 'rest' for man in that the 'world' was cleansed from sin. Thus 'Noah' was given that name, meaning 'rest', "because this child will bring us relief from all our hard work" (Gen. 5:29 G.N.B.). Adam's work in Eden wasn't onerous; his work when cast out of the garden was hard. The wrong ideas are clearly alluded to and often reversed- in order to show that a loving God created the world for humanity, for our benefit and blessing- and not to toil for the gods in order to save them the effort. The 'rest' so sought by the Mesopotamian gods was actually intended by the one true God as His gift to humanity.

The Biblical account of the flood gives details which are imaginable, earthly realities; there is nothing of the grossly exaggerated and other-worldly which there is in the pagan flood legends. Thus the Biblical dimensions for the ark are realistic, whereas the boat mentioned in the Babylonian legend recorded by Berossus was supposedly about one kilometre long and half a kilometre wide. Noah was 600 years old according to the Biblical record, whereas Ziusudra, the Mesopotamian equivalent of Noah, was supposedly 36,000 years old at the time of the flood.

The Biblical Flood and the Gilgamesh Epic

The Gilgamesh flood stories are significantly lacking in attaching much value or significance to human moral behaviour. The flood happened as a result of arguments amongst the gods,

or because they just didn't want so many human beings on the earth- and not because of human sin. According to Gen. 6:3 (cp. 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5) there was a period of grace for 120 years before the flood, during which time Noah preached and urged people to repent. Such grace and pleading with man isn't found in the pagan myths because they fail to locate the root cause of the flood in human sin. And the gods of the various pantheons knew nothing of grace. God's appeal to humanity via Noah is in sharp contrast to the way the Gilgamesh Epic speaks of the flood being a secret which the gods carefully hid from man. The Epic records how Utnapishtim loaded the ark with his silver and gold lest it be destroyed (Gilgamesh Tablet 11:80-85 and 94,95); the Biblical record says nothing of this, speaking only of how living creatures and people were saved by the ark. Clearly life and people are of more importance to God than wealth, which cannot ultimately be saved. The ark of Gilgamesh had sailors to sail it, and "the pilot" is recorded as leaving the ship at the end of the flood. The Biblical ark had no sailor nor pilot apart from God. The Gilgamesh hero of the flood escaped it despite the will and intentions of the gods, who had decreed man's destruction. Noah was a Biblical hero because he believed in God's gracious desire to save him. The theme of Divine regret is found in both Genesis and Gilgamesh; according to the Bible, Yahweh regretted the *creation* of man (Gen. 6:6), whereas according to Gilgamesh, the gods regretted the *destruction* of man. This purposeful contrast is surely to indicate that whilst Yahweh has emotions, His judgment of man was just and was done without regret.

The Rainbow

The Babylonian Epic Of Creation (6.82) claims that after Marduk's victory, he set his bow in the sky and it became a constellation. He also supposedly used his bow to shoot arrows at the clouds which caused the deluge. "So, too, the pagan Arabs related of one of their gods that after discharging arrows from his bow, he set his bow in the cloud" (6). These myths are alluded to and corrected by the statement that God's bow is simply the rainbow (Gen. 9:13), a purely natural phenomenon which is merely an optical feature and certainly not a literal bow of any god. Yahweh's bow, the rainbow, is a symbol of His

grace and love towards His creatures. The later Old Testament repeatedly uses the idea of the true God shooting His arrows as a figure of His judgment of His enemies and salvation of His people (Hab. 3:9,11; Zech. 9:14; Ps. 38:2; 64:8; 77:17; 144:6; Job 6:4; Lam. 2:4; 3:12). The whole mythical, pagan idea of a god having a literal bow and arrows is thereby deconstructed. The question arises, however, as to why Moses is alluding to Babylonian myths which were current only centuries after his time. My response is threefold. Firstly, God could have inspired Moses to speak in terms which would later take on relevance to the myths which God foresaw would arise. Secondly, the Babylonian myths may well have developed from myths which were current in Moses' time. A third possibility is that the Pentateuch was re-written under Divine inspiration whilst Judah were in captivity in Babylon, and the historical accounts presented in such a way as to have relevance to the Marduk worship and other Babylonian mythology which surrounded God's people in Babylonian captivity. I have given further evidence for this possibility elsewhere (7).

Here are some other examples of the Biblical record of the flood deconstructing pagan mythology:

- The Gilgamesh Epic specifically records that Utnapistim gave the workmen wine to drink whilst they built the ark (Tablet 9, lines 72-73). The Biblical account appears to consciously contradict this by stating that Noah was the first to make wine- and he did this *after* the flood (Gen. 9:20).
- The Mesopotamian myths speak of how the hero of the flood (cp. Noah in the Biblical account) was raised to divine, immortal status. Gen. 9:29 comments simply upon Noah: "And he died".
- The myths all emphasize how depleted humanity after the flood started to re-grow in size by miraculous means- the Atrahasis Epic claims that magic incantations of the god Ea over 14 lumps of clay gave birth to many new humans after the flood; the Greek flood tradition asserts that Deucalion threw stones which turned into men. The Biblical record states simply and realistically how the population re-grew through natural procreation.

Babel

I explained in the above section concerning the flood how Moses' words in Genesis deconstruct later Babylonian myths. Perhaps the clearest case of this is in the record of Babel. The Babylonian myths boasted of the building of the city of Babylon and its tower / ziggurat. The tower of Babel was built in a plain (Gen. 11:2); and both Strabo and Herodotus mention that Babylon was built in a wide plain. The record of the tower being built with bricks is so similar to the Babylonian *Epic Of Creation*, Tablet 6, lines 58-61, which held that "For a year [the gods] made bricks" to build the ziggurat of Babylon. Their myths claimed that after the deluge, humanity came to Babylon and the Anunnaki deities, who had supported Marduk in his battle, built the city. But Gen. 11:5 labours that it was "the sons of men" who built Babel. Cassuto describes the Genesis record as "a kind of satire on what appeared to be a thing of beauty and glory in the eyes of the Babylonians" (8). The phrase "city and tower" is so often found in Babylonian writings with reference to Babylon; but the phrase is used of Babel in Gen. 11:4. The temple of Marduk in Babylon had a sanctuary, the Esagila- "the house whose head is in heaven" and a tower called Etemenanki, "the house of the foundation of heaven and earth". Marduk supposedly lived on the seventh storey. The Babylonian inscriptions speak of the ziggurat tower as having its top in Heaven. The Genesis record deconstructs all this. The tower of Babel was built by sinful *men* and not gods; the one true God came *down* to view the tower- its top did *not* reach to Heaven, and there is a powerful word play on the word Babylon, meaning 'the gate of Heaven' in their language, and yet 'Babel', the equivalent Hebrew word, means 'confusion'. What the Babylonians thought was so great was in God's eyes and those of His people the Hebrews simply confusion and failure. The Genesis record goes on to show how that it was Abraham who had a great name made for himself (Gen. 12:2), whereas the Babel builders failed in their desire to make a permanent name for themselves. God's intention that mankind should spread out and fill the earth after the flood did eventually triumph over the builders of Babel-Babylon who tried to thwart it. Zeph. 3:9-11 allude to the Babel record- at the time of Judah's restoration from Babylon, it was God's intention to undo the effects of

Babel and "change the speech of the peoples to a pure [united] speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve Him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering". Those dispersed would then gather as one, i.e. Babel would be reversed.

The Joseph Story

Several studies have revealed the similarities between Moses' account of Joseph and the Gilgamesh Epic and other Mesopotamian writings. World-wide famines of seven years' duration are a common theme in many of the Epics. But they are usually explained as arising from the death or anger of a demon / god (9). Gilgamesh 6.104 describes Ishtar as preparing for the seven year famine in an almost identical way to Joseph. Ishtar is being deconstructed, and brought down to a human level- a faithful human being, Joseph, rather than any god or Ishtar, was who prepared for and staved off the effects of the famine through his obedience to God. And it was the one God of Israel who brought the seven year famine, rather than any demon or Satan figure. The similarities between Joseph and Osiris, the Egyptian fertility god, 'the provider of food', also can't be lightly dismissed. Like Osiris, Joseph was confined until the word of his prediction came true, and afterwards he taught wisdom to the elders of Egypt (Ps. 105:19,22). The allusion is surely intended to rid the Israelites of any hankering to still believe in Osiris, within whose cult they had lived for 400 years, and instead to believe that it is Yahweh who provides fertility and the blessing of food through His obedient servants here on earth like Joseph. The pagan fantasies are alluded to but brought down to more human, earthly terms, with Yahweh being presented as the only true God.

The Egyptian tale of Anat tempting Aqhat is similar in outline terms to Potiphar's wife tempting Joseph; as the god Khnum hides a precious object in grain, so does Joseph; the Egyptian fertility deities were gods of dreams and associated with the stars; they are at times slain by wild animals and their blood stained clothes presented as evidence (10). Having lived several generations in Egypt, the Israelites for whom Moses was

composing Genesis would've been aware of these myths. And Moses is clearly referring to them- and applying them to a real, historical person, an Israelite, who had lived 400 years previously.

In a dated but fascinating book entitled *The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation to Egyptian* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1933), A.S. Yahuda demonstrated that the syntax and vocabulary of the Joseph story is very similar to Egyptian idiom. This would strengthen my suggestion that Moses is consciously seeking to engage with and deconstruct the Egyptian stories, amongst whose influence Israel had lived for four centuries. Moses is writing what we will later refer to as 'The Israelite epic', in response to the 'stories' and epics of the surrounding peoples amongst whom they lived and through whom they travelled. But Moses paints this picture, constructs the true, Divinely inspired version of the story, through engagement with and allusion to the incorrect stories and epics of the Gentiles. And in linguistic terms, Yahuda shows at depth how Moses is writing with allusion to Egypt and Egyptian in a manner which only the Israelites who had lived in Egypt would have perceived- e.g. Moses records how the cows in Pharaoh's dream represented years, but the hieroglyphic symbol for "year" was a cow.

The Law Of Moses

Throughout the Torah, we see the same pattern- of allusion to surrounding beliefs in order to show Yahweh's supremacy. The nations surrounding Israel had legal codes which defined the punishment for breaking certain laws. Yahweh's law featured this, but it also in places lacks any stated penalty for disobedience. The commands to not covet in the heart are obvious examples. This reflects God's perspective- that sin is an internal matter, in the heart, and will meet with Divine judgment at a later date even though humans will not judge such matters as legal disobedience. And there are other significant differences between Moses' law and the legal codes of the surrounding nations. Thus these codes often held that certain physical, sacred places could be entered and provide even murderers with freedom from judgment. The Torah allows this in some cases, but not in the case of deliberate murder. Thus when Joab grabs

the horns of the altar, thinking he therefore couldn't be slain for his sin, he is dragged away and slain (1 Kings 2:28). This would've read strangely to many of the surrounding peoples. Hammurabi's laws had a sliding scale of punishment according to the social status of the person who had been harmed by misbehaviour- if a rich man struck out the eye of a 'commoner', he had to pay less compensation than if he did so to a person of higher status. The Torah reflects the immense value placed by God upon the human person; for such distinctions are totally absent in it.

It has been widely noted that many elements of the ten commandments are to be found in the legislation of Mesopotamia. Thus there are references to the Sabbath being kept as a monthly festival; and later "the name Shabattu was applied by the Babylonians and Assyrians to the day of the full moon, the fifteenth of the month, which was especially dedicated to the worship of the moon-god... the days of the full moon were considered days of ill luck... the Israelite sabbath was instituted, it seems, in antithesis to the Mesopotamian system" (11). Thus most pagan festivals of the time were begun by the lighting of a candle in the home; but a candle was not to be kindled on the Sabbath (Ex. 35:3). Yahweh *blessed* the Sabbath (Ex. 20:11). Work was not to be done so as to rest and remember God's creative grace; whereas in pagan thought, work wasn't done because 'Sabbath' was an unlucky day on which it was best to do as little as possible in case some 'Satan' figure struck. Such belief was being deconstructed in the Sabbath law. The Mosaic 10 Commandments included the unique commandment not to covet / lust. This was unknown in any Mesopotamian legal code- because obviously it's impossible to know what a person is thinking within themselves, and so impossible to judge or punish it. But God's law introduced the whole idea that sin / transgression of law is ultimately internal, and this will be judged by the one true God.

We can easily imagine how the people of Israel were prone to be confused by all the mythology they had encountered in their surrounding world. Being illiterate and having no inspired record from their God as to how to understand the past, they relied on dimly recalled traditions passed down. Hence Moses

was inspired to write the Pentateuch. It is full- as so much of Scripture is- of allusion to the surrounding religious ideas- not because it in any sense depends upon them, but because it seeks to allude to and correct them. And further, the Torah labours how the one true God is so far superior to all the other gods whom Israel were tempted to believe in. In contrast with Near Eastern mythology, which had men as the lackeys of the gods to keep them supplied with food, the God of Genesis makes man and woman in His own image and gives them responsibility for His creation.

The Tabernacle

The Divine commands about the tabernacle likewise allude to the ideas of the surrounding nations, and yet bring out significant differences. In the same way as the Babylonians believed that the temple of Marduk in Babylon was a reflection of the Heavenly temple, so the tabernacle was also a reflection of the pattern of Yahweh's Heavenly temple. The Canaanites spoke of their god El as living in a tent- just as Yahweh dwelt in a tent. The Ugaritic epic of King Keret speaks of how "The gods proceed to their tents, the family of El to their tabernacles" (Tablet 2 D, 5, 31-33). El's tabernacle was thought to be constructed of boards- just as Yahweh's tabernacle was. Both had a veil, just as the Moslem shrine in Mecca has one. But there were significant differences. The Canaanite legends speak of the gods building their temples themselves; Cassuto points out that the very terms used about Bezaleel's skill and talent in building the tabernacle are used in Canaanite legends about the skill and talent of the gods in supposedly building their own temples. Perhaps the Exodus record so labours the point that Moses and the Israelites built Yahweh's tabernacle is in order to highlight the difference between the one true God and the pagan gods, who had to build their own tabernacles.

The Ugaritic poems speak of the furniture in Baal's heavenly temple, and it's very similar to that in the Most Holy Place. But the poems especially focus upon Baal's bed and chests of drawers for his clothing. These are noticeably absent in Yahweh's tabernacle furniture. The pagan god tabernacles all feature some kind of throne, upon which the god visibly sits.

The cherubim of the Israelite tabernacle are similar to the Mesopotamian *karibu*, cherubim, upon which their gods sat. Phoenician and Egyptian art uncovered by archaeologists shows they believed in cherubim very similar in form to those described in Ezekiel's visions of Yahweh's cherubim. The throne of Yahweh was the ark, covered by the cherubim. There, above the blood spattered lid of the ark (or "mercy seat"), supported by the cherubim, the pagan mind expected to see Israel's God enthroned. The similarities to the pagan shrines were intentional- to set up this expectation. But there was nothing there. It was, to their eyes, an empty throne- just as God appears to be absent to so many people today. There was no visible image resting upon the wings of the cherubim, nothing on the throne / lid of the ark but the blood of atonement (which pointed forward to that of God's Son). The ark is called both the throne of God and also His footstool (Ps. 94:5; 132:7,8; 1 Chron. 28:2). Above or sitting upon the cherubim, the pagan mind expected to see Israel's God. But there was (to their eyes) an empty throne. Yahweh had to be believed in by faith. And His supreme manifestation was through the blood of sacrifice. Cassuto gives evidence that the Egyptians and Hittites placed their covenant contracts in a box beneath the throne of their gods; and the tables of the covenant were likewise placed beneath the throne of Yahweh. This similarity begged the comparison yet stronger- Israel's God was *not* seated there. He had to be believed in by faith. Such a concept of faith in an invisible god was quite foreign to the pagan mind; and yet the whole tabernacle plan was designed to have enough points of contact with the pagan tabernacles in order to elicit this point in very powerful form: the one true God is invisible and must be *believed in*.

The same point is taught by how Yahweh had a "table". The Mesopotamian gods likewise had a table (*passuru*) upon which food was placed as a meal for the god (as in Is. 65:11). But the beakers, cups and vessels on Yahweh's table remained empty (Ex. 25:29); the wine was poured out onto the sacrifices and vaporized; the priests ate the shewbread. There was no pretence that Yahweh was a hungry god who needed to be fed by His worshippers. To the pagan mind, this would've meant that if He didn't eat, He wasn't actually around nor powerful. Again, the difference and similarities were intentional, in order to point up

the need for *faith* in the power and existence of Yahweh. Most of the surrounding tabernacles featured quite a lot of noise- especially incantations and spoken formulas regarding the holiness of the god and shrine. There were few spoken words in the Mosaic rituals; "Holy to the Lord" was *written* upon the forehead of the High Priest rather than stated by incantations (Ex. 28:36). We could maybe go so far as to say that we see here the exaltation of God's *written* word, with all the *faith* and understanding which this requires, as opposed to the incantations of other worship systems.

Correcting Error

The stars in particular were thought to be in control of human destiny but the Genesis record emphasizes that they are merely lights created by God with no independent influence, therefore, upon human life on earth. The sun, the moon and the stars were all worshipped as gods in the Middle East but in Genesis 1 they are simply created things made by God. Genesis 1 is based around the number 7- and the practical issue of the creation record was that Israel were to remember the seventh day as Sabbath. Yet this was a purposefully critical commentary upon the Babylonian views. "According to one Babylonian tradition, the seventh, fourteenth, nineteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of each month were regarded as unlucky: Genesis however, declares the seventh day of every week to be holy, a day of rest consecrated to God (2:1-3)" (12).

Thus we see the way God's word deconstructs error without as it were primitively confronting it in a 'I am right, your ideas are wrong and pitiful' kind of way. I find this bears the stamp of the Divine and the ultimately credible. Cassuto has a very fine comment upon this, made in the context of his view that Genesis 6 is deconstructing Canaanite legends about sinful gods, demons and giants: "The answer contradicts the pagan myths, but without direct polemic. This is the way of the Torah: even when her purpose is to oppose the notions of the gentiles, she does not derogate, by stooping to controversy, from her ingrained majesty and splendour. She states her views, and by inference other ideas are rejected" (13). This has bearing on why the Lord Jesus didn't in so many words state that 'demons' don't exist;

rather by His miracles did He demonstrate "by inference" that they have no effective power or existence. More on this in [section 4-12](#).

The closer we look at the Pentateuch, the more we see the huge emphasis placed by Moses upon deconstructing the wrong views about Satan and presenting Yahweh as omnipotent, and the ultimate source of both good and evil in the lives of His people. Thus in the prayer of the first fruits recorded in Dt. 26:5-11 we have the Hebrew verb "to give" repeated seven times. The first and last three usages of it refer to what God has 'given' to Israel; but the centrepiece reference is to Israel being '*given* hard bondage' in Egypt (Dt. 26:6). Thus Yahweh is presented as the ultimate giver- of both good and evil.

And so time and again we find that the local pagan myths about Satan are alluded to and deconstructed by Moses. It has been observed that the Passover ritual of smearing the blood of the sacrifice on the doorposts was very similar to what Bedouin tribes have been doing in the Middle East for millennia- they smear the blood on their tent poles and tent entrances when they erect a new home or tent, in order to keep 'satan' figures away (14). But the Exodus record is at pains to point out that the 'Destroyer' was one of Yahweh's Angels; and thus it was ultimately Yahweh Himself who slew the firstborn in those homes without the daubed blood. Again- yet again- we see a pagan idea concerning 'satan' being taken up and reinterpreted in light of the fact that the 'satan' figures don't really exist, and God is the ultimate and unrivalled source of disaster. Ex. 21:6 speaks of bringing a slave "to God", i.e. to the door post of the home, and nailing his ear to it. "God" is paralleled with the door post. R.E. Clements notes that this alludes to the ancient pagan practice whereby "a household god would have been kept by the threshold of a house to guard it" (15). Moses is attacking this idea- by saying that God, Israel's God, is the One there- and not the household gods which those around Israel believed were there. The Pentateuch in similar vein uses the term 'to see the face of God', usually translated as 'to come into God's presence' (Ex. 23:16); this was a pagan term used at the time to describe seeing an image of a god (16). But as we noted when discussing

the tabernacle, Israel were being taught that their God had no image, but all the same, they could come into His presence.

Genesis 1-3 In Context

The early chapters of Genesis were intended as the seed bed from which Israel would understand that they had grown. The nature of the record of creation was therefore primarily for their benefit. The lesson for us likewise must be- that what God did at creation, He can in essence do in our lives and experiences too. The record of Gen. 1-3 especially opens up in a new way when viewed from this angle. Difficult parts of the account seem to fall into place. Gen. 2:5 says that the creation account explains how God created "every plant of the field before it was in the earth / *eretz* / land [promised to Abraham]". Quite simply, the plants Israel knew had been made by God and somehow transplanted or moved into the land, just as one does when developing a garden. It was Moses' understanding that on entering the land, God would be planting Israel there (Ex. 15:17; Num. 24:6), just as God had planted in Eden (Gen. 2:8 s.w.). And when we read that Eve was "the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20), this was in its primary application explaining to the Israelites in the wilderness where they ultimately originated from. Israel were to trace their first origins and parents back not merely to Abraham, but to Adam and Eve. Num. 35:3 [Heb.] uses the term to describe the "all living" of the congregation of Israel; indeed, that Hebrew word translated "living" is translated "congregation", with reference to the congregation of Israel (Ps. 68:10; 74:19). Note how the Hebrew idea of 'all living' repeatedly occurs in the account of the flood (Gen. 6:19; 8:1,17 etc.)- which we will later suggest was a flood local to the area which the Israelites knew and which had been ultimately promised to Abraham. "All living" things which were taken into the ark therefore needn't refer to literally every living thing which lives upon the planet, but rather to those species which lived in the flooded area, the earth / land / *eretz* promised to Abraham. I've explained elsewhere that the garden of Eden can be understood as the land promised to Abraham, perhaps specifically being located around Jerusalem, the intended geographical focus for God's people; and that the term *eretz* can

be used to describe the land promised to Abraham rather than the whole planet.

In fact the whole record of Adam and Eve in Eden is alluded to multiple times in Moses' law. As they were given a command not to eat, so Israel were asked not to eat certain things. As there was a snake who was there in the 'land' of Eden, so there was the equivalent amongst Israel- the false teachers, the tribes who remained, etc., the "serpents of the dust" (Dt. 32:24- an evident allusion to the language of the snake in Eden). As Adam and Eve were to "be fruitful and multiply" in the land / Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:28), so Noah and his sons were to do just the same in the same land after the flood (Gen. 9:7); and the children of Abraham were promised that they would do likewise in the very same land (Gen. 35:11). The descriptions of the promised land, covered with good trees, whose fruit could be freely eaten, were reminiscent of the descriptions of Eden. Israel were to enter that land and tend it, as Adam should've done; they were to learn the lesson of Adam and Eve's failure in their possession of Eden. But as Eve lusted after the fruit, so Israel lusted after the fruits of Egypt. As Adam and Eve failed to "subdue" the garden of Eden (Gen. 1:28), so Israel failed to fully "subdue" [s.w.] the tribes of the land (Num. 32:22). They subdued a few local to them; but they never really rose up to the reality of being able to have the whole land area promised to Abraham subjected to them. And so Lev. 26 and Dt. 28 promised a curse to come upon the land [of Eden / Israel] for their failure within it, just as happened to Adam and Eve; and of course ultimately they were driven out of the land just as Israel's very first parents had been. As the *eretz* / earth / land was initially "without form and void", so the same term is used of the land of Israel after the people had been driven out of it (Jer. 4:23). As thorns and thistles came up in the land [and those plants are unknown in some parts of the planet], so they did again when Israel were driven from their land (Gen. 3:18; Hos. 10:8). As Adam was punished by returning to dust, so Israel would be destroyed by dust (Dt. 28:24).

Umberto Cassuto, as one of Judaism's most painstakingly detailed expositors of the Torah, has observed that the entities referred to in Genesis 1-3, such as the serpent, the cherubim etc.,

are spoken of in such a way that implies that Israel were familiar with the ideas. Cassuto notes the use of the definite article- *the* cherubim, *the* flaming sword- when talking about things which have not been mentioned earlier in the record. He concludes that therefore these things "were already known to the Israelites. The implies that their story had been recounted in some ancient composition current among the people" (17). The intention of Genesis was therefore to define these ideas correctly, to explain to Israel the truth about the things of which they had heard in very rambling and incorrect form in the various legends and epic stories they had encountered in Egypt and amongst the Canaanite tribes. Thus the description of the fruit as "pleasant to the sight" (Gen. 2:9) is found in the Gilgamesh epic about the trees in the garden of the gods. But that myth is alluded to, and Israel are told what *really* happened in the garden.

There can be no question that the Genesis record presents the serpent as a literal animal, the most cunning "of all the beasts of the field which the Lord God had made" (Gen. 3:1). This is highly significant- for many of the creation myths feature some kind of serpent, but always as some entity far more than a literal animal. The myths tend to present the serpent as a dragon figure, similar in appearance to the Biblical cherubim. Some cherubim-like figures uncovered in Egypt are in fact winged cobras (18). But the Genesis record clearly differentiates between the serpent and the cherubim. "Serpents figure in various Ancient Near Eastern myths in a demonic way" (19). The Sumerian god Ningishzida [meaning 'Lord of the tree'] was portrayed as a serpent (20). But the Genesis record is insistent that the truth is different, and that for the Bible believer, the serpent was a snake, not a god, not a cosmic dragon nor a demon, but a literal "beast of the field" created by the one God just as all the other animals were created.

Sin and Death in the Gilgamesh Epic

It's been suggested that the Canaanites and Egyptians were fond of epic poems and stories, those of Gilgamesh and the conflict between the gods Baal and Mot being examples. Cassuto analyzed these at length and compared them against the Pentateuch. He noted many examples of similar wordings and

phrasings punctuating both the Pentateuch and the pagan epics- e.g. "he lifted up his eyes and saw", "he lifted up his voice and said", "and afterwards [person X] came" (21). The point seems to be that Moses wrote the Pentateuch to be as it were the *Israelite* epic- and Israel's Divinely inspired epic deconstructed all the other Gentile ones, very often at the points where they speak of cosmic conflict between the gods, or 'satan' figures. One of the great themes of the Babylonian epics, especially Gilgamesh, was the problem of death. My quotations from the Gilgamesh Epic are all taken from the English translation in Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963)- a study which has stood the test of time and is well worth reading in this connection. Genesis 1-3 likewise addresses the problem of death, clearly locating the reason for death as human sin, and defining death as a return to the unconsciousness of dust. The Babylonian and Assyrian speculations about death held that death in the natural creation and also for man was the outcome or by-product of superhuman conflicts between the gods over which man had no control. They also held that the gods were only immortal in the sense that they couldn't die a "natural death"; but they could perish as a result of violence from other gods. Thus Apsu and Mummu were killed by Ea; Tiamat by Marduk, Tammuz by Ishtar (Gilgamesh, Tablet 6:46,47). In this we see the significance of the Old Testament's frequent claims that Yahweh as the only true God is immortal by nature and cannot die for any reason. Further, the Enuma Elish (Tablet 6:120) claimed that death existed well *before* the creation of the universe. These ideas, we can suppose, were likewise held by the tribes amongst whom Israel moved. Moses in Genesis, confirmed by Paul in Romans 5:12, emphasizes that sin and death entered the world *after* creation as a result of human sin. The pagan creation myths saw a relation between sin and death, but blamed this upon the nature with which man was created, and traced this back to the fault of the gods: "According to the main Babylonian creation story, man was formed with the blood of wicked Kingu and was therefore evil from the very beginning of his existence. Furthermore, we read in the Babylonian Theodicy: "[the gods] who fashioned them [men] have presented to mankind perverse speech, lies and untruth they presented to them forever"" (22). The Genesis record presents

man's fall into sin as totally his fault, and his punishment reflected that fact. Gen. 2:16,17 is clear that man had no necessity to sin, he had freewill to obey or disobey, and he chose disobedience. The very existence of the tree of life in Eden shows that God intended man to "live forever"; He didn't create man an inevitable sinner and hopelessly mortal, cursed being from the beginning, as the myths claimed. Death was a punishment for human sin, according to Genesis; not something which existed from before creation, as the myths claimed.

The record of the lies of Cain and the sins of the people at the time of the flood and later at Babel all clearly locate human beings as responsible for the very sins which the pagan myths blamed upon the gods, with the implication in the Gilgamesh Epic that man was created an inevitable sinner by nature and therefore not fully culpable for his sin. Such ideas have in their essence re-appeared in mistaken Christian theologies of later millennia. Sin and death were blamed upon the gods. Thus Gilgamesh was told by Siduri: "When the gods created mankind, they allotted death to mankind, but life they retained in their keeping" (Tablet 10, col. 3, 3-5). In these kinds of ideas we see the essence of common ideas about Satan; the blame for sin and the human condition that arises from it is blamed upon some superhuman being.

Gen. 3:15 clearly prophesies the hope of redemption from human sin, through the descendant of the woman [the Lord Jesus Christ]. The pagan myths had no such concept of salvation from sin. Sin against the gods could hasten death and obedience to them could prolong life, but there was no hope of real forgiveness of sin. And therefore there was no hope of eternity in a promised land such as was preached to Abraham in later sections of Genesis and which was developed as a golden thread throughout the entire Bible, namely the good news of the future Kingdom of God on earth. Even a superman like Gilgamesh had to face the day of death, "the unsparing death". The hope of the resurrection of the human body implied in the promises to the Jewish patriarchs in Genesis and made explicit in later Scripture was simply unknown in the pagan myths. It should be noted too

that obedience to Yahweh wasn't seen as always, in every case, extending mortal life now; because from Genesis onwards, the Bible presents the perspective of God's future, eternal Kingdom as the time for reward and immortality. There are times when God takes away the righteous from the evil of this life (Is. 57:1-23:29). There are other Biblical instances where the wicked have long life and prosperity in this world. This is because the Bible presents the ultimate judgment and reward of human life and faith as being at the last day, and not right now. In Gilgamesh and the pagan myths, only some of the gods had hope of resurrection, e.g. Marduk (as mentioned in the Enuma Elish, Tablet 6:153,154). But humans certainly didn't. The implication of resurrection in the promises to Abraham, and the specific statements about it in the later Old Testament (e.g. Job 19:25-27; Dan. 12:2), thereby reflects a colossal value and importance attached by God to the human person. What the pagan myths reserved only for a few gods, Yahweh offers to every human being who believes in His promises.

The punishment of death which is introduced in early Genesis was created and executed by the same one God who also created the world and the opportunity of eternal life. Gilgamesh and the pagan myths presented whole groups of gods as responsible for and presiding over death and the underworld, and another, separate, pantheon of gods as involved in creation. The Biblical emphasis upon one God is significant and unusual; it is Yahweh who sends man back to the dust from which He created him, and the same Yahweh who is in total control of *sheol* [the grave or underworld], and in a sense even present there (Dt. 32:22; Job 26:6; Ps. 139:7,8; Prov. 15:11; Am. 9:2). The state of the dead is defined in Genesis as a return to dust, and later Scripture emphasizes that this means unconsciousness, for the righteous merely a sleep in hope of bodily resurrection. This was radically different to the ideas espoused by the peoples amongst whom Israel travelled and lived. The dead dwell in silence (Ps. 94:17; 115:17) having returned to dust, and as such don't become disembodied spirit beings which were later understood as 'demons'. The whole concept of demons was in this sense not allowed to even

develop in the minds of God's people by the definitions of death which Moses presented in the Pentateuch. The utter supremacy of God is taught in the Genesis record in a way it never is in any of the other myths. **One of the most fundamental differences with the creation myths is that Genesis 1 presents God as uncreated, having no beginning, and focuses upon what *He* created- whereas the other records seek to explain where their gods came from and how *they* were created:** "These foreign creation myths recount not only the origins of the visible world, but, at the same, of the gods. Genesis 1, however, distinguishes itself radically from these all sincere there is no such theogony. This observation indicates the grandeur of Israel's religion" (23).

Notes

(1) For more on this see P.D. Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven: Azazel and Euhemeristic Heroes", *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 96 (1977) pp. 195-233.

(2) Martin Buber, *Moses* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1947) p. 17.

(3) Buber, *ibid* p. 34.

(4) Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical And Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973) Vol. 1 pp. 21-28.

(5) Joseph Campbell, *The Masks Of God: Vol. 3, Occidental Mythology* (New York: Viking Arkana, 1991) p. 103.

(6) Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On The Book Of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992) Vol. 2 p. 136.

(7) In *Bible Lives* Chapter 11.

(8) Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On The Book Of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992) Vol. 2 p. 227.

(9) See documentation in Donald Redford, *The Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970) p. 98; C.H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York: Norton, 1965) pp. 69,88.

(10) Documented in Donald Redford, *The Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970) p. 100; W.F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1957) p. 241; A. Jeremias, *The Old Testament in the Light of the Ancient East* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1911) Vol. 2 p. 64.

(11) Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On The Book Of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997) p. 244.

(12) Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary Genesis 1-15*, (Waco TX: Word Books) Vol. 1 p. 49.

(13) Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On The Book Of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992) Vol. 2 p. 24.

(14) Roland De Vaux, *Studies In Old Testament Sacrifice* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961) p. 7.

(15) R.E. Clements, *Exodus* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1972) p. 133.

(16) Clements, *ibid.*, p. 152.

(17) Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical And Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975) Vol. 2 p. 104.

(18) Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon, Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1992) p. 60.

(19) J. R. Porter, *The Illustrated Guide to the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 29.

(20) John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews & Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary To The Old Testament* (Downers Gove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000) p. 32.

(21) Umberto Cassuto, 'The Israelite Epic', reprinted in his *Biblical And Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975) Vol. 2 pp. 69-109.

(22) Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. 138.

(23) Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997) p. 126.

2-3 Satan and the Devil

Sometimes the original words of the Bible text are left untranslated ("Mammon", in Mt. 6:24, is an Aramaic example of this). 'Satan' is an untranslated Hebrew word which means 'adversary', while 'Devil' is a translation of the Greek word 'diabolos', meaning a liar, an enemy or false accuser. 'Satan' has been transferred from the Hebrew untranslated, just like 'Sabaoth' (James 5:4), 'Armageddon' (Rev. 16:16) and 'Hallelujah' (Rev. 19:1-6). If we are to believe that Satan and the Devil are some being outside of us which is responsible for sin, then whenever we come across these words in the Bible, we have to make them refer to this evil person. The Biblical usage of these words shows that they can be used as ordinary nouns, describing ordinary people. This fact makes it impossible to reason that the words Devil and Satan as used in the Bible do in themselves refer to a great wicked person or being outside of us.

J.H. Walton comments upon the word "Satan": "We would have to conclude... that there was little of a sinister nature" in the word originally. The negative associations of the word were what he calls "a secondary development" as a "technical usage". They arose in the interpretations of men rather than from the Bible text itself. He continues: "Based on the use of

"Satan" in the OT, we would have to conclude that Israel had little knowledge of a being named Satan or of a chief of demons, the Devil, during the OT period" (1). This of course highlights the fact that the popular idea of the Devil grew over time, and requires to be 'read back' into Old Testament texts. The Old Testament of itself simply doesn't state any doctrine of Satan as a personal being. How come they would be left in ignorance about this matter, if such a being exists and God presumably wishes to inform us about him and save us from him? How much effort did God make to save His people from a personal Satan, if throughout the entire Old Testament He never tells them of him? It should be noted that nearly all the Old Testament instances of the word "satan" refer to an adversary to *people* rather than to God. The picture of "Satan" opposing God hardly has a Biblical foundation.

George Lamsa grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which spoke a language similar to the Aramaic of Jesus' times, and which had survived virtually unchanged. He moved to America and became an academic, writing over 20 books of Biblical and linguistic research. Significantly, he came to the conclusion that the idea of a personal Satan was unknown to the Biblical writers, and that Western Christians have built their concept of it on a serious misreading of Biblical passages, failing to understand the original meaning of the word "Satan" and the associated idioms which went with it. Consider a few of his conclusions in this area: "Satan" is very common in Aramaic and Arabic speech. At times a father may call his own son "Satan" without any malicious intent. Moreover, an ingenious man is also called "Satan" (Arabic *shitan*)" (2). "Easterners in their conversations often say, "He has been a Satan to me", which means that he has caused me to err or mislead me" (3).

THE WORD 'SATAN' IN THE BIBLE

1 Kings 11:14 records that "The Lord raised up an adversary (same Hebrew word elsewhere translated "Satan") against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite". "And God raised up another adversary (another Satan)... Rezon... he was an adversary (a Satan) of Israel" (1 Kings 11:23,25). This does not mean that God stirred up a supernatural person or an angel to be a Satan/adversary to Solomon; He stirred up ordinary men. A related word occurs in Gen. 25:21- a well was named 'Sitnah', שִׁטְנָה , because the well had been a place of contention / opposition. Mt. 16:22,23 provides another example. Peter had been trying to dissuade Jesus from going up to Jerusalem to die on the cross. Jesus turned and said unto *Peter*: "Get behind me, Satan...you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men". Thus Peter was called a Satan. The record is crystal clear that Christ was not talking to an angel or a monster when he spoke those words; he was talking to Peter.

Because the word 'Satan' just means an adversary, a good person, even God Himself, can be termed a 'Satan'. The word 'Satan' does not therefore necessarily refer to sin. The sinful connotations which the word 'Satan' has are partly due to the fact that our own sinful nature is our biggest 'Satan' or adversary, and also due to the use of the word in the language of the world to refer to something associated with sin. God Himself can be a Satan to us by means of bringing trials into our lives, or by standing in the way of a wrong course of action we may be embarking on. But the fact that God can be called a 'Satan' does not mean that He Himself is sinful. The wicked Balaam was opposed by an Angel of God, who stood in the walled path as an adversary, or *Satan* to him, so that his donkey couldn't pass by (Num. 22:22). This shows that a good being can act as a Satan to a person. Interestingly, the Septuagint translates this with the word *endiaballein*, 'to set something across one's path'; a *diabolos* is a person who performs this act. The same idea repeats in the New Testament,

where Peter is described by Jesus as a stumbling block across His path to the cross, and thus Peter is a 'Satan' (Mt. 16:23).

The books of Samuel and Chronicles are parallel accounts of the same incidents, as the four gospels are records of the same events but using different language. 2 Sam. 24:1 records: "The Lord...moved David against Israel" in order to make him take a census of Israel. The parallel account in 1 Chron. 21:1 says that "Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David" to take the census. In one passage God does the 'moving', in the other Satan does it. The only conclusion is that God acted as a 'Satan' or adversary to David. He did the same to Job by bringing trials into his life, so that Job said about God: "With the strength of Your hand You oppose me" (Job 30:21); 'You are acting as a Satan against me', was what Job was basically saying. Or again, speaking of God: "I must appeal for mercy to my accuser (Satan)" (Job 9:15 NRSV). The Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament uses the Greek word *diabolos* to translate the Hebrew 'Satan'. Hence Devil and Satan are effectively parallel in meaning. Thus we read in the Septuagint of David being an adversary [Heb. *Satan*, Gk. *diabolos*] in 1 Sam. 29:4; the sons of Zeruiah (2 Sam. 19:22), Hadad, Rezon and other opponents to Solomon (1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25). We face a simple choice- if we believe that every reference to 'Satan' or 'Devil' refers to an evil cosmic being, then we have to assume that these people weren't people at all, and that even good men like David were evil. The far more natural reading of these passages is surely that 'Satan' is simply a word meaning 'adversary', and can be applied to people [good and bad], and even God Himself- it carries no pejorative, sinister meaning as a word. The idea is sometimes used to describe our greatest adversary, i.e. our own sin, and at times for whole systems or empires which stand opposed to the people of God and personify sinfulness and evil. But it seems obvious that it is a bizarre approach to Bible reading to insist that whenever we meet these words 'Satan' and 'Devil', we are to understand them as references to a personal, supernatural being.

When reviewing the references to *ha-Satan* ("the adversary") in the Old Testament, it's significant that a number of them occur in the context of the life of David. There was an incident where David behaved deceitfully with the Philistines with whom he once lived, and he is described as being "a Satan" to them (1 Sam. 29:4). That's another example of where the word 'Satan' doesn't necessarily have an evil connotation- a good man can be an adversary, just as Peter was (Mt. 16:21-23) and God Himself can be (2 Sam. 22:4). But we find that David and his dynasty were afflicted with Satans, adversaries, from then on. The word is used about human beings who were adversarial to them in 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kings 5:4,18; 11:14-22,25; Ps. 109:6,20 (Heb. "They say, "Appoint a wicked man against him, let an accuser [*Satan*] stand on his right hand"). David's enemies are called שטנני [a related word to 'satan'] in Ps. 38:20; likewise שטן in Ps. 71:13; and שטנני in Ps. 109:4. These are all related words to 'satan'. Note that it is stated that *God* stirred up men to be 'Satans' to David and Solomon- whatever view we take of 'Satan', clearly it or he is under the direct control of God and not in free opposition to Him.

THE WORD 'DEVIL' IN THE BIBLE

The word 'Devil' too is an ordinary word rather than a proper name. However, unlike 'Satan', it is always used in a bad sense. Jesus said, "Did I not choose you, the twelve (disciples), and one of you is a Devil? He spoke of Judas Iscariot..." (Jn. 6:70) who was an ordinary, mortal man. He was not speaking of a personal being with horns, or a so-called 'spirit being'. The word 'Devil' here simply refers to a wicked man. 1 Tim. 3:11 provides another example. The wives of church elders were not to be 'slanderers'; the original Greek word here is 'diabolos', which is the same word translated 'Devil' elsewhere. Thus Paul warns Titus that the aged women in the ecclesia should not be 'slanderers' or 'devils' (Tit. 2:3). And

likewise he told Timothy (2 Tim. 3:1,3) that “In the last days... *men* will be... slanderers (devils)”. This does not mean that human beings will turn into superhuman beings, but that they will be increasingly wicked. It ought to be quite clear from all this that the words ‘Devil’ and ‘Satan’ do not refer to a fallen angel or a sinful being outside of us.

SIN, SATAN AND THE DEVIL

In the New Testament, the words ‘Satan’ and ‘Devil’ are sometimes used figuratively to describe the natural sinful tendencies within us which we spoke of in the previous section. I emphasize 'sometimes'. For there are many occurrences of the words where they simply refer to a person playing an adversarial role. But it is human sin and dysfunction which is our great Satan / adversary, and so it's appropriate that these things at times are going to be described as the great ‘Satan’ or adversary. Our lusts are deceitful (Eph. 4:22), and so the Devil or ‘deceiver’ is an appropriate way of describing them. They are personified, and as such they can be spoken of as ‘the Devil’ - our enemy, a slanderer of the truth. This is what our natural ‘man’ is like - the ‘very Devil’. The connection between the Devil and our evil desires - sin within us - is made explicit in several passages: “Since the children (ourselves) have flesh and blood, he (Jesus) too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the Devil” (Heb. 2:14 NIV). The Devil is here described as being responsible for death. But “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Therefore sin and the Devil must be parallel. Similarly James 1:14 says that our evil desires tempt us, leading us to sin and therefore to death; but Heb. 2:14 says that the Devil brings death. The same verse says that Jesus had our nature in order to destroy the Devil. Contrast this with Rom. 8:3: “God ... by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man (that is, in our human nature) ... condemned sin in sinful man”. This shows that the Devil and the sinful tendencies that are naturally within human nature are effectively the same. It is vitally important to understand that Jesus was tempted just like us. Misunderstanding the doctrine of the Devil means that we cannot correctly appreciate the nature and work of Jesus. It was only because Jesus had our human nature - the ‘Devil’ within him - that we can have the hope of salvation (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15). By overcoming the desires of his own nature Jesus was able to destroy the Devil on the cross (Heb. 2:14). If the Devil *is* a personal being, then he should no longer exist. Heb. 9:26 says that Christ appeared “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself”. Heb. 2:14 matches this with the statement that through his death Christ destroyed the Devil in himself. By His death Jesus in prospect destroyed “the body of sin” (Rom. 6:6), i.e. human nature with its potential to sin in our very bodies.

“He who sins is of the Devil” (1 Jn. 3:8), because sin is the result of giving way to our own natural, evil desires (James 1:14,15), which the Bible calls ‘the Devil’. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil” (1 Jn. 3:8). If we are correct in saying that the Devil is our evil desires, then the works of our evil desires, i.e. what they result in, are our sins. This is confirmed by 1 Jn. 3:5: “He (Jesus) was manifested to take away our sins”. This confirms that “our sins” and “the works of the Devil” are the same. Acts 5:3 provides another example of this connection between the Devil and our sins. Peter says to Ananias: “Why has Satan filled your heart?” Then in verse 4 Peter says “Why have you *conceived this thing in your heart?*” Conceiving something bad within our heart is the same as Satan filling our heart. If we ourselves conceive something, e.g. a sinful plan, then it begins *inside us*. Note that when Peter speaks of how Ananias has "conceived this thing in your heart" he's alluding to the LXX of Esther 7:5, where the wicked Haman is described as one "whose heart hath filled him" to abuse God's people (see RV). Note in passing that the LXX of Esther 7:4 speaks of Haman as *ho diabolos* [with the definite article]- a mere man is called "the satan". It's been suggested

that 'Satan filling the heart' was a common phrase used in the first century to excuse human sin; and Peter is deconstructing it by using the phrase and then defining more precisely what it refers to- conceiving sin in our heart, our own heart filling itself with sin.

Is. 59:13 defines lying as “conceiving and uttering *from the heart* words of falsehood”. If a woman conceives a child, it doesn't exist outside of her; it begins inside her. James 1:14,15 use the same figure in describing how our desires *conceive* and bring forth sin, which brings forth death. Ps. 109:6 parallels a sinful person with a 'Satan': “Set a wicked man over him: and let an accuser (Satan) stand at his right hand”, i.e. in power over him (cp. Ps. 110:1). It makes an interesting exercise to read through the letter of James and note how frequently we are warned about our internal thought processes; to control them and have them influenced by the Lord is the essence of following Him. James 2:4 would be an obvious example- when we see a well dressed believer, we are not to judge him "within yourself" as a judge who has evil thoughts, an unjust judge (see R.V.). We shouldn't deceive ourselves within ourselves (James 1:22), our mind is not to immediately forget the truths we encounter in God's word (James 1:25)... There is no mention of an external source of sin such as the commonly held view of Satan. Paul speaks of both Jew and Gentile as being "under the power of sin" (Rom. 3:9 RSV)- which in itself suggests that he saw "sin" personified as a power. If sin is indeed personified by the Bible writers- what real objection can there be to the idea of this personification being at times referred to as 'satan', the adversary? It has been argued that Paul was well aware of the concept of dualism which the Jews had picked up in Babylonian captivity, i.e. the idea that there is a 'Satan' god opposed to the true God; but he reapplies those terms to the conflict he so often describes between flesh and spirit, which goes on within the human mind (4).

All through the Old Testament there is the same basic message - that the human heart is the source of disobedience to God. The Proverbs especially stress the need to give serious attention to the state of the heart. The human mind is the arena of spiritual conflict. David speaks of how “transgression” speaks deep in the heart of the wicked, inciting them to sin (Ps. 36:1 NRSV). The New Testament develops this idea further by calling the unspiritual element in the “heart of man” our enemy / adversary / opponent. The English pop star Cliff Richard expressed this connection between the Devil and the human mind in one of his well known songs: "She's a Devil woman, with evil on her mind". I'd describe the 'Devil' as the 'echo' which I observe going on in my mind, and I'm sure you've had the same experience. “I believe in God”, we think, and there comes back an echo ‘Yes, but... is He *really* out there? Maybe this is just living out the expectations of my upbringing...?’. Or, “OK, I should be generous to that cause. OK, I'll give them some money”. And the echo comes back: ‘Yes but what if they aren't sincere? Can you really afford it? You need to be careful with your money...’. It's this 'echo' that is the Biblical 'Devil'.

Karl Barth, the Einstein of 20th century theology, returned to Germany in 1946 and lectured about core Christian doctrine in the ruins of the University of Bonn. The memory of the Nazi trauma, the holocaust, the awareness of sin and evil, was clearly uppermost in his mind as he spoke. His lectures were transcribed, in a somewhat raw verbatim form, and then translated into English, purposefully unpolished and unedited- and *Dogmatics In Outline* became one of the most reprinted standard theological texts for the next 60 years. Barth spoke in the shattered lecture hall of how whenever we desire to perform good and resist sin, "there will always be a movement of defiance, not least deep within ourselves. If we summarise all that opposes, that 'satans', as the power of contradiction, one has an inkling of what Scripture means by the devil. We ask "Has God really said...?"; "Is God's Word true?", etc." (5). This internal defiance, the principle of

contradiction deep within, is indeed the Biblical 'devil'.

PERSONIFICATION

The response to what I've said could easily be: 'But it does talk as if the Devil is a person!'. And that's quite correct; Heb. 2:14 speaks of "him who holds the power of death - that is, the Devil". Even a small amount of Bible reading shows that it often uses personification - speaking of an abstract idea as if it is a person. Thus Prov. 9:1 speaks of a woman called 'Wisdom' building a house, Prov. 20:1 compares wine to "a mocker", and Rom. 6:23 likens sin to a paymaster giving wages of death. Our Devil, the 'diabolos', often represents our evil desires. Very early in Scripture we meet the idea of the need for internal struggle against sin. "Sin" is described as "couching at the door, its desire is for you (Moffatt: "eager to be at you"), but you must master it" (Gen. 4:7). This in turn is surely alluding to the earlier description of a struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent- sin (Gen. 3:16).

Yet you cannot have abstract diabolism; the evil desires that are in a man's heart cannot exist separately from a man; therefore 'the Devil' is personified. Sin is often personified as a ruler (e.g. Rom. 5:21; 6:6,17; 7:13-14). It is understandable, therefore, that the 'Devil' is also personified, seeing that 'the Devil' also refers to sin. In the same way, Paul speaks of us having two beings, as it were, within our flesh (Rom. 7:15-21): the man of the flesh, 'the Devil', fights with the man of the spirit. Yet it is evident that there are not two literal, personal beings fighting within us. This sinful tendency of our nature is personified as "the evil one" (Mt. 6:13 R.V.) - the Biblical Devil. The same Greek phrase translated "evil one" here is translated as "wicked person" in 1 Cor. 5:13, showing that when a person gives way to sin, his "evil one" - he himself - becomes an "evil one", or a 'Devil'. Even in the Old Testament, sin was personified as 'Belial' (1 Sam. 2:12 mg.). It really has to be accepted that 'Devil' and 'Satan' are used to personify sin, because if we read these words as always meaning a literal being, then we have serious contradictions. Thus "the Devil" is a lion (1 Pet. 5:8), a hunter (2 Tim. 2:26) and a snake (Rev. 12:9); it can't be all these things. Whatever the Devil is (and we believe it to essentially refer to human sin), it is personified in various ways. As J.B. Russell concludes: "The Devil is the personification of the principle of evil" (6). Evil and sin are never abstract. They must be understood in terms of the actions and suffering of persons- and so it's quite appropriate and natural that sin should be personified. As Ivan says to Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "I think that if the Devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness" (7).

The Old Testament, along with the New Testament for that matter, personifies evil and sin. However, Edersheim outlines reasons for believing that as Rabbinic Judaism developed during the exile in Babylon, this personification of evil became extended in the Jewish writings to such a point that sin and evil began to be spoken of as independent beings. And of course, we can understand why this happened- in order to narrow the gap between Judaism and the surrounding Babylonian belief in such beings. Edersheim shows how the Biblical understanding of the *yetzer ha'ra*, the sinful inclination within humanity, became understood as an evil personal being called "the tempter" (8). We've already shown in [Section 1-1-1](#) how the Jews came to be influenced by pagan ideas about Satan whilst in captivity.

Another reason why sin and evil are personified is because the total sum of evil on earth is somehow greater than all its component parts. One reason for this may be, as M. Scott Peck pointed out in several of his popular books, that human

group morality is strikingly less than individual morality. Collective evil, e.g. of a lynch mob, reaches a higher peak than that of the individuals in the mob. Whatever, the 'corporate' nature of evil is not unreal to the evil or sin within each individual person, even though it is ultimately greater than that. And therefore it can be appropriately characterized by personification. Just as a company, an institution, a Government may have some kind of 'personality' greater than all the individuals within it, so it is with human sin and evil. We look at the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust and wonder how individual human sin could be responsible for it... because the total achievement of evil in it seems far greater than that of all the evil in people alive in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s put together. The resolution of this observation is not that an external Devil exists who orchestrated it. Rather, the sum total of any group of people, spirit of living and being, is often greater than the sum of the individual parts. N.T. Wright observed just the same: "Evil is real and powerful. It is not only 'out there' in other people, but it is present and active within each of us. What is more, 'evil' is more than the sum total of all evil impulses and actions. When human beings worship that which is not God, they give authority to forces of destruction and malevolence; and those forces gain a power, collectively, that has, down the centuries of Christian experience, caused wise people to personify it, to give it the name of Satan", the adversary (9).

Christian psychologists of recent times have analyzed why sin is personified. They conclude that giving a mass of right / wrong, yes / no commands would hardly be the way to bring a person to holistic spiritual development. This was why there was a ritual of cleansing sin and guilt by blood sacrifice. It wasn't that the blood of animals could take away sin; nor was it that *God* needed it. But it was a helpful teaching mechanism for *people*; that *they* might more powerfully see the nature, seriousness and cost of sin. A visual approach is always helpful, especially bearing in mind that the majority of God's people over the centuries have been illiterate. And so this is why sin and evil have been given some level of symbolism in the Bible, especially personification- for sin supremely is relevant to persons (10). I think that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the curing of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more.

Personification is far more popular in Greek and Hebrew (the main languages in which the Bible was written) than in English. "In a language [e.g. ancient Greek] which makes no formal distinction between animate and inanimate and which has no such convention as the initial capital for a proper name, where can the line be drawn between an abstract noun and its personification?" (11). Those who believe in an orthodox Satan figure need to consider whether the Bible uses personification; and whether sin is personified; and whether sin is the great human satan / adversary / enemy. The answer really has to be 'Yes, sir' to those questions. For as an academic in the field of linguistics has rightly pointed out, "the personification of sin [is] a prominent feature of human speech in any language and particularly of Biblical language" (12). In this case, why should there be any reasonable objection to what we're suggesting- that 'Satan' in the Bible at times refers to a personification of sin? G.P. Gilmour, one time chancellor of Canada's McMaster University, shared this perspective. His reflections bear quoting: "The devil provides for our minds the idea of a focus or personification of evil... we are dealing here with the difficult language not only of metaphor but of personification. Personification is a necessity of thought and speech, for sophisticated and unsophisticated thinkers alike; but only the sophisticated stops to ask himself what he is doing" (13). Dostoevsky very profoundly understood all this when he created a fictional dialogue between the

Devil and Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky makes the Devil say to Ivan: "You are not someone apart, you are myself. You are I and nothing more". To which Ivan replies: "You are the incarnation of myself, but only of one side of me... of my thoughts and feelings, but only the nastiest and stupidest of them... You are myself- with a different face. You just say what I am thinking, you are incapable of saying anything new!" (Part 4, ch. 9). Dostoevsky was trying in his own way to deconstruct the existence of the Devil as a supernatural entity. Satan is often a metaphor, and "a good metaphor is supposed to challenge conventional ways of looking at things and suggest an alternative perspective. Metaphors disclose a way of viewing life and relationships, but they may also conceal things from us" (14). This is true- and that's exactly why we must take metaphors as they are, metaphors, and not read them literally nor think that there is no other aspect to the situation they are addressing.

The personification of sin is therefore a means of enabling us to grapple with the sin that is within us; a tool for self-examination and self-mastery. William Barclay came to this conclusion: "In Paul, sin becomes personalized until sin could be spelled with a capital letter, and could be thought of as a malignant, personal power which has man in its grasp" (15). The practical purpose of personifying sin has been brought out well by Barry Hodson, who observed that "In every respect, Paul describes the working of sin in terms which link up with the original serpent... it is appropriate that [sin] should be personified... we [are to] regard every temptation as a re-enactment of the temptation of our first parents. It will greatly help us in our warfare against sin if we can" (16). As and when temptation enters our minds, we are to see it for what it is, speak to it, deal with it, resist it, overcome it... Indeed, human beings often externalize things in order to get to grips with them, define them, and engage with them. Winston Churchill spoke frequently of his depression as a black dog which followed him home; and in movies and novels we are accustomed to abstract things being externalized into a person, or character in the story. Thus in the Disney version of Pinocchio, the Blue Fairy appoints Jiminy Cricket [intended to be interpreted as 'Jesus Christ'] as the official conscience of Pinocchio, a voice in his ear which accompanies him on his journeys. It's totally normal and to be expected, therefore, that on the level of literature, the Bible narrative should at times externalize and personify sin as a 'Satan' figure. Indeed it would be most surprising if the Bible *didn't* personify sin.

'DEVIL' AND 'SATAN' IN A POLITICAL CONTEXT

These words 'Devil' and 'Satan' are also used to describe the wicked, sinful world order in which we live. The social, political and pseudo-religious hierarchies of mankind can be spoken of in terms of 'the Devil', not least because they are structured around human, sinful desires- the great adversary to God's Spirit. Hence 1 Pet. 4:2,3 parallels living "in the flesh, to the lusts of men" with "working the will of the Gentiles". The will of the world is the will of the flesh, and is thus adversarial, 'satanic', to the will of God. The Devil and Satan in the New Testament often refer to the political and social power of the Jewish or Roman systems. Thus we read of the Devil throwing believers into prison (Rev. 2:10), referring to the Roman authorities imprisoning believers. In this same context we read of the church in Pergamos being situated where Satan's throne, was - i.e. the place of governorship for a Roman colony in Pergamos, where there was also a group of believers. We cannot say that Satan himself, if he exists, personally had a throne in Pergamos. The Bible repeatedly stresses that human political authority, civil authorities etc. are God given, deriving their power from Him (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17); never are they said to derive their authority from 'Satan'. Yet they can be called 'Satan' in that they are adversarial at times to His people.

Individual sin is defined as a transgression against God's law (1 Jn. 3:4). But sin expressed collectively as a political and social force opposed to God is a force more powerful than individuals; it is this collective power which is sometimes personified as a powerful being called the Devil. In this sense Iran and other Islamic powers have called the United States, "the great Satan" - i.e. the great adversary to their cause, in political and religious terms. This is how the words 'Devil' and 'Satan' are often used in the Bible. And again I repeat the path of logic used a few paragraphs above: 1) Is sin personified? Clearly it is. 2) Is it true that 'Satan' can be used just as a noun? Yes, it is. What real problem, therefore, can there be in accepting that sin is personified as our enemy/Satan? The world is often personified in John's letters and Gospel (see R.V.); what better title for this personification than 'Satan' or 'the Devil'?

It has been observed, however, by many a thoughtful mind- that the total evil in the world does so often appear greater than the sum of all the individual personal sin / evil which there is committed by and latent within each person. In this context, let's hear Tom Wright again: "All corporate institutions have a kind of corporate soul, an identity which is greater than the sum of its parts... industrial companies, governments or even (God help us) churches, can become so corrupted with evil that the language of "possession" at a corporate level becomes the only way to explain the phenomena before us" (17). In the same way as collective bodies of persons somehow achieve an identity greater than the sum of the individual contribution of each person, so, I submit, there appears a corporate evil / sin in our world which is greater than the sum of what each individual person contributes towards it. But in the same way as there is no literal 'ghost in the machine', so this phenomena doesn't mean that there is actually a personal superhuman being called 'Satan'. But it would be fair enough to use the term "the Satan", the adversary, to describe this globally encompassing corporation of 'sin' which we observe. For it's not solely our own personal sinfulness which is our great enemy, but also the kind of corporate sin which exists in our world. Arthur Koestler's work *The Ghost In The Machine* analyzes the progressive self-destructiveness of humanity over history, and seeks to address the question of how the total evil in the world is simply so huge (18). He takes the perspective that there is no personal Satan responsible, but rather the human mind has progressively developed in evil so that impulses of hate, anger etc. overpower- and progressively are overpowering- what he calls "cognitive logic"; i.e. we do what we know is unwise, illogical and wrong.

In conclusion, it is probably true to say that in this subject more than any other, it is vital to base our understanding upon a balanced view of the whole Bible, rather than building doctrines on a few verses containing catch-phrases which appear to refer to the common beliefs concerning the Devil. It is submitted that the doctrinal position outlined here is the only way of being able to have a reasonable understanding of all the passages which refer to the Devil and Satan. I submit it's the key which turns every lock. Some of the most widely misunderstood passages which are quoted in support of the popular ideas are considered in [Chapter 5](#).

Notes

- (1) J.H. Walton, 'Serpent', in T.D. Alexander and D.W. Baker, eds, *Dictionary Of The Old Testament And Pentateuch* (Leicester: I.V.P., 2003) p. 738.
- (2) George Lamsa, *New Testament Light* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1968) p. 24.

- (3) George Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1945) p. 604.
- (4) E.P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1996) p. 93.
- (5) Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, translated by G.T. Thomson (London: S.C.M., 1972 ed.) p. 20.
- (6) J.B. Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987) p. 23.
- (7) Feodyor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1990) p. 283.
- (8) Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah* (London: Longmans, 1899) Vol. 2, Appendices 13 and 16.
- (9) N.T. Wright, *The Lord And His Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) p. 71.
- (10) See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism Of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) for more on this.
- (11) E. Stafford, *Worshipping Virtues: Personification And The Divine In Ancient Greece* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2000), p. 9
- (12) Graham Jackman, *The Language Of The Cross* (Lulu, 2008) p. 40.
- (13) G.P. Gilmour, *The Memoirs Called Gospels* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1959) pp. 113,114.
- (14) John Sanders, *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove: I.V.P., 1998) p. 11.
- (15) William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (London: S.C.M., 1992) p. 124.
- (16) Barry Hodson, *The Cross Of Christ* (Wanganui, New Zealand: Christian Restoration Centre, 2009) p. 24.
- (17) N.T. Wright, *Evil And The Justice Of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006) p. 38.
- (18) Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost In The Machine* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990 ed.).

2-4 The Jewish Satan

We have explained above that the word ‘satan’ means ‘adversary’, and ‘the devil’ refers to a false accuser. These terms can at times refer to individuals or organizations who are in some sense ‘adversarial’, and sometimes in the New Testament

they refer to the greatest human adversary, i.e. sin. Close study of the New Testament makes it apparent that quite often, the 'satan' of both the Lord Jesus and His first followers was related to the Jewish system which so opposed Him and the subsequent preaching of Him. Not only did the Jews crucify God's Son, but the book of Acts makes it clear that it was Jewish opposition which was the main adversary to Paul's spreading of the Gospel and establishment of the early church (Acts 13:50,51; 14:2,5,6,19; 17:5-9,13,14; 18:6,12-17; 21:27-36; 23:12-25). Paul speaks of the Jewish opposition as having "killed both the Lord Jesus and the [first century Christian] prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins" (1 Thess. 2:13-16). These are strong words, and must be given their full weight in our assessment of the degree to which the Jews were indeed a great 'Satan' to the cause of Christ in the first century. Three times did the synagogues beat Paul with 39 stripes (2 Cor. 11:24). The Jews of Antioch in Pisidia cursed Paul and his message (Acts 13:45 Gk.), drove him out of the city, and then travelled 180 km. to Lystra to oppose his preaching there. The Jews of Iconium and Jerusalem sought to "stir up" the Gentile authorities against Paul (Acts 14:2,5). No wonder that Paul's midrash on Hagar and Sarah speaks of the earthly Jerusalem as being the persecutors of God's true children (Gal. 4:29). Many of Paul's letters were occasioned by Jewish false teaching and attempts at infiltrating the churches he had founded (Gal. 2:4). In Rome and elsewhere, the Jews sought to curry favour with the Romans by reporting Christian activity to the authorities (1).

The Lord Jesus was fully aware of the opposition to His flock which would come from the Jewish opposition. He speaks of how "the thief" comes to the flock to steal and kill, whereas Jesus as the good shepherd came to give life (Jn. 10:10). It's too simplistic to say that "the thief" here is "satan". Earlier in John 10, the Lord Jesus had pointed out that various other thieves and robbers, who are "strangers" to the true flock, have tried to steal the sheep by persuading them to follow their voices (Jn. 10:1,5). When :10 speaks of "the thief", the Lord is speaking of the characteristics of a thief- but the "thieves" are many, and they are the opposite of Jesus the true shepherd. John 10 is shot through with allusion to Ezekiel 34- which is all about false shepherds. The thieves, robbers and strangers were the false shepherds, the antitheses to the one true Messianic shepherd. But they are personified as one "thief" or robber. The false shepherds in the immediate context were of course the Jewish leaders of Israel- and they clearly were the original 'satan' or opposition to Jesus and His flock. The sheepfold is interpreted as the temple (Ps. 95:6,7; 100:3,4); and the temple was full of "robbers" in the sense of false teachers and abusive religious leaders (Jer. 7:11). Let's remember that the Lord was speaking these words near the temple, and according to the commentaries of Adam Clarke and Isaac Newton, there were folds of sheep near the temple, in a kind of market place, where sheep could be purchased for sacrifice. The folds could be rented, along with "shepherds"- the "hirelings" to which Jesus refers. Perhaps He spoke these words with the bleating of the abused temple sheep in His ears. The emphasis in John 10 is upon the need to hear the shepherd's voice and reject the voice or teaching of others (Jn. 10:4,5,8,14,16,20,27,41,42). False teachers and shepherds sought to "draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). The thieves came to "kill"- and this applies to the Jewish opposition to Jesus who sought to kill the disciples, the sheep, thinking they thereby did God service (Jn. 16:2). The point was that the true flock would not be led away by the voice or teaching of Jewish false teachers, because they knew the word of Jesus the true shepherd Messiah.

The Jewish scribes and Pharisees tried hard "that they might find an accusation against" the Lord Jesus (Lk. 6:7); their false accusation of Him was especially seen at His trials. Pilate's question to them "What accusation do you bring against this man?" (Jn. 18:29) shows the Jews as the ultimate false accusers of God's Son. For it was because of their playing the

ultimate role of the Devil, the false accuser, that the Son of God was slain. No wonder the ideas of 'devil' and 'satan' are often associated with the Jewish system's opposition of Christ and His people. The same Greek word for 'accuser' is five times used about Jewish false accusation of Paul in an attempt to hinder His work for Christ (Acts 23:30,35; 24:8; 25:16,18).

The Jewish Opposition To The Gospel As Satan

There are a surprising number of references to the Jewish system, especially the Judaizers, as the Devil or Satan:

- Lk. 6:7 describes the scribes and Pharisees as looking for every opportunity to make false accusation against the Lord Jesus. They were indeed 'the Devil' - the false accuser.
- 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 relates how "the Jews...have persecuted us (Paul and his helpers)...forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles". But Paul goes on to say in :18: "wherefore we would have come unto you ...once and again but Satan hindered us". The "Satan" refers to Jewish oppositions to the Gospel and Paul's planned preaching visit to Gentile Thessalonica.
- "False apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ... Satan himself is transformed into and Angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:13-14) probably refers to the subtle Judaist infiltration of the young churches with 'double-agents' (see 2 Cor. 2:11; Gal. 2:4-6; Jude 4).
- The false teachers "crept in" just as a serpent creeps (Jude 4).
- The same group may have been in Christ's mind in His parable of the tares being sown in the field of the (Jewish) world by the Devil, *secretly* (cp. "false [Jewish] brethren unawares brought in", Gal. 2:4-6).
- The parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men...neither suffer ye them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).
- The Jewish religious leaders were "of your father the Devil" (Jn. 8:44). This would explain the Lord's description of Judas as a devil (Jn. 6:70) because the Jewish Devil had entered him and conceived, making him a 'devil' also. In the space of a few verses, we read the Lord Jesus saying that "the devil" is a "liar" - and then stating that His Jewish opponents were "liars" (Jn. 8:44,55). These are the only places where the Lord uses the word "liar" - clearly enough He identified those Jews with "the devil". If the Jews' father was the Devil, then 'the Devil' was a fitting description of them too. They were a "generation of (gendered by) vipers", alluding back to the serpent in Eden, which epitomized "the Devil"; "that old serpent, called (i.e. being similar to) the Devil and Satan" (Rev. 12:9). In the same way as Judas became a devil, the "false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus" is called a "child of the Devil" (Acts 13:6,10), which description makes him an embodiment of the Jewish opposition to the Gospel. There are many other connections between the serpent and the Jews; clearest is Isaiah 1:4 "A people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters". This is describing Israel in the language of Genesis 3:15 concerning the serpent. Thus the Messianic Psalm 140:3,10 describes Christ reflecting that His Jewish persecutors "have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips...let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire" (referring to the falling masonry of Jerusalem in A.D. 70?). It is quite possible that Christ's encouragement to the seventy that "I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (Lk. 10:19) has a primary reference to their ability to overcome Jewish opposition during their preaching tour.
- Psalm 109 is a prophecy of Christ's betrayal and death (:8 = Acts 1:20). The satans ("adversaries") of the Lord Jesus which the Psalm speaks of (:4,20,29) were the Jews, and the specific 'Satan' of v. 6 was Judas.

- Michael the Archangel's disputing with the Devil about the body of Moses could refer to the Angel that led Israel through the wilderness contending with a group of disaffected Jews (Jude 9).
- "The synagogue of Satan" who were persecuting the ecclesias (Rev. 2:9; 3:9) makes explicit the connection between 'Satan' and the Jewish opposition to the Gospel.

Judas, Satan And The Jews

Psalm 55:13-15 foretells Judas' betrayal of Jesus. It speaks of Judas in the singular, but also talk of his work as being done by a group of people - the Jews, in practice: "It was you, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together... let death seize them (plural), and let *them* go down quickly into hell" (cp. Judas' end). Likewise the other prophecy of Judas' betrayal also connects him with the Jewish system: "My own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread (cp. Jesus passing the sop to Judas), has lifted up his heel against me. But You, O Lord, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them" (Ps. 41:9,10). Thus Judas is being associated with the Jews who wanted to kill Jesus, and therefore he, too, is called a devil. Both Judas and the Jews were classic 'devils' due to their surrender to the flesh. This is further confirmed by a look as Psalm 69. Verse 22 is quoted in Romans 11:9,10 concerning the Jews: "Let their table become a snare before them... let their eyes be darkened". The passage continues in Psalm 69:25: "Let *their* habitation be desolate; let none dwell in *their* tents". This is quoted in Acts 1:16,20 as referring specifically to Judas, but the pronouns are changed accordingly: "This scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas... Let *his* [singular] habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and *his* bishoprick let another take".

In the parable of the sower, "the Devil" is defined as the enemy of Christ the sower / preacher of the Gospel- and His enemies initially were the Jews. These were the "tares" sown amongst the wheat which Christ had sowed, "things that offend" - and Paul warns of the Judaizers who caused *offences* and schisms to wreck the ecclesia (Rom. 16:17; 14:13; Mt.13:38,39,25,41). This is all confirmed by Jesus in Mt. 15: 12-13 describing the Pharisees as plants "which My Heavenly Father hath not planted" which were to be rooted up at the judgment. It was this 'Devil' that put the idea of betraying Jesus into Judas' mind, so Lk. 22:2,3 implies: "the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him...then entered Satan into Judas". The Jewish ideas of an immediate Kingdom and the throwing off of the Roman yoke by a glamorous, heroic Messiah entered Judas, and caused him to become so bitter against Christ's Messiahship that he betrayed Him. The Jewish Satan, in the form of both the Jews and their ideology, was at work on the other disciples too: "Satan hath desired to have you" (plural), Jesus warned them. Especially was the High Priest seeking Peter: "I have prayed for thee (Peter - singular), that thy faith fail thee not" (Lk. 22:31-32). Could Jesus foresee the Satan - High Priest later arresting Peter and his subsequent trial in prison? Throughout the first century, the Jewish and Roman Devil sought "whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). It is possible that 1 John 2:14 has reference to the Jewish Satan or "wicked one" trying to especially subvert young converts, both in years and spiritual maturity, just as it had tried to subvert the disciples during Christ's ministry: "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one".

The Law Of Moses As An Adversary

When Peter was explaining how Christ had opened a way for Gentiles to obtain salvation without the Law, he reminded them how Jesus had healed "all that were oppressed of the Devil" (Acts 10:38). 'Oppressed' meaning literally 'held down',

is he hinting that the people Jesus helped had been hopelessly in bondage to the Jewish system? “Him that had the power of death, that is the Devil” (Heb. 2:14) may refer to the fact that “the sting (power) of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the (Jewish) Law” (1 Cor. 15: 56; see also Rom. 4:15; 5:13; 7:8, where ‘the Law’ that gives power to sin is clearly the Jewish law). Bearing in mind that the ‘Devil’ often refers to sin and the flesh, it seems significant that ‘the flesh’ and ‘sin’ are often associated with the Mosaic Law. The whole passage in Heb. 2:14 can be read with reference to the Jewish Law being ‘taken out of the way’ by the death of Jesus [A.V. “destroy him that hath the power of death”]. The Devil kept men in bondage, just as the Law did (Gal. 4:9; 5:1; Acts 15:10; Rom. 7:6-11). The Law was an ‘accuser’ (Rom. 2:19,20; 7:7) just as the Devil is.

One of the major themes of Galatians is the need to leave the Law. “You have been called unto liberty... for all the Law is fulfilled... this I say then (therefore), Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit... so that you cannot do the things that you would”. It was because of the Law being impossible for sinful man to keep that it was impossible to obey it as one would like. “But if you be led of the Spirit, you are not under the Law”. This seems to clinch the association between the Law and the flesh (Gal. 5:13-18). The same contrast between the Spirit and the Law/flesh is seen in Rom. 8:2-3: “The Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the Law (of Moses / sin) could not do...”. The Law indirectly encouraged the “works of the flesh” listed in Gal. 5:19-21, shown in practice by the Jews becoming more morally degenerate than even the Canaanite nations, and calling forth Paul’s expose of how renegade Israel were in Romans 1.

Gal. 5:24-25 implies that in the same way as Jesus crucified the Law (Col. 2:14) by His death on the cross, so the early church should crucify the Law and the passions it generated by its specific denial of so many fleshly desires: “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections (AVmg. “passions”) and lusts”. This seems to connect with Rom. 7:5: “When we were in the flesh the motions (same Greek word, ‘affections’ as in Gal. 5:24) of sins, which were by the Law, did work in our members”. “When we were in the flesh” seems to refer to ‘While we were under the Law’. For Paul implies he is no longer ‘in the flesh’, which he was if ‘the flesh’ only refers to human nature.

Hebrews 2:14 states that the Devil was destroyed by Christ’s death. The Greek for ‘destroy’ is translated ‘abolish’ in Ephesians 2:15: “Having abolished [Darby: ‘annulled’] in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances”. This would equate the Devil with the enmity, or fleshly mind (Rom. 8:7) generated by the Mosaic Law; remember that Hebrews was written mainly to Jewish believers. The Law itself was perfect, in itself it was not the minister of sin, but the effect it had on man was to stimulate the ‘Devil’ within man because of our disobedience. “The strength of sin is the Law” (1 Cor. 15:56). “Sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me (Rom. 7: 8,11). Hence “the wages of sin (stimulated by the Law) is death” (Rom. 6:23). It is quite possible that the “sin” in Romans 6, which we should not keep serving, may have some reference to the Mosaic Law. It is probable that the Judaizers were by far the biggest source of false teaching in the early church. The assumption that Paul is battling Gnosticism is an anachronism, because the Gnostic heresies developed some time later. It would be true to say that incipient Gnostic ideas were presented by the Judaizers in the form of saying that sin was not to be taken too seriously because the Law provided set formulae for getting round it. The Law produced an outward showing in the “flesh”, not least in the sign of circumcision (Rom. 2:28).

There is a frequent association of sin (the Devil) and the Mosaic Law throughout Romans (this is not to say that the law is itself sinful- it led to sin only due to human weakness). A clear example of this is found in Romans 6 talking about us dying to sin and living to righteousness, whilst Romans 7 speaks in the same language about the Law; thus “he that is dead is free from sin... you (are) *dead indeed unto sin*” (Rom. 6:7,11) cp. “You also are become *dead to the Law*” (Rom. 7:4). Other relevant examples are tabulated below:

Romans 6 (about sin)	Romans 7 (about the Law)
“Sin shall not have (anymore) dominion over you: for you are not under the Law” (:14)	“The Law has dominion over a man... as long as he lives” (:1)
“Dead indeed unto sin” (:11)	“She is loosed from the Law” (:2).
“Being then made free from sin” (:18)	“She is free from that Law” (:3)
“As those that are alive from the dead... you have your fruit unto holiness” (:13,22), having left sin.	“You should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (:4), having left the Law.
“Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin (as a result of sin having dominion over you)” (:13,14).	“When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members... but now we are delivered from the law” (:5,6).
“Therefore... we also should walk in newness of life” (:4).	“We should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” of the Law (:6).

“For what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin” (Rom. 8:3) - cp. Gal. 4:4-5, “Made of a woman, made under the Law (cp. “sinful flesh”) to redeem them that were under the Law”. The drive of Paul’s argument in its primary context was that having been baptized, they should leave the Law, as that was connected with the sin from which baptism saved them- it introduced them to salvation by pure grace in Jesus. The Hebrew writer had the connection in mind when he wrote of “*carnal ordinances*” (Heb. 9:10; 7:16). To be justified by the Law was to be “made perfect by the flesh”, so close is the connection between Law and flesh (Gal. 3:2,3). “We (who have left the Law)... have no confidence in the flesh (i.e. the Law). Though I might also have confidence in the flesh...” (Phil. 3:3-4), and then Paul goes on to list all the things which gave him high standing in the eyes of the Law and the Jewish system. These things he associates with “the flesh”.

Paul summarizes this argument in Colossians 2, where, in the context of baptism and warning believers not to return to the Law, he argues “If ye be dead with Christ (in baptism) from the rudiments of the (Jewish) world, why, as though living in the (Jewish) world, (i.e. under the Law) are ye subject to (Mosaic) ordinances...?” (:20). The Law was “against us... contrary to us” (Col. 2:14) - hence it being called an adversary/Satan. The natural Jews under the Mosaic Law, as opposed to the Abrahamic covenant regarding Christ, are called “the children of the flesh” (Rom. 9:8). Similarly those under the Law are paralleled with the son of the bondwoman “born after the flesh” (Gal. 4:23). Paul reasons: “Are you now made perfect by the flesh?... received you the Spirit by the works of the Law?” (Gal. 3: 2,3) - as if “by the flesh” is equivalent to “by the law”. Now we can understand why Heb. 7:16-18 speaks of “The Law of a carnal commandment... the weakness and unprofitableness thereof”. Not only is the word “carnal” used with distinctly fleshly overtones elsewhere, but the law being described as “weak” invites connection with phrases like “the flesh is weak” (Mt. 26:41). Rom. 8:3 therefore describes the Law as “weak through the flesh”.

"The god of this world"

If Scripture interprets Scripture, “the god of this world (*aion*)” in 2 Corinthians 4: 4 must be similar to “the prince of this world (*kosmos*)” (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Both the Jewish age [*aion*] and *kosmos* ended in A.D. 70. In the context, Paul has been talking in 2 Cor. 3 about how the glory shining from Moses’ face blinded the Israelites so that they could not see the real spirit of the law which pointed forward to Christ. Similarly, he argues in chapter 4, the Jews in the first century could not see “the light of the glorious (cp. the glory on Moses’ face) gospel of Christ” because they were still blinded by “the god of this world” - the ruler of the Jewish age. The “prince” or “God” of the “world” (age) was the Jewish system, manifested this time in Moses and his law. Notice how the Jews are described as having made their boast of the law...made their boast of God (Rom. 2:17,23). To them, the Law of Moses had become the god of their world. Although the link is not made explicit, there seems no reason to doubt that “the prince of this world” and “Satan” are connected. It is evident from Acts (9:23-25,29-30; 13:50,51; 14:5,19; 17:5,13; 18:12; 20:3) that the Jews were the major 'Satan' or adversary to the early Christians, especially to Paul. Of course it has to be remembered that there is a difference between Moses’ personal character and the Law he administered; this contrast is constantly made in Hebrews. Similarly the Law was “Holy, just and good”, but resulted in sin due to man’s weakness - it was “weak through the flesh”, explaining why the idea of Satan/sin is connected with the Law. Because of this it was in practice a “ministry of condemnation”, and therefore a significant ‘adversary’ (Satan) to man; for in reality, “the motions of sins... were by the Law” (Rom. 7:5).

Jewish Opposition As "Satan" In Romans 16

The Jewish system ceased to be a serious adversary or Satan to the Christians in the aftermath of its destruction in A.D. 70, as Paul prophesied: “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom. 16:20). A closer study of the context reveals more precisely the mentality of the Judaizer Satan. Satan being bruised underfoot alludes back to the seed of the serpent being bruised in Genesis 3:15. The Jews are therefore likened to the Satan-serpent in Genesis (as they are in Jn. 8:44), in their causing “divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned” (Rom. 16:17). Other details in Romans 16 now fall into the Genesis 3:15 context: “they that are such serve... their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (:18). The fair speeches of the Judaizers were like those of the serpent. Instead of ‘Why not eat the fruit?’ it was ‘Why not keep the law?’. Is. 24:6 had earlier made the point that because of the sin of the priesthood “therefore hath the curse devoured the earth / land”; “their poison is like the poison of a

serpent” (Ps. 59:4).

The tree of knowledge thus comes to represent the Law - because “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). The fig leaves which Adam and Eve covered themselves with also represented the Law, seeing they were replaced by the slain lamb. Their initially glossy appearance typifies well the apparent covering of sin by the Law, which faded in time. The fig tree is a symbol of Israel. It seems reasonable to speculate that having eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge, they made their aprons out of its leaves, thus making the tree of knowledge a fig tree. Both the tree and the leaves thus represent the Law and Jewish system; it is therefore fitting if the leaves were from the same tree. It is also noteworthy that when Christ described the Pharisees as appearing “beautiful” outwardly, he used a word which in the Septuagint was used concerning the tree of knowledge, as if they were somehow connected with it (Mt. 23:27).

It was as if the Judaizers were saying: ‘Yea, hath God said you cannot keep the law? Why then has He put it there? It will do you good, it will give you greater spiritual knowledge’. Colossians 2:3-4 shows this kind of reasoning was going on: “In (Christ) are hid *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words”. Here is another allusion to the serpent. Because all spiritual knowledge is in Christ, Paul says, don’t be beguiled by offers of deeper knowledge. Thus Adam and Eve’s relationship with God in Eden which the serpent envied and broke is parallel to us being “in Christ” with all the spiritual knowledge that is there. Hence Paul warned Corinth: “I fear, lest... as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). The ‘simplicity in Christ’ was therefore the same as man’s relationship with God in Eden. So again we see the Judaist false teachers equated with the Satan-serpent of Genesis. Titus 1:10 and 2 Peter 2:1-3 specifically define these men who used an abundance of words and sophistry as “they of the circumcision”, i.e. Jewish false teachers. Those in 2 Peter 2 are described as speaking evil of Angels (:12 cp. Jude 8) - in the same way as the serpent spoke evil of the Angelic commands given in Eden. It’s been pointed out that there’s an Aramaic pun which connects the serpent [*hewya*] with the idea of instruction [*hawa*] and also Eve, the false teacher of Adam [*Hawah*] (2).

Back in Romans 16, the Judaizer Satans/ adversaries are spoken of as serving “their own belly” (:18) like the serpent did. Maybe the serpent liked the look of the fruit and wanted to justify his own eating of it; to do this he persuaded Eve to eat it. Because he served his belly, he had to crawl on it. Similarly the Judaizers wanted to be justified in their own keeping of the Law, and therefore persuaded Eve, the Christian bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:1-3), to do the same. “Yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple (AVmg. “harmless”) concerning evil” (Rom. 16:19) - “be wise as serpents, (primarily referring to the Pharisees?) and harmless as doves”, Jesus had said (Mt. 10:16). Phil. 3:19 has a number of allusions to the serpent, the conflict predicted in Gen. 3:15 and the fall of Adam in Eden: “*Enemies* [cp. ‘enmity’] of the cross of Christ. Their end is *destruction*, their god is the *belly* (s.w. Gen. 3:14 LXX), they glory in their *shame*”. The context speaks of the Judaizers- they are presented, by way of allusion, as the serpent.

Conclusions

The extent of the Jewish opposition to the Gospel of Christ is clearly discernible throughout the New Testament, even if one has to ‘read between the lines’ to perceive it. Through both direct and indirect allusion, the Jews are set up as the great ‘Satan’ or adversary to the Christian cause in the first century.

Notes

- (1) Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove: I.V.P., 2004) Vol. 2 p. 1026.
 (2) Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1989) p. 30.

2-5 Hell

The popular conception of hell is of a place of punishment for wicked 'immortal souls' straight after death, or the place of torment for those who are rejected at the judgment. It is our conviction that the Bible teaches that hell is the grave, where all men go at death.

As a word, the original Hebrew word 'sheol', translated 'hell', refers to the grave. Some say it means 'a covered place'. There are some parallels between 'sheol' and 'covering' in the Bible, e.g.

"*Sheol* is naked before God... Abaddon has no *covering*" (Job 26:6)

"Your pomp is brought down to the grave [she'ol]... and the worms *cover* thee" (Is. 14:10,11)

"In the day when he went down to the grave [she'ol] I caused a mourning: I *covered* the deep for him" (Ez. 31:15).

'Hell' is the anglicised version of 'sheol'; thus when we read of 'hell' we are not reading a word which has been fully translated. A 'helmet' is literally a 'hell-met', meaning a covering for the head. In old English, especially in Scotland, there was the practice of "helling potatoes", burying them underground in

Winter, covering them, in order to preserve them; putting a thatched roof on a building was to "hell a house", to cover it. The village of Hellington in Eastern England was originally so named because of the thatchers who lived there- those who 'helled' rooves. Webster's Third New International Dictionary, defines "Hell" as coming "from . . . helan, to conceal". Biblically, this 'covered place', or 'hell', is the grave (1). There are many examples where the original word 'sheol' is translated 'grave'. Indeed, some modern Bible versions scarcely use the word 'hell', translating it more properly as 'grave'. A few examples of where this word 'sheol' is translated 'grave' should torpedo the popular conception of hell as a place of fire and torment for the wicked.

☞ "Let the wicked...be silent in the grave" (sheol [Ps. 31:17]) - they will not be screaming in agony.

☞ "God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave" (sheol [Ps. 49:15]) - i.e. David's soul or body would be raised from the grave, or 'hell'.

The belief that hell is a place of punishment for the wicked from which they cannot escape just cannot be squared with this; a righteous man can go to hell (the grave) and come out again. Hos. 13:14 confirms this: "I will ransom them (God's people) from the power of the grave (sheol); I will redeem them from death". This is quoted in 1 Cor. 15:55 and applied to the resurrection at Christ's return. Likewise in the vision of the second resurrection (see Study 5.5), "Death and Hades (Greek for 'hell') delivered up the dead who were in them" (Rev. 20:13). Note the parallel between death, i.e. the grave, and Hades (see also Ps. 6:5).

Hannah's words in 1 Sam. 2:6 are very clear: "The Lord kills and makes alive (through resurrection); he brings down to the grave (sheol), and brings up".

Seeing that 'hell' is the grave, it is to be expected that the righteous will be saved from it through their resurrection to eternal life. Thus it is quite possible to enter 'hell', or the grave, and later to leave it through resurrection. The supreme example

is that of Jesus, whose “soul was not left in Hades (hell), nor did his flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:31) because he was raised. Note the parallel between Christ’s ‘soul’ and his ‘flesh’ or body. That his body “was not *left* in Hades” implies that it was there for a period, i.e. the three days in which his body was in the grave. That Christ went to ‘hell’ should be proof enough that it is not just a place where the wicked go.

Both good and bad people go to ‘hell’, i.e. the grave. Thus Jesus “made his grave with the wicked” (Is. 53:9). In line with this, there are other examples of righteous men going to hell, i.e. the grave. Jacob said that he would “go down into the grave (hell)...mourning” for his son Joseph (Gen. 37:35).

It is one of God’s principles that the punishment for sin is death (Rom. 6:23; 8:13; James 1:15). We have previously shown death to be a state of complete unconsciousness. Sin results in total destruction, not eternal torment (Mt. 21:41; 22:7; Mk. 12:9; James 4:12), as surely as people were destroyed by the Flood (Lk. 17:27,29), and as the Israelites died in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:10). On both these occasions the sinners *died* rather than being eternally tormented. It is therefore impossible that the wicked are punished with an eternity of conscious torment and suffering.

We have also seen that God does not impute sin - or count it to our record - if we are ignorant of His word (Rom. 5:13). Those in this position will remain dead. Those who have known God’s requirements will be raised and judged at Christ’s return. If wicked, the punishment they receive will be death, because this is the judgment for sin. Therefore after coming before the judgment seat of Christ, they will be punished and then die again, to stay dead for ever. This will be “the *second* death”, spoken of in Rev. 2:11; 20:6. These people will have died once, a death of total unconsciousness. They will be raised and judged at Christ’s return, and then punished with a second death, which, like their first death, will be total unconsciousness. This will last forever.

It is in this sense that the punishment for sin is ‘everlasting’, in that there will be no end to their death. To remain dead for ever

is an everlasting punishment. An example of the Bible using this kind of expression is found in Dt. 11:4. This describes God's one-off destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea as an eternal, on-going destruction in that this actual army never again troubled Israel: "He made the waters of the Red sea overflow them... the Lord has destroyed them to this day".

One of the parables about Christ's return and the judgment speaks of the wicked being 'slain' in his presence (Lk. 19:27). This hardly fits into the idea that the wicked exist forever in a conscious state, constantly receiving torture. In any case, this would be a somewhat unreasonable punishment - *eternal* torture for deeds of 70 years. God has no pleasure in punishing wicked people; it is therefore to be expected that He will not inflict punishment on them for eternity (Ez. 18:23,32; 33:11 cf. 2 Pet. 3:9).

A misbelieving Christendom often associates 'hell' with the idea of fire and torment. This is in sharp contrast to Bible teaching about hell (the grave). "Like sheep they are laid in the grave (hell); death shall feed on them" (Ps. 49:14) implies that the grave is a place of peaceful oblivion. Despite Christ's soul, or body, being in hell for three days, it did not suffer corruption (Acts 2:31). This would have been impossible if hell were a place of fire. Ez. 32:26-30 gives a picture of the mighty warriors of the nations around, lying in their graves: "the mighty who are fallen (in battle)...who have gone down to hell with their weapons of war; they have laid their swords under their heads...they shall lie...with those who go down to the Pit". This refers to the custom of burying warriors with their weapons, and resting the head of the corpse upon its sword. Yet this is a description of "hell" - the grave. These mighty men lying still in hell (i.e. their graves), hardly supports the idea that hell is a place of fire. Physical things (e.g. swords) go to the same "hell" as people, showing that hell is not an arena of spiritual torment. Thus Peter told a wicked man, "Your money perish with you" (Acts 8:20).

The record of Jonah's experiences also contradicts this. Having been swallowed alive by a huge fish, "Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God from the fish's belly. And he said: 'I cried...to the

Lord...out of the belly of Sheol (hell) I cried” (Jonah 2:1,2). This parallels “the belly of Sheol” with that of the fish. The fish’s belly was truly a ‘covered place’, which is the fundamental meaning of the word ‘sheol’. Obviously, it was not a place of fire, and Jonah came out of “the belly of Sheol” when the fish vomited him out. This pointed forward to the resurrection of Christ from ‘hell’ (the grave) - see Mt. 12:40.

I have emphasized throughout this book that the Bible seeks to deconstruct the wrong pagan myths about Satan figures, and presents Yahweh, Israel's God, as the one true God. One of the most pervasive Canaanite myths was the idea that Baal and Mot, the gods of the skies and underworld respectively, were locked in mortal combat. This idea of cosmic conflict recurred in Babylonian ideas of a struggle between light and darkness, and is found today in the common idea that God and Satan are locked in Heavenly and earthly combat. The Bible often refers to Mot, or Mawet, although in most translations the Hebrew is rendered as 'death' or 'the underworld'. However, very often Mawet is paralleled with *sheol*, the grave. Take Hab. 2:5- the insatiable hunger of Mawet / Mot is paralleled with the insatiability of the grave. The Ras Shamra texts speak of the insatiable appetite of Mot for dead people- he eats them ceaselessly with both hands (2). There are frequent parallels drawn between Mot / Mawet, and the grave: 2 Sam. 22:5,6; Is. 28:18; Hos. 13:14; Job 28:22; 30:23; Ps. 6:5; 18:5; 89:48; 116:3; Prov. 2:18; 5:5; 7:27. The point is that Mot / Mawet doesn't exist, it is simply to be understood as the grave. For very often, language used about Mot in the pagan literature is applied to God in order to show Mot's effective non-existence (see, e.g. section 5-4-3). In our context, the significance of this point is that at times, the Bible refers to pagan ideas about 'Satan' like figures in order to deconstruct them, and show their effective non-existence in the light of the supremacy of the one true God.

FIGURATIVE FIRE

However, the Bible does frequently use the image of eternal fire in order to represent God’s anger with sin, which will result in the total destruction of the sinner in the grave. Sodom was punished with “eternal fire” (Jude v. 7), i.e. it was totally

destroyed due to the wickedness of the inhabitants. Today that city is in ruins, submerged beneath the waters of the Dead Sea; in no way is it now on fire, which is necessary if we are to understand 'eternal fire' literally. Likewise Jerusalem was threatened with the eternal fire of God's anger, due to the sins of Israel: "Then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jer. 17:27). Jerusalem being the prophesied capital of the future Kingdom (Is. 2:2-4; Ps. 48:2), God did not mean us to read this literally. The houses of the great men in Jerusalem were burnt down with fire (2 Kings 25:9), but that fire did not continue eternally. Fire represents the anger/punishment of God against sin, but His anger is not eternal (Jer. 3:12). Fire turns what it burns to dust; and we know that the ultimate wages of sin is death, a turning back to dust. This perhaps is why fire is used as a figure for punishment for sin.

Similarly, God punished the land of Idumea with fire that would "not be quenched night nor day; its smoke shall ascend for ever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste...the owl and the raven shall dwell in it...thorns shall come up in its palaces" (Is. 34:9-15). Seeing that animals and plants were to exist in the ruined land of Idumea, the language of eternal fire must refer to God's anger and His total destruction of the place, rather than being taken literally.

The Hebrew and Greek phrases which are translated "for ever" mean strictly, "for the age". Sometimes this refers to literal infinity, for example the age of the kingdom, but not always. Is. 32:14,15 is an example: "The forts and towers will become lairs for ever...until the spirit is poured upon us". This is one way of understanding the 'eternity' of 'eternal fire'.

Time and again God's anger with the sins of Jerusalem and Israel is likened to fire: "My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place - (Jerusalem)...it will burn, and not be quenched" (Jer. 7:20; other examples include Lam. 4:11 and 2 Kings 22:17).

Fire is also associated with God's judgment of sin, especially at the return of Christ: "For behold, the day is coming, burning like

an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up” (Mal. 4:1). When stubble, or even a human body, is burnt by fire, it returns to dust. It is impossible for any substance, especially human flesh, to literally burn forever. The language of ‘eternal fire’ therefore cannot refer to literal eternal torment. A fire cannot last forever if there is nothing to burn. It should be noted that “Hades” is “cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14). This indicates that Hades is not the same as “the lake of fire”; this represents complete destruction. In the symbolic manner of the book of Revelation, we are being told that the grave is to be totally destroyed, because at the end of the Millennium there will be no more death.

GEHENNA

In the New Testament there are two Greek words translated ‘hell’. ‘Hades’ is the equivalent of the Hebrew ‘sheol’ which we have discussed earlier. ‘Gehenna’ is the name of the rubbish tip which was just outside Jerusalem, where the refuse from the city was burnt. Such rubbish tips are typical of many developing cities today (e.g. ‘Smoky Mountain’ outside Manila in the Philippines.) As a proper noun - i.e. the name of an actual place - it should have been left untranslated as ‘Gehenna’ rather than be translated as ‘hell’. ‘Gehenna’ is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew ‘Ge-ben-Hinnon’. This was located near Jerusalem (Josh. 15:8), and at the time of Christ it was the city rubbish dump. Dead bodies of criminals were thrown onto the fires which were always burning there, so that Gehenna became symbolic of total destruction and rejection.

Again the point has to be driven home that what was thrown onto those fires did not remain there forever - the bodies decomposed into dust. “Our God (will be) a *consuming* fire” (Heb. 12:29) at the day of judgment; the fire of His anger with sin will consume sinners to destruction rather than leave them in a state of only being singed by it and still surviving. At the time of God’s previous judgments of His people Israel at the hand of the Babylonians, Gehenna was filled with dead bodies of the sinners among God’s people (Jer. 7:32,33).

In his masterly way, the Lord Jesus brought together all these Old Testament ideas in his use of the word 'Gehenna'. He often said that those who were rejected at the judgment seat at His return would go "to hell (i.e. Gehenna), into the fire that shall never be quenched ... where their worm does not die" (Mk. 9:43,44). Gehenna would have conjured up in the Jewish mind the ideas of rejection and destruction of the body, and we have seen that eternal fire is an idiom representing the anger of God against sin, and the eternal destruction of sinners through death.

The reference to "where their worm does not die", is evidently part of this same idiom for total destruction - it is inconceivable that there could be literal worms which will never die. The fact that Gehenna was the location of previous punishments of the wicked amongst God's people, further shows the aptness of Christ's use of this figure of Gehenna. Again, as with so many other doctrinal areas, pagan ideas influenced Christian perceptions. The Egyptians believed that the underworld was a place of fire- and this was imported into Jewish belief, and led to Christians being prone to misinterpret Christ's figurative use of the fires of Gehenna as a symbol of utter destruction. Note too how the Egyptian Copts believed that the gods of the underworld used tridents to torment the dead, and this too passed into Christianity in the form of depictions of Satan in "hell" armed with a trident. But the trident is never spoken of in the Bible, nor is there any hint of the wicked being tormented straight after death- rather their punishment is repeatedly spoken of as being reserved until the final day of judgment.

Joachim Jeremias explains how the literal valley of Gehenna came to be misinterpreted as a symbol of a 'hell' that is supposed to be a place of fire: "[Gehenna]...since ancient times has been the name of the valley west and south of Jerusalem...from the woes pronounced by the prophets on the valley (Jer. 7:32 = 19:6; cf. Is. 31:9; 66:24) because sacrifices to Moloch took place there (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6), there developed in the second century BC the idea that the valley of Hinnom would be the place of a fiery hell (Eth. Enoch 26; 90.26)... it is distinguished from *sheol*" (3).

The Jews believed that 'hell' had three sections: Gehenna, a place of eternal fire for those Jews who broke the covenant and blasphemed God; 'the shades', an intermediate place similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory; and a place of rest where the faithful Jew awaited the resurrection at the last day (4). This distinction has no basis in the Bible. However, it's significant that the Lord Jesus uses 'Gehenna' and the figure of eternal fire to describe the punishment of people for what the Jews of His day would've considered incidental sins, matters which were far from blasphemy and breaking the covenant- glancing at a woman with a lustful eye (Mk. 9:47), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1,5; Mt. 23:27-33), not giving a cup of water to a "little one", forbidding a disciple of John the Baptist to follow Jesus (Mk. 9:39-43); not preaching the Gospel fearlessly and boldly (Mt. 10:25-28). These matters were and are shrugged off as of no eternal consequence. But just like the prophets of Israel did, the Lord Jesus seizes upon such issues and purposefully associates them with the most dire possible punishment which His Jewish hearers could conceive- Gehenna. Time and again, the Bible alludes to incorrect ideas and reasons with people from the temporary assumption those ideas might be true. The language of demons, as we will show later, is a classic example. And it's quite possible the Lord is doing the same here with the concept of Gehenna- the punishment for the Jew who breaks the covenant and blasphemes. The Lord was primarily teaching about behaviour, not giving a lecture about the state of the dead. And so He takes the maximum category of eternal punishment known to His audience, and says that this awaits those who sin in matters which on His agenda are so major, even if in the eyes of the Jewish world and humanity generally they were insignificant.

We also see the Lord doing this, in a very striking way, in Mt. 25:41. There He speaks of "the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels"- clearly alluding to the Gehenna myth. This is a phrase taken straight from Jewish apocalyptic thinking and literature. It was the worst category of punishment conceivable in Judaism. And yet Jesus in the context is talking of the way that religious people who claim to believe in Him will not go unpunished for ignoring the needs of their poor brethren. This all too easy to commit sin... the Lord uses

Judaism's toughest language to condemn. But this doesn't mean that He actually believed in the literal existence of either "eternal fire" nor a personal Devil. The Devil's angels are those who ignore their needy brethren. It's a powerful and telling juxtapositioning of ideas by the Lord Jesus.

A Psychological Note

Robert Funk observed: "Survey after survey has demonstrated that most people who believe in hell think themselves headed for heaven; people who believe in hell usually think it is for others" (5). I've done no surveys, but my experience chimes in with this completely. Those who believe and preach "hell fire" do so from deep seated psychological reasons rather than from an honest examination of the Biblical text. A desire to 'legitimately' damn others, with the apparent weight of the Bible behind them; to hit back at the world whilst bolstering ones own righteousness... it's really a classic.

Notes

(1) "The Indo-European word **kel* means "cover" or "concealment" and yields English "hole", "helmet" and German *hohl* (empty), *Hohle* (cave), *Halle* (hall, dwelling), and *Holle* (hell)"- J.B. Russell, *The Devil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) p. 62. Alva Huffer in *Systematic Theology* (Oregon, IL: The Restitution Herald, 1960) p. 160 suggests: "Scripturally speaking, hell is the grave. Hell is an English word derived from the Anglo-Saxon word *helan*, which means 'to cover' or 'to hide out of sight'". Another view, not necessarily contradictory to this, is that ""Hell" is a Germanic word, the name of an underworld goddess ("Hel")"- see T.J. Wray and Gregory Mobley, *The Birth Of Satan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 151. In this case we'd have an example of where using a word doesn't mean that we necessarily agree with the mythological background in its origin. I mean by this that I, for example, do not believe the goddess Hel existed, I understand that hell means simply the grave. But I still use the word "hell", because it's come into the English language. Likewise we show several times in chapters 4 and 5 that incorrect pagan and mythical ideas can be used in Biblical language, without

meaning that the Bible nor its writers actually believed in the source ideas of those words.

(2) Reference in Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical And Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975) Vol. 2 p. 115.

(3) Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London: S.C.M., 1972) p. 129.

(4) J.B. Russell, *A History Of Heaven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) p. 28.

(5) Robert Funk, *Honest To Jesus* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996) p. 213.

Digression 5 Christ and “The spirits in prison”

“Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, that aforetime were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water: which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:18-21 ASV).

“He went”

Firstly, we need to remove any misunderstanding which arises from the phrase “he went”. Contemporary Greek literature often used such expressions in a redundant sense. Eph. 2:17 speaks of the Lord Jesus ‘coming’ and preaching peace to us. But this doesn’t mean that He Himself in person came up to us and preached. Indeed, the language of going, coming or moving is often used in relation to the preaching of a person- e.g. Mt. 9:13: “*but go* and learn what that meaneth”. The Lord didn’t intend that they literally went away somewhere. Likewise Dan. 12:4 and Hab. 2:2 bid those who understand God’s word to “run”- not literally, but in response to the word preached. God Himself is spoken of as coming, descending etc. when He ‘preaches’ to humanity (e.g. Gen. 11:5; Ex. 19:20; Num. 11:25; 2 Sam. 22:10). In Jer. 39:16, the imprisoned Jeremiah is told to “go, tell Ebed-melech...” a word from the Lord about him. Jeremiah couldn’t have literally left prison to do so- but the idea is that a person encountering the Lord’s word has as it were experienced the Lord ‘going’ to him or her. And in this sense the message of the Lord Jesus (in its essence) could ‘go’ to persons without Him physically going anywhere or even existing consciously at the time.

Preaching In The Spirit

We seek to understand how Christ could preach in his spirit. He was “put to death in the flesh but made alive in [Gk. ‘through, on account of’] the spirit”. The Lord was raised “according to the spirit of holiness” (Rom. 1:4). Why was Christ resurrected? Because of His sinless life and character, i.e. His “spirit” of a holy life. In this lies the connection between the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and the resurrection of Jesus. He was raised by the Father because of His spirit of holiness, his holy spirit of life. We too will be raised to eternal life on account of our spirit of life which we are now developing: “If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11). This passage shows that the spirit of Christ is the same spirit that is to dwell in us. This doesn’t mean we are disembodied spirits, but rather that our way / spirit of life must be that of Jesus. 1 Pet. 4:1 makes the same point- we are to arm ourselves with the same mind / spirit that was in Christ as He suffered on the cross. If our Spirit and that of Christ coincide and are one, then we have the witness that we are truly God’s children (Rom. 8:16). It was through *this* same spirit that Christ witnessed to imprisoned humanity, especially at the time of Noah, as Peter shows. The spirit of Christ was in all the prophets, and this was the essence of their witness. “The testimony [preaching] of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” in the sense that the preaching of the prophets was in essence the preaching of Jesus insofar as they had His Spirit in their message.

There is an undoubted theme throughout 1 Peter 3 and 4 of the opposition between the “flesh” (that which is external, the appearance of things) and the “spirit”, that which is internal, which is of God.

Being dead to sins	Should live unto righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24)
Not the outward adorning	But the hidden man...a quiet spirit (1 Pet. 3:3,4)
Put to death in the flesh	But quickened by the spirit (1 Pet.

	3:18)
Baptism is not a washing of the flesh	But the answer of a good conscience / spirit (1 Pet. 3:21)
Don't live in the flesh	But to the will of God (1 Pet. 4:2)
Judged by men in the flesh [outwardly]	Live to God in the spirit (1 Pet. 4:6)

The spirit by which Jesus was quickened is thus paralleled with our spirit of living to God, a quiet spirit, a life of righteousness, of good conscience etc. His Spirit is to be our spirit- we are to be of the “same mind / spirit” with Him, sharing the mind which He had especially during His time of dying (1 Pet. 4:1). And this is exactly the point of Phil. 2:5: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” at the time of His death. Notice that the Spirit of Jesus is epitomized by the mindset which He displayed during His death. It is this very mind / spirit which is to be in us. It is therefore in this sense that *through His death* the Lord Jesus preached ‘in spirit’ to those whom He had never met.

In this sense, it was the spiritually minded lifestyle of Noah which was his witness to the world of his day. Peter says in 1 Pet. 3:19 that Christ through His Spirit preached to the people of Noah’s day. In 2 Pet. 2:5 he says that Noah was a preacher of, or [Gk.] ‘by’ righteousness to the people around him. Yet in 1 Pet. 3:19 Peter says that Christ preached to those same people through His Spirit. The resolution surely is that although Noah had never met the Lord Jesus, he lived according to the same Godly spirit as did Jesus; and this was his witness to his world. There is ultimately only one Spirit (Eph. 4:4). The same spirit of holiness which was in Jesus was likewise thus in Noah. “The Spirit”, the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ are all equated in Rom. 8:9.

“The spirits in prison”

Biblically, a man or woman is identified with their spirit in the sense of their mind or way of life. Heb. 12:23 speaks of the spirits of just men, with whom the believer ought to associate. This means that we ought to identify ourselves with the way of

life, the spirit of life, of “just men” of the past. God is “the God of the spirits of all flesh” (Num. 16:22; 27:16) in the sense that He is the God of all humanity. So “spirits in prison” can refer to people who, in their spiritual lives, are imprisoned. Immediately the mind goes to Is. 42:2,7, which in speaking of the preaching of Jesus, prophecies that He would release the spiritually imprisoned- not so much by direct didactic teaching, but by the spirit of His personality and example. So the “prison” is simply the prison of the human mind, which the mental example of Jesus can open up.

We obviously ask *why* ordinary people should be described in this passage as “spirits”. The context is speaking of the witness of Jesus to people through His Spirit or way of life as manifested in His people. The *spirit* within His people appeals to the imprisoned *spirit* or heart / mind of their audience. We appeal to the *heart*, the spirit, by our witness- not merely to the intellect. The spirit of Christ within us appeals to the imprisoned spirit within others.

The “spirits in prison” were once [“aforetime”] disobedient (1 Pet. 3:20). The same two Greek words translated “aforetime” and “disobedient” occur in Rom. 11:30 about all of us, who “in times past [s.w. “aforetime”] have not believed [s.w. “disobedient”]. This is surely one of the many times when Peter’s phrasing is so similar to Paul’s that he is surely alluding to him; and thus Peter is making the point that although the witness of the spirit of Christ was, in his context, specifically to Noah’s generation, it is also the witness which we all receive from those with the spirit of Christ at any time. Peter has just spoken of how disobedient [s.w.] people are converted by the witness of a spiritual, Christ-centred way of life (1 Pet. 3:1). Peter is writing against a background of “the last days”, of which Noah’s generation is a clear type. Just as they were witnessed to by the spirit of Christ in Noah, so will the generation of the last days have a like witness. God’s patience “waited” in Noah’s time; the Greek implies to wait *for* something. It is also translated “expect”. God was waiting for and expecting a response from Noah’s witness; and in this we see the essential hopefulness of God. He hoped against hope for response; and none came. The Spirit of Christ and of God has

always been His witness to all generations. The question arises as to why Peter chose to especially focus upon the example of Noah out of all the generations. Perhaps this was because Noah's generation is a type of the last days, in which Peter believed he was living. And therefore this entire study has a great relevance to our day; for the crucial witness of the last days is through the spirit of Christ in us witnessing to an increasingly self-imprisoned world.

This whole misunderstanding originally came about as a result of one error leading to another. Thomas Aquinas argued that "It was fitting for him to descend into hell in order to deliver us also from going down into hell" (1). If only Aquinas and others had done their most basic Biblical homework, they would've understood 'hell' to be simply the grave- into which we all descend. We die, and need resurrection. Therefore the Lord Jesus as our representative also died, was buried, and yet rose again. There is no classical hell as a place of fiery punishment of the wicked; and so there was no requirement for the Lord Jesus to descend into it. Struggling with this problem led to Aquinas to commit yet another folly, in claiming that Jesus must have descended into that section of hell where the just are detained, and not into the section where the wicked are kept (2). The Bible is silent about such sections of hell. This is the desperation of the man who takes a wrong turning up a dead end, and instead of having the humility to turn around and retrace his steps, just drives madly onwards into a forest.

Notes

(1) *Summa Theologica* III,52,1.

(2) *ibid* III,52,2.

CHAPTER 3

SOME PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

3-1 Some Practical Implications

Battle For The Mind, Not Blaming Others

We're going to now take a break from the theology, and look at where all this leads in practice. We have spoken of history, of ideas, of theology, of Biblical interpretation. But if we leave all this at the level of mere ideas, lodged merely within some complex brain chemistry beneath our skulls- we will have totally missed the point. These 'ideas' must have real encounter with our whole personalities. I mean that reading the Bible, or this book or that book *about* the Bible as we ride to work or a few pages each night before sleep takes us... really should and can have a gripping effect upon human personality, upon our entire world-view, taking us far beyond our safe, sleepy little bedtime studies, out into the most fundamental issues of the cosmos, and into the real issues of the dirty lives we humans live out on the face of this spectacularly beautiful planet. The fruit of correct understanding of these issues will in the end be love, and walking humbly with our God. We now want to reflect on what these ideas mean for us in these intensely practical terms. I urge you to take these reflections especially seriously; for I believe there is a huge danger in purely academic study of God's word which doesn't lead to any praxis. For all that he was a Roman Catholic priest, Raimundo Panikkar put it well: "If intellectual activity divorces itself from life, it becomes not only barren and alienating, but also harmful and even criminal [because]... I am convinced that we live in a state of human emergency that does not allow us to entertain ourselves with bagatelles" (1).

The idea is generally held that 'Satan' tries to stop people being righteous, and uses every opportunity to tempt people, but is overcome by spiritual mindedness and quoting Scripture. If

Satan is a personal being, exactly *why* and *how* would this evil being be scared off, so to speak, by spirituality? Exactly *why* is this supposedly powerful being somehow driven away by spirituality or encouraged by unspirituality and moral weakness? I see no real answer to those questions. To simply say 'Well, he's like that' only throws the question a stage further back- why is he like that? How did he become like that? Eph. 4:27 says that anger and an unforgiving spirit give a foothold to the Devil; 1 Tim. 5:14 warns that young widows will give Satan a door of opportunity if they don't remarry. When we are told: "Resist the Devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7), we hardly imagine us wrestling with a literal beast who runs away just because we put up a fight. Putting meaning into those words, seeking to understand what they really mean for us in daily life, it's surely apparent that James speaks of the need to resist sin *in our minds*, and that very process of resistance will lead to the temptation receding.

These kinds of passages make so much more sense once we understand the real adversary / Satan as being our own temptations, our own weak mind. We all know how anger and a hard spirit within our hearts lead us to sin more. We can imagine how for a young widow in the first century world, being single could lead her into a range of temptations. But the psychological processes involved in those temptations would all have been internal to her mind [e.g. sexual unfulfilment, lack of status in society, being childless, economic difficulties etc.]. Not remarrying didn't of itself allow an external Devil to lead her to sin; rather the situation she might chose to remain in could precipitate *within her* a range of internal temptations.

The fact that the Lord Jesus really conquered the Devil should mean for us that in our struggles against sin, victory is ultimately certain. If we grasp this, we will battle daily for control of the mind, we will strive to fill our mind with God's word, we will do our daily readings, we will be cynical of our motivations, we will examine ourselves, we will appreciate the latent liability to sin which we and all men have by nature. We won't take the weakness of others towards us so personally; we will see it is their 'Devil'. Belief in a personal Devil is so popular, because it takes the focus away from our own struggle

with our innermost nature and thoughts. Yet whilst we don't believe in a personal Devil, we can create the same thing in essence; we can create an external Devil such as TV or Catholicism, and feel that our entire spiritual endeavour must be directed to doing battle with these things, rather than focusing on our own desperation. A lack of focus on personal sinfulness and the need for personal cleansing and growth, with the humility this will bring forth, can so easily give place to a focus instead upon something external to us as the real enemy⁽²⁾. Realizing who 'the Devil' really is inspires us to more concretely fight against him. Albert Camus in his novel *The Rebel* develops the theme that "man is never greater than when he is in revolt, when he commits himself totally to the struggle against an unjust power, ready to sacrifice his own life to liberate the oppressed". Once we have the enemy clearly defined, we can rise up to that same struggle and challenge. Truly, man is never greater when he's in the one and only true revolt worth making, and sacrificing life for the ultimate cause.

We should not blame our nature for our moral failures in the way that orthodox Christians blame an external Devil. We must hang our head over every sin we commit and every act of righteousness which we omit. In this we will find the basis for a true appreciation of grace, a true motivation for works of humble response, a true flame of praise within us, a realistic basis for a genuine humility. Dorothy Sayers in *Begin Here* correctly observes: "It is true that man is dominated by his psychological make-up, but only in the sense that an artist is dominated by his material". We really *can* achieve some measure of self control; it cannot be that God is angry with us simply because we are human. It cannot be that our nature forces us to sin in a way which we can never counteract. If this were true, the anger of God would have been against His own spotless Son, who fully shared our nature. The Lord shared our nature and yet didn't commit sin, and in this He is our ever beckoning example and inspiration. The question 'What would Jesus do...?' in this or that situation has all the more inspirational power once we accept that the Lord Jesus, tempted just as we are, managed to put the Devil to death within Him, triumphing over it in the cross, even though He bore our nature. People parrot off phrases like "I'm a sinner", 'going to heaven',

'Satan', without the faintest idea what they are really saying. And we can do just the same- we can speak of 'Sin' with no real idea what we ought to feel and understand by this.

The Swiss psychiatrist Paul Tournier wrote an incisive and brilliant study, *Violence et puissance*- in English translation, *The Violence Within* ⁽³⁾. From wide experience of practicing psychotherapy and investigating the causes of various neuroses, Tournier discerned that within each person there is a huge battle between the right and the wrong, good and evil, temptation and resistance to temptation. This battle goes on constantly, over even the most insignificant things- e.g. the choice to take an instant dislike to another person, to get angry and aggressive because we feel a person in a restaurant is somehow laughing at us, etc. Most people on earth wouldn't agree with the religious / theological conclusions we have reached- that the Devil refers not to a 'fallen Angel' or supernatural being but rather to our own internal temptations which battle with us, as Peter says, like a roaring lion. Yet in practice, a psychiatric analysis of human beings reveals that indeed, like it or not, the 'violence within' is not only very real, but a fundamental part of our moment by moment spiritual experience. Along with Tournier, the French sociologist Claude Levi-Strauss came to the same conclusions, written up in his classic *The Savage Mind* - a book whose title says it all (4). I mean that our Biblical / theological conclusions about the Devil are actually confirmed by psychotherapy and psychiatric analysis of people. Our conclusions are true in practical experience, even if people don't want to accept the way we express them Biblically because they have a tradition of believing that the real problem is the supposed violence from without, supposedly perpetrated by a supernatural 'Devil'. And here doctrine comes to have a biting practical relevance- for if we truly perceive and believe that in fact 'the Devil' and its power has been vanquished in Jesus, if we survey the wondrous cross and see there the power of the Devil finally slaughtered in the perfect mind of the Lord Jesus as He hung there, and that ultimate victory of victories shared with us who are in Him... the source, the root cause, of so much neurosis and dysfunction, is revealed to us as powerless. For we who have given in and do give in to temptation, who submit to 'the violence within' all too often, who are at times beaten in the fight, have been saved from

the power of that defeat by grace and forgiveness, and are counted by the God of all grace as being 'in Christ'. Thus the whole thing becomes what Frederick Buechner called *The Magnificent Defeat*. The Lord Jesus was the one who overcame that 'violence within' moment by moment, as well as in the more accentuated and obvious scenes of 'the violence within' which we see in the wilderness temptations and on the cross. And by grace, we are counted as in Him. No wonder that to achieve this He had to share human nature, to have 'the violence within', in order to overcome it. Perfectly and seamlessly, to my mind at least, one true aspect of Biblical interpretation thus leads to another, and becomes the basis for a transformed life in practice. In all this we see the matchless, surpassing beauty of how God works with humanity towards our salvation.

Sin De-Emphasized And Minimized

It's commonly understood that human beings frequently practice 'projection' onto others of certain attitudes and behaviours with which they struggle. It seems to me that the Satan concept is a classic case. We've taken all the aspects of God's personality with which we struggle- not least, that He brings evil into our lives; and we've also taken all the aspects of our own personality which we dislike, our sin, our unpleasantness... and projected them onto an external being called Satan. All this is not only a minimizing of our own sin; it's an attempt to remake 'God' into our image of who we think He should be. It's blasphemous, as well as demeaning to Him, and reflects our huge barrier to accepting that we are not God, that we are sinners, and need to work on self-improvement rather than projecting all our weakness away from ourselves and onto something or someone else.

We as sinful humans in relationship with a perfect God have a terrible tendency to justify, rationalize and minimize our sin. This is the very essence of the Biblical 'Devil'- a false accuser of God, effectively a 'slanderer' of Him, somewhere within our psyche and self-perceptions. So many times we justify sin in the heat of the moment, only later to realize the extent of our self-deception. If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar (1 Jn. 1:10); if we don't believe Him, we likewise "make him

a liar", we slander or falsely accuse Him (1 Jn. 5:10). We may recoil at this language. But it is so- to deny our sinfulness, to disbelieve what God says about it, is to slander God. We not only do this within our own mind, self-perceptions and psyche. We do this in a more formal and rational manner when we twist Bible teaching in order to somehow minimize sin. And this is what has happened with the steady progression of human thought about sin and the Devil. I am not saying that God's intention is that we should feel ourselves as miserable sinners who incite God's wrath constantly; positively, an awareness of our sin is the basis for the joy and marvel at God's grace, that energy to serve Him and love Him through thick and thin, which so many Christians privately admit that they lack. Without doubt, the Biblical message concerns our salvation from *sin* by God's grace and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. The focus is not upon how God saved us from the clutches of some cosmic being; it's very much on the fact that *we* have been saved from *our very own sins*.

The Sin Of Adam And Eve Minimized

Take the Biblical account of Adam and Eve's sin. In Biblical Christianity, it is man's fall that led to the fall of the cosmos; yet the pagan myths as well as apostate Judaism turned this around- so that man's fall was just the result of the fall of cosmic powers. The Bible underlines human guilt, whereas false doctrines of men seek to minimize it. At least one Akkadian myth features a vaguely similar story to that of Genesis 3, whereby the gods deceive a man into eating forbidden food and he is punished for it with mortality (5). As I explained in [Digression 3](#), the Genesis record alludes to such myths in order to deconstruct them and show where the truth really lies. According to that Akkadian myth, the gods were to blame for the deception, and man was punished with mortality somewhat unfairly. The Biblical record brings out how Adam and Eve's attempts at self-justification were effectively a blaming of God, and draws a red line through them as ultimately irrelevant excuses for their sin. Thus Eve blames her fall upon the serpent, whilst Adam seems to blame God for providing him with Eve- "the woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree" (Gen. 3:12). The idea of blaming 'the gods' for humanity's fall was a feature of the pagan

myths; and Genesis 3 deconstructs them by alluding to them and placing the blame back upon Adam and Eve themselves.

The Jewish apocryphal Book of Enoch was instrumental in forging the Jewish misunderstanding of Satan as a personal being. This book shifts the blame for sin from humanity to a Satan-figure called Azazel: "The whole earth has been corrupted through the works that were taught by Azazel: to him ascribe all sin" (1 Enoch 9:6; 10:8). There is a subtle but significant difference between this and the Biblical record in Gen. 6:11- which states that the earth became corrupt before God because of *human sin*. The Biblical record makes no attempt to pass the blame for this onto any other being- humanity was punished because *they* sinned. It would in any case be surely unethical for God to punish humanity because of what Azazel did.

The account of Adam and Eve has been slowly re-interpreted by Christian dogma, initially under such Jewish influence, to mean that the real villain was the Devil who supposedly used the snake, or turned into a snake, in order to deceive Eve; and the way of putting it right is to cheer on Christ in Heaven as He does battle with this terrible 'Devil'. But as we've stressed so many times, the Bible speaks of the snake as a snake, one "of the beasts of the field" which God created (Gen. 3:1). The ideas of Satan, Devil, lucifer, fallen angels, rebellion in Heaven- simply don't occur in the Genesis record. The real issue is that by one *man* sin entered into the world, and so death and the curse pass upon us all, for we have all likewise sinned (Rom. 5:12). Neil Forsyth points out how Milton's *Paradise Lost* minimizes Eve's sin. The huge presence of Satan as it were excuses her fall. And Milton makes out that she simply bought in to Satan's suggestion she could become a goddess: "In Book 9, Satan appeals to Eve's desire to be like a goddess to make the heroic attempt to rise above her lot, and [Milton] ignores the point of her act in the Christian epic- simple disobedience" (6). The point is that if we were in Adam and Eve's position, as we are daily in essence, we would have made, and we do make, just the same bad choice as they did. This is why the record of Adam's sin is alluded to throughout Scripture as being the prototype of the experience we all go through whenever we sin. Adam is Everyman, his failure and salvation by grace is re-

enacted in the experience of every human being; hence the Hebrew word for 'man' or 'humanity' is in fact '*adam*'. My ever analytical friend Dr. Alan Fowler commented to me in a private communication that Adam is set up in Scripture as our (human) representative, whereas the Lord Jesus is presented as God's representative to us.

The way in which Adam is to be seen as everyman is exemplified by how Paul speaks of his own spiritual life and failure in terms of Adam's encounter with sin in the form of the serpent. Note the allusions to Adam's fall in Rom. 7:8-11: "But sin [cp. the snake], seizing an opportunity in the commandment [singular- there was only one commandment in Eden], produced in me all kinds of covetousness [the essence of the temptation to eat the fruit]... I [as Adam] was once alive apart from the law [Adam was the only person to ever truly exist for a time without any law], but when the commandment [singular- to not eat the fruit] came, sin sprang to life and I died [as Adam], and the very commandment that [seemed to] promise[d] life [cp. the hope of eating of the tree of life] proved to be death to me. For sin [cp. the snake] seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me [s.w. 2 Cor. 11:3 about the serpent deceiving Eve] and through it killed me". Note how Rom. 7:7-13, with all the Adam allusions, speaks in the past tense; but in the autobiographical section which follows in Rom. 7:14-25, Paul uses the present tense- as if to suggest that both Paul and by extension all of us live out the essence of Adam's failure. He was everyman, and his salvation through the seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus, can be everyman's salvation if he so chooses. But in our context we note the pointed- and it is pointed- omission by Paul of any reference to a Satan figure.

That Adam is indeed set up in Scripture as 'everyman' is apparent on almost every page of the Bible through the allusions back to him. Thus Jezebel's provocation of Ahab to sin is presented in the same terms as that of Adam and Eve; Israel "like Adam have transgressed the covenant" (Hos. 6:7). John speaks of how we are tempted by "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 Jn. 2:16), alluding to the very things which were Adam and Eve's temptation in Eden. Paul sensed that as the serpent deceived Eve by his subtilty, so

the minds of the Corinthian Christians were being deceived by false reasoning (2 Cor. 11:3 = Gen. 3:13). The sinner chooses or accepts the words of the "tongue of the subtle" (Job 15:5- the same word is used about the serpent in Gen. 3:1). The frequent command "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17 etc.) uses the same Hebrew word translated "desire" when we read of how Eve "desired" the fruit (Gen. 3:6); yet Israel "desired" the wrong fruit (Is. 1:29). As Eve saw the fruit and fell for it, so the people of Reuben and Gad saw the land East of Jordan and imagined how good it would be to have it, despite having been given 'all the land' West of Jordan to enjoy [cp. Adam and Eve's dominion in Eden] (Num. 32:1,2,7). In all these allusions [and they exist in almost every chapter of the Bible] we are being shown how human sin is a repetition in essence of that of our first parents. The insistent emphasis is that we should rise above and *not* be like them. And yet this call for personal effort and struggle with ourselves in order to overcome sin is muted and misplaced by all the stress upon a supposed Devil tempting Eve, pushing the blame onto him, and thereby de-emphasizing our role in overcoming sin within ourselves. And so we see so many loud-mouthed condemners of the Devil totally not 'getting it' about the need for personal self-control and spiritual mindedness in daily life and private character.

The record of Adam's sin and the resulting curse can seem simplistic; the punishment seems to far outweigh the crime, the colossal penalty appears out of proportion to the sin. And yet in that apparent lack of proportion is the very essence of the message- that sin, any sin, is really that serious. There can never again in our understanding be any such thing as a little sin, a breaking of God's law which is inconsequential. The more we reflect upon the deceptively simple record of Adam's sin, the more we perceive how Adam's choice is that of everyman in every sin; it was a choice between a total "yes" or a total "no" to God. The desire was to know "good and evil"; and this term is used as an idiom for "everything" (Gen. 24:50; 2 Sam. 14:17,20), the whole area in between good and evil is in this sense "everything" (cp. Gen. 31:24; 2 Sam. 13:22). Adam and Eve were attracted by the possibility of experiencing everything, of having the total knowledge, the omniscience, which is with God alone. Their failure was more than simply eating a fruit; it

involved rebellion and pride, a desire to be equal with God. It was *human* pride which clearly lead to the greatest fall imaginable; it was *man* who wanted to rise up to be like God. To fantasize about *Satan's* pride and fall is to tragically miss the entire point of the narrative. It seems that human religions have struggled by any means to wriggle out of the simple message—that human sin brought about the fall. In a lengthy and detailed study of the fall narrative, the Belgian theologian Henricus Renckens finds no evidence in it for the existence of a personal Satan being, but rather notes that the emphasis is upon human sin and responsibility for that sin: "The evil is in the name. It is man who has drawn down a curse upon himself" (7).

Mea Culpa

I am far from the first writer to observe that belief in a personal Satan minimizes sin. C.F. Evans, in one of the most well known commentaries on the Lord's Prayer in the 20th century, pressed home the point: "It is precisely a quasi-belief in a spiritual being who for many a long year has been little more than a comic figure, a belief which even in those who wish to be most orthodox is often an inert and inoperative belief, which is likely to minimize the seriousness of evil... it is precisely the Christian Gospel... which locates the height of spiritual evil in man... a being wholly devoted to evil is hardly congruent with anything, since as such he is beyond redemption, and there would be no reason for God to permit his continued existence, unless it were his impotence to bring it to an end" (8).

"It was not theologically insignificant that the "O mea culpa" passage of the Easter liturgy was expunged by certain medieval churches" (9). And indeed it wasn't insignificant. The liturgy originally read:

I confess to Almighty God,
... that I have sinned exceedingly,
in thought, word and deed:
through my fault [*mea culpa*],
through my most grievous fault [*mea maxima culpa*].

But *mea culpa* was changed to *felix culpa*. 'Felix culpa' literally means "the happy / fortunate fall"- the idea being that Adam's fall brought about our salvation. In this we see the minimizing of personal sin- "my fault" was replaced with a reference to Adam's fall. A willful misunderstanding of the Genesis record was used to deflect attention away from the tragedy of our personal sin. And the logical fallacy is evident- Christ died so that we could be saved from the effect of Adam's sin. Yet this was twisted around by the "felix culpa" idea into a position where Adam's sin was a blessing, which led to our salvation. Yet we and this world only require salvation because of the effects of Adam's sin- his sin was a tragedy which required the sacrifice of Jesus. Indeed the idea of Adam's sin being the *felix culpa*, the fortunate fall, is the basis of the reasoning that "let us continue in sin, that grace may abound" which Paul so stridently argues against in Rom. 6:1.

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage in the third century, sought to minimize human sin by teaching that the fall, and humanity's subsequent suffering, was the fault of Satan rather than Adam. Paul's position was quite the opposite: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Compare this with Cyprian: "He [Satan] took away from Man the grace of immortality which he had first lost himself" (10). The Canaanite, Babylonian and Assyrian myths of creation say nothing about the culpable sin of humanity in the beginning. They explain our fallen world as resulting from unreasonable punishment of man by the gods, or humanity being caught up in the fallout from some cosmic conflict. It was the gods and not man who 'fell'. The Biblical account shows Adam falling from a "very good" state. The myths speak of the gods behaving immorally, filled with hatred, anger, murder, immorality etc., and they conceive humanity as descended from them, created from their blood. So they have no place for a "very good" human personally falling from that state; for they presuppose that man was created evil and not "very good". "In Genesis man is created in the image of God; but the Babylonians created their gods in the image of man... Man, consequently, was created evil and was evil from his very beginning. How, then, could he fall? The idea that man fell from a state of moral perfection does not

fit into the system or systems of Babylonian speculation" (11). Personal disobedience, sin against the one and only God and creator, thus defacing His image, consequences and responsibilities arising from that sin... all these things, which find their unique answer in the Christian Gospel, are simply not even recognized as the issues in the myths. And the Genesis record is bringing this out, highlighting what are the real issues, by means of allusion to these myths.

So many commentators have noted that Gen. 1-3 is one of the most misused and misunderstood sections of the whole Bible. But why? They give no significant explanation. I'd suggest it's because humanity [and that includes theologians and formulators of church doctrine] squirms awkwardly under the glaring beam of the simple record of human guilt. And therefore the serpent has been turned into a superhuman being that gets all the blame; and human sin has been minimized, at the expense of the plain meaning of the text. The whole structure of the Biblical narrative is concerned with the guilt and sin of the man and the woman; the snake isn't where the focus is. Von Rad, in one of the 20th century's most seminal commentaries on Genesis, understood this clearly: "In the narrator's mind, [the serpent] is scarcely an embodiment of a 'demonic' power and certainly not of Satan... the mention of the snake is almost secondary; in the 'temptation' by it the concern is with a completely unmythical process, presented in such a way because the narrator is obviously anxious to shift the problem as little as possible from man" (12). The record keeps using personal pronouns to lay the blame squarely with Adam: "*I* heard... *I* was afraid... *I* was naked; *I* hid... *I* ate... *I* ate" (Gen. 3:10-13; and compare Jonah's similar confession of sin in Jonah 4:1-3- Jonah appears to allude to Adam here). Nobody reading the Genesis record with an open mind would surely see anything else but the blame being placed on humanity; as I have repeatedly stressed, the words 'Satan', 'Lucifer' and the idea of the serpent as a fallen Angel are simply not there in Genesis. They have to be 'read in' from presuppositions, which ultimately have their root in pagan myths.

John Steinbeck, who was hardly a Biblical Christian, was fascinated by the early chapters of Genesis, and his 1952 novel

East Of Eden is evidently his commentary upon them. And he finds no place for a 'Satan' figure. Instead, he is struck by the comment to Cain that although sin crouches at the door, "do thou / thou mayest rule over him". Steinbeck concluded from this that victory over sin and the effects of Adam's sin is possible; and therefore we're not bound by some superhuman Satan figure, nor by an over-controlling Divine predestination to sin and failure. There's a passage in chapter 24 of the novel that bears quoting; I find it deeply inspirational, and another example of the practical import of the correct understanding of early Genesis: "It is easy out of laziness, out of weakness, to throw oneself onto the lap of the deity, saying, "I couldn't help it; the way was set". But think of the glory of the choice! That makes a man a man. A cat has no choice; a bee must make honey. There's no godliness there... these verses are a history of mankind in any age or culture or race... this is a ladder to climb to the stars... it cuts the feet from under weakness and cowardliness and laziness... because "thou mayest" rule over sin". The practical inspiration ought to be evident; all further commentary is bathos.

Out Of Denial

To assist us in understanding the extent of our sin, let me ask those who believe in a personal Devil: Could or would we sin if the Devil didn't exist? If not, then surely we suffer and are punished unfairly for our sins? If we would, then to what extent is the Devil responsible for our sins as so often claimed, seeing we would sin anyway? Biblically, logically and practically the problem remains with us, and we simply can't palm it off onto any personal Devil. Likewise the real victory and achievement of Jesus was against sin, in the control of His natural tendency, never sinning, never omitting to perform any act of righteousness- and thereby He opened the way for our ultimate victory against sin and all its consequences. But men like Origen presented Christ's whole mission as being a struggle against a personal Devil. He repeatedly identified death with the Devil, rather than facing up to the repeated Bible teaching that we die because of sin, and not because of a personal Devil (Rom. 5:12,21; 6:16,23; 7:13; 8:2; 1 Cor. 15:56; James 1:15). Tertullian taught that at baptism we are to renounce Satan and

[supposedly] sinful Angels: "These are the angels whom we in baptism renounce". Nowhere does the Bible speak of this- rather it is personal sin which is to be renounced and repented of at baptism.

The 'Miracle plays' of the Middle Ages frequently presented Satan and demons as beings whom the audience could safely ridicule, laugh at and rejoice in their fall before the might of Christ. But what that approach failed to get across was that the real battle is not on a stage, not out in the cosmos- but in the human heart. And the question arises: Why, on a psychological level, did Dante and others revel in presenting Satan as so utterly grotesque? I would argue that they did this because they recognized the existence of awful and radical evil / sin, and eagerly transferred it to someone or something outside of ourselves. People eagerly looked at the pictures, watched the plays... because it somehow reassured them that the awfulness of sin and evil could be externalized. Deep and honest self-examination reveals that more than anything else, we are in denial as to the greatness of our sin.

For a long time I was unwilling to give myself wholly to this idea that sin is *solely* rooted in the individual human heart. I would've gone along with Jeffrey Russell's comment that: "It is true that there is evil in each of us, but adding together even large numbers of individual evils does not enable anyone to explain an Auschwitz" (13). Like you, I surveyed the evil and radical sin in the world, and intuitively felt there must be something beyond individual humanity at work. Why [along with so many others] did I have that impression, and why was it so strong and so intuitive? Because I simply didn't want to face up to what Paul calls 'the exceeding sinfulness of sin' (Rom. 7:13). Paul speaks in that passage of how even in his life, God had had to reveal this to him, how sin had to be revealed as sin to him. That process goes on in each of us. Instead of thinking that sin is an occasional "whoopsy", we come to see that it really is the radical issue which the Bible presents it as. And no longer do we labour under the impression that there must surely be some source of sin / evil beyond humanity which infects our world. The example of Auschwitz quoted above is personally significant for me. Living in Eastern Europe, I visited Auschwitz

four times over a period of 16 years. It was only on the fourth visit that I came to disagree with J.B. Russell's comment. Quite simply- we radically, seriously, majorly and above all *dangerously* under-estimate the power of human sin, and the colossal influence for evil which our sinful actions, thoughts and decisions can have upon others. My intuitive desire to find some bigger source of evil to explain the Holocaust is probably typical of the struggle we all have to not only minimize our own sin, but also the sin of humanity and other people. This, perhaps, is why grappling with the issues of sin and radical evil as we are in this book- is simply not popular. There seems to be the idea that because these things cannot be investigated by science, therefore they shouldn't be seriously investigated at all. But I submit that's just the same old psychological desire to shift the focus from ourselves and the gravity of human sin. The 'Devil' remains an unexamined assumption in much of Christianity, and in most societies and religions. The presence of unexamined assumptions in our lives and hearts, as well as in societies, ought to be a red flag. Why, in this age of apparently fearless examination, eager toppling of paradigms, deconstruction of just about everything, rigorous research, trashing of tradition, brutal testing of assumptions... does the Devil idea remain an unexamined assumption? I suggest it's because to reject *that* tradition of a personal Satan [for that's all it is- tradition] and get down to living out the Biblical position on the Devil demands just too much. It's hard to accept all negative experience in life as ultimately allowed and even sent by a loving God, it's humiliating to realize we're only tiny children, whose view of good and evil isn't fully that of our Father; and it's the call of a lifetime to recognize that our own personal, natural passions and desires are in fact the great Satan / adversary. That our view of 'good' and 'right' is often so wrong can be easily proved- think of all the times a believer has asked for something in prayer, but God doesn't answer, and later they realize that they had asked for the wrong thing, and are grateful God didn't answer them. Perhaps Job's requests that God would immediately take his life would be a Biblical example (Job 6:8).

The popular view of the Devil also de-emphasizes the victory of Jesus against sin. It wasn't merely a George-and-the-dragon style heroic conflict between a man and a beast. We are saved

because the Lord Jesus put to death in His mind every sinful impulse, and then gave His life for us, so that we in our turn could be freed from the power of sin and death. Heb. 2:14 labours the point that it was exactly because Jesus had our nature that He could destroy the Devil. And it was His *death* that destroyed the Devil. These Biblical facts make little sense in a theology that claims that Jesus and the Devil are in cosmic conflict, which is fought out to the bitter end, until Jesus emerged triumphant and killed the Devil. Heb. 2:14 and the entire New Testament makes the point that sin / the Devil was destroyed by the *death of Jesus*. It wasn't as if He was locked in mortal combat with the Devil until He killed the Devil. Jesus *died* and it was that death which killed the Devil. This makes no sense in the context of the idea of cosmic conflict between Jesus and the Devil. It was because He had our nature that the Devil was destroyed- and simply possessing human nature would be of no relevance if the victory of Jesus was merely against a literal personal being.

The Value Of Persons

The de-emphasis of sin by the personal Satan theory also results in a devaluing of human salvation and the personal wonder of it. Grace means little on a personal level for any of us, if our salvation was really an abstract transaction which occurred somewhere out in the cosmos between God and Satan. The Biblical picture is so much more personally gripping- salvation was achieved by a *man*, Jesus the Son of God, here on this earth, on a stake just outside Jerusalem. He died in love *for us*, for the forgiveness of our personal sins, rather than to provide some payment to a cosmic creature called Satan. The essential failure is not of the cosmos- it is the failure in our human response to God's love and grace.

In the same way as sin is minimized by the popular conception of Satan, so, in a related way, is the importance of the individual minimized. Increasingly in the modern world, large numbers of people are the victims of radical evil- mass exterminations, terrorist acts, wars etc. But for each person who dies, there are many others who effectively die in their souls, such is their struggle with and experience of that radical evil. Solzhenitsyn

reflected how the children of NKVD victims often died of broken hearts, or lived lives deadened by their experience of the evil: "When we count up the millions of those who perished in the camps, we forget to multiply them". And so it is for us all. We all have loved ones who experience evil, and we are multiple times affected by their sufferings. The extent of individually experienced evil in our world and lives is simply beyond words to describe. It seems to me that our attempt to cope with it has been to try to abstract it all, putting it in the metaphysical terms of a cosmic conflict between God and Satan, rather than facing up to the individual experience of sin and evil. The suffering and value of the individual has become minimized by all this. We speak, for example, of 6 million Jews murdered in the Holocaust. But those numbers disguise the reality of evil. It is the suffering of one Jew that we can understand, and not that of millions of persons. The orthodox idea of Satan attempts to reduce evil and sin to some abstraction, to something out in the cosmos, to something intellectual... and thus the Biblical focus upon the individual is lost. No longer do we fully grieve with our suffering brother, squarely face up to the sin in our own lives and that of others... the huge effort required is too much, and so we palm it all off onto this all too convenient idea of a superhuman Satan.

Sin Is Serious

Our Biblical understanding of Satan leads us to realize that the same essential sinful tendencies are within us as within the most depraved rapist or sadist. Godliness isn't merely about separating from sinful people; it's about dissociating from the sinful passions within our very own hearts. Solzhenitsyn both experienced and reflected upon evil more than most; and his conclusion is the same: "If only it were all so simple! If only... it were necessary only to separate [evil people] from the rest of us and destroy them! But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?" (14). Erich Fromm set out to use logic, sociology, psychology and philosophy to understand the origin of human destructiveness; and he came to similar conclusions to which we've come to from Bible study, and which Solzhenitsyn came to from observed experience. He too

found the idea of a superhuman Satan an irrelevancy, concluding that evil comes from within *all* humanity and not just from a minority of us: "Evil is life turning against itself... our innate attraction to that which is dead" (15). Fromm concluded that it's our attractions and way of living life which are the source of human wickedness- and this is in line with Biblical revelation. A superhuman Satan plays no role, neither in the Biblical explanations, scientific approaches, or observed experience. Realizing all these things will lead us to see that the answer isn't in physical separation from wicked people nor in ourselves killing them off, neither by wars nor death sentences; but in appreciating that the same basic tendencies are within us as within the most outwardly evil of people. Our experiences of Hitlers, Stalins etc. should make us look within ourselves rather than demonize them. One only has to skim read Robert Simon's *Bad Men Do What Good Men Dream Of* - and look seriously and honestly into our own hearts- to see that we're all tempted to be the same desperate criminals (16). I know that some readers will object to this suggestion... but I can only appeal to your brutal honesty about the thoughts and desires that at times skate through your mind. "Everybody always talks about changing the world, but no one ever talks about changing himself", so Leo Tolstoy observed somewhere in *War And Peace*. And it's true. All the talk about preserving and saving the physical planet is all good stuff; but it can be an excuse for not facing up to the essential problem, which is within individual human beings. Indeed it may be more than an excuse for not doing that; it could even be an indication that we are running, madly, from ourselves as individuals, looking outwards with our telescopes and carbon dioxide reductions... because we just can't hack looking within.

Responsibility For Actions

Understanding that sin comes from within leads us to a far higher level of responsibility for our own actions- as well as teaching us to hold others the more responsible for theirs, too. Responsibility is something sadly and increasingly lacking in the modern world. We justify both ourselves and others, to the point that real feelings of contrition, humility, joy at the experience of forgiveness, realistic and victorious striving for

self-improvement, all seem little known in the lives of many today. And further, we will hold others responsible too, rather than slipping into the postmodern, emotionless mindset of shrugging at others' behaviour and passively excusing it. As Andrew Greeley observes: "Why else be angry at a man for doing evil unless you think he is responsible for his evil?" (17). Rollo May was yet another Christian psychologist who came to the same conclusions as we have been led to from Scripture: "The common personalized term [for evil] which has been used historically, namely the devil, is unsatisfactory because it projects the power outside the self... Furthermore, it always seemed to me a deteriorated and escapist form of what needs to be understood about evil" (18). That is indeed the case- the popular conception of the Devil is a form of escapism from our own responsibility for sin, a looking outside of ourselves rather than within.

Forgiving, Not Excusing

Understanding the personal nature of sin gives us the understanding and mechanism through which we can forgive others, and even forgive ourselves. This is of vital practical importance. We simply *must* forgive. The only option is revenge, against others or against ourselves. The pain a person causes you always feels heavier to you than it does to them; and what we may consider as minor failings on our part toward another are felt as brutally heavy by them. Because of this, revenging pain never balances out. So... we simply must forgive, or else we will be caught up in ever more debilitating war within ourselves and with others. To say "the devil made them / me do it" is to excuse sin; and we sometimes find forgiveness hard because we confuse it with excusing. Forgiving both others and ourselves requires us to be specific- she / he / I / they did this, that or the other sin. We don't just vaguely 'forgive', we must narrow down what we are seeking to forgive, to hard, actual specifics. We may wonder why we feel hatred at times, both of ourselves and of others. A lot of it comes from our own, or their own, sin; sin which we are each ultimately accountable for and can't blame off upon a Satan figure. Lewis Smedes makes an acutely powerful observation: "The pain we cause other people

becomes the hate we feel for ourselves. For having done them wrong" (19).

All the time we're excusing that wrong we do, or the wrong others have done to us, we can't begin the process of healing. Dostoevsky's *Crime And Punishment* tells the tale of Raskolnikov, a murderer who couldn't forgive himself because he kept trying to excuse himself. Excusing ourselves or others is the classic result of believing in the mantra of "Satan made me / them / her / him do it". And this is a significant barrier to forgiveness, both of ourselves and others. In the story, Raskolnikov has a relatively happy ending, because he came to realize "the fundamental falsity in himself...". It's this 'fundamental falsity in ourselves' which the Bible calls the Devil, the liar within us, the false accuser. Earlier in the story, Dostoevsky adds the narrator's comment: "How happy he would have been if he could have blamed himself! He could have borne anything then, even shame and disgrace". That's so true. Happy / blessed are those who blame themselves and not Satan. Let me stress that self-forgiveness isn't the same as having a high opinion of ourselves. It's exactly because we can candidly face our sin in all honesty that we can forgive ourselves. This is why the 12 steps require recovering alcoholics to list in great, specific detail all the times they've lied, lost money, hurt people, as a result of their addiction. The honest specifics are necessary for healing and forgiveness to happen. Confrontation of our own sins and those of others [even if they won't confront them] is required on our part if we are to forgive. We have to be realistic about human sin. By making ourselves and others accountable for sin, not blaming it on any Satan figure out there, we open up the possibility of forgiveness. If we're not specific about our failures, or about the sins of others who have hurt us, then we will easily drown under our own weight of vague self-condemnation. We forgive people, and ourselves, for what is actually *done*, and not for who people *are*. Attempts to forgive people or ourselves for who we *are* often end in miserable, depressing failure- because we were going for the wrong goal. It takes courage to be specific, not least because the self-righteous societies in which we live often unconsciously want us to live under an umbrella of permanent shame, to make them feel and look better. It may be that we still have some anger after

achieving forgiveness, probably we can only forgive both ourselves and others in dribs and drabs and not in the one-time magnanimous way that God does (for we are not God)... but all the same, forgiveness is an achievable goal. It's the ultimate sign of freedom, that we aren't going to be dominated by others' hurts toward us, nor by our own sin. We are going to forgive, and thus be ultimately free and creative, after the Divine pattern in Christ.

Demonization Of Others

I've noted throughout these studies that there's a huge attraction to the idea that we here on earth are somehow on the side of God and Jesus, who are engaged in a cosmic conflict with the Devil in Heaven. It empowers us to assume that anyone against us on earth must therefore be somehow 'of the Devil', and we are made to feel that any aggression towards them or description of them in Satanic terms is somehow legitimate. The craze of witch hunting in the Middle Ages claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people- it was a kind of psychological epidemic that spread throughout society. People assumed that whenever a disaster occurred, or someone fell sick, this was the work of Satan- and therefore anyone felt to be somehow against the sufferers was held to be 'of Satan'. Cross eyed old ladies, anyone who looked or thought differently to the crowd, therefore became a target for attack. "This belief generally assumed a very contagious character, spreading like an epidemic in the particular district in which the incidents happened" (20). What for me is significant in all this is how eager humanity is to believe in a personal Satan. It enables us to take out our anger, our dysfunctions, our gut dislikes of others- in the name of God, in the name of participating in a battle against Satan in which we nobly take the side of Jesus. Here is the danger of the idea. The real, Biblical understanding of Satan is so different, and calls us to personal self control, self-examination, awareness of our weakness and Christ's strength- and this, in turn, affects our attitude to others. Rather than witch hunting and demonizing, we become understanding of human weakness and sensitive to the human condition, ever seeking to share the colossal victory of the Lord Jesus with others.

We tend to assume that God takes sides in all the squabbles which occur here on earth- and, of course, we like to think that He is on *our* side, and therefore our opponents are against God and therefore particularly awful and worthy of our best hatred. Shakespeare's Macduff reflects our assumptions in this area: "Did heaven look on and would not take their part?". It's this presumption that God is on our side in matters great and small, from a squabble with the neighbour to international wars, that in turn leads to a demonization of the enemy. And the Jewish and pagan myths about a dark god of evil who exists in opposition to the true God then become very attractive to us. We *want* to believe in them, because it just suits us down to the ground to be able to paint our disagreeable neighbour or the country next door as dark, evil, wicked through and through, and in league with supposed cosmic forces of evil with which we are doing valiant battle. It's no wonder that the basic idea of a superhuman Devil is so attractive, and is pressed into service by all sides in a dispute. I have on my computer a file of images of cartoons and posters which demonize people as the Devil. In the two world wars, each side 'demonized' the other. C.S. Lewis wrote his *Screwtape Letters* and other allusions to Satan against the background of the second World War and the British demonization of Nazis and later Communists. Since 1945, Soviets demonized their enemies with 'Satan' features even though they officially didn't believe in Satan nor God; Western powers likewise 'Satanized' the Soviets. More recently, the West has done the same in their cartoons of Islamic leaders and terrorists; and Islamic cartoonists have done likewise in representing Western and Israeli leaders as 'the great Satan'. Bosnian Moslems and Serbian Christians did the same to each other in the wars which wracked the former Yugoslavia... flicking through those images on my hard drive is a depressing experience. Everyone is out to demonize the other, and drawing horns and tail on 'the other guy' is obviously *so* easy and attractive. And whilst most of us aren't into drawing cartoons, we effectively tend to do the same in conflicts great and small.

Notes

- (1) Raimundo Panikkar, *Worship And Secular Man* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), vi.
- (2) These thoughts are well developed in David Levin, *Legalism And Faith* (Ann Arbor: Tidings Publishing, 2002) ch. 21.
- (3) Paul Tournier, *The Violence Within*, translated by Edwin Hudson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978).
- (4) Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1961).
- (5) "In the Akkadian myth of Adapa... Ea summoned Adapa... and warned him that, having displeased Anu... the gods would offer him the food and drink of death, which he must refuse. Anu, however, learning of this indiscreet disclosure, fooled Ea by offering Adapa the bread of life and the water of life and, when he refused them at his father's orders, grimly sending him back to the earth as a perverse mortal"- Robert Graves & Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (New York: Greenwich House, 1983) p. 79.
- (6) Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) p. 7.
- (7) H. Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The Theology of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) p. 289.
- (8) C.F. Evans, *The Lord's Prayer* (London: S.C.M., 1997) p. 70.
- (9) Richard Tarnas, *The Passion Of The Western Mind: Understanding The Ideas That Have Shaped Our Worldview* (London: Pimlico / Random House, 2000) p. 137.
- (10) Cyprian, *Jealousy*, Chapter 4, as cited in H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 180.

(11) Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis, The Story of Creation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984) pp. 125,126.

(12) Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (London: S.C.M., 1966) p. 85.

(13) J.B. Russell, *The Prince Of Darkness: Radical Evil And The Power Of Good In History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) p. 275.

(14) Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Monad Press, 1974) pp. 431,168.

(15) Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy Of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Rinehart & Winston, 1973) pp. 9,10.

(16) Robert Simon, *Bad Men Do What Good Men Dream Of* (Washington: American Psychiatric Press, 1999). Simon was a forensic psychologist, reflecting upon a lifetime of examining murderers and other major criminals.

(17) Andrew Greeley, *Unsecular Man* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972) p. 212.

(18) Rollo May, "Reflections and Commentary," in Clement Reeves, *The Psychology of Rollo May: A Study in Existential Theory and Psychotherapy* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1977), p. 304.

(19) Lewis Smedes, *Forgive And Forget* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984) p. 72.

(20) F.G. Jannaway, *Satan's Biography* (London: Maranatha, 1900) p. 12.

3-1-1 "To be spiritually minded": the Essence of Christianity

Consider the huge emphasis of the New Testament upon 'thinking / talking within oneself'- especially within the Gospels. The same Greek phrase is used repeatedly:

- "Think not to say within yourselves" (Mt. 3:9)
- "The scribes said within themselves" (Mt. 9:3)
- "She said within herself" (Mt. 9:21)
- The believer who fails to grow spiritually has no root "within himself" (Mt. 13:21)
- "They reasoned within themselves... Why do you reason within yourselves..." (Mt. 16:7,8)
- "The husbandmen... said within themselves" (Mt. 21:38)
- The disciples "disputed within themselves" (Mk. 9:33)
- Have salt "within yourselves" (Mk. 9:50)
- The Pharisee "spake within himself" (Lk. 7:39)
- The guests "began to say within themselves" (Lk. 7:49)
- The rich fool "thought within himself, saying..." (Lk. 12:17)
- "The steward said within himself" (Lk. 16:3)
- The unjust judge "said within himself" (Lk. 18:4)
- Peter "doubted in himself" (Acts 10:17)
- Jews who heard the Gospel "reasoned within themselves" (Acts 28:29 Gk.)
- Israel "through the lusts of their own hearts... dishonoured their bodies within themselves" (Rom. 1:24)
- "Within yourselves... you have a better and enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34)
- "Partial within yourselves, judges of evil thoughts" (James 2:4)

There are many other Bible verses which likewise speak of the internal state of a person and the significance of our self-talk- these are just examples of one Greek phrase. It is logical therefore to expect that the great adversary or 'satan' to be internal thinking, how we think and speak within ourselves. And properly understood, this is indeed what 'satan' in the Bible sometimes refers to.

The state of our hearts, what we think about, is of supreme importance. We all carry on conversations with ourselves, often involving us imagining certain situations and how we would speak or act to a person. The intended result of all our trials and experiences, of our belief in all the true Bible doctrines which comprise the good news, is that we should become spiritually minded. This is the end result of believing; membership of a denomination, Bible reading, believing the right doctrines... all these things are only means to an end, and that end is to develop the mind of Christ, to "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). The wicked will be rejected for the state of their hearts, rather than their specific actions;

hence God's summary of why He rejected the wilderness generation was that "It is a people that do err in their heart" (Ps. 95:10). Similarly, God could have condemned Babylon for a whole host of sinful actions; but His essential, repeated reason was because of how they spoke in their hearts (Is. 47:10; Zeph. 2:15; Rev. 18:17). And He gave the same reason for His condemnation of Tyre (Ez. 28:2) and Edom (Obadiah 3). The more we come to know ourselves, the more we will perceive the importance of self-talk. I take Ecclesiastes to be Solomon's self-examination at the end of his life. Five times in this short book he describes how "I said in my heart..." (Ecc. 2:1,15 [twice]; 3:17,18). As he looked back and analyzed how and why he had lived and been as he had, he appreciated that it was all a result of his self-talk, how he had spoken to himself in his mind. His introspection reveals just how we talk to ourselves – e.g. "I said in my heart, "Go on now, I will prove you with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure"" (Ecc. 2:1). We all talk to ourselves; and the records of the Lord's wilderness temptations are an amazing psychological window into the self-talk of God's very own son. As we know, He answered every temptation that arose within His self-talk with quotations from Scripture. He lived out in reality David's words: "Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin" (Ps. 119:11 – cp. how God's word was in the heart of men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Jer. 20:9; Ez. 3:10). This, then, is the ultimate fruit of familiarity with Scripture, of the "daily reading of the Bible" which has been the catch cry of every serious Christian community.

We need to let passages like Eph. 5:3–5 have their full weight with us. Fornication, covetousness, all uncleanness should not be "named amongst us", in the same way Israel were not to take even the names

of the Gentile idols onto their lips (Ex. 23:13) – “but rather giving of thanks”, knowing that those who do such things will not be in the Kingdom of God. A thankful attitude, thinking and speaking of those things with which we will eternally have to do, is to replace thinking and talking about all the things which shall not be our eternal sphere of thought in the Kingdom age. And yet our generation faces the temptation like none before it – to privately watch and read of those things, vicariously involved in them, whilst being under the illusion that we’re not actually doing them ourselves. For this is what the entertainment industry is based around.

There’s a strange juxtaposition of ideas in Jer. 4:12–14. Jeremiah promises that Yahweh’s horrendous judgments will come upon His people, through chariots, clouds and whirlwind. But for what? Because of the wickedness of Judah’s heart / mind. No other God, no penal code, would stipulate such extreme judgments ‘merely’ for an internal attitude of mind. The pinnacle of Judah’s sin was that “it reaches unto your heart” (Jer. 4:18). This is all how seriously God views the state of the human heart.

Self-Talk

Knowing the truth about Satan leads to us being far more in touch with ourselves, aware of the nature of our thought processes and the crucial importance of our own personality and character. “Self-talk is based on your beliefs. And what you truly believe is manifested both in your inner and oral conversations” ⁽¹⁾. All the angst expended in worrying about an external personal Devil is put into self-control and personal spiritual development. For we are to be in a living personal relationship with the Father and Son, responding to them both in absolutely unique ways. For there are as many responses to Jesus as there are human fingerprints. And it is this personal, deeply internal response to them which becomes sidelined if we are mere spectators at a show, watching some cosmic battle play itself out up in the sky.

It would be fair to say that the Biblical Devil often refers to our self-talk – the very opposite of the external Devil idea. Jesus pinpointed the crucial importance of self-talk in His parable of the rich fool, who said to himself that he had many goods, and discussed with his own “soul” the need for greater barns etc. (Lk. 12:17–19). If we at least realize that our self-talk is potentially our greatest adversary [‘Satan’], then we will find the strength to move towards genuine spiritual mindedness, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Paul’s

wording here suggests that naturally our “every thought” is not obedient to Christ; and this is his way of speaking about ‘the Devil’.

Dt. 15:9 has Moses warning Israel: “Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart”. The Hebrew for ‘thought’ really means ‘word’ – the idea is to ensure that you don’t have a self-talk that says... that because the year of release was coming up soon, therefore you would not lend your brother anything, knowing that you had to forgive him the debt in the year of release. Here we have the OT equivalent of the New Testament ‘Devil’. We can control our self-talk, but we must be aware that it takes place. Moses is basically saying: ‘Beware of your own self talk; see how you speak to yourself in unfinished sentences like “The year of release is at hand...”, resulting in you ‘finishing the sentence’ by unkind deeds’.

Perceiving the reality and power of our own self-talk is one outcome of truly comprehending who the Devil is. Ps. 36:1 warns: “Sin speaks to the wicked man in his heart” (Heb.). The path of Cain involved reviling what he did not understand (Jude 10,11). He didn’t understand, or didn’t let himself understand, the principles of sacrifice, and so he reviled his brother and God’s commands, he became a true child of the Biblical Devil – because he didn’t understand.

Our self-talk actually defines where we go in our relationships. If we keep reacting to events, encounters, stimulations etc. with the same kind of self-talk, this cuts a groove in our brain as it were, and ends up affecting who we are as well as how we interact with others. It’s not really true that certain events make us inevitably act or feel in a certain way. What they do is trigger our self-talk, those attitudes, evaluations, opinions, mental pictures, imagined reactions, which we already have worked out in our previous conversations with ourselves. And it is this self-talk which then dictates how we will feel or act when things happen or are said. If we have a certain ‘self-talk’ opinion of someone and yet speak and act nicely to them, sooner or later we won’t be able to keep up the act any longer. The gap between your real self and the image you project will become so great that all manner of depression, anger and dysfunction will result. I remember underlining a phrase of Soren Kierkegaard, quite stunned by how intensely true it was, and how much truth is compacted by him into so few words: “An unconscious relationship is more powerful than a conscious one”. This says it all. What you say to yourself about your wife, how you analyze to yourself the actions of your child... this has the real power, far beyond any forms of words and outward behaviour we may show. Yet sadly, this world thinks that how you say things is all important; it’s a running away from the importance and crucial

value of the real self within. And it's yet another reason why self-talk is crucial to true, real living and spiritual development. And this is all an outflow from a clear grasp of the fact that the real Satan is the adversary of our own internal thoughts, and not some external Devil or some guy who fell off the 99th floor back in the Garden of Eden. Not for nothing does the Bible at times describe our self-talk as a 'Devil', a false accuser. For so much of what we are tempted to think about others in our conversations with ourselves is slanderous, untrue, and negative. Our self-talk tends to over generalize, over-interpret, gets things way out of perspective, magnifying some things and minimizing others. Whereas to have the mind of the Spirit, the mind influenced by God's word rather than the word of our own self-talk, will lead to truth, life and peace. Well does the NCV translate Prov. 4:23: "Be careful what you think because your thoughts run your life". We are to gather together "the loins of your mind" (1 Pet. 1:13), make a conscious effort to analyze our thinking, get a grip on it and gather it together into Christ.

The psychological intensity of our inner battles is recognized throughout Scripture. Take Ex. 23:5: "If you see the ass of him that hates you lying under his burden, and would forbear to help him, you shall surely release it". This Divine law perceived that in such a case, there would be the inner temptation to "forbear" assisting; but no, "you shall surely release it". The very structure of Biblical Hebrew as a language is often instructive as to how God wishes us to perceive things. There is actually no literal word in Biblical Hebrew for 'to think' – instead there is a word meaning 'to say in one's heart'. And there are times when the word is wrongly translated simply "say" (e.g. 1 Sam. 16:6 – NEB correctly renders as "thought"). This provides a window into understanding how the Greek *logos* means both 'speech' and 'reason'; and sets the backdrop for the repeated teaching of Jesus that God counts human thoughts as if they are the spoken word or acted deed. But my point in this context is that the Hebrew Bible continually focuses our attention upon the internal thought processes – for here is the real 'Satan', the real enemy to true spirituality.

If we keep telling ourselves something about ourselves, we'll act accordingly. So much depression and anger is caused by people speaking negatively about themselves in their self-talk: "I'm bad, I'm no good, I can't make the grade...". There's a huge amount of negativity in the world, and increasingly the value of the individual is glossed over – we're treated as nobodies, and it rubs off. But *our* self-talk should be based around the unspeakable joy of knowing that we are in Christ, that we are secure in and with Him. As we wait in line at the supermarket checkout, we can be telling ourselves: "He... loves

me, yes me... I will be there". And pounding in our brain as we find ourselves caught up in yet another traffic jam can be the urgent reminder: "He died for me... tormented by flies probably too... He had me in mind". Or recite a Bible verse to yourself... whatever, "Don't let the world squeeze you into its mould, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:1 JB Phillips). This positive self-talk will enable us to maintain our basic human dignity, as well as our faith and spiritual integrity, in the face of rejection, slander and breakup of human relationships. It's all too easy to be negative. Moses said within himself "I am a foreigner in this land" – and his self-talk led to the very public 'word' of naming his son 'Gershom' (Ex. 2:22). David kept telling himself that Saul would defeat him: "David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1 Sam. 27:1). And he acted accordingly, and his negative self-talk led him into a faithless situation. Yet it seems that David later perceived his error, and the importance of self-talk. For in the Psalms, he characterizes the wicked in Israel as being distinguished by what they say in their heart, in their self-talk. Take Psalm 10: "He has said in his heart, "I shall not be moved"... he has said in his heart, "God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see it"... he has said in His heart "You (God) will not require it"" (Ps. 10:6,11,13). Notice how effectively the wicked man prays to God in his thoughts – "You will not require it".

How could David be so confident that he knew what was going on in the hearts of others? Surely because he perceived that actions are so certainly the fruit of self-talk, that he could reason back from the words and behaviour of the wicked to know what their self-talk must be. So certain was David, as the Lord Jesus was later, that thoughts are directly reflected in words and actions. For sure, the wicked whom David observed would have denied that they said such things about God. Especially would they have denied David's confident assertion in Ps. 14:1 that "The fool has said in his heart, There is no God". For atheism was unheard of in early Israel; it was a perversion of far later times. But their actions reflected a deeply internal assumption that God doesn't actually see and know all things; that He's simply not watching when we sin. And the self-talk of the wicked is effectively that 'There's no God out there'. Like David, the Lord Jesus saw through peoples' actions to the self-talk behind it. He observed the body language of the Pharisee, despising the repentant woman; Lk. 7:39 records that the man "said within himself... 'She is a sinner!'", but "Jesus *answering* said unto him..." (Lk. 7:40). The Lord perceived the man's self-talk, and responded to it. For Him, the Pharisee's unspoken words were loud and clear, and Jesus acted as if He was in a conversation with the man. He correctly read the man's silent disapproval as actually saying something, and responded to it as if in

conversation. Of course we could argue that the Lord was empowered by a flash of Holy Spirit illumination to be able to read the Pharisee's mind; but it seems to me altogether more likely that it was His own sensitivity, His own perception of the other's self-talk, that enabled Him to know what was being silently said within the man's mind.

'Said in his heart' is a common Biblical phrase (e.g. Gen. 17:17; 1 Sam. 27:1; 1 Kings 12:26; Esther 6:6). Further, there are many instances where we read that a person 'said' something; but it's apparent that they said it to themselves, in their heart. Take Gehazi in 2 Kings 5:20: "But Gehazi said, Behold, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but, as the Lord lives, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him". For sure, Gehazi said this to nobody but himself. Or Moses – he's recorded as saying "People have found out what I have done!" – surely he said this within himself (Ex. 2:14 GNB). Samuel's comment about Eliab was likewise presumably to himself (1 Sam. 16:6); Saul's "I'll strike [David] to the wall" was surely said to himself (1 Sam. 18:11); likewise his explanation of his plan to trap David via his daughter Michal was all hatched out within his own brain (1 Sam. 18:21); other examples in 1 Sam. 27:12; 1 Kings 12:26 etc. Only God knew what those men 'said in their heart'; and yet He has recorded it in His inspired word for all generations to see. In this alone we see how ultimately, nothing remains secret; at the day of judgment, what we spoke in darkness (i.e. In our own minds) will be heard in the light of God's Kingdom (Lk. 12:3). Note how Paul read the Lord's words here in this way – for he surely alludes here when he speaks of how "the hidden things of darkness" are "the counsels of the hearts" which will be revealed at His return (1 Cor. 4:5). The implications of this are awesome. The thoughts and intents of our hearts in this life will be eternally open and manifest in the eternal light of God's Kingdom. In that day, our brethren will see every one of our hidden thoughts. To live now according to the principle 'I can think what I like, but I won't act like it, for the sake of appearances to others' is therefore foolish. Who we are now in our hearts is whom we shall ultimately be revealed to be. So we may as well get on and act according to how we really think; for throughout eternity, what we think now will be manifest to everyone, seeing that a man *is* as he thinks in his heart.

Prayer

Prayer is largely carried out in the mind – how we 'speak in the heart' is effectively read as our prayer to God. We find the phrase used

about how Abraham's servant prayed, 'speaking in his heart' (Gen. 24:45). Thus our self-talk merges into prayer; Hannah's "prayer" appears to have been the same (1 Sam. 2:1). Solomon's prayer for wisdom is described by God as "in your heart" (2 Chron. 1:11). This close link between thought and prayer is developed in the Lord's teaching in Mk. 11:23,24: "Truly I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he says comes to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them". Our self-talk is to be fantasy about the fulfillment of our prayers. Yet how often do we hit 'send' on our requests to God, like scribbling off a postcard, and hardly think again about them?

Our Words

It's a common mistake in the Christian warfare to think that we can think what we like, but we must strive earnestly to control our words so we don't let the thoughts out publicly, as it were. Our thoughts *are* our words; the intention is the action. In any case, there is a Biblical theme that what we say in our heart comes out into the open: "Esau said *in his heart*, The days of mourning for my father are at hand. Then will I slay my brother Jacob. And the words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah" (Gen. 27:41,42). What Esau said to himself became public knowledge through his actions. Haman is described as having 'presumed in his heart' to destroy the Jews (Esther 7:5); but the Hebrew word translated "presumed" is also translated "accomplished". The thought was as if he had done it. Perhaps the Lord Jesus had reflected upon these things, and it was this reflection which led Him to teach that our thoughts are counted as our deeds and words. It all underlines the simple fact that we cannot think one way about a person, and hope that brutal self-control will somehow stop us acting out those thoughts in some way. Perhaps this was one of the many Old Testament examples which led the Lord towards His firm conviction that thought and deed are the same. In passing, let's not take this as only negative. Our intentions to do good can also, on this basis, be counted as if they were performed. Thus if we have a generous spirit, and would love to be generous to the needy, but just can't do it – it's counted as if we've done it. The generous poor at Corinth are the parade example: "For if there first be a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man has [to give], and not according to that he hasn't got [to give]" (2 Cor. 8:12).

Nicespeak No More

What we say in our heart may well not be revealed by us public ally in those very words of self-talk. Prov. 23:6,7 warns that a mean person will say to you: "Eat and drink!", but his heart is not with you; "for as he thinks in his heart, so is he". In his heart, he's counting the cost of those vegetables, that meat on your plate, rather hoping you won't help yourself to too many of the candies he 'generously' offers you with his welcoming words. He thinks in a mean way; so this is how he really is. His heart isn't with you; his words are just nicespeak. Nebuchadnezzar had been warned by Is. 14:13 that the King of Babylon would be brought down because he would say *in his heart* "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God". Yet the promised fall of Babylon's King only happened when he said out loud: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?". The record continues: "While the word was in the king's mouth (i.e. he spoke this out loud), there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken" (Dan. 4:30,31). What was the "it" that was spoken about him? Surely the prophecy of Isaiah 14, which was a prediction waiting for a king of Babylon to come along and fulfil it. So the king's self-talk was that he would rise up to Heaven; but his actual words were an admiration of *his* Kingdom as opposed to God's. And yet he was judged for the self-talk behind his words. And this is the kind of relentlessly analytical judgment which a loving Father applies to us too. The culture of nicespeak comes crashing down before His piercing eyes; for the world teaches us that it's all about *how we put it over*, the words we choose, the image we cut; and yet God looks upon the heart. God is the God of all grace; He judges (it's not that He doesn't judge – He does!), but *with grace*. And the extent of that grace becomes the larger, is given greater backdrop, as we appreciate the more how He searches and analyzes our lives constantly, always taking our words and actions right back to their essential root – in our self-talk. And how does He do this? Heb 4:12 answers: "For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart". Through our interaction with God's word, our deepest self-talk is revealed to us (if we read properly, and not as a conscience-salving dashing through some Bible reading for the sake of it); and yet perhaps it is through our response to God's word that our thoughts are revealed to God. That'd be to say, that His knowledge of us may not be as it were 'automatic', but He uses His word as the means, the mechanics as it were, by which He has such

piercing knowledge of human hearts. No wonder we ought to pray before we read Scripture...

The miserly man we spoke about hasn't got his heart 'with you', Prov. 23:7 warns. The implication is that if our words and actions are truly congruent with our thoughts, then there will be an attractive openness about us which more easily binds us in meaningful fellowship with others. What we all like is someone who is real; the more real, the more credible. We're too used to seeing through hypocrisy; we want a real person to befriend, to open our hearts to, to bare our self before. And the reason we tend not to do this is because we realize that people aren't what they seem. 21st century humanity has become too smart at faking it, weaving words, throwing up blinds, building a brilliant disguise. As our interactions between each other these days become increasingly online, they rely more upon written, premeditated words than they do upon spoken words and personal contact. There's not much we can do about the way society is going, but there is a crying need in this kind of society to be *real*, to have utter congruence between who we internally are and who we show ourselves to be in the words we tap and occasionally speak.

Some Practical Suggestions

"To be spiritually minded" can't be achieved by brutally willing ourselves to 'think spiritually'. If we spend an hour in encounter with a particularly inspirational person; meet a dying person; witness a man being murdered; deeply share another's joy... The impression remains quite naturally in our thinking. We don't have to force ourselves to think about these things – they come to us naturally. Perhaps the art of the spiritual life is making all the wonderful things we know come real to us, so that we are deeply under the impression of them in our daily thinking. The breaking of bread is intended as a special gift to us in this regard. Let it have its intended power. "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19) is an inadequate translation of the Greek text – "the words do not indicate a mere memorial meal in memory of a man now dead, but strictly mean "making present reality" of Christ's saving death" ⁽²⁾. So let the bread and wine truly be an *aide memoire*. That on a Friday afternoon, on a day in April, on a hill outside Jerusalem, around 2000 years ago, Jesus died for me. Three days later, a man dressed as a working man, a humble gardener, walked out of a tomb, perhaps folded His grave clothes first, and saw the lights of early morning Jerusalem twinkling in the distance. And 40 days later ascended through cotton wool clouds and blue sky, with the necks and throats of watching disciples moving backwards as they gaped at

the sight; and will just as surely come again, to take you and me unto Himself. These things, and the endless implications of them, are what will fill our minds if they impress us as having really happened. If we believe the Bible is inspired, it will have the result of what Harry Whittaker called "Bible television"; we will see these things as if they happened before our eyes. And yet there are some more conscious things we can do and be aware of in order "to be spiritually minded":

– Garbage in, garbage out. It's so true – if we fill our minds with the trashy songs and soap operas of this world, then these are the themes and phrases we will have in our self-talk. And truly "You never go anywhere your mind hasn't already been". It's why I don't have a TV and don't listen much to the radio. Use time wisely. Make full use of CDs of Bible talks and readings. Get into Christian music; "speaking to yourselves (a reference to self-talk?) in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19).

– Read God's word daily; carry a pocket Bible; grab verses to feed your mind through the course of the day. Stick Bible verses around the house.

– Watch your company; for bad company corrupts good habits, and it's no good assuming that just because a person is baptized, they're automatically "good company".

– If you travel to work, *use that time* in prayer, reading, listening or meditation.

– Don't let anything – and demanding daily employment is a classic example – get such a grip on your mind that you have no time for God. It *is* possible to be spiritually minded in the midst of busy lives.

– Identify and keep away from issues which you know are going to lead you into unspiritual thinking. "I don't wish to talk about it at the moment" is a perfectly legitimate response.

– Above all, pray to be filled with the spirit / mind of Christ, open your mind to His, open the door and invite Him in... and He will come and dwell with you.

And bit by bit, we will know the truth of Rom. 8:6: "To be spiritually minded is life and peace". Spiritual mindedness is the seal of the Spirit, the guarantee that we will eternally be there with Christ in His Kingdom; for having "Christ in you" is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). I

am stumbling along what has seemed for too long to be just the early part of this road; and I think all of you join me in balking somewhat at the height of the calling. To bring every thought into captivity to Christ; to be able to say with Paul "but we have the mind of Christ". But I think that Paul got there (in the end), and like me you've probably met even a few in your ecclesial experience who apparently 'got there' by the end of their days – who had "the mind of Christ", and whom we laid to rest in sleep knowing that truly, "I knew a [wo]man in Christ". For all his failure and dysfunction, David is given the amazing accolade – 'a man after God's own heart' (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). And remember, this was God's very own estimation of David. *We can, we really can, be 'after God's own heart / mind'. May we find camaraderie and true fellowship with each other as we walk towards that same goal, knowing that "we all, with unveiled face, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord (Jesus), are (being, slowly) transformed into the same image, from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18).*

Notes

(1) H. Norman Wright, Larry Renetzky, *Healing Grace For Hurting People* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007) p. 105.

(2) Gunther Bornkamm, *Paul* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982) p. 202.

3-2 The Devil and Satan: the Hard Questions

The common understanding of the Devil as a fallen Angel and personal being throws up a huge number of unanswerable questions- unanswerable, at least, within Scripture. This led Shelley to point out that popular Christianity's view of the Devil was its weakest point: "The devil... is the weak place of the popular religion- the vulnerable belly of the crocodile... Christians invented or adopted the Devil to extricate them from this difficulty [of trying to understand the existence of a good God and the reality of evil]" (1). J.B. Russell thought likewise: "This has always been the weakest seam in Christian theology" (2). The sheer volume of contradictory mainstream Christian explanations of Satan and the mass of unanswered questions they generate is all confirmation of this observation. Within the context of speaking about practical consequences of our beliefs

in this area, I wish to list these questions. I do so because any basis for belief, any framework for understanding the Gospel, which has so many gaping contradictions and difficulties is hardly going to inspire a solid, dynamic, stable relationship with God. The issues of sin and evil are ever present in our daily lives; and I sincerely believe that without a sound way of understanding the issue, a hermeneutic if you like, these contradictions and apparently 'theoretical' difficulties will come to term in a disordered and insecure life. So very often, it is a struggle with these issues ['How could God do *this* or allow *that*?'] which leads to even a total loss of faith; and conversely, it is being able to make sense of sin and evil which allows God to confirm our faith through those negative experiences. So here are some of the questions thrown up by the mistaken ideas imported into Christendom on the devil issue- I catalogue them as part of my unashamed appeal for you to turn away from the common but false understanding of Satan which exists:

- If the Devil fell, what was the nature of his fall? What was his sin? Did he physically depart from Heaven and then go somewhere else? If so, where? Was it hell, or the earth, or somewhere in mid air? If it was to the earth, where did the Devil land? The garden of Eden? Was it Christ or Michael the Archangel who defeated him? Who exactly threw him out of Heaven?

- Where exactly is the Devil now? If he's indeed a personal being, he must surely have a location? If Angels literally fell from Heaven, where are they?

- Did the supposed fallen Angels come down to earth to tempt humans to sin, or because they were cast down by God? If they were cast down by God in punishment for *their* sin, why then should humanity suffer because of that? Isn't that like punishing a psychopath by giving him a loaded gun and casting him out of the courtroom into a school playground? If they came down from Heaven to earth of their own volition and fell into sin on earth, then the whole idea of rebellion in Heaven etc. is contradicted.

- Could or would we sin if the Devil didn't exist? If not, then surely we suffer and are punished unfairly for our sins? If we would, then to what extent is the devil responsible for our sins, seeing we would sin anyway?

- If the Devil is a personal being, does he have a body? What does he look like? If he is claimed to be a "spirit being", then in what sense is he a person? Where is the Biblical evidence for the existence of 'spirits', or indeed, any existence apart from in a personal form?

- What is the relationship between the Devil and the fallen angels / demons? How does their punishment differ from each other? Was the sin of the fallen angels different to that of the devil?

- Can the Devil and those angels ever repent? Does he now have freewill? Did he ever have freewill? Was he originally of Christ's nature in Heaven? If Adam sinned but could repent, why could not Satan and the supposed fallen angels also repent? As Milton observed in *Paradise Lost*: "Man therefore shall find grace / The other [i.e. satan] none" (3.131). Oddly enough, the early incantations chanted at baptisms implored Satan to repent. The *Ergo maledicte* began: "Therefore, accursed Devil, recall [i.e. reverse] your sentence and give honour to the living and true God" (3). This problem of how Adam could sin and repent, but Satan could sin and not repent, led all kinds of people to struggle towards the realization that the common perception of Satan is wrong. The Yezidi Kurds came to depart from standard Moslem thinking about Iblis [Satan] over this issue of the illogicality of a Satan who cannot repent, and came to the conclusion that there is no personal Satan, that human beings have total responsibility for their sinfulness, and will meet the result of their sins in the afterlife (4). And this hard question remains for those who insist upon the popular interpretation of Satan. Tony Lagouranis comments on a Yazidi prisoner he met in Iraq in 2004: "There's a lot of mystery surrounding the Yazidi, and a lot of contradictory information. But I was drawn to this aspect of their beliefs: Yazidi don't have a Satan. Malak Ta'us, an archangel, God's favorite, was not thrown out of heaven... If there is evil in the world, it does not come from a

fallen angel or from the fires of hell. The evil in this world is man-made" (5). And yet significantly, the Yezidis are accused of satan worship. In her memoir of her service with an intelligence unit of the U.S. Army in Iraq, Kayla Williams records being stationed amongst the Yezidis and how "local Muslims considered the Yezidis to be devil worshippers" (6). This is psychologically interesting; for those of us who likewise deny the existence of a literal Satan being are often accused of actually being possessed by Satan, held in 'his' paws, and saying exactly what 'he' wishes us to say, that 'he' doesn't exist. This total lack of reason, logic and Biblicism in the mouths and words of supposedly religious people is, I submit, a reflection of their own (perhaps unconscious) dis-ease over this whole question. If someone suggests that 'Satan' doesn't exist and that sin is really our fault- then, hit them hard for it, slander them, attack them. Why? Because there is an unconscious suspicion that actually, those people may be correct.

- When did the Devil fall? Before creation? Before Adam was created? Afterwards? At the time prophesied in Revelation 12? At the time of Noah, when the sons of God married the daughters of men (Gen. 6)?

- Where did demons come from? The New Testament refers to the surrounding beliefs about demons- but in the first century, demons were thought to be the 'immortal souls' of the dead. Wicked immortal souls became wicked demons (see Josephus, *Wars Of The Jews* 6.47). If demons are the supposedly wicked angels who fell at the creation or in Genesis 6, how can they also be wicked 'immortal souls' of human beings? From where can the idea of 'immortal souls' be justified in the pages of a Bible which so insistently stresses the mortality of the human soul?

- According to misreadings of Ez. 28:15 "Thou wast perfect in thy ways till iniquity was found in thee" and Jn. 8:44 "the devil was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there was no truth in him", those who believe in a personal Devil are faced with a contradiction- was the Devil originally a sinner, or, was he once perfect but fell?

- How can the *positive* spiritual effect of Satan be explained? Men were delivered to Satan, so they might learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:20); deliverance to Satan results in "the destruction of the flesh" (1 Cor. 5:5)- and "the flesh" usually refers in the New Testament to the fleshly *mind* (Rom. 8:5-9; Eph. 2:3; Jn. 8:15). Surely all this makes sense if 'satan' merely refers to an adversary, and not to some cosmic being bent on making us sin?

- When was the Devil punished, and how? At his fall to earth? At the crucifixion? During the ministry of Jesus, when He said He beheld satan falling as lightning? Or at the second coming? Will the Devil be saved? Origen argued that he would be ultimately, and yet "elsewhere Origen denied the salvation of Satan and called the idea that he believed it a mad invention of his enemies" (7). The intellectual desperation of the 'fathers' on this matter is evident.

- What exactly is our defence against the Devil? Why would the Devil get scared off by our Bible reading, uttering the name of Christ, getting baptized, wearing or touching a cross, making the sign of the cross, reciting charms and the other things suggested by the early church "fathers"?

- Related to all this: Why did Christ have to die? Because of Satan's tyranny, as the 'church fathers' so often claimed? Or because of our and Adam's sin, as Paul explains throughout Romans?

- What are the Devil's powers, what function does he perform in our world? Is he responsible for the effects of the curse placed on the earth after Adam fell? Does he operationalize it? Does he cause disasters? Does he cause moral sin in individuals?

- Gregory the Great and other Christian writers claimed that God permits Satan to operate. Why, then, do we repeatedly read of evil coming "from the Lord" and being "sent" by Him (Am. 3:6; 1 Sam. 18:10; Is. 45:5-7 etc.)? Does God as it were respect Satan's 'rights' over us?

- Was the Devil the serpent, or did he merely use the serpent? The Genesis record states that the serpent was punished by having to eat dust "all the days of your life"- hinting at his mortality. Does the Devil literally eat dust? What is the relationship between the snakes we know today, crawling on their bellies as they do, and Satan?

- Does each sin have its own demon / fallen angel? Does the Devil enter our minds or our bodies? How does the Devil tempt us? The Biblical explanation of the process of internal temptation within the human mind is clear enough (James 1:13-15; Mk. 7:15-23), and validated within our own experience. But how exactly does a personal devil tempt us and lead us to sin?

- Does the Devil punish sinners after death, or administer condemnation to them? How does the Devil work with God, if at all?

- What will the Devil do in the Millennium, seeing he will be "bound"? Why does a literal being have to be "bound" to restrain him if he is so spiritually active?

- In the bungled attempt to resolve 'hard questions' about the origin of suffering and negative experiences in the lives of God's people, the 'personal Satan' solution seems to create even more hard questions- and runs into deep contradictions. Thus in the Book of Jubilees, Mastema / Satan empowers the Egyptians to persecute the Israelites, yet on the other hand he is the one who also kills the firstborn of Egypt. This begs the question: 'So where was God in all this?'. The Biblical explanation gives far less difficulty and avoids running into these deep contradictions.

- The curse that came upon the earth and humanity after Adam's sin was from God, not the Devil- according to Genesis. What, then, did the devil do the earth after his supposed fall? From whence did the curse come- from God or the Devil? If [as is so often supposed] the Devil brought suffering and curse into the earth, how did he have power to curse the natural creation and the animals, who didn't sin?

- If we accept that Satan exists as a person, with power to lead every human being into temptation, he must have enormous power and knowledge. From where did he get such power and authority? God works in the micro business of millions if not billions of human lives world-wide, adjusting His plan with the full knowledge of the countless trillions of possible futures which His creation of human freewill enable to exist. If Satan is going to seriously oppose this great God of ours, then he is pitting Himself against the Almighty who has His passionate eye on a billion universes, who follows the random motions of every subatomic particle in the countless stars of numberless galaxies... is the supposed Satan *really* this seriously powerful? Is not the idea of *any* cosmic opposition to the Creator simply absurd, even pitiful? Likewise, the idea that God had to pay a ransom to Satan in order to deliver His Son and all humanity surely gives Satan far too much power- and power which the Bible is utterly silent about him ever having. Ps. 139:12 joins us in mocking this idea that God is seriously in struggle against such a power of darkness: "Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as light to you".

- If Satan was indeed thrown out of Heaven, against his will- well *how* actually was this achieved? For the orthodox view of the matter claims that Satan still retains a lot of his power, with which he works mischief in the earth today. Surely he didn't come down without a fight. Apostate Judaism ran into this problem, and attempted to solve it by claiming that a "powerful angel was sent to evict Satan"- this assertion is made in several of the documents discovered at Qumran (8). But this begs a whole catena of further hard questions. *Who* exactly is this Angel, more powerful than Satan? Why no other mentions of him in Scripture? Wasn't the whole struggle of Satan with God somewhat ethically unfair, if God is so far more powerful, and has Angels around who are more powerful than even Satan? Weren't the dice just loaded against poor Satan from the start? Messing up the answer to one hard question only leads to provoking many more even harder questions. Quite simply, one has to re-trace the steps back to the original problem and seek to answer it in purely Biblical terms.

- In a book which raises piercing questions but provides no concrete answers, Ruth Anshen perceptively challenges believers in a fallen-Angel Satan with issues like: How did Satan's rebellion and punishment lead to human beings becoming more sin prone and exposed to evil? Why did God punish humanity and expel Adam from Eden because of Satan's sin? If Satan was once a good Angel who sinned and 'fell', surely there is left in him some vestige of 'good'- for persons who sin are not wholly sinful and often display streaks of good. How does that fit in with the classical image of a totally wicked Satan? Seeing we live in an expanding universe, does this mean that Satan's cosmic power is likewise expanding? What and where exactly is Satan's dominion? What was Satan's game plan in Eden? To build an empire for himself? Why did he so hate mankind? Was his anger against God or man? If Satan was originally an Angel with Divine nature, he was surely immortal. It's impossible to lose immortality if you have it- so will Satan eternally exist? If not, will he be saved? An immortal sinner is surely an impossible concept, if sin has to be punished ultimately by death (9).

- The popular theories about Satan require the Lord Jesus to have encountered him on the cross and somehow conquered him in the resurrection. But the Gospel records of the death and resurrection of the Lord are all significantly silent about this. "There is little in the Passion story suggestive of the demonic; whatever may be true of later church views, the resurrection is not seen as the deliverance of Jesus from Satan" (10). Seeing Jesus destroyed the Devil on the cross (Heb. 2:14), how come that sin and evil are ever increasing in our world- if the Devil indeed is responsible for them? And if the Devil has been "destroyed", in what sense is this personal being still alive and active? How can the Devil be judged at the last day if he was destroyed on the cross? Surely the only way to make sense of all this is to see all the Biblical references to the Devil as not referring to one personal being, but rather to various human 'adversaries' and the power of sin. Man Friday asked Robinson Crusoe: "If the Lord has the power to destroy the Devil and wishes him destroyed, why does he wait till the end of the world?". And that's a fair question. The orthodox view of the Devil fails to make any sense of the description of Christ having

destroyed the Devil (Heb. 2:14). Once we understand the Devil in that context to refer to the power of sin, all becomes clear. Sin's power was destroyed; in Christ, for Him personally, the Devil was dead and overcome. We now live out His victory through destroying the power of sin, through His victory and in His strength, throughout our lives, assured of ultimate victory in Christ.

I would argue that this huge raft of fundamental and yet unanswered questions is fatal for the integrity of any personal or theological position which can't get a grip on them. The church 'fathers' recognized the difficulty of these questions, but tried to block out any serious thought about them by the average Christian. "Such questions... as 'Whence is evil?' were, the Christian writer Tertullian said, "the questions that make people heretics"" (11). That is surely a tacit recognition that something's deeply wrong with a theology, even if it bears the name 'Christian', which can't engage with such questions which are at the very core of true Christian thought and living. The way that standard Christianity comes up with so many wildly differing answers to the questions, and has suggested them over history, merely indicates to me that they have it wrong on this point. The key that turns all these locks is to understand that the Biblical explanation of sin as coming from within, of all evil / disaster as ultimately coming from God, is the only one that makes sense. All these hard questions are really a reflection of how unsatisfying is the standard explanation of Satan and evil. Susan Neiman spends a whole book exemplifying how the history of European thought, philosophy and politics is all really the history of unsuccessful attempts to come to terms with and explain the origin of evil (12). From Kant to Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, even Hitler... it can all be understood as a series of increasingly desperate attempts to come to terms with past patterns of evil and the present experience of it. It's more than time that we give God and His book the Bible a serious look. For human efforts to explain, no matter whether they partially allude to the Bible or not, are clearly getting nowhere fast. It's been my observation that people's experience of how human theories fail to explain evil is what brings them to God- if they're presented with the correct Biblical explanation of His viewpoint. Take M. Scott Peck, a classically liberal American agnostic

psychotherapist. He explains in his *People Of The Lie: The Hope For Healing Human Evil* (13) how he once sought to explain human 'sinfulness' as merely misguidedness, dysfunction etc., carefully omitting the concept of 'evil'. But it was through his final recognition of evil, his facing up to it, and to the way that humanity really are self-deceived, that 'the devil' really is a 'false accuser' as the Greek word *diabolos* literally means, that he came not only to God but also to Christ and to far more effective ministering to people.

Notes

(1) P.B. Shelley, *On The Devil* in *The Complete Works Of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (New York: Scribner's, 1965).

(2) J.B. Russell, *The Devil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) p.222.

(3) H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 212. See too his *The Devil At Baptism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) pp. 237,238.

(4) See John S. Guest, *Survival Among The Kurds: A History Of The Yezidis* (London: Kegan Paul, 1993) pp. 31,236; Peter Awn, *Satan's Tragedy And Redemption: Iblis In Sufi Psychology* (Leiden: Brill, 1983).

(5) Tony Lagouranis, *Fear Up Harsh: An Army Interrogator's Dark Journey through Iraq* (New York: New American Library, 2007).

(6) Kayla Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the US Army* (New York: Norton and Company Inc., 2005).

(7) J.B. Russell, *A History Of Heaven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) p. 75.

(8) 11Q11, col. 4, II. 1-10- English translation in F.G. Martinez and E.J.C. Tighehaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) Vol. 2 pp. 1202-3.

(9) Ruth Anshen, *The Reality Of The Devil: Evil In Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) pp. 14,15,89.

(10) Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), p. 58.

(11) Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, And The Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1997) xxiv.

(12) Susan Neiman, *Evil In Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

(13) M. Scott Peck, *People Of The Lie: The Hope For Healing Human Evil* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983).

CHAPTER 4

DEMONS

4-1 The Devil, Satan and Demons

It has been explained earlier that the Devil or Satan is not a personal being or monster. We've explained that the words simply mean 'the adversary', or 'false accuser'. Sometimes these ideas are used in a metaphorical sense to refer to the sinful tendencies innate within human nature. If we accept that there is no such being as 'Satan', then it surely follows that demons, who are held to be the servants of the Devil, also do not exist. Many people seem to think that God gives us all the good things of life, and the Devil and his demons give us the bad things, and take away the good things which God gives us. But as we approach the specific issue of demons, let's recap some of the basic Bible principles covered earlier.

The Bible clearly teaches that God is the source of all power, and that He is responsible for both the good things *and* the bad things in our lives:

“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (Is. 45:7);

“Evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem”(Mic. 1:12);

“Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord has not done it?” (Am. 3:6).

Therefore when we get trials, we should accept that they come from God, not blame them on a Devil or demons. Job was a man who lost many of the good things which God blessed him with, but he didn't blame his losses upon demons. Listen to what he said: “The Lord gave, and *the Lord* has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21); “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? (Job 2:10). Once we understand that all things are from God, when we have problems in life we can pray to God for Him to take them away, and if He does not, we can be assured that He is giving them to us in order to develop our characters and for our good in the long run: “My Son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loves He (not

demons!) chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is he whom the Father chastens not? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards and not sons” (Heb. 12:5–8).

God: Source of All Power

God is the source of all power:

“I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God (the Hebrew word for ‘god’ essentially means ‘power’) beside Me” (Is. 45:5); “Is there a God beside Me? Yea, there is no God; I know not any”, God says (Is. 44:8); “The Lord He is God; there is none else beside Him” (Dt. 4:35). Such verses occur time and again throughout the Bible. Because God is the source of all power and the only God, He is therefore a jealous God, as He often reminds us (e.g. Ex. 20:5; Dt. 4:24). God gets jealous when His people start believing in other gods, if they say to Him, ‘You are a great God, a powerful God, but actually I believe there are still some other gods beside You, even if they are not as powerful as You’. This is the problem with believing that there are demons or a Devil in existence as well as the true God. This is just the mistake Israel made. Much of the Old Testament is spent showing how Israel displeased God by believing in other gods as well as in Him. The “demons” some people believe in today are equivalent to those false gods Israel believed in.

Biblical Christianity differs from most religions in that it doesn’t offer a specifically stated theology about demons. Many uninspired religious writings explain in great detail how their religion views demons and Angels, how there is a hierarchy of good ones and a hierarchy of bad ones and so forth. The Bible is significantly silent on this point – if indeed the common views of fallen Angels, demons etc. are Biblical, why is the Bible lacking such a demonology? Why does the Bible never actually define for us what a demon is? The Bible records no eye-witness accounts of meetings with demons. This point has been heavily pressed by various writers ⁽¹⁾. The Bible refers to demons in the same way as it refers to various contemporary religious ideas, e.g. Baal; but such reference doesn’t of itself prove that the Bible supports those contemporary views. And there are of course as many theories about demons [‘demonologies’] as there are cultures and religions; which one would we chose as true?

It has been observed that the concept of demons became necessary because the Middle Eastern peoples around the first century could not conceive that the main gods could operate directly in human life – they had to be understood as somewhat distant and uninvolved in daily human issues. This was in fact one of the underlying themes behind Plutarch’s writings about demons⁽²⁾. It has been observed that “the idea that demons were responsible for all moral and physical evil had penetrated deeply into Jewish religious thought in the period following the Babylonian exile, no doubt as a result of Iranian influence on Judaism in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.”⁽³⁾. This whole premise contrasts sharply with the one true God revealed in the Bible – a God “near at hand and not afar off” (Jer. 23:23), ever active and passionately involved in the minutiae of human lives. Plutarch’s view of demons was evidently based upon Plato’s false understanding of an ‘immortal soul’ – effectively, demons were held to be demi-gods existing as some form of immortal soul. Here we see the importance of the demon issue – for the Biblical teaching about the mortality of humanity, and especially the mortality of the “soul”, is fundamental. The Biblical hope is that of resurrection of the body at the final coming of Messiah in glory to establish God’s Kingdom on earth. One false idea so easily leads to another. To present our conclusion in summary before we consider the evidence: the Lord Jesus deals with this issue tactfully and subtly, in the same spirit as the Old Testament prophets dealt with the false views about the existence of dragons, monsters beneath the earth, in the sea, up in the sky etc. The Lord’s approach was to show that the only real power in the earth is with God and not anyone nor anything else. And that even if folk wished to cling on to their cultural superstitions about demons, they had to accept the power of God was so infinitely greater... that effectively, to all intents and purposes in human life, these beings have no practical power nor influence. Our lives, every aspect of them, are in God’s hands, “a faithful creator” (1 Pet. 4:19), and not in anyone else’s hands.

Notes

(1) Andrew Perry, *Demons, Magic and Medicine* (Sutton, UK: Willow, 1999); H.C. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1986).

(2) See the Introduction to *Plutarch: Selected Essays and Dialogues* ed. D. Russell (Oxford: O.U.P., 1993); and J. Black and A. Green, eds., *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (London: The British Museum Press, 1992).

(3) Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (London: S.C.M., 1993) p. 61.

4-2 Demons and Idols

Demons Refer to Idols

Dale Martin in an article “When Did Angels Become Demons?” (1) points out that there are six different Hebrew words which are all translated 'daimon' in the Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament, and this is the term which the New Testament uses for 'demons'. He concludes: “Ancient Jews used δαιμόνιον to translate five or six different Hebrew words. In the ancient Near Eastern context, those words referred to different kinds of beings ... What they have in common, nonetheless, is that they all were thought of as gods – in fact, as the gods other people falsely worship: the gods of the nations... we find no equation of fallen angels with Greek *daimons*” (pp. 662, 670). As an example, the Hebrew 'sedim' translated "demons" in Dt. 32:17 and Ps. 106:37 is defined by Martin as follows: "In the ancient Near Eastern context, the word sedim is related to the Assyrian sidu, which referred to the great bull statues in front of the Assyrian palaces, sometimes depicted with wings. According to some modern commentators, the word שֵׁטַל originally meant simply “lord” and served as a divine title like “Baal” or “Adonai”. It could, therefore, be taken to refer to ancient gods of Canaan and other surrounding people, who could have viewed them as good powers or gods". The connection between demons and idols is quite clear, both from context and linguistic analysis.

In 1 Corinthians Paul explains why Christians should have nothing to do with idol worship or believing in such things. In Bible times people believed demons to be lesser gods who could be worshipped to stop problems coming into their lives. They therefore made models of demons, which were the same as idols, and worshipped them. This explains why Paul uses the words “demon” and “idol” almost interchangeably in his letter: “The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons...if anyone says to you, ‘This was offered to idols,’ do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you...” (1 Cor. 10:20,28). So idols and demons are effectively the same. Notice how Paul says they sacrificed “to demons (idols) and not to God” – the demons were not God, and as there is only one God, it follows that demons have no real power at all, they are not gods. The point is really driven home in 1 Cor. 8:4: “Therefore concerning the eating of

things offered to idols, we know that an idol (equivalent to a demon) *is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one*. an idol, or a demon, has no existence at all. There is only one true God, or power, in the world. Paul goes on (:5,6): “For even if there are so – called gods...(as there are many gods and many lords, [just as people believe in many types of demons today – one demon causing you to lose your job, another causing your wife to leave you, etc.]) yet for *us* [the true believers] there is only *one* God, the Father, of whom are *all* things [both good and bad, as we have seen from the earlier references]”. Gal. 4:8,9 says the same thing when translated properly. Paul challenges the Galatians: “You who were enslaved to those who were not really gods... How can you turn back again to those weak and beggarly spirits (*stoicheia*), whose slaves you want to be once more?” (Gal. 4:8,9). Here he parallels demonic spirits with ‘gods who are not really gods’. But note how Paul argues [under Divine inspiration] – “*even if* there are” such demons / idols... *for us* there is to be only one God whom we fear and worship. This in fact is a continuation of the Psalmists’ attitude. Time and again the gods / idols of the pagan nations are addressed *as if they exist*, but are ordered to bow down in shame before Yahweh of Israel (Ps. 29:1,2,10; 97:7). Whether they exist or not becomes irrelevant before the fact that they are powerless before the one true God – and therefore it is He whom we should fear, trusting that He alone engages with our lives for our eternal good in the end. “Yahweh is a great King above all gods” (Ps. 95:3) shows the Divine style – rather than overly stressing that the gods / idols / demons don’t exist, the one true God isn’t so primitive.

Neither were the authors and singers of Psalm 95. The greatness of His Kingship is what's focused upon – not the demerits and non-existence of other gods. To do so would be altogether too primitive for the one true God. And likewise with the Lord's miracles – God's gracious power to save was demonstrated, *this* was where the focus was; and its very magnitude shows the relative non-existence of 'demons'.

Further proof that people in New Testament times believed demons to be idols or 'gods' is found in Acts 17:16–18; this describes how Paul preached in Athens, which was a "city given over to idols", therefore worshipping many different idols. After hearing Paul preach the Gospel, the people said: "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign (i.e. new) gods (demons)' because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection". So the people thought that Jesus and the resurrection were new demons or idols that were being explained to them. Paul goes on to teach the truth to these people, and in v. 22 he says: "You are very religious" (literally: devoted to demon worship). He explains how God is not present in their demons, or idols. Remember that God is the only source of power. If He is not in demons, then demons do not have any power because there is no other source of power in this universe – i.e. they do not exist.

Old Testament Demons Were Idols

Going back to the Old Testament, there is more proof that 'demons' are the same as idols. "They sacrificed to demons, not to God ..." (Dt. 32:17, cp. Ps. 106:37). Dt. 28:14–28,59–61 predicted that mental disease would be one of the punishments for worshipping other gods/demons. This explains the association of demons with mental illness in the New Testament. But let it be noted that the language of demons is associated with illness, not sin. We do not read of Christ casting out demons of envy, murder etc. It must also be noted that the Bible speaks of people *having* a demon/disease, rather than saying that demons *caused* the disease. It is significant that the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) used the word *daimonion* for "idol"; this is the word translated "demon" in the New Testament. "Idols" in Ps. 96:5 is translated "demons" in the Septuagint; and the Septuagint uses the same word in Is. 65:11 to describe Gad, the Syrian god / idol of fortune. Ps. 106:36–39 describes the errors of Israel and likens the idols of Canaan to demons: "They (Israel) served their *idols*, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to *demons*, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and daughters,

whom they sacrificed to the *idols* of Canaan... Thus they were defiled by their own works, and played the harlot by their own deeds”.

Quite clearly demons are just another name for idols. Israel’s worship of demons is described by God as worshipping their “*own works... their own deeds*” because their belief in demons was a result of human imagination; the idols they created were their “*own works*”. So those who believe in demons today are believing in things which have been imagined by men, the creation of men, rather than what God has taught us. The word used for idols literally means ‘no-things’, stressing that they have no existence in the real world, only in the minds of people who believe in them.

Dt. 32:15–24 describes just how angry God gets when His people believe in demons: Israel “scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God, to gods they did not know ... that your fathers did not fear ... and He (God) said: ‘I will hide My face from them...for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faith. They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; they have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols... I will heap disasters upon them”. Is. 65:3 LXX is just as clear: “[Israel] burn incense on bricks to demons, *which exist not*”. The idols of the nations, representing as they did the supposed ‘demons’ of the cosmos, were “vanity” because what the demons and gods they supposedly represented did not exist – they are “beings that are nothing” (1 Sam. 12:21 LXX), “a thing of nought” (Jer. 14:4).

So God describes demons as the same as foolish idols, abominations – things which are folly to believe in, which have no existence. Believing in demons shows a lack of faith in the one and only God. To put this more theologically. Paul Martinson comments upon 1 Cor. 10:19–21: “I take ‘demons’ to be a functional term and not substantive [i.e. referring to actual beings]. After all, Paul already denied the idols substantially (“nothing”)”⁽²⁾. To put it again more simply, translating from academe to lay English: If demons are another way of speaking about idols, and idols are nothing, they don’t really exist, they’re just hunks of wood and stone – then, demons don’t exist. But all the same, there is an appropriate culture used by the Almighty in this matter.

Note

(1) Dale Martin “When Did Angels Become Demons?” (*Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 129, no. 4 [2010]: 657-677).

(2) Paul Martinson, “People other than Christians pray”, in Paul Sponheim, ed., *A Primer on Prayer* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

4-2-1 Canaanite Theology Smashed

An analysis of the surrounding religious beliefs of the early Canaanite tribes at the time of the Exodus indicates that the one true God chose to reveal Himself in language which clearly alluded to the surrounding theological ideas. It has been shown that 'El' was the name of the most powerful Canaanite god in the plurality of deities which the Canaanites worshipped (1). The characteristics of Yahweh God of Israel are almost identical to the language of the day used to describe the Canaanite deity 'El' (2). For example, 'El' married the prostitute Asarte, as Yahweh married the prostitute Israel (Hos. 3:1); and most noteworthy of all 'El' sacrificed his own son (3). Significantly, 'El' is one of the titles which God uses for Himself in His word. Arthur Gibson points out that the name 'Yahweh' has similarities with the Amorite god Ya-Wi, and the Ugarit god Yahaninu (4). So here is clear evidence that God reveals Himself in the language of the day in order to demonstrate, by the very fact of His evident superiority, that these other deities to whom He alludes did not exist; Yahweh was the true 'El'. Those gods with similar names were nothing compared to the true Yahweh El.

Martin Buber, one of academic Judaism's finest minds, coined the term "Yahweh's demonism" (5). He perceived in, e.g., the record of the Angel meeting Moses at night, seeking to slay him and then 'letting him go', all the language which was typically applied to demons- meeting and seeking to slay a man of God (Ex. 4:24). But the point is, it is not a demon who did this, but a righteous Angel of God, to the extent that it was possible for the record to state that it was Yahweh who sought to slay Moses, and yet changed His purpose because of Moses' repentance and the intercession of a woman. Buber's point was that the text is an allusion to the local beliefs about demons, but the Biblical record deconstructs these beliefs by showing that it is Yahweh and His Angels responsible for those situations which pagans would otherwise attribute to supposed 'demons'. Other examples include how the bull cherubim were understood in the surrounding cultures as the abode or throne of a demon; but it is

Yahweh who is enthroned upon the bull cherubim; or how the record of Balaam would've lead the contemporary hearers to expect him to receive inspiration from a demon- but instead the inspiration comes from Yahweh, and is *against* those who believed in demons and pagan gods. Paul Volz took the idea further when he observed that in the early Old Testament passages where Yahweh is portrayed as doing the things expected of demons, He has "absorbed everything demonic... so that no demons were required any more in Israel" (6). And so there are no further associations of Yahweh with demons / idols but rather an overt mocking of their existence in the later Old Testament. Something similar happens in the New Testament. Initially, the Lord Jesus is presented as dealing with and overcoming real demons; but His miracles are so powerful that it becomes evident that they effectively don't exist, and the later New Testament exalts in the supremacy of God over the demons / idols which in fact are non-existent.

Karl Barth in his roundabout and theological way came to the same conclusion: "God is superior to all other powers. These other powers... appear to be genuinely real. God is not in the series of these worldly powers, perhaps as the highest of them; but He is superior to all other powers, neither limited nor conditioned by them, but He is the Lord of all lords, the King of all kings. So that all these powers, which as such are indeed powers, are *a priori* laid at the feet of the power of God. In relation to Him they are not powers in rivalry with Him" (7).

Elijah And Elisha

This manner of demolishing the claims of surrounding pagan beliefs in idols and demons is common in the Old Testament. Thus the record in 1 Kings 18 sets up a contest for credibility between Baal, the god of storm and rain, and Yahweh God of Israel. It is evident that Baal did not exist; the onlookers were utterly convinced by the extent of the miracle that "Yahweh, Yahweh, *He* is the God".

2 Kings 2:19 (AV mg.) records how the people complained that "the water is naught, and that ground causing to miscarry". This was evidently an incorrect superstition of the time; barren

ground cannot make the women who live on it barren. But Elisha does not blow them into next week for believing such nonsense. Instead he performed the miracle of curing the barrenness of the land. The record says that there was no more barrenness of the land or women “*according to the saying of Elisha which he spake*”. Normally the people would have resorted to wizards to drive away the relevant demon which they thought was causing the problem. But the miracle made it evident that ultimately God had caused the problem, and He could so easily cure it. This was a far more effective way of sinking the people’s foolish superstition than a head-on frontal attack upon it.

Lucifer Likewise...

We keep one of the best examples until last. Isaiah 14:12-15 describes how ‘Lucifer’, the king of Babylon, wants to ascend up above the heavens and usurp Yahweh’s throne. This is actually quoting from a Ugaritic legend concerning the god Attr (the Hebrew for ‘Lucifer’ is the equivalent of this) (8). Attr wanted to become the head of the gods, and he succeeded – in surrounding mythology. Isaiah 14 quotes this part of the legend, but shows how he would be cast down to the earth by Yahweh, to the lowest pit. This clearly establishes that the Bible uses allusion to the false ideas of the surrounding world in order to bring home the extent of God’s power and therefore the non-existence of idols/demons.

The Old Testament way of deconstructing pagan ideas carried over into the New Testament. For example, it has been shown by many students that the Gospel and epistles of John are shot through with allusion to the language of surrounding Gnostic philosophy in order to show the infinite superiority of the true Gospel over the vain philosophy of the first century world in which John’s Gospel was first inspired (9). This is a New Testament example of what was done throughout the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Law Of Moses

We could say that the whole concept of 'demons' is not only deconstructed in the Old Testament; it is positively subverted. By this I mean that terms appropriate to demons are picked up and used and yet through this not only their non-existence but also the power of the one God is demonstrated. Thus the golden bells on the High Priest's garments (Ex. 28:33) were familiar in local religions as charm to ward off demons by their noise (10). But they are used in the Divine scheme of things to remind of God's holiness and the danger of human sin impinging upon this and thus leading to death. And thereby fear of demons was to be replaced by fear of God's holiness and human sin. Likewise the plate or rosette on the High Priest's turban would've recalled pagan plates which warded off supposed demons; but this one spoke of "Holiness to Yahweh", again replacing the negative with the positive (11). Ornaments / amulets were worn at the time in order to fend off evil spirits; the way Moses records how at least twice Israel threw them away could be understood as a hint that they needed no defence against demons, because of God's Almightyness (Gen. 35:4; Ex. 32:24). Or again, incense smoke was supposed to drive away demons (12); but the image is used to represent prayer and Yahweh's glory (Lev. 16:3,13; Rev. 5:8).

Notes

(1) J.C.L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978).

(2) J.Gray *The Legacy Of Canaan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1957); see too F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).

(3) This is mentioned by Werner Keller, *The Bible As History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1957 ed.) p. 261.

(4) Arthur Gibson, *Biblical Semantic Logic* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1981) pp. 35,137.

(5) Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Macmillan, 1949) p. 47; also see his *On The Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982) p. 72.

(6) Paul Volz, *Das Dämonische in Jahwe* (Tübingen, 1924) as quoted in Martin Buber, *Moses* (Oxford: The Phaidon Press, 1947) p. 57.

(7) Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: S.C.M., 1972) p. 47.

(8) The correspondence is remarkable. A tablet was found at Ras Shamra in 1929 bearing this mythical legend, and including the very words which Isaiah 14 quotes. It is Ugarit Text no. UM129. See C.H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Manual* (Rome: P.I.B., 1955).

(9) For example, John Carter, *The Gospel of John* (Birmingham: C.M.P.A., 1943). C.H. Dodd demonstrates that phrases in John's letters like "We are in the light", "We know God", "We dwell in God" etc. are all Gnostic phrases; what John is saying is that *we*, the true believers, are in this position on account of knowing the true Gospel. Thus the Spirit is alluding to the false claims of the surrounding world and showing that the power of the Spirit exposed these claims as false. See C.H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953).

(10) R.E. Clements, *Exodus* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1972) p. 182.

(11) Clements, *ibid.*.

(12) Clements, *ibid* p. 192.

4-2-2 Case Study: Resheph

I now want to bring together much of what I've been saying by considering a widely believed in demon called Resheph. He is mentioned by name in documents found in such widely separated places as Mari, Ugarit, Egypt, Cyprus and Carthage. This indicates the popularity of belief in him amongst Israel's neighbours – neighbours who constantly tempted Israel to accept their beliefs, hence God's allusion to Resheph in the prophets. He was thought to

be responsible for plague and violent death. A dictionary defines him as: "Probably a War God. Lord of the Arrow. Has gazelle horns on his helmet. He destroys men in mass by war and plague. He is the porter of the sun Goddess Shepesh (this seems to resemble Khamael of the Hebrews). He is also called Mekal (Annihilator), and could be related to the Hebrew Michael (Mikal) who is also a War God (ArchAngel)". He was thus set up as the pagan demonic equivalent to Michael, the Angel that stood for Israel (Dan. 12:1). This demon was widely believed in throughout the nations surrounding Israel ⁽¹⁾. So common was this belief that we might expect a specific denunciation of his existence from Yahweh. But not so. We read of Resheph in the Hebrew text of the Bible; and always Yahweh is demonstrating that what Resheph is supposed to do, actually *He* is responsible for. The miracles of plague and destruction wrought by Yahweh at the Exodus would have been attributable by the surrounding nations to the demon Resheph; in their eyes, such things were exactly his calling card. But the Biblical record is at pains to emphasize that the nations were brought to realize that Yahweh God of Israel had done these things, they came to fear *His* Name – and thereby Resheph was shown to be non-existent and powerless. Commenting on the Exodus miracles, Habakkuk 3:5 describes how "before him (Yahweh manifest in the Exodus Angel) went the pestilence, and Resheph (AV "burning coals") went forth at his feet". To be at someone's feet is a Biblical idiom for humiliation and destruction. Israel were being taught that at the Exodus, the credibility of Resheph's existence had been destroyed; the things (e.g. pestilence) *he* was supposed to do had so evidently

been done by Yahweh God of Israel. Notice how in Hab. 3:4 it is God, as manifest in the Angel Michael who brought Israel out of Egypt, who has “horns” and who was responsible for the mass destruction of Egypt and the Canaanite nations.

The sudden destruction and plague in Egypt would have been thought of first of all as the work of Resheph. But Psalm 78:48–49 comments on this: “*He* (this is where the emphasis should be) gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to Resheph (AV “hot thunderbolts”). *He* cast upon them the fierceness of *His* anger (not that of displeased demons), wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending angels of disaster amongst them”. The idea that Resheph had the power to do these things of his own volition is being utterly ridiculed and exposed as pure fantasy.

The spiritually weak within Israel would have been tempted to believe in the existence of Resheph. The sudden destruction of the Assyrian army outside Jerusalem would have perhaps seemed like the work of Resheph. But Psalm 76:3 comments: “There (on that battlefield, see context) brake he (God) Resheph” (AV “the arrows of the bow”).

Note

(1) See R.K. Harrison, “*Demonology*” in Merrill Tenney, ed., *The Zondervan Encyclopaedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) Vol. 2 p. 96.

4-2-3 Case Study: the Gods of Egypt

Consider the plagues upon Egypt; each of those miracles (for that is what they were) was designed by God to expose the utter non-existence of the main Egyptian demons (idols). “Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am Yahweh” (Ex. 12:12; 15:11; Num. 33:4). The “gods” are spoken of for a moment as real and existing, in order to show Yahweh’s total superiority over them to the point that they didn’t exist. Note how it was the Egyptian people who were judged (Gen. 15:14); their idols (“gods”) are used by metonymy to stand for those who believed in them. Likewise “demons” is sometimes put by metonymy for those who believed in them (e.g. Mk. 2:32,34). The judgment upon Egypt’s gods is brought out by an otherwise obscure reference in Ex. 7:19 to how “there shall be blood in all the land of Egypt on wood and in stone”. “Wood and stone” is a term usually used in the Bible for idols; and “the Egyptian priests used

to wash the images of their gods in water every day early in the morning” ⁽¹⁾. Thus the gods were shown to be effectively dead and bleeding. The greatest Egyptian god was the sun-god Ra, and the Pharaoh was seen as his manifestation on earth. It may be that Pharaoh alludes to this when he threatens Moses: “Look, for there is evil [*ra’a*] before you” (Ex. 10:10). And Yahweh’s response was to darken the sun and create a darkness which could be felt (Ex. 10:21)

Plague	Egyptian Demon / Idol Targeted
Nile water turned to blood	HAPI – the god of the spirit of the Nile
Frogs	HEKOT – the goddess of magic who had a frog’s head
“The dust of the land” turned to lice or gnats (Exodus 8:16)	SEB – god of the dust of the earth
“Swarms of beetles” (Exodus 8:21 Hebrew)	RA and the forerunner of BEELZEBUB were likened to beetles; much pagan Egyptian jewellery features beetles.
Murrain of cattle	APIS – the sacred bull god
Boils. “Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it <i>toward heaven...</i> and it shall become... a boil” (Exodus 9:8–9)	NEIT – the queen of the heavens
Thunder and hail	SHU – god of the atmosphere
Darkness	RA – the sun god
Locusts	SERAIJA – protector of Egypt from locusts

The Other Gods of Egypt

Yet rarely is there an explicit denial by God of the existence of those gods. They are shown to be meaningless inventions of men by the sheer power of the miracles. The New Testament use of demon terminology to describe the miracles of Jesus is another example of this. There is no explicit denial of the existence of demons, but their non-existence is demonstrated by the miracles. It is significant that the New Testament language of demon possession only occurs in the context of the power of God being shown through His miracles of healing. And yet, generally, Israel failed to grasp the lesson.

Have you ever wondered why Israel chose to make a golden calf? Why not some other animal? It appears that Israel identified the golden calf with the Egyptian goddess Hathor. "The Egyptian goddess Hathor came in the form of a cow, a woman with a cow's head, or a woman with cows horns and / or cows ears. She bore several other titles including The Golden One and Mistress of Music. She was the patron of love, motherhood, drunkenness, fun, dance and music. The worship of Hathor degenerated into immorality and she is depicted in some scenes and statues as a sensual young woman. Hathor was the protector of travellers from Egypt to various areas including Sinai". So Israel so quickly forgot the lesson so artlessly taught them – that the idols / demons of Egypt were of no power at all!

The following references to Hathor provide further insight:

Hathor had several forms including, a cow, a woman with a cow's head, or a woman with cows horns and or ears ⁽²⁾.

Hathor was also known as 'The Golden One' ⁽³⁾

Hathor was the protector of travellers from Egypt to various areas including Sinai ⁽⁴⁾.

Patron of drunkenness ⁽⁵⁾

Hathor had the title 'Mistress of Music' ⁽⁶⁾

The worship of Hathor included playing on all kinds of musical instruments together with dancing ⁽⁷⁾.

The worship of Hathor was for the joy and pleasure of those who took part ⁽⁸⁾.

Hathor is also the goddess of love ⁽⁹⁾

The worship of Hathor degenerated into immorality ⁽¹⁰⁾.

Whilst considering Israel's relationship to Egypt, it is fascinating to discover that the dreams of Pharaoh at the time of Joseph were a clear inversion of the surrounding pagan ideas. One of the foremost Egyptian gods, Osiris, had seven cows; it must have taken some courage for Joseph to comment on the fact that the seven fat cows were to be eaten up by the seven thin ones (Gen. 41:20; possibly representing Israel in the long term, cp. Hos. 4:15–16; Am. 4:1). The point I wish to make in the present context is that the pagan ideas of

Pharaoh were not explicitly corrected; instead, the supremacy of Yahweh and His people over them was taught by implication.

It has been shown by many writers that there are a number of mythical stories in surrounding Middle Eastern culture which sound like allusions to Biblical miracles like the sun standing still, the Red Sea drying up etc. ⁽¹¹⁾. They attribute these miracles to their various gods. It is quite possible that these legends are only corruptions of the events which occurred in the Biblical record, and had their origin well after the performance of the miracles. However, it is impossible to accurately date the origin of these pagan legends. In accordance with the ample evidence that God did such miracles in order to destroy the credibility of the surrounding mythology and philosophy, it seems quite probable that these legends existed *before* the Biblical miracles occurred. When God parted the Red Sea or stopped earth's rotation He would have been powerfully alluding to the legends which stated that such miracles had been done by deity X, Y or Z. It was clear that Yahweh, Israel's God, had done these things – and in actual reality, not just in storybook legend.

Digression 6: “Even the demons believe and tremble” (James 2:19)

“Demons” is put here by metonymy for the [supposedly] demon possessed people, and their observed ‘trembling’ at the time of their cure. But I don't think that this verse is James as it were telling us doctrinal truth about demons. The context of James 2 shows it to be part of an imagined dialogue between the “works man” [who thinks works can save], and a “faith man” [who thinks merely saying we believe is enough and our lives are irrelevant]. Both these imaginary men come out with ‘wrong’ statements, so it's not surprising that the ‘works man’ disparages ‘faith’ by saying that even demon possessed people can believe and be cured. Of itself, this passage can hardly be taken as proof that demons really do believe – the usual position taken is that demons are fallen angels who cannot believe and cannot repent nor be healed. This passage even taken on face value would contradict that system of belief.

Another possibility here is that there is an allusion to Is. 19:1: "An oracle concerning Egypt: See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them" (NIV). I have elsewhere demonstrated in [Section 4-2](#) Demons and Idols that the idols of the first century Middle Eastern world were

made to demons; and the ultimate non-existence of idols therefore proves the non-existence of demons.

Notes

(1) Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997 ed.) p. 99.

- (2) M.A. Murray, *Egyptian Temples* (London: Duckworth, 1931) pp. 53–54.
- (3) *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. 5, p.57.
- (4) *Eretz Israel*, Vol. 12, p.118.
- (5) Joyce Tyldesley, *Hatchepsut the Female Pharaoh* (London: Penguin, 1998) p.171.
- (6) Joyce Tyldesley, *ibid* p.171.
- (7) M.A. Murray, *op cit* p. 185.
- (8) *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. 5, P.57.
- (9) D.B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) p.232.
- (10) M.A. Murray, *op cit* p.54.
- (11) Several standard Religious Education textbooks for schools include some references relevant here. Perhaps the most striking evidence for the extent of the allusions is provided by Immanuel Velikovsky in his books *Worlds in Collision* and *Ages in Chaos* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1957, 1959).

4-3 Demons and Sickness

Yet in the New Testament we read of demons being cast out– in fact, the New Testament is written as if the common idea of demons is correct. I suggest that the answer to this paradox lies in an understanding of the way in which God uses language in the Bible. George Lamsa comments: "'Cast out" is an Aramaic phrase which means to restore to sanity" (1). The evidence given above is proof enough that demons do not exist. If the New Testament speaks as if they do exist, and the Bible does not contradict itself, it follows that surely the answer is to be found in an analysis of the way in which God uses language. If we are clearly told that God brings our problems and that He is the source of all power, then the Bible cannot also tell us that demons– little gods in opposition to the one God– bring these things upon us. It seems significant that the word “demons” only occurs four times in the Old Testament and always describes idol worship, but it occurs many times in the Gospel records. We suggest this is because, at the time the Gospels were written,

it was the language of the day to say that any disease that could not be understood was the fault of demons. "So far as the [1st century] populace was concerned, any disease involving mental disturbance, delirium or spasms was attributed to demons, believed to swarm in the air" (2). If demons really do exist and are responsible for our illnesses and problems, then we would read more about them in the Old Testament. But we do not read about them at all in this context there.

I observe a lot of confusion in the position of those who believe in demons as literally existing. They tend to see demons in a *moral* frame, speaking of how demons make people sin and proffer temptation. But the context surrounding the use of "demon" language in the Gospels is distinctly *medical* rather than moral. Symptoms of epilepsy or schizophrenia are described as demon possession. The demons supposedly make people dumb, cause seizures, make people run around naked, scream, cut themselves etc. There's nothing *morally* wrong with any of these behaviours; they're not part of any great struggle between good and evil. Rather are they expressions of medical conditions. Some of the accounts of 'demon possession' are very similar to medical descriptions of epilepsy:

<p>"And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit... And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones." (Mark 5:1-5, KJV).</p>	<p>"Deliberate self-harm is particularly associated with borderline personality disorder (BPD)... DSH has been found in patients with anxiety disorders... and schizophrenia. Skin cutting (70%) is by far the most common form of DSH, followed by banging or hitting oneself (21%-44%) and skin burning (15%-35%)." ("Psychiatry Essentials for Primary Care", Robert K. Schneider, M.D., James L. Levenson, M.D.).</p>
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<p>"And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is mine only child. And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him... And as he was yet a coming, the devil (daimonion) threw him down (Note: In Mark 9:20 it says the boy fell down), and tare him. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father." (Luke 9:38-42, KJV).</p>	<p>"Convulsive seizure with tonic phase... falls, cries out, Jerking of arms and legs, Excessive salivation (drooling or foaming)..." ("Epilepsy 101", O'Hara & Shaefer, American Epilepsy Society).</p>
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It's significant that Hinduism speaks of a demon called Apasmāra. Apasmāra represents epilepsy in Hinduism, and Ayurvedic medicine [a system of Hindu traditional medicine] describes neurological disorder as Apasmāra. This kind of thing was clearly going on likewise in the Middle Eastern cultures of the first century- epilepsy and neurological disorder was blamed on a demon, and that demon became the name for the disease. But the medical causes and treatment options for epilepsy are now scientifically established- with no reference to demons. Indeed, there are other examples in ancient societies of unexplained illnesses being named after the name of the demon thought to be responsible for them.

Demons And Mental Illness

To say that demons were cast out of someone is to say that they were cured of a mental illness, or an illness which was not understood at the time. People living in the first century tended to blame everything which they couldn't understand on these imaginary beings called 'demons'. Mental illness being hard to

understand with their level of medical knowledge, the people spoke of those afflicted as 'demon possessed'. In Old Testament times, an evil or unclean spirit referred to a troubled mental state (Jud. 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:14; 18:10); and in every Old Testament reference to evil spirits, they were sent by God, not an orthodox 'Devil'. In New Testament times, the language of evil spirit/demon possession had come to refer to those suffering mental illness. The association between demons and sickness is shown by the following: "They brought unto him (Jesus) many that were possessed with demons: and He cast out the spirits with a word... that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Mt. 8:16-17). So human infirmities and sicknesses are described as being possessed by "demons" and "evil spirits".

When we read in Acts 8:7 of unclean spirits crying out, the Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out". This is because, according to George Lamsa, "'Unclean spirits' is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics" (3). It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the devil and demons- he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal devil and demons.

Philo and other writers comment how the demon-possessed were laughed at and mocked especially by children- indicating that 'demon possessed' people refer to the mentally ill rather than the physically sick. When Legion was cured of his 'demons', we read of him as now "clothed and in his right mind" (Mk. 5:15). The 'demon possessed' man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out- showing he was mentally afflicted. People thought that Jesus was mad and said this must be because He had a demon- "He has a demon, and is mad" (Jn.

10:20; 7:19-20; 8:52). They therefore believed that demons caused madness.

Healing The Sick

When they were healed, people “possessed with demons” are said to return to their “right mind” (Mk. 5:15; Lk. 8:35). This implies that being “possessed with demons” was another way of saying someone was mentally unwell – i.e. not in their right mind. Those “possessed with demons” are said to be “healed” or “cured” (Mt. 4:24; 12:22; 17:18), implying that demon possession is another way of describing illness. In Luke 10:9 Jesus told His 70 apostles to go out and “heal the sick”, which they did. They returned, rejoicing that, in their terms and frames of understanding, “even the demons are subject unto us through Your name” – again, demons and illness are equated (Lk. 10:17). Christ not only rebuked unclean spirits, but also wind and waves (Mt. 8:26) and fever (Lk. 4:39) – all impersonal things. Note that when people brought to Jesus a woman whom they said had been bound 18 years by satan, we read that Jesus simply said: “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity” (Lk. 13:16). Jesus says nothing about 'satan' nor does He get involved for a few minutes in some cosmic conflict with 'satan' in order to 'release' the woman. He left the false idea of being bound by Satan unremarked upon; but He simply showed that whatever people believe about the unseen and unknown [to them] world, He and His power are so far greater that effectively these things don't exist as significant factors in the lives of His people.

There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today- e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia.

Everyone who believes demons exist has to ask themselves the question: “When I am ill, is it caused by demons?”. If they think

the New Testament references to demons are about little gods going round doing evil, then they have to say “yes”. In that case, how can we explain the fact that many diseases once blamed on demons can now be cured or controlled by drugs? Malaria is the classic example. Many people in Africa believed until recently that malaria was caused by demons, but now we know that malaria can be cured by quinine and other drugs. Are we then saying that as the demons see the little yellow tablets going down a person's throat they become frightened and fly away? Some of the diseases which Jesus cured, which are described as being the result of demon possession, have been identified as tetanus or epilepsy – both of which can be relieved by drugs.

A friend of mine comes from a village just outside Kampala in Uganda. He told me once how that people used to believe malaria was caused by demons, but once they saw how the drugs controlled it so easily, they stopped blaming the demons. However, when someone had cerebral malaria (causing serious mental illness) they still blamed the demons. A doctor came from the nearby town and offered them strong anti-malarial drugs as a cure, but they refused because they said they needed something to fight demons not malaria. The doctor returned later and said, “I have a drug which will chase away the demons”; the sick person eagerly took the drug, and became better. The second tablets were just the same as the first ones. The doctor did not believe in demons, but he used the language of the day to get through to the person – just like the “Great Physician”, the Lord Jesus, of 2,000 years ago. Norman Lewis, one of the 20th century's best-selling travel writers, observed the same in his travels in Asia. He recalls how in Burma in the 1950s, doctors could likewise only get the cooperation of their patients by assuring them that they were going to 'cast out a demon' from them (4).

I'm far from alone in my understanding of this issue. Raymond Brown sums up what we've been saying: "Some of the cases that the Synoptic Gospels describe as instances of demon possession seem to be instances of natural sickness. The symptoms described in Mark 9:17,18 seem to be those of epilepsy, while the symptoms in Mark 5:4 seem to be those of dangerous insanity. One cannot escape the impression that sometimes in

relation to demon possession both the evangelists and Jesus are reflecting the inexact medico-religious understanding of their times" (5). Joachim Jeremias in similar vein: "Illnesses of all kinds were attributed to demons, especially the different forms of mental illnesses...we shall understand the extent of this fear of demons better if we note that the absence of enclosed mental hospitals meant that illnesses of this kind came much more before the public eye than they do in our world...There is therefore nothing surprising in the fact that the gospels, too, portray mental illness as being possessed by demons. They speak in the language and conceptuality of their time"⁽⁶⁾. In *Jesus: The Village Psychiatrist*, Donald Capps makes a convincing case that Jesus cured the sick by what he calls psychosomatic means, by healing the mind of the person, the physical manifestations of the illnesses were thereby cured. To the first century Galilean observer, this looked like demons being cast out; but in reality it was deeply spiritual healing (7).

Notes

- (1) George Lamsa, *Gospel Light* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1939) p. 64.
- (2) G.P. Gilmour, *The Memoirs Called Gospels* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1959) p. 69.
- (3) George Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1945) pp. 57,58.
- (4) Norman Lewis, *Golden Earth: Travels In Burma* (London: Eland, 2003) p. 196.
- (5) Raymond Brown, *An Introduction To New Testament Christology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994) p. 41.
- (6) Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London: S.C.M., 1972) p. 93.
- (7) Donald Capps, *Jesus: The Village Psychiatrist* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

4-3-1 Legion and the Gadarene Pigs

Mark 5:1-17 (Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-38) "They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the pigs, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea. The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region".

In considering this passage, let's bear in mind some conclusions reached elsewhere:

- The Bible uses the language of the day, speaking of some things as they appeared in the eyes of their first audience- see [4-4 The Language Of The Day](#) and [4-5 God Adopts A Human Perspective](#)
- 'Casting out demons' is a way of saying that mental illness had been cured- see [4-3 Demons And Sickness](#)
- 'Demons' in the first century were understood to be demigods responsible for illness; they are paralleled with idols, and we are assured that demons / idols have no ultimate power or existence- see [4-2 Demons And Idols](#)

These principles enable us to understand the passage as an account of the healing of a mentally disturbed man- albeit written in the language of the day, from the perspective and worldview of those who first saw the miracle. The following comments hopefully assist in clarifying this interpretation:

1. Mk. 5:2 describes Legion as a man with an "unclean spirit". He cried out. But when we meet a similar situation in Acts 8:7 of unclean spirits crying out, the Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out". This is because, according to George Lamsa, "'Unclean spirits' is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics" (1). It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that

Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the devil and demons- he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons.

2. When Legion was cured of his 'demons', we read of him as now "clothed and in his right mind" (Mk. 5:15). His 'demon possession' therefore referred to a sick state of mind; and the 'casting out' of those demons to the healing of his mental state. People thought that Jesus was mad and said this must be because He had a demon- "He has a demon, and is mad" (Jn. 10:20; 7:19-20; 8:52). They therefore believed that demons caused madness.

3. A comparison of the records indicates that the voice of the individual man is paralleled with that of the 'demons'- the man was called Legion, because he believed and spoke as if he were inhabited by hundreds of 'demons':

"Torment *me* not" (Mk.5:7) = "Are you come to torment *us*?" (Mt. 8:29).

"*He* [singular] besought him" (Mk. 5:9) = "*the demons* besought him" (Mk. 5:12)

The man's own words explain his self-perception: "*My* name [singular] is Legion: for *we* are many (Mk. 5:9)". This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.

4. Note that the sick man is paralleled with the demons. "*He* begged him earnestly not to send *them* out of the country" (Mk. 5:10) parallels "he", the man, with "them", the demons. And the parallel record speaks as if it were the demons who did the begging: "*They* begged him not to order them to go into the abyss" (Lk. 8:31). This is significant in that the record doesn't suggest that demons were manipulating the man to speak and be mad; rather are they made parallel with the man himself. This indicates, on the level of linguistics at least, that the language of "demons" is being used as a synonym for the mentally ill man. There's another example of this, in Mark 3:11: "Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"". Who fell down on their knees and who shouted? The mentally disturbed people. But they are called "unclean spirits". James 2:19 likewise: "The demons believe and tremble". This is surely an allusion to the trembling of those *people* whom Jesus cured, and 'belief' is appropriate to persons not [supposed] eternally damned agents of Satan. Clearly James is putting "demons" for 'mentally disturbed people who believed and were cured'. And thus we can better understand why in Mk. 5:8 Jesus addresses Himself not to these supposed spirits; but to the man himself: "Jesus said to *him*, Come out of the man, you unclean spirit". He doesn't say to the *unclean spirit* "Come out of the man". Jesus addresses Himself to "the man". The demons / unclean spirits never actually say anything in the records; it's always the man himself who speaks. Josephus records that when the first century Rabbis cast out demons [as they supposed], they first had to ask for the name of the demon. The Lord Jesus doesn't do this; He asks the man for *his* personal name. The difference is instructive- the Lord wasn't speaking to demons, He was speaking to the mentally sick man, and going along with the man's belief that he had demons within him. The 'demons' plead with Jesus not to torment them, and back this up by invoking God. 'They' believed in God and honoured Him to the point of believing He was the ultimate authenticator of oaths. 'They' hardly fit the classical idea that demons are anti-God and in conflict with Him. Clearly enough, when we read of demons and spirits in this passage we are not reading of the actual existence of 'demons'

as they are classically understood, but simply of the mentally ill man himself.

5. Why did the pigs run over the cliff, and why did the Lord Jesus agree to the man's request for this?

Because mental illness features intermittent episodes, it's understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the 'spirit' assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: "I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him" (Mk. 9:25). It's in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion's cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the curing of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God's Son (Mk. 5:6); indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus "from out of the city" (Lk. 8:27) and yet Mt. 8:28 speaks of him living in the tombs outside the city. He pleads with the Lord not to torment him (Mk. 5:7)- full of memories of how the local folk had tied him up and beaten him to try to exorcise the demons. Probably Legion's greatest fear was that he would relapse into madness again; that the cure which he believed Jesus could offer him might not be permanent. And so the Lord agreed to the man's request that the demons he perceived as within him should be permanently cast out; and the sight of the herd of pigs running over the cliff to permanent death below, with the awful sound this would've made, would have remained an abiding memory for the man. Note how the 'demon possessed' man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out (Mk. 1:23)- showing he was likewise afflicted by intermittent fits.

Steve Keating pointed out to me that the madness may have been an infection in the brain of the trichina parasite, commonly found infecting the muscles of pigs - and transmissible to humans in undercooked pork. The infected man would likely have been forced by poverty to eat this kind of food, and likely associated his "problem" with it because of the prohibition of pork under the Mosaic Law. This approach is confirmed by medical observations such as the following:

“Neurocysticercosis is the most common parasitic disease in the world which affects the central nervous system... A 25 year old, illiterate married Hindu male... presented with a three month history of gradual change in behavior in the form of irrelevant talk ... On mental status examination, he was well oriented to time, place and person, cooperative, communicative and responded well to questions asked... Delusions of persecution and reference were present... he accepted the illness but attributed the cause to evil spirits... histopathology report of subcutaneous nodule confirmed the diagnosis of cysticercosis cellulosa... Significant improvement in psychiatric symptoms was also observed following albendazole (an anti-parasitic drug) therapy. Delusions of persecution and delusions of reference were not found on mental status examination. Insight also improved; instead of attributing the illness to evil spirits, the patient accepted having a physical illness.” (“Neurocysticercosis Presenting as Schizophrenia: A Case Report”, B. Bhatia, S. Mishra, A.S.

Srivastava, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 1994, Vol. 36(4), pp. 187-189).

The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman came to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

6. The Lord focused the man's attention upon the man's beliefs about himself- by asking him "What is your name?", to which he replies "Legion! For we are many!". Thus the man was brought to realize on later reflection that the pig stampede was a miracle by the Lord, and a judgment against illegal keeping of unclean animals- rather than an action performed by the demons he thought inhabited him. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman came to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, God is accommodating the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

7. Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him. Anyone dealing with mentally disturbed people soon learns that you can't correct all of their delusions at one go. You have to choose your battles, and walk and laugh with them to some extent. Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the devil into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness by the spirit (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time- e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities Of The Jews* 8.46-48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pig stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

8. The Legion incident "proves too much" if we are to insist on reading it on a strictly literal level. Do demons drown? Presumably, no. And yet the story as it stands requires us to believe that demons drown- if we are talking about literal 'demons' here. Clearly, Legion was mentally ill. We therefore have to face the hard question: Was that mental illness caused by demons, or, as I am suggesting, is the language of demon possession merely being used to describe mental illness? If indeed mental illness is caused by demons, the observations of T.S. Huxley are about right: "The belief in demons and demoniacal possession is a mere survival of a once universal superstition, its persistence pretty much in the inverse ratio of the general instruction, intelligence, and sound judgment of the population among whom it prevails.

Demonology gave rise through the special influence of Christian ecclesiastics, to the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women, and children... If the story is true, the medieval theory of the invisible world may be and probably is, quite correct; and the witchfinders, from Sprenger to Hopkins and Mather, are much-maligned men... For the question of the existence of demons and of possession by them, though it lies strictly within the province of science, is also of the deepest moral and religious significance. If physical and mental disorders are caused by demons, Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries rightly considered that relics and exorcists were more useful than doctors; the gravest questions arise as to the legal and moral responsibilities of persons inspired by demoniacal impulses; and our whole conception of the universe and of our relations to it becomes totally different from what it would be on the contrary hypothesis” (2).

Another case of 'proving too much' arises from reflection upon the fact that the 'demon possessed' Legion clearly recognized Jesus as the Son of God (Mk. 5:7); Mark seems to emphasize that demon possessed' people perceived Jesus as God's Son (Mk. 1:24,34; 3:11). Yet Mark and the other Gospel writers likewise emphasize the slowness or refusal of many other groups in the Gospels to arrive at the same perception. And so we are forced to deal with the question: Since when do 'demons' bring people to accept Jesus as God's Son? Surely, according to the classical schema of understanding them, they and the Devil supposedly behind them are leading people to unbelief rather than to belief? But once we accept the language of 'demon possession' as referring to mental illness without requiring the actual physical existence of demons, then everything falls into place. For it's so often the case that the mentally ill have a very fine and accurate perception of spiritual things. And we see a clear pattern developed in the Gospels: the poor, the marginalized, women, slaves, the mentally ill ['demon possessed'], the disenfranchised, the lepers, the prostitutes, are the ones who perceive Jesus as God's Son and believe in Him.

9. A fairly detailed case can be made that the man Legion was to be understood as representative of Judah in captivity, suffering for their sins, who despite initially opposing Christ (Legion ran up to Jesus just as he had 'run upon' people in aggressive fits earlier), could still repent as Legion did, be healed of their sins and be His witnesses to the world. This fits in with the whole theme which the Lord had- that the restoration of Israel's fortunes would not be by violent opposition to the Legions of Rome but by repentance and spiritual witness to the world. The point is, Israel were bound in fetters and beaten by the Gentiles because of their sins, which they were culpable of, for which they had responsibility and from which they could repent; rather than because they had been taken over by powerful demons against their will. Here then are reasons for understanding Legion as representative of Judah under Gentile oppression; I am grateful to John Allfree and Andrew Perry for bringing some of them to my attention:

- Israel were “A people... which remain among the tombs, and lodge in the monuments” (Is. 65:3-4).
- Legion was always “in the mountains”- the "high places" where Israel sinned (Is. 65:7; Hos. 4:13).
- The man's name, Legion, suggests he was under the ownership of Rome. The miracle occurred in Gentile territory, suggesting Judah in the Gentile dominated world.

- 'What is your name?' is the same question asked of Jacob

- Legion's comment that 'we are many' is identical to the words of Ez. 33:24 about Israel: "Son of man, they that inhabit those wastes of the land of Israel speak, saying, Abraham was one, and he inherited the land: but *we are many*; the land is given us for inheritance. Wherefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?"

- Legion had often been bound with fetters and chains (Mk 5:3,4)- just as God's people had so often been taken into captivity in "fetters and chains" (2 Chron. 33:11; 36:6, 2 Kings 24:7).

- When the sick man asks that the unclean spirits not be sent "out of the country" (Mk. 5:10), I take this as his resisting the healing. But he later repents and asks for them to be sent into the herd of pigs. This recalls a prophecy about the restoration of Judah in Zech. 13:2: "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land".

- The herd of pigs being "destroyed" in the water recalls the Egyptians being "destroyed" in the Red Sea when Israel were delivered from Gentile power before. The Gadarene Gentiles "were afraid", just as the Gentile world was at the time of the Exodus (Ex 15:14). The curing of Legion is termed "great things" (Mk 5:19); and Israel's exodus from Gentile power and the destruction of the Egyptians is likewise called "great things" (Ps. 106:21).

A Psychological Approach

I have outlined above how Legion could be seen as representative of Israel in their weakness. Mark records how Jesus asked the man his name- as if He wished the man to reflect upon who he thought he was. He replied: "Legion". And of course the word "legion" referred to a division of Roman soldiers, usually five or six thousand. The man felt possessed by Roman legions. Through the incident with the pigs, Jesus helped him understand that He alone had the power to rid the man, and all Israel, of the Roman legions. The observation has been made that the incidents of 'driving out demons' nearly all occur in "militarized zones", areas where the Roman army was highly visible and resented (3). The man wished the "demons" he imagined to be possessing him to be identified with the pigs. And Jesus empowered that desire. The 'band' of pigs is described using the same original word as used for a group of military cadets. And the pig was the mascot of Rome's Tenth Fretensis Legion which was stationed nearby; indeed, "pigs" were used as symbols for Romans in non-Roman literature of the time (4). William Harwood comes to the same conclusion: "Jerusalem had been occupied by the Roman Tenth Legion [X Fretensis], whose emblem was a pig. Mark's reference to about two thousand pigs, the size of the occupying Legion, combined with his blatant designation of the evil beings as Legion, left no doubt in Jewish minds that the pigs in the fable represented the army of occupation. Mark's fable in effect promised that the messiah, when he returned, would drive the Romans into the sea as he had earlier driven their four-legged surrogates" (5). The claim has been made by Joachim Jeremias that the Aramaic word for "soldiers" was in fact translated "Legion" (6). Jesus elsewhere taught that through faith in Him, "this mountain" could be cast into the sea (Mt. 21:21; Mk. 11:23). Seeing that mountains are symbolic in Scripture of empires, it could be that He was referring to how the empire contemporary with Him as He

spoke those words, the Roman empire, could be cast into the sea through faith in Him. The acted parable of the Legion of pigs running into the sea was surely teaching the same thing. In passing, I note the apparent discrepancy between the fact that a Roman Legion contained five or six thousand people and yet there were two thousand pigs drowned. I found the comment on an internet forum, by an unbeliever, that "the governor of Judaea only had 2000 legionaries at his disposal". I have searched Josephus and other sources for confirmation of this, but can't find any. If it were to be found, it would be marvellous confirmation of the thesis I'm presenting here- that the pigs were to be understood as representative of the Roman Legions, who in their turn were responsible for the man's mental illness (7). In any case, there is evidence to believe that there were Roman troops stationed in Gadara, and the pigs were likely being kept in order to provide food for them (8). "Pigs for the pigs" would've been the common quip about that herd of swine.

I suggest that the man's mental illness was related to the possession of his country by the Roman Legions. Perhaps he found huge power within himself to smash the chains with which he was restrained because he imagined them as symbolizing the Roman grip upon his soul and his country. In this case, his self-mutilation, gashing himself with stones (Mk. 5:5), would've been from a desire to kill the Legions within him, the 'demons' of Rome whom he perceived as having possessed him. He saw himself as representative of his people; Walter Wink sees the man's gashing himself with stones as a result of how he had "internalized [Judah's] captivity and the utter futility of resistance" (9). So often the mentally ill internalize their abusers; they act and speak as if their abusers are actually them, within them. This is why the abused so often end up abusing others; it's why Israel treat some Palestinians in a way strangely similar to how they were treated at the hands of the Nazis; and it's why Jesus urges us to pray for those who persecute us, to the end we might place a psychological distance between them and us, be ourselves, and not become like them. Jesus recognized this long before modern psychiatry did; hence he asks the sick man his name, "Legion". The man's reply really says it all- as if to say 'I am my abusers. I have internalized them'. Hence one commentator writes of how Legion "carries his persecutors inside him in the classic mode of the victim who internalizes his tormentors" (10).

Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist who analyzed the psychological damage done to those living under repressive regimes. Taking case studies from the French colonization of Martinique and Algeria, Fanon demonstrated that many darker skinned local people came to see themselves as second rate and dirty, and that when these darker skinned natives interacted with the white colonizers, they often experienced a tension between who they really were, and who they had to act as in secular life with the white masters. One of his books says it all in its title: *Black Skin, White Masks*. Having listed the various types of mental illness and multiple personality disorders which he attributed to French colonialism, Fanon concluded that there was brought about "this disintegrating of personality, this splitting and dissolution... in the organism of the colonized world" (11). Similar observations have been made, in a white-on-white context, about the psychological damage done by the Soviet occupation to the ethnic Baltic population, perhaps explaining why the tiny countries of Latvia and Lithuania have some of the highest suicide and mental illness rates in the world. The point is, however exaggerated these studies may be in some areas, there is indeed huge psychological damage caused by occupying, colonial powers; and this was the case in first century Palestine, and I submit that Legion with his multiple personalities was an example of mental illness caused by such a scenario. Paul Hollenbach likewise interprets the case of Legion, commenting in that context that "mental illness can be seen as a socially acceptable form of oblique protest against, or escape from, oppressions... his very madness permitted him to do what he could not do as sane, namely express his total hostility to the Romans; he did this by identifying the Roman legions with demons. His possession was thus at once both the result of

oppression and an expression of his resistance to it" (12). Richard Horsley takes the idea further: "The demon possession of the manically violent man among the Gerasenes can be understood as a combination of the effect of Roman imperial violence, a displaced protest against it" (13). By asking the sick man for his name, the Lord Jesus was surely seeking to help the man clarify the fact that his real issue was with Rome, and the man actually need not fear supposed 'demons'. This refocusing upon the real problem is a common feature of how the Bible deals with the whole subject of Satan and demons, as we've often seen in the course of this book. Horsley is right on target in his conclusion: "The casting out and naming of "Legion" is a demystification of demons and demon possession. It is now evident to Jesus' followers and to the hearers of Mark's story that the struggle is really against the rulers, the Romans" (14). Newheart writes in very similar terms: "Jesus... demystified the demons, showing that the real culprit was Rome" (15).

Another psychological approach to the self-mutilation [which is a classic symptom of mental illness] would be to understand it as him trying to stone himself, convinced he was unworthy and deserving of condemnation. No surprise, in this case, that the presence of Jesus lifted that sense of condemnation from him, and the miracle of the pigs was therefore performed to assure him that his sin really had been removed and condemned by drowning in the sea [a figure of condemnation in Mt. 18:6 and Rev. 18:21. 33]. The French social scientist René Girard commented at length upon the curing of the demoniac. He took the gashing of himself with stones as being representative of the man's desire to stone himself, and he observes the phenomena of "autolapidation" (self-stoning) as being common within the mentally disturbed. But he observes further that the pigs running over the cliff has "ritual and penal connotations" in that both stoning and being thrown over a cliff were common methods of execution in primitive societies (16). We recall how the townspeople tried to execute Jesus by throwing Him off a cliff (Lk. 4:29). And yet Jesus turned the man's fears on their head; for the pigs, representing the crowd who wished to stone the man and throw him off the cliff, are the ones who are thrown over the cliff by Jesus. The crowd therefore suffer the execution which they wished to inflict upon the victim. Thus "the miracle of Gerasa reverses the universal schema of violence fundamental to all societies" (17). Now we understand why Jesus declined Legion's request to follow Him on His mission, but insisted he instead return to his own society and live at peace with them. For Jesus had taught the man that the crowd he feared were no more, the lynch mob he obsessively feared had themselves been lynched over the cliff. The man begged that the demons *not* be cast into the sea (Lk. 8:31) in the sense that he himself feared being cast over the cliff into the sea by the mob. But that fear was taken away by Jesus; for it was the demons, the lynch mob which he feared, the Roman Legions, which he saw represented by the pigs, hurtling to their own destruction over the cliff.

On a perhaps simpler level, we can quite easily identify with Legion, in that the "demons" he imagined infesting him are easily understandable as our varying sins and weaknesses. And our identification with him progresses to being likewise left cleansed, in our right mind, and able and willing to witness for the Christ who cleansed us. Thus C.S. Lewis describes his own conversion to Christ: "For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was Legion" (18).

Matthew's Account

Matthew's account in Matthew chapter 8 seems to bring out another aspect to Legion. The following verse-by-verse notes

attempt to bring it out:

:28 *Gergesenes*- The "Girgashites" of Dt. 7:1, some of the original inhabitants of Canaan who had never been cast out of the land as intended by God. These men stopped anyone passing along the way or road. The point may be that those whom Israel should've 'cast out' to secure their inheritance of the Kingdom were finally cast out by Christ. This lays the basis for the language of 'casting out' the demons into the lake.

Two possessed- Mark and Luke focus upon just one of them, Legion. Luke says that Peter went to the Lord's tomb after the resurrection, yet several other disciples also went there ("some of our number"). Luke chose to focus upon only Peter; and here too, he chooses to focus upon only one of the two demoniacs.

Coming out- See on 8:34.

:29 *Torment us*- The language of judgment at the last day, "the time" (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). See on :30 *a good way off* and on :31 *cast us out*.

:30 *A great way off*- The term is used about those 'far off' from Christ, the unsaved (Lk. 15:20; Acts 2:39; 22:21; Eph. 2:13,17). The men saw themselves as far from Christ, with nothing in common between them and Him (:29). His response was to say that OK, let's get the condemnation over and done with- and you yourselves shall be saved. This is very much the kind of teaching which John's Gospel records as being specifically on the Lord's lips. See on :31.

:31 *Cast us out*- The word is used about 'casting out' to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). These men were obsessed with the thought of condemnation at the last day, being 'tormented' at the last day (:28), being 'far off' from Christ and His salvation (see on :30), 'going away' into condemnation (s.w. Mt. 25:46), plunged into the sea of condemnation (see on :32). They correctly perceived that meeting Jesus in this life was in effect a meeting of Him in judgment, for even then, even now, He is the judge of all. The Lord was assuring them that their fear of condemnation was well and truly 'cast out'; His destruction of the pigs was an acted parable of final condemnation at the last day. John's Gospel doesn't record this incident but as so often, he records the essential teaching in spiritual terms. In John's terms, we need have no fear of future condemnation, for we have received it now, and have passed from judgment to life and salvation. These men had a fine understanding of the Lord Jesus. They realized that meeting Him was meeting their judge. And they ask that the pigs bear their condemnation. And the Lord agrees- which meant that once they had as it were received their condemnation, they had passed from death into life.

Suffer us- They recognized Jesus as not only Son of God but also their Lord, in total control of their final destiny.

To go away- The same word is used about the rejected at the final judgment 'going away' into condemnation (Mt. 25:46).

:32 *Perished in the waters*- Death in the sea was seen as condemnation; the same figure is used of Babylon's final condemnation.

:33 *Went their way*- See on :34 *besought*.

:34 *Besought*- The very same word used about the demons / mentally ill men 'beseeching' Jesus in :31. As the mentally ill men besought Jesus to send away the demons, so the city dwellers besought Jesus to also 'go away'. As the keepers of the pigs "went their way" (:33), so the same word is used of the demons 'going away' into the pigs (:31,32). As the city dwellers 'came out' to meet Jesus, so the mentally ill men 'came out' of the tombs to meet Jesus (8:28) and the demons 'came out' of them (8:32). Perhaps the idea is that those unbelievers were spiritually in the same position as the despised mentally ill men whom they had excluded from their society. And the story ends with the mentally ill saved, and the townspeople asking Jesus to depart from them, which will be the exact position of the rejected at the last day (Mt. 25:41; Lk. 13:27). It is they who are condemned, by their own wish; the mentally ill men asked for the pigs to bear their condemnation, which they felt worthy of- and thus were saved.

Notes

(1) George Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1945) pp. 57,58.

(2) T. S. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition* (New York: Appleton, 1899) p. 225. Available on Google Books.

(3) Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) p. 115.

(4) Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001) p. 71; Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000) pp. 212,213.

(5) William Harwood, *Mythology's Last Gods: Yahweh and Jesus* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1990) p. 48.

(6) The same point is made in Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Earliest Palestinian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1978) pp. 101,102.

(7) There is a strange flip of the tail in all this. Josephus records how the Romans massacred many Jewish rebels in Gadara, the very place of the Legion miracle, in AD69: "Vespasian sent Placidus with 500 horse and 3000 foot to pursue those who had fled from Gadara... Placidus, relying on his cavalry and emboldened by his previous success, pursued the Gadarenes, killing all whom he overtook, as far as the Jordan. Having driven the whole multitude up to the river, where they were blocked by the stream, which being swollen by the rain was unfordable, he drew up his troops in line opposite them. Necessity goaded them to battle, flight being impossible... Fifteen thousand perished by the enemy's hands, while the number of those who were driven to fling themselves into the Jordan was incalculable; about two thousand two hundred were captured..." (*Wars of the Jews*, Book 4, Chapter 7). This is all very similar to the picture of the [Roman] legions being driven into the water, as Jesus had implied would happen. Perhaps we are to understand that what was made potentially possible for the Jews by the work of Jesus was in fact turned around against them- they suffered the very punishment and judgment which was potentially prepared for Rome, because they refused their Messiah. This is possibly why the destruction of Rome / Babylon predicted in the Apocalypse is described in terms of Jerusalem's destruction in the Old Testament. The judgment intended for Babylon / Rome actually came upon Jerusalem and the Jews.

- (8) Michael Willett Newheart, *"My name is Legion": The Story and Soul of the Gerasene Demoniac* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004) p. 14.
- (9) Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) Vol. 2 p. 46.
- (10) Robert G. Hammerton-Kelley, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994) p. 93.
- (11) Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963) p. 57. See too his *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
- (12) Paul Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 99 (1981) p. 575.
- (13) Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) p. 145.
- (14) *Ibid* p. 147.
- (15) Newheart, *op cit* p. 84.
- (16) René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) p. 176. Pages 165-183 contain his exposition of the healing of Legion. The same points are made in Jean Starobinski, "The Gerasene Demoniac", in Roland Barthes et al, eds., *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974) pp. 57-84.
- (17) *Ibid* p. 179.
- (18) C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of my Early Life* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955) p. 213.

4-3-2 Exorcism of Demons

Throughout Old and New Testament times there was the belief that by calling the name of a god over a sick person, demons could be exorcised (cp. Acts 19:13). The name of the god was held to have some mystical power. The true worship of Yahweh also placed great importance on the power of the *Name* of Israel's God, e.g.: "May the name of the God of Jacob defend you... Save me, O God, by Your Name" (Ps. 20:1; 54:1). The fundamental difference between the Name of Yahweh and that of other gods was that the Yahweh Name was both a declaration of His character and also a prophecy of His people's eternal future; therefore it was a means of real salvation. However, Yahweh evidently did not devise a system of worship for Israel which shied as far away as possible from using the language of contemporary beliefs. He revealed Himself in a way which showed His supremacy over those beliefs. Understanding this paves the way for a correct grasp of the New Testament language of demons. Christ spoke as if pagan exorcists had power (Mt. 12:27); it was only

indirectly that He taught His superiority over them. There is much emphasis on the use of the *name* of Christ to cast out demons/heal diseases (Mk. 16:17; Acts 3:6; 4:10; 16:18; 19:13–16; James 5:14). This has some similarity with the way in which the pagans repeated the names of their gods to exorcise what they believed to be demons. We can therefore come to the conclusion that in the demonstration of His power as being greater than that of other ‘gods’ and so-called ‘demons’, Yahweh is very indirect about it, and does so through alluding closely to the style and language which those false systems used. If this is truly appreciated, it will be evident that just because the New Testament sometimes uses the style and language of the surrounding paganism, this is no proof that those pagan beliefs have any substance.

The conclusion is that the Bible uses language which is riddled with allusions to surrounding pagan beliefs, in order to demonstrate the supremacy of Yahweh worship over them. Yahweh was not just another god who took His place amongst the pantheon of deities the Canaanite people believed in. The God of Israel was the *only* true God. He was therefore in active antagonism towards the claims of the other gods; hence Yahweh continually alludes to them in His self-revelation through His word. But His style is evidently not to criticize those gods in so many words. This would be altogether too human for the Maker of Heaven and earth.

Modern medicine and psychotherapy can at times use the belief systems of the patient to effect a cure – even whilst disbelieving those belief systems to the point of ridicule. Consider the following extract from *“The Rainbow Machine” – Tales from a Neurolinguist’s Journal* by Andrew T. Austin (Boulder, CO: Real People Press, 2007). What Austin did is in essence what the Lord Jesus did by using the language of demons:

“Several years ago a successful businessman, who for all appearances was perfectly normal, consulted me. His wife had recently left him, and he was suffering from severe insomnia brought about by issues relating to the separation, and from the demands of his busy work schedule. I took a full history from him and nothing seemed out of the ordinary. He was just a normal guy reacting to his circumstances in a normal way – until I asked him a question I often ask, “So out of all the people in the phone book, why did you come to see me. What is it you think I can do for you?” Dr Siebert would be proud of me.

“Well,” he said, “I know of your interest in the occult, and that is why I thought you could help me. My wife has a friend who is a Black Witch. She is able to enter my mind and make me ill. She is a very powerful woman.”

Now, I ask the reader to stop for a moment and think carefully about how you would respond to this. Read the sentence again. Is he mad? Deluded? Ill? Is she really a Black Witch? Can she really enter his mind and make him ill? Are such things possible?

I personally don't doubt that they are possible, it's just that I have yet to meet anyone who is really able to do such things. Derren Brown creates a very good illusion of such things, but he doesn't claim any real psychic powers – he is very clear that what he does is “a mixture of magic, misdirection, and showmanship.”

Many schools of thought say that colluding with a delusion or reinforcing it is a very bad thing to do, and that arguing with them, or correcting them, is a good thing to do. If you have ever tried arguing with a devout religious follower that his religion is wrong, you know that the chance that you will succeed in that is very close to zero.

So, how do I help this guy? Change his belief? Reduce the hallucination? Challenge him? I did none of those. I constructed a powerful sigil – a charm or talisman – according to the instructions in *The Greater Key of Solomon*. He collected it a week later, and I gave him strict and detailed ritual instructions for its use. I didn't hear from him again for over a year, when I met him at a chance encounter during a business conference.

“I feel a bit awkward saying this,” he told me in the queue for coffee, “but after I used the sigil in the way you described, I realized how silly I was being, and that there was no way that woman could be doing the things that I thought she was. But I didn't want to tell you, because I knew how sincere you were about the sigil and how it would work for me.”

Magic can indeed be a strange art at times. Explained in Ericksonian terms, he was caught in a therapeutic double bind. The instructions were designed to act as a convincer for the efficiency of the sigil, but they also made him feel just a little bit silly. He'll either be convinced that he's now protected from malign psychic influence, or he'll realize that there isn't such a thing – a win-win situation.

When working with any particular problematic belief, I rarely see fit to challenge it. I know that it might seem counterintuitive to some people, but challenging a delusion can in fact actually make it stronger and tougher. So think of it in these terms – don't challenge it or reinforce it – instead, just accept it and expand it to make it more workable”.

4-4 The Language of the Day

We have demonstrated that in New Testament times, it was the language of the day to describe someone as being possessed with demons if they were mentally ill or had a disease which no one understood⁽¹⁾. The contemporary Roman and Greek cultural belief was that demons possessed people, thereby creating mental disease. Those Christians who believe in the existence of demons are effectively saying that the contemporary pagan beliefs in this area were perfectly accurate⁽²⁾. The first century Jews definitely thought that ‘demons’ were ‘immortal souls’⁽³⁾. But the Bible knows nothing of ‘immortal souls’. Therefore we must conclude that the Bible speaks of contemporary ideas which are doctrinally wrong without highlighting the fact that they are wrong.

Error Not Explicitly Corrected

Paul says that Sinai is "in Arabia" (Gal. 4:25), but "Arabia" was understood in the first century as a specific area, Nabatea, which isn't the Sinai Peninsular where we now believe mount Sinai to be located. However, "in antiquity, people venerated Nabatea as the place of Moses' vision" (4). This factually incorrect idea was used by Paul because he wasn't concerned so much with the details as in using those popular beliefs to present an allegory, connecting Sinai to Gentile Arabia and the Jerusalem of the temple system. The appropriacy of the mention of Arabic / Nabatea may have been because the area was inhabited by Arabs who practiced circumcision and who were therefore despised by the Jews as being fake Jews. We see here in essence the same thing as happened in the Lord's development of allegories and parables using the popular ideas of Satan and demons, e.g. His parable of the binding of the strong man (Mt. 12:29).

The miracles of Jesus exposed the error of local views, e.g. of demons, without correcting them in so many words. Thus in Lk. 5:21 the Jews made two false statements: that Jesus was a blasphemer, and that God alone could forgive sins. Jesus did not verbally correct them; instead he did a miracle which proved the falsity of those statements. It was clearly the belief of Jesus that actions speak louder than words. He rarely denounced false ideas directly, thus he did not denounce the Mosaic law as being unable to offer salvation, but He showed by His actions, e.g. healing on the Sabbath, what the truth was. When He was wrongly accused of being a Samaritan, Jesus did not deny it (Jn. 8:48,49 cp. 4:7-9) even though his Jewishness, as the seed of Abraham, was vital within God's plan of salvation (Jn. 4:22). Even when the Jews drew the wrong conclusion (wilfully!) that Jesus was "making himself equal with God" (Jn. 5:18), Jesus did not explicitly deny it; instead He powerfully argued that His miracles showed Him to be a man acting on God's behalf, and therefore he was *not* equal with God. The miracles of Jesus likewise showed the error of believing in demons. Christ's miracle of healing the lame man at the pool was to show the folly of the Jewish myth that at Passover time an angel touched the water of the Bethesda pool, imparting healing properties to it. This myth is recorded without direct denial of its truth; the record of Christ's miracle is the exposure of its falsehood (Jn. 5:4). Another example would be the Jewish myth that the High Priest's Passover address was a direct speaking forth of God's words; this wrong idea isn't specifically corrected, but it is worked through by God- in that Caiaphas' Passover words just before the crucifixion came strangely true, thus condemning Caiaphas and justifying the Lord Jesus as Israel's Saviour (Jn. 11:51).

Thus the way that Christ did not explicitly correct error regarding demons is in harmony with other cases of blatant error which are also not explicitly corrected. The false thinking of the Jews about "Abraham's bosom" was subtly mocked by the Lord Jesus rather than explicitly corrected (Lk. 16:19-31). The idiom of Jacob being "gathered to his people" (Gen.

49:33) is used, despite the fact that many Bible readers will misunderstand this as meaning that he therefore joined them in some disembodied existence. The idiom is used but not corrected. God is not so primitive as to keep on as it were tripping over Himself to defend and define what He has said and the way He has chosen to say it. He speaks to us in our language, and at various times over history has dealt with men in terms they can cope with. And so the faithful too say things like 'May the King live for ever', using a social form which they knew had no real truth or intention in it (Neh. 2:3; Dan. 2:4; 3:9). We read of men being able to sling stones and not miss "a hair's breadth" (Jud. 20:16)- another idiom which of course isn't literally true.

When the people shouted Hosannas and "Blessed be the King that comes in the name of the Lord!" (Lk. 19:38), they thought the Messianic Kingdom had come. And the Lord didn't turn round and correct them for their misapplication of Scripture. Neither did He reject them or call fire down from Heaven upon them because of their misunderstanding. He said nothing, and let the crowd live on in their misunderstanding and see His death- in order to teach them something about what was needed in order to enable the Kingdom. And the same 'long term' approach of the Lord is found in His dealing with the demons issue. The elder son in the parable falsely claims to God that he has never broken one of His commands; but although this is evidently untrue, the father (representing God) does not correct him in so many words (Lk. 15:29-31). Naaman the Syrian accepted the faith of the God of Israel; after his 'conversion' he asked for some Israeli soil to be given to him to take back to Syria (2 Kings 5:17). This shows that Naaman was influenced by the surrounding superstition that one could only worship a god of another nation whilst on their soil. But this is not explicitly corrected by Elisha; he simply but powerfully comments: "Go in peace". In other words, Elisha was saying that the peace experienced by Naaman in his daily life was so wondrous that it obviated the need for worshipping on Israeli soil. Gen. 29:31 speaks of closed and open *wombs*, not fallopian tubes. There was no need for inspiration to produce a document that was so scientifically correct that the generation contemporary with it couldn't cope with it. Indeed, the whole beauty of God's revelation is that He takes people from where they are as they are, and leads them on to higher truth without having head on confrontation with them regarding their incorrect scientific understandings. Thus we read of "the sweet influences of Pleiades" even though we know that the stars do not have influence upon our lives today (Job 38:31).

Think through the following examples of error nor being corrected explicitly:

- Hananiah, a false prophet, is called a prophet (Jer. 28:5,10)

- A woman thought that Angels know everything and therefore David was like an Angel (2 Sam. 14:20). Angels don't know *everything*. Yet the woman's immature concept isn't corrected.

- Ex. 16:18 states that the Israelites in the wilderness went out and gathered manna, they returned and measured it with an omer measure, and found that each person had the same omer of manna. The Jewish Midrash strayed from the Bible text, claiming that the stronger men gathered more manna and gave to the weaker, so that everyone had the same. This is a twist of the actual Biblical text; and yet Paul alludes to the idea in 2 Cor. 8:15 in order to make a point to his audience- that the wealthy should support the poorer. He does so in the same spirit as a Christian might quote the Koran in order to make a point to a Moslem- but this doesn't mean that the Christian believes the Koran is God's word. Paul and the Bible writers weren't so on the back foot all the time that they as it were footnoted their allusions to incorrect beliefs with comments to

the effect that “Now this is not actually what happened”.

- False gods are spoken of as if they really are alive and capable of ‘eating’ sacrifices: God says He will starve (Heb.) the idols of the Gentiles (Zeph. 2:11). So, seeing ‘demons’ refer in the Old Testament to false gods, it’s not so unusual to find the Bible speaking of demons *as if* they are real, when, just like the false gods, they actually aren’t.

The Bible Uses The Language Of The Day

If the reasoning presented so far is correct, then we must demonstrate that the Bible does use (at times) the language of the day, contemporary with the time when it was first inspired. Jn. 10:23 speaks of “Solomon’s colonnade”, but as the NIV Study Bible correctly points out, this was “commonly but erroneously thought to date back to Solomon’s time”. But the error isn’t corrected. The language of the day is used. Prov. 8:28 speaks of God establishing “the clouds *above*”, and the surrounding context seems to describe God as forming the sky around the earth and then putting a horizon in place- just the sort of geo-centric view held by people at the time. And Job 26:11; 1 Sam. 2:8; 2 Sam. 22:8 speak as if Heaven / the sky rests on the mountains, from where earth seems to touch the heavens (Is. 13:5), with the stars stretched out in the north (Job 26:7). The point surely was that *however* people understood creation to have happened, God had done it, and in wisdom.

Because the Bible uses the language of the day does not mean that the God who inspired it wishes us to believe in demons. Modern English has many terms which are reflective of untrue understandings. We describe a certain disorder as “St. Vitus’ Dance” which is not caused by “St. Vitus” nor do most users of the term know anything about Vitus. It’s evident that Jesus Christ was not born on December 25th; yet many still use the term ‘Christmas day’ when speaking of that day. The names of the days of the week are based upon pagan idol worship – e.g. ‘Sunday’ means ‘the day devoted to worshipping the sun’; ‘Saturday’ was the day upon which the planet Saturn was to be worshipped, ‘Monday’ for the moon, etc. To use these names does not mean that we share the pagan beliefs of those who coined them. ‘Influenza’ is likewise a term in common use today; it strictly means ‘influenced by demons’. When Daniel was renamed ‘Beltshazzar’, a name referencing a pagan god, the inspired record in Daniel 4:19 calls him ‘Beltshazzar’ without pointing out that this word reflected false thinking. I speak about ‘the Pope’ as a means of identifying someone, even though I think it wrong to actually believe that he is a ‘pope’ or spiritual father (Mt. 23:9).

English has the word “lunatic” to describe someone who is mentally ill. Literally it means one who is “moon struck”. It was once believed that if a person went out walking at night when there was a clear moon, they could get struck by the moon and become mentally ill (cp. Mt. 17:15). We use that word “lunatic” today to describe someone who is ill, but it does not mean that we believe mental illness is caused by the moon. If our words were written down and re-read in 2,000 years’ time, people might think we believed that the moon caused illness; but they’d be wrong because we are just using the language of our day, as the Lord Jesus did 2,000 years ago. The New Testament likewise reflects this association between the moon and mental illness. “They brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, and those which were lunatick, and paralytics; and He healed them” (Mt. 4:24 A.V.). The repetition of the word “and...” gives the impression that every kind of illness- physical and mental, understood and not understood- was healed by the Lord Jesus. “Lunatick” translates the Greek *selēniazomai*- “to be moon

struck", derived from the noun *selēnē*, the moon. It's not true that some mental illnesses come from being moon-struck. But the idea is used, without correction- just as the idea of 'demon possession' is in the preceding phrase.

The Bible is written in terms which the surrounding people would have understood; therefore it sometimes speaks of how things appear to be *as if* this really is the case. God warns against dabbling with "them that *have* familiar spirits" (Lev. 19:31); not 'those who think they've got access to the supposed spirit world which, of course, doesn't exist'. Thus Genesis 18:2 speaks of "three men" visiting Abraham; actually they were Angels (Gen. 19:1 RV), but they are described as they appeared. Likewise we read that Jesus "entered in to a ship, and sat in the sea" (Mk. 4:1). Of course He didn't literally sit in the sea. But this is how it would have appeared to a spectator sitting on the grassy hillside, hearing Jesus' voice clearly from a great distance because of the natural amphitheater provided by the topography. In this case, the Spirit adopts this perspective in order to invite us to take our place on that same hillside, as it were, beholding the Lord Jesus in the middle distance, looking as if He were sitting in the sea. Perhaps the record is implying that listeners were so transfixed by the words and person of Jesus that they stopped seeing the boat and only saw Jesus, giving the picture of a magnetic man with gripping words sitting in the sea teaching a spellbound audience. There's another example of this kind of thing in Jud. 4:5: "The mountains melted ['flowed', AVmg.]"- to a distant onlooker, the water flowing down the mountains gave the impression that they themselves were melting; not, of course, that they actually were.

"The God that is above"

In both the Old and New Testaments, the Bible often speaks of the sun 'rising', 'going down' and travelling across the sky; this is a human way of putting it, as it appears to an earthbound observer, but it is not scientifically correct. We read of "the God that is above" (Job 3:4; 31:28); seeing that the earth revolves upon its own axis, this is not strictly correct. God's dwelling place is revealed as a fixed location; the fact that the earth revolves as it does would mean that God cannot literally be "the God that is above" for a believer in Australia and one in England at the same time. Yet God is spoken of as being "above" physically (Ez. 1:22,26; 10: 9); indeed, Christ used "above" as an idiom for God (Jn. 8:23; 19:11). The point we are making is that God reveals Himself in terms earthbound mortals can comprehend. The majority of His children down through the centuries probably believed in a flat earth, with God living up in the sky (hence the same Hebrew word is used for "Heaven" in the sense of God's dwelling place, and "heaven" in terms of the sky). And God went along with that in the language He used in the Bible. The sun is spoken of in Genesis 1 as the greatest planet of light in the whole of creation; yet there are millions of suns, our sun only appears the greatest light from our human viewpoint. And God went along with this in the linguistic style of the Genesis record. And so let's drive the point home: God was doing exactly the same with the language of demons in the New Testament.

The Primary Readership

It should be noted from all this that the Bible which we have bears the marks of the fact that it was written for a primary readership (as well as for us), and the language used is proof of that. Take a read through 1 Corinthians 7 to see what I mean. It is clear that Paul is answering some highly specific questions which the Corinthian believers had written to him. He begins his paragraphs: "*Now concerning* the things whereof ye wrote unto me... *now concerning* virgins... *now as touching* things offered unto idols..." (1 Cor. 7:1,25; 8:1). We can almost imagine him sitting there with their letter in front

of him, answering the questions point by point. But we don't know what their questions were, and this fact makes the interpretation of Paul's words here difficult; although of course the study of them is beneficial to us. The fact is, some parts of the Bible which we have were written for its primary readership, and the language used reflects this (Dt. 3:9,11).

The early church possessed the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, which have now been withdrawn; yet the New Testament records commands concerning them which were relevant only to the New Testament church. We can learn general principles from these accounts, but their existence is no proof that we can possess the gifts today.

Old Testament Language Of The Day

Some of the Bible's language refers to pagan superstitions which are evidently untrue; thus stones listen (Josh. 24:27), trees talk (Jud. 9:8-15), corpses speak (Is. 14:9-11). These ideas are clearly nonsense. And yet they are picked up and used by the Spirit in order to express God's word to people in contemporary terms. Thus Isaiah 34:1 invites the nations around Israel to come near and hear the judgment God was pronouncing against Idumea. Not surprisingly, what follows is a description of utter desolation using language which those people could relate to. In contemporary thought, the demon Lilitu was believed to be a night demon who prowled among the ruins and lurked in desolate places (5). Isaiah 34:14 describes the desolation of Idumea in these terms: "The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr (a demon allusion) shall cry to his fellow; Lilith (the Hebrew form of the Akkadian Lilitu; "the screech owl", AV) also shall rest there". Now there is no way that the Bible is teaching the real existence of Lilitu. Yet there is no caveat or warning to the effect that Lilitu does not exist. We are evidently expected to realize from the copious demonstrations and statements that Yahweh is the only true God that Lilitu does not exist. If we insist that demons exist because of the way the New Testament is written, then we must also accept that Lilitu also exists and haunts every derelict building site after dark. R.K. Harrison has the following comment: "As a general observation it should be noted that such references to pagan mythology as do occur in the OT have themselves been thoroughly stripped of their pagan associations, and appear largely as figures of popular thought or speech rather than as serious metaphysical concepts" (6) – i.e. 'Don't take the fact that the language of demons is used in the Bible to prove that demons do really exist'.

The Bible is quite clear that death is unconsciousness, and that the human soul is mortal and not immortal. And yet there are allusions to wrong ideas about these things throughout the language of the Old Testament- in order to get a point over to Israel in terms which they understood. Thus Jer. 31:15 speaks of Rachel at Ramah weeping for her children. Rachel was buried near Ramah (1 Sam. 10:2), and Jeremiah paints a picture of the spirit of Rachel haunting her tomb and weeping for the Jews being killed by the Assyrians, now centuries later. Jeremiah is describing how God empathizes with Judah's pain, and in order to do so, He speaks to them in terms they can understand- but the thrust of the passage is very much 'So dry your eyes, God will reverse all this'. Yet to make that point, an allusion is made to false ideas about the spirit of Rachel in her tomb.

There was a myth in Ezekiel's time that the physical land of Israel was responsible for the misfortunes of those in it. This was not true and yet God reasons with Israel, using the idea that was then popular: "Thus says the Lord God: 'Because they say to you, "You (the land) devour men, and bereave your nation of children," therefore you shall devour men no more... says the Lord God'" (Ez. 36:13,14). We commented in chapter 1 that there was a common pagan notion that the

sea was a great monster desiring to engulf the earth. Whilst this is evidently untrue, the Bible often uses this figure in order to help its initial readership to grasp the idea being presented: see Job 7:12 (Moffat's Translation); Am. 9:3 (Moffat); Jer. 5:22; Ps. 89:9; Hab. 3:10; Mt. 14:24 (Greek text); Mk. 4:37. Assyrian mythology called this rebellious sea monster 'Rahab'; and this is exactly the name given to the sea monster of Egypt in Is. 51:9.

Another example is in the description of lightning and storm clouds as a "fleeing or twisted serpent" (Job 26:13; Is. 27:1). This was evidently alluding to the contemporary pagan belief that lightning and frightening cloud formations were actually visions of a massive snake. These passages do not expose the folly of such an idea, or attempt scientific explanation. Instead they make the point that *God* controls these things. Nahum 1:3 surely alludes to these ideas: "Yahweh has *His* way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of *His* feet". The attitude of Christ to the prevailing belief in demons is identical in this regard; His miracles clearly demonstrated that the power of God was absolute and complete, unbounded by the superstitions of men concerning so-called 'demons'. Those who believe that the New Testament records of 'demons' prove that such beings do actually exist are logically bound to accept that the sea is really a monster, and that lightning is actually a huge serpent. This is surely a powerful point; there *must* be a recognition that the Bible uses the language of the day in which it is written, without necessarily supporting the beliefs which form the basis of that language. We have shown our own use of language to be similar. The Bible does this in order to confirm the kind of basic truths which we considered in Chapter 2- that God is all powerful; He is responsible for our trials; sin comes from within us. All these things can be made sense of by appreciating the greatness of God's power to save.

As with the descriptions of the sun rising and going down, illness is spoken of in the technically 'incorrect' language of 'demons'. There are many Biblical examples of language being used which was comprehensible at the time it was written, but is now unfamiliar or irrelevant to us, for example, "skin for skin" (Job 2:4) alluded to the ancient practice of trading skins of equivalent value; a male prostitute is called a "dog" in Deuteronomy 23:18. And Ezekiel's description of the latter day invasion of Israel around the time of Christ's second coming speaks of the invaders coming with horses, swords and other ancient military hardware (Ez. 38: 4; 39:3,9,10). Their swords, bows and arrows, we are told, will be burnt in the land of Israel for the first seven years of the coming Kingdom of God. Literally speaking, this is most unlikely to come true. We must take the mention of swords, bows and arrows as language of the day for what we now understand as missile launchers, tanks etc. The language of demons is another example. We read of demon possession, and in today's language we can interpret this as epilepsy and certain mental illnesses.

Frequently the Old Testament speaks of males as being "gathered to their fathers" (e.g. Jud. 2:9). This is referring to the common idea that after death, a man went to be with his father, grandfather and other male ancestors (7). Yet the Bible is crystal clear that all human beings are mortal, death is not the gateway to new life, it is unconsciousness. I've more than laboured this point throughout chapter 4 of *Bible Basics*. And yet this idiom of death being a gathering to ones' fathers is used repeatedly- even though it refers to a theology that is grossly incorrect and simply mythical. But the language of the day is used to describe death- just as the language of demons is used in the New Testament to refer to mental or inexplicable illnesses. The Hebrew word for "cemetery" is used in Jer. 31:40- *shede-mot*. Literally this means 'the field of Mot'- and Mot was the Canaanite god of death (8). False ideas about death had entered into the very fabric of the Hebrew language; and yet God still uses that term when inspiring Jeremiah to write His word to Israel. God doesn't offer any footnote, as it were, to the effect that 'Now of course we know that Mot doesn't exist'. God is too great to have to cover

Himself or anticipate criticism in this way. He simply uses human words and terms.

New Testament Language Of The Day

With this in mind, it is surprising how many examples can be found in the New Testament of the language of the day being used without that language being corrected. Here are some examples:

- The Pharisees accused Jesus of doing miracles by the power of a false god called Beelzebub. Jesus said, "If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out?" (Mt. 12:27). 2 Kings 1:2 clearly tells us that Beelzebub was a false god of the Philistines. Jesus did not say, 'Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true'. No, He spoke as if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, 'actually, they do not exist', He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.
- The Lord spoke of 'mammon'; the Syrian god of riches, with no footnote to the effect that this god didn't exist- His more essential point was that we should serve the one *true* God.
- Paul speaks of the Galatians as being "bewitched" (Gal. 3:1)- an idiom that employed false ideas, without any clarification from Paul.
- Likewise Paul at times quotes from or alludes to popular Jewish ideas with which he may not have necessarily agreed. The lack of quotation marks in New Testament Greek means that it's hard for us at this distance to discern when he does this- but it seems to me that it's going on a lot in his writings. Thus he uses the phrase "your whole spirit, soul and body" (1 Thess. 5:23), a popular Jewish expression for 'the whole person'- but it's clear from the rest of Paul's writings that he didn't see the body and soul as so separate. Likewise he uses the term "thrones, dominions, principalities and powers" in Col. 1:16- a Jewish rabbinic term which expressed their idea of "the various gradations of angelic spirits" (9). But it's doubtful he believed in this himself.
- Acts 16:16-18 are the words of Luke, under inspiration: "a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of Python met us". As explained in the footnote in the Diaglott version, Python was the name of a false god believed in during the first century, possibly the same as the god Apollo. It was believed that the 'spirit' of Python took over the 'immortal soul' of the person being possessed. Seeing that the Bible strongly opposes the idea of an immortal soul, there is no way that a spirit of Python can possess anyone. So Python definitely did not exist, but Luke does not say the girl was 'possessed with a spirit of Python, who by the way, is a false god who does not really exist...'. In the same way the Gospels do not say that Jesus 'cast out demons which, by the way, do not really exist, it is just the language of the day for illnesses'. The demons cast out of Legion went "into the abyss" (Lk. 8:31 Gk.); the pagan concept of the abyss is a nonsense, yet if we believe that the record of Legion's cure teaches the existence of demons, then we must logically believe in 'the abyss' too.
- Luke 5:32 records Jesus saying to the wicked Jews: "I came not to call the righteous...". He was implying, 'I came not to call those who believe they are righteous'. But Jesus spoke to them on their own terms, even though, technically, He was

using language which was untrue. Luke 19:20-23 shows Jesus using the untrue words of the one-talent man in the parable to reason with him, but He does not correct the wrong words the man used.

- The Jews of Christ's day thought that they were righteous because they were the descendants of Abraham. Jesus therefore addressed them as "the righteous" (Mt. 9:12-13), and said "I know that you are Abraham's seed" (Jn. 8:37). But He did not believe that they were righteous, as He so often made clear; and He plainly showed by His reasoning in John 8:39-44 that they were *not* Abraham's seed. So Jesus took people's beliefs at face value, without immediately contradicting them, but demonstrated the truth instead. We have shown that this was God's approach in dealing with the pagan beliefs which were common in the Old Testament times. Christ's attitude to demons in New Testament times was the same; His God-provided miracles made it abundantly plain that illnesses were caused by God, not any other force, seeing that it was God who had the mighty power to heal them.

- Paul quoted from Greek poets, famous for the amount of unbiblical nonsense they churned out, in order to confound those who believed what the poets taught (Tit. 1:12; Acts 17:28). What we are suggesting is epitomized by Paul's response to finding an altar dedicated to the worship of "The Unknown God", i.e. any pagan deity which might exist, but which the people of Athens had overlooked. Instead of rebuking them for their folly in believing in this, Paul took them from where they were to understand the one true God, who they did not know (Acts 17:22-23). When the resurrected Lord Jesus spoke from Heaven and told Paul: "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14), He was quoting the Greek poet Euripides (10). Here we have an exquisite essay in how even now, the Lord Jesus is aware of all popular culture in this world, and is happy to use it at times to prod the conscience of His people. But in our context we note how He is and was willing to use pagan ideas in the education of His people.

- Ephesians 2:2 speaks of "the prince of the power of the air". This clearly alludes to the mythological concepts of Zoroaster – the kind of thing which Paul's readers once believed. Paul says that they once lived under "the prince of the power of the air". In the same verse, Paul defines this as "the spirit (attitude of mind) that... works" in the natural man. Previously they had believed in the pagan concept of a heavenly spirit-prince; now Paul makes the point that actually the power which they were formally subject to was that of their own evil mind. Thus the pagan idea is alluded to and spoken of, without specifically rebuking it, whilst showing the truth concerning sin.

- Acts 28:3-6 describes how a lethal snake attacked Paul, fastening onto his arm. The surrounding people decided Paul was a murderer, whom "vengeance suffers not to live". Their reading of the situation was totally wrong. But Paul did not explain this to them in detail; instead, he did a miracle – he shook the snake off without it biting him.

- 2 Peter 2:4 talks of wicked people going to Tartarus (translated "hell" in many versions). Tartarus was a mythical place in the underworld; yet Peter does not correct that notion, but rather uses it as a symbol of complete destruction and punishment for sin. Christ's use of the word Gehenna was similar.

N.T. Wright observed: "The Greek New Testament doesn't actually have a word that means 'miracle'; when things happened which seemed to give normal ideas of reality some sort of jolt, the gospel writers used words like 'signs', 'powerful acts'..." (11). And I'd go further and suggest that this has something to do with why they used the 'language of the

day' for 'miracles'- i.e. 'casting out demons'. Joachim Jeremias puts it well: "Illnesses of all kinds were attributed to demons, especially the different forms of mental illnesses...we shall understand the extent of this fear of demons better if we note that the absence of enclosed mental hospitals meant that illnesses of this kind came much more before the public eye than they do in our world...There is therefore nothing surprising in the fact that the gospels, too, portray mental illness as being possessed by demons. They speak in the language and conceptuality of their time" (12).

Why Does God Use The Language Of The Day?

The people of Bible times obviously held many erroneous understandings of the world around them, and that included the Bible writers. The process of Divine inspiration didn't as it were correct the authors in all the areas of scientific misunderstanding they held. Thinking through the situation, it's apparent that there was almost no other choice than to speak and cause to be written within the incorrect frames of reference which were held in those times. The alternative would have been to scientifically educate the writers and readership; but this would've been as unnecessary as it would've been unrealistic. "These peoples had relatively primitive and sometimes erroneous conceptions, and these conceptions were shared by Israel as a whole and by the biblical authors in particular. And yet it remains that these conceptions, for all their inadequacy, were the indispensable vehicle of religious truth... for if in reality God had caused the inspired writers to speak with complete scientific accuracy, the people of Israel would not have understood the saving truth which it was their purpose to convey, any more than it could have grasped their scientific teaching... there was no reason why God should have rectified the inadequacies of Israel's profane knowledge" (13). I had to read these sentences a few times when I first encountered them; but they cut to the core of why God uses the language of the day regarding demons and many other things.

Another perspective is that God answers a fool according to his folly (Prov. 26:5). Thus God resurrected Samuel when Saul asked the witch to bring him to life (1 Sam. 28). Of course witches have no power to contact the dead; yet God confirmed Saul in his stupidity. If men choose to follow the vain philosophy of the flesh, God will confirm them in their delusions (2 Thess. 2:11). In accord with this, God punishes men with a recompense which is appropriate for the kind of sin they commit (Rom. 1:27). We have shown how God clearly appealed to Israel to stop believing in demons, because they did not exist and He was the only true God (Deut. 32:15-24). Sadly, Israel continued to believe in demons. God's punishment of them was therefore expressed in language which alluded to demons.

The language of the Bible often alludes to the false thinking of the surrounding pagan world in such a way as to demonstrate the power of the true God and His doctrine. One of the earliest examples is found in Genesis 4:7: "If you do not well, sin is couching at the door" (Heb.). This seems to be saying that if Cain was willing to repent, a suitable sin offering was lying down outside the door, which he could slay and offer as God required. But there is a very clear allusion here to the Mesopotamian demon Rabisu or "the croucher", who was thought to lie in wait secretly for his enemies. This idea was current at the time Moses was inspired to write up the Genesis record. Through this allusion to the mythical Rabisu, God is saying: "Don't worry about Rabisu, he doesn't exist; you need to fear Me, not him. What you need to do is make a sin offering and reconcile yourself to Me the only true God, rather than worry about myths like Rabisu'. Notice that it is not God's style to launch off into some long direct justification of His greatness as opposed to Rabisu.

Demon worshipping Israel in the wilderness were annihilated by “the destruction (LXX *daimonion*, or demon) that wastes at noonday” (Ps. 91:6). This presumably referred to how some of the Israelites were killed by sunstroke, and alludes to the common belief that dizziness at midday was a result of demonic activity. It is as if God is saying: ‘Demons don’t exist. But if you insist in believing in them, well, OK, demons will destroy you’. In like manner Christ will condemn the wicked at the day of judgment out of their own mouth (Lk. 19:22), i.e. He will punish them on their own terms. Jesus isn’t a hard man- but in the parable, He doesn’t correct the man for saying this, but rather reasons on the basis that if this *were* true, then what had the man *done* about his belief in Jesus, even if it was a wrong belief. “The terror of the night” (Ps. 91:5 Heb.) is also spoken of as destroying Israel, and this may also be an allusion to a mythical demon supposed to kill people at night. Despite these allusions, it is evident that *God* through His Angels destroyed and punished Israel (Ps. 78:48-49), not the sinful, independent demons which the surrounding cultures believed in. There was a common theme in ancient demonology that there were seven senior demons, who were responsible for plague and calamity. Christ alluded to this, without correcting it, in his parable of the *seven* evil spirits who re-entered the healed man (Mt. 12:45). Deuteronomy 28:22 may also allude to it when it describes the *seven* calamities which would befall Israel if they turned away from Yahweh.

Notes

(1) This is also the interpretation suggested by G.B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980) pp. 238,239. There is much in this book which is highly relevant to the issue of how God uses language in relation to demons. The connection between demons, idols and the language of the day is also developed by John Allfree, *Demon Possession* (Mansfield: Bible Study Publications, 1986). F.G. Jannaway quotes an account from *Yates' History Of Egypt* where the author recounts how in the Middle East in the 19th century, he was asked "to cast out a devil", by which I merely understood that I was to cure the bodily ailments of the individual". See F.G. Jannaway, *Satan's Biography* (London: Maranatha, 1900) p. 54.

(2) The logic of this point is driven home hard by Robert Roberts, *Christendom Astray* (Birmingham: C.M.P.A., 1962 ed.) Chapter 7.

(3) See Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 7.156.

(4) Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Random House, 2005) p. 67.

(5) See R.C. Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia* (London: Kuzac & Co., 1904) and R.K. Harrison, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) Vol. 1 pp.853, 854.

(6) R.K. Harrison, “*Demonology*” in Merrill Tenney (ed.), *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible* Vol. 2 p.97 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

- (7) See Robert Boling, *Judges (The Anchor Bible)*, (New York: Doubleday, 1975) p. 72; Eric Meyers, *The Biblical Archaeologist* Vol. 33 (1970) pp. 15-17.
- (8) See John Bright, *Jeremiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1965) p. 283.
- (9) See John Simpson, *The Meaning Of Satan* (Grammata: Brentwood Bay, B.C., 1999 ed.) p. 76.
- (10) Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Random House, 2005) p. 275.
- (11) N.T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) p. 80.
- (12) Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (London: S.C.M., 1972) p. 93.
- (13) H. Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The Theology of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) p. 15. I would add further that it seems significant to me that although the scientific errors of Israel are uncorrected, the Bible doesn't make historical mistakes. This is because the Bible doesn't claim to be a scientific textbook, but it does claim to present a history of God's people Israel and of the development of salvation.

4-5 God Adopts a Human Perspective

Because God answers foolish men according to their folly, there are many examples of God speaking of the false ideas of men as if they were true. We have just shown how He did that in speaking to Israel about demons. But there are other examples of this general principle, of the Bible describing things how they appear to the onlooker of the moment:

– Ahithophel advised Absalom to attack and kill righteous king David without any more delay. Absalom refused this advice. The inspired record comments: “For the Lord had appointed to defeat the *good counsel* of Ahithophel” (2 Sam. 17:14). Was it really *good* counsel? Not in God's eyes. It was only ‘good’ for Absalom from a fleshly viewpoint. And yet the record speaks from Absalom's perspective; it

speaks of something definitely evil as being “good” within the context in which it was given. Thus the record here refers to men’s bad thinking as if it is correct.

– It *seemed that* the sword at Joab’s side accidentally fell out of its scabbard as he went toward Amasa to greet him (2 Sam. 20:8) – but it was on purpose, of course.

– Likewise, Jacob was smooth skinned, but he placed skins on his hands to deceive Isaac that he was Esau. Isaac “discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau’s hands” (Gen. 27:23). Were Jacob’s hands really hairy? No. He made them *appear* hairy, and this is the perspective the record adopts, without correcting it. It doesn’t say ‘Isaac didn’t realize, because Jacob’s hands *seemed* hairy’.

– Wicked men are called “righteous” because this is how they perceive themselves (Mt. 8:12; 9:13; Ez. 21:3,4) – God adopts their perspective through inspiration

– Joseph is called “the father” of Jesus (Lk. 2:48) – he only was from a human perspective

– 1 Cor. 1:21,25 speak of the Gospel as “the foolishness of the thing preached” (RV) – not that it *is* foolish, but it is perceived that way

– Walking on the sea, Jesus “would have passed by them” (Mk. 6:48). I don’t suppose He *would* have done, because He was ‘coming unto them’, but this was how they perceived it – and thus the record stands written

– Was Jonah really asleep all through the storm (Jonah 1:5)? Wasn’t he *pretending* to be asleep, and the sailors swallowed it?

– “Whosoever shall keep the whole law [i.e. he *thinks* he keeps it perfectly and completely], and yet offend in one point...” (James 2:10)

– “A cloud received him” (Acts 1:9) – surely it was a cloud of Angels not water droplets. But so it looked to them standing on earth.

– The “pillar of fire” was only “as it were the appearance of fire” (Num. 9:15) but the record elsewhere speaks of it as “fire”, because that’s what it looked like to the Israelites. The Scriptures speak of how a pillar of fire was with Israel in the wilderness (Ps. 105:39). But actually when it first appeared, it was described as “*the appearance of fire*”

(Num. 9:15). It wasn't fire, it appeared as fire. And yet it's spoken of later simply as "fire". There's no inspired footnote reminding us that, well, actually, it wasn't really fire. Likewise "the mount [of Sinai] burnt with fire" (Dt. 9:15). The mountain didn't catch fire. But that's how it looked to the Israelites from a distance; and so that's how it's described.

– Mt. 13:12 speaks of what a man *has*, whereas Lk. 8:18 AV mg. more precisely speaks of what a man *thinks* he has. Matthew's record adopts a more human perspective.

– John prophesied that the disciples would be baptized with fire (Mt 3:11); this was fulfilled by tongues of Spirit descending which looked like fire (Acts 2:3). Evidently this was not literal fire or else it would not have rested on the heads of the disciples. So the words of Matthew 3:11 spoke of how things would *appear* to the disciples, without saying so explicitly.

– Nahum 3:9 describes Nineveh's power as "infinite" (Nah. 3:9). This is how it appeared from the standpoint of a Jew in puny Israel; ultimately, from God's perspective, Nineveh's power was anything but infinite.

– "Though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them" (Am. 9:3). Of course nobody can really be hidden from God. But God adopts the perspective of the person who thinks he *can* hide from God. And then He shows him that of course he isn't hidden. Likewise Jonah is recorded as fleeing from the Lord's presence (Jonah 1:3,10) – there is no inspired footnote that says 'Now of course you can't actually flee from God's presence, as David says "Whither shall I go from Your presence..."'.

– Ezekiel 28:3–4 says that the prince of Tyre was "wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that they can hide from you: with your wisdom and with your understanding you have gotten yourself riches". But this must mean that he *thought* he was wiser than Daniel, he *thought* that his wisdom had resulted in his riches. The king of Assyria had made the same mistake; and he was explicitly told by God that he was only a rod in God's hand: "For he says, By the strength of my hand (rather than God's hand which held him) I have done it, and by my wisdom... I have robbed their riches" (Is. 10:13 RV mg.). Later on in Ezekiel 28:13–14 we read words which have been much misunderstood as a result of failing to appreciate the way the Bible uses language: "You have been in Eden... you are the anointed cherub". Seeing the

prophecy is about the Prince of Tyre, this just cannot be literally true. What it means is that the Prince of Tyre blasphemously claimed to have been the Cherubim in the garden of Eden. Thus the Prince is spoken of as being the actual thing which he perceived himself to be, even though this was not true. In fact, throughout Ezekiel 28 there are subtle connections between the Prince of Tyre and sinful Adam in Eden – this was who he really was, in God's sight (see v. 3,9 AV mg. 13,15,16, 17). God spoke to the Prince about his beliefs in the same way He spoke to Israel about their belief in demons. Yet another example of this kind of thing will be found in Ezekiel 13:18–20.

– God's early plagues on Egypt were imitated by Pharaoh's magicians. We can imagine their pathetic mimicry, e.g. of turning rods into snakes. Yet the record does not highlight how pathetic their endeavours were. When God turned *all* the Nile water into blood, "the magicians of Pharaoh did so with their enchantments" (Ex. 7:22). Their claims would have been almost comical; because *all* the Nile water was made blood, it was impossible for them to take some of it and turn it to blood. But the record does not record a word of this *explicitly*. Their false claims are recorded uncorrected – to bring home (to the sensitive reader) the power of Yahweh's triumph over them.

– Christ was once asked why He ate with sinners. He replied: "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lk. 5:31–32). Christ is referring to the wicked Pharisees here as "the righteous... they that are whole". Yet they were not righteous. Christ was speaking of them according to how they saw themselves.

– On a more innocent level, consider how God records Moses being found by Pharaoh's daughter, who then (unknowingly) asks his mother to be his nurse: "The maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me... and *the woman* took the child and nursed it" (Ex. 2:8–9). Why not say '*And Moses' mother* (not "the woman") took him (not "it") and nursed him (not "it")'? The answer seems to be that the record adopts the incorrect and ignorant perspective of Pharaoh's daughter– although with no explicit statement that this is so.

– In like manner, Christ accused the Jews of rejecting John the Baptist (Mt. 17:12; Lk. 7:32–35), and on other occasions He commented on the fact that they had accepted his teaching, with the result that spiritually their house was swept and garnished (Mt. 12:44; Jn. 5:35). We can conclude from this that their *appearance* of accepting John's message was spoken of by Jesus as if they had accepted it. Likewise

Christ called the Jews both children of hell (Mt. 23:15) and children of the Kingdom (Mt. 8:12); the latter was how they perceived themselves. In Matthew 13:38 Christ speaks of the faithful as children of the Kingdom, and the wicked Jews as children of the Devil. But never does Jesus explicitly explain to us His use of language. We are left to figure it out for ourselves through comparing Scripture with Scripture. The same goes for the language of demons.

In a sense, if we feel something is true, then for us it is true. The Bible seems to recognize this in its use of language. Thus both David and Jesus said that God had forsaken and forgotten them (Ps. 22:1; 42:9). God did not do this; but they *felt* forsaken and forgotten, therefore in a sense God had forsaken them. What *seemed* true is recorded in the Spirit record, with no direct suggestion that it was untrue. Ditto for demons.

The disciples mistakenly thought that they had seen a ghost. Such things do not exist, seeing the Bible teaches that all existence is in a bodily form. Yet Jesus did not begin scolding them for their doctrinal weakness. Instead he calmly demonstrated the ridiculousness of such ideas: "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see me have" (Lk. 24:39). Jesus spoke about "a spirit" as if such a thing existed, even though he did not believe in it. By all means compare this with how faithful Jephthah spoke of the idol Chemosh as *if* he existed (Jud. 11:24). Thus Christ's attitude here and in the entire demons issue is an indication of His personality: patient, positive, powerful, intellectually rigorous, hoping to win others round, not mocking or pejorative.

Digression 7 The Teaching Style of Jesus

Patient Leading

The Lord Jesus spoke the word to men "as they were able to hear it", not as He was able to expound it (Mk. 4:33). He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed. The language of Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel is very different to that we encounter in the other Gospels. Indeed, the difference is so striking that some have claimed that John put the words into Jesus' mouth in his account. My suggestion is that the Lord did in fact say all the words attributed to Him in all the Gospel records. But He had two levels of talking with people- a Heavenly, spiritual kind

of style (which John picked up on); and also a more earthly one, which Matthew, Mark and Luke tended to record. In our context, the simple point that emerges is that Jesus spoke in different ways to different people; He tailored His language in accordance with His audience. It's significant that there are no records of Jesus casting out demons in John's record; this occurs only in the more audience-friendly accounts of the Synoptics.

There is a tendency amongst some personality types to turn every disagreement over interpretation of Scripture into a right : wrong, truth : error scenario. Matters relating to basic Gospel doctrine are capable of being dealt with like this. But to turn the interpretation of every Bible verse into a conflict area is a recipe for disaster in relationships. This is perhaps why the Lord seems to have let some issues go without immediate comment- His use of the language of demons is a major example. He lost a battle to win the war- of showing men that the power of God was so great that there was no room for belief in the existence of demons. Yet on the way to that end, He commanded 'unclean spirits' to leave men, with the result that observers marvelled that 'even unclean spirits obey him!'. He didn't on that occasion challenge the wrong belief directly, even though this meant that in the short term the wrong belief was perpetuated. But over time in His ministry, and in the whole New Testament, reference to demons becomes less and less, as His preaching of Truth by example and miracle made the point that these things really don't exist. Likewise the gods of Egypt were not specifically stated to not exist: but through the miracles at the Exodus, it was evident that Yahweh was unrivalled amongst all such 'gods', to the point of showing their non-existence (Ex. 15:11; 18:11). When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than Satan (Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'Satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

We must speak the word as others are able to hear it, expressing the truths of Christ in language and terms which will reach them. There are some differences within the Gospels in the records of the parables. It could be that the different writers, under inspiration, were rendering the Lord's Aramaic words into Greek in different styles of translation. Also, we must bear in mind the different audiences. Mark speaks of the four watches of the night which would have been familiar to Romans (Mk. 13:35 cp. 6:48), whereas Lk. 12:38 speaks of

the Jewish division of the night into three watches (cp. Jud. 7:19). Yet Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience. Thus Lk. 6:47; 11:33 speak of houses with cellars, which were uncommon in Palestine; and in Lk. 8:16; 11:33 of houses with an entrance passage from which the light shines out. The synagogue official of Mt. 5:25 becomes the “bailiff” in Lk. 12:58. In Palestine, the cultivation of mustard in garden beds was forbidden, whereas Lk. 13:19 speaks of mustard sown in a garden, which would have been understandable only to a Roman audience. It seems in these cases that inspiration caused Luke to dynamically translate the essence of the Lord’s teaching into terms understandable to a non-Palestinian audience. Even in Mt. 5:25 we read of going to prison for non-payment of debts, which was not the standard Jewish practice. Imprisonment was unknown in Jewish law. The point of all this is to show that we must match our terms and language to our audience; and this principle is revealed in the way that ‘demon’ language is used about the curing of some diseases in the Gospels.

The Tolerance of Jesus

Jn. 8:31 credits some of the Jews with believing on Jesus – and yet the Lord goes on to show how they didn’t ‘continue in His word’, weren’t truly confirmed as His disciples, and were still not true children of Abraham. Yet it would appear God is so eager to recognize any level of faith in His Son that they are credited with being ‘believers’ when they still had a very long way to go. The Lord condemned how the Pharisees “devoured widow’s houses” – and then straight away we read of Him commending the widow who threw in her whole living to the coffers of the Pharisees. It wasn’t important that the widow saw through the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and didn’t ‘waste’ her few pennies; her generosity was accepted for what it was, even though it didn’t achieve what it might have done, indeed, it only abetted the work of evil men. The Lord was criticized for “receiving sinners” and eating with them (Lk. 15:2). Instead of the usual and expected Greek word *dechomai*, we find here the Greek *prosdechomai* – He welcomed them into fellowship, symbolizing this by eating with them. This was an act which had religious overtones in 1st century Palestine. Notice that *prosdechomai* is used by Paul to describe welcoming a brother / sister in spiritual fellowship (Rom. 16:2; Phil. 2:29). The Lord fellowshiped people in the belief that this would lead them to repentance, following His Father’s pattern of using grace in order to lead people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). He didn’t wait for

people to get everything right and repented of and only then fellowship them, as a sign that they were up to His standards.

The Teaching Style of Jesus

The Lord and the Gospel writers seem to have recognized that a person may believe in Christ, and be labelled a 'believer' in Him, whilst still not knowing the fullness of "the truth": "Then said Jesus to those Jews which had believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are you truly my disciples; and you shall know the truth" (Jn. 8:31,32). Clearly the Lord saw stages and levels to discipleship and 'knowing the truth'. The life of Jesus was a life of outgiven grace and seeking the salvation of men, after the pattern of Joseph going to seek the welfare of his brethren. Even when he was delirious, according to the Hebrew text of Gen. 37:15 [AV "wandering"], he told the stranger that he was seeking his brethren (who hated him); seeking them was his dominant desire. And so it was in the life of the Lord. Like His Father, He was willing to be incredibly patient, in order to win people.

Consider some examples:

The Demon Issue

The centurion seems to have believed in demon possession. He understood that his servant was "grievously tormented" by them. He believed that the Lord could cure him, in the same way as he could say to his underlings "go, and he goes" (Mt. 8:6-10). And so, he implied, couldn't Jesus just say to the demons 'Go!', and they would go, as with the 'demons' in the madman near Gadara? The Lord didn't wheel round and read him a lecture about 'demons don't exist' (although they don't, of course, and it's important to understand that they don't). He understood that this man had faith that He, as the Son of God, had power over these 'demons', and therefore "he marvelled, and said... Verily... I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel". He focused on what faith and understanding the man had. With the height of His spirituality, with all the reason He had to be disappointed in people, the Lord marvelled at a man's faith. It is an essay in how He seized on what genuine faith He found, and worked to develop it, even if there was an element of false understanding in it ⁽¹⁾.

Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him; indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58).

Lk. 8:29 says that Legion “was driven of the Devil into the wilderness”, in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness by the spirit (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the ‘Devil’ in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord ‘went along’ with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into ‘the deep’, thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord ‘went along with’ that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

“By whom do your sons cast them [demons] out?” (Lk. 11:19) shows the Lord assuming for a moment that there were demons, and that the Jews could cast them out. He doesn’t directly challenge them on their false miracles, their exaggerated reports of healings, nor on the non-existence of demons. He takes them from where they are and seeks to lead them to truth.

There may well be more examples of this kind of thing in the New Testament than may appear to the English reader. The warning that the wicked will be cast into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil (Mt. 25:41) was referring to the apocryphal fate of supposedly ‘wicked angels’ as recorded in 1 Enoch 54. The references to Tartarus and sinful angels in 2 Peter and Jude are also clear references to wrong beliefs which were common in Jewish apocryphal and pseudo-epigraphical writings. These wrong ideas – and they are wrong – are not corrected directly, but rather a moral lesson is drawn from the stories. This is the point of the allusion to them; but there is no explicit correction of these myths in the first instance. The way the Lord constructed His parable about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 is proof enough that He Himself alluded to false ideas without correcting them, but rather in order to make a moral point within the faulty framework of understanding of His audience. Indeed, the Bible is full of instances of where a technically ‘wrong’ idea is used by God without correction in order to teach a higher principle. Thus an eagle doesn’t bear its young upon its wings; it hovers over them. But from an earth-bound perspective, it would appear that [looking up], the eagle is carrying its young on its wings. God accommodates Himself

to our earthly perspective in order to lead us to Heavenly things. He doesn't seek to correct our knowledge at every turn, or else His end aim would not be achieved.

“Satan has an end”

In Mk. 9:23, the father of the child was asked whether he could believe [i.e., that Jesus could cast out the demon]. The man replied that yes, although his faith was weak, he believed [that Jesus could cast out the demon]. His *faith* was focused on by Jesus, rather than his wrong beliefs. Faith above all was what the Lord was focusing on in the first instance. The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan “has an end” (Mk. 3:26). His approach was ‘OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that’s the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That’s the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed ‘binding the strong man’, rendering Satan powerless, making him ‘have an end’, and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is powerless and not an item now’. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: “If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] ‘Beelzebub’, how much more shall they call them of his household?” [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn't *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn't make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms.

Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled ‘Satan’ were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of ‘Satan’. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: “Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah” (*Maimonides’ Epistle to Yemen*). It’s been suggested that the way the

Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression זכרו שמו ימח (*yemach shemo vezichro* – “May his name and memory be obliterated”). This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They saw Jesus as Satan himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally ‘the lord of the house’; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

Other Examples in the Teaching of Jesus

– The Lord’s men were accused of ‘threshing’ on the Sabbath because they rubbed corn in their hands (Mk. 2:23–28). The Lord could have answered ‘No, this is a non-Biblical definition of working on the Sabbath’. But He didn’t. Instead He reasoned that ‘OK, let’s assume you’re right, but David and his men broke the law because they were about God’s business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience’. The Lord Jesus wasn’t constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

– The eagerness of the Lord for the inculcation of faith is seen in the way He foresees the likely thought processes within men. “Begin not to say within yourselves....” (Lk. 3:8), He told a generation of vipers; and He eagerly strengthened the centurion’s faith when it was announced that faith was pointless, because his daughter had died. And we sense His eager hopefulness for response when He said to the woman: “Believe me, woman...” (Jn. 4:21 GNB). Even though she was confrontational, bitter against Jewish people, and perhaps [as it has been argued by some] pushing a feminist agenda...the Lord sought for faith in her above correcting her attitude about these things. God too seeks for faith, and some of the ‘flash’ victories He granted in the Old Testament were to otherwise unspiritual men who in their desperation turned to Him. He so respects faith that He responded (e.g. 1 Chron. 5:10–20).

– When the Jews mocked Him for saying that He had seen Abraham, the Lord didn’t respond that of course that wasn’t what He meant;

instead He elevated the conversation with “before Abraham was I am”.

– The disciples didn’t have enough faith to cure the sick boy. Jesus told them this: it was “because of your little faith... if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove...” (Mt. 17:20 RV). Think carefully what is going on here. They had not even faith as a tiny grain of mustard seed; they didn’t have the faith to cure the boy. But Jesus says they did have “little faith”. He recognized what insignificant faith they did have. He was so sensitive to the amount of faith in someone, even if it was insignificant in the final analysis. We likewise need to be able to positively and eagerly discern faith in those we preach to and seek to spiritually develop. In a similar kind of way, God was disappointed that His people had not only been disobedient to Him, but they had not even been obedient to their conquerors (Ez. 5:7). He so values obedience, and had an attitude that sought to see if they would show it to at least someone, even if they had rejected Him.

– The Lord spoke of not making the Orthodox Jews stumble by not paying the tribute; yet He goes on to say that one must beware lest we make the little ones who believe, to stumble (Mt. 17:27; 18:6). Is it not that He saw in Orthodox Jewry the beginnings of faith... a faith which was to come to fruition when a great company of priests were later obedient to the faith in Him? None of us would have had that sensitivity, that hopefulness, that seeking spirit. It is truly a challenge to us. As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father’s house, Jesus didn’t have to pay the temple tax. He could have insisted that He didn’t need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father’s glory. And so He told Peter that “lest we should offend them”, He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren’t fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have.

– When the disciples foolishly sought to have what they thought were to be the favoured places at His right hand and His left, the Lord could have answered: ‘You foolish people! Those on my left hand will be condemned!’. But He graciously didn’t comment on their glaring error. He pushed a higher principle – that we should not seek for personal greatness, seeing that God is the judge of all (Mt. 20:23). Yet sadly, so much of our preaching has been solely concerned with pointing out

the errors of others without being sensitive to what little faith and understanding they do have, and seeking to build on it.

– When the people asked: “What sign do you shew then, that we may see, and believe you?” (Jn. 6:30), the Lord could have spoken words similar to Heb. 11:1 to them – He could have corrected them by saying that actually, faith is not related to what you can see. You cannot “see and believe” in the true sense of belief. But the Lord doesn’t do that. He says that He in front of them is the bread of God, miraculously given. And their critical tone changes: “Lord, evermore give us this bread!” (:34). This surely is our pattern – not to necessarily correct every error when we see it, but to pick up something the other person has said and develop it, to bring them towards truth.

– Another woman thought that by touching His garment, she would be made whole. She had the same wrong notion as many Orthodox and Catholic believers have today – that some physical item can give healing. The Lord corrected her by saying telling her that it was her faith – not the touch of His garment – that had made her whole (Mt. 9:21,22). Again, He had focused on what was positive in her, rather than the negative. We know that usually the Lord looked for faith in people before healing them. Yet after this incident there are examples of where those who merely sought to touch His garment were healed (Mk. 6:56; Lk. 6:19). They were probably hopeful that they would have a similar experience to the woman. One could argue they were mere opportunists, as were their relatives who got them near enough to Jesus’ clothes. And probably there was a large element of this in them. But the Lord saw through all this to what faith there was, and responded to it. It is perhaps not accidental that Mark records the link between faith and Jesus’ decision to heal in the same chapter (Mk. 6:5).

– Yet another woman was evidently a sinner; and the Lord made it clear that He knew all about her five men. But He didn’t max out on that fact; His response to knowing it was basically: ‘You’re thirsty. I’ve got the water you need’. He saw her need, more than her moral problem; and He knew the answer. When she replied that she had no husband, He could have responded: ‘You liar! a half truth is a lie!’. But He didn’t. He said, so positively, gently and delicately, ‘What you have said is quite true. You had five men you have lived with. The one you now have isn’t your husband. So, yes, you said the truth’ (Jn. 4:16–18). He could have crushed her. But He didn’t. And we who ‘have the truth’ must take a lesson from this. He let Himself be encouraged by her response to Him, even though her comment “Could this be the

Messiah?" (Jn. 4:29) implies she was still uncertain. Raymond Brown has commented: "The Greek question with *meti* implies an unlikelihood" (The Gospel According to John, Vol. 1, p. 173). And so this Samaritan woman was at best being deceptive when she said that "I have no husband / man / fella in my life" (Jn. 4:17). The Lord could have answered: 'Don't lie to me. You know you're living with a man, and that you've had five men in your life'. Instead, the Lord picks up her deceptive comment positively, agreeing that her latest relationship isn't really a man / husband as God intends. I find His positive attitude here surpassing.

– The Lord knew that Peter had a sword / knife hidden in his garment when in Gethsemane. But He did nothing; He didn't use His knowledge of Peter's weakness to criticize him. He knew that the best way was to just let it be, and then the miracle of healing Malchus must have more than convinced Peter that the Lord's men should not use the sword. For their Master had healed, not murdered, one of the men sent to arrest Him.

– "John bare witness unto the truth [i.e. the legitimacy of Jesus' claims]. But I receive not testimony from man [e.g. John]; but these things I say, that ye might be saved...I have greater witness than that of John... the works which the Father hath given me... bear witness... the Father himself... hath borne witness of me". I wish to stress the Lord's comment: "But these things I say, that ye might be saved". The Lord wanted men to accept His Father's witness; but He was prepared to let them accept John's human witness, and actually this lower level of perception by them, preferring to believe the words of a mere man, would still be allowed by the Lord to lead them to salvation.

– There is no record that the Lord corrected the disciples' misunderstanding that He was going to commit suicide in order to "go unto" Lazarus (Jn. 11:16). He let events take their course and allowed the disciples to reflect upon the situation in order to come to a truer understanding of His words.

– The disciples thought the resurrected Christ was a spirit, a ghost. They returned to their old superstitions. Yet He didn't respond by lecturing them about the death state or that all existence is only bodily, much as He could have done. Instead He adopted for a moment their position and reasoned from it: "A spirit has not flesh and bones as you see me have" (Lk. 24:39). The essence of His concern was their doubt in Him and His resurrection, rather than their return to wrong superstitions.

– The record stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man’s self-righteousness: “The youth answered, all these have I kept from my youth up”. He was young – and he says that since a young man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn’t lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive – as if to say ‘You are zealous for perfection? Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!’.

– The Pharisees had reasoned themselves into a position whereby plucking heads of corn whilst walking through a corn field on the Sabbath was regarded as reaping. When the Lord was questioned about this issue, He didn’t reply as most of us would have done: to attack the ridiculous definition of ‘work on the Sabbath’. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter.

– The Lord explained that “the least in the Kingdom of Heaven” would have broken “the least” commandments, and would have taught men so (Mt. 5:19); and yet “the least in the Kingdom” was a phrase He elsewhere used about those who would actually be in the Kingdom (Mt. 11:11). Here surely is His desire to save, and His gracious overlooking of intellectual failure, human misunderstanding, and dogmatism in that misunderstanding (‘teaching men so’).

– The Lord wasn’t naive, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly that they were full of “unbelief”, and couldn’t do miracles which He expected them to because they didn’t pray and fast (Mt. 17:19–21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn’t fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord’s inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognized Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had.

– Similarly, His parable of the sower concluded by lamenting that His general Jewish audience did not understand, and He spoke the parables knowing they wouldn’t understand and would be confirmed in this. And He stressed that a feature of the good ground is that His message is understood. In this context, the Lord commends the disciples because they saw and heard, in the sense of understanding

(Mt. 13:13,15,16,23). Yet so evidently they didn't understand. And yet the Lord was so thrilled with the fact they understood a very little that He counted them as the good ground that understood.

– The wedding feast at Cana had been going on for some time, to the point that men had drunk so much wine that they could no longer discern its quality. The Lord didn't say, as I might have done, 'Well that's enough, guys'. He realized the shame of the whole situation, that even though there had been enough wine for everyone to have some, they had run out. And so He produced some more. He went along with the humanity of the situation in order to teach a lesson to those who observed what really happened (Jn. 2:10).

– The Lord evidently knew how Judas was taking money out of the bag. As the Son of God He was an intellectual beyond compare, and sensitive and perceptive beyond our imagination. And He noticed it; and yet said nothing. He was seeking to save Judas and He saw that to just kick up about evident weakness wasn't the way. If only many of our brethren would show a like discernment.

– His attitude to John's disciples is very telling. He saw those who "follow not us" as being "on our part", not losing their reward, as being the little ones who believed in Him; and He saw wisdom as being justified by all her children, be they His personal disciples or those of John (Mk. 9:38–41; Lk. 7:35). John's men had a wrong attitude to fellowship – they should have 'followed with' the disciples of Jesus; and it would seem their doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit was lacking, although not wrong (Acts 19:1–5). Indeed, they are called there "disciples", a term synonymous with all believers in Luke's writing. And the Lord too spoke in such an inclusive way towards them. No wonder His disciples had and have such difficulty grasping His inclusiveness and breadth of desire to fellowship and save.

– This focus on the positive is shown by the way the Lord quotes Job 22:7 in the parable of the sheep and goats: "You have not given water to the weary to drink, and you have withholden bread from the hungry". These words are part of Eliphaz's erroneous allegations against Job – for Job was a righteous man, and not guilty on these counts. Yet the Lord extracts elements of truth from those wrong words, rather than just contemptuously ignoring them. Likewise Job 22:25 speaks of God being our "treasure... our precious silver" (RV). Surely the Lord had this in mind when saying that our treasure must be laid up "in heaven", i.e. with God (for He often uses 'Heaven' for 'God'). And James follows suite by approvingly quoting Job 22:29 about the lifting up of the humble (James 4:6).

– The Lord’s tolerance is demonstrated by how He handled the issue of the tribute money (Mt. 22:21). The coin bore an image which strict Jews considered blasphemous, denoting Tiberius as son of God, the divine Augustus ⁽²⁾. The Lord doesn’t react to this as they expected – He makes no comment upon the blasphemy. He lets it go, but insists upon a higher principle. ‘If this is what Caesar demands, well give it to him; but give what has the image of God, i.e. yourself, to God’. He didn’t say ‘Don’t touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim’. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this – even though the present writer is more than conservative in his taste in these matters]. The Lord wasn’t like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body, fashioned in God’s image – and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God’s people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

I am not suggesting from these examples that therefore doctrine is unimportant. But what I am saying is that we must look for the positive in others, and like the Lord in His attitude to demons, bear with them and recognize faith when we see it. God worked through the pagan superstitions of Laban regarding the speckled animals, and through the wrong beliefs of Rachel and Leah regarding their children... in order to build the house of Israel. He didn’t cut off His dealings with men at the first sign of wrong understanding or weak faith or mixed motives. Moses seems to have shared the primitive idea that a god rose or fell according to the fortunes of his worshippers, when he asks God to not cut off Israel in case the nations mock Yahweh. He could have responded that this was far too primitive and limited a view. But no, He apparently listens to Moses and goes along with his request!

John the Baptist showed the same spirit of concession to human weakness in his preaching. He told the publicans: “Extort no more than that which is appointed you” (Lk. 3:13 RV). He tacitly accepted that these men would be into extortion. But within limits, he let it go. Likewise he told soldiers to be content with their wages – not to quit the job. Consider too how the disciples responded to the High Priest rebuking them for preaching; he claimed that they intended to bring

the blood of Jesus upon them (Acts 5:24). The obvious, logical debating point would have been to say: 'But you were the very ones who shouted out 'His blood be upon us!!' just a few weeks ago!'. But, Peter didn't say this. He didn't even allude to their obvious self-contradiction. Instead he positively went on to point out that a real forgiveness was possible because Jesus was now resurrected. And the point we can take from this is that true witness is not necessarily about pointing out to the other guy his self-contradictions, the logical weakness of his position... it's not about winning a debate, but rather about bringing people to meaningful repentance and transformation.

Another example of the Biblical record going along with the incorrect perceptions of faithful men is to be found in the way the apostles nicknamed Joseph as 'Barnabas' "under the impression, apparently, that it meant 'son of consolation' [Acts 4:36]. On etymological grounds that has proved hard to justify, and the name is now generally recognized to... mean 'son of Nabu'"⁽³⁾. Yet the record 'goes along' with their misunderstanding. In addition to this, there is a huge imputation of righteousness to human beings, reflected right through Scripture. God sought them, the essence of their hearts, and was prepared to overlook much ignorance and misunderstanding along the way. Consider how good king Josiah is described as always doing what was right before God, not turning aside to the right nor left – even though it was not until the 18th year of his reign that he even discovered parts of God's law, which he had been ignorant of until then, because the scroll containing them had been temporarily lost (2 Kings 22:2,11).

Notes

(1) It is likely that to some degree the Father overlooks the moral and intellectual failures of His children on account of their ignorance, even though sins of ignorance still required atonement and are still in some sense seen as sin. This could explain why Eve committed the first sin chronologically, but she did it having been "deceived" by the serpent; whereas Adam committed the same sin consciously and was therefore reckoned as the first sinner, the one man by whom sin entered the world.

(2) Documentation in E. Bammel and C.F.D. Moule, eds., *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1984) pp. 241–248.

(3) Margaret Williams, "Palestinian Personal Names in Acts" in Richard Bauckham, ed. *The Book of Acts* Vol. 4 p. 101 (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995).

4-6 Demons: Why Didn't Jesus Correct People?

God isn't so paranoiac or primitive as to need to 'cover His back' all the time when He speaks, endlessly footnoting, as it were, His statements, lest they be misinterpreted. He speaks and writes quite calmly in the language of the time. In Digression 3, I pointed out how God alludes to mistaken ideas about demons, sinful gods etc. and corrects them by employing the language used about them in relation to Himself as the ultimate source of all in human life. Thus we saw the way God's word deconstructs error without as it were primitively confronting it in a 'I am right, your ideas are wrong and pitiful' kind of way. I find this bears the stamp of the Divine and the ultimately credible. Cassuto has a very fine comment upon this, made in the context of his view that Genesis 6 is deconstructing Canaanite legends about sinful gods, demons and giants: "The answer contradicts the pagan myths, but without direct polemic. This is the way of the Torah: even when her purpose is to oppose the notions of the gentiles, she does not derogate, by stooping to controversy, from her ingrained majesty and splendour. She states her views, and by inference other ideas are rejected" (1). This has bearing on why the Lord Jesus didn't in so many words state that 'demons' don't exist; rather by His miracles did He demonstrate "by inference" that they have no effective power or existence. We see something similar in how the Old Testament initially presents Yahweh as "the greatest of all gods" (e.g. Ex. 18:11)- without specifically stating that those other gods don't exist. But as God's relationship with Israel unfolds, the later prophets declare Yahweh as the only God and the other gods as no gods, mocking them as utterly non-existent.

It is worth noting that Matthew, Mark and Luke use the 'demon' language, because those records are basically a transcript of the Gospel they taught to unbelievers. John's Gospel, which seems more aimed at believers facing pressure from Judaists and Gnostics, omits any reference to them. The Lord uses demon language in connection with healings in rural Galilee rather than in the presence of more educated people in cities like Jerusalem- because presumably it was in the rural areas where the inability

to grasp a direct denial of 'demons' would have been more deep rooted. It has been observed: "Demon possession in the Gospel accounts is not a geographically-uniform phenomenon. Specific cases of demon possession in the synoptics occur in regional clusters, always in northern regions such as Galilee, rather than occurring throughout every location in which Christ travelled and performed healings. Conversely, there are no descriptions of demon possession in Judea or Jerusalem in the four Gospel accounts. Moreover, there are several summaries of demon possession in Galilee and the northern regions that imply demon possession was a common and even characteristic phenomenon in this area. No comparable statements for the Judean area are found in the Gospel records. Finally, certain ostensibly physical pathological conditions, such as blindness, deafness and muteness are sometimes attributed to demon possession in the north, but are never so characterized in the south, even though descriptions of these conditions do occur in texts commenting on the Judean ministry". Clearly enough, the Bible writers reflected the perceptions of the people about whom they wrote. If they were writing about Galileans, they spoke of healing the mentally sick in terms of demons being cast out; but they don't use this language in speaking about Jerusalem. The *Encyclopedia Of Religion And Ethics* clarifies further: "Galilee was the centre of Palestinian demonology, and it will almost invariably be found that the Galileean teachers accepted, whilst the Judean teachers rejected, the existence of spirits" (2).

2 Kings 17:9 speaks of Israel doing "secretly those things that were not right". There was no ultimate secret, for God knew their ways, and their actions were manifest on "every high hill and under every green tree" (:10). The 'secrecy' was in that they thought their deeds could be kept secret from God. And the record reflects their wrong perspective with no further comment. It is for us to perceive it. And the same is true with the matter of demons. This is one reason why the apparent error isn't corrected.

God so wishes to reach out to unbelievers and misbelievers that His word makes allusion to their beliefs without specifically correcting them or criticizing them- in order to try to persuade them of a better way. Take Luke's genealogy of Jesus. He

frames it to have 77 genealogies leading to Christ- and he mentions that Enoch was seven generations from Adam. But the uninspired book of Enoch claimed that the final judgment was to come 70 generations after Enoch (1 Enoch 10:12-14). Surely Luke's idea, or rather God's idea behind the inspiration of Luke, was that those familiar with Enoch would hear bells ringing when they met the word 'Enoch' - and would be wondering what was to come 70 generations later. And as they read on through Luke's genealogy, they would find the answer- the final judgment is in essence in the person of Jesus.

The Lord spoke the word of Truth to men as they were able to hear it (Mk. 4:33); like Paul, He became all things to all men, so that by any means He might save some (1 Cor. 9:22). The Lord Jesus used well known medical techniques in His ministry (Mk. 7:33; Jn. 9:6); not because He needed to use them, but in order to somehow get His hearers at ease. And so, it seems to me, He used the language of demons. He dealt with people in terms which they would be able to accept. In Paul's case, being all things to all men meant that at times He sacrificed highest principle in order to get through to men; He didn't just baldly state doctrinal truth and leave his hearers with the problem of whether to accept it. He really sought to persuade men. He magnified his ministry of preaching to the Gentiles, he emphasized the possibility of Gentile salvation, "If by any means I may provoke to emulation ['incite to rivalry'] them which are my flesh [the Jews], and might save some of them" (Rom. 11:13,14). This hardly seems a very appropriate method, under the spotlight of highest principle. But it was a method Paul used. Likewise he badgers the Corinthians into giving money for the poor saints in Jerusalem on the basis that he has boasted to others of how much they would give (2 Cor. 9:2), and these boasts had provoked others to be generous; so now, they had better live up to their promise and give the cash. If somebody promised to give money to charity and then didn't do so, we wouldn't pressurize them to give. And we wouldn't really encourage one ecclesia to give money on the basis of telling them that another ecclesia had promised to be very generous, so they ought to be too. Yet these apparently human methods were used by Paul. He spoke "in human terms" to the Romans, "because of the infirmity of your flesh" (Rom. 6:19

NIV); he so wanted to make his point understood. And when he told husbands to love their wives, he uses another rather human reason: that because your wife is “one flesh” with you, by loving her you are loving yourself. ‘And’, he reasons, ‘you wouldn’t hate yourself, would you, so- love your wife!’. The cynic could reasonably say that this is pure selfishness (Eph. 5:29); and Paul seems to recognize that the higher level of understanding is that a husband should love his wife purely because he is manifesting the love of Christ to an often indifferent and unappreciative ecclesia (5:32,33). And yet Paul plainly uses the lower level argument too.

God Himself frequently does this kind of thing: He comes down to the terms and language of men in His zeal to save. He invites the Jews to put Him to the test: if they paid their tithes, He would bless them with fruitful harvest (Mal. 3:10). And yet surely the whole message of God’s revelation is that we are to accept His hand in our lives, that obedience won’t automatically bring blessing now, that we are not to put our God to the test (Dt. 6:16 cp. Mt. 4:7) but to trust in Him and the coming of His Kingdom to resolve all things. And yet Yahweh seems to come down from these high principles in Malachi’s time, to try to convince them of the logic of devotion to Him. And most personally, Yahweh Himself had stated in His own law that to divorce a wife and then re-marry her after she had been “defiled” was an act of abomination to Him, and would defile the land (Dt. 24:4). And yet in full knowledge of this, and with conscious allusion to it, Yahweh begs His defiled, divorced wife Israel to return to Him (Jer. 4:1), even though the land was defiled by her (Jer. 3:9; 16:18). Here we see the utter self-abnegation of Yahweh, God of Israel, that He might save His people.

And so the Lord’s use of the language of the day regarding demons is surely another example of the zeal of the Father and Son to communicate to men. We like Paul must catch this spirit. God meets people where they are; and His Son was no different. He deals with people according to their perceptions, even if those perceptions are wrong. Exactly because the Jews thought that the mere existence of the temple meant the presence and acceptance of God amongst them, “*therefore shall Zion for your*

sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps” (Mic. 3:12). And perhaps something similar is going on in the NT’s use of demon language. For those who think that God is so weak that He is in conflict with other demi-gods, He confirms them in their wrong perception. He meets them where they are, however, and to the sensitive mind, reveals Himself as truly Almighty. In Phil. 2:10, the Lord Jesus is said to have been given power over all beings in heaven, earth and the nether-world. The Romans understood the world to be divided into these three spheres of the cosmos. But this passage is based upon Is. 45:23, which says that God has total supremacy- and this has been granted to His Son. As I understand it, Paul is reasoning that if God is all powerful, and if that power has been given to the Lord Jesus, then whatever cosmology there is around, e.g. belief in a nether-world, well, in that case, Jesus has all power over that as well. The same argument applies to demons. If they exist, well the essence is that they are well and truly under the Lord’s control and aren’t essentially powerful. Paul doesn’t so much ridicule the idea of a nether-world, rather he takes the view, as Jesus did in His dealings with the demon issue, that God’s power is so great that their existence is effectively not an issue.

The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water- that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to

tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17-20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'.

In exalting about the wonderful power of God in human life through Christ, Paul exalts that "neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come: nor height (Gk. *hypsoma*- the highest point a star reaches) nor depth Gk. *bathos*- the abyss from which a star rises), nor any other creature, are able to separate us from the love of God" (Rom. 8:38,39). "The position of the stars was supposed to affect human destinies. 'Whatever the stars may be supposed to do', Paul says, 'they cannot separate us from God's love'" (3). Likewise by referring to "any other creature", Paul seems to be saying that there is no reality, nor even any supposed reality in heaven and earth, that can separate us from God's loving power. It seems to me, given the facts that Paul doesn't teach the existence of a personal Satan / demons and so often deconstructs the common ideas about them, that Paul is effectively saying here: 'Even if you think these things exist, well they are of utterly no power and consequence given the extraordinary and ultimate nature of God's power'.

The Case Of John's Gospel

It has been widely recognized that John's Gospel often refers to the same themes found in the Synoptics, but in different language and from a different perspective. The account of the virgin birth as the word being made flesh is one such example. Another would be the effective repeating of the great commission in different terms. Yet another would be the description of water baptism as being born of water (Jn. 3:3-5). The accounts of casting out demons which we have in the Synoptic Gospels are not found in John- not in so many words. But I suggest that the essence of it all is there in John, too. The battle between Jesus and the 'devil' is referred to there frequently. He is accused of being in league with the devil (Jn. 7:20; 8:48; 10:20); but He labels His critics as being of the devil

(Jn. 8:44). And in that same passage He redefines their view of "the devil" as being a question of doing sinful "desires" . Judas is portrayed as being "of the devil" (Jn. 6:70,71; 13:2,27). John speaks of an epic struggle between life and death, light and darkness, truth and error, faith and unbelief, God and evil / sin. In this struggle, the forces of evil have no real power over the Lord Jesus; He is greater than them and overcomes them to such an extent that they are effectively non-existent for those in Him. The Synoptics speak of the opposition to Jesus as being from Scribes, Pharisees etc. John describes this opposition as the Jewish 'satan' or adversary to the Lord. John presents the opposition to Jesus from the Jews as being symbolic of evil and sin itself. Effectively, the more literal accounts of the Synoptics are saying the same thing- that the Lord showed that the power of God is so great that effectively, demons don't exist as any realistic force in the lives of both Jesus and His people. John puts this in more epic and symbolic language- the forces of evil were overcome and revealed to be powerless by the Lord Jesus, ultimately expressing this through His death. And perhaps that's why John's Gospel doesn't speak of the Lord casting out demons- because his record has made it clear enough that effectively, those things don't exist ⁽⁴⁾ .

The whole account of the crucifixion in John shows how the Lord gave His life up of Himself; the Jews and Romans had no power to take it from Him, and throughout John's accounts of the trials and crucifixion, it is apparent that it is the Lord and not His opponents who is in total control of the situation. Even though 'the devil' is seen as a factor in Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Jn. 13:27,30), it is clear that Jesus was delivered up [s.w. 'betrayed'] by the "determinate counsel [will] and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). It wasn't as if God fought a losing battle with a personal Satan in order to protect His Son from death. The way that the Lord Jesus is 'sat down upon' the Judgment Bench, as if He is the authentic judge (Jn. 19:13), is an example of how the Lord Jesus is presented in John as being totally in control; His 'lifting up' on the cross is portrayed as a 'lifting up' in glory, enthroned as a King and Lord upon the cross⁽⁵⁾ . Other examples of John bringing out this theme of the Lord being in control are to be found in the way He confronts His captors (Jn. 18:4), questions His questioners (Jn. 18:20,21,23; 19:11), gets

freedom for His followers (Jn. 18:8), and makes those come out to arrest Him fall to the ground.

Notes

(1) Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical And Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973) Vol. 1 p. 24.

(2) Article "Demons and Spirits (Jewish)", *Encyclopedia Of Religion And Ethics* ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911) Vol. 4 pp. 612,613. The article provides full documentation from the Talmud for this statement. R.H. Lightfoot demonstrated in great depth that the doctrinal focus of Jesus varied with His geographical location- see his *Locality And Doctrine In The Gospels* (London: Hodder, 1938).

(3) A.M. Hunter, *Romans* (London: S.C.M., 1981) p. 87.

(4) This is developed at length in S. Garrett, *The Demise Of The Devil* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

(5) For justification of reading the Greek *kathizo* as a transitive verb ['to sit someone down'], see I. de la Potterie, 'Jesus King and Judge According To John 19:13', *Scripture* Vol. 13 (1961) pp. 97-111 and Wayne Meeks, *The Prophet-King* (Leiden: Brill, 1967) pp. 73-76.

4-7 The Psychology of Belief in Demons

Demons are never described in the Bible as trying to tempt people or corrupt them; demons in the sense of demon possessed people often express faith in Christ. This is in sharp contrast to the assumption commonly made that demons are fallen angels intent on tempting people to sin- in Pentecostal churches we hear of a shopping demon, a smoking demon, a speeding demon, etc. But this simply isn't how 'demons' are referred to in the New Testament. The Bible speaks of demons as being the idols which

had been built to represent them; and it is stressed that these idols and the demons supposedly behind them don't exist. And therefore "be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil", nor have they any capacity to in fact do anything (Jer. 10:3-6; Ps. 115:2-9).

Bullinger has some interesting comments upon the woman with an unclean "spirit of infirmity" (Lk. 13:11) that resulted in her being unable to lift herself up straight. "The negative is *me*, not *ou*; and is therefore subjective. She *felt as if* she could not do so...it appears, therefore, to have been a *nervous disorder*; and had to do with her *pneuma*" or mind ⁽¹⁾. And yet she is described as having been 'bound by satan'. The 'satan' or adversary to her standing upright was her own mindset. And it was this spirit or mindset "of infirmity" from which the Lord released her. Here we clearly see the connection between 'spirits' and mental disorder or dysfunction; for 'spirit' in Scripture so often refers to the psychological mindset of a person.

For what it's worth, psychologists have suggested that belief in demons is rooted within the human desire to externalize our internal problems, to unload all our inner fears and anger onto some mythical creatures of our creation. I am no great fan of Freud, but some of his conclusions are at least worth referencing. He denied the literal existence of demons, but addressed the question of why people believe in them. He claimed that the belief derived "from suppressed hostile and cruel impulses. The greater part of superstition signifies fear of impending evil, and he who has frequently wished evil to others, but because of a good bringing-up, has repressed the same into the unconscious, will be particularly apt to expect punishment for such unconscious evil in the form of a misfortune threatening him from without" (2). Further he wrote: "[it is] quite possible that the whole conception of demons was derived from the extremely important relation to the dead... nothing testifies so much to the influence of mourning on the origin of belief in demons as the fact that demons were always taken to be the spirits of persons not long dead" (3). The anger, guilt and fear which is part of the mourning process therefore came to be unloaded onto the 'demons' which were imagined. Gerardus van der Leeuw, a theologian, took the idea further: "Horror and

shuddering, sudden fright and the frantic insanity of dread, all receive their form in the demon; this represents the absolute horribleness of the world, the incalculable force which weaves its web around us and threatens to seize us. Hence all the vagueness and ambiguity of the demon's nature.... The demons' behaviour is arbitrary, purposeless, even clumsy and ridiculous, but despite this it is no less terrifying" (4). I am unsure whether I can agree with everything these writers suggest in this context- but it seems to me a likely enough psychological explanation for the common belief in demons. Our anger, our fear, our trembling, our fear of the unknown, of ourselves even, was somehow transformed by people into a belief that all these things existed in a tangible concrete form as 'demons' external to us. We as it were unload our own internal demons onto external, literal demons... as always, to make ourselves appear the less culpable, the less fearful and the less sinful.

Notes

(1) E.W. Bullinger, *Word Studies On The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1985 ed.) p. 63 [formerly published as *The Giver And His Gifts*].

(2) Sigmund Freud, "Psychopathology of Everyday Life," in *The Basic Writings Of Sigmund Freud*, ed. A. A. Brill (New York: The Modern Library, 1938), p. 165.

(3) Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo," in *The Basic Writings Of Sigmund Freud*, op. cit., pp. 857-858.

(4) G. van der Leeuw, *Religion In Essence And Manifestation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 134-135.

4-8 'Casting out demons': A Curing of Psychosomatic Illness?

Another approach to the question of demon possession is provided by recognizing the psychological basis behind many of the apparently 'physical' afflictions which Jesus healed. I began thinking about this because of the extensive experience my wife and I had with a deeply traumatized woman whom we counselled and virtually lived with for several months. She had been made pregnant by her father, and then gave birth to a stillborn, in very difficult circumstances and little medical attention, with the dead body of the baby disposed of in a particularly awful manner before her eyes. Her trauma afterwards was such that she at times lost the use of her legs, lost her speech and at times even her sight. After each such episode, we shared with her the comfort of God's love, in words and so far as we could in practical ways, and the symptoms would go away, sometimes instantly. One moment she couldn't walk, she was as if paralyzed; and then she could, perfectly well. This was nothing to do with demons nor our possession of any miraculous gift of healing; it was an outcome of her encounter with Jesus through the Gospel and in our faces, as members of the body of Christ.

It's been observed that many of the illnesses which the Lord Jesus cured were disabilities such as blindness, deafness, muteness, skin diseases and paralysis which may have had their root cause in psychological problems; those diseases, according to this suggestion, weren't the result of internal causes such as bacteria or a virus, but they were psychophysical, or psychosomatic. In other words, the cause of the illness was mental or emotional. Jesus as God's Son would or could have been an intellectual beyond compare, and He likely had an understanding of the interaction between mind and body far beyond the physicians of His day, who typically worked to alleviate symptoms rather than address root causes of disease. The very real existence of this kind of 'physical' illness as a result of mental issues is clearly recognized in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1). This Manual spends 25 pages listing various forms of such "somatoform disorders". Of particular interest are what are classified as "conversion disorders", so

named because the sufferer 'converts' mental or spiritual pain into some physical effect. These effects can include motor symptoms- loss of balance, paralysis, loss of voice; and sensory symptoms such as blindness, double vision or deafness. The observable results of these can be identical, externally, to those suffering them from more 'physical' reasons. Experiments have been done on two paralyzed men. Their arms were lifted above their heads in front of a mirror, so they could see that if their arm were to be released, it would hit their head. The 'physically' paralyzed man was helpless to stop this happening when his arm was released. The other man made his arm fall to one side to avoid it striking his head. His apparent paralysis had some mental dimension to it; apparently uncontrollable muscles and reflexes could be controlled in him if e.g. his attention was directed elsewhere. It's further been observed that the less educated, the more medically naive a person is, the more likely they are to suffer from such conversion disorders, and the easier it is to modify their behaviour. This category of persons ideally fits the peasants of Palestine whom Jesus cured. The American Psychiatric Association conclude that "the individual's somatic [i.e. bodily] symptom represents a symbolic resolution of an unconscious psychological conflict, reducing anxiety and serving to keep the conflict out of awareness ('primary gain')... the individual might also derive 'secondary gain' from the conversion symptom- that is, external benefits are obtained or noxious duties or responsibilities are evaded" (2). An example would be that paralysis excludes a man from having to do the army service which he dreads, or that a woman is made sexually unavailable, or receives material benefit from the state because of her state rather than having to go into the workforce. Perhaps Jesus perceived this when He asked the otherwise banal question more than once: 'Do you want to be healed?' (e.g. Jn. 5:6).

Significantly, at the time of the witch hunting of the Middle Ages in Europe, people with temporary blindness, double vision, paralysis etc. were considered to be demon possessed. Before those times, various 'physical' theories had been advanced as to the cause of their sickness. In a history of mental illness, Mark Micale observes that "The scene of diagnosis shifted from the hospital to the church and the courtroom" (3). But in the modern period, physicians "sought to recapture the[se diseases] from the

realms of religion and magic by arguing forcibly that [any such illness] was a medical pathology with naturalistic causes” (4). Clearly enough, illness at one time blamed upon demon possession had both before and after that time been understood in medical terms; and this is likewise true of the concept of demon possession in first century Palestine. It simply cannot be denied that the healing miracles recorded in terms of ‘casting out demons’ often refer to diseases which we now can define and treat medically. They are not, therefore, any evidence of the actual existence of demons. Thus John P. Meier observes: “A conservative Christian might wish to maintain the reality of demon possession [but] even a scholar with such a worldview would have to admit that the case of the demon possessed boy in Mark 9 points to epilepsy rather than demonic possession” (5).

The Healing of the Paralyzed Man

Jesus did of course perform total miracles such as the resurrection of Lazarus and the healing of the man born blind which were a direct result of He as the Father’s Son having the power of His Spirit to act on earth as He thought best. But this is not to say that His healings in many other cases didn’t involve a large element of psychological healing in order to bring about the cure of psychosomatic conditions. This is perhaps most clearly evident in His healing of the paralyzed man in Mk. 2:5, where He firstly forgives the man his sins, and makes the point that it is one and the same for Him to forgive this person or to heal him. The man’s complexes about past sins were perhaps psychologically responsible for his paralysis. We may draw a parallel with how Sigmund Freud recounts how he met a young woman who had lost the use of her legs, for no apparent physical reason. In therapy, she recounted how as her sister lay dying, she had gone for long romantic walks with her sister’s husband. Her guilt about this had led her to have a complex about walking, and she had lost the use of her legs. Once she faced her guilt feelings and accepted forgiveness, and learnt that the man had remarried and that another man was interested in her, she was able to walk perfectly (6). The similarities with the healing work of Jesus are profound; He removed sin and guilt in

a way no other ever could or can; and He thereby becomes the new interest in the life of the forgiven person. For He is interested, passionately, in us; for He paid dearly for each of us. I likewise noted above that some apparently paralyzed people can regain some use of their limbs if their attention is directed elsewhere, if another focus appears. Freud elsewhere observed that such paralysis can occur “in order to remove the ego from a situation of danger”; by e.g. being paralyzed, “the ego is removed from danger” (7). Understanding the real message of Jesus and salvation in Him not only removes the emphasis upon our “ego”, but provides assurance of the ultimate escape from personal danger in that our salvation is assured in Him. So instead of being like the frightened deer, paralyzed with fear by the approaching headlights, frozen to the spot, now the paralyzed man could walk again because he had been liberated from his fears in a way only Jesus could so. He had been paralyzed by his own fears, haunted by unforgiven sin and unresolved guilt. The way that Jesus tells him to get up and “go to your home” (Mk. 2:11) may also be significant; for perhaps some of his trauma had occurred in a domestic context, and Jesus wished to assure him that all was well there, he would be accepted there.

Healings of the Blind

We are left likewise to ponder the significance of Jesus asking the blind man to go straight home and not go into the town (Mk. 8:26); as if there was maybe some complex about “home”, and a fear of being a sighted man in the town. Perhaps his blindness was partly a result of never wanting to see that town again, or because of things he had seen in that place. The way the Lord gently led the man outside of the town to cure him may well be related to His perception that there was a problem for the man there. The way the man initially saw men as if they were trees could suggest that his problem related to looking upon people, for whatever reason; or his fear of their looking at him (Mk. 8:24). The spitting on the man’s eyes (Mk. 8:23) may suggest that Jesus cleansed his eyes, as it were, in a moral sense; perhaps the man felt that he had sinned with his eyes, or that his

blindness was indeed the punishment for sin which it was commonly assumed to be. Jesus freed him from these fears- and his blindness left him. Admittedly, all this cannot be proven in a Euclidean sense; but then very little can be in this field. Male life expectancy in Palestine was around 30 years; Jesus did not die as a “young” man but rather lived perhaps the average life expectancy of a human being in His context. Very few people are born blind, and blindness from macular degeneration or other problems related to the ageing of the retina would have been uncommon. Blind people were therefore for the most part those who had gone blind, and not because of retinal ageing. And this immediately opens the possibility that their blindness was perhaps psychosomatic. The case of “Bartimaeus son of Timaeus” may have been like this (Mk. 10:46). Note how his sonship of Timaeus is twice emphasized, as if this was a major defining issue for him (“Bar-Timaeus” means ‘son of Timaeus’). He emphasizes that he considers Jesus not to be ‘son of Joseph’ as many would have considered Him, but “Son of David”; he says this twice (Mk. 10:47,48), perhaps to balance how he is twice called “son of Timaeus”. Perhaps he had suffered from some father-son complex, and saw in Jesus someone who wasn’t the son of any human father; the way he afterwards “followed Jesus in the way” (Mk. 10:52), with all the Biblical implications of walking in “the way”, would suggest that he saw his healing as the beginning of a spiritual journey with Jesus. The “secondary gain” which the psychiatrists speak of, wanting to remain afflicted because of some benefit arising from this, may have been in this case that he received a fair income from begging as a blind man. Jesus therefore addressed this issue by enquiring what the man wanted from Him (Mk. 10:51), the implication being ‘Do you want alms from me, too?’. Bartimaeus is very clear that no, he’s not looking for a few pennies, not the “secondary gain”, but his sight- so that he might follow Jesus. It’s been observed that many blind people who regain their sight through surgery, or those born blind who become sighted through modern medical procedures, are often unhappy (8). Jesus foresaw this, hence His enquiry as to whether the man *really* wanted his sight. For sure, Jesus perceived the possibility that the man may have been somehow contented in his blind position, confirming my suggestion that the man’s blindness could have been psychosomatic.

The Woman with an Issue of Blood

To suffer chronic bleeding for 12 years (Mk. 5:25) is most abnormal for any standard, physical illness. Dysfunctional bleeding can be associated with hormonal imbalances leading to a loss of control over menstruation, and hormonal imbalances can be caused by psychological factors. Such long term bleeding can't be explained very easily in terms of standard medicine. Given that women were seen as sexual objects and the bearers of children, it could be that the woman subconsciously was saying "no" to standard expectations of her, and secreting her life blood through her most private parts in a way which made her ritually unclean as a kind of statement that she wanted no part in standard society with its expectations. Her "secondary gain" was perhaps that she placed herself out of the interest of men. It could be that she had deeply rooted sex-related concerns. We obviously don't have the required background information to state anything with much certainty, but as a general observation it would seem we are on safe ground in suggesting that something psychological was going on. The American Psychiatric Association *Manual* quoted earlier connects some forms of psychosomatic disorders with people who are uncomfortable when they aren't the centre of attention and who interact inappropriately with others by provocative behaviour (a woman reaching out and touching a man would've been seen as sexually inappropriate). The *Manual* also comments that such people may be "overly trusting, especially of authority figures whom they see as magically solving their problems" (9). These characteristics would fit the haemorrhaging woman of Mark 5. She accepted Jesus as her authority figure, and her trust wasn't misplaced- she perhaps achieved that focus upon Him as a result of her experience of failure at the hands of so many physicians. So again, His acceptance of her was what led to her healing. Erik Erikson has written a lot of sense about this incident, calling it "the decisive therapeutic event in the Gospels", and noting that the flow of "virtue" out of Jesus was more than simply raw power exuding from Him; rather was it a "mutual transfer of energy" (10). His "virtue", His acceptance of her, which perhaps she had previously perceived in some other

encounter, meant that her actual connection with Him was enough to psychologically heal her of her dysfunction and therefore of the psychosomatic problems she had. Hence Jesus emphasized that the physical touch of His clothes was not of itself what had cured her, but rather her *faith* in Him (Mk. 5:34). Donald Capps puts it so very well: “We choose life not because we believe in ideas, however compelling these may be, but because we believe in persons, especially those persons who have faith in us” (11). It seems to me that this was indeed how Jesus healed this woman.

The Epileptic Boy

Mark 9:17-22 describes the ‘demon possessed’ young man brought to Jesus by his distraught father in language which seems almost purposefully intended to be a kind of clinical description of epilepsy- indeed, the RSV and NRSV translations use the very word “epileptic”, the NIV uses “seizures”. Impeded speech, seizures, foaming at the mouth, grinding teeth, going rigid, convulsions on the ground, rolling around. Perhaps the intention of the process of Divine inspiration is in fact to define this case of demon possession as simply epilepsy, as if to point us to understanding the language of ‘demon possession’ as a way of describing illness. But “epilepsy” is a wide term; it is a seizure disorder related to “periodic disturbances of the brain’s electrical activity... temporary brain dysfunction” (12). The same medical authority concedes that the cause is often unknown, and the seizures are therefore called “idiopathic”. Seizure disorders typically happen when the person is under stress or provocation. It would be fair to suggest that the young man’s condition may well have had a psychosomatic element. Significantly, the things he is described as doing to himself nearly all use language which the Bible elsewhere uses to describe the fate of the condemned and rejected at the final judgment; inability to speak (Mt. 22:12), grinding of teeth (Mt. 22:13), falling to the ground and going rigid as if he was dead, throwing himself into water (Mk. 9:42) and fire (Mt. 13:42), crying out (Mt. 13:50). It would seem that he purposefully threw himself into fire and water, rather than accidentally fell into

them; and the language of 'throwing' is associated in the above references with the condemnation of the last day. The young man may well have had issues of self-hatred and a paranoia about rejection by God- typical for some adolescents. Roy Porter points out that the Jews hadn't always believed in demon possession, but picked up the idea in Babylon [as they did the idea of a personal Satan figure]: "The Babylonians held that certain disorders were caused by spirit invasion, demonic malice, the evil eye... possession was both judgment and punishment" (13). The young man, having heard these ideas, therefore acted as 'demon possessed' because he thought that this was the punishment for sin and the condemnation of the wicked. It was and is the good news of Christ alone which can free a person from such fear of sin and condemnation, and the associated self-loathing. Rather in Christ is the believer affirmed as a person. We can therefore reasonably suppose that the curing of the youth's psychosomatic problems was associated with his realization that the Lord Jesus was personally interested in him, loved him, accepted him and wished to save him.

The Language of Demons

I have quoted Freud with approval, but this shouldn't be taken as meaning I agree with him on everything; in fact, very far from it. But his reflections on the language of demon possession bear careful consideration in our context. He wrote a paper reflecting on how cases of supposed demon possession in fact refer to psychological problems which can be cured. It is surely asking too much to believe that demons flee in the face of a psychotherapist who may well be an atheist or non-Christian. The problems previously blamed on 'demon possession' are illnesses of the mind, albeit having a manifestation in the body ['psychosomatic'] which can be cured by engagement with the afflicted mind. He wrote about a recorded case of "demoniacal possession in the seventeenth century" as being "what we are prepared to recognize under other names... the neuroses of olden times masqueraded in a demonological shape... many authors have recognized states of [supposed] demoniacal possession to be manifestations of hysteria... if more attention had been paid

to the history of such cases at the time, it would have been a simple matter to find in them the same content as that of the neuroses of today... what in those days were thought to be evil spirits to us are base and evil wishes... we do not subscribe to the explanation of these phenomena current in medieval times; we have abandoned the projection of them into the outer world, attributing their origin instead to the inner life of the patient” (14). And this happens to support the conclusion I have arrived at Biblically elsewhere- that the essential ‘evil spirit’ is the spirit of man, it is our internal temptation, dysfunction and sin which is in essence the great ‘Satan’, the adversary, of humanity. This is but a Biblical personification of what Freud calls our “base and evil wishes”.

There can be no doubt that illnesses once described as demon possession are now recognized as diseases which medicine can control and at least partially cure; the description of epilepsy in Mark 9 as demon possession is a parade example. Quite simply, the non-physical aspect of disease was blamed upon demons, but now we understand that the actual ‘demons’ were internal psychological attitudes and malaises which resulted in psychosomatic illness. Jesus cured these diseases by engaging with those psychological issues, driving out guilt, fear and other neuroses in the way which only He can- because He offers a real, felt forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and certain salvation. To have even begun to explain the psychosomatic basis of those illnesses would have been well beyond the understanding of the first century audience of the Gospel records. It was well beyond most people until the last few centuries. And so the language of demons being cast out was used, because in a sense there was no other way of describing the fact that such inexplicable illnesses no longer afflicted a person. But my point is that Jesus achieved those cures not by fighting with demons in the sense of real, cosmic beings or forces. He effected the healings by engaging with the psychology of the person, pouring in His grace, love and Hope of His Kingdom. Instead of gallantly bopping a few demons on the head to cure the blind man of Mark 8, He led him out of the town and talked with him, touching him to show His identity

with him. He engaged constantly with the minds of those whom He sought to heal and save. For that is the arena of the real spiritual conflict; not out in the ether somewhere, in Heaven, out in the world, beneath the earth. And in that arena of conflict within the believer, there is Jesus, engaging with us within our deepest heart. In this sense, His healing work continues to this day.

Notes

(1) American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994) pp. 445-469.

(2) American Psychiatric Association, *op cit.*, p. 453.

(3) Mark Micele, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and its Implications* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) p.20.

(4) *Ibid.* p. 21.

(5) John P. Meier, *Jesus: A Marginal Jew* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) Vol. 2 p. 661.

(6) “The case of Fraulein Elisabeth von R.” is one of the case studies Freud presents in his *Studies on Hysteria* (New York: Basic Books, 1957 ed.).

(7) Sigmund Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959 ed.) pp. 144,169.

(8) Examples are given throughout Patrick Trevor-Roper, *The World through Blunted Sight* (London: Penguin, 1988), but especially pp. 177,178 where he quotes eye doctors as commenting that there is a strange ingratitude in patients whose sight is enabled for them in later life.

(9) American Psychiatric Association *op cit.* p. 655.

(10) Erik Erikson, *Dimensions of a New Identity* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1974) p. 48.

(11) Donald Capps, *Jesus the Village Psychiatrist* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) p. 124.

(12) Mark H. Beers, *The Merck Manual of Medical Information* (New York: Pocket Books, 2003) p. 495.

(13) Roy Porter, *Madness: A Brief History* (Oxford: O.U.P., 2002) p. 12.

(14) Sigmund Freud, "A Neurosis of Demoniacal Possession in the Seventeenth Century", in his *On Creativity and the Unconscious: Papers on the Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958 ed.) pp. 264,265.

CHAPTER 5

AN EXAMINATION OF THE SPECIFIC BIBLE PASSAGES WHICH MENTION THE DEVIL AND SATAN

5-1 Preface: Misunderstood Bible Passages

We have explained at length in earlier chapters that 'Satan' and 'Devil' in the Bible are renderings of Hebrew and Greek words which basically mean 'adversary', 'false accuser', 'opponent'. They can refer to persons, good or bad, who play that role. But sometimes in the New Testament, they are used more metaphorically to refer to sin, in various forms, and to systems which oppose the Gospel. Sin must be manifested through something; one cannot have abstract diabolism, it must always be manifested in a person or system of things. It is for this reason that the Devil is personified; because sin (the Devil) cannot exist in the abstract, it can only be found within the human heart and person.

In some passages, notably in Revelation, the Devil refers to sin manifested through a political system, notably that of the Roman empire. In others, there is reference to the Jewish system which was the great 'Satan' or adversary to the early church.

Consider the following assignment: 'Give a brief Biblical history of the Devil, according to your interpretation of Bible passages'. The responses would be highly contradictory. According to 'orthodox' reasoning, the answer has to be something like this:

- a) The Devil was an angel in heaven who was thrown out into the garden of Eden. He was thrown to earth in Gen. 1.
- b) He is supposed to have come to earth and married in Gen 6.
- c) At the time of Job he is said to have had access to both heaven and earth.
- d) By the time of Is. 14 he is thrown out of heaven onto earth.
- e) In Zech. 3 he is in heaven again.

- f) He is on earth in Mt. 4.
- g) He is “cast out” at the time of Jesus’ death, according to the popular view of “the prince of this world” being “cast out” at that time.
- h) There is a prophecy of the Devil being ‘cast out’ in Rev. 12.
- i) The Devil is “chained” in Rev. 20, but he and his angels were chained in Genesis, according to the common view of Jude 6. If he was bound with ‘eternal chains’ then, how is he chained up again in Rev. 20?

All this is contradictory – moreover, Heb. 2:14 states that the Lord Jesus “destroyed” the Devil at the time of His death. And if the Devil was cast out of Heaven in Eden, how come he appears to talk with God so freely in Heaven itself afterwards? Quite simply, the orthodox story just doesn’t add up. It’s literalism’s last gasp.

5-2 The Serpent in Eden

Genesis 3:4–5: “And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”.

Popular Interpretation

It is assumed that the serpent here is an angel that had sinned, called “Satan”. Having been thrown out of heaven for his sin, he came to earth and tempted Eve to sin.

Comments

1. The passage talks about “the serpent”. The words “satan” and “devil” do not occur in the whole book of Genesis.
2. The serpent is never described as an angel.
3. Therefore it is not surprising that there is no reference in Genesis to anyone being thrown out of heaven.

4. Sin brings death (Rom. 6:23). Angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35-36), therefore angels cannot sin. The reward of the righteous is to be made equal to the angels to die no more (Lk. 20:35-36). If angels can sin, then the righteous will also be able to sin and therefore will have the possibility of dying, which means they will not really have everlasting life.

5. The characters involved in the Genesis record of the fall of man are: God, Adam, Eve and the serpent. Nobody else is mentioned. There is no evidence that anything got inside the serpent to make it do what it did. Paul says the serpent “beguiled Eve through his (own) subtilty” (2 Cor. 11:3). God told the serpent: “Because thou hast done this...” (Gen. 3:14). If “satan” used the serpent, why is he not mentioned and why was he not also punished?

6. Adam blamed Eve for his sin: “She gave me of the tree” (Gen. 3:12).

Eve blamed the serpent: “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Gen. 3:13).

The serpent did not blame the devil - he made no excuse.

7. If the idea of a talking animal is difficult to accept, remember that:-

(a) a donkey was once made to speak and reason with a man (Balaam); “The (normally) dumb ass speaking with a man’s voice forbad the madness of the prophet” (2 Pet. 2:16). and

(b) The serpent was one of the most intelligent *of all the animals* (Gen. 3:1). The curse upon it would have taken away the ability it had to speak with Adam and Eve. But it was an animal.

8. God created the serpent (Gen. 3:1); another being called “satan” did not turn into the serpent; if we believe this, we are effectively saying that one person can enter the life of someone else and control it. This is a pagan idea, not a Biblical one. Sin entered the world from man (Rom. 5:12); the serpent was therefore not a moral entity, it was speaking from its own

natural observations, and was not as such responsible to God and therefore did not commit sin. The serpent was a beast of the field which God had made (Gen 3:1). Yet out of the ground [Heb. *adamah*- earth, soil] God formed all the beasts of the field, including the serpent (Gen. 2:17). So the serpent was likewise created by God out of the ground- it wasn't a pre-existing agent of evil. Note the snake, as one of the beasts of the field, was "very good" (Gen. 1:31)- hardly how one would describe the serpent according to the orthodox reasoning. The Torah doesn't speak of purely symbolic, abstract concepts; there is always a literal reality, which may then be interpreted in a symbolic way. The serpent, therefore, begs to be understood in this context as just that- a serpent. The view has been pushed that the serpent is to be read as a symbol of our human or animal nature. This would mean that Eve's nature deceived Eve, and such a separation between a person and their nature is problematic to say the least. This view runs into huge difficulties- for how could Eve's nature be punished in a way separate to her punishment, in what way was her deceptive nature created by God like the animals, and how just was Eve's personal judgment in this case... and the questions go on, continuing to be begged the more we think about it.

Some suggest that the serpent of Genesis 3 is related to the seraphim. However, the normal Hebrew word for "serpent", which is used in Genesis 3, is totally unrelated to the word for "seraphim". The Hebrew word translated "seraphim" basically means a "fiery one" and is translated "fiery serpent" in Numbers 21:8, but this is not the word translated "serpent" in Genesis 3. The Hebrew word for brass comes from the same root word for "serpent" in Genesis 3. Brass represents sin (Jud. 16:21; 2 Sam. 3:24; 2 Kings. 25:7; 2 Chron. 33:11; 36:6), thus the serpent may be connected with the idea of sin, but not a sinful angel.

9. Note that the enmity, the conflict, is between the woman and the serpent, and their respective seed. The serpent is presented not so much as the foe of God, but the enemy of mankind. The promise that the seed of the woman would crush his head is echoed in the words to Cain in regard to sin: "Its desire is for you, but you will be able to master it" (Gen. 4:7). The snake is

to be connected symbolically with human sin, not any superhuman Satan figure.

10. Victor Hamilton, a conservative evangelical writing in the popular *New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, puts it well: "Regarding the serpent's origin, we are clearly told that he was an animal made by God. This information immediately removes any possibility that the serpent is to be viewed as some kind of supernatural, divine force. There is no room here for any dualistic ideas about the origin of good and evil" (1).

Suggested Explanations

1. In the courtroom-like session when God arraigns Adam and Eve for their sin and gives them and the serpent their judgments, the serpent gets no opportunity to defend itself. It says nothing and offers no repentance nor self-justification- because it has no moral accountability. The serpent was a "beast of the field" and therefore a-moral.

2. The following are further indications that the account of Adam and Eve and the serpent's temptation should be read literally:-

- Jesus referred to the record of Adam and Eve's creation as the basis of His teaching on marriage and divorce (Matt. 19:5-6); there is no hint that He read it figuratively.

- "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived (by the serpent), but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (1 Tim. 2:13-14) - so Paul, too, read Genesis literally. And most importantly he wrote earlier about the way the "serpent beguiled Even through his subtilty" (2 Cor. 11:3) - notice that Paul doesn't mention the "devil" beguiling Eve.

- In Digression 3 I attempt to outline the original intention and context of Genesis 3- to explain to the Israelites in the wilderness where the truth lay in all the various myths about creation and 'Satan' figures which they had encountered in the

epics and myths of Egypt and the Canaanite tribes. The record appears at pains to stress that the account of the garden of Eden is intended to be understood literally. Consider Gen. 2:11,12 about "The land of Havilah, where there *is* [now] gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stones are [right now] there". Cassuto comments about the record: "Its intention was to express a protest against the mythological notions current among the people. Do not believe- so it comes to tell us- that the Garden of Eden was a supernatural garden, and that its trees bore precious stones or gold balls instead of fruit that was good for food... yet was its fruit real fruit, fruit good for human food. Bdelium, onyx and gold come to us from one of the countries of *our world*, from the land of Havilah" (2). The literality is indeed being emphasized, and I therefore suggest that we likewise read the serpent as indeed a "beast of the field" created by God- and nothing more.

3. Because the serpent was cursed with having to crawl on its belly (Gen. 3:14), this may imply that previously it had legs; coupled with its evident powers of reasoning, it was probably the form of animal life closest to man, although it was still an animal - another of the "beasts of the field which the Lord God had made" (Gen. 3:1,14). It was cursed "above ("from among", RVmg.) every beast of the field" (Gen. 3:14), as if all the beasts were cursed but especially the serpent.

4. Maybe the serpent had eaten of the tree of knowledge which would explain his subtility. Eve "saw that the tree was...a tree to be desired to make one wise" (Gen. 3:6). How could she have seen this unless she saw the result of eating the fruit in the life of something that had already done so? It may well be that Eve had had several conversations with the serpent before the one recorded in Genesis 3. The first recorded words of the serpent to Eve are, "Yea, hath God said..." (Gen. 3:1) - the word "Yea" possibly implying that this was a continuation of a previous conversation that is not recorded.

5. I've shown elsewhere (3) that the entire Pentateuch is alluding to the various myths and legends of creation and origins, showing what the truth is. Moses was seeking to disabuse Israel of all the myths they'd heard in Egypt, to deconstruct the wrong

views they'd grown up with- and so he wrote Genesis 1-3 to show the understanding of origins which God wished His people to have. The serpent had a major significance in the surrounding cultures. It was seen as a representative of the gods, a kind of demon, a genie. But the Genesis record is at pains to show that the serpent in Eden was none of those things- it was one of the "beasts of the field". No hidden identity is suggested for the serpent in Genesis. J.H. Walton comments: "The Israelites [made no] attempt to associate it [the serpent] with a being who was the ultimate source or cause of evil. In fact, it would appear that the author of Genesis is intentionally underplaying the role or identification of the serpent...In Canaanite literature the role of chaos was played by the serpentine Leviathan / Lotan. In contrast, the Biblical narrative states that the great sea creatures were simply beasts God created (Gen. 1:21). This demythologizing polemic may also be responsible for avoiding any theory of conspiratorial uprisings for the existence of evil... there is no hint in the OT that the serpent of Genesis 2-3 was either identified as Satan or was thought to be inspired by Satan. The earliest extant reference to any association is found in Wisdom of Solomon 2:24 (first century BC)... the earliest reference to Satan as the tempter through the serpent is in *Apocalypse Of Moses* 16-19, contemporary to the NT... in the writings of the church fathers, one of the earliest to associate the serpent with Satan was Justin Martyr " (4). Even within Judaism, it is accepted that the idea that the serpent was Satan is not in the text itself, and arose only within later Rabbinic commentary: "The interpretation... according to which the serpent is none other than Satan... introduces into the text concepts that are foreign to it... the primeval serpent is just a species of animal... it is beyond doubt that the Bible refers to an ordinary, natural creature, for it is distinctly stated here: Beyond any best of the field that the Lord God had made" (5).

Why So Misunderstood?

Throughout the entire history of Jewish and Christian thought, Genesis 1-3 has been the most studied passage, the verses most used to justify theories, theologies, dogmas and behavioural demands. There's simply a huge amount of material been written about these chapters, and a colossal weight of dogma built upon

them. The result is that psychologically, most people approach these chapters with assumptions and pre-existing ideas as to what's going on there. Here more than anywhere else in the Bible, we run the danger of *eisegesis* (reading *into* the text) rather than *exegesis*, reading *out of* the text what *God* is saying, rather than projecting our own preconceived ideas onto the text and calling the process 'Biblical interpretation'. Augustine, one of mainstream Christianity's greatest influencers, based much of his teaching upon early Genesis. His whole teaching about sex, human nature, Satan, temptation, salvation, judgment etc. all had its basis in his understanding [or misunderstanding] of these chapters. Within the Christian spectrum, evolutionists and creationists, pro-life and otherwise, gay and straight... all seek justification from these chapters.

So it's not surprising that many commentators have noted that this passage is one of the most misused and misunderstood in the whole Bible. But why? I'd suggest it's because humanity [and that includes theologians and formulators of church doctrine] squirms awkwardly under the glaring beam of the simple record of human guilt. And therefore the serpent has been turned into a superhuman being that gets all the blame; and human sin has been minimized, at the expense of the plain meaning of the text. The whole structure of the Biblical narrative is concerned with the guilt and sin of the man and the woman; the snake isn't where the focus is. Von Rad, in one of the 20th century's most seminal commentaries on Genesis, understood this clearly: "In the narrator's mind, [the serpent] is scarcely an embodiment of a 'demonic' power and certainly not of Satan... the mention of the snake is almost secondary; in the 'temptation' by it the concern is with a completely unmythical process, presented in such a way because the narrator is obviously anxious to shift the problem as little as possible from man" (6). The record keeps using personal pronouns to lay the blame squarely with Adam: "*I* heard... *I* was afraid... *I* was naked; *I* hid... *I* ate... *I* ate" (Gen. 3:10-13; and compare Jonah's similar confession of sin in Jonah 4:1-3- Jonah appears to allude to Adam here). Nobody reading the Genesis record with an open mind would surely see anything else but the blame being placed on humanity; as I have repeatedly stressed, the words 'Satan', 'Lucifer' and the idea of the serpent as a fallen Angel are simply

not there in Genesis. They have to be 'read in' from presuppositions, which ultimately have their root in pagan myths. John Steinbeck, who was hardly a Biblical Christian, was fascinated by the early chapters of Genesis, and his 1952 novel *East Of Eden* is evidently his commentary upon them. And he finds no place for a 'Satan' figure. Instead, he is struck by the comment to Cain that although sin crouches at the door, "do thou rule over him". Steinbeck concluded from this that victory over sin and the effects of Adam's sin is possible; and therefore we're not bound by some superhuman Satan figure, nor by an over-controlling Divine predestination to sin and failure. There's a passage in chapter 24 of the novel that bears quoting; I find it deeply inspirational, and another example of the practical import of the correct understanding of early Genesis: "It is easy out of laziness, out of weakness, to throw oneself onto the lap of the deity, saying, "I couldn't help it; the way was set". But think of the glory of the choice! That makes a man a man. A cat has no choice; a bee must make honey. There's no godliness there... these verses are a history of mankind in any age or culture or race... this is a ladder to climb to the stars... it cuts the feet from under weakness and cowardliness and laziness... because "thou mayest" rule over sin". The practical inspiration ought to be evident; all further commentary is bathos.

The Motive And Origin Of The Sin

What were the motives of Adam and Eve for sinning, for accepting the serpent's suggestion? Considering this can help open a window onto the question of the *origin* of Adam's sin. They were attracted by the idea of "knowing good and evil". But this phrase is elsewhere used in the Bible about how an adult 'knows good and evil', but a child can't (Dt. 1:39; 2 Sam. 19:35; Is. 7:16). Adam and Eve were immature; like children, they wished to 'grow up', they resented the restraints which their immaturity required them to be under; they wanted, just as children want, to be the all-knowing adults / mature people whom they had seen the Elohim as. As children long to escape from what they see as meaningless and onerous restrictions, whilst having no idea what this would really mean in practice and how un-free it would really be- so Adam and Eve were attracted by the idea of having the knowledge of good and evil

just for the bite of the forbidden fruit. I find this a perfectly understandable explanation of the *motive* for Adam and Eve's sin. It seems a quite imaginable exercise of the freedom of choice and behaviour which God had given them. There is no hint that 'Satan made them do it', or that they were 'possessed' by some sinful spirit. They did just what we so often do- misused, wrongly exercised, their freewill and desired that which was inappropriate. Simple as that. There's no need to bring in an external Satan figure to explain what happened.

The Serpent And The Woman

In Gen. 3:15 we have the famous prophecy that the seed of the woman would have conflict with the seed of the serpent. The woman's son would mortally wound the snake by striking it on the head, whereas the serpent would temporarily wound the woman's son by 'bruising' him in the heel. New Testament allusion suggests we are to understand this as a prediction of the fight between the Lord Jesus, as the seed of Eve, and the power of sin. The Lord Jesus was temporarily wounded, dying for three days, but through this the power of death, i.e. sin, was destroyed (Heb. 2:14). In our context, it's noteworthy that the prophecy of Christ's crucifixion in Is. 53:10 underlines that it was *God* who 'bruised' Christ there. Gen. 3:15 says it was the seed of the serpent who bruised Christ. Conclusion: God worked through the seed of the serpent, God was [and is] totally in control. The serpent is therefore not a symbol of radical, free flying evil which is somehow outside of God's control, and which 'bruised' God's Son whilst God was powerless to stop His Son being bruised. Not at all. God was in control, even of the seed of the serpent. However we finally wish to interpret "the seed of the serpent", the simple fact is that God was in powerful control of it / him.

Walter Brueggemann summarizes the situation: "The Old Testament itself offers none of the material through which Satan emerges as the popular figure of tempter and devil. The propensity of Christians to reach such a role in Genesis 3 is to project backward into the text from later texts" (7).

Adam as Everyman

Adam's sin is indeed everyman's. The account of Adam and Eve's sin is in essence the account of every sin and fall into temptation, and is alluded to on nearly every page of the Bible. God had told Adam to eat *in abundance* from *all* the trees of the garden (Gen. 2:16,17). Eve tells the serpent that they can simply "eat" (she doesn't mention 'in abundance') from "the trees of the garden" (she doesn't mention 'from *all* of them'; Gen. 3:2,3). If Adam and Eve had enjoyed God's blessings as He intended, there would not have been such a pull into the temptation. Appreciating the blessings God has given us, with regular prayers of thankfulness throughout the day (meal times are a great opportunity to remember to do this) will likewise lead us away from temptation; minimizing His blessings propels us towards it. Each time we fail in this, we are repeating Eve's sin. Likewise we can discern a positive focus by Eve upon the object of temptation; God had told Adam and Eve to eat in abundance "from all trees of the garden" but not to eat "from the tree of knowledge". Eve repeats this to the serpent by inserting the word 'fruit': "From the *fruit* of the trees of the garden we may eat, but from *the fruit* of the tree that is in the middle of the garden...". Focusing on the forbidden fruit in such detail is a sure way to ultimately succumb to the temptation. Or again, the command to not eat of the tree was twisted by Eve into saying that God had commanded that they were to not even *touch* it. She put a fence around the law [or Adam did, in explaining it to her]- and it had the opposite effect. Paul alludes to this by saying that Jewish regulations such as "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch... are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh" (Col. 2:21-23). In all these things we find Adam to be everyman, to be me, to be you, to be us.

There are many allusions to Adam in the book of Job- Zophar in chapters 11 and 20 accuses Job of being as Adam, and Job denies this by way of allusion and specifically at Job 31:33. But then the whirlwind comes, and God speaks out of it to convict Job that he is indeed as Adam. The translation of *ruach hayom* in Gen. 3:8-11 as God walking "in the wind of the day" totally misses the point- the

idea is of a theophany of *ruach*, Spirit wind, and Adam trying to hide and shelter among the trees from the blast of the wind. And out of that wind, God speaks and convicts him of his sin. This is what happened to Job as the wind approaches throughout Elihu's speeches, and then he is called to account and recognition that he is as Adam. The description of Behemoth in Job 40:15 is relevant, for this is the term used for the "cattle" above which the serpent was cursed (Gen. 3:14).

Verse by Verse Notes on Genesis 3

3:1 *More subtle*- The great temptation for Israel in their *eretz* was Canaanite idolatry. Baal was seen as a god of wisdom; perhaps the serpent spoke of all such idolatry, tempting Israel to 'play God', to assume His wisdom, which is the essence of every temptation. As there was a snake who was there in the 'land' of Eden, so there was the equivalent amongst Israel- the false teachers, the tribes who remained, etc., the "serpents of the dust" who would be the cause of Israel's destruction (Dt. 32:24- an evident allusion to the language of the snake in Eden).

Than any animal of the field which Yahweh God had made- This suggests the serpent was indeed an animal, created by God. The serpent was cursed more than the other beasts of the field (:14); the most superior animal was brought down beneath the others, by having to crawl on its belly. Those who argue for a non-literal serpent would presumably have to read this as meaning: 'The serpent was more subtle than any of the animals God had made [although it was not an animal]'. I suggest the more comfortable reading of the text is: 'The serpent was one of the animals but was the most subtle of them all'. The question of interpretation is hard to resolve by appeal to the original Hebrew alone. The preceding chapters 1 and 2 have stated that all things and all categories of things exist because they were created by God. So the serpent was a created being- in which category was it to be placed, if not as an "animal of the field"? If we are intended to see the serpent as not created by God, then surely

that would be stated. The whole context is about creation or bringing into being by God. The implication is surely that the serpent was one of the animals God had made. We can break down the text like this: The serpent [A] was more [B] than [C]. The question is whether [A] is part of [C], i.e. was the serpent [A] one of the 'animals of the field' [C]. The same kind of Hebrew construction is found elsewhere. In each case, the idea would be that [A] is part of and included within the category of [C]. Thus Israel [A] were not more in number [B] than any other nation [C] (Dt. 7:7). But Israel were a nation, included within the [C] category. "I [A] am more foolish [B] than any man [C]" (Prov. 30:2). The writer was a man, he was a member of the category [C]. Likewise Is. 52:14 "His [Messiah's] [A] face was more marred [B] than any man [C]". Messiah was a man, He was part of the category of [C], but He had the most marred face. Ez. 15:2 might be the clearest: "What is the vine tree [A] more than [B] any tree [C]?". The vine tree is a tree, a member of the category [C]. And so the serpent [A] was more subtle [B] than any animal of the field [C]. The serpent was part of that category, it was an animal of the field made by God.

Sin entered the world by Adam, not by the serpent (Rom. 5:12). But see on :14 *eat dust*. I have suggested that the 'creation' account in Genesis 1 is a dramatic presentation explaining how *eretz* Israel was prepared for habitation. I then developed the similarities between that *eretz* and Eden. But Eden was a literal place; and Adam and Eve are understood in later Scripture as literal beings. And so I see no hint within the genre of Genesis 3 which suggests that the serpent is to be read purely symbolically. If Gen. 1:2-2:4 is poetic or dramatic, then there must come some point at which the genre changes- for the rest of Genesis is not in that genre. I suggest that cut off point is at 2:4. The natural must come before the spiritual and allegorical interpretation of it. Just as Adam represented Israel, and his exile Eastward from the *eretz* looked ahead to Judah's exile to Babylon, so the creature known as the serpent represented that within the *eretz* which caused God's people to sin and be

expelled from it. Just as Eden, Adam and Eve were literal, so was the "serpent". But as they each represented things, so the serpent did too. The besetting temptation of Israel was the cult of idols, Baal in particular, and this was represented by the creature known as "the serpent". Just as the serpent "deceived" Eve (:13), so the same word is used of how false teachers deceived Israel into idol worship (Jer. 29:8). The Hebrew for "serpent" has a wide range of associations, most of them connected with false worship. Just as Adam and Eve should have not meddled with the serpent and instead brought it under their dominion, likewise Israel were warned not to meddle with those who 'serpent' (AV "use enchantment", the verb form of the noun for "serpent"; Lev. 19:26; Dt. 18:10). The literal animal known as the serpent, which differed, I suggest, from snakes of today, represented various things- not least, the temptations which led to Israel, God's specially created people, being exiled from the *eretz*. It represents other things too. But this is not to say that "the serpent" is merely symbolic. To say this runs the risk of a serious [and common] error in reasoning, whereby something abstract is made symbolic of something else. 'Love', e.g., an abstract concept, cannot be symbolic of e.g. grace. So a symbolic entity, e.g. "the serpent", could not be itself symbolic of something else, e.g. sin or temptation. Literal things can represent abstract things or point forward to other things- the blood of the Mosaic sacrifices symbolized the atoning work of the Lord; the High Priest symbolized the Lord; the manna symbolized the word of God; the waters of the exodus symbolized the water of baptism, etc. But the symbolism functions because a literal thing or entity is used to represent something more abstract. If Adam, Eve and Eden were literal, and the creation or placement of animals and plants in Eden was literal, then it would seem gapingly inappropriate for a symbolic non literal "serpent" to appear in the record.

Many of the creation myths feature some kind of serpent, but always as some entity far more than a literal animal. The myths tend to present the

serpent as a dragon figure, similar in appearance to the Biblical cherubim. Some cherubim-like figures uncovered in Egypt are in fact winged cobras (1). But the Genesis record clearly differentiates between the serpent and the cherubim. "Serpents figure in various Ancient Near Eastern myths in a demonic way" (2). The Sumerian god Ningishzida [meaning 'Lord of the tree'] was portrayed as a serpent (3). But the Genesis record is insistent that the truth is different, and that for the Bible believer, the serpent was an animal, not a god, not a cosmic dragon nor a demon, but a literal "beast of the field" created by the one God just as all the other animals were created.

(1) Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon, Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1992) p. 60.

(2) J. R. Porter, *The Illustrated Guide to the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 29.

(3) John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews & Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary To The Old Testament* (Downers Gove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000) p. 32.

3:7 *They knew that they were naked*- Adam and Eve were "made naked" in the sense that they now realized their nakedness. The idea is alluded to in Ex. 32:25 and Mic. 1:11, where we read that Israel were "made naked to their shame" by their idolatry. Again we see Adam's sin as being presented as Israel's sin; the punishment of being cast out of the *eretz* precisely matches that of Israel, who were cast out from the same geographical area.

3:14 *Eat dust*- It's tempting to think that there must be a connection between the serpent and snakes we see today. But snakes do not eat dust; and in any case, there are many varieties of snake. Yet Genesis 3 speaks of a specific creature. My suggestion therefore is that the serpent was a literal animal, on legs, which could speak, or was given the power of speech. Its punishment was to crawl on its belly and eat dust. It's hard to describe snakes as 'crawling'; and they don't eat dust. The serpent was part of the environment required to bring about the testing of Adam and Eve. But its punishment was to crawl and eat dust- and then, this creature died. That is why we continue to read of the man and woman in the record, but nothing more is said about the creature known as the serpent. It died and was never any more, foretelling how the final conflict with the serpent's "seed" or spiritual descendant would likewise end in total and permanent destruction. In the description of Eden restored in Isaiah 65, we encounter the cryptic comment: "And dust shall be the serpent's food" (Is. 65:25), as if to say that although Eden will be restored, the judgment upon the serpent was permanent, and there will be no serpent in the restored Eden. It did not reproduce, in contrast to the curse on the woman, which allowed for reproduction. The comment that he was to eat dust "all the days of your life" could suggest that this creature would eat dust and then die- and never reproduce. The "seed" of the serpent refers to those having the characteristics of the historical serpent.

3:15 *Enmity*- I have argued that whilst the serpent in Eden was a literal serpent, it represents the conflict within the *eretz* between God's people and sin /

temptation / idol worship etc. Ez. 25:15 and 35:5 use the same word to speak of "the old enmity" between Israel and the other inhabitants of the land. This old enmity continues to this day. The 'oldness' of it refers surely to the enmity in Eden, between the serpent and the children of God.

Her offspring- Most usages of *zera*, "offspring" or "seed", when referring to a singular individual, refer to an immediate offspring rather than to some far off descendant. Perhaps the promise of salvation could have potentially been fulfilled in a son of Eve, but this didn't happen, the required conditions weren't met [whatever they were], and so the fulfilment of the promise was deferred until the Lord Jesus. This kind of promise and then deferment and reapplication of fulfilment is common in the Bible's prophecies.

There's something of a wager here. Either the man kills the snake by hitting it on the head, or the snake will bite the man's heel. He has to kill it outright, first time. See article "David and Goliath" in 1 Sam. 17.

3:24 *Cherubs at the east of the garden of Eden*- Just as Adam and Eve were exiled to the East, so Judah fled East of Jerusalem (Jer. 52:12-16) and then further East, to Babylon. Babylon [which is Babel] was built by men travelling East from Eden (Gen. 11:2). Again we see an identity between Eden and the land of Israel.

The visions of the cherubim and living creatures all seem to have Angelic associations. One of the clearest is that the cherubim were to keep "the way" to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24), whereas the keeping of the way is later said to be in the control of Angels- e. g. in Gen. 18:19 the Angels decide Abraham will keep "the way of the Lord", implying they were the ones

guarding it; and in Ex. 32:8 the Angel talking with Moses on Sinai comments "They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them" (see too Dt. 9:10,12).

Notes

(1) Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) p. 188.

(2) Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical And Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975) Vol. 2 p. 107.

(3) See Digression 3 The Intention And Context Of Genesis 1-3.

(4) J.H. Walton, 'Serpent', in T.D. Alexander and D.W. Baker, eds, *Dictionary Of The Old Testament And Pentateuch* (Leicester: I.V.P., 2003) pp. 737/8.

(5) Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary On The Book Of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998 ed.) Vol. 1, pp. 139,140.

(6) Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (London: S.C.M., 1966) p. 85.

(7) Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 188.

5-3 Sons of God and Daughters of Men

Genesis 6:2-4: "...the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. There were

giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown”.

Popular Interpretation

It is thought that “the sons of God” are angels who, on being thrown out of heaven for their sin, came down to earth and married attractive women, resulting in them having very large children.

Comments

1. There is no mention at all of “the sons of God” coming down from heaven.
2. Why assume these “sons of God” are angels? The phrase is used concerning men, especially those who know the true God (Dt. 14:1 (R.S.V.); Hos. 1:10; Lk. 3:38; Jn. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:1).
3. If believers are to be made equal to angels (Lk. 20:35,36), will they still experience the same carnal desires which then motivated the sons of God, or have the possibility of giving way to them? Of course not!
4. Luke 20:35,36, clearly says that the angels do not marry: “They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the

resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage... for they are equal unto the angels”.

5. It is commonly believed that the angels who are thought to have sinned came down to earth at the time of the garden of Eden incidents, but Genesis 6 concerns the time of the flood, which was many years later.

6. The Hebrew word for “giants” in Genesis 6:4, is also used to describe the sons of a man called Anak in Numbers 13:33. Freak human beings of unusual size or strength are sometimes born today, but it does not mean that their parents were angels.

7. We are not specifically told that the giants were the children of the “sons of God”. “There were giants... and also *after that*... the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men” (:4).

8. If Angels married women, then who were the children, and what were they like? The apocryphal book of 1 Enoch claims that the offspring were “evil spirits” and witches (1 Enoch 15:8–16:1) – but the Bible is utterly silent about this.

Suggested Explanations

1. We have shown that the “sons of God” may refer to those with the true understanding of God. The “sons of God” of every generation have kept themselves separate from the people of the world, and are warned by God not to marry such people because they will influence them away from following the true God (Ex. 34:12,15,16; Josh. 23:12–13; Ezra 9:12; 1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14–16). Genesis 3:15 describes how the seed (descendants) of the serpent would be in constant conflict with the seed of the woman (cp. Gal. 4:29). The early chapters of Genesis highlight the fact that there were these two sorts of people; the descendants of Seth called themselves “by the name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:26 A.V margin) and comprised the righteous “sons of God”, the seed of the woman. By contrast, the descendants of Cain, are described as being associated with murder and instituting polygamy (Gen. 4:23,19), the art of weapon production (Gen. 4:22) and entertainment (Gen. 4:21). The names of these people imply that at this time they started an alternative, apostate, system of worship to replace the true worship of God, which angered God; e.g. Cain named a city after Enoch, whose name means “dedicated”; Irad means “eternal city”; Mehujael means “God combats”; Lamech means “Overthrower” (of the truth ?). The sons of God marrying the

daughters of men would therefore describe the inter-marriage of these two lines, so that only Noah and his family were the “seed of the woman” at the time of the flood.

2. Careful reflection on Genesis 6 indicates that the “sons of God” must have been men:

– They “took them wives of all that they chose”. This process of choosing an appealing woman for marriage is so obviously something experienced by men. Notice how the “sons of God” probably took more than one wife each – “wives of all that they chose”. This was a characteristic of the seed of the serpent (Gen. 4:19), showing us that the two lines had merged; because of the sons of God marrying the daughters of men, God said that in 120 years’ time, He would destroy man (Gen. 6:3) in the flood. Why should God punish and destroy man if the angels had sinned? Seeing that angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36), there would have been no point in destroying the earth with a flood to try and destroy them. Things fall into place far better if the “sons of God” were men: therefore God said, “The end of all flesh(mankind) is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with (from) the earth” (Gen. 6:13). The violence on the earth which vv. 3–5 associate with the apostasy of the “sons of God” arose through man – man, not angels or the Devil, had filled the earth with violence: another reason God brought the flood was because the earth had become corrupt. Why did this happen? It was corrupt, “for (because) all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth” (Gen. 6:11,12). Man had corrupted the true way of God – due to the sons of God, who understood “the way”, mixing with the people of the flesh. “The way” is a phrase used to describe the true understanding of God (e.g. Gen. 3:24; 18:19; Ps. 27:11; 119:32,33; Acts 16:17; 9:2; 18:25; 19:9,23; 2 Pet. 2:2). This corruption of “the way” by the “sons of God” in Genesis 6 is commented on in Jude 11, where the apostate Christians of the first century are likened to those men who went “in the way of Cain” – not of the truth. Cain was the father of the seed of the serpent line

– The actions of the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:2, are described in v. 5 as “the wickedness of man”, which “was great in the earth... every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”

– Jesus said that the world in the last days would be similar to what it was at the time of Noah. He implied that in the same way as men had the wrong attitude to marriage in Noah’s time, so men also would in the last days before His return (Lk. 17:26,27). The only reference to

attitudes to marriage at Noah's time is in Genesis 6:2, thus again implying that the "sons of God" who married wrongfully were men.

3. "There were giants in the earth in those days". The Hebrew syntax here would suggest that this is a notice that at this time, there were giants in the earth. The giants aren't described as being the offspring of the relationship between the sons of God and daughters of men. The word "giants" has two possible meanings: "fallen ones" (which would be relevant to their being the "sons of God" who had spiritually fallen away) and "assailants, hackers, tyrants" – the definition provided by Martin Luther and H.C. Leupold⁽¹⁾. This is the root of the Hebrew word for "giant", and is used in 2 Kings 3:19,25, to describe a vicious attack on the Moabites by Israel. Thus we get the impression that there were men, perhaps of great physical size and strength, who went around viciously attacking people. They became famous (or infamous) – "men of renown". Job (22:15–17) comments upon them: "Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflowed with a flood: which said unto God, Depart from us". Notice that this refers to men, not angels. In passing, it would seem these men may have their latter day counterpart in the gang warfare and its associated mentality of our modern world. We have shown in Digression 4 that the intention of Moses in Genesis was to explain Israel's surrounding world to them, and deconstruct the false ideas they encountered in surrounding myth. The people were frightened by the "giants" they met in the land of Canaan (Num. 13:33). These *nephilim* [LXX *gigantes*] had their origin explained by Moses in Genesis 6 – the righteous seed intermarried with the wicked, and their offspring were these *nephilim*, mighty men of the world. Note in passing how Ez. 32:27 LXX uses this same word *gigantes* to describe pagan warriors who died – no hint that they were superhuman or Angels.

4. The idea of cosmic beings coming to earth and having sexual relations with human women is a classic piece of pagan myth; and the Jews came to adopt these into their interpretations of the Genesis 6 passage, e.g. In the Book of Enoch. Josephus brings out the similarities: "The angels of God united with women... The actions attributed to them by our tradition [note that – "our tradition", not Scripture itself!] resemble the bold exploits which the Greeks recount about the Giants"⁽²⁾. Clearly, Jewish thinking sought to accommodate the pagan myths.

5. The Israelites were aware of the existence of unusually large people – the Zamzumin, Zumin, Rephaim, Nephilim, Emim, and

Anakim (Dt. 1:28, 2:10,11, 20,21, 3:11). The bed of Og, King of Bashan, a Rephaim, was nine cubits long, over four meters (14 feet) – Dt. 3:11. In Canaanite mythology these giants came from intermarriage between human beings and the gods; but Moses in Genesis 6 is surely addressing this myth and correcting it. He's saying (by implication) that this didn't happen, but rather the Godly seed and the wicked intermarried; and yes, at that time, there were giants in the earth, but they were judged and destroyed by the flood, and the implication surely was that the Israel who first heard Moses' inspired history could take comfort that the giants they faced in Canaan would likewise be overcome by God.

6. We have elsewhere commented on how apostate Jewish theology sought to minimize human sin and blame it on a Satan figure. It's significant that when the inspired New Testament writers refer to the flood, there is no suggestion by them that they accepted the idea that sinful Angels somehow led humanity into sin. Instead, they repeatedly underscore the fact that it was human sin which led God to punish humanity. The uninspired Book of Jubilees, written about 150 BC, claims that Noah complained to God about "the unclean demons" leading his grandchildren into sin and asked God to judge these demons, thus resulting in the flood (Jubilees 10:1–7). That is mere fantasy – and quite the opposite of what the Genesis record states – where clearly it is human wickedness which leads God to judge humans. What I find so highly significant is that the Lord Jesus and His apostles stress that it was indeed human sin which led to Divine judgment through the flood. Effectively, they're thus deconstructing these false ideas which were circulating and upholding the Biblical emphasis against the sophistry of the false theology about Satan / demons which was circulating. It's a tragedy that the same false understandings still circulate, and so many still refuse to face up to the clear teaching of Scripture – that human beings sin and must take responsibility and bear judgment for that sin.

7. I commented at some length in Digression 4 how this passage is actively deconstructing false Canaanite myths about sinful gods, giants, demons etc. it could be argued that this passage, along with much of early Genesis, is actually deconstructing the wrong ideas about Angels, demons, Satan etc. which Israel had encountered in Egypt and amongst the Canaanite tribes. It is teaching that the giants which Israel had noticed were in fact only human, and no more. They were "mighty *men*", "*men* of renown". Later Scripture does likewise – the *Rephaim* had children like other human beings (2 Sam. 21:16,18; Dt. 3:11), inhabiting an area known as the valley of Rephaim (Josh. 15:8). Cassuto comments: "The intention of the section is actually to

contradict certain folk-tales, and to erase, as far as possible, their mythological features”⁽³⁾. Elsewhere, Cassuto draws attention to the significance of God’s comment upon the sin of the ‘sons of God’ in Gen. 6:3: “My spirit shall not abide in [or, strive with] *man* forever”. God comments upon the *human* condition, not upon anything out in the cosmos. He comments: “[this] implies: Do not believe the heathen tales about human beings of divine origin, who were rendered immortal; this is untrue, for in the end every man must die, “in as much as he, too, is flesh”... The Torah’s intention is to counteract the pagan legends and to reduce to a minimum the content of the ancient traditions concerning the giants”⁽⁴⁾. The record of the flood which follows that of the mention of the ‘giants’ can be read as a further deconstruction of the myths about them. The Biblical record states that God opened the “windows of Heaven” (Gen. 7:11). The identical term in Ugaritic occurs in Tablet 2 AB, col. 7 line 17 of the Ras Shamra tablets. Cassuto explains that “The Canaanites used to tell of the god Baal that at one stage he built for himself a palace in the sky and opened therein windows... The Canaanites attributed to Baal the sending down of rain from heaven”, but that the giants / offspring of the wicked gods “set down their feet and closed up the deep, and they placed their hands on the windows”⁽⁵⁾. The Genesis record stresses that the giants were mere men; and that it was God and not the giants who opened and closed the windows of Heaven and sent the rain of the flood. This would fit in with wider evidence that the flood record, like that of the sons of God and daughters of men, is also purposefully deconstructing pagan myths about the flood. Just one example: Gen. 8:2 states clearly that it was God who caused the flood rains to cease and the waters to subside – whereas the pagan myths claim that it was the sun god who appeared and caused the waters to evaporate. The Biblical record says nothing about the waters disappearing by solar evaporation, but claims they subsided as a result of the work of Israel’s God.

Notes

(1) H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis, Vol. 1* (Ann Arbor, MI: Wartburg Press, 1942), p. 250.

(2) *Antiquities of the Jews* 1.3.1.

(3) Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975) Vol. 2 p. 108.

(4) Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998 ed.) Vol. 1 p. 300.

(5) References in Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992 ed.) Vol. 2 pp. 86,87.

5-4 Job's Satan

Job 1:6: "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them".

Popular Interpretation

Satan in Job is an angel who came among the angels in heaven and criticized Job, whom he had been watching whilst walking around in the earth seeing what trouble he could make. He then brings lots of problems upon Job to try and turn him away from God.

Comments

1. "Satan" is only mentioned in the first two chapters of Job and nowhere in the book is he explicitly defined as an angel.
2. We have seen in our comments on Genesis 6:2, that the phrase "sons of God" can refer to those who have the true understanding of God (Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 6:17-18; 1 Jn. 3:7). Angels do not bring false accusations against believers "before the Lord" (2 Pet. 2:11)
3. It cannot be conclusively proved that Satan was a son of God - he "came among them".
4. Satan is described as "going to and fro in the earth". There is no implication that he was doing anything sinful. Zechariah 1:11 implies that this is a Hebraism for observing.
5. How can Satan be in heaven and also on the earth in Job's time when, according to popular belief, he was thrown out at the time of Adam, or in 1914, according to the "Watchtower"?

6. Remember that there cannot be sin or rebellion against God in heaven (Ps.5:4-5; Hab. 1:13; Matt. 6:10; Ps. 103:19-21).

7. The major theme of the book of Job is that *God* brought the problems into Job's life and that eventually they made him a more righteous person (Job 2:10; 16:11; 19:21; 23:16; 42:11). Notice that Job did not believe that only good things came from God; he nowhere complains about Satan bringing the problems. Job realized that his sufferings had made him come to know God in practice rather than just in theory - "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee" (42:5). Seeing that problems make us more righteous people if we respond correctly to them (Heb. 12:5-11), why would a sinful, wicked being, who wants to turn us away from God, bring these things into our lives, when actually they only make us more righteous and closer to God?

8. The fact that Satan and the sons of God were in "the presence of the Lord" and presented themselves "before the Lord" (2:7; 1:6) does not necessarily mean that they were in heaven. The representatives of God carry the name of God, e.g. the angel which led Israel through the wilderness was called "the Lord" because it carried God's name (Ex. 23:20-21), but it was not God himself in person (Ex. 33:20 cp. v. 12). Similarly, priests represent God (2 Chron. 19:6) and to come before them was to come "before the Lord" (Deut. 19:17). Cain "went out from the presence of the Lord" (Gen. 4:16) - not out of heaven but probably away from the presence of the angel - cherubim. Jesus was presented as a baby "before the Lord" (Lk. 2:22)- i.e. before the priest.

9. Notice that Satan had to get power from God (Job 2:3-6); he had none in his own right, indeed, God brought Job to Satan's notice (1:8). Job comments about God being the source of his sufferings: "If it be not he, who then is it?" (Job 9:24 RV). Job didn't believe anyone apart from God was responsible.

10. There is no indication that anything Satan did was sinful. Satan never actually says or does anything wrong; he simply makes the observation that there may well be a relationship between Job's service of God and the material blessing which

God has given him. He is then empowered by God to bring calamities into Job's life. Time and again it is stressed, really stressed, that God brought the problems upon Job, not Satan independently (1:12,16; 2:3,10; 6:4; 8:4; 19:21; 42:18).

11. Even if the "Satan" (adversary) to Job was an angel, there is no reason to think it was sinful. An angel asked Abraham to offer Isaac to find out exactly how obedient Abraham would be, hence he said, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me" (Gen. 22:12). Similarly the angel which guided Israel out of Egypt, "led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no" (Deut. 8:2). God himself knows all things, but the angels bring problems into the lives of their charges in order to see how they will respond. It may be possible to understand Job's Satan like this. Remember that an evidently righteous angel was called a "Satan" in Numbers 22:22.

12. Much has been made of the fact that in Job 1 and in Zech. 3:1,2 we read of *ha satan*, the adversary. In Hebrew as in English, the definite article is significant. If I refer to myself as a personal, specific individual / being, I say "Duncan". To speak of "the Duncan" would be a description of a function, more than a reference to my personal name. Sitting at a restaurant table, you might call out: "Waiter!", intending a specific individual. You'd only speak of "the waiter" when describing his function—e.g. "The waiter served me badly". Hebrew and English operate in the same way here. So when we read in Job 1 and Zechariah 3 of *the satan*, *ha satan*, we're not reading of 'A specific person whose personal proper name is 'Satan'. Rather we're reading of a person who *functioned as* a Satan or adversary. Dianne Bergant makes the point: "The word 'satan' appears with an article indicating that here the word is a title or description and not a proper name" (1). In other words, 'the satan' isn't the personal name of a personal being called Satan. It's a description of the function of a character, as an adversary. Note that the man Haman is called *ho diabolos* in Esther 7:4 LXX.

13. We read and receive the style of the book of Job in a way far different to how its original readership would've done.

Continuing the point made in [12] above, the Russian literary analyst Vladimir Propp has shown that all stories, folklore etc. of that time contained characters with a set function- there was the hero, the companion, the friends / bystanders, and *the adversary* (2). Whilst I accept that Job was a historical character, the way the book is written in such structured Hebrew poetry shows for sure that the events were 'written up' in story / ballad form. And so when the initial readership encountered "the adversary", *ha satan*, they wouldn't have thought of him as a cosmic being of evil. The presence of someone functioning as "the adversary" would've been quite normal to them.

14. If we follow through the argument of the book, the logical answer of Job to the friends' allegations would have been "I'm suffering because Satan has it in for me! He's doing this, not God!". For the friends were reasoning that God was bringing such affliction into Job's life because Job was a sinner. The fact Job doesn't make this obvious retort indicates to me that "the Satan" wasn't understood by either Job nor the friends as a personal supernatural being of evil.

15. We have demonstrated in chapter 1 how Jewish thinking came to be influenced by Babylonian ideas of a dualistic cosmos, split between God and some 'Satan' figure. The book of Job is a corrective to this, in that it teaches that evil comes from God, and any Satan figure is under His total control. Yet a mere skim reading of the prologue to Job has led some to the very opposite conclusion. Significantly, the apostate Jewish writing *The Testament Of Job* completely twists the intent of the Biblical record, and adds into it the common misconceptions concerning Satan- e.g. it claims of Job's wife: "Satan followed her along the road, walking stealthily, and leading her hear astray... [Job warns her] 'Do you not see Satan standing behind you and unsettling your reasoning?'" (23:11; 26:6). These classical images of 'Satan' have to be *added in* to the Biblical record- because they are simply not there in the Biblical text.

Suggested Explanations

1. We have seen that coming “before the Lord” may describe coming before a representative of God, such as a priest or an angel. The “sons of God” - the believers at that time - presented themselves before a priest or angel, perhaps at a religious feast. Someone there, maybe one of the worshippers, reflected that it was not surprising that Job was such a strong believer, seeing that God had so richly blessed him. God gave that person the power to afflict Job, to demonstrate that Job’s love of God was not proportionate to the blessings God had given him.
2. Maybe the Satan was composed of Job’s three “friends” - they are rebuked at the end of the book (notice that “satan” is not rebuked by name). Their discussions with Job indicate that they had their doubts as to his integrity and suspected that his faith was now weak because God had taken away the blessings from him - “But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest: it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled...who ever perished (which it looked as though Job was going to), being innocent?” Eliphaz pointed out (Job 4:5 & 7).
3. It has been suggested that the prologue to Job is in fact a literary device to place theological problems before us, e.g. of the relationship between service of God and receipt of blessing, and sin and suffering. But we must remember that later Scripture takes the experiences of Job as literal, and Job himself as a real historical person. However, it is not impossible that the account of the conversation between God and the satan was not a literal occurrence, but simply a way of setting up the problems which the historical narrative then addresses. It's worth meditating on this one. The three different messengers come and tell Job of the various disasters and conclude with the same rubric "and I alone have escaped to tell you". This is surely a theatrical presentation rather than a literal transcription of actual speech which historically occurred; my friend Steve Cook has suggested, quoting Jewish sources, that Job may well be the very earliest extant theatrical drama script of ancient literature. Job being drama would explain why the book is written as poetry. This approach also assists us in understanding how Job was told by a messenger that his sons had all died, and then at the end of the

book he appears to be given his sons back again. If the messenger wasn't telling the truth, but was just part of the plot, the mechanism to present the theological problem, then this is understandable. The use of "the satan" would therefore not be referring to any cosmic being, but rather to a *role*. It has been observed: "In biblical sources the Hebrew term the *satan* describes an adversarial role. It is not the name of a particular character" (3). And again: "[*ha-satan*] is not the personal name Satan but a role specification meaning "the accuser/adversary/doubter"" (4). And I'm grateful to Steve Cook again for pointing out that the 'satan' is in fact being presented as more adversarial to *God* rather than to Job personally. The 'satan' or adversary was not therefore necessarily sinful: "As he first appears in the Hebrew Bible, Satan is not necessarily evil, much less opposed to God. On the contrary, he appears in the book of Numbers and in Job as one of God's obedient servants" (5). He is "subject to God's control and was used by God to accomplish his purposes... [there is] a pronounced emphasis on his subordination" to God (6).

4. The friends insist that "the destroyer" [by which they surely meant an early equivalent to 'the devil' of popular belief today] had touched Job- whereas Job insists that it is *God* who had destroyed him (Job 15:21 cp. 19:10; 13:21). In some ways the book of Job is a deconstruction of the popular Persian and Canaanite myths about a 'satan' figure. Job, both in the story of his sufferings and his specific words, seeks to demonstrate that the essential issues in life is being "just with God", and not whether or not we are touched by the hand of an evil being; for the hand of God which touched Job (Job 19:21) is the hand of 'satan' into whom God delivered Job temporarily (Job 1:12). Job says that the attitude of the friends is wrong- they should be looking into themselves, rather than fantasizing about the action of some unseen evil being they imagined: "Ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in *me*?... know that there is a [personal] judgment"(Job 19:28,29).

5. It can be argued that the book of Job is a dialogue concerning evil and suffering, with three popular views being represented by the three friends. These views are examined and corrected by the personal history of Job, as well as by the epilogue and

prologue to the book. Eliphaz seems to be representative of the idea that Job is being hit by supernaturally controlled evil—Eliphaz speaks of a force of darkness (Job 22:10,11) and sinful or faulty Angels living in an unclean Heaven (Job 4:18; 15:15). Yet the *answer* to all this is that the Satan figure is under God's control, all Job's misfortunes come from *God* and His Angels—one of whom may have been called 'the adversary' ('Satan')—are in fact perfectly obedient to Him and not disobedient. And finally, Eliphaz and the friends are rebuked for their various wrong understandings, with God declaring Himself supreme and ultimate sovereign. Likewise Bildad's view of Angels in Job 25:5 "The stars are not pure in God's eyes" is corrected by God in Job 38:7, when He says that "the morning stars sang together and all the Sons of God shouted for joy".

In conclusion, it's worth considering the conclusion of a respected theologian: "It is worth pausing to consider the Old Testament view of "Satan." Contrary to popular thinking, for the ancient Israelites this figure was not the personification of evil, the archnemesis of God—this view developed in later Judaism and Christianity. Rather, "satan" in the Old Testament describes a character (human or divine) who functions as an adversary or opponent, or even a prosecutor in legal contexts (cf. 1 Sam. 29:4 [David]; 2 Sam. 19:22 [Abishai]; 1 Kings 5:4; Ps. 109:4). Even in the book of Job, the "satan" is not evil but is associated with the group of divine beings called the "sons of God" whose duty it is to serve the Lord (Job 1:6; 2:1; see NIV notes). The "satan" in Job is a sort of divine prosecutor whose task is to ferret out hypocrisy" (7).

Notes

(1) Dianne Bergant, *Job, Ecclesiastes* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982) p. 27.

(2) Vladimir Propp, *Theory And History Of Folklore*, ed. Anatoly Liberman (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1984); *Morphology Of The Folktale* (Austin: University Of Texas Press, 1968).

(3) Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1996) p. 39.

(4) N.C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (London: S.C.M., 1985) p.89.

(5) Pagels, *op cit.* p. 39.

(6) S.H.T. Page, "Satan: God's Servant" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*; Sept. 2007 Vol. 50 No. 3 p. 449.

(7) Hans Walter Wolff, "1-2 Samuel," in Andrew E. Burge, Gary M. Hill, eds, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), pp. 311,312.

5-4-1 The Satan in Job: a Fellow Worshipper?

Such a strong case can be made for the Satan being a fellow worshipper that there simply must be some truth in it. "There was a day [a set feast] when the sons of God [the believers – 1 Jn. 3:1; Mt. 5:9] came to present themselves before Yahweh [before a priest, or other representative of Yahweh, probably at an altar, Dt. 19:17; Ps. 42:2], and Satan came also among them". Here we have a picture of an early ecclesia; scattered believers coming together for a special meeting, the forerunner of our breaking of bread service. As we walk, drive, ride on train or bus, to our memorial meetings, we are repeating what in principle has been done by the sons of God from earliest times. The Satan says he has been "going to and from in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (1:7). There is good reason, linguistically and theologically, to think that the events of Job occurred early in spiritual history (compare the mentions of "Jobab" and some of the friends in 1 Chron. 5). There are also many links with the early chapters of Genesis. We should therefore see Satan's description of himself as being in the context of Gen. 4:12–14, where Cain is made a wanderer in the earth because of his bitter jealousy against his righteous brother. So the Satan may have been another believer who was in some sense 'out of fellowship', and yet still came to the gatherings of the believers to express his envy of Job. The reference to the sons of God coming together in worship before a priest or altar comes straight after the record of Job's children holding rather riotous birthday parties (1:4). "All the days", each day, they did this, Job offered sacrifice for them (1:5 AV mg.); but then "there was a day" when the sons of God came to keep a feast to Yahweh. It seems that

we are led to connect the keeping of days. It could be that the sons of God were in fact Job's children. They came together to party and kill their fatted calves, and then they came together to kill their sacrifices; but the difference was, that then they allowed the Satan to come in among them.

It must be noted that the Satan never occurs again, under that name. The real adversary of Job was his “friends”; and in God’s final judgment, it is they who are condemned, not ‘Satan’. It is therefore reasonable to see a connection between the Satan and the ‘friends’ of Job; they too walked to and fro in the earth in order to come to him, as it seems Satan did at the beginning. And we pause here for another lesson. The great Satan / adversary of Job turned out to be those he thought were his friends in the ecclesia / assembly. And so it has been, time and again, in our experience: our sorest trials often come from the words of our brethren. Without underestimating the physical affliction of Job, his real adversary was his brethren. Rather than bemoaning his physical affliction, he commented how his friends had become his satans (19:19). And so with the Lord Jesus, whom Job so accurately typified. Again, without minimizing the material agony of His flesh, the essential piercing was from His rejection at the hands of those He died for.

Consider the following hints that the friends were in fact the Satan:

– There are several passages where Job speaks as if the friends were responsible for his physical persecution (e.g. 19:22,28); as if they had brought the calamity which the opening chapters make Satan responsible for. He associates his deceitful brethren with the troops of Tema and the companies of Sheba which had fallen upon his cattle at Satan’s behest (6:19). Job knew that the friends had power over his persecutors (6:24). They, Job said, had caused calamity to fall upon him, and thereby overwhelmed their one-time friend (6:27 AV mg.). They thought, as Satan did, that Job’s spirituality was only a sham (6:28).

– Job makes several references to the arguments of the Satan in his replies to the friends; as if they were in fact the Satan, and as if he knew perfectly well what they had said to Yahweh. Thus he tells the friends that those who provoke God are secure (12:6), whereas the Satan had suggested that Job would provoke God to His face if his security was taken away. Job says that such people who provoke God have all things given into their hand by Yahweh; and it is hard not to see in this a reference to the Satan, into whose hand Job had been delivered. It was as if Job was saying to them: ‘You are the ones who have provoked God, you are the ones into whose hand God has delivered me; so actually you are the wicked, not me’.

– The words of the friends suggest that their view was in fact that of the Satan in the prologue. Satan obviously quibbled with God’s pronouncement of Job as perfect and upright (1:8). And Bildad likewise

seems to allude to this when he comments concerning Job's downfall: "If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee" (8:6).

– There is reason to think that Eliphaz, the leader of the friends, may have been the specific individual referred to as 'Satan' in the prologue. God singles him out for especial condemnation at the end (42:7). After one of Eliphaz's speeches, Job responds with what appears to be a comment upon him, rather than God: "He hath made me weary: thou hast made desolate all my company. And thou hast filled me with wrinkles... he teareth me in his wrath, who hateth me (surely Job speaks here about Eliphaz, not God): he gnasheth upon me... mine enemy (Satan) sharpeneth his eyes upon me. They (the astonished friends?) have gaped upon me with their mouth, they have smitten me... they have gathered themselves together (as the friends did to Job) against me" (16:9–11). Eliphaz was a Temanite, from where Job's afflictors came (6:19).

5-4-2 Job's Satan: an Angel–Satan?

There is a quite different interpretation possible, which also has the ring of truth to it, just as much as the suggestion that the Satan was a fellow worshipper, possibly Eliphaz, who infiltrated Job's ecclesia through the weakness of his children. There is nothing in itself wrong with an Angel being called a Satan – we have examples of this in Num. 22:22 and 1 Chron. 21:1. We know that Angels can't sin: and yet they are limited in knowledge (e.g. Mt. 24:36). an Angel commented that now he knew that Abraham feared God, after he had seen his willingness to offer Isaac (Gen. 22:12); Israel's guardian Angel lead them through the wilderness in order to learn about Israel's spirituality (Dt. 8:2,3). God Himself, of course, already knew the hearts of men. The "sons of God", in the context of the book of Job, refer to the Angels (38:7). The sons of God coming before Yahweh suggests a scene in the court of Heaven, similar to that of 2 Chron. 18:19–21, where the Angels appear before Yahweh to discuss the case of Ahab, and then one Angel is empowered by God to carry out his suggestion. Satan going out from the presence of Yahweh, empowered by Him to afflict Job, would correspond with other references to Angels 'going out' from God's presence to execute what had been agreed in the heavenly assembly (Ps. 37:36; 81:5; Zech. 2:3; 5:5; Lk. 22:22; Heb. 1:14). Satan describes himself as going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it (1:7) – using exactly the language of Zech. 1:11 concerning the Angels. The way that the Satan smote Job with a

skin disease (2:7) would suggest that he was not only a mere man; accepting an Angel–Satan solves this problem. No unaided man could have brought a skin disease upon Job. If the Satan refers to a righteous Angel, it is likewise easier to understand why all the problems which the Satan brought are described as God bringing them (especially as Job may have conceived of God in terms of an Angel). It is also understandable why there is no rebuke of the Satan at the end.

A Satan–Angel

Num. 22:22 describes how an Angel of God stood in a narrow, walled path before Balaam, so that his donkey fell down beneath him. That Angel is described as a “Satan”, an adversary, to Balaam. Job comments how the sufferings which the ‘Satan’ brought upon him were God ‘walling up my way that I cannot pass’ (Job 19:8). The connection is clear – and surely indicates that Job’s Satan was a Satan–Angel, acting as an adversary to Job just as such an Angel did to Balaam. Job and Balaam have certain similarities – both were prophets (in Job’s case see 4:4; 23:12; 29:4 cp. 15:8; Amos 3:7; James 5:10,11); both had genuine difficulty in understanding God’s ways, but they to varying degrees consciously rebelled against what they did understand; both thus became angry with God (in the Angel), and were reproved by God through being brought to consider the Angel–controlled natural creation. One suspects there are more links than this.

In Job 2:5 Satan asks God: “Put forth Thine hand”. The hand of God is a phrase often used concerning what God did through the Angels. God agrees – “he is in thine hand” (v.6). Thus Satan’s hand is God’s hand, which is an Angel. This is proof enough that Satan is not in any way against God – they work together. Job seems to emphasize the place of God’s hand in bringing his trials – 2:5,6,10; 6:9; 10:7; 13:21; 19:21; 27:11 AV mg; 28:9. Job in 12:9 feels that in the same way as God’s hand had created the natural creation – and the Angels did this – so that same Angelic hand was upon him for evil. “By His Spirit [God “makes His Angels spirits”] He hath garnished the Heavens; His hand hath formed the crooked serpent” (26:13). Thus Job associates God’s Spirit with His hand, which is Satan’s hand. It seems far more fitting that this hand and spirit should be Angelic rather than human. Again, it was Angelic work that formed the Heavens. Job recognized that his trials came from the hand of God, but knew that His hand would not kill him – “with Thy strong hand Thou opposest Thyself against me...howbeit He will not stretch out His hand to (bring me to) the

grave” (30:21,24). This was exactly the brief given to Satan – to try Job, but “preserve his life”. The hand of God creating evil (2:10,11) must surely refer to God’s “Angels of evil” (Ps.78:49) rather than to man – Cyrus had to be taught that no one except God (including human satans!) created evil (Is.45:5–7).

God asked Satan initially: “Hast thou considered (lit. ‘set your heart upon’) My servant Job..?” (2:3). Later Job complains to God: “What is man, that Thou dost magnify him? and that Thou shouldest set Thy heart upon him? (lit. ‘consider him’)” (7:17). Thus Job sees God – whom he probably conceived of as an Angel – as ‘considering’ him, whilst we are told earlier that Satan / the adversary was told to do this. A human Satan considering Job would not in itself have brought the trials, and Job would not have complained so bitterly about a human being considering him.

Angel Eyes

The references to ‘wandering about on the face of the earth’ have great similarities with the language used to describe the Persian empire’s spies, called “The King’s Eye” – a kind of agent of the King who wandered around picking up information and reporting back to him. But of course, “The King’s Eye” was on the King’s side and not working against him! ⁽¹⁾. Satan’s walking / running “to and fro in the earth / land” and reporting back to God about an individual is thus very much taken from the Persian idea of the King’s “evil eye”, “the eye of the King”, a kind of *agent provocateur*, a secret police–type agent, travelling around the Kingdom and reporting back to the King about suspect individuals. It also has an evident connection with the Zechariah passages which speaks of the Angels in the time of the exile and restoration from Persia “running to and fro in the earth” on God’s behalf (Zech. 1:10,11; 4:10). The implication of course was that God and His Angels, and not the Persian King and his agents, were the ones really in control of the land. It’s maybe significant that the Septuagint translates “going to and fro” in Job 1:7 with the word *peripatei* – and we find the same word in 1 Pet. 5:8 about the adversary of the early Christians ‘going about’ seeking them – a reference to the agents of the Roman and Jewish systems. I have elsewhere demonstrated that much of the Hebrew Bible was rewritten [under Divine inspiration] in Babylon, to bring out relevant issues for the Jewish exiles in Babylon ⁽²⁾. This includes the book of Job. It can be understood as an allegory – Job, the suffering servant of the Lord, becomes a type of Israel, the suffering servant of Isaiah’s later prophecies ⁽³⁾. There are many links between Isaiah’s prophecies and

Job – a glance down the margin of most reference Bibles will indicate that. Just as the returning exiles faced ‘satans’ in the form of local Arabic opposition, so did Job. The Zechariah 3:1,2 passage uses the word ‘Satan’ to describe this opposition to the returned exiles. Note that both Zechariah 3 and Job 1 use the idea of a Heavenly court. As God put a fence around Job (Job 1:10), so He was a “wall of fire” to the returning exiles (Zech. 2:5). And his final triumph and restoration, by God’s grace, was intended as a prototype for Judah in captivity. J.B. Russell mentions a Babylonian document consisting of a dialogue between a sufferer and his friend ⁽⁴⁾. Perhaps the re-writing of the book of Job during Judah’s captivity in Babylon was intended as a counter to this, explaining Yahweh’s perspective on suffering.

Further Insights

– 5:7 “Man is born unto trouble, as the sons of the burning coal lift up to fly” (AV mg.) is using Angel–Cherubim language to say that it is inevitable that our Angels will bring trials into our lives.

– 14:3 “Dost thou open Thine eyes (Angels) upon such an one, and bringest me into judgement with Thee?”. Job here seems to be able to sense when the Angels were closely present in his life – he seems to be asking why God is using His Angel–eyes to take such a special interest in him; why God has asked His Angel to “consider My servant Job”.

– 16:9 “He gnasheth upon me with His teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth His eyes upon me”. In the context, Job seems to be perceiving God as his enemy, and we have shown that God’s eyes often refer to the Angels.

– 6:9,10 “Oh... that He would let loose His hand, and cut me off... I have not concealed the words of the Holy One”. We have shown that God’s hand was Satan’s hand and that the Satan Angel was forbidden to “cut (Job) off” as both Job and the Angel requested. Job associates the Satan with the Holy One, which is also Angelic language. Job being a prophet (see notes on 19:8), he would have received revelation from an Angel. He did not conceal the word of this “Holy One”.

– 1:14 “And there came a messenger (Heb. *malak*) unto Job” with news of the calamities brought by the Satan Angel. It would be understandable if that ‘malak’ should have been translated ‘Angel’ seeing there is so much other Angelic language in this area.

– 1:16,19 Job's sons were killed by wind and fire – both of which are associated with Angelic manifestation.

– It may be that Job's Satan Angel was the Angel representing the three friends (satans) of Job. Because of His close identification with them, the Satan Angel spoke their thoughts as if they were his own – e.g. compare Eliphaz's thoughts of 4:5 with Satan's words of 1:9,10.

And yet the question arises: which interpretation is correct? Was the Angel a doubting believer, or a righteous Angel? These two approaches are not irreconcilable. In the same way as the earthly tabernacle was a pattern of the Heavenly system (Heb. 9:24), so it would appear that each of us has an Angelic representative in Heaven, appearing before the presence of God's glory in what we are invited to see as the court of Heaven. Angels can also represent a whole group – e.g., an ecclesia (Rev. 1:20). So closely identified with their charges are these Angels, that they themselves are rebuked (e.g. Rev. 2:5) – not that they sinned, of course, but because they represented those ecclesias in the Heavenly court.

Notes

(1) More documentation of this in Rivkah Kluger, *The Satan of the Old Testament* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967). This view is confirmed in other research by Harry Torczyner, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sefer, 1981) pp. 38–45. Note that Torczyner also interprets the Satan as being in God's service, and not in opposition to Him: "The figure and role of the Satan derives from the Persian secret service... We now understand that there are in God's service, as in that of any earthly king, secret roving officials, who go and come and report to him on the doings of his subjects".

(2) See my *Bible Lives* Chapter 11.

(3) I have traced the similarities between Job and Israel, and Job and the "suffering servant", in *Bible Lives* Sections 3-1-3, 3-1-5 and 3-3-7.

(4) J.B. Russell, *The Devil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) p. 87.

5-4-3 The Deconstruction of the 'Satan' Myth in Job

It strikes me as ironic that the mention of 'Satan' in the early chapters of Job has been speed-read as evidence for the orthodox concept of Satan as an evil being in opposition to God. For on closer reading of Job, especially against its background of Canaanite and Babylonian

myths about Satan, it becomes apparent that one purpose of the book is to deconstruct the myth of an evil 'Satan' figure. The epic poem demonstrates that God is all powerful, the ultimate source of calamity, and yet He works through this to the ultimate happy blessing of His children.

It has been correctly observed that we don't read of 'Satan' after the prologue to Job. Instead we read only of God bringing the afflictions into Job's life. But the friends, and Job himself, struggle to explain those afflictions in terms of the current ideas in the surrounding world. This may not be immediately evident, because the Hebrew of Job is notoriously hard to translate. But closer attention to the text reveals that there is repeated mention of the various beings and forces of evil which were thought to be in competition with God. It seems that the story of Job originated very early in Biblical history, in the times of the patriarchs. And yet the book has many connections with the latter half of Isaiah – just take a glance down the marginal cross references in Job, and see how often the later chapters of Isaiah are referenced. My suggestion is that the book was rewritten and edited [under Divine inspiration] during the captivity in Babylon, as a message especially relevant for the Jewish exiles as they struggled with the temptation to accept Babylonian mythological explanations of evil. This would explain the allusions to both early Canaanite and later Babylonian views of the 'Satan' figure. And we recall from Is. 45:5–7 how Israel's God was at pains to remind the exiles of His omnipotence, that He is the only God and source of power in creation, and that both good and disaster, light and darkness, are ultimately His creation; and the surrounding Gentile myths about these things were totally wrong. This is in fact the theme of the book of Job. Susan Garrett points out how Babylonian views of a dualistic cosmos, with God creating good and the 'Satan' figure creating evil, began to influence Jewish thought. She shares my view that the purpose of the book of Job was to counter this: "The story of Job checked an escalation in the power and authority that were ascribed to the Satan-figure, by the repeated and unambiguous assertions in Job 1–2 that Satan had obtained the authority to test Job from none other than God" ⁽¹⁾.

The references to 'Satan'-like beings and related myths in the book of Job is in order to ultimately deconstruct them as false, and to reiterate the utter omnipotence of Yahweh as the only source of power, the only God. And this of course we would expect from an Old Testament, God-inspired book. It's been suggested by literary critics that the prologue which mentions Satan (Job chapters 1 and 2) and epilogue (Job 42:7–17) were likely written before the poetic discourses – they appear to be "an Israelite revision of an older

Canaanite or Edomite epic poem expressing their views on the age-old problem of evil”⁽²⁾. Thus those ideas are alluded to and deconstructed – God is presented as all powerful, and the ‘Satan’ beliefs as untrue.

Job is poetry, and poetry works by using familiar words and images in new ways. Hence myths can be alluded to and used, but in order to present them in a different context and to achieve more powerfully a conclusion rather than just baldly stating it; i.e. that Yahweh is all powerful and that there are actually no abiding realities behind the myths. Thus poetry is an appropriate medium through which to articulate this message. “The deceived and the deceiver are His” is poetry which even comes through somewhat in translation (Job 12:16). The expectation is that the deceiver is Satan, and God is with or sympathetic to the deceived. But no. Such dualistic expectations are set up, but crushed at the end of the strophe: both deceived and deceiver are God’s. For there is no dualistic cosmos out there.

The Court of Heaven

The prologue opens with the court of Heaven. I have earlier suggested that the ‘Satan’ figure is not in itself evil, but could refer to an Angel [a ‘good’ one, as I submit there are no ‘sinful’ Angels], or an Angel representative of a fellow worshipper on earth. The debates in Heaven between the Angels, the will of God as articulated there, is then reflected and carried out on earth – rather like how in Daniel 1–6 we have events on earth described in historical terms, and then we are given an insight into what’s been going on in Heaven in Daniel 7–12. Yet the court / legal language continues throughout the book – e.g. Job is “perfect”, i.e. legally blameless. Job appeals for ‘witnesses’ (Job 9:33–35; 16:18–22; 19:20–27), an advocate in Heaven (Job 9:33), denies his guilt and demands a legal list of his sins (Job 13:19), he wishes for God to come to trial (Job 9:3), and thus Job is described as a man who has taken out a ‘case’ with God (Job 23:4; 40:2). Job 29–31 is effectively Job’s declaration of legal innocence and an appeal to God to hear his case more sympathetically (Job 31:35). And of course God pronounces a final legal verdict at the very end (Job 42:7), in response to Job’s earlier plea: “Sleeplessly I wait for His reply” (Job 16:22). It’s as if the whole experience of Job was [at least partly] in order to test out the Canaanite theories of ‘Satan’, suffering and evil in the court of Heaven. The friends represent the traditional views of evil, and often make reference to the myths of their day about ‘Satan’ figures. They speak as if *they* are the final court – Eliphaz speaks of how the judges and elders of their day, the “holy ones”, had

concluded Job was guilty, and that they, the friends, were right: “To which of the holy ones will you appeal [legal language]?... we have [legally] examined this, and it [Job’s guilt] is true” (Job 5:1,27). This is of great comfort to those who feel misjudged by man – above them in Heaven the ultimate Heavenly court is considering our case, and that is all that matters. Job perhaps perceived this, even though the vision of the court of Heaven in chapters 1 and 2 was presumably unknown to him as he endured his sufferings; for in response to the friends’ wrong judgment of him, he comments that “God covers the faces of the judges of the earth” (Job 9:24). The final summing up speeches from both God and Job simply emphasize the omnipotence of God; how ultimately *He* has been the adversary to Job, and there is no room in the cosmos of His creation for any other power, especially any of the various personal ‘Satan’ figures believed in by the worlds of both Canaan and Babylon. The heavenly court of “sons of God” is paralleled with all the stars in Job 38:7. Bear in mind that the stars were understood as pagan deities. The whole pagan understanding of the cosmos is being deconstructed. The stars are paralleled with the Angelic sons of God who are all totally under God’s control; they are *His* Heavenly court.

The legal language of the book of Job has far reaching implications. We have noted the many connections between Job and the latter part of Isaiah, where again there is the impression of ‘God in the dock’, a cosmic trial of truth. The gods of the nations are invited to present their best cases, to demonstrate their reality against the claims of Yahweh, Israel’s God, to be the only true God. In this trial, the suffering servant is the witness used by God. And this in turn is the basis for the same lawsuit motif in the Gospel of John, where the witness is the Lord Jesus as the suffering servant, and by extension all those in Him ⁽³⁾. Indeed there appear to be seven witnesses in John: John the Baptist (Jn. 1:7), Jesus Himself (Jn. 3:11), the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:39), God Himself (Jn. 5:32), the miracles (Jn. 5:36), the Old Testament (Jn. 5:39) and the crowd (Jn. 12:17). John presents the cross as the decisive verdict, linking back to a similar verdict pronounced in Isaiah, which in turn has as its basis the final verdict of Yahweh in support of Job against the beliefs of the friends in the various ‘Satan’ gods of Canaan and Babylonia.

Leviathan and Behemoth

These monster figures appear at the end of the book of Job, forming a kind of *inclusio* with the opening reference to Satan; and they are clearly part of God’s final answer to Job’s “case”. Behe–mot can be understood as a reference to Mot, the Canaanite god of death; and

Leviathan appears to be the Canaanite version of the orthodox 'Satan' figure, perhaps a reference to the 'Lotan' of the Ugaritic myths. In great detail, these figures are deconstructed. They are shown to be *created* beings – created by the one almighty God of the Old Testament, to be completely under His control to the point that He can even tease them, so enormously greater is His power than theirs. These Canaanite 'Satan' figures are thereby shown to have no significant existence; and they certainly don't exist as opposed to God. They are totally under His control. And yet these monster figures clearly have characteristics shared by known animals, such as the hippopotamus, crocodile etc. Those similarities are intended. It's been well observed: "To say that Leviathan has characteristics of the crocodile and the whale is not to say that it *is* such a creature, but rather to suggest that evil is rooted in the natural world" ⁽⁴⁾ – and the point is so laboured in Job that the natural world is of God's complete creation. 'Evil' in a form independent of Him, in radical opposition to Him, simply isn't there. It is He who not only created Behemoth, but can effortlessly control him in accord with His purpose (Job 40:15). That's the comfort of the message. Indeed the descriptions of the natural world which lead up to the Leviathan / Behemoth passages are there to underline this point; and it's interesting that those passages zoom in upon the cruelties and even brutalities within nature. Yet these are all of God's ultimate design and creation, and under His providential control. Job had earlier perceived this; for he responds to the friends' allusions to an evil 'Satan' figure as the source of his suffering by observing: "Ask the animals... The birds of the air... [they show that] the hand of the Lord [and not any supernatural 'Satan'] has done this" (Job 12:7–9). Ginzberg demonstrates that the Jews saw the monster 'Rahab' and Leviathan as the same entity ⁽⁵⁾; and twice Job stresses how infinitely greater than Rahab is Yahweh. When God starts speaking about Leviathan, He is therefore confirming the truth of what Job has earlier said about His power over Rahab / Leviathan. The context of Job's comments was to answer the theories of the friends – and God is as it were confirming that Job's deconstruction of their 'Satan' theories was correct. The same Hebrew words are used about God's binding and loosing of the stars [which were thought to control evil on earth] and His binding, loosing and opening of Leviathan's mouth (Job 38:31 cp. Job 40:29). Whether or not Leviathan / a 'Satan' figure, or the bad stars, are for real... God is in utter control of them, and there is thus no conflict, no war in Heaven, no ultimate dualism at all in the cosmos. Which is just the message we would expect from a monotheistic Old Testament book. Israel's God is truly the Almighty. Just as Job is described as God's "servant" (Job 1:8), so is Leviathan (Job 40:28; 41:4). No evil power uncontrolled by God is at work in Job's life. We

also need to give due weight to the fact that God speaks the Leviathan / Behemoth passages “out of the storm”, which had been gathering since Job 37:2. This is significant because storms were seen as manifestations of evil powers. Yet here (and elsewhere in Scripture), the one true God speaks out of such storms, to demonstrate how far greater He is than any storm god; and showing by implication that such storm gods don’t exist, and the ‘evil’ which supposedly came from them was in fact under His control.

Much of the language used about Leviathan and Behemoth is also used about God’s manifestation of Himself:

Leviathan	God
Smoke from nostrils, flame from mouth (Job 41:11,12)	Ps. 18:8 identical
Strength before and dismay behind (Job 41:14 Heb.)	Pestilence before and plague behind (Hab. 3:5)
Strong ones and leaders cringe in fear (Job 41:17 Heb.)	Earth reels (Ps. 18:7); mountains tremble (Hab. 3:6)
Deep sea stirred up (Job 41:23,24 Heb.)	Deep sea laid bare (Ps. 18:5)
Terrible teeth	Job felt that <i>God</i> was gnashing His teeth at him (Job 16:9)
Breath carries men away	The breath of God’s mouth will carry away the wicked (Job 15:30)
On earth there is not his equal (Job 41:33)	Only ultimately true of God

Leviathan is called the ‘cruel one’ (Job 41:10) – and the very same word is used by Job about God in His afflicting Job in Job 30:21. Leviathan, the seemingly overbearing power of evil in the world, is in fact a manifestation of God to such an intense degree that effectively it ‘is’ God; God, ultimately, is the adversary / Satan to Job. The epilogue and prologue to Job are evidently related. Job begins sitting in dust and ashes and ends repenting in dust and ashes (Job 2:8; 42:4). The silence of the friends at the opening of the book is matched by the silence after God has finally spoken (Job 40:4). Job intercedes for his children (Job 1:5) and ends up interceding for his friends. Job begins with the description of being the Lord’s servant; and the book concludes on the same note (Job 42:7,8). The question of course is: ‘So what’s the equivalent of the ‘Satan’ figure in the epilogue?’. The

omission is intended and obvious. Ultimately the answer is the essence of the whole book: the 'Satan', the adversary, is none other than God Himself, in His love.

The Captivity Context

There are several allusions in Job to Babylonian legends concerning Marduk – indicating that the book must have been re-written in Babylon with allusion to these legends. Thus the *Enuma Elish* 4.139,140 speaks of how Marduk limited the waters of Tiamat, and set up a bar and watchmen so that the waters wouldn't go further than he permitted. But this very language is applied to God in Job 7:12 and Job 38:8–11. One of the purposes of Job was to urge Judah that Yahweh was greater than Marduk, He and not Marduk was to be Israel's God.

In passing, it's significant that dragons in the form of serpents were common in Babylonian theology. Figures on vases show serpent griffins, there was one on Marduk's temple in Nippur, and also on the Ishtar Gate in Babylon. These would have been familiar to Judah in Babylonian captivity; and we have suggested that the book of Job was edited there, under inspiration, for their benefit. They may well have seen a similarity between the Babylonian monsters and the Leviathan / Behemoth beasts. That God is greater than Leviathan and can do what He wills with him would therefore have had a special meaning to the faithful Jew in exile. In a restoration context, Isaiah comforted Judah that God would destroy "Leviathan the gliding serpent; He will slay the monster of the sea" (Is. 27:1). The real 'monster' faced by Judah in exile wasn't a supernatural being; it was a concrete kingdom of men on earth, namely Babylon. God taught Job, and through him showcased to the watching world, that all such imaginations of Leviathan, monsters in the raging sea, crooked serpents etc. were vain – in any case, God had created them and used them to do His will with His people, symbolized as they were by Job. His sitting in dust and ashes is very much the picture of Judah sitting by the rivers of Babylon, bemoaning their losses. The language of Job's captivity being 'turned' (Job 42:10) is the very term used about the restoration of Judah from Babylon (Jer. 29:14; Ps. 126:4).

Other References to Canaanite / Babylonian Ideas of 'Satan'

The sea was understood to be the abode of evil monsters. Yet Job stresses how God is in control of the raging sea. Just look out for all

the references to the sea in Job ⁽⁶⁾. God artlessly claims to have created the sea (Job 38:8–11). In the Canaanite pantheon, Baal was seen as well matched in conflict by Yam, the sea god. But it's emphasized by God that He created the sea, shuts it up within bounds, brought it out from the womb (Job 38:8). In Canaanite myth, Aquhat [another 'Satan' figure in their theology] could alone "count the months" ⁽⁷⁾ – but the same phrase is used in Job 39:2 about how God alone has this power. As God 'shut up' Job (Job 1:10), so He could 'shut up' the sea, with all the evil associated with it (Job 38:8). For at creation, He had commanded the waters where to go and they obeyed just one word from Him. The point is, God is using poetry to reframe these pagan myths in the context of His omnipotence, to show that His awesome power means that there's no room left for these supposed beings to exist. It's noteworthy that many times the Bible speaks of the power of God over raging seas – for the sea was so deeply associated with evil in the minds of Semitic peoples (e.g. Ps. 77:19; 93:4 and the fact that three of the Gospels emphasize how Jesus walked over raging sea – Mt. 8:23–27; Mk. 4:36–41; Lk. 8:22–25; "Who is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him!").

Baal was temporarily conquered by Mot, and the Ugaritic poem about their conflict which was found in the Ras Shamra texts speaks of how Baal was made a "slave forever" ⁽⁸⁾. This very language is picked up in Job 41:4, where God mocks that in no way would He become a "slave forever". The allusion shows that the one true God is in no way Baal. He is greater than Baal. Unlike Baal, He is in no conflict with Mot nor anyone. Baal's sister, Anath, muzzled a dragon with great difficulty – but Yahweh muzzled Leviathan and then sported with him (Job 41:1–5). The poem challenges Baal to "Pierce through Lotan the serpent, destroy the serpent the seven headed tyrant" ⁽⁹⁾. Yet this is exactly the language picked up in Is. 27:1: "Yahweh will punish with His powerful, great and mighty sword Leviathan the serpent, Leviathan the serpent, and He will slay the dragon". Yahweh's utter supremacy over any other god is so great that it makes all ideas of cosmic conflict simply laughable. Ps. 92:10 likewise: "Lo, thine enemies, I YHWH, lo, thine enemies shall perish, all evil doers shall be scattered" alludes to Part 3 lines 8 and 9 of the poem about the Mot–Baal conflict: "Lo, thine enemies, O Baal, lo thine enemies wilt thou pierce through, lo, thou wilt destroy thine adversaries" ⁽¹⁰⁾. Note too that Baal's enemies, i.e. Mot and the demons of the underworld, are paralleled with "evildoers". Human sinners rather than demons are the real issue.

Job's Theology

Significantly, it is the friends who make allusion to the 'Satan' figures and gods as if they are real, whereas Job in his responses always denies their reality and sees God as the direct source of His sufferings. Bildad speaks of how Job's troubles are to be associated with "the king of terrors" (Job 18:14); Eliphaz blames them upon the "sons of Resheph" (Job 5:7); but Job's response is that the source of the evil in his life is ultimately from *God* and not any such being. Eliphaz there speaks of how man's trouble comes "as the sons of Resheph fly upwards". Resheph was known as "the lord of the arrow" and the Ugaritic tablets associate him with archery⁽¹¹⁾. We would therefore be justified in reading in an ellipsis here: man's trouble comes "as the [arrows of] the sons of Resheph fly upwards". Job's response is that "The arrows of *the Almighty* are in me" (Job 6:4), and he laments that God is an archer using him as his target for practice (Job 7:20; 16:12,13). Job refuses to accept Eliphaz's explanation that Job is a victim of Resheph's arrows. For Job, if God is "the Almighty" then there is no space left for Resheph. Each blow he received, each arrow strike, was from God and not Resheph.

Job makes the amazing comment: "If although He slays me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15). The language of 'slaying' takes us back to the Mosaic commands about how a 'slayer' of a man might be killed by the 'avenger of blood'. Job saw God as slaying him; yet he also sees God as the 'witness' in the case (Job 16:19), and the avenger of Job's blood (Job 19:25). Job even asks God to not let the earth cover his blood, so that God as the avenger of Job's blood may avenge Job's death (Job 16:18). Job does *not* see 'Satan' as his slayer, and God as the avenger of his blood. Instead Job – in a quite breathtaking set of associations – sees God in all these things: the slayer, the legal witness to the slayer, the avenger of blood, and the One who will enforce the doing of justice in this case, the One who will not let the earth cover Job's blood. If Job really believed in a superhuman Satan, in Satan as the bad guy and God as the avenger of the injustice, he surely would've expressed himself differently. As Job imagines God as it were taking vengeance on Himself, so he came to portray for all time the way that evil and good are indeed both ultimately from God.

Job begins the book by being described as a man who shunned [the Hebrew word is also translated "to be without" and "to reject"] *ra*, "evil". Michel understands *ra* here to refer to 'the evil *one*', the Canaanite god of evil, whom Job disbelieved and rejected⁽¹²⁾. Job says that the friends who came to mourn with him were "ready to raise up Leviathan" (Job 3:8) – or, as it can also be translated with allusion to

the friends, “to raise up their mourning” (see A.V.). They thought that Leviathan, the ‘Satan’ figure they believed was real, could be blamed. But Job continually sees God as the ultimate source of what had happened to him, and understood the whole matter in terms of ‘how can a man be just with *God*’ rather than ‘how can a man get Satan off his back?’. A key passage is Job 9:24: “If it be not he, who then is it?” (R.V.); or as the G.N.B. puts it: “If God didn’t do it, who did?”. After all the theories of ‘Who’s responsible for all this evil in Job’s life?’, Job concludes that the source simply has to be God – and not anyone else. If He truly is all powerful, then who else could ultimately be responsible? Job states that “the cohorts of Rahab [a Canaanite ‘Satan’ figure] shall stoop under [God]” (Job 9:13), clearly alluding to the helpers of Tiamat in the Babylonian myth. “God *alone* stretches out the heavens, and treads on the back of Yam” – the sea, or sea-monster (Job 9:8). Job believed that it was *God* who was seeking to swallow him up in death (Job 10:8 Heb.) – surely alluding to how Mot, the god of death, was thought to have jaws encompassing the earth and swallowing up people at their death into the underworld. But Job rejected that myth – he saw God as the swallower, and death as a return to the dust, albeit in hope of bodily resurrection at the last day (Job 19:25–27). Perhaps Job is also alluding to the myths about Mot when he speaks of how “Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering” (Job 26:6 R.S.V.); and in that context speaks as if God is the real attacker, not, therefore, Mot or any other such being. Note too how Num. 16:31–35 describes *God* as swallowing up Korah, Dathan and Abiram into death in the earth – as if to deconstruct the idea that Mot did things like this.

Job understood God to be in control in Heaven; he rejects the idea of a cosmic conflict going on ‘up there’ which the friends seem to allude to. More specifically, Job speaks of how God’s hand forms and can pierce the “crooked serpent” and smite any monster (Job 26:11–14). It’s as if Job is mocking the idea that God has let him go into the hands of the cosmic monsters which the friends believed in. For Job so often stresses that it is the “hand of God” which has brought His affliction (Job 19:21; 23:2). That Divine hand was far greater than any mythical ‘Satan’ figure. The theme of his speech in Job 28 is that Yahweh alone is to be feared throughout the entire cosmos. Nobody else – such as the ‘Satan’ figures alluded to by the friends – needed to be feared.

Job understands that it is *God* who sends the good and evil, the light and the darkness, into his life (Job 30:26). Significantly, he states his faith that *God even marks out the boundary between light and darkness* (Job 26:10) – a similar idea in essence to the reassurance of

Is. 45:5 that God creates both light and darkness. The 'darkness', however we experience and understand it, is framed and limited by God; it is not a power or being with independent existence outside the realm of God's power. God confirms Job's understanding later, when He says that it is He who can swaddle the sea [another figure for uncontrollable evil] in bands of darkness (Job 38:9) – as if to say that it is God who gives things like darkness and the sea their sinister appearance and perception by men; but He is in control of them, using them in His hand. Job's idea that God fixes limits for the darkness is repeated by God saying that He sets limits for the raging sea (Job 38:10 N.I.V.). God controls evil, or our perception of it (e.g. of the sea as being evil), and He sets limits for it – which was exactly what He did to the power of 'Satan' in the prologue to Job. All these statements by God about His use of and power over things like darkness and sea, with the perceptions of them as being independent forces of evil, are quite different to Canaanite and Babylonian views of creation. In them, gods like Baal had to fight Yam, the evil sea god, with clubs provided by other deities; in the Babylonian version, Marduk has to arm himself with various weapons in order to try to get supremacy over Tiamat⁽¹³⁾. But Yahweh as revealed in the book of Job has utter and absolute power over the sea [monster] and the [supposed god of] darkness – for He created the sea and the darkness and uses them creatively for His purpose. That's the whole purpose of the many 'nature passages' in the book of Job. And the language of Genesis 1:9 is evidence enough of His power. He speaks a word – and light, darkness and seas are created, the waters gathering obediently where He commands them. Likewise God isn't in any battle with Leviathan – rather is the monster actually His "plaything" (Ps. 104:26 says likewise).

What Job Learnt

It was so hard for Job to accept that God and not any orthodox 'Satan' figure was his adversary. It's one thing to deduce from the Bible that both good and disaster comes from the Lord, as per Is. 45:5–7. It's of course quite another to accept it in real life, and Job is an inspiring example. Job 16:9–14 is so powerful – the poetry speaks of Job's awesome and even angry realization that *God* is in fact [in a sense] his enemy / adversary. "Here Job... identifies God as his enemy rather than his advocate. From his perspective he is led to wonder if the God in whom he trusted is not in reality his Satan"⁽¹⁴⁾. In Job 2:4–6 we have the 'Satan' commenting that Job's flesh and skin need to be harmed; but in Job 19:26 we have Job stating his faith that even

though *God* destroys his flesh and skin, yet God shall ultimately save him.

I have pointed out that Job all through rejects the ideas promoted by the friends, the view of traditional wisdom (especially emphasized by Bildad, Job 8:8–10), that various supernatural ‘Satan’ monsters and figures were responsible for his experiences. Job began by saying that we receive both good and evil from God’s hand (Job 2:10 cp. Is. 45:5–7). And he ends saying the same – that the Lord brought the trouble upon him (Job 42:11). He repeatedly sees God as the source of all his affliction. Hence God can say that Job has spoken about Him that which is right (Job 42:8). But Job came to realize the massive practical extent of what he had previously known in theory, what he had “by the hearing of the ear”. Now his eye saw / perceived that truly no plan of God can be thwarted, by any of the various ‘Satan’ monsters imagined by men (Job 42:2). We too may say that we believe in the omnipotence of God; but such a belief requires us to throw out all beliefs in supernatural Satan figures. And that’s not a merely intellectual exercise; to see the tragedies and cruelties of our lives as being ultimately from God and under His control is something which shakes us to the core. God almost jokes with Job, that he had been trying to draw out Leviathan with a fish hook (Job 41:1), and I see that as a commentary upon so many human attempts to get a handle on the way God is the adversary / Satan figure in our lives. Shrugging it off as chance and bad luck, believing in a personal Satan in the sea or in Heaven, thinking God is punishing us... all this is trying to capture Leviathan with a mere fishing rod. The book of Job isn’t an explanation for specific human suffering – and many who turn to the book looking for that come away disappointed. Rather is it an account of God’s sovereign power, putting meaning into the word “All-mighty” when applied to God. On a ‘doctrinal’ level it is indeed a deconstruction of the ideas of supernatural ‘Satan’ figures. But on a more personal level, it challenges us to follow in Job’s faithful footsteps, as it challenged Judah in captivity.

Notes

(1) Susan Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 49.

(2) Douglas Wingeier, *What About the Devil? A Study of Satan in the Bible and Christian Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006) p. 15. More documentation of this is to be found in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. George Buttrick, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954) Vol. 3 pp. 878,879.

(3) Expounded at length in Andrew Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000).

(4) Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job* (Leicester: I.V.P. / Apollos, 2002) p. 27.

(5) L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909) Vol. 5 p.26.

(6) J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1985). The book of Daniel perhaps makes the same point – the beasts that arise out of the raging sea are all under God's control and part of His purpose with Israel (Dan. 7:2).

(7) Robert S. Fyall, *op cit* p. 75.

(8) Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975) Vol. 2 p. 6.

(9) Cassuto, *ibid* p. 7.

(10) Cassuto, *ibid* p. 8.

(11) William J. Fulco, *The Canaanite God Resep* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1976).

(12) W.L. Michel, *Job in the Light of Northwest Semitic* (Rome: Bible Institute Press, 1987) Vol. 1 p. 29.

(13) S. Dalley, *Myths From Mesopotamia: Vol. 4, The Epic of Creation* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1989) pp. 251–255.

(14) J.E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) p. 302.

5-5 Lucifer King of Babylon

Isaiah 14: 12-14: “How art thou fallen from heaven , O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High”.

Popular Interpretation

It is assumed that Lucifer was once a powerful angel who sinned at Adam's time and was therefore cast down to earth, where he is making trouble for God's people.

Comments

1. The words "devil", "satan" and "angel" never occur in this chapter. This is the only place in Scripture where the word "Lucifer" occurs.
2. There is no evidence that Isaiah 14 is describing anything that happened in the garden of Eden; if it is, then why are we left 3,000 years from the time of Genesis before being told what really happened there?
3. Lucifer is described as being covered in worms (v. 11) and mocked by men (v. 16) because he no longer has any power after his casting out of heaven (vs. 5-8); so there is no justification for thinking that Lucifer is now on earth leading believers astray.
4. Why is Lucifer punished for saying, "I will ascend into heaven" (v. 13), if he was already there?
5. Lucifer is to rot in the grave: "Thy pomp is brought down to the grave...and the worms cover thee" (v. 11). Seeing angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35-36), Lucifer therefore cannot be an angel; the language is more suited to a man.
6. Verses 13 and 14 have connections with 2 Thessalonians 2: 3-4, which is about the "man of sin" - thus Lucifer points forward to another man, perhaps another king of latter day Babylon- but not to an angel.
7. It should be noted that the idea of 'morning star' is translated 'Lucifer' in the Vulgate [Latin] translation of the Bible made by Jerome. Significantly, he uses 'Lucifer' as a description of Christ, as the 'morning star' mentioned in Revelation. Indeed, some early Christians took the name 'Lucifer' as a 'Christian

name' in order to identify themselves with Jesus (1). It wasn't until Origen that the term 'Lucifer' took on any connotation of 'Satan' or a force of evil; and even then it was only popularized much later in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. 'Lucifer' in its strict meaning of 'bearer of the light' actually was applied in a positive sense to Christian communities, e.g. the followers of Lucifer of Cagliari were called 'Luciferians'. As an aside, it's worth pointing out that they were one of the groups who insisted that the devil was not a personal being and held to the original Biblical picture of sin and the devil (2).

Suggested Explanations

1. The N.I.V. and other modern versions have set out the text of Isaiah chapters 13-23 as a series of "burdens" on various nations, e.g. Babylon, Tyre, Egypt. Is. 14:4 sets the context of the verses we are considering: "Thou shalt take up *this* proverb (parable) against the king of Babylon...". The prophecy is therefore about the human king of Babylon, who is described as "Lucifer". On his fall: "they that see thee shall...consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble...?" (v. 16). Thus Lucifer is clearly defined as a man.
2. Because Lucifer was a human king, "All kings of the nations...shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us?" (vs. 9-10). Lucifer was therefore a king like any other king.
3. Verse 20 says that Lucifer's seed will be destroyed. Verse 22 says that Babylon's seed will be destroyed, thus equating them.
4. Remember that this is a "proverb (parable) against the king of Babylon" (v. 4). "Lucifer" means "the morning star", which is the brightest of the stars. In the parable, this star proudly decides to "ascend (higher) into heaven...exalt my throne above the (other) stars of God" (v. 13). Because of this, the star is cast down to the earth. The star represents the king of Babylon. Daniel chapter 4 explains how Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, proudly surveyed the great kingdom he had built up, thinking that he had conquered other nations in his own strength, rather than recognizing that God had given him success. "Thy

greatness (pride) is grown, and reacheth unto heaven” (v.22). Because of this “he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws” (v. 33). This sudden humbling of one of the world’s most powerful men to a deranged lunatic was such a dramatic event as to call for the parable about the falling of the morning star from heaven to earth. Stars are symbolic of powerful people, e.g. Genesis 37: 9; Isaiah 13:10 (concerning the leaders of Babylon); Ezekiel 32: 7 (concerning the leaders of Egypt); Daniel 8:10, cp. v. 24. Ascending to heaven and falling from heaven are Biblical idioms often used for increasing in pride and being humbled respectively - see Job 20: 6; Jeremiah 51:53 (about Babylon); Lamentations 2 :1; Matthew 11:23 (about Capernaum): “Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell” (the grave). Ecclesiasticus 50:6 describes Simon ben Onias being "as the morning star in the midst of a cloud and as the moon at the full". Adam Clarke's commentary rightly notes: "The truth is, the text speaks nothing at all concerning Satan nor his fall... but of the pride, arrogance and fall of Nebuchadnezzar".

5. Verse 17 accuses Lucifer of making the “world as a wilderness, (destroying) the cities thereof; that let not loose his prisoners to their home...(that did) fill the face of the world with cities...the exactress of gold” (vs 17 & 21 R.V.; v. 4 A.V. margin). These are all descriptions of Babylonian military policy - razing whole areas to the ground (as they did to Jerusalem), transporting captives to other areas and not letting them return to their homeland (as they did to the Jews), building new cities and taking tribute of gold from nations they oppressed. Thus there is emphasis on the fact that Lucifer was not even going to get the burial these other kings had (vs. 18-19), implying that he was only a human king like them, seeing his body needed burying. Is. 14:8 records the relief that now the "Lucifer" figure would no longer cut down cedars in Lebanon and hew mountains. This is exactly the language used by Nebuchadnezzar: "What no former king had done, I achieved: I cut through steep mountains, I split rocks, I opened passages and constructed a straight road for the transport of Cedars... to Marduk, my king, mighty cedars... the

abundant yield of the Lebanon" (3). Clearly the figure spoken of in Is. 14 was Nebuchadnezzar.

6. Verse 12 says that Lucifer was to be "cut down to the ground" - implying he was a tree. This provides a further link with Daniel 4: 8-16, where Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon are likened to a tree being cut down.

7. Babylon and Assyria are often interchangeable phrases in the prophets, thus, having spoken of the demise of the king of Babylon, v. 25 says, "I will break the Assyrian...". The prophecies about Babylon in Isaiah 47, are repeated concerning Assyria in Nahum 3: 4, 5, & 18, and Zephaniah 2 :13 & 15; and 2 Chronicles 33:11, says that the king of Assyria took Manasseh captive to Babylon - showing the interchangeability of the terms. Amos 5:27 says that Israel were to go into captivity "beyond Damascus", i.e. in Assyria, but Stephen quotes this as "beyond Babylon" (Acts 7:43). Ezra 6:1 describes Darius the king of Babylon making a decree concerning the rebuilding of the temple. The Jews praised God for turning "the heart of the king of Assyria" (Ezra 6: 22), again showing that they are interchangeable terms. The prophecy of Isaiah 14, along with many others in Isaiah, fits in well to the context of the Assyrian invasion by Sennacherib in Hezekiah's time, hence v. 25 describes the breaking of the Assyrian. Verse 13 is easier to understand if it is talking about the blasphemous Assyrians besieging Jerusalem, wanting to enter Jerusalem and capture the temple for their gods. Earlier the Assyrian king, Tilgath-Pilneser, had probably wanted to do the same (2 Chron. 28: 20-21). Isaiah 14:13: "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven...(symbolic of the temple and ark - 1 Kings 8: 30; 2 Chron. 30: 27; Ps. 20: 2 & 6; 11: 4; Heb. 7:26) I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation (mount Zion where the temple was) in the sides of the north" (Jerusalem - Ps. 48:1-2).

8. There's a good reason why the King of Babylon is described as "the morning star", or Venus. The Babylonians believed that their king was the child of their gods Bel and Ishtar, both of whom were associated with the planets- they thought that their King was the planet Venus.

9. The Lucifer-king was to "lie down" (Is. 14:8) in his destruction- and that Hebrew term occurs later in Isaiah with reference to the 'laying down' of Babylon's King and army in the grave (Is. 43:17)

10. Note that "the stars of God" can refer to the leaders of Israel (Gen. 37:9; Joel 3:15; Dan. 8:10), above whom the King of Babylon wished to arise.

11. The passage about "Lucifer" is alluding to and deconstructing a contemporary myth, in a manner which is common to much Biblical literature. "An ancient myth told how Heylel, the morning star (Venus), tried to climb the walls of the northern city of the gods to make himself king of heaven, only to be driven from the sky by the rising sun. In Isaiah 14:12-20 this myth is given a historical application" (4). Isaiah is mocking the myth, and saying that the King of Babylon was acting like Heylel in the myth- but would be thrown down not by another planet, but by God Himself.

12. "The mount of the congregation in the sides of the north" (:13) is surely an allusion to "the Babylonian Olympus, the [supposed] dwelling place of the gods, which was considered to be situated somewhere in the high Asiatic mountain range which forms the boundary or the Plain of Mesopotamia on the northern side, and is also the region of the source of the Euphrates and Tigris" (5). This location was *on earth*- not in Heaven. The King of Babylon, the morning star, didn't aspire to greatness in Heaven, but rather to mount Olympus, or possibly to the temple mount in Jerusalem [another possible interpretation of the mount on the sides of the north". The point of the prophecy is that it is Yahweh alone who is the ultimate and only God-King, reigning on *His* mount, the mountain of God, which is mount Zion, not Olympus.

13. "Lucifer" wishes to ascend into Heaven (:13). This is somewhat different from the scenario traditionally assumed- which is that Lucifer was in Heaven already, wanted to rise higher, and was therefore thrown down to earth because of his prideful intentions. But the text actually says that he wished to ascend into Heaven- so he was not there originally. The point

has been made by that "heaven" was often how the capital city of a nation or people was perceived; for in that city the national god supposedly lived, thus making the city "heaven". The "Hymn to the City of Arbela" is an example in the Assyrian context- because of the gods who supposedly lived there, "Arbela is as lofty as heaven... O lofty sanctuary... gate of heaven!" (6). The desire to ascend into 'heaven' would therefore speak of the king of Babylon or Assyria's desire to capture Jerusalem and supplant her God- Yahweh- with their own gods. This idea of Jerusalem as "heaven" is continued in later Isaiah, where the Divine revival of Jerusalem is spoken of as the creation of a new or renewed 'heaven' (Is. 51:6,16; 65:17,18).

H.A. Kelly- one of the leading historians of religious ideas of recent times- observed from much research that "It was not until post-Biblical times that Lucifer was associated with Satan, or that Satan was thought to have been cast out of heaven before the creation of Adam and Eve, or that Satan had some connection with Adam and Eve" (7). The New Testament references to Jesus as the morning star, Venus, have been read by H.A. Kelly as a conscious allusion to the growing idea that Lucifer ['light-bringer', *heosphoros* in Greek, the dawn-bringer] / Venus, the morning star, was in fact something or someone evil (8). All the N.T. references to the morning star are positive, and all refer to Jesus (2 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 2:28; 22:16). It's possible to read Jn. 1:8 in this context, too. Here John the Baptist is described as "bearing witness to the light", which was language understandable with reference to Venus, the Morning Star which is seen in the East just before the Sun rises in the West.

Notes

(1) Nick Lunn, *Alpha And Omega* (Sutton, UK: Willow, 1992) p. 254.

(2) W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement Of Protest In Roman North Africa* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1952).

(3) J.B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating To The Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3rd ed., 1969) p. 307.

(4) G.B. Caird, *The Revelation Of St. John The Divine* (London: Black, 1966) pp. 114,115.

(5) H. Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The Theology of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964) p. 206.

(6) M. Nissinen, “City as lofty heaven: Arbela and other Cities in Neo-Assyrian Prophecy” in L. L. Grabbe and R. D. Haak, eds., *Every City shall be Forsaken* (JSOTSup 330) (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) pp. 172-209.

(7) H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006) p. 1.

(8) H.A. Kelly, *ibid* pp. 164,165.

5-6 The Anointed Cherub

Ezekiel 28:13-15: “Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold; the workmanship of they tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou are the anointed cherub that covereth and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee”.

Popular Interpretation

It is assumed that this refers to Satan once having been in Eden, totally perfect, but because of his pride, he had been cast out.

Comments

1. The words “devil” , “satan” and “angel” do not occur in this chapter, nor in the rest of Ezekiel. The context shows this is a

prophecy about the King of Tyre; the preceding chapter 27 is an oracle against Tyre, and now chapter 28 speaks specifically about the King of Tyre. Ezekiel chapters 27 and 28 clearly hold together as a literary unit. The city of Tyre and the King of Tyre are described in similar terms, e.g. "perfect in beauty" (compare 27:3 and 28:12; 27:16,17 with 28:13; 27:33 with 28:16). The passage plainly speaks of the King of Tyre, not anything that happened at the beginning of the world.

2. It is commonly believed that Satan was thrown out of heaven into Eden, or that he gained access to Eden in order to tempt Adam and Eve, but this passage says that this person was in Eden before he sinned and was cast out when he sinned. The garden of Eden was on the earth, not in heaven (its boundaries are given in Gen. 2: 8-14), therefore the casting out was not out of heaven.

3. The person was to "die the deaths of the uncircumcised" (Ez. 28:10), but angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35-36). That a man is referred to is confirmed by v. 9: "thou shalt be a man...in the hand of him that slayeth thee". Verse 2 defines him as the "prince of Tyrus".

4. "Thou was perfect in thy ways," is no proof that a super-human person is being spoken of, seeing that the word is applied to Noah, Abraham, Job and David (Gen. 6: 9; 17:1; Job 1:1; Ps. 18:23 & 25).

5. "Perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created," refers to this man being "perfect" (upright) from the time of his spiritual birth - which is how the word "created" is used in Ezekiel 21:30 and Psalm 102:18 (cp. 2 Cor. 5:17).

6. "Thou hast been in Eden", refers to where the king of Tyre was in place, not in time. Pharaoh and Assyria are similarly described as being a "cedar in Lebanon", no "tree in the garden of God was like unto him in his beauty...all the trees of Eden envied him...yet shalt thou be brought down with the trees of Eden unto the nether parts of the earth: thou shalt lie in the midst of the uncircumcised" (Ez. 31:2,3,8,9,16,18). Thus "You have been in Eden" has similarities with the language used by Ezekiel

about Egypt in Ez. 31. Egypt is described in language which recalls the trees in the garden of Eden, watered by many waters- and then cut down. In the same way as the Garden of Eden was ended, so would Egypt be.

The trees in Eden are not to be taken literally, they represent the nations whom Pharaoh and Assyria conquered, possibly referring to the fact that they were all within the old geographical boundaries of the garden of Eden. Pharaoh being the greatest of the trees in Eden and the most appealing maybe, suggests that he was taking to himself the place of the tree of knowledge, which was in the midst of Eden and probably the most attractive of them all, seeing that it fascinated Eve so much with its tempting fruit. Pharaoh was not literally that tree, but in the parable he was making himself like it. Similarly the king of Tyre is likened in this parable to the cherubim in Eden.

7. There are numerous parallels between Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. We have shown that Isaiah 14 was not concerning satan but about a human king. Ezekiel 28 and Ezekiel 31, are also about such human kings, each of whom went through the same pattern of being used by God for His purpose, getting proud in what He used them to achieve, blaspheming the God of Israel and therefore being punished.

8. As with Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28 is one of a series of prophecies about various nations, in this case about Tyre.

9. "Thou art wiser than Daniel" (v. 3) is no proof that a super-human being is referred to; this is an illustration of Luke 16: 8: "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light".

10. "Thou art the anointed cherub...and I have set thee so" (Ez. 28:14) shows that God was in control of the cherub.

11. According to misreadings of Ez. 28:15 "Thou wast perfect in thy ways till iniquity was found in thee" and Jn. 8:44 "the devil was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there was no truth in him", those who believe in a

personal devil are faced with a contradiction- was the devil originally a sinner, or, was he once perfect but fell?

12. Eden was a geographical area on earth known to Ezekiel's readers- this is how it is used elsewhere in Ezekiel (Ez. 27:23; 31:8,9; Is. 51:3; Gen. 13:10). 'Eden' was not understood as a historical reference to the garden of Eden in early Genesis, but rather to a known nation / region of Ezekiel's time.

Suggested Explanations

1. We have seen that “the king of Tyrus” (v. 12) is the subject of this prophecy. Verses 4 and 5 describe him as getting rich by his trading in silver and gold, and getting proud because of this - much more applicable to a human king than to an angel. His sin is defined in Ez. 28:15,16: "The iniquity of your trading... by the multitude of your trading... you have sinned". The sin in view wasn't some Angelic rebellion against God.

2. Tyre occupied a privileged position in its relationship to Israel. David and Hiram had been close friends (2 Sam. 5:11; 1 Kings 5:1,6,7,10), and Hiram and Solomon had made a league in which Hiram supplied materials for the building of the temple (1 Kings 5:12,17,18). The language of Ezekiel 28:13-18 is taken from Israelitish worship and used symbolically for the relationship of Israel and Tyre (by implication suggesting the divine favour which rested upon Tyre because of its association with Israel). Consider the following:

a) ‘Every precious stone was thy covering’ (v.13); ‘thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire’ (v. 14). This is an allusion to the stones set in the breastplate of the high priest of Israel (Ex. 39:10-14). They were ‘stones of fire’ because of the way they would shine when exposed to the brilliance of the Shekinah glory of the sanctuary. They symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel (Ex. 39:14). The king of Tyre walked in the midst of these stones of fire when he moved among the children of Israel (as in the preparation of the materials for the temple). The position of Israel in the divine purpose provided a ‘covering’ for Tyre on the basis of the decree in Genesis 12: 3: “I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth

thee'. God blessed the house of Potiphar because of Joseph: '...the LORD blesses the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field' (Gen. 39:5). Similarly, Tyre was 'covered' by Israel.

b) 'Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth' (v. 14). The cherubim were figures of beaten gold at either end of the mercy seat (Ex. 37: 7-9). Their wings overshadowed the mercy seat with which they were of one piece (Ex. 25:19-20). Although the translation of the Hebrew is uncertain (accepting the A.V.), the suggestion may be that Tyre as a great mercantile power was privileged to cast its 'wings' over Israel. It was the abuse of this exalted position that was a factor in the ruin of Tyre (vs. 4-5).

c) "Thou wast upon the holy mountain of God' (v. 14). This holy mountain is Mt. Zion, the future site of God's house of prayer for all people (Is. 2: 2-3; 56: 7). This 'holy mountain of God' is on the earth, not symbolically in heaven as J.W.'s assert (see Ez. 20:40).

d) 'Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities' (Ez. 28:18). This verse may imply that Tyre had set up forms of worship similar to that of Israel. Hiram was 'ever a lover of David' and rejoiced with Solomon in the building of the temple (1 Kings 5: 1-12). The king of Tyre would so doubt have learned about God's kingdom in Israel from these two kings of Israel. Or, the verse may be interpreted this way: Tyre's sanctuaries were in Israel when the divine presence and favour were manifest. But Tyre failed to appreciate its privileged association with Israel. When Nebuchadnezzar came down into Jerusalem (586 B.C.), the prince of Tyrus said: 'Aha, the gate of the peoples is broken, it has swung open to me; I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste' (Ez. 26:2 R.S.V.). In so saying, Tyre had spoken her own nemesis according to the decree of Genesis 12: 3: 'I will...curse him that curseth thee'. Tyre, in her self-centred, mercantile interests, had profaned the sanctuaries and was herself to be reduced to ashes.

e) 'I will bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of

all them that behold thee' (v. 18). Tyre could not with impunity violate her privileged relationship with Israel. When Nadab and Abihu treated the sacred as secular, 'there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD' (Lev. 10: 2). Similarly, Tyre had failed to make a difference between the holy and unholy. It was, therefore, to be reduced to ashes - devoured like Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19: 24-25)."

The above points are taken from Ron Abel, *Wrested Scriptures*, (South Croydon: C.A.T., 2005 ed.) pp. 171-173, Section 8.

3. The question still has to be answered as to why there are so many allusions to the events in Eden in this chapter. It appears that the prophecy of the fall of Tyre is being consciously framed to mirror the fall of man, e.g. v. 2: "thou art a man"; "man" is *Adam* in Hebrew, as if God is saying to the prince of Tyre, "You are like Adam in this parable". Verse 17 tells how he will be brought to the ground - as Adam had to return to the dust. The passage is often skim read, leading to the assumption that the King of Tyre is being likened to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, or to some Satan figure who fell from Heaven at that time. But careful reading shows that the King of Tyre is being likened to Adam in Eden, not to the serpent. Careful attention to the Hebrew text supports this further. "Thou art the anointed cherub... and I have set thee so" (Ez. 28:14) would be better rendered: "I had provided you with a guardian cherub", or "I put a terrifying angel there to guard you" (G.N.B.); "I will destroy thee, O covering cherub" (Ez. 28:16) is better "The guardian cherub banished [or, destroyed] you", or "the angel who guarded you drove you away" (G.N.B.)- with reference to the cherubim keeping Adam from re-entering Eden. These translations are justified at length in a fascinating article at <http://assemblyoftrueisrael.com/Documents/KingofTyre.html> .

4. Another approach is suggested by recent archaeological discoveries in the region of Tyre. A number of sphinx have been discovered, which appear to be a Canaanite pagan rendition of the cherubim described earlier in Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10. "A sphinx is merely a pagan cherub. The sphinx often depicted a king's head, and an animal's body—the animal was usually

regarded as a god. Head and body were a composite god: the deification of the king” (1).

A large cherub-sphinx with a king’s head and animal’s body set on a base of sculptured mountains was discovered in nearby Sidon, apparently a deification of a king of Tyre who is here described as being “upon the holy mountain of God” (Ez. 28:14). Phoenician and Ugaritic texts record the King of Tyre pronouncing that “I am *El*” - exactly what we read him doing in Ez. 28:2, proclaiming that “I am God, I sit in the seat of God” (2).

With Hiram’s knowledge of the true God, it seems that subsequent Kings of Tyre came to put themselves in the position of God, seated between the cherubim on Mount Zion, in the same way as the king of Assyria effectively aspired to the same thing - Phoenician inscriptions have been uncovered calling the king of Tyre “Lord of the Heavens”. Even more amazingly, the jewels described in v. 13 were all found embedded in this sphinx-cherubim. The three jewels of the breastplate missing from the list in v. 13 were also missing from the sphinx. Inscriptions also describe Tyre as the “garden of God”, and reliefs of cherubim guarding Tyre as they did Eden have been found. Thus the king of Tyre had set up a blasphemous system of worship copying that of the temple and of Eden, with himself as God in the midst of it. Harry Whittaker makes a distinction between "the prince of Tyre" (Ez. 28:2) and "the king of Tyre" (Ez. 28:12). which he sees as a reference to the Tyrian god Melkart ("King of the city"). He suggests that Tyre had installed a system of Yahweh worship similar to that which was in Jerusalem (perhaps a result of Hiram's relationship with Solomon and assistance in building Yahweh's temple)- but this had become mixed with the worship of Melkart (3). “Thou sealest up the sum” (v. 12). The Hebrew for “sum” can also mean “pattern, imitation” - as if God is saying that He is aware that this replica of His system of worship has been pushed by the king of Tyre as far as it can go - “thou sealest up the sum” (imitation of God). No wonder a prophecy like Ezekiel 28 was necessary to expose his sin!

According to the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary: "This feeling of superhuman elevation in the king of Tyre was fostered by the fact that the island on which Tyre stood was called "the holy island" [Sanconiathon], being sacred to Hercules and Melkart, so much so that the colonies looked up to Tyre as the mother city of their religion". "The city was thought of as rising from the waters like the rock-throne of God" (4). This would explain why the King of Tyre is criticized for saying "I am a God, I sit in the seat of God" (Ez. 28:2). It would also explain all the allusions to Israelite worship- he was setting himself up as a rival to Zion, dressing himself in clothing featuring all the jewels in the High Priestly breastplate (Ex. 28:15-20); the word used for his "workmanship" with those jewels in Ez. 28:13 is used in Ex. 31:3,5; 35:31 of the workmanship of the tabernacle and associated garments. Note how Ez. 27:22 says that Tyre traded in "all precious stones". The King of Tyre claimed to be "perfect in beauty" (Ez. 28:12)- just as Zion was described earlier in Ezekiel in the same terms (Ez. 16:14).

5. In section 1-1-1 and Digression 3, we noted that the Genesis record alludes to various incorrect pagan myths which Israel had encountered, and seeks to deconstruct them and refocus their terms upon the real issues- sin and sinful people. Ez. 28:11-19 is perhaps another example. Here, the king of Tyre is likened to a cherub dwelling in Eden, the garden of God. However, the Genesis record stresses that the cherubim dwelt not *in* the garden, but east of it. It would therefore seem that Ez. 28:11-19 is alluding to some pagan story of the garden of Eden, and re-focussing the myth upon a real, known human being on earth- i.e. the king of Tyre. Other examples of this kind of re-focussing of pagan myths onto the *real* enemies- sinners and sinful nations- are to be found in section [1-1-1](#). Cassuto points out that the Ezekiel reference to the cherub 'walking in the midst of the stones of fire' is an allusion to Ugaritic poetry which speaks of 'stones of fire'. Ezekiel does the same thing in Ez. 31:8,9, where he references pagan ideas about Eden, the cherubim etc., and re-focuses them upon Pharaoh, king of Egypt. It could even be argued that Ezekiel's detailed visions of the cherubim in Ez. 1 and 10 are a deconstruction of Babylonian and underlying

Canaanite myths about the cherubim- showing who the cherubim *really* are.

Notes

(1) Arthur Gibson, “The Diabolical Prince of Tyre”, *The Testimony* Vol. 46 (1976) p. 174.

(2) Descriptions of the sphinx-cherubim discovered and the references to the King of Tyre’s claim to be “El” are to be found in R. D. Barnett, "Ezekiel and Tyre", *Eretz-Israel* Vol. 9 (1969), p. 9 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society). The King of Tyre claiming to be *El* is also referenced in W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (London: Athlone Press, 1968) p. 49.

(3) H.A. Whittaker, *The Very Devil* (Wigan: Biblia, 1991) p. 33.

(4) Ralph Woodrow, *Was Satan Once An Angel In Heaven?* (Riverside, CA: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1968) p. 7. Woodrow was one of the few, if not the only, popular American Evangelical preacher of the 20th century who spoke out against the popular view of Satan.

5-7 Satan in Zechariah 3

This passage is commented upon in section 5–30. Section 5–4–2 considers it too in terms of its connection with the Satan in the Heavenly court which we meet in Job 1. According to Dt. 32:8,9 LXX, humanity has been divided up “according to the number of the angels of God”; each nation has its Angelic representative in Heaven. These Angels are spoken of as being ‘punished’ in the sense that their charges on earth are punished. Note the parallelism in Is. 24:21,22:

“Yahweh will punish
The host of heaven in heaven
And on earth the kings of the earth”.

This doesn’t mean that the representative Angels are themselves sinners; but they are identified in the court of Heaven with those on earth whom they represent.

Zechariah 3 was written in the context of the Jews in Babylon. It has been shown that the Babylonians believed that each person has a god who accuses them ⁽¹⁾. As elsewhere, Zechariah and the prophets

allude to contemporary beliefs and deconstruct them, i.e. they show the truth about these matters as Yahweh wished His people to understand them, just as Moses alluded to creation myths in order to show what was false and to explain the truth about some of the matters they touched upon. So here Zechariah is making the point that the truth is that in the court of Heaven, Angels represent human beings and organizations and their positions and accusations against God's people; and it is God who judges those accusations, and sends forth His Angels to implement His subsequent judgment of the cases upon earth. Paul may have this in mind when he exults that if God and Christ are on our side, we now have no accusers – for they are the only ones who can bring valid accusation against us. And even if we have accusers, the fact that *they* are our justifiers means that effectively, no such accusation is of any power (Rom. 8:33,34).

Note

(1) Rivkah Scharf Kluger, *Satan in the Old Testament* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), pp. 134,135.

5-8 The Temptation of Jesus

Matthew 4: 1-11: “Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards an hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. “Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at anytime thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. “Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him”.

Popular Interpretation

This passage is read as meaning that a being called the “devil” tempted Jesus to sin by suggesting certain things to Him and leading Him into tempting situations.

Comments

1. Jesus “was in all points tempted, like as we are” (Heb. 4: 15), and: “every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14). We are tempted by the “devil” of our own lusts or evil desires, and so was Jesus. We are not tempted by an evil being suddenly standing next to us and prompting us to sin - sin and temptation come “from within, out of the heart of man” (Mk. 7: 21). They “proceed” out of the

heart, as if to stress that the heart really is their source. Jesus was tempted just as we are (Heb. 4:15,16), and in this sense He becomes for us a legitimate example. Paul borrows the language of "the tempter" coming to Jesus and applies it to "the tempter" coming to Christians (1 Thess. 3:5). And we can note that Matthew alone records how Jesus fasted during the temptation period- and it is Matthew alone who records instruction to *us* about fasting (Mt. 16:16-8 cp. 9:14,15). Seeing we're not physically encountered by a literal personal satan in our times of testing, it surely follows that neither was Jesus our example.

2. The temptations are hard to take literally:-

- Matthew 4: 8 implies that Jesus was led up into a high mountain to see all the kingdoms of the world in their future glory, "In a moment of time". There is no mountain high enough to see all the world. And why would the height of the mountain enable Jesus to see what the world would be like in the future? The earth, being a sphere, there is no point on its surface from which one can see all the parts of the world at one time.

- A comparison of Matthew 4 and Luke 4 shows that the temptations are described in a different order. Mark 11:13 says that Jesus was "in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan", whilst Matthew 4 : 2-3 says that "when he had fasted forty days...the tempter (Satan) came to Him...". Because Scripture cannot contradict itself, we can conclude that these same temptations kept repeating themselves. The temptation to turn stones into bread is an obvious example. This would fit nicely if these temptations occurred within the mind of Jesus. Being of our nature, the lack of food would have affected him mentally as well as physically, and thus his mind would have easily begun to imagine things. Just going a few days without food can lead to delirium for some (cp. 1 Sam. 30:12). The similarity between rolls of bread and stones is mentioned by Jesus in Mt. 7: 9, and doubtless those images often merged in his tortured mind - although always to be brought into swift control by his recollection of the Word

- Jesus probably told the Gospel writers the record of His temptations, and to bring home in words the intensity of what

He underwent, He could have used the figurative approach seen in Matthew 4 and Luke 4.

- It seems unlikely that several times the devil led Jesus through the wilderness and streets of Jerusalem and then scaled a pinnacle of the temple together, all in view of the inquisitive Jews. Josephus makes no record of anything like this happening - presumably it would have caused a major stir. Similarly, if these temptations occurred several times within the forty days as well as at the end of that period (which they did at least twice, seeing that Matthew and Luke have them in different order), how would Jesus have had time to walk (n.b. the devil "led" Jesus there) to the nearest high mountain (which could have been Hermon in the far north of Israel), climb to the top and back down again, return to the wilderness and then repeat the exercise? His temptations all occurred in the wilderness - He was there for forty days, tempted all the time by the devil (he only departed at the end - Matt. 4:11). If Jesus was tempted by the devil each day, and the temptations occurred only in the wilderness, then it follows that Jesus could not have left the wilderness to go to Jerusalem or travel to a high mountain. These things therefore could not have literally happened.

- If the devil is a physical person who has no respect for God's Word and is interested in making people sin, then why would Jesus quote Scripture to overcome him? According to the popular view, this would not send the devil away. Notice that Jesus quoted a Bible passage each time. If the devil was the evil desires within Jesus' heart, then it is understandable that by His having the Word in His heart and reminding Himself of it, He could overcome those bad desires. Psalm 119:11 is so relevant that perhaps it is specifically prophesying Christ's experience in the wilderness: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee".

- That the temptations were internal to the mind of Jesus is suggested by the way that in Matthew's record, there is a progression from the desert, to the temple pinnacle, to a high mountain- as if in some sort of ascent toward Heaven. It's even possible that Paul has this in mind when he comments that Jesus did not consider rising up to equality with God a thing to be

grasped at, He dismissed that temptation, and instead He progressively *lowered* Himself, even to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

We can of course understand the 'Satan' figure to be a literal person who as it were ministered the suggestions / temptations / tests to the Lord Jesus. This would be in keeping with how in Old Testament times God had raised up various adversaries through whom to test His children. But those individuals were very much under God's control and as it were on His side. John Thomas, who shared our view of Satan completely, put it like this: "If Deity became Satan to Israel, and to Job, it is not to be denied that an angel may have assumed the same attitude in the case of Jesus Christ" (1).

3. The devil left him "for a season" to return later. The temptations from 'the devil' returned when the Jewish people, the Pharisees and Herod demanded of Jesus that He pull off a miracle (Lk.23:6-9; Mk. 6:1-6; 8:11-13; 15:31; Mt. 12:38-42). This was just the temptation He had faced and overcome in Mt. 4:5-7. Yet there is no record of a creature literally approaching the Lord later in His ministry. And yet the essence of the three temptations did indeed return to Him later, and the three of them found their quintessence in the experiences of the cross. Thus "cast thyself down" was matched by the Jews [again associating things Jewish with the devil] tempting Jesus to come down from the cross. There is a strong association between the 'satan' and the Jewish system. The whole structure of the record would have sounded to first century ears like a debate between the Jewish rabbis and their disciple: "Matthew's and Luke's stories are in the form of a three-part conversation not unlike the debates of the scribes which utilize proof-texts from Scripture" (2). The triple temptations are to be compared with the Lord's triple temptation in Gethsemane, and His three trials for His life (before the Sanhedrin, Herod and Pilate). In this sense the satan 'returned' to Him. This is especially clear in Mark's Gospel. The Jews- the Jewish Satan as it were, the adversary to the Lord's cause- are recorded as putting Him to the test, just as He was tested in the desert (Mk. 8:11-13; 10:2; 12:13-17).

We note that the Gospels go on to call Peter "satan" and Judas "a devil"- perhaps because both of them offered the Lord Jesus the same temptations to immediate glory without the cross which "satan" did in the wilderness. They would therefore have been occasions of where Satan 'returned' to the Lord as predicted at the close of the account of the wilderness temptations. A good case can be made for Judas' betrayal of the Lord being rooted in his desire for an immediate Messianic Kingdom, and his bitter disappointment and anger when he finally understood that the Lord's Kingdom was not to come about in that way. It's been suggested that 'Iscairiot' is related to the Latin *sicarius*, an assassin, which would suggest that Judas [like Peter] was a zealot willing to use force and violence to bring about the Kingdom of Jesus (3).

John's Gospel omits many of the incidents and teaching accounts of the synoptics, but repeats their essence in a different way (4). It seems John's equivalent of the temptation narratives is his account in Jn. 6:1-14 of the Jews tempting Jesus to do a miraculous sign to prove Himself Messiah, and to provide manna in the wilderness. In this case, John is casting the Jews and their thinking in the role of the "satan" of the wilderness temptations. The following parallels between the wilderness temptations and the Lord's experience as recorded in Jn. 6 indicate how the 'devil' of temptation returned to the Lord Jesus- and note in passing how the equivalent of 'satan' is the Jews:

John

The wilderness temptations

The Jewish crowd wanted to make him king (Jn. 6:15) Satan offers him the kingship of the [Jewish?] world

The Jews ask for miraculous bread (Jn. 6:31) Satan invites him to make miraculous bread

The [Jewish] disciples want Jesus to go to Jerusalem to show His power (Jn. 7:3) Satan takes Jesus to Jerusalem and tempts Him to show His power

The Synoptics speak of how satan 'comes to' and tempts and challenges the Lord Jesus to claim earthly political power, which 'satan' can give him (Mt. 4:8,9). But John describes this in terms of "the people" coming to Him and trying to make Him King- which temptation He refused (Jn. 6:15). Likewise it was 'the devil' in the wilderness who tempted Jesus to make the stones into bread. But in Jn. 6:30,31, it is the Jewish people who offer Him the same temptation. In the wilderness, the Lord responded that man lives by the bread which comes from the mouth of God. In Jn. 6:32, He responds likewise by speaking about "the true bread from heaven". The temptation from 'the devil' to publically display His Divine powers in front of Israel in the Jerusalem temple (Mt. 4:5,6; Lk. 4:9-12) is repeated by John in terms of the Lord's brothers tempting Him to go up to the same temple and openly validate Himself "to the world" (Jn. 7:1-5).

In any case, the temptation to produce manna in the wilderness was a temptation to play the role of Messiah as the Jews would have expected it to be played- and this was exactly the temptation that Jesus overcame. Likewise, the temptation to appear on the pinnacle of the temple and jump down to Israel from there was a temptation to again be the Messiah Israel wanted, rather than the One God wanted; for according to the rabbinic *Pesiqta Rabbati* 36, "When the King, the Messiah, reveals himself, he will come and stand on the roof of the temple". These temptations repeated themselves, as "the devil departed for a season" to return later- e.g. in the form of the relatives of Jesus tempting Him to go up to Jerusalem and to some dramatic works to prove His identity. It was the Jews who repeatedly demanded from Jesus a dramatic "sign from Heaven" (Mt. 16:1; 22:18,35; Mk. 8:11; 10:2; 12:15; Lk. 11:16)- "tempting him" to give one. They are the ones continuing the tempting of Jesus which we first encounter in the record of His wilderness temptations. Hence we can connect the wilderness "satan" with the Jews / Jewish thinking and the temptation to be as *they* wanted rather than as God intended.

Matthew's record speaks of "the tempter", and the suggestion has been made that this was a technical term used to refer to the Essene priest whose duty it was to test the claims to Messiahship

made by people (5). This would confirm the suggestion that the Lord's temptations were at the hands of the Jews. The desert where He was would've been accessible from the Qumran settlement of the Essenes, and the preceding chapter 3 of Matthew has recorded how many of these people appear to have accepted baptism from John the Baptist in the very area where the temptations occurred. Perhaps "the tempter" priest stayed around and entered into dialogue with Jesus. In confirmation of the idea that the "devil" was some form of Jewish priestly figure, we note that Mt. 4:4 records that Jesus told him that "It is *written*...". To the illiterate, Jesus usually said that they would have *heard* something *said* in the Old Testament; but to the literate Jewish religious leadership, He prefaces His quotations or allusions by saying that "It is *written*". The fact He uses this phrase here would suggest He may have been talking to one of that class. The Wisdom of Solomon 2:12-20 has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life and death amongst the Jews, suggesting that they did indeed subject Him to tests of His Messiahship:

“Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false...he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit... and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it" (6).

4. In Lk. 11:21,22, the Lord Jesus speaks of how He has already overcome 'Satan' and is now sharing Satan's goods with His disciples. Now this may be prophetic of the Lord's faith in victory over 'satan' in the cross. But it could also be a reference back to His successful struggle with 'satan' in the wilderness. If this is the case, then He is reflecting how He understood 'satan'

not as a literal strong man who guards his house, for Jesus didn't fight with such a person in the wilderness, but rather to the symbolic power of sin with which He had fought and overcome (7).

5. There is an evident similarity between the temptations / testing of Jesus and the temptations / testing of Israel, also in the wilderness. That's why each time, the Lord replies to the temptation with a quotation from Deuteronomy relevant to the wilderness temptations of Israel. The point is that it was *God* who tested Israel. The Greek words *peirazo* and *peirasmos* which are translated "tempt" in the wilderness temptation record are used in the Greek Old Testament in connection with *God* testing His people (Gen. 22:1; Ex. 15:25; 17:7; Num. 14:22; Dt. 4:34; 8:2; 9:22; 33:8; Ps. 95:8). Quite simply, whoever or whatever "the devil" was in the Lord's temptations, it was under the control of God. We've earlier pointed out how *God* tested Israel in 2 Sam. 24:1, but the parallel 1 Chron. 21:1 says that "satan" did this.

6. The Lord Jesus overcame the temptations by quoting Scripture. This is an understandable way to overcome temptation that goes on within the human mind; but there is no logical nor Biblical reason why an evil being such as a personal satan would be somehow scared off by quoting Scripture. If tempted or threatened by an evil person, let alone a personal "Satan", it would be quite useless to merely quote Bible verses to the person so that they leave us. But once the real 'satan' is understood to be the adversary of our own internal temptations and thoughts, all becomes clearer.

7. The idea of the Lord being led by the spirit and then seeing things like Him standing on a high mountain, or perched on a temple pinnacle, all have some similarities with the experience of Ezekiel. He was likewise 'led of the spirit' of God to the captives by the river Chebar; he was 'in spirit' transported there, but I don't think that means he literally went there (Ez. 1:4-28; 3:11-15; 11:1,24,25). It seems the same happened with the Lord Jesus, the "son of man" whom Ezekiel typified in so many ways.

8. The account of the temptations begins and ends with reference to "the spirit". The Lord Jesus was led by God's spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, and then "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (Lk. 4:1,14). The nature of the record hardly suggests that 'Satan' was in radical, independent opposition to the spirit of God; even if we take 'Satan' as a personal being in the narrative, clearly there was a co-operation between him and God in order to test God's Son (cp. Paul's delivering of people unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme, 1 Cor. 5:5). And that runs counter to the classical view of Satan as a rebellious being locked in combat with God, ever seeking to oppose Him.

Suggested Explanations

1. When Jesus was baptized in Jordan by John, He received the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:16). As soon as He came out of the water, He was driven into the wilderness to be tempted. Knowing that He had the power of the spirit to turn stones into bread, jump off buildings unharmed etc., these temptations must have raged within His mind. If a person was suggesting these things to Jesus and Jesus knew that person to be sinful, then the temptations were a lot less subtle than if they came from within Jesus' own mind.

2. The temptation to take the kingdoms to Himself would have been far more powerful if it came from within Christ. Jesus' mind would have been full of Scripture, and in His afflicted state of mind, caused by His fasting, it would be tempting to misinterpret passages to enable Him to use them to justify taking the easy way out of the situation He was in.

Standing on a high mountain recalls Ezekiel being shown what the Kingdom would be like from a high mountain (Ez. 40:2), and John, seeing "the holy Jerusalem" from "a great and high mountain" (Rev. 21:10). Jesus saw the world's kingdoms as they would be in the future (Lk. 4:5), i.e. in the Kingdom, when "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). Maybe He would have thought of Moses at the end of 40 years' wilderness wandering (cp. His forty days) looking out at the Promised Land (the Kingdom)

from Mount Nebo. It is emphasized in Daniel (Dan. 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21) that “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will”; Jesus would have known that only God, not anyone else, could give Him the kingdom. Therefore it would not have been much of a temptation if an evil monster claimed to be able to give Jesus the kingdom, when He knew only God had the power. However, Jesus knew that it was His (the Father’s) good pleasure to give Jesus the kingdom, and it must have been suggested by the “devil” within Jesus that He could take that kingdom immediately. After all, He could have reasoned, God has delegated all authority to me in prospect (Jn. 5:26-27), to the extent that He had power to both give His life and take it again (Jn. 10:18), although ultimately all power was given unto Him only after His death and resurrection (Matt. 28:18). Jer. 27:5-8 and Jer. 34:5-8 in the LXX speak of how God has made the earth and will give it (Gk. *dosō*) to whomever He wishes; and these are the very words of the 'satan' in Luke's record: "I will give (*dosō*) it to you... I give it to whomever I wish". One could say that this is a way of explaining how the Lord Jesus was tempted to 'play God' and seek equality with God- which temptation He refused (as Paul points out in Phil. 2).

3. With His familiarity with Scripture, Christ would have seen the similarities between Himself and Elijah, whose morale collapsed after 40 days in the wilderness (1 Kings 19: 8) and Moses, who forfeited his immediate inheritance of the land at the end of 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus at the end of 40 days, was in a similar position to them - faced with a real possibility of failure. Moses and Elijah failed because of human weakness - not because of a person called “the devil”. It was this same human weakness, the “satan’ , or adversary, that was tempting Jesus.

4. “And the devil said unto Him, If thou be the Son of God...” (Lk. 4: 3). It must have been a constant temptation within the mind of Christ to question whether He really was the Son of God, seeing that everyone else thought He was the son of Joseph (Lk. 3:23; Jn. 6:42) or illegitimate (so Jn. 9:29 implies), and that the official temple records described him as the son of Joseph (Matt. 1:1,16; Lk. 3:23, where “supposed” means ‘reckoned by

law'). He was the only human being not to have a human father. Philippians 2: 8 implies that Jesus came to appreciate that He really was a man like us, inferring it was tempting for Him to disbelieve He was the Son of God, or to misunderstand His own nature.

5. The temptations were controlled by God for Christ's spiritual education. The passages quoted by Jesus to strengthen Himself against His desires ("devil") are all from the same part of Deuteronomy, regarding Israel's experience in the wilderness. Jesus clearly saw a parallel between His experiences and theirs:-

Deuteronomy 8:2 "The Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments (word), or no."	Matthew 4 / Luke 4 "Jesus led up of the spirit" "forty days" "in the wilderness". Jesus was proved by the temptations. Jesus overcame by quoting the Scriptures that were in His heart (Ps. 119:11), thus showing it was the Scriptures that were in His heart.
Deuteronomy 8:3. "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word...of the Lord..."	"He was afterward an hungered". In John 6 manna is interpreted by Jesus as representing the Word of God, which Jesus lived by in the wilderness. Jesus learnt that spiritually He lived by the Word of God. "He answered...it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word ...of God".,
Deuteronomy 8:5 "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee"	Jesus no doubt reflected on His experiences. God chastened His Son, Jesus- 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89: 32.

Thus Jesus showed us how to read and study the Word - He thought Himself into the position of Israel in the wilderness, and

therefore took the lessons that can be learnt from their experiences to Himself in His wilderness trials. The description of the Lord Jesus as being in the wilderness with beasts and Angels (Mk. 1:13) is another connection with Israel's experience in the wilderness- they were plagued there by "wild beasts" because of their disobedience (Dt. 32:19-24 and context).

6. There is a strange outline similarity between the record of the Lord's temptations and Jewish myths about what happened in Eden. According to the Midrash, Adam was fed by Angels (*Life of Adam* 4, *Bab. Sanhedrin* 59 B) and worshipped by wild beasts (*Apocalypse of Moses* 16) whom Adam dominated (*Apocalypse of Moses* 10). Mk. 1:13 brings these traditions together by saying that the Lord Jesus was with the wild beasts and after the temptations, Angels ministered to Him [the Greek could mean 'fed Him']. Further, *Life of Adam* claims that Adam fasted for 40 days standing in the Jordan River as penitence for his sin (6,17), surrounded by wild beasts (8), whilst Satan complains that Adam didn't want to worship him (12) (8). What is the point of these connections, and why do they appear so vague? Again I return to the idea of deconstruction. The inspired Gospel writers were alluding to these popular but uninspired Jewish myths in order to show how God wanted His people to understand Jesus as the second Adam. Instead of believing those jumbled myths and gossips about Adam and Satan in Eden, the Christian believer was instead to focus upon the sinless Lord Jesus and His successful 40 day fasting and battle against the temptations which arose from His own mind, as strength and encouragement in our own battles against the same temptations. For He was tempted in all points as we are (Heb. 4:15,16). If indeed such deconstruction of Jewish myths was one intention of the record, then this would explain why it is written as it is, with some features which at first blush are confusing to Gentile readers separated by 20 centuries from the milieu against which and for which the accounts were first written.

Notes

(1) John Thomas, *Eureka: An Exposition Of The Apocalypse* (West Beach, Australia: Logos Publications, 1985 ed.), Vol. 3 p. 65.

(2) G.H. Twelftree, 'Temptation Of Jesus', in I.H. Marshall, ed., *Dictionary Of Jesus And The Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1992) p. 822. Ernst Lohmeyer likewise noted that the account of the wilderness temptations reads very much as a disputation between two Rabbis- as if Jesus was arguing with a Jewish mind about the interpretation of Scripture. See Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer* (London: Collins, 1965) p. 224. Henry Kelly sees the record as "a typical rabbinical "show-debate". Such debates were a form of midrash (meditation on Scripture) that displayed an authoritative figure responding to a series of challenges by citing the correct passage from Scripture"- *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 87. There's a passage in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 89b) where 'Satan' three times tempts Abraham, and is rebuffed by Abraham's quoting of Scripture. There's another example in the *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 11.5 where Moses likewise is portrayed as having a triple dialogue with an Angel about agreeing to his death. The more researchers explore the Jewish literature contemporary with the Gospels, the more it becomes apparent that the style of the Gospel records is similar to that found in the contemporary literature- and such a show trial was very much Jewish rabbinic style. "The Gospel tradition presents much of Jesus' teaching in literary forms akin to those characteristic of rabbinic literature. Such "forms" include miracle stories, parables, disputations, and "cases", examples drawn from real life situations"- M. Wilcox, 'Semitic Influence On The New Testament', in C.A. Evans and S.E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary Of New Testament Background* (Leicester: IVP, 2000) p. 1094.

(3) See Oscar Cullmann, *The State In The New Testament* (New York: Scribners', 1956) p. 15.

(4)

**The Synoptic
Gospels**

John's Gospel

Mt. 16:19 the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom

Jn. 20:21,23

the more literal accounts of the birth of Jesus

Jn. 1: 1-14

The great preaching commission

Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21;
Jn. 15:8,16; Jn. 17:23
RV

The Synoptics all include the Lord's Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead-in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion

In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord's discourse in the upper room. "The day of the son of man" in John becomes "the hour [of the cross]... that the son of man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). "Coming", "that day", "convict / judge the world" are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now.

The three synoptic gospels all include Peter's 'confession',

In John's gospel the account of the transfiguration is

shortly before Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain.	lacking. Are we to assume that Thomas' confession in chapter 20 is supposed to take its place?
The need for water baptism	Jn. 3:3-5
The account of the breaking of bread	John's version is in John 6:48-58. He stresses that one must absorb Christ into themselves in order to really have the eternal life which the bread and blood symbolize. It seems John puts it this way in order to counter the tendency to think that merely by partaking in the ritual of breaking bread, believers are thereby guaranteed eternal life.
The many quotations from the Old Testament, shown to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.	John expresses this in more abstract language: "The word was made flesh" (Jn. 1:14).
The synoptics each give some account of the literal origin of Jesus through giving genealogies or some reference to them.	John's Gospel speaks of Jesus as if He somehow existed in the plan of God from the beginning, but "became flesh" when He was born of Mary.

(5) See Laurence Gardner, *Bloodline Of the Holy Grail* (Gloucester, MA: Fair Winds Press, 2002) p. 314. This point is apparently confirmed in Barbara Thiering, *Jesus the Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006) pp. 80,81,88.

(6) Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68.

(7) This is actually the view of Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1971) p. 73.

(8) More such references and evidence for connection between the temptation narrative and the Jewish Midrash about Adam are to be found in Eduard Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship* (London: S.C.M., 1960) p. 35.

5-8-1 Jesus in the Wilderness: A Study in the Language and Nature of Temptation

I have suggested above that one view of the wilderness temptations would be that we have here a dramatic representation of the Lord's internal struggle against temptation. Samuel T. Lachs in *A Rabbinic Commentary of the New Testament* (1) describes the temptation record as "Jesus' struggle with himself and overcoming the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination, part of all men, and which is externalized in the literature by the figure of Satan". Further, he suggests that Jesus' temptations in the wilderness "could be seen as Jesus' struggle with himself and overcoming the *yezer hara*, the evil inclination" and that "The confrontation with Satan could be seen as Jesus' struggle with himself and overcoming the *yezer hara*, the evil inclination, part of all men, and which is externalized in the literature by the figure of Satan".

It may well be argued that the language of the wilderness temptations implies there was physical movement going on, e.g. the tempter came to Jesus and led Him. We now consider how such language is relevant to internal desires within the human mind.

"And when the tempter came to Him..."

I want to show that temptation and desire are often described in terms of physical movement, thus enabling us to analyze them in a way which is easier to visualize than to describe them in purely abstract terms.

The Lord “was tempted in every point like as we are” (Heb. 4:15); and “every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts (desires) and enticed” (James 1:14). For Jesus to be tempted like us, He had to go through the same process of temptation as we do. So to some extent He also was “drawn away” by the evil desires – the ‘Devil’ – which He had within Him. This would explain why the Devil is described as taking Jesus into Jerusalem and onto a mountain; this “taking” is the same as being “drawn away” in James 1. This association of our natural desires with the idea of physical movement is picked up frequently in the New Testament. “Lead us not into temptation” (Mt. 6:13) is a case in point. We are led by our desires, as Jesus was to a small extent in the wilderness; and yet God is expressed here as ultimately in control of these things. He is greater than those desires, and is able to stop them leading us, to “keep us from falling” (note the connection of temptation and physical movement again). The world generally makes no resistance to being led by the Devil – thus “silly women” are “led captive... led away with divers lusts... led away with the error of the wicked” (2 Tim. 3:6; 2 Pet. 3:17). Jesus was not led by the Devil – His lusts which He shared with us – to the same extent as these people were. But nevertheless, the same basic idea of sin leading us in order to tempt us was true of Him. The Greek word translated “taketh” in Matthew 4 in relation to Jesus being ‘taken’ by the Devil is used both figuratively and literally in Scripture. The following examples show its figurative use:

“...customs they have *received* to hold” (Mk. 7:4)

“His own *received* Him not” (Jn. 1:11)

“You have *received* Christ” (Col. 2:6)

Similarly, the Devil ‘coming’ to Jesus can also be subjective; the Greek word for ‘coming’ can also be used either figuratively or literally. It is translated ‘consent’ in 1 Timothy 6:3: some “consent not to wholesome words”. Hebrews 12:1 describes “the sin that does so easily beset us” as if sin – the Devil – comes up to us and besets us. The language of Revelation 20 regarding the Devil and Satan being loosed and going out throughout the world now falls into place, once it is appreciated that the diabolism – our evil desires – are likened to coming to people. The Lord Jesus answered each temptation by quoting Scripture, as if the whole experience was a living demonstration of Psalm 119:11: “Your word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against You”. Although Jesus had the word in His

heart, He had our lusts / desires, and for a brief moment it was possible that “the lusts of other things *entering in*” (Mk. 4:19) could try (albeit in vain) to choke that word, even in *His* heart. For them to try to ‘enter in’, they must ‘come’ to us; and thus the Devil – those desires – came to Jesus. The parable of the sower equates all the various reasons for failure to produce fruit, seeing they all have the same effect. Satan ‘coming’ to take away the word from the new convert is parallel, therefore, to “the lusts of other things entering in (choking) the word” (Mk. 4:15,19).

There’s another example of our internal lust being described as physically moving in to us ⁽²⁾. Nathan’s parable about David’s sin with Bathsheba blamed the act on a traveller ‘coming to’ David asking to be satisfied. The traveller of the parable represented David’s lusts which led to adultery and murder (2 Sam.12:4), although both these come “from within, out of the heart of man” (Mk. 7:20–23).

The Diaglott translates James 1:14 “each one is tempted by his own inordinate desire, being drawn out and entrapped”. This is the language of hunting animals – drawing them out and trapping them. 1 Timothy 3:7 talks of the “snare of the Devil” – our inordinate desires. Thus for Jesus to be tempted He had to be drawn out of the tremendous shell of His own spirituality, like a mouse is attracted out of a hole towards cheese set in a trap; and then having the self control and self possession to withdraw back again.

Note

(1) Samuel T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary of the New Testament* (Jersey City: Ktav, 1987) p. 50.

(2) This and other observations in this section are confirmed in Wayne E. Oates, *Temptation: A Biblical and Psychological Approach* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991).

5-8-2 The Wilderness Temptations: a Window into the Mind of Jesus

We have shown that our Lord’s experiences were similar to those of Israel in the wilderness. The following are additional comments which give greater insight into His temptations:

– The Lord realized He was in a similar position to Israel in another wilderness, and therefore personalized Scripture in Deuteronomy concerning *their* experience then to apply to Himself.

– The personification of the sinful temptations in the Lord's heart as a person called 'the Devil' shows how clearly His mind was divided between flesh and spirit – without the hazy overlap so characteristic of our semi-spirituality. It was probably with this in mind that He deftly broke the bread representing his body into two at the Last Supper – to show that clear division within Himself (Mt. 26:26). A psychotherapist friend of mine, Dr. Artur Dombrovsky, suggested to me in discussing the wilderness temptations that the more in touch with themselves a person is, the more clearly they will be able to see themselves from outside themselves; the greater the distance they are able to place between them and the 'self' whom they analyze and dialogue with in self-examination. Much of our self-talk is vague; that of the Lord Jesus was specific and focused. He was the man ultimately in touch with Himself.

– The quotation of Dt. 6:13 "You shalt fear the Lord your God (alone)" was probably made with Dt. 6:14 in mind "You shall not go after other gods". Perhaps He interpreted the pagan idols as the evil thoughts of His heart. Earlier Dt. 6:7,8 had warned that not repeating the Law would result in idol worship – and Christ saw that His neglect of the Father's word would result in His serving His evil desires. Thus the purpose of the temptations was to prove whether Christ would really keep and apply the word in His heart (Dt. 8:2), as it was for Israel in their wilderness.

– God alone has the power to give the Kingdom (Dan. 4:32). That Jesus was tempted to take it for Himself (Mt. 4:9) indicates He was tempted to make Himself equal to God. Phil. 2:6 comments on this: that although He had the same perfect mind as God, He did not consider equality with God a thing to be even considered. This shows (again) how conscious Christ was of His sinless mind, and how this tempted Him to proudly assume equality with God. This was probably in the back of His consciousness as He argued in Jn. 10:34–36 that men in the Old Testament had been called God, but He was not then taking that title to Himself as He could have done, but only calling Himself the *Son* of God. His appreciation of the many passages which functionally applied the Name of Yahweh to Him would have tempted Him to use the name in His own right because of His ultimate manifestation of God. Christ reflected that to whomsoever *He* wanted He could give the Kingdom (Lk. 4:6) – and He thought of giving it to

Himself. Note how later He promised to give the cities of the Kingdom to us (Mt. 19:28; Lk. 19:17).

– His ‘adversary’, His own mind, quoted Ps. 91:11,12 to Himself (Mt. 4:6): “He shall give His Angels charge over you”. This Psalm has primary reference to Joshua being protected by the Angel during the wilderness wanderings when the apostate Israelites were consumed by the destroyer Angel. The specific reason for this protection is given in Ps. 91:1; because he had remained in the tabernacle, no doubt from the motive of wanting to hear as much as possible of God’s word spoken by the Angel to his master Moses (Ex. 33:11). Our Lord was in a similar position – dedicated to the word of God, the rest of Israel apostate. It would have been tempting to abuse the subsequent Angelic power which His spirituality had made available to Him.

– There is the implication that it took the Lord 40 days to overcome the Devil, at which point the Devil departed. This is more easily understandable in terms of an internal battle, than a literal struggle against a supernatural being. And the fact it took 40 days shows how hard was the struggle for the Lord.

– The Lord standing on a high mountain beholding the coming Kingdom of God ⁽¹⁾ points forward to an identical scene in Rev. 21:10. There are other connections with Revelation – “The kingdoms of the world” = Rev. 11:15; v.9,10= Rev. 22:8,9; v.5= Rev. 21:2. It is almost as if the Lord Jesus in giving Revelation was looking back to His wilderness trials, rejoicing that what He had been tempted to have then *illegitimately*, was now His and ours legitimately. The wilderness temptation was to take the Kingdom and rule it for Himself rather than for God; i.e. not to manifest God, even if externally there would not be any evident difference between whether He was manifesting God in an acceptable spirit or not. For these temptations to be real, it must have been possible that God would have allowed Christ to take the Kingdom; as He would have allowed the Lord to use the Angels to rescue Him from his ordeal in Gethsemane. That God was willing to accept a second best, to allow His plan for salvation to go as far as Christ’s freewill effort allowed it to, would have been a tremendous temptation and yet stimulation to Jesus. Hence God’s supreme delight in the totality of Christ’s effort and victory, as described, e.g., in Is. 49:5–9.

– There can be little doubt that standing on a mountain looking out over God’s Kingdom would have reminded Christ of Moses on Nebo, who for one slip was denied it all. And that must have sobered Him (Dt. 34:1). And having quoted Dt. 8:3 to Himself about living on the

bread/word of God, His mind would have gone on to Dt. 8:9 with its description of eating bread without scarceness in the Kingdom – i.e. feeding fully on spiritual things, in the allegory.

– The Lord was tempted to believe that He would be miraculously preserved from dashing His foot against a stone. This is an allusion to Prov. 3:23, which promises that the Father will keep the Son in whom He delights from ‘stumbling in the way’. Prov. 3:4 is specifically applied to the Lord Jesus in Lk. 2:52. But ‘stumbling in the way’ in the context of Prov. 3 refers to sinning, and the need to not stumble by the hard effort of applying Divine wisdom in daily life. Do we get another window here into the mind of the Lord? Is not the implication of all this that He was tempted to think that as God’s Son, somehow God would preserve Him from sinning, and so He could do as He wished? Thank God, and Him, that He put that thought so far behind Him.

Note

(1) Christ seeing “all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time” (Lk. 4:5) surely refers to the future Kingdom of God on earth – all the kingdoms as they would be in the future (cp. Rev. 11:15).

5-9 Unclean Spirits

Matthew 12:43–45: “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.”

Popular Interpretation

Unclean spirits are said to be servants of the Satan, who are responsible for entering people and making them sin.

Comments

1. Neither Satan nor the Devil are mentioned as controlling the unclean spirit.
2. Sin comes from within and nothing from outside a man can enter him and defile him (Mk. 7:15).
3. Verse 45 concludes: "Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation", showing that this passage is meant to be understood as a parable. "Unclean spirit" is a phrase often synonymous with "demons" in the Gospels. We showed in chapter 4 that Jesus was using the language of the day when talking about demons, and so He was here. Jesus was effectively saying, "In the same way as you believe unclean spirits can go out of a man and re-enter him, so this generation was once cleansed, but is soon going to become even worse than it was initially".
4. This passage is in the context of Matthew 12:22–28, where Jesus uses the common ideas of the Pharisees to disprove their own argument: "Every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and *if* Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself... and *if* I by Beelzebub cast out devils (demons), by whom do your children cast them out?". So Jesus was not saying He believed in Satan or Beelzebub – indeed, Beelzebub is clearly defined as a pagan idol in 2 Kings 1:2 – but He was using the language of the day to confound the Jews. So it is not surprising that a few verses later He is talking in parabolic language again about unclean spirits. In the same way as He did not believe in Beelzebub, so He did not believe in unclean spirits.
5. That this passage is parabolic is indicated by Matthew 13:10, where "the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why do you speak unto them in parables?". Jesus spoke the parables about Beelzebub and unclean spirits on the same day as He told that of the sower (Mt. 12:46; 13:1). The large amount of parabolic language used that day therefore prompted their question.
6. Careful reading indicates that "the unclean spirit" is synonymous with the man, as a deaf demon refers to a deaf man in v. 22 of the same chapter. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walks through dry places...". Walking through a wilderness and deciding to return to one's house is clearly language applicable to a man. This is all confirmed by the fact that Jesus is almost certainly alluding to a verse in the Septuagint version (which was the Bible in

common use in Christ's time) at Proverbs 9:12, although it is omitted for some reason in the A.V. This verse clearly speaks of a man, not a spirit, "(the scorner of instruction) walks through a waterless waste, through a land that is desert, and with his hands garners barrenness".

7. The "spirit" often refers to the attitude of mind (e.g. Dt. 2:30; Prov. 25:28; Is. 54:6; 61:3; Ez. 18:31; Mk. 14:38; Lk. 2:40; 2 Cor. 2:13; 12:18; Eph. 4:23). an "unclean spirit" may possibly refer to an unclean state of mind, which would fit the context in vv. 34–36. Because "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7), the spirit would be synonymous with the man. Thus the parable would describe a man's attitude of mind being cleansed and then his going into an even more degenerate state as happened when Saul's 'unclean spirit' was cured by David playing the harp, and then it returned even worse. Notice that we read of "an evil spirit *from the Lord*" affecting Saul (1 Sam. 16:14); this attitude of mind was sent by God, not a super-human evil being.

Suggested Explanations

1. John the Baptist cleansed the Jewish nation to a certain extent; he tried to change the evil heart (spirit) of the Jews (Mal. 4:1,6 cp. Mt. 11:10,14). The man walking in the wilderness ("dry places") is like the Jews going out to hear John preach in the wilderness. The whole discourse was sparked off by Jesus curing "one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb" (Mt. 12:22). The cured man was probably standing by, and it would have been a powerful way of reasoning: "You know what this man used to be like. It's so wonderful that he is now whole. How tragic it would be if he became seven times worse than he was before. But that's how tragic it will be for you, seeing you do not want to continue in the spiritual healing which John brought you".

2. We have seen that Jesus was alluding to a passages in Proverbs 9:12, linking the man who rejects wisdom with the Jews, who were now rejecting "Christ... The wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), Christ "who... is made unto us... wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:30). Other details in Proverbs 9 accord with this approach:

– "Wisdom... has killed her beasts... furnished her table. She has sent forth her maidens: she cries upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither" (Prov. 9:1–4). This is the basis of the parable of the marriage supper, where the Jews refuse to accept the call to learn the wisdom of Christ (Luke 14). Wisdom crying

upon the high place of the city recalls Jesus crying out in the temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Jn. 7:37).

– “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning” (Prov. 9:9) would refer to those who learnt from John and went on to learn more from Christ.

– “Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled” (Prov. 9:5) recalls Christ’s invitation to eat His flesh and drink His blood, in symbol, at the communion service (Mt. 26:26–28).

– “Wisdom has builded her house” (Prov. 9:1) would perhaps refer to Christ’s sweeping of His house in Matthew 12:44. Thus the two women of Proverbs, the whore and wisdom, would represent the teaching of the Jewish system and Christ respectively. Apostate Israel are likened to a whore in Ezekiel (16:28,29,31) and Hosea (chapters 1,2); see also Jeremiah 3:1,6, 8.

3. We are now in a position to trace some of the symbology in this passage a little deeper. The man, representing the Jews, who would not heed the teaching of Christ, walked through “dry places”. This may recall apostate Israel in the wilderness, who also “tempted Christ” (1 Cor. 10:9), refusing to obey the teaching of Moses, who represented Christ (Dt. 18:18). God led Israel “through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt” (Jer. 2:6). This exactly recalls the language of Proverbs 9:12 in the Septuagint – “through a waterless waste, through a land that is desert... barrenness”. Notice that Israel in the wilderness sought for the “rest” of the kingdom, but never found it (Heb. 3:11). Similarly, the man in Matthew 12:43 went through the dry wilderness “seeking rest, and finding none”.

4. The man decided to return to his house. This must have reference to v. 29, spoken shortly before, which says that the strong man of a house must be bound before the contents of his house can be taken away. Luke 11:22 adds that this can only be done by a stronger man than he. This strong man is Satan, sin, which only Jesus was strong enough to overcome. Because Jesus bound Satan – sin – He was able to do miracles and thus share with us the spoils of the house. There is a hint in the Gospels that the people Jesus cured were also forgiven their sins and sometimes their illnesses were a direct result of their sins (Lk. 5:20; Jn. 5:14). The infirm woman was described as being bound by Satan (Lk. 13:16) until Jesus cured her. Jesus could reason that it was just as effective to say “Your sins be forgiven you”

as to say “Rise up and walk” (Lk. 5:23). The Devil – sin – kept us as bond–slaves in his house until Jesus destroyed him (Heb.2:14–18). Jesus began to bind the strong man of sin in His life, and therefore could share the spoils with us to some extent then, although He did so more fully through His death. Thus the house to which the man returned was empty – all the goods of the strong man (v. 29) had been taken away. This may have been symbolized by Jesus cleansing the temple (Mk. 11:15–17). He described the temple to the Jews as “*your* house” (Mt. 23:38). The man, representing apostate Israel, would call the temple “*my* house”. Christ’s cleansing of the temple at Passover time would have mirrored the Jewish custom, based on Exodus 12:19, of the firstborn sweeping the leaven from the house. Jesus cleansed the temple, His “Father’s house” (Jn. 2:16).

In prospect, the spiritual house of Israel was swept and emptied of the bad things sin had put in it. The house was “garnished”. Literally this is “kosmos–ed” (Gk. *kosmeo*). The word *kosmos* describes an order of things. Jesus set up a new *kosmos* in the house of Israel by doing away with the Law, which brought awareness of sin, the strong man, Satan (Rom. 7:7–11; 4:15). For more details see 2–4 “The Jewish Satan”.

The seven other spirits entering the man therefore represent the intense rejection of the Gospel by the Jews after having heard it. Peter seems to allude to “the last state of that man is worse than the first” (Mt. 12:45); talking primarily of the Jewish Christians who had now turned away from Christ, Peter reasons that “If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world (cp. “swept and garnished”) through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Pet. 2:20). Thus it may be that Peter interprets the seven spirits entering the man, i.e. entering his house, as a prophecy of the many Jewish Christians who turned away from the faith due to the work of the Judaizers, who encouraged them to return to the Law. Verse 21 and 22 are on the same theme:

“For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire”.

5-10 The Devil and His Angels

Matthew 25:41: "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels"

Popular Interpretation

This is taken to prove that the Devil is a person controlling sinful angels.

Comments

1. The Devil and his angels are to be destroyed. Everlasting fire is symbolic of total destruction (Jer. 17:27; Jude 7). Angels in the sense of supernatural beings cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36).
2. 'Angels' can refer to men (e.g. John the Baptist, Mt. 11:10; John's disciples, Lk. 7:24; the two spies, James 2:25), the original word *aggelos* being translated and implying a messenger or, by extension, a follower.
3. This verse is describing the judgment at Jesus' return (v. 31,32). If the Devil is a personal being, he is destroyed then, but Revelation 20:10 describes the Devil being thrown into a lake of fire at the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ, which will begin at His return. If the Devil is a person, he can only be destroyed once – either at the end or the beginning of the 1,000 years. Seeing that Scripture says the Devil is destroyed at both times, it follows that it is not a specific individual but representative of something or various groups of people.
4. Matthew 25:32 says that the purpose of the judgment is to punish the wicked men of all nations, the "goats". Why then is v. 41 saying that the Devil is going to be punished, seeing that, according to popular belief, he is not an ordinary man?

Suggested Explanations

1. The fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels; those "on the left hand" are thrown into it. It would seem that the Devil's angels are the goats on the left hand, who are ordinary people guilty of vs. 42–45 – not visiting the sick or giving to the poor, etc. People who follow the

Devil – their evil desires – are guilty of neglecting such things, therefore they can be described as the Devil's "angels" or followers.

2 We have shown that "everlasting fire" represents everlasting punishment. The Devil and his angles are to be thrown into everlasting fire. Verse 46 says, "these (the unloving men and women of vs. 42–45; the "goats" of the human nations of v. 32) shall go away into everlasting punishment". Thus the Devil's angels are equated with fleshly people who are "angels" (messengers, i.e. servants) of their evil desires.

3. Matthew 13:38–42 says that those people who are sinners although apparently still in the kingdom of the Jewish world (vs. 38,41) are "tares" sown by the Devil, and they will be punished by eternal fire (punishment). The tares are plants similar to the wheat – the faithful – but at the day of judgment there is a division made between the good and bad Christians. Bringing together Matthew 13 and Matthew 25, we can see that the Devil's children or "angels" are the same as wicked men:

The good seed, Word, wheat	the Tares
Sown by Jesus	Sown by the Devil
Children of the Kingdom	Children of the wicked one
Sheep	Goats
The righteous	The wicked
Enter the Kingdom	Go away into everlasting punishment (death)
Loving people (Mt. 25:35,36)	Selfish people (Mt. 25:42–44) Them (people) which do iniquity wail and gnash their teeth (a reaction experienced by men).

5-11 Satan Takes Away the Word

Mark 4:15: "And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts".

Popular Interpretation

Satan is a person who stops us being righteous.

Comments

1. If this is so, then there is nothing we can do to stop Satan hindering us; “we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor. 15:19).
2. “Your Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11). Jesus showed the power of the Word in overcoming the Devil in the wilderness. There is no way that a personal being can be more powerful than God’s Word, otherwise there is no point in God giving us the Word to fortify ourselves – “put on the whole armour of God (e.g. ‘the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God’), that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil” (Eph. 6:11,17).
3. Satan “coming” does not mean it is a personal being: v. 19 describes “the lusts of other things” – i.e. the true Devil – “entering in”, as though they, too, physically moved.

Suggested Explanations

1. It is our giving way to our own evil heart that is the only thing that can stop the Word acting on us as it should. Our lack of effort to apply the Word of God, which springs from our evil desires, is therefore our “Satan”. We are our own Satan / adversary.
2. Matthew 13:19 says that the reason for “Satan” taking away the Word from the hearts of these people is because they do not understand it (Mt. 13:14–15). The arena of the conflict is clearly the human heart and understanding.
3. See 2–4 “The Jewish Satan” for another approach to this parable.

5-12 Satan as Lightning

Luke 10:18: “And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven”.

Popular Interpretation

This shows that Satan was once in heaven.

Comments

1. We have shown that no sinful being can be tolerated in God's presence in Heaven (Mt. 6:10; Ps. 5:4–5; Hab. 1:13)
2. Jesus is using parabolic language – “as lightning fall from heaven”, so this “Satan” fell. Lightning comes from heaven in the sense of the sky, not as in the dwelling place of God.
3. Any attempt to link this with the prince of this world being cast out is difficult, because that happened at Christ's death (N.B. “now” in Jn.12:31), whereas this falling of Satan occurred during His ministry.
4. According to popular thought, “Satan” is supposed to have fallen from heaven in Eden, so that he was on the earth at Job's time, yet Jesus is described as seeing this occurring at His time. Weymouth adds a marginal note on Lk. 10:18 in his translation of the Bible: “The thought is not that of Milton's rebel angel banished for ever from the abode of bliss”.
5. If an evil being and his host of followers fell down on to earth literally, why did only Jesus see it and not the disciples? Why is there no other record of this strange event?
6. Falling from heaven is figurative of losing authority, e.g. it is used about the demise of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14. See also Lamentations 2:1 and Jeremiah 51:53.

Suggested Explanations

1. The apostles had just cured many people (Lk. 10:17) and were blinded by their great physical power over disease (v. 20). The real cause of illness and disease is our sin prone nature. That sin is the ultimate reason for illness is stressed in Matthew 9:12 and 12:11, where a sheep gone astray, a clear symbol of a sinner (Mt. 18:13), is equated with a sick man. The principle is summed up in Matthew 9:5 “Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk?”. Thus Jesus said, “I beheld Satan fall”, i.e. “In My view the great thing was that the power of sin was being overcome”.

2. There must be a connection with v. 15: “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell”. Is Jesus implying that “Satan”, the ways of the flesh, which were so well exemplified in Capernaum, were being overcome? Notice that Capernaum was “exalted” in Jewish eyes. “Satan” often referring to the Jewish system (2–4 “The Jewish Satan”), maybe Jesus is equating Capernaum with “Satan” and commenting how the sin which was at the basis of this system was being overcome by the preaching of the Gospel.

5-13 Satan Entered Judas

Luke 22:3: “Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve”.

See Section 2–4, “The Jewish Satan”.

Note how “enter” is used in a non-physical sense in Mt. 25:21 “enter into the joy of your Lord”, entering in at the narrow gate (Mt. 7:13), entering into another’s labours (Jn. 4:38). ‘Satan’ enters a man’s heart in the sense that “the lusts of other things enter in” (Mk. 4:19); in this sense we can “enter into temptation” (Lk. 22:46).

The link between Judas and the ‘Devil’ is brought out by a consideration of Luke’s comment that Judas “sought an opportune time [*eukairan*] to betray Jesus” (Lk. 22:6). But Luke earlier used this word in Lk. 4:13 to describe how the “Devil” in the wilderness departed from the Lord “until an opportune time” [*achri kairou*]. The Lord’s victory in the wilderness prepared Him for the victory over the ‘Devil’ which He achieved in His final passion. Just as the temptation to ‘come down from the cross’ was a repetition of the temptation to throw Himself down from the temple. John’s Gospel often repeats the history of the other Gospels, but in different language. In Mt. 26:46, the Lord comments upon the arrival of Judas: “Rise, let us be going; my betrayer is coming”. But Jn. 14:30,31 puts it like this: “The prince of this world [a phrase understood as meaning ‘the evil one’, the Devil] is coming... Rise, let us be going”. John is picking up the mythological language of the ‘Satan’ figure, and applying it to a real person with real attitudes and sinful intentions – i.e. Judas, who is presented as a personification of the ‘Satan’ / ‘Devil’ / ‘Prince of this world’ principle.

We can easily overlook the huge significance of Mk. 14:21 recording the Lord’s words that Judas personally was guilty for betraying Him,

and would suffer accordingly – even though Lk. 22:22 says that Judas did this because the Satan [i.e. the Jews] ‘entered him’. *Whatever* that means, it doesn’t mean that Judas nor anyone is thereby not personally responsible for their actions.

The translation of the Greek text in Jn. 13:2 has been problematic. “The Devil having put into the heart of Judas” doesn’t quite do justice to what the Greek is really saying. The respected expositor and Greek student C.K. Barratt insists that strictly, the Greek means ‘the Devil had put into his own [i.e. the Devil’s] heart, that Judas should betray Jesus’⁽¹⁾. This translation is almost impossible to make any sense of given the orthodox understanding of the ‘Devil’. And so most popular translations ignore the obvious difficulty by glossing over the strict meaning of the Greek. Understanding the ‘Devil’ as the innate source of temptation within the human heart, the picture becomes clearer. The idea is surely that the thought of betraying Jesus began within the Devil–mind of Judas; he ‘put the thought in his own mind’, as if to stress how Judas conceived this thought totally of himself and within his own mind, just as later Ananias and Sapphira [in an analogous incident] ‘conceived this thing within their heart’. So properly translated, Jn. 13:2 actually supports our general thesis about the Devil – it is stressing that the heart of Judas was itself responsible, that heart put the idea of betraying Jesus into itself – and nobody else was responsible. Note how the Lord addresses Judas as if Judas had full responsibility for his actions and control over them – e.g. “What you are going to do, do quickly” (Jn. 13:27), and Mk. 14:21 “Woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born”. Those two passages alone surely make it clear that Judas was no robot, no puppet on a satanic string. He had full responsibility and choice over his actions, hence these words of the Lord to him. Summing up, we are left with the question: Did *Judas* betray Jesus, or did *Satan*, working through Judas, betray Jesus? The answer, surely, is that it was Judas, and he must bear full responsibility for that.

Note

(1). C.K. Barratt, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) p. 365. Barratt’s view of the Greek is confirmed in D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981) p. 131.

5-13a The Woman Bound by Satan

Luke 13:11-17

Luke 13:11-17 And a woman was there who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years; she was bent over and could in no way straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her: Woman, you are free from your infirmity. And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue, being moved with indignation because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, answered and said to the crowd: There are six days in which men ought to work. In them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day. But the Lord answered them and said: You hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath release his ox or his ass from the stall and lead him away for watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound for eighteen years, to have been freed from this bond on the Sabbath day? And as he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the crowd rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.

Popular Interpretation

This passage is understood to mean that Satan uses "spirits" to bind people with illness.

Comments

1 The woman "had" a spirit which was associated with her being bent over (Lk. 13:11). She was not attacked by a "spirit" from outside of her, but she "had" this spirit within her. "Spirit" is commonly to be understood in Biblical usage as an attitude of mind. She had an attitude of mind which disabled her. And this spirit came from an adversary, a satan. And that adversary is explained in the context- the "adversaries" were the Jewish system who had so crippled the woman (Lk. 13:17).

2 There is no explicit statement that "Satan", the adversary, controlled the "spirit". That has to be assumed by those who wish to see that idea, but the text itself doesn't support it.

3 Jesus is not recorded as doing spiritual battle with Satan or any evil spirit; He simply said "Woman, you are free from your infirmity". He dealt directly with the issue of her illness. And it was "*your* infirmity", just as the woman "had" a disabling spirit. The source of her illness was within her, internal to her rather than having been imposed by some external, cosmic entity.

Suggested Explanations

1 I have elsewhere outlined the connection between "Satan" and the Jewish opposition to Jesus [see <http://www.realdevil.info/2-4.htm>]; for they were the main adversary / satan to His work and that of the early church. The connection is made explicit in this passage- the Jews are called Christ's "adversaries" (Lk. 13:17), as if explaining who the 'satan'

was who had 'bound' the woman. The woman's binding by Satan is connected with the fact she was "a daughter of Abraham", a Jewess. Why make this otherwise throwaway comment, that she was a Jewess? For we are led by the context to assume that obviously she was Jewish. The point surely is that the Jewish system had 'bound' this woman. I suggested in section 4-8 <http://www.realdevil.info/4-8.htm> that many of the diseases Jesus cured had a psychological basis to them; His healing of minds was reflected in the healing of bodies from conditions which had been brought about psychologically. Just as He "loosed" the woman from her illness, so He "loosed" sinners from the burden of their sin [the same word is used in Mt. 18:27 in this connection, and is twice translated "to forgiven" in Lk. 6:37]. It may've been that it was her sense of unforgiven sin which was the actual psychosomatic cause of her strange physical condition. The woman's physical condition- being chronically bowed down- may well have been her body reflecting how her mind felt, bowed down by the heavy burdens the Jewish leaders placed upon her. And of course Jesus uses that very figure in describing the weight placed upon Jewish people by the teachers of Judaism (Mt. 23:4- "They bind heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders; but they will not move them with their finger"). The context of the miracle is that the Jews loosed their tied up animals on the Sabbath, and Jesus reasoned that He likewise could loose His sheep who had been bound or tied up by Satan. But who tied up the animals whom the Jewish leadership loosed? They themselves bound / tied them and loosed them. Jesus says that He looses / unties those whom Satan has tied up. He thus draws a parallel between the Jewish leadership and Satan, the adversary to His work. The unloosing was performed on the Sabbath- the very day whose Mosaic regulations the Jews had abused to burden people. Significantly, Jn. 5:18 uses the same word translated "loose" to describe how Jesus was accused of 'breaking' or 'unloosing' the Sabbath. He did not come to destroy the Law of Moses itself during His lifetime, but to teach Israel that the Jewish additional laws were to be unloosed. The same Greek word is used in other contexts of how Jesus through His death unloosed ['took down'] the wall of partition which excluded Gentiles (Eph. 2:10).

2 Without doubt there is a word play going on in Lk. 13:16: "And ought [*dei* - must] not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound [*deo* - a form of *dei*, literally, 'must-ed'] for eighteen years, to have been freed from this bond [*deis-mon*, another form of *dei*, this 'must-ing'] on the Sabbath day?". Who was it who had taught the woman 'You must this, that and the other; you must not this or that'? Was it Satan in the sense of a personal, cosmic being? Was it surely not the Jewish system who were 'must-ing' people? They, therefore, were the adversary in this context.

5-14 Peter and Satan

Luke 22:31; "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat".

See 2–4 “The Jewish Satan”. Apart from the comments on these two verse there, it is noteworthy that the Lord had previously warned that the Jewish Satan would be actively trying to influence the disciples away from the Truth: “Woe unto the world (often referring to the Jewish world in the Gospels) because of the offences!... but woe to that man by whom the offence comes!... whoso shall offend one of these little ones (the disciples – Zech. 13:7 cp. Mt. 26:31) which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned” (Mt. 18:6,7). This invites comparison with “Woe unto that man by whom the son of man is betrayed... it had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Mt. 26:24). Notice that this stumbling of the disciples at the hand of the Jewish world and its servant Judas was to be around the time of Christ’s capture (Mt. 26:31); which is what Luke 22:31 is warning the disciples (“you” plural) about, and which proved to be so relevant to Peter in the hours after the Lord’s capture. Further proof that “the world” that was to cause these offences was the Jewish world is found by comparing Mt. 13:38,41 (and cp. notes on these verses in “The Jewish Satan”). It’s also been pointed out that ‘Satan desires to sift you as wheat’ “is a proverbial expression” ⁽¹⁾. Schleiermacher therefore observes about this passage: “There is no intention to teach anything with regard to Satan or to confirm that older belief” ⁽²⁾.

There’s also some evident allusion back to the record of Job in the Septuagint version. “The Lord said to the Devil, ‘Behold I give him over [*paradidonai*] to you; only preserve his life” (Job 2:6 LXX). *Paradidonai* and related words are very frequently used of how the Lord Jesus was ‘handed over’ to the systems of the Roman and Jewish Satan (e.g. Mk. 14:41), and yet ultimately His life was preserved by God. Here in Lk. 22:31 we have the Jewish Satan desiring to have the disciples, just as Job’s ‘Satan’ desired. If the disciples grasped the allusion, they would perceive that they were to be as Job, and believe that ultimately the ‘Satan’ was under God’s control, and through prayerful endurance they would come to victory

as	Job	did.
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Notes

- (1) H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 312.
 (2) F.E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: Clark, 1999 ed.) p. 165.

5-15 Your Father the Devil

John 8:44: “Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it”.

Popular Interpretation

The Devil is a person who has children, who are the sinful people. They obey what he tells them to do. “From the beginning” is taken as a reference to the serpent in Eden.

Comments

1. The use of the pronoun “he” does not indicate that the Devil is a person. “Wisdom” is personified as a woman house-builder (Prov. 9:1) and sin as a paymaster paying wages (Rom. 6:23). Human lust is personified as a man who drags us away to enticement. If it is accepted that sin and sinful tendencies are personified, there should be no problem in imagining that persona being given a name – “Satan”, the adversary.
2. There is no specific reference here to the serpent in Eden.
3. We sin because of the lusts that begin inside us (Mk. 7:21–23; James 1:14; Jer. 17:9). Our evil heart – the real Devil – is the father of our lusts and sins. “The lusts of your father” the Devil, are thus the same as the lusts of our evil heart – the Devil.
4. The Devil is a murderer. But “no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn. 3:15). The Devil must, therefore, die – but as angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36) they are therefore immortal, and have eternal life abiding in them.

5. In our exposition of Mark 4:15, we have identified the children of the Devil as those who obey their evil desires – the real Devil.

6. “You do that which you have seen with your father” (the Devil) v. 38. The Jews had not literally seen a person called the Devil, which indicates that when Jesus spoke about the Jews being of their father the Devil, He was again using parabolic language.

7. They were *of* the Devil in the sense that “you do the deeds of your father” (v. 41), i.e. they continued the family likeness.

8. If the Devil is a murderer then he isn’t immortal, for in commentary on this verse John later explained [as if there had already arisen misunderstandings in the time between John’s Gospel and epistles]: “No murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn. 3:15). Angels are immortal (Lk. 20:36), so therefore this “murderer” wasn’t a ‘fallen Angel’.

Suggested Explanations

1. Scripture often uses the characteristics of something mentioned at an earlier point in the Bible to describe what a group of people are like. Thus “the sting of death is sin” (1 Cor. 15:56) alludes back to the sting of the serpent in Eden, but it doesn’t mean that death is a literal serpent – it has the characteristics of the serpent. Thus the dragon in Revelation 12:9 is called “that old serpent”. A dragon cannot be a snake at the same time; but it had the characteristics of the serpent in Genesis.

2. Similarly, the Devil, the desires which are in our heart forming and stimulating an evil inclination, has the characteristics of the serpent, but it does not mean that the serpent was the Devil itself. The serpent was “subtil” (Gen. 3:1; 2 Cor. 11:3); this may well be behind the description of the Jews consulting “that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him” (Mt. 26:4). The serpent in Eden was the prototype of the Jewish system; their killing of Jesus was the fulfilment of the prophecy that the seed of the serpent (sin manifested in the Jews, Mt. 12:34; Lk. 3:7, in its primary meaning) would wound the seed of the woman, Christ, in the heel (Gen. 3:15).

3. John 8:44 is also a reference to Cain, the first murderer – “he was a murderer from the beginning” (Gen. 4:8–9). He “abode not in the truth” as he was the father of the seed of the serpent who corrupted the true

way of worshipping God (see exposition of Gen. 6:2 for more on this: "Suggested Explanations", No. 4). The letter of John often alludes to the Gospel of John, and 1 John 3:12,15, is an example; it confirms this interpretation: "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one (i.e. the Devil – Mt. 13:19 cp. Mk. 4:15) and slew his brother...Whosoever hateth his brother (as Cain did) is a murderer". However, it is also true that John 8:44 alludes to the serpent as well. The serpent told the first lie, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4); he did not abide in the truth; he was a murderer in the sense that he brought about the death of Adam and Eve. "He is a liar, and the father of it". Cain was not a super-human person called the Devil, but an ordinary man. He characterized sin, the Devil. The way in which the fire consumed Abel's offering but not Cain's is paralleled by the fire burning up Elijah's offering but leaving those of the apostate Jewish Baal worshippers (1 Kings 18:19–40). This would associate Cain with apostate Jews, i.e. the Jewish Devil.

4. Note: "...he is a liar, and the father of it". Jesus does not say "he was a liar". If we tell a lie, it is a result of the Devil, in the sense of our evil desires prompting us – not due to any force outside of us. Lying is one of those things that Jesus lists in Mk. 7:15,21–23 as not entering a man from outside him, but originating from within him. The Devil is the 'father' of lies in the sense that they originate from within us – which is where the Biblical Devil is located.

5. "When he speaks a lie" – when someone lies, it is not a super-human person called the Devil standing in front of him, it is the Devil, in the sense of the man's evil desires speaking to him. "Deceit" – i.e. lies – proceed "from within, out of the heart of men" (Mk. 7:21–22).

6. The context of John 8 is Jesus stressing that if only the Jews would truly follow the Word of God, then they would not be seeking to murder Him. There is a pointed contrast between those who are born of the Word of God and those conceived by the Devil, our evil heart. Man's heart is evil continually (Gen. 6:5), and it is only by the Word of God being there that we can stop the evil desires there – the Devil – leading us into sin (Ps. 119:11; James 1:13–15):

– Thus Jesus said that the Jews were murderers (i.e. of the Devil – v. 44) because the word "has no place in you" (Jn. 8:37)

– "Because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father the Devil" (v. 43–44)

– Because Jesus kept the saying (Greek *logos* – word) of God, He was not a liar like the Jews (v. 55) – and they were liars because they were of the Devil (v. 44)

– “There is no truth in him” (the Devil – v. 44) because “Your Word is truth (Jn.17:17). The Devil is therefore the opposite to the Word of God. Jesus said “If you continue in my Word... you shall know the Truth” (Jn. 8:31–32)

– “He that is (born) of God hears God’s Words: you therefore hear them not, because you are not of God” (v. 47), i.e. they were of the Devil (v. 44)

– The seed of the Devil is our lusts, which result in the conception of sin (James 1:13–15; Mt.13:39). Believers are born “not of (this) corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23; James 1:18), the seed of the Word preached by Christ (Lk. 8:11).

Because it is through the Word of God that our evil desires are overcome, they who like the Jews reject that Word, will be living lives and making judgments governed solely by their evil desires – they will be truly “of the Devil”.

5-16 Oppressed of the Devil

Acts 10:38: “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the Devil; for God was with him”.

See exposition of Matthew 12:43–45, “Suggested Explanations” No. 4.

5-17 Child of the Devil / The Sons of Sceva

Acts 13:10: “And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the Devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?”

See exposition of John 8:44 and section 2–4 “The Jewish Satan”.

Acts 19:13-16: “God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or

aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded”.

Comments

The passage begins with the statement that “the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them” (Acts 19:12). Clearly diseases and “evil spirits” are paralleled. There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and here of the diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12).

The diseases were thought to be caused by evil spirits inhabiting the people. The disease in view here is clearly mental, because “the man in whom the evil spirit was” (:16) had a violent episode involving the display of great strength, typical of a psychotic episode observed amongst the mentally ill. But people experiencing those episodes do not have superhuman power; their mental disposition enables the release and mastery of physical strength not normally in their power to use, just as a mother seeing her young child trapped beneath a heavy car can find [apparently] superhuman strength to lift the car up and release the child from beneath it. Her strength is psychologically released and not superhuman in origin. I mentioned elsewhere the way that the language of “demons” decreases over the period of the New Testament; the miracles of the Lord Jesus demonstrated that if they existed, then they were effectively of no power. Here, we read of “evil *spirits*”, and Biblically, the spirit refers

to the mind. Understanding was improving by this point, although far from accurate still. The mental illness of the man was indeed a problem of the 'spirit'.

Throughout Old and New Testament times there was the belief that by calling the name of a god over a sick person, demons could be exorcised. And this incident is an example. There is much emphasis on the use of the *name* of Christ to cast out demons/heal diseases (Mk. 16:17; Acts 3:6; 4:10; 16:18; 19:13–16; James 5:14). This has some similarity with the way in which the pagans repeated the names of their gods to exorcise what they believed to be demons. We can therefore come to the conclusion that in the demonstration of His power as being greater than that of other 'gods' and so-called 'demons', Yahweh is very indirect about it, and does so through alluding closely to the style and language which those false systems used. If this is truly appreciated, it will be evident that just because the New Testament sometimes uses the style and language of the surrounding paganism, this is no proof that those pagan beliefs have any substance. The point of the incident here in Acts 19 was to prove that the name of Jesus was no mere talisman, but was only powerful in the mouths of those who genuinely believed in Him.

When we read that "the evil spirit" replied to the seven men (Acts 19:15), this is clearly parallel with "the man in whom the evil spirit was" (Acts 19:16) who jumped on the men after first stating that he does not recognize their authority, whereas he does recognize the authority of Paul and Jesus. We read in 1 Jn. 4:1 of 'spirits' who should not be believed, and the reference clearly is to human teachers whose message should be analysed and rejected if it were false. A 'spirit' can therefore refer to a person- the Lord Jesus is called "the Lord the Spirit" in 2 Cor. 3:18 RV.

We note that Sceva is called "high priest" (Acts 19:14- this is the word usually used for the singular "High Priest"). His claim was fraudulent, but again we find the New Testament describing things from the perspective of how they appeared to people, without a footnote, as it were, pointing out that the understanding or claims were incorrect. And this explains why there likewise is no specific note to the effect that the understandings of demons and evil spirits were not in fact correct.

In the Jewish *Testament of Solomon* Chapter 18 there is extensive information about the practices of the itinerant exorcists in the area of

Ephesus and this provides a clearer picture of what Sceva was about (1). The Jewish itinerant exorcists claimed to heal by calling the names of Angels over the sick, claiming they had access to the heavenly areas where demons supposedly existed, and there had power to expel the demons. The way that these men were beaten and their powers and belief system exposed as so powerless is surely intentional; indicating that the whole idea of evil spirits, battles in Heaven etc. was being deconstructed by the whole incident. The man “overpowered” them; the power of his illness was greater than their powers. The sick man claimed that he did *not* recognize the power of these men and therefore their belief systems were powerless. In contrast the name of Jesus as believed by Paul was powerful. The theme of deconstruction continues when we discover that the man’s question “Who are you?” (:15) is in fact part of the very formula used by the Jewish exorcists (2); they asked this question of the [supposed] demon and then claimed to cast it out. The man was turning things around, implying that the exorcists were the ones who were spirit possessed and *he* was the one with power to cure them. This is why the seven men are described as running away naked and traumatized [:16 Gk.]—the behaviour and situation associated typically with the ‘possessed’. It may well be that the Jewish heresy of worshipping Angels which Paul warned the Colossians against was in fact the work of Sceva and his itinerant Jewish teachers—Colosse was 120 miles from Ephesus, so Sceva’s itinerant influence may well have been there too. In that same context, Paul teaches that Christ has “disarmed” the supposed [demonic] rulers and authorities which the Jews thought brought sickness (Col. 2:15); if they existed, then they are powerless and therefore effectively non-existent. Christ is in any case “head over every power and authority” (Col. 2:10 NIV).

The record in Acts 19 goes on to record how exactly because of this incident, there was a huge turning away from the practice of such ‘magic’ and towards the word of God. This completes the victory of Christ through Paul, both practically and intellectually— the wrong ideas concerning demons, Angels and exorcism have been publically demonstrated to be wrong, and people turn to Christ in spirit and in truth: “This became known to all that dwelt at Ephesus, both Jews and Gentiles; and fear fell upon them all. And the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Many also of those that had believed came, confessing and declaring their sinful deeds. And not a few of those that practised magical arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they

counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (Acts 19:17-20).

Notes

(1) This is demonstrated at great length in Arnold Clinton, ‘Sceva, Solomon and Shamanism’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 55 (1): 7–26.

(2) Pablo Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King. From King to Magus* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) pp. 51,52.

5-18 The Power of Satan

Acts 26:18: "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me".

Popular Interpretation

This is used to "prove" that a being called "Satan" keeps the whole world in ignorance of the Gospel.

Comments

1. Verse 17 shows that the "they" and "them" referred to are the Gentiles. Are we to think that the Jews were not under "the power of Satan"? At the time Paul was writing there were very many sinful Jews, consciously persecuting the Christians. So this verse cannot be referring to the entire human race.

2. There is no specific indication here that "Satan" is a personal being.

Suggested Explanations

1. There are some clear contrasts drawn here:

To open their eyes	(They were blind).
To turn them from darkness	to light.
From the power of Satan (sin)	unto God (cp. 1 Jn. 1:5).
(Unforgiven)	receive forgiveness of sins.
(Gentiles without inheritance by faith in "the hope of Israel")	them (the Jews) that had access to sanctification by faith.

The Word of God is a light (Ps. 119:105) and is associated with open eyes (Ps. 119:18). We are sanctified by the Word (Jn. 17:17). We have seen in our exposition of John 8:44 that it is by the Word that the power of Satan is overcome; i.e. Satan in the sense of the power our evil desires have over our unregenerate heart. 'Satan' is therefore the

antithesis to the light of God's word – it refers to the flesh, which is the opposition of the Spirit word.

2. Ephesians 4:17–20 almost seems to directly allude back to this passage in Acts 26:18: “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ...”.

Being under the power of Satan is therefore a result of having an empty, vain, fleshly mind (i.e. the Satan of evil desires in our mind having full power) and being ignorant, without understanding. Matthew 13:19 says that Satan (cp. Mk 4:15) has power over a person because of their lack of understanding of the Word. Ephesians 4:17–20 is referring to the same thing as “the power of Satan” defined in Acts 26:18. “To open their eyes” implies to have the eyes of understanding opened (cp. Eph. 1:18).

3. Acts 26:18 implies that it was “the power of Satan” that stopped the Gentiles from sharing the inheritance of the Gospel which was preached to the Jews in the promises (Gal. 3:8; Jn. 4:22). We have shown (in section 2–4 “The Jewish Satan”) that “Satan” is often connected with the Law and the Jewish system. Maybe this is another example. Note too the allusions in this verse to Isaiah 42:6,7: “I... will... keep you, and give you for a... light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house”. This equates the power of Satan with a prison house, and the Law is likened to a prison in Galatians 3:23 and 4:3.

There are allusions in Acts 26:18 to the Jews' crucifixion of Jesus: “This is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Lk. 22:53); “Satan” (the Jews) has desired to have you” (Lk. 22:31), Jesus warned the disciples at the last supper.

The previous verse (Acts 26:17) shows Jesus strengthening Paul to be brave in his mission to the Gentiles – “delivering you from the [Jewish] people, and from the Gentiles”. Jesus Himself was “delivered to the Gentiles” (Lk. 18:32–33) for crucifixion by the Jews, and Mark 15:15 implies Jesus was delivered to “the people”, too. The phrase “the people” frequently occurs in the crucifixion records. It is as if Jesus is saying: ‘I was delivered to the Gentiles and (Jewish) people

because of My preaching; I am now commissioning you to preach, facing the same battle against (the Jewish) Satan and man's blindness to the Word of God, due to his love of the flesh, as I did; but I will deliver you from the Gentiles and Jewish people, rather than deliver you to them, as I was. You are going to spend your life going through the same experiences as I faced in My last hours'. Thus, in yet another way, we can understand how Paul could say "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). This interpretation is confirmed by our "Suggested Explanation" No. 3 of 2 Corinthians 12:7.

5-19 Delivering Unto Satan

1 Corinthians 5:5: "...To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus".

Popular Interpretation

It is argued that when a believer falls from grace, he is taken over again by Satan.

Comments

1. The purpose of this delivering was in order "that the spirit may be saved". If Satan is intent on making people sin and alienated from God, why should what he does to them result in them being saved? It is by the experiences of life that God controls, that we are spiritually developed (Heb.12:5-11).

2. How could the church at Corinth deliver the fallen brother to Satan if no one knows where to locate him?

3. "Destruction" can also imply "punishment" (e.g. 2 Thess.1:9). Are we to think that God would work in cooperation with an angel who is rebelling against Him?

4. Notice that Satan is not described as eagerly entering the man, as we would expect if Satan is constantly trying to influence all men to sin and to turn believers away from God. The church (v. 4) is told to deliver the man to Satan.

Suggested Explanations

1. One of the big “Satans” – adversaries – to the early church was the Roman authority of the time, who, as the first century progressed, became increasingly opposed to Christianity. The Greek phrase “to deliver” is used elsewhere, very often in a legal sense, of delivering someone to a civil authority, e.g.:

- Someone can “deliver you to the judge” (Mt. 5:25).
- “They will deliver you up to the councils” (Mt. 10:17).
- The Jews “shall deliver (Jesus) to the Gentiles” (Mt. 20:19)
- “The Jews will... deliver (Paul) into the hands of the Gentiles” (Acts 21:11).
- “Yet was I delivered prisoner” (Acts 28:17).

So is Paul advising them to hand over the sinful brother to the Roman authorities for punishment? The sin he had committed was incest, and this was punishable under the Roman law. Remember that “destruction” also implies “punishment”. Leander Keck demonstrates that the behaviour of the incestuous man was “contrary to both Jewish and Roman law”, rendering him liable to punishment by those authorities ⁽¹⁾.

2. “Satan” here may simply refer to the man’s evil desires. He had given way to them in committing the sin of incest, and Paul is perhaps suggesting that if the church separates from the man and leaves him to live a fleshly life for a time, maybe eventually he will come round to repentance so that ultimately his spirit would be saved at the judgment. This is exactly what happened to the prodigal son (Luke 15); living a life away from his spiritual family and totally following Satan – his evil desires – resulted in him eventually repenting. Jeremiah 2:19 sums this up: “Your own wickedness shall correct you and your backslidings shall reprove you: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter” (that they had done).

3. “The flesh” does not necessarily mean “the body”. It may also refer to a way of life controlled by our evil desires, i.e. Satan. Believers “are not in the flesh, but in the spirit” (Rom. 8:9). This does not mean that they are without physical bodies, but that they are not living a fleshly life. Before conversion “we were in the flesh” (Rom. 7:5). Galatians 5:19 mentions sexual perversion, which the offender at Corinth was

guilty of, as a “work of the flesh”. 1 John 3:5 (cp. v. 8), defines sins as the “works of the Devil”, thus equating the flesh and the Devil. Thus 1 Corinthians 5:5 could be understood as ‘Deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of Satan/the Devil’, so that we have Satan destroying Satan. It is impossible to understand this if we hold to the popular belief regarding Satan. But if the first Satan is understood as the Roman authority and the second one as the flesh, or sinful expressions of our evil desires, then there is no problem.

4. We have seen in our notes on Luke 10:18 that Satan is sometimes used in the context of reminding us that physical illness is ultimately a result of our sin. It may be that the spirit – gifted apostles in the first century had the power of afflicting sinful believers with physical illness or death – e.g. Peter could order Ananias and Sapphira’s death (Acts 5); some at Corinth were physically “weak and sickly” as a punishment for abusing the communion service (1 Cor. 11:30); Jesus could threaten the false teachers within the church at Thyatira with instant death unless they repented (Rev. 2:22–23) and James 5:14–16 implies that serious illness of some members of the church was due to their sins, and would be lifted if there was repentance. If the sickness mentioned here was an ordinary illness, it does not follow that if a Christian repents of sin he will automatically be healed, e.g. Job was afflicted with illness as a trial from God, not because he sinned. It was for the help and healing of repentant believers who had been smitten in this way, that “the gift of healing” was probably mainly used in the early church (1 Cor. 12:9). Thus Paul’s delivering the incestuous brother to Satan and also delivering “Hymaenaeus and Alexander... unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20), may have involved him smiting them with physical sickness due to their following of Satan – their evil desires.

Some time later Paul noted how Alexander still “greatly withstood our words” (2 Tim. 4:14,15). The extent of his withstanding Paul’s preaching is made apparent if we understand that Alexander had been struck ill by Paul before he wrote the first letter to Timothy, but had still refused to learn his lesson by the time Paul wrote to Timothy again. Again, notice that Satan would try and teach Alexander “not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20). If Satan is an evil person who is a liar and blasphemer of God’s word, how can he teach a man not to blaspheme God?

5. The same verb for ‘delivering over’ occurs in the LXX of Job 2:6, where God ‘hands over’ Job to Satan, with the comment [in LXX]: “you are to protect his *psyche*, his spirit”. The connection between the passages would suggest to me that Job was in need of spiritual

improvement, even though he was imputed as being righteous (Job 1:1). Whatever, the point surely is that God handed a person over to an adversary, for that person's spiritual salvation. The orthodox idea of God and Satan being pitted in conflict just doesn't cut it here. Biblically, God is portrayed as in charge of any 'Satan' / adversary, and using 'satans' at His will for the spiritual improvement of people, rather than their destruction. The story of Job is a classic example. Are we to really understand that there is a personal being called Satan who's disobedient to God, out of His control, and bent on leading people to their spiritual destruction? No way, Jose. Not yet, Josette. 1 Cor. 5:5 and the record of Job teach the very dead opposite. And by all means bring on board here 2 Tim. 2:26, which speaks of people being caught in the Devil's trap at God's will / desire ⁽²⁾.

Notes

(1) Leander Keck, *Paul and His Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) p. 106.

(2) This is the translation offered by H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 119.

"Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11).

The other references to 'Satan' in 2 Corinthians clearly refer to the Jewish-Roman 'adversaries' to the Christian church (see commentary on 2 Cor. 11:14; 12:7). Yet elsewhere in the New Testament, 'satan' is also used to refer to the great adversary of every Christian- the mind of the flesh. The 'satan' Paul has in view here in 2 Cor. 2:11 can be understood in the same way.

Satan as the Mind of the Flesh

The context of 2 Cor. 2:11 is Paul's urging of the church in Corinth to accept back into membership the immoral brother whom he had earlier advised them to disfellowship in 1 Cor. 5. He urges them to forgive him and accept him, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). What happens if a repentant brother is not forgiven and not re-integrated into the church? The individual is typically lost to the cause of Christ, and the church becomes lifted up with hypocrisy and arrogant attitudes which result in many of them likewise becoming lost to Christ. It is asking too much to believe that if we don't forgive someone, then some cosmic being replete with horns and tail somehow gets an advantage over us. The Greek word translated "devices" occurs almost exclusively in 2 Corinthians, and is translated "minds" or "thoughts" (2 Cor. 3:14; 4:4; 10:5; 11:3). This is a significant point. We are not ignorant of how the mind of the flesh works, the devices / thoughts of our satan / adversarial mind- we all have experience of what happens both to us and to others in such cases where an

individual is refused fellowship. Congregations and communities are littered with the damaged baggage of refusing fellowship to those who ought to be given it. What stops all this is not any vigilance against an external cosmic being. What causes all these problems are internal attitudes of mind. And Paul's appeal is for us to know our own minds and beware of our own habits of reaction and thinking. The Greek behind "ignorant of his devices" is a word play based around the Greek word *noema*, 'to know'. "Ignorant" translates *ag-noeo*, 'not-knowing', and 'devices' translates *noema*, the noun of *noeo*. 'Don't be unmindful or his mind', 'don't be unknowing of his knowing' would be the idea. 'Know yourself' is in effect what Paul is saying.

Satan as Roman or Jewish Opposition

Paul had earlier appealed for the immoral brother to be 'delivered to Satan' (1 Cor. 5:5). The Greek for 'deliver' there is elsewhere translated 'to put in prison'. As in cases of serious sexual crime today, we may have to deliver the wrongdoer to the local authorities, even though they were clearly adversarial ['satans'] to the Christian cause; and if s/he is impenitent, to hope that by delivering them to the life of the flesh, or 'satan', that they will in due course come through that to repentance. It could be that this dual usage of the term 'satan' continues here in 2 Cor. 2:11. Refusing to forgive and rehabilitate such a person would give more strength to the mind of the flesh, but it would also possibly give advantage to the local 'satan' of the Roman or Jewish authorities. They might have used the fact that the church still considered the man at fault as an excuse to re-arrest him and to start persecuting the church. The Greek for "take advantage" can mean 'to rob' (1). The 'robbing' would have been of the man who had been 'turned over to Satan' in 1 Cor. 5. If he was not forgiven and welcomed, then the adversary would rob the community of him. If someone is excluded from the community of believers, then it's likely that they will wither and die spiritually. The 'satan' of 1 Pet. 5:8 sought to devour, to rob the flock- and that passage speaks without doubt of Roman-Jewish opposition to the Christian community (see commentary on 1 Pet. 5:8). The same idea is here in 2 Corinthians - the adversary / satan can rob the community of a member. Paul's concern was that the Corinthians' behaviour would lead to the ministry being 'blamed' (2 Cor. 6:3); he was very conscious that the ministry / service of Christ could be discredited in the eyes of the surrounding Roman-Jewish world, which is so often presented in the New Testament as the 'satan' of the early church.

Notes

(1) Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) p. 667.

5-20 The God / Prince of this World

2 Corinthians 4:4: “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them”.

John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11: “The prince of this world”

See 2–4 “The Jewish Satan”.

2 Corinthians 4:4 “The god of this world”

The Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: “To those in this world whose minds have been blinded by God, because they did not believe”

Note in passing that it is darkness which blinds men’s eyes (1 Jn. 2:11), i.e. not walking according to the light of God’s word. There is only *one* God – not two. And it’s also noteworthy that Is. 6:10 speaks of *God* as having the power to blind Israel. The New Testament repeats this. Rom. 11:8 says that *God* (and not Satan) blinded Israel to the Gospel; 2 Cor. 3:14 says that their minds were blinded or

“hardened” (RV) as Pharaoh’s was. Whoever “the god of this world” is or was, God worked through it and is therefore greater than it. Henry Kelly comments: “Given this track record, can we see the God of this Aeon as *our* God, as Yahweh? He is, after all, in charge of everything”⁽¹⁾. It is God and not any independent Satan figure who sends people an *energeia* of error to believe falsehood (2 Thess. 2:12) – the ultimate ‘energy’ in the process is from God.

For something to be called “the god of this world” does not necessarily mean that it is in reality “the god of this world”; it could mean ‘the thing or power that this world counts to be God’. Thus Acts 19:27 speaks of the goddess Diana, a lifeless idol, “whom all the world worshippeth”. This doesn’t mean that the piece of wood or stone called Diana was in reality the goddess of this world. I mentioned in section 1-1-2 that Paul is quoting “the god of this world” from contemporary Jewish writings rather than actually believing such a ‘god’ existed. It’s also possible that “the god of this world” who blinds people is an allusion to material in the documents comprising what are now known as the Gnostic Gospels. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* claims to record God’s rebuke of Satan: ““You are mistaken, Samael”, which means, “god of the blind””⁽²⁾. Paul in this case would be alluding to popular belief about Satan, and reapplying this language to the Jewish opposition to the Gospel, and to the human “blindness” which stops them accepting Christ. In Eph. 4:18 Paul specifically defined what he meant by “darkness”: “Having the understanding darkened... through the ignorance that is *within* them... The blindness of their heart”. That opposition, rather than any mythical ‘Samael’, was the real adversary / Satan.

Even if it is insisted that Satan exists as a personal being, the question has to be faced: Who created Satan? Is his power under God’s control, or not? Time and again the ‘Satan’ and ‘demon’ passages of the Bible indicate that however we are to understand these terms, God is more powerful, God is in control. The book of Job shows how the Satan there had all power given to him *by God*. The power of the Lord Jesus over ‘demons’ makes the same point. And in that context, note how Ex. 4:11 assures us that God is the one who makes people deaf, but Lk. 11:14 speaks of how such muteness is apparently caused by demons. Clearly, God is in control. This world, with all the evil and negative experience in it, has not been left under the control of some out-of-control evil being. With this in mind, it should be apparent that the ‘god of this world’ can’t mean that the world is under the *ultimate* control of Satan rather than God. Rather, “the god of this world” [*aion*] “can also be read as merely a

personification of all the forces of this *aion* that would thwart the success of the Christian message”⁽³⁾.

The way that the idea of ‘Satan’ is used to describe both individual sin and societies governed by the principle of sin is very much in line with the way that first century society was very much a communalistic rather than an individualistic society. The society was the person. Further, social scientists and psychologists have time and again confirmed the Biblical teaching that the fundamental motivation of human beings is the ego, self-interest – what the Bible calls ‘Satan’. This is what drives people at the individual level, and thus drives societies⁽⁴⁾. It’s appropriate, therefore, for ‘Satan’, the personification of human sin and self-interest, to also be a term applied to human governments and societies as a whole. Truly in this sense (the Biblical) Satan could be understood as “the god of this world”.

A Jewish Interpretation

If Scripture interprets Scripture, “the god of this world (*aion*)” in 2 Corinthians 4:4 must be similar to “the prince of this world (*kosmos*)” (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Both the Jewish age [*aion*] and *kosmos* ended in A.D. 70. In the context, Paul has been talking in 2 Cor. 3 about how the glory shining from Moses’ face blinded the Israelites so that they could not see the real spirit of the law which pointed forward to Christ. Similarly, he argues in chapter 4, the Jews in the first century could not see “the light of the glorious (cp. The glory on Moses’ face) gospel of Christ” because they were still blinded by “the god of this world” – the ruler of the Jewish age. The “prince” or “God” of the “world” (age) was the Jewish system, manifested this time in Moses and his law. Notice how the Jews are described as having made their boast of the law...made their boast of God (Rom. 2:17,23). To them, the Law of Moses had become the god of their world. Although the link is not made explicit, there seems no reason to doubt that “the prince of this world” and “Satan” are connected. It is evident from Acts (9:23–25,29–30; 13:50,51; 14:5,19; 17:5,13; 18:12; 20:3) that the Jews were the major ‘Satan’ or adversary to the early Christians, especially to Paul. Of course it has to be remembered that there is a difference between Moses’ personal character and the Law he administered; this contrast is constantly made in Hebrews. Similarly the Law was “Holy, just and good”, but resulted in sin due to man’s weakness – it was “weak through the flesh”, explaining why the idea of Satan/sin is connected with the Law. Because of this it was in practice a “ministry of condemnation”, and therefore a significant

'adversary' (Satan) to man; for in reality, "the motions of sins...were by the Law" (Rom. 7:5).

John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 "The prince of this world"

The "prince of this world" is described as being "cast out", coming to Jesus, having no part in Him and being "judged", all during the last few hours before Christ's death (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11). All these descriptions seem to fit the Jewish system as represented by the Law, Moses, Caiaphas the High Priest, Judas and the Jews wanting to kill Jesus, and Judas. Note that "the prince of this world" refers to Roman and Jewish governors in 1 Cor. 2:6,8. At Christ's death the Mosaic system was done away with (Col. 2:14–17); the "bondwoman", representing the Law in the allegory, was "cast out" (Gal. 4:30). "The prince of this world" is described, in the very same words, as being "cast out" (Jn. 12:31).

Caiaphas?

Wycliffe in archaic English renders Mt. 26:3: "Then the princes of priests and the elder men of the people were gathered into the hall of the prince of priests, that was said Caiaphas". The "world" in John's Gospel refers primarily to the Jewish world; its "prince" can either be a personification of it, or a reference to Caiaphas the High Priest. Caiaphas' equivalent name in Hebrew could suggest 'cast out'; his rending of his priestly clothes at Christ's trial declared him "cast out" of the priesthood (see Lev. 10:6; 21:10). "This world" and its "prince" are treated in parallel by John (12:31 cp. 16:11) – just as Jesus, the prince of the Kingdom, can be called therefore "the Kingdom" (Lk. 17:21). Colossians 2:15 describes Christ's ending of the Law on the cross as "spoiling principalities and powers" – the "prince" of the Jewish world being "cast out" (a similar idea in Greek to "spoiling") would then parallel this. The Jews "caught" Jesus and cast Him out of the vineyard (Mt. 21:39) – but in doing so, they themselves were cast out of the vineyard and "spoiled" by Jesus (Col. 2:15).

If indeed "the prince of this world" is a reference to Caiaphas, then we have to face the fact that this individual is being singled out by the Lord for very special condemnation, as the very embodiment of 'Satan', sin and its desires, all that was then in opposition to God. This is confirmed by the Lord's comment to Pilate that "he that delivered me unto you has the greatest sin" (Jn. 19:11 Gk. – "greater" in the AV is translated "greatest" in 1 Cor. 13:13; Mk. 9:34; Mt. 13:32; 18:1,4;

23:11; Lk. 9:46; Lk. 22:24; Lk. 22:26). It was Caiaphas and the Jews who “delivered” Jesus to Pilate to execute (Mt. 27:2,18; Jn. 18:30,35 s.w.). But the Lord speaks as if one person amongst them in particular had delivered Him to Pilate – and that specific individual was Caiaphas. If Caiaphas had the “greatest sin” in the crucifixion of God’s son, we can understand how he is singled out by the Lord Jesus for such description as the “prince of this world”. A number of expositors have interpreted “the Devil... that had the power of death” in Heb. 2:14–17 as an allusion to Caiaphas.

Judas and “The prince of this world”

After Judas left the upper room we get the impression that Jesus started to talk more earnestly and intensely. Immediately after Judas went out Jesus said, “Now is the Son of man glorified... Little children, yet a little while I am with you... Hereafter I will not talk much (longer) with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (Jn. 13:31,33; 14:30). Because He knew Judas would soon return with his men, Christ wanted to give the disciples as much instruction as possible in the time that remained. This would explain the extraordinary intensity of meaning behind the language used in John 14–17. After He finished, “Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, *cometh...*” (Jn. 18:3); “The prince of this world *cometh*”, Jesus had prophesied, epitomized in the person and attitude of Judas. Christ had told the disciples that “the prince” “hath nothing (cp. no part) in Me” (Jn. 14:30). Not until Judas appeared with the men would the disciples have realized that he was the betrayer (see Jn.18:3–5). Jesus knew this would come as a shock to them, and would lead them to question whether they themselves were in Christ; therefore He warned them that Judas, as a manifestation of “the prince of this world”, had no part in Him any longer. For “the Devil” of the Jewish authorities and system, perhaps Caiaphas personally, had put into the heart of Judas to betray the Lord (Jn. 13:2). The whole Jewish leadership were the “betrayers” of Jesus (Acts 7:52) in that Judas, the one singular betrayer, was the epitome of the Jewish system. The prince having nothing in Christ suggests a reference to Daniel 9:26: “And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and shall have nothing (A.V. margin – i.e. have no part): and the people of the prince that shall come (the Romans) shall destroy the city and the sanctuary”. Thus it was the Jewish world as well as Judas which had nothing in Messiah, and the system they represented was to be destroyed by another (Roman) “prince that shall come” to replace the (Jewish) “prince of this world”. The occurrence of the phrase “prince”

and the idea of having nothing in Messiah in both Daniel 9:26 and John 14:30 suggest there must be a connection of this nature.

Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus because he was bought out and thus controlled by the Jewish 'Satan'. The fact that Judas was "one of the twelve" as he sat at the last supper is emphasized by all the Gospel writers – the phrase occurs in Matthew 26:14; Mark 14:20; Luke 22:47 and John 13:21. Thus later Peter reflected: "he was numbered with us" (cp. "one of the twelve"), and had (once) obtained *part* of this ministry" (Acts 1:17), alluding back to Christ's statement that "the prince of this world" ultimately had *no* part in Him. Similarly 1 John 2:19 probably alludes to Judas as a type of all who return to the world: "They went out from us, but they were not of us" (cp. "Judas, one of the twelve"). Judas is described as a Devil (Jn. 6:70), and his leaving the room may have connected in the Lord's mind with "the prince of this world" being cast out. Those who "went out from us" in 1 John 2:19 were primarily those who left the Jewish ecclesias (to whom John was largely writing) to return to Judaism, and they who left were epitomized by Judas. 2 Peter 2:13,15 equates the Judaizers within the ecclesias with Balaam "who loved the wages of unrighteousness". The only other time this latter phrase occurs is in Acts 1:18 concerning Judas.

"Cast out"

"Cast out" in the Old Testament at times refers to Israel being cast out of the land for their disobedience (cp. Lk. 19:45). This was what was to happen to the first century Jews. The Law itself was to be "cast out" (Gal. 4:30). The idea of being cast out recalls the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael. The Lord commented concerning the end of the Mosaic system: "The servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever" (Jn. 8:35). The description of apostate Israel as being "cast out in the open field" with none to pity them except God must have some reference to Ishmael (Ez. 16:5). Galatians 4:29–30 specifically connects the Law with Hagar, and the source of this passage in Isaiah 54:1–7 concerning the calling again of a forsaken young wife who had more children than the married wife has similarities with Hagar's return to Abraham in Genesis 16. After Hagar's final rejection in Genesis 21, she wandered through the Paran wilderness carrying Ishmael – as Israel was carried by God through the same wilderness. The miraculous provision of water for Israel in this place is a further similarity, as is Ishmael's name, which means 'God heard the cry' – as He did of His people in Egypt. Thus Hagar and Ishmael represent apostate Israel, and both of them were "cast out". Romans 9:6–8 provides more confirmation: "For they are not all

Israel, which are of Israel...but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God". Paul's reminder that the seed was to be traced through Isaac, and that the apostate Israel of the first century were not the true Israel of God but the children of the flesh, leads us to identify them with Ishmael, the prototype child of the flesh. In the same way, Jeremiah describes wayward Israel as a wild ass (Jer. 2:24), perhaps inviting comparison with Ishmael, the wild ass man (Gen. 16:12). I have elsewhere given many other Biblical examples of how God's apostate people are described in terms of those who are *not* God's people ⁽⁵⁾.

Notes

(1) H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 66.

(2) As quoted in Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1989) p. 29.

(3) Neil Forsyth, *Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) p. 275.

(4) See R. Harre, *Personal Being* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984) and many others.

(5) See my *Judgment to Come* 4–8, http://www.aletheiacollege.net/judgment/judgment4_8.htm

5-21 an Angel of Light

2 Corinthians 11:13–15: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works"

Popular Interpretation

This is taken to mean that Satan is an angel who deceives Christians by pretending to be righteous.

Comments

1. It is also commonly believed that Satan was originally an angel of light and then transformed himself into a serpent or became a sinful angel of darkness. This is the exact opposite of what this verse teaches. This transforming of Satan occurred in Paul's time – not in Eden, nor in 1914. The popular idea is that Satan was punished for rebellion by being turned from an Angel of light into some kind of 'dark Angel'. But this verse states that Satan transforms himself, in the time of Paul in the first century. Yet the orthodox view of Satan is that he was an Angel of light who was punished by God to become an Angel of darkness. Yet here Paul is saying that in the first century, in the city of Corinth, here on planet earth, 'Satan' transformed himself into an Angel of light. Transformed himself from what? From his fallen state back into his state before he fell? In this case God's supposed punishment of Satan has little meaning if Satan is able to transform himself back into his previous state.

2. We have seen in section 2–1 that an "angel" in some cases can refer to a man

3. Concerning Satan's ministers, we are told "whose end shall be according to their works". This recalls Paul's words about false Christians in Philippians 3:19: "whose end is destruction", and also Revelation 20:12–13, which speaks of the resurrected dead believers being "judged every man according to their works". If Satan's ministers are to be judged and destroyed, then they cannot be angels, seeing that angels cannot die or be destroyed (Lk. 20:35,36).

4. These verses speak as though the believers to whom Paul was writing were in contact, literally, with Satan's ministers. The believers were being troubled by "false apostles", not sinful angels.

Suggested Explanations

1. Verse 4 speaks of some who had entered the church preaching a wrong Gospel and another Jesus. This sets the context for the rest of the chapter. A comparison of verses 13 and 15 clearly shows that these "false apostles" are the "ministers of Satan" – thus they are men, not angels.

2. "Satan" often refers to the Jewish system, especially in its being opposed to Christianity (see section 2–4 "The Jewish Satan"). These ministers of Satan were therefore people working on behalf of the

Jews who were infiltrating the Christian churches spreading wrong doctrine. There are frequent references to this infiltration and undermining:

– “False brethren (cp. “false apostles”) unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage” (Gal. 2:4). “Bondage” in Galatians refers to the bondage of keeping the Law of Moses (Gal. 3:23; 4:3,9). “After my (Paul’s) departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29 – the leaders of apostate Israel are likened to wolves in Ez. 22:27 and Zeph. 2:3).

– As there were false Jewish prophets among Israel in the wilderness, so there would be the same types among the Christian Jews to whom Peter wrote (1 Pet. 1:1), “who privily shall bring in damnable heresies” (2 Pet. 2:1).

– “These are spots in your feasts of charity (i.e. the love-feasts; the Breaking of Bread), when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear...these speak evil of those things which they know not” (Jude 12,10), i.e. they spoke falsely about Christianity, which they really knew little about.

– “His (Paul’s) letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak” (2 Cor. 10:10). Thus Paul showed that he was “not ignorant of (Satan’s) devices” (2 Cor. 2:11) to undermine Christianity.

– “Him whose coming in (Greek) is after the working of Satan” (2 Thess. 2:9) probably refers to these people too. Their possession of “all power and signs” was due may be to some of the apostate Jewish Christians still possessing the miraculous Spirit gifts (as in Heb. 6:4–6; 1 Cor. 14).

3. The apostles or ministers of John are called his “angels” – Lk. 7:19,24 (cp. 2 Cor. 11:14–15). Thus we can understand the parallel between the apostles of Christ and the angel (apostle) of light. Remember, too, that Christ is the light (Jn. 1:8; 8:12).

False apostles	transforming into Apostles of Christ
Satan	transforming into Angel (apostle) of light (Christ)
His ministers	transforming into ministers (angels) of righteousness (Christ)

4. The application of these ministers of Satan to Jews infiltrating the Christians is confirmed by Paul saying in 2 Cor. 11:22 that he was also a Jew as they were.

5. That the ministers of righteousness are to be interpreted as ministers, or apostles, of Christ, is confirmed by Paul saying that he was also a minister of Christ, as they claimed to be (:23).

6. The individual “Satan” in the singular referred to in :14, can either be the Jewish system as a whole trying to give a Christian facade (an angel of light, i.e. a minister of Christ, the true light), or an individual leader of the Jewish system. Bearing in mind the reference of “the prince of this world” to the High Priest (see section 5–20), there may be a reference here to some unrecorded pronouncement by the High Priest concerning Christianity which would give the implication that a bridge could be built between Judaism and Christianity.

7. The “deceitful workers” of :13 who were ministers of the Satan are clearly defined in Philippians 3:2 as “evil workers... of the circumcision”, i.e. those who were teaching that Christians had to be circumcised and thus keep the Law of Moses to be saved. This faction of Jewish believers in the church is described as “them which were of the circumcision” (Gal. 2:12).

8. It needs to be recognized that Paul’s writings very often allude to extant Jewish and Gentile literature, sometimes quoting verbatim from them, in order to correct popular ideas. Thus Paul quotes Aratus (Acts 17:28), Menander (1 Corinthians 15:33) and Epimenides (Titus 1:12) – he uses odd phrases out of these uninspired writings by way of illustration. I’ve shown elsewhere ⁽¹⁾ that much of the Biblical literature does this kind of thing, e.g. the entire Pentateuch is alluding to the various myths and legends of creation and origins, showing what the truth is. The fact Paul’s 21st century readers are largely ignorant of that literature, coupled with Paul’s rabbinic writing style not using specific quotation rubric or quotation marks, means that this point is often missed. It’s rather like our reading of any historical literature – parts of it remain hard to understand because we simply don’t appreciate the historical and immediate context in which it was written. When Paul speaks of Satan being transformed as a bright Angel, he’s actually quoting from the first century AD *Life of Adam and Eve* (12–16) which speculated that ‘Satan’ refused to worship the image of God in Adam and therefore he came to earth as a bright Angel and deceived Eve: “Satan was wroth and transformed himself into the brightness of angels, and went away to the river” ⁽²⁾. Paul’s quoting from that document; although in the preceding verse (2 Cor. 11:3) he

Popular Interpretation

This is read to suggest that Satan brings problems into our lives. “Messenger” being the same original word as “angel”, it is argued that Satan uses a sinful angel to do this.

Comments

1. The work of this messenger of Satan resulted in Paul developing the spiritual characteristic of humility. The Satan stopped Paul from being proud. Pride is produced by the Devil – 1 Timothy 3:6,7. So we have the situation where Satan stops the work of Satan. Again, this does not make sense under the traditional interpretation of Satan. Mark 7:20–23 says that pride is a result of our evil heart. Thus the trial brought on Paul by a person acting as a Satan to him stopped his evil desires – another use of the word “Satan” – from leading him into the sin of pride.

2. We have seen in chapter 2 that “Satan” can be used to describe a man (e.g. Mt. 16:23) and that the Greek word for messenger / angel can also apply to men (e.g. Mt.11:10; Lk. 7:24; James 2:25). “Satan” may also refer to the adversarial Jewish system, and thus the messenger of Satan is most likely a man acting on behalf of the Jews.

3. The passage can be translated “a messenger, an adversary...”.

4. Everywhere in Paul’s writings, as well as in Revelation, ‘Satan’ always has the definite article – apart from here. Likewise, this is the only time Paul uses the form *Satan* rather than his usual *satanas*. One reason for that could be that Paul is alluding to or quoting from known Jewish literature or ideas which mentioned a “messenger of Satan”. Another possibility is that he refers here to an Angel–Satan – for the Greek word translated “messenger” is also that for Angel. In this case, he saw himself as Job, suffering affliction from an Angel–adversary, in order to bring about his spiritual perfection. I have noted the similarities between Job and Paul elsewhere ⁽¹⁾.

Suggested Explanations

1. “The messenger of Satan” is probably the same as the ministers of Satan referred to in 2 Corinthians 11:13–15, which we have interpreted as the Judaizers in the early church who were discrediting Paul and seeking to undermine Christianity. The buffeting done by this

“messenger of Satan” is defined in v. 10: “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions...” (i.e. In my thorn in the flesh which God will not take away). Note the parallel between the thorn and those things it caused. The reproaches refer to the Jewish ministers of Satan saying things like, “his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor. 10:10), as previously explained. The necessities and persecutions quite clearly refer to the constant waves of persecutions he received by the Jews which the book of Acts describe. This would fit the language of “buffeting” – implying physical discomfort that he experienced periodically. The infirmities would refer to the ill health which his persecutions by the Jews no doubt resulted in – being beaten until he appeared dead (Acts 14:19) must have done permanent damage, as would receiving “forty stripes save one” five times and thrice being “beaten with rods” because of the Jews (2 Cor. 11:24–25). Thus the passage probably refers to an organized program of persecution of Paul by the Jews which began after the vision of 2 Corinthians 12:1–4, from which time he dates his experience of the thorn in the flesh. It was from this time that Paul’s zealous preaching to the Gentiles no doubt stimulated the Jews to more violent opposition to him. Their complaint against him was often that he was adulterating the Jewish religion by allowing Gentiles the chance of salvation by what he preached.

2. There is the implication that one particular “messenger” of the Jewish Satan organized the persecution of Paul – Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14–15; 1 Tim. 1:20). The link between the messenger of Satan in 2 Corinthians 12:7 and those of 2 Corinthians 11:13–15 indicates that this person was a member of the ecclesia also. Whilst the prophecy about “the man of sin” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 has clear reference to the Papacy, a primary application of it may well be to this individual being in the temple (i.e. To church – 1 Tim. 3:15) of God, “whose coming is after the working of (the Jewish) Satan” (2 Thess. 2:9). This person could do miracles – same as v. 9 – and the Jewish Christians in the early church who brought the ideas of Judaism into the church could also do them (Heb. 6:4–6). These Jews thus crucified Christ a second time (Heb. 6:6) – the Jews having done it once already. This man of sin is “the son of perdition” (2 Thess. 2:3), a phrase used to describe Judas (Jn. 17:12). This suggests an allusion back to Judas, and indicates that the man of sin might also be a Jew, who was within the ecclesia, as Judas was, but who betrayed Christ because he wanted the aims of Judaism to be fulfilled rather than those of Christ. The “day of Christ” referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:2–3, before which time the man of sin must be developed, was primarily the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 – which again indicates a primary Jewish

fulfilment of the “man of sin”. Notice that organized Jewish opposition to Paul’s preaching was very intense at Thessalonica – Acts 17:5–13.

3. “A thorn in the flesh”. The Greek word for “thorn” can mean a “stake” – as was used for crucifying. This was to buffet Paul, as Christ was buffeted at the crucifixion (Mt. 26:67). Like Christ in His last hours, Paul prayed for the buffeting of Satan to be removed (2 Cor. 12:8 cp. Lk. 22:42). Paul “besought the Lord thrice” for this and so did Jesus in the Garden (Mt. 26:39, 42, 44). Also like Christ, Paul’s prayer for release was not granted, ultimately for his spiritual good. Thus it is implied that because of Paul’s sufferings at the hands of the Jewish Satan throughout his life, his whole life was “crucified with Christ” in that he experienced constantly the sufferings Christ had in His last few hours. This is exactly what we see in Acts 26:18 (see “Suggested Explanations” No. 3 on that passage).

4. There are several other references to the idea of a “thorn in the flesh” in the Old Testament. Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13; Judges 2:3; and Ezekiel 28:24, all use this figure of speech to describe the nations surrounding Israel who were eventually the reason for their rejection and their failure to fully inherit the kingdom – Israel failed to destroy them during their initial conquest of the land as they were commanded. These nations are the Arab nations, and the Arabs are figurative of apostate Israel who still trusted in the Law (see “The Jewish Satan” for more details on how Hagar and Ishmael, the Arab ancestors, are connected with apostate Israel). Thus it is understandable that Paul should use this figure of a thorn in the flesh to describe the apostate Jews who were persecuting him. The figure of the thorns in the flesh is always used in the Old Testament in the context of something that hinders the chances of God’s people of entering the kingdom. Thus this thorn of Jewish opposition to Paul was a big temptation to keep Paul out of the Kingdom. Paul implies that for him to stop making the effort to preach was an especial temptation that would keep him from the Kingdom (1 Cor. 9:16; Eph. 6:20; Col. 4:4; Acts 18:9), therefore at the end of his life he could thankfully say that he had finished his ministry of preaching (Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7). He was tempted not to preach because of the Jewish opposition – the Jewish thorn in the flesh. So the Old Testament figure of a thorn in the flesh tempting a man not to be in the kingdom was being used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7.

5. Joshua 23:13 describes the nations as “thorns” to Israel – “nails in your heel” in the Septuagint version. This is alluding back to Genesis 3:15, where the seed of the serpent was to bruise the seed of the woman in the heel. Thus the “thorns in the flesh” are linked with the

seed of the serpent. Romans 16:17–20 describes the Judaizers as a Satan who would be shortly bruised under the feet of the Christians, again using the language of Genesis 3:15 (see 2–4 “The Jewish Satan” for more on this). Therefore it is fitting for Paul to call the “messenger” of the Jewish Satan a “thorn in the flesh”.

Note

(1) See my *Bible Lives* Section 3-3-8.

5-23 The Prince of the Air

Ephesians 2:1–3: “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others”.

Popular Interpretation

The prince of the power of the air is said to be the Devil, who is a spirit making people disobedient to God.

Comments

1. The words “Satan” and “Devil” do not occur here.
2. “Walking”, v. 2, (i.e. living) according to the prince of the power of the air, is defined in v. 3 as living according to the lust of our fleshly mind. The “lusts of our flesh” come from within us (Mk. 7:21–23; James 1:14) not from anything outside of us.
3. “The power of the air” is clearly a figurative expression – “the prince” probably is also.
4. “The prince” is “the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience”. The spirit frequently refers to an attitude of mind (e.g. Dt. 2:30; Prov. 25:28; Is. 54:6; 61:3; Ez. 18:31; Mk.14:38; Lk. 2:40; 2

Cor. 2:13; 12:18; Eph. 4:23). This is confirmed by v. 3 – such peoples' lives are controlled by “fulfilling the lusts of our flesh (which come from our heart – James 1:14), fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind”. Fleshly people do not allow their lives to be controlled by a physical “prince” outside of them, but by following their fleshly desires which are internal to their minds. A physical being cannot exist as a “spirit” in the sense of an intangible essence. A spirit does not have flesh and bones, i.e. a physical body (Lk. 24:39); therefore because “the prince” is a “spirit”, this must be a figurative expression, rather than referring to a physical being. The “spirit” or attitude of mind is a figurative prince, as sin is a figurative paymaster (Rom. 6:23).

5. This passage (and v. 11) speaks of their former Gentile lives. 1 Pet. 4:3 speaks of life before conversion as: “In the time past we wrought the will of the Gentiles... we walked in *lusts*”. Their own flesh was their “prince”. Thus walking according to the prince of the air (v.2) is parallel with walking in the flesh (v. 11). The more common antithesis to walking in spirit is walking after the *flesh* – here termed “the course of this world”.

6. George Lamsa, a native speaker of Aramaic, understands “the prince of the power of the air” to be the dynamic equivalent of the Arabic / Aramaic *resh shultana*, which he claims would've been understood as meaning simply ‘the head of the government’, with no intended reference to the literal air ⁽¹⁾.

7. Athanasius argued that the death of Jesus cleansed the air where the demons / fallen angels now live, and therefore physically opened up a way for [supposed] immortal souls to find a way into Heaven ⁽²⁾. Not only was all this unBiblical, it reflects a literalism which reduces God to a being hopelessly bound by physicality. In short, this kind of thinking arose from a basic lack of faith in God as the Almighty, who doesn't need to build bridges over problems which men have created for Him in their own minds. It should be noted that the idea of saying “Bless you!” when someone sneezes derives from Athanasius' idea that demons can become so small that they enter a person from the literal air. This is what happens if we insist that the Devil was thrown out of heaven and some of his angels are still in the literal air – it's literalism gone wrong.

Suggested Explanations

1. Verse 1 says that “you” – the faithful at Ephesus – were dead in sins. Verses 2 and 3 then express the reason for this in four parallel ways:

- (a) "...you walked according to the course of this world"
- (b) "...according to the prince of the power of the air"
- (c) "...the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience"
- (d) "...were by nature the children of wrath".

The "whole world lays in wickedness (1 Jn. 5:19). "The children of disobedience" show this by their lives "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (vv. 1,3). Thus "the prince of the power of the air" is our evil, fleshly mind, i.e. the real Devil.

2. There are many links between Ephesians and Colossians. One of the clearest is between these verses and Colossians 3:3–7. Colossians 3:3 speaks of us having died to sin as Ephesians 2:1 does. Verses 5–7 amplify what are "the lusts of the flesh" which "the children of disobedience" fulfil:

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which you also walked some time, when you walked in them". These things of v. 5 are "the works of the flesh" mentioned in Galatians 5:19. These things come from within us, not from anything outside (Mk. 7:21–23). Therefore the prince of the power of the air, which causes these things, is again defined as our evil desires.

3. "The air" normally refers to the literal air around us which we breathe. It is a different word to that translated "air" in the sense of the heavens, e.g. "the birds of the air" (Lk. 9:58). The seven angels of Revelation 16 pour out their vials on people in various parts of the earth in preparation for the establishment of God's Kingdom. "The seventh angel poured out his vial into the air" (Rev. 16:17) because his work affected the whole of the earth; it is as a result of this vial that the Kingdom of God is established on the earth and the kingdoms of men are ended. Thus the "power of the air" is a phrase which figuratively refers to a power which has influence over the people of the whole earth – and the power of sin, the fleshly mind, is worldwide.

4. Time and again, the popular language of cosmic conflict is reapplied and repositioned by the New Testament writers with reference to the *internal* struggle against sin. The idea that we are in conflict with actual demons in Heaven was common in the first century. But "Paul himself never makes explicit the element of conflict with the demonic world... Paul does not interpret the struggle of God and the powers of darkness in an objective, speculative way, as often in the [uninspired] apocalyptic literature. Rather he transfers the metaphors of struggle into the

life of the believer and of himself. This internalizing of the conflict is one of Paul's ways of communicating his awareness of the fact that God's historical action is not something external, but is now creating a reality in which the believer can participate" (3).

Notes

(1) George Lamsa, *New Testament Light* (San Francisco Harper & Row) p. 248.

(2) See Nathan K. Ng, *The Spirituality of Athanasius* (Bern: Lang, 2001).

(3) W.A. Beardslee, *Human Achievement and Divine Vocation in the Message of Paul* (London: S.C.M., 1961) p. 69.

5-24 Giving Place to the Devil

Ephesians 4:26–27: “Be angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the Devil”.

Popular Interpretation

The Devil is a person trying to gain access to our hearts and we must resist.

Comments

1. Anger and wrath are works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19–20) and proceed out of our evil heart (Mk. 7:21–23).

2. Letting them develop by being bitter-hearted at the end of a day is the same as giving “place to the Devil”. It is the Devil, therefore, that causes these things. But we have shown in comment1, that it is the flesh and evil heart which do, therefore they are the “Devil”.

3. To “give place to the Devil” implies that the Devil enters us. “The lusts of other (sinful) things entering in” (Mk. 4:19) cause us to sin. Our lusts are described several times as physically moving into our heart from our evil nature where they are stored (see section 5–8–1).

4. Verse 28 continues with a warning not to steal, which is a result of our evil desires suggesting wrong things to us. Doing such a thing is thus giving way to the Devil in the sense of our evil desires.

5. See Comments on 1 Timothy 5:14–15.

5-25 The Wiles of the Devil

Ephesians 6:11-13: “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities,

against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand”.

Popular Interpretation

This is taken to indicate that there are wicked spirits in heaven who are making the world sinful, against whom we have to fight. These spirits/angels are thought to be super-human in power.

Comments

1. Angels are not mentioned here.
2. This passage lists various things against which the Christian fights - it does not say that those things are trying to enter men and make them sin.
3. The world is under God’s control, not that of evil beings in heaven (Dan. 4: 32). “All power” in heaven and in earth has been given to Jesus (Matt. 28:18) by God (Rev. 3:21; Lk. 22:29), so it cannot also be possessed by wicked beings in heaven.
4. We have seen that there can be no sinful being in heaven itself (Ps. 5: 4 & 5; Hab. 1:13; Matt. 6:10).
5. Verse 12 may be translated, “For we wrestle not only against flesh and blood...” i.e., we do not only wrestle against individual men, but against organized systems.
6. There is much figurative language in vs. 11-17 - the armour of the Christian is figurative, as is the wrestling, seeing that “the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men” (2 Tim. 2:24); v. 12 should be similarly interpreted.
7. If the “Devil” was cast out of heaven in Eden, how could he and his followers still have been in the literal heavens in Paul’s time?

Suggested Explanations

1. The context is set in v. 13. The preparation was to be because the church was facing “the evil day”. This refers to a period of especial persecution of the church, which was to come at the hands of the Romans, seeing they were the only people with enough power to create an “evil day” for the Christian church at the time Paul was writing. (1 Pet. 4:12; 5: 8-9). The wrestling was against “the rulers of this dark world”, who at the time were the Romans. Note that the wrestling is spiritual wrestling to keep the faith (2 Cor. 10: 3-5). This time of evil had already begun as Paul was writing (Eph. 5:16)- “the days are evil”.

2. “Principalities” is translated “magistrate” in Luke 12:11; human “rule”, in the sense of human government, in 1 Corinthians 15:24, and the “power” of the Roman governor in Luke 20:20. So it does not necessarily have reference to any power or prince in heaven.

3. “Powers” is translated as the “authority” of the Roman governor in Luke 20:20, and regarding one having “authority” in Matthew 7:29. We must “be subject to principalities and powers” (Titus 3:1) in the sense of earthly governments, insofar as they do not ask us to do things which are contrary to the Law of God (Acts 5:29; 4:19; Matt. 19:17). If “principalities and powers” are evil beings in heaven whom we must resist, why are we told to be subject to them? If we accept that they refer to human governors and authorities, then this is easily understandable.

4. “Wicked spirituals in high (heavenly) places”. We have shown that this cannot refer to wicked beings in heaven itself. The exalted position of the true believers in Christ is described as being “in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 2:6). “Spirituals” can be used to describe those in the church who had the gift of the spirit; having given a list of commands as to how the gifts of the spirit should be used, Paul concludes: “If any man (in the church) think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual (i.e. spiritually gifted, see N.I.V.), let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). 1 Corinthians 14 shows there was a big problem in the

church of believers misusing the spirit gifts. Hebrews 6: 4-6 describes some Jewish Christians in the first century who had the gift of the spirit, but who were leading the church away from true Christianity by their attitude. These would be a prime example of wicked spirituals in the heavenlies (i.e. in the church). The temple and ark are sometimes referred to as the heavens (2 Sam. 15:25, cp. 1 Kgs. 8: 30; 2 Chron. 30:27; Ps. 20: 2 & 6; 11: 4; Heb. 7:26). The church is the new temple. In the same way as wicked people could be in the temple, so, too, they could be in the heavenlies of the church. Possession of the Spirit did not mean that someone was necessarily acceptable in God's sight, e.g. Saul possessed it for a time (1 Sam. 10:10) as did the judges of Israel (Num. 11:17) although they were not righteous; they did not believe the report of Joshua and Caleb and therefore were condemned to die like the other Israelites, despite their having the Spirit - Psalm 82:1-7 says as much. For a period the churches of Revelation 2 and 3 possessed the gifts despite their errors, until eventually their candlestick was removed (cp. Acts 20: 28-29; Eph. 4:11; Rev. 2:5). Thus the wicked spirits in the heavenlies were apostate Christians within the church, leading the church into an "evil day" of temptation.

5. Thus the threat to the church was twofold: from the Roman/Jewish persecution and from the (often Judaist) "false apostles" (2 Cor. 11:13) within. Remember Ephesians 6:11-13 was written to the church at Ephesus. Paul had previously warned them about this threat from within: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30).

Rotherham's translation brings this out well:

"Our struggle is against the principalities against the authorities against the world - rulers of this darkness, AND against spiritual wickedness in heavenlies".

6. Thus, all these things are "the wiles of the Devil" (v. 11) in the sense of the evil desires of the flesh expressed through the system of world government and apostate Christians.

7. “Heavenly places” may also refer to positions of authority in the secular world. Thus the king of Babylon was a figurative “star” in heaven (Is. 14:12), i.e. a great ruler. Jesus is the “sun” (Mal. 4:2), the saints are the “stars” (Dan. 12:3) of the future order. The present “heavens” of man will be replaced by the new Heavens when the Kingdom is established on the earth (2 Pet. 3:13), i.e. the positions of power and rulership, now in the hands of sinful men, will be handed over to the true Christians. The saints of the Most High shall possess the kingdoms of men (Dan. 7:27). Thus wicked spirits in the “heavens” could refer to men of wicked minds in places of power in the world who were persecuting the Christians.

8. It is just possible to still interpret “the Devil” in v. 11, as having a certain degree of reference to the “Jewish Satan”. The “Heavenly places” of v. 12 may refer to the Jewish heavenlies; 2 Peter 3 and Deuteronomy 32:1 speak of the Jewish heavens. This is strengthened by the fact that the “sun, moon and stars” are sometimes figurative of the Jews (e.g. Genesis 22:17; 37: 9; Dan. 8: 9, 10, 24). We have shown that the wicked spirituals may have reference to the Jewish Christians who were spirit-gifted, but turned to apostasy. They would thus be in both the Christian and Jewish “heavenlies”. The threat from within the church posed by the Judaizers infiltrating the church (see “Suggested Explanation” - all points - of [2 Cor. 11:13-15](#)), who were Jews. In “Suggested Explanation” No. 2 of [1 Timothy 5: 14-15](#), it is shown that the “seducing spirits” (spirituals) of 1 Timothy 4:1 were Jewish false teachers. Thus “the Devil” was manifested in the Roman authorities *and* the Jews within the Christian church.

The “wiles of the Devil” offers support to the Jewish context in that one of its few other occurrences the word for “wiles” is translated “to lie in wait to deceive”, in a verse which talks about the Judaizers subtly trying to introduce false doctrine into the church: the church was being “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14). If the “heavenly places” also represent the Jewish system, further meaning is given to Ephesians 3: 3-10: “The mystery...that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs (with the

Jews), and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel...to make all men (both Jews and Gentiles) see what is the fellowship of the mystery...to the intent now that unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God”, i.e. that by the church showing the unity that existed between Jew and Gentile within it, the Jewish leaders (“principalities and powers in heavenlies”) might come to appreciate “the manifold wisdom of God”. This, in turn, opens up John 17:21, “That they all (Jews and Gentiles) may be one...that the world (this phrase almost always means the Jewish world in John’s Gospel) may believe that thou hast sent me”. The “evil day” of v. 13 would be a result of the Judaizers, who were “evil men and seducers” (2 Tim. 3:13). For the links between 2 Timothy 3 and the Judaizers, see notes on [2 Timothy 2:26](#) ; between them and “seducers”, see “Suggested Explanation” No. 2 of [1 Timothy 5:14](#).

9. Ps. 78:49 speaks of the existence of "Angels of evil" at the time of the Passover deliverance- not sinful Angels, but Angels who had the responsibility for bringing "evil" in the sense of the judgment which God alone is responsible for (Is. 45:5-7). God was bringing "evil" upon the 1st century world in the wake of the crucifixion of His Son and the refusal of Israel to repent. And the "evil" which the Christians were experiencing from their persecutors was ultimately allowed and orchestrated by God Himself through His Angels, in order to develop them towards His Kingdom. It could be possible to interpret the heavenly hosts of spirits [Angels] responsible for the situation on earth experienced by the believers. Note that they wrestled *pros* these forces- and *pros* doesn't necessarily mean "against", but can carry the sense of 'alongside', 'relating to'. The forces of darkness had a *kosmokrator* ("ruler") over them; it could be that the Angels responsible for "evil" have an Angel over them, just as the "Angels of evil" at Passover time were co-ordinated by the Angel of death, whom the Passover Angel [the Angel co-ordinating "good"?] didn't permit to touch the observant Israelites (Ex. 12:23). Regarding the word *kosmokrator*, "In Rabbinic literature... the Greek term occurs as a foreign word for the angel of death" (1). What is to be noted is that the Angel of death was not sinful, but was working for God, doing His work

and will. Note the other allusions to the Passover night in the context (Eph. 6:18 = Ex. 12:42 Heb.; Eph. 6:14,15 = Ex. 12:11; It would therefore be the case that the message of Eph. 6:12 is that evil, in whatever form we encounter it, isn't radical, not free range in the cosmos, but is under the total control of the ultimately good God and His righteous Angels. The Lord Jesus may have alluded to this Angel of death in saying that the prince of this world was coming, as he did to Egypt at Passover time, but found no cause for slaying Christ, just as the faithful Israelites were preserved (Jn. 14:30).

Another Approach

David Pitt-Francis expounded the view that many of the later New Testament documents are full commentary upon and critical allusion to popular ideas of false religion which were circulating at the time. His commentary on Ephesians 6 bears quoting at more length (2):

"The object of the Christian message was to shake such imagined deities out of their places, so that men would give real glory to Christ, and to the God of Heaven alone. Paul describes the conflict of Christian witness as a struggle, not against flesh and blood but... "against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness; against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places". To many unacquainted with the real impact of the gospel, both sun and moon seemed to have personalities which they did not possess, as did the stars of heaven, heaven itself, and those exalted parts of nature such as mountains and islands. Thus Isaiah 2, which contains primarily a prophecy against idolatry in Israel and describes idol-worship in the context of 'high mountains' and 'lofty hills' contains a description of the flight of men into caves and holes of the rocks from the terror of God, and this description is borrowed in Revelation . The end of the worship of sun, moon and stars is also foretold by Isaiah in a later passage, where the imagined gods of heaven are described as being punished: "On that day, the Lord will punish the host of heaven, in heaven - and the kings of the earth, on earth - they will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit... ... then the moon will be ashamed, and the sun confounded for the Lord of hosts

will reign.” Here the host of heaven cannot represent the kings of the earth, who are separately described in this passage. The kings imprison themselves in a pit, just like those of chapter 2 who enter the caves and holes of the earth and the chief men of the sixth seal. The effect of Christian testimony would be the downfall of the imagined gods of the ancient world who were all associated with the exalted things of nature. In a Graeco-Roman context, for example the sun would have been associated with Apollo, the moon with Artemis, the stars with many deities and heaven itself with Uranus. Mountains and islands were not only objects of worship, but often places of worship (compare the ‘high place’ worship of apostate Israel). Yet the Graeco-Roman context is a partial and deceptive one, and has resulted in a restricted and partial understanding of the prophecy. The interpretation is the obvious one, and yet the most neglected one. In the Old Testament, the words ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ occur frequently as the objects of false worship. The phrase ‘host of heaven’ (i. e. the stars) is similarly used. The teaching that those things that are exalted in nature represented the gods that were then thought to exist, against whom Christianity made its onslaughts was plainly accepted by the early Church in its reading of passages such as: ‘every mountain and hill shall be made low’ (60) - to prepare a highway for the progress of the Gospel. There are not, nor have there ever been ‘spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places’ in the sense in which the phrase may primarily have been understood by converted pagans, but the adoration of sun, moon and stars has dominated the religious cults of every nation under heaven, and every kind of evil has been associated with it. The Old Testament prophecies, such as those quoted from Isaiah, were taken to mean that the gods would lose their power, because of Christian testimony, for the bulk of people in the days of Isaiah and of John would have regarded sun, moon and stars as personalities in their own right, whether they worshipped them or not. Every nation worshipped its sun-god and moon-god. The light of sun and moon was equated by many with the supreme light of God Himself. The perverted worship of all nations was directed to the host of heaven, and Isaiah, in the passages quoted foresaw the time when the host of heaven would be ‘ashamed’ by the supreme light of Divine Truth. It would have been tedious in Revelation to have named specifically the deities of Greece and Rome, far

less those of all other nations. The names of the sun-god, Apollo, Ra, Amon, Baal, Bel-Marduk.... would have alone formed quite a catalogue. Add the names of the moon-god, the host of heaven, the sky, island - and mountain-gods and the list would have been impossibly long. Further, this chapter does not, as does Isaiah, mention those associated with oaks and trees, but only the exalted obstacles to the progress of the Gospel, those in the sky, and those that project towards the sky. Jesus' words are even more concise, for He says that the 'powers of heaven' will be shaken. These powers are not natural phenomena (e. g. the 'order' or 'course' of nature). In its original context the word meant forces or armies. It is inconceivable that angelic armies should be shaken, hence the word must, using the language of Ephesians, mean those imaginary forces reputed to exist in the heavens, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. This collection of 'powers' was the pantheistic ragbag of Greece, Rome, Egypt, Babylon and the other ancient nations. These powers would lose their control over peoples' minds because of the boldness of the Church in its preaching. They would make way for the Lamb of God to occupy heaven, and much later human scientific knowledge would reveal them to be no more than sterile masses of matter. Thus, the 'principalities and powers', the 'powers of heaven', 'the host of heaven' would soon lose their influence. Shortly, Clement of Alexandria would be derisory in his 'Exhortation to the Gentiles' about the apparent impotence of those gods, who had once seemed to be so active".

Notes

(1) R. Feldmeier, "Kosmokrator", in K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, Pieter Willem van der Horst, eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) pp. 908-9.

(2) David Pitt-Francis, *The Most Amazing Message Ever Written* (Irchester: Mark Saunders Books, 1984) chapter 4.

5-26 The Snare of the Devil

1 Timothy 3:6–7: “Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the Devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the Devil”.

Popular Interpretation

This is used to suggest that the Devil is a person constantly hunting souls.

Comments

1. The word “soul” does not occur here.
2. Because the Word of God can overcome the Devil (our evil desires) as we see from Jesus’ wilderness temptations, we must have it in our hearts (Ps. 119:11); it is when one is inexperienced in the Word that they fall to the Devil – in this verse, pride, the “Devil” or the evil desires of the human mind taking over.
3. The idea of the Devil consciously trying to catch people in v. 7 has to be read into this verse. By contrast it is stressed that he (the bishop, vv. 1,2) may “fall” into the snare of the Devil.
4. The “snare of the Devil” is defined in 1 Timothy 6:9: “they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare...into many foolish and hurtful lusts”. Thus the snare of the Devil is the temptation that comes from our lusts, which is exactly what James 1:13–15 says.

Suggested Explanations

1. “The condemnation of the Devil” is that brought about by the Devil. At the judgment it would be unfair for us to be condemned personally for how the Devil, in the sense of an external being, had used us. But we will be condemned on account of letting the Devil – our evil desires – go unchecked, e.g. “by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Mt. 12:37). The Lord taught that He is a Saviour, and He came more to save than condemn. And yet some will sadly be condemned. Why? By whom? They will have condemned themselves by their own sinful behaviour. They will have been condemned by “the Devil”.

2. We have commented earlier how the Word of God is the power by which we overcome the Devil: “Your Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11). The Hebrew word for “hid” means to lay a snare for, as if the evil thoughts enter our consciousness, but are snared by the Word. Thus the language of the Devil’s victory over men is also used of man’s spiritual victory over the Devil. Other examples include the following:

– Men “fall away” because of losing their hold on the Word (Lk. 8:13). The Devil “departed” (same word translated “fall away”) from Christ because He held on to the word in His mind (Lk. 4:13). We are captured either in the Devil’s victory procession (2 Tim. 2:26) or Christ’s (Eph. 4:8 N.I.V.).

– 2 Timothy 2:26 A.V. margin says that men are taken alive by the Devil at his will, but men are caught alive by the Word of the Gospel (Lk. 5:10). Thus the exhortation comes home again of the great power in God’s word, and that through it we can conquer the Devil and become “wise as serpents” (Mt. 10:16).

– We have seen in our consideration of the wilderness temptations that our evil desires are described as ‘coming’ to us. Yet this same language of physical movement is used about the Word of God coming to the prophets, and Christ coming to us through the preaching of the Word (Eph. 2:17).

3. “Reproach and the snare of the Devil” may refer to the Jewish Satan/Devil being quick to pick up any shadow that hung over a Christian leader to discredit Christianity – they would bring reproach on Christianity if the bishop had a bad “report of them which are without”. Examples of the Jews and Judaizers using these tactics are in 1 Peter 2:12; 3:16; 2 Peter 2:10 (the “dignities” may be similar to the “bishops” of 1 Tim. 3); 1 Timothy 5:14; 2 Corinthians 10:10; Acts 21:28–29.

A novice might “fall into the condemnation of the (Jewish) Devil” by not being mature enough to resist the inroads of the Judaizers as they tried to “subvert whole houses” (Titus 1:11) – i.e. house churches – probably by subverting the bishops or leaders of the churches first.

2 Timothy 2:26: “And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the Devil, who are taken captive by him at his will”.

Popular Interpretation

This is thought to mean that the Devil is actively capturing people to make them sinful “at his will” – whenever he desires.

Comments

1. If the Devil literally captures anyone he desires, then there is nothing we can do to stop him. The Word of God is not powerful enough to stop him in this case.

2. “Recover” really means “awake”. It is through Christians being spiritually sleepy that they are captured by the Devil; thus ultimately it is their fault.

3. “Taken captive” means to catch alive, as fish are caught (it is translated “catch” in Lk. 5:10). The Devil catches people by his snare. We have defined this “snare of the Devil” as the evil desires of man in the notes on 1 Timothy 3:7, Comment No. 5,.

4. Knowing the Truth (i.e. the Word of God – Jn. 17:17) and receiving teaching and instruction (which ultimately only comes from the Word) are the means of awaking out of the snare of the Devil here (2 Tim. 2:24–26). The Word of God overcomes our evil desires (Ps. 119:11; cp. Jesus in the wilderness); here, the Word of God overcomes the snare of the Devil, which is, therefore, our evil desires. It is therefore implied that through lack of attention to the Word, these people had been ensnared by the Devil. Thus being ensnared is not due to an evil being just deciding to make someone sin, but of that person’s lack of attention to the Word.

5. The Greek word translated “will” refers to the desires. Most times when it is not used about the will of God and of Jesus, it is used about the evil “will” or desires within man:

– Peter defines “the will of the Gentiles” as walking in “lusts” and fleshly behaviour (1 Pet. 4:3). In the previous verse he contrasts the will of God and the lust of men, implying that the lusts of men are the will of men;

– See too 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 7:37; Luke 23:25.

The will of the Devil here in 2 Timothy 2:26 therefore refers to the evil lusts within our nature, which will ensnare us if we neglect the Word of God.

Suggested Explanations

1. Apart from the Devil referring to our evil desires here, it may also apply to the Jewish Devil taking people alive (v. 26 A.V. margin) in the sense of subverting them to remain within the church in order to undermine Christianity. The “snare of the Devil” of 1 Timothy 3:7 is interpreted that way in the “Suggested Explanations” under that heading.

2. The context in 2 Timothy 2 seems to be about the Judaizers within the church, which would support what is suggested in 1 above.

3. “Profane and vain babblings... foolish and unlearned questions... that... gender strifes” (vv. 16, 23) – these sound like the Jewish fables and genealogies which minister questions of which Paul had previously warned Timothy (1 Tim. 1:4; Titus 1:14).

4. “Repentance... that they may recover themselves” (vv. 25,26) implies that the people referred to had once believed the Truth.

5. These people are described as “vessels... To dishonour” in v. 20. This very same expression is used in Romans 9:21–25 concerning the Jews after they had rejected the Truth as it is in Christ.

6. “Concerning the truth (they) have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already” (v. 18). This de-emphasizing of the future Kingdom on the earth was very necessary in early Judaist theology. To them their reward was to live acceptably before God in this life.

7. They “overthrow the faith of some” (v. 18). “Overthrow” is the same word translated “subvert”. Nearly every other time it occurs it is in the context of the Judaizers subverting the Christians – Titus 1:11; 3:9–11 (an equivalent word); Acts 15:24 (the Judaizers “subvert your souls, saying, You must be circumcised, and keep the law”).

8. Note that we are to catch men in our preaching of the Gospel. Yet Paul uses the same figure here to describe what the Devil does. Men are caught by one thing or the other – the Devil, or our preaching of Christ.

5-27 Turned Aside After Satan

1 Timothy 5:14–15: “I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan”.

Popular Interpretation

This is taken to mean that young widows are likely to be carried away by Satan because of having spare time on their hands.

Comments

1. The widows turn themselves aside after Satan – Satan is not necessarily seeking the women.
2. Verses 12 and 13 explain that the widows “cast off their first faith” – something they did themselves. “They learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house”. It was by their doing this that they “turned aside after Satan” – their evil desires.
3. Using the tongue in the wrong way is a result of an evil state of the heart – “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Mt. 12:34). Their turning aside after Satan involved being “tattlers... and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not” (v. 13). Thus “Satan” refers to their evil heart.
4. Through profitless talking and not keeping hold of the true spirit of the Word of God, some at the Ephesus ecclesia where Timothy was based had “turned aside unto vain jangling” (1 Tim. 1:6). Paul is now pointing out that some of the young widows in that ecclesia had also turned aside for the same reason “unto Satan”, or their evil desires, expressed in their idle talking.
5. The phrase “*already* turned” implies “immediately”; Paul is saying that as soon as their husbands die, the young widows immediately go aside after Satan, their evil desires, therefore it is better for them to remarry.
6. “The adversary” is not the same word as “Satan”, although it may still refer to the Jews seeking opportunity to criticize the Christians (see note on 1 Tim. 3:6–7 “Suggested Explanations” No. 3). It can mean “an adversary at law” in a legal sense, implying that the Jews

could get them in trouble at a Roman court. There's plenty of historical evidence of this.

Suggested Explanations

1. By publicly getting a bad name for "wandering about from house to house" (v. 13), these women were giving opportunity to the Jewish adversaries to "rail against" (A.V. margin) the Christians. Jude 9,10 implies that the Judaizers brought "railing accusation" against the Christians.

2. "Speaking things which they ought not" (v. 13), recalls Jude 10 about the Judaizers: "these speak evil of those things which they know not". "Wandering" connects with Jude's description of "wandering stars" (Jude 13). Diotrephes, one of the Judaizers who was trying to discredit the apostle John and the other apostles, (as the Judaizers did to Paul) is described as "prating against us with malicious words" (3 Jn. 10). "Prating" is from the same word translated "tattlers" in 1 Timothy 5:13 concerning these women. The women going from house to house may imply from church to church, as that is how the word "house" is often used in the New Testament (due to the many house churches then in existence). This is what the Jewish false teachers did; 2 John 7 talks about deceivers or seducers that had entered into the Christian world, i.e. the false brethren "unawares brought in" to the church of Galatia. There are many references to these "seducing spirits" (1 Tim. 4:1) – i.e. false teachers (1 Jn. 4:1) – within the church, to which the church was not to give "heed" (1 Tim. 4:1). That these were Jewish false teachers is suggested by other references to "giving heed" in the context of being watchful against Jewish infiltration of Christianity:

– "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees" (Mk. 8:15);

– "Not giving heed to Jewish fables" (Titus 1:14);

– "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies" (1 Tim. 1:4) – the source of which genealogies was probably the Old Testament, over which the Judaizers were encouraging the Christians to argue to no profit.

The "seducing spirits" of 1 Timothy 4:1 had seared consciences (v.2), implying that they were apostate believers. They forbade to marry, "commanding to abstain from meats" (v. 3), which especially the latter, was the big contention of the Jewish element in the church in the first

century. Notice that what is said here about the Judaizers is also true of the Catholics – supporting the idea that 2 Thessalonians 2 is about both Jews and Catholics.

Thus the “seducing spirits” of 1 Timothy 4:1 were the Jewish infiltrators of the church, which were doubtless amongst the “deceivers” of 2 John v.7, which 2 John v. 10 implies were going from house to house (church to church) spreading their doctrine of belittling the person of Christ. These Judaizers “subvert whole houses” (Titus 1:11). Back in 1 Timothy 5:13, the fact that the women also went from house to house is another indication that what they were doing was also what the Judaizers were doing. Thus it is an interesting possibility that when their husbands died, these women lacked spiritual leadership, and therefore turned aside after the Jewish Satan, being influenced by the Jews to undermine the church. Using such apparently innocent members of the church would have been a very effective way of infiltrating. Perhaps there is a reference to this in 2 Timothy 3.

This speaks of men within the ecclesia, “having a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof” (v. 5), unsound judgment in church decisions (v. 8 A.V. margin). “Their folly shall be manifest unto all men” (v. 9) – at the Judgment, where the responsible appear. They are likened to Jannes and Jambres, who, according to Jewish tradition, were apostate Jews. These false teachers (probably Judaizers), “creep into (i.e. subtly infiltrate) houses (churches), and lead captive silly women” (v. 6). Note how the Judaizers are described as capturing Christians to become infiltrators in 2 Timothy 2:26 and in 1 Timothy 3:7. This view of the women is confirmed by the following two points:

- i) Acts 13:50 describes the Jews stirring up “the devout and honourable women and (thereby)... raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas”.
- ii) There is evidence in profane history that many Gentile women were influenced by the Jews. Thus Josephus (“Wars of the Jew”, II, 20.2) claims that when the Jews of Damascus were persecuted, the proselyte wives of the Gentiles living there were also attacked. Josephus describes the Gentile wives of the men of Damascus as “almost all of them addicted to the Jewish religion”. William Barclay says that during the first century “the Jewish religion had a special attraction for a women... round the synagogues were gathered many women, often women of high social position, who found in this (Jewish) teaching just what they so much longed for. Many of these

women became proselytes” ⁽¹⁾. That the women Paul refers to were also wealthy is shown by them having time to go round from house to house, instead of having to work.

Note

(1) William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 2003) p. 114.

5-28 Resist the Devil

James 4:7: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you”.

1 Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”.

Popular Interpretation

These verses are taken to mean that the Devil is a monster, like a lion, actively choosing people to devour, against whom the Christian has to be on guard.

Comments

1. The Devil is like a roaring lion. Those who believe the Devil is a monster insist on reading verses like this literally. In this case they have a problem. seeing that the Devil is described as being like a snake and a dragon in Revelation 12:9; a lion in 1 Peter 5:8; and a man in John 6:70. If all of these are taken literally, it is unclear as to who or what the Devil really is.

2. Sin comes from within us (Jer. 17:9; James 1:14–15). There is nothing outside of us that can enter us and cause us to sin (Mk. 7:21–23). In the face of these clear statements, the passage under consideration cannot prove that there is a person who enters us and makes us sin, seeing that the Bible does not contradict itself.

3. If the Devil can literally walk about, roaring like a lion, why has no one seen or heard him? To read this passage literally is surely literalism's last gasp.

4. How can human vigilance and resistance lead to the Devil fleeing from us, seeing he is supposed to have super-human powers? Either we are to take the Devil as a literal lion-like beast, or we must interpret this passage figuratively. The language of standing firm, in faith, is inappropriate for a battle against a literal lion. James 4 says that the Devil will flee from us if we stand firm. A literal lion will not flee just because the man s/he is hunting stands still. Once we understand the Devil here as some reference to spiritual evil, then the language of faith and holding in where we are takes on so much more meaning.

5. The Devil is said to "devour" people here; 2 Timothy 2:26 (A.V. margin) says that he captures them alive, and leads them after him (so the Greek of 1 Tim. 5:15 implies). Thus the devouring cannot be a literal death. When a roaring lion devours a man, it literally kills and consumes him. Seeing that the devouring is not literal, neither is the lion. 'Devouring' is part of the same figure as 'going about'. The 'movement' of the Devil is therefore also figurative.

6. Lion-like characteristics have been applied to people (e.g. Ps. 22:12,13, concerning the Jews who crucified Christ; Ps. 57:4; Prov. 28:15). Paul, in describing the success of his first appeal against the accusations he was being tried for, says he was, "delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim. 4:17), i.e. from the Roman court, whom he is likening to a lion. The Devil, like a lion seeking whom he may devour, may therefore refer to the Romans and Jews between them, seeking opportunity to condemn the Christians in court, hence Paul's warnings regarding the Christian way of life in order not to give this Devil the chance of bringing them to court (2 Cor. 2:11; 1 Tim. 5:14-15; 3:6-7; 2 Tim. 2:26; 2 Cor. 11:12).

There may be a parallel between 2 Timothy 4:17 regarding Paul being "delivered out of the mouth of the lion" and 2 Timothy 3:11-13, where, concerning the persecutions the Jews brought upon him, Paul could say "out of them all the Lord delivered me... (from) evil men and seducers" (the Jewish false teachers – see "Suggested Explanations" No. 2 of 1 Tim. 5:14-15).

Thus again it is possible to interpret the Devil, and in this case also the lion, on two levels:

- our evil desires, and
- those evil desires manifested in the Roman and Jewish systems.

Suggested Explanations: James 4:7

1. The preceding verses define the Devil in terms of our evil desires – “the spirit that dwelleth in us (naturally) lusts to envy... God resists the proud” (vs. 5–6).

2. If we are proud, we are giving way to our evil desires (Gal. 5:19; Mk. 7:21–23); we are of the Devil. We are of impure hearts (James 4:8). As we are not resisting the Devil, it will come nearer to us in that those evil desires will become stronger. But if we submit to God and “draw nigh to God”, “He will draw nigh to you” (v. 8); if we are humble (v. 6) and single-minded in our commitment to resisting the Devil (v. 8), i.e. by having only the Word of God in our minds, then the Devil will flee from us. From personal experience we must all be aware that if we consciously resist our evil desires (the Devil), then they will decrease – they will flee away.

3. Ephesians 4:27 says the same – “neither give place to the Devil” (see notes on that verse).

4. “Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners” (James 4:7–8). This conjures up the picture of a man moving towards God, and God moving towards him. The closer he gets to God the further the Devil flees in the opposite direction.

Thus the more spiritual effort we make to move towards God, the wider the gap will be between us and the Devil. Note, too, how James implies that this coming to God is through repentance – “cleanse your hands”. This recalls Luke 15:20, where the father of the repentant prodigal son (i.e. God) comes out to meet him – He draws nigh to him as he draws nigh to Him. The cleansing of hands and purifying of hearts spoken of in v. 8 by which the Devil is overcome is by “the washing of water by the Word” (Eph. 5:26) and by sanctifying by the Word (Jn. 17:17). Thus the Word overcomes the Devil, i.e. our evil minds, as we have seen so often; the Word affects our minds.

5. Resisting the Devil would result in it fleeing. Thus there is a parallelism between resisting and fleeing – the Christians were to flee from the Devil to escape it and resist it. Christ told the Christians to flee from the Jewish Devil both in its active persecution of them and

subtly trying to mislead them doctrinally, Matthew 10:23 (example Acts 13:50–51; also Jn. 10:5). He warned them to flee from the Roman Devil in Matthew 24:16.

6. The Christians resisted the Jewish Devil in Acts 6:10 – “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which (Stephen) spake”. Luke 21:12,15 shows that they would resist both Jewish and Roman Devils: “They shall lay their hands on you... delivering you up to the synagogues (the Jewish Devil) and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers (the Roman Devil)... I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries (both Jewish and Roman) shall not be able to gainsay nor resist”.

We have suggested that Ephesians 6:11–13 is relevant to both the Jewish and Roman systems creating an “evil day” of persecution for the church. “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand (same word translated “resist”) in the evil day” (Eph. 6:13), i.e. the church would be able to resist, or wrestle, against the Jewish and Roman systems successfully (in ultimate terms, at least).

Suggested Explanations: 1 Peter 5:8

1. The greatest adversary we have is that of our own evil desires.
2. 1 Peter 5:5–10 has many points of contact with James 4:7–9; the following are some of them:

James 4:6–11	1 Peter 5:5–9
“Submit yourselves therefore...”	“Submit yourselves...”
“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”	“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you.”
“Speak not evil one of another.”	“...be subject one to another”
“God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.”	“...God resists the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”
“Resist the Devil.”	“...the Devil... whom resist...”

Thus the Devil as defined in James 4:7 is the same as that referred to in 1 Peter 5:8, i.e. our evil desires and also the Roman and Jewish systems.

3. In the context of 1 Peter 5, Peter has been warning the Christians to be of a “ready mind” (v. 2), to have a humble mind (v. 5), to have an attitude of mind not too taken up with the cares of the present life (v. 7). This is to be equated with his warning in v. 8 about the Devil, i.e. against a proud and wrong attitude of mind. Thus again we see that the Devil can refer to the evil heart within man. Therefore v. 9 comforts them that all believers throughout the (Roman) world were experiencing the same problems – all believers everywhere are afflicted by the Devil of our evil desires, and this can be a comforting thought when we feel that we are being especially tempted.

4. The resisting of the Devil was by being steadfast in the faith, i.e. the “one faith” comprised of the doctrines taught by God’s Word (Eph. 4:4–6). Thus the Word could overcome this Devil. The Word also overcoming evil desires of the mind, we can conclude that the Devil here can refer to them. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 Jn. 5:4), thus equating the “world” with the “Devil”. “The world” is defined in 1 John 2:16 as the lusts of our flesh and eyes.

5. Our exposition of James 4:7 has shown that the Devil whom the Christians had to resist was the Roman and Jewish systems. Note how the lion represents wicked rulers in Prov. 19:12; 20:2; 28:15; Zeph. 3:3; Ez. 22:25. Paul refers to his persecution at the hands of the Romans as being as it were facing the mouth of a lion (2 Tim. 4:17).

6. 1 Peter 5:9 “The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world”. “The world” often refers to the Roman world – throughout the empire of the Roman Devil, the Christians were being persecuted (especially under the Emperors Nero and Diocletian). We have earlier commented on the connection between the Devil and the Roman authorities, and the “seeking” of opportunity to disgrace the Christians by both Jewish and Roman systems.

7. Members of the Jewish Satan are described as walking about, as the Devil is said to do in 1 Peter 5:8 (e.g. Jn. 12:35 and context; Rom. 14:15; 2 Cor. 4:2).

8. There must be some allusion in this passage to Ezekiel 22:25: “There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have

taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof". This refers to a group of apostate Jews in Jerusalem bent on spiritually ruining the nation, although giving an appearance of righteousness. They would exactly mirror the Jewish Judaizer Devil of the first century as roaring lion. Notice that they wanted to take her "precious things". Is it just coincidence that "precious" occurs seven times in Peter's letters to describe the precious things of the Christian faith – which the Judaizer opposition was trying to destroy? It occurs only ten other times in the whole of the New Testament.

9. The word "adversary" in the passage can mean an "adversary at law", and would therefore be in a context of the oppression of the Christian in the courts by the Roman legal system, or Devil. The whole theme of Peter is to warn Christians of the coming period of persecution at the hands of the Roman/ Jewish Devil (1 Pet. 5:9; 4:12,16–19).

10. The Greek word translated "adversary" here is not the same one rendered 'Satan'. It occurs in Luke 12:58: "When you go with your adversary to the magistrate (in time of persecution, v.53), as you are in the way, give diligence that you may be delivered from him; lest he hale you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and the officer cast you into prison". This parallels Matthew 5:25: "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison". The adversary here is "your brother" (Mt. 5:24). Connecting these verses together, it appears from Matthew 5:25 and Luke 12:58 that the adversary who would persecute the believers would be from among their own brethren. But the adversary is defined in 1 Peter 5:8 as being like a lion, an 'adversary at law'. This would suggest that the external persecution from the Roman and Jewish authorities was associated with the brethren within the ecclesia acting in collusion with them, which exactly fits into place if we understand the 'Devil' of 1 Peter 5:8, that was seeking whom he could devour, as the Judaist members of the ecclesia searching for every opportunity to bring the believers within the clutches of the Roman or Jewish authorities.

5-29 Chains of Darkness

2 Peter 2:4: "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment..."

Jude 6: "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day".

Popular Interpretation

This is taken as proof that angels sinned in Eden and still await punishment.

Comments

1. We have shown in section 2–1 that Angels in the sense of super-human beings cannot sin. The Bible cannot contradict itself.
2. If literal angels are referred to here, then they are not going round making people sin, seeing that they are kept safely chained up. They are "under darkness", i.e. not openly on the earth nor in heaven.
3. The context of Jude 5 implies that Jude 6 is a reference to a well known fact, "I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this". There is no record in any other part of the Bible about angels sinning in Eden; how then could these Christians be reminded of these things? All the other examples which Jude mentions are taken from Old Testament examples which were well known, and v. 6 is no exception.
4. There is no indication that these things happened in Eden. There is no mention of the angels starting to cause trouble after they sinned – the implication in v. 6 is that they were immediately chained up under darkness. At the creation "all the sons of God (the angels) shouted for joy" (Job 38:7) and they saw "everything... was very good" (Gen. 1:31); there was no evil whatever.
5. We have seen in section 2–1 that "angels" can refer to men.
6. These "angels" are to be judged at "the great day" of the second coming. The punishment of the unworthy at that day will be total

destruction (Mt. 25:41); yet we know that angels cannot die or be destroyed (Lk. 20:35,36). an angel walked with Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:27,28). We read of the angel that appeared to Manoah, "when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar" (Jud. 13:20). God "makes his angels spirits: his ministers a flaming fire" (Ps. 104:4). Therefore these "angels" who are to be condemned must be human ones, because fire cannot destroy angels.

7. Jude 7 says that Sodom and Gomorrah also ("even as") "are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (i.e. total destruction after judgment – Mt. 25:41). This implies that the angels that sinned were made a public example (as was Sodom) of what would happen to those who disobey God. However, there is no Biblical record of angels sinning in Eden – so how are these "angels" of v. 6 "set forth for an example"? There is no indication that even Adam and Eve saw the punishment of anyone apart from the serpent. Remember that sin entered the world "by one man" – Adam (Rom. 5:12) – not by an angel sinning.

8. Notice that the words "Devil" and "Satan" do not occur in these passages.

9. 2 Peter 2:9–11 interprets the reserving of the angels unto judgment as "The Lord knows how... To reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished... them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government... speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels... bring not railing accusations". This is saying that the counterparts of the sinful angels are the unjust men who follow their human lusts. That these men are not angels is shown by the fact that they speak evil of people, whereas angels do not. Peter doesn't imply there are different categories of angels, sinful and good. He does not say 'the good angels do not...', but rather he refers simply to "angels", all of whom are good beings.

10. "Chains of darkness" represent death in Proverbs 5:22–23 ("cords" in v. 22 is rendered "chains" in the Septuagint). Thus the 'angels' are now dead. They are "reserved" unto the day of judgment. "Reserved" does not mean (in the Greek) 'kept prisoner', it implies rather that God has made a note of these people, and will give them their judgment accordingly, at the second coming of Christ.

11. 2 Peter 2:1 sets the context for v. 4: "But there were false prophets also among the people (of Israel, in the wilderness, cp. Jude 5), even

as there shall be false teachers among you". Thus the angels that sinned appear to refer to false teachers amongst Israel in the wilderness. That God "spared not" the sinful 'angels' connects with how God "spared not" the sinful Israelites in the wilderness (Ps. 78:50). Indeed, the idea of God not sparing is often associated with His attitude to apostate Israel: Dt. 29:20; Jer. 13:14; 21:7; Ez. 7:4,9; 8:18; 9:10. The angels "reserved unto judgment" matches how the Jewish world was "reserved unto judgment" in AD70 (2 Pet. 3:7).

12. The immediate context is in 2 Peter 2:3 – the Judaizers were about to be suddenly punished (in the holocaust of A.D. 70) – "whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not". Peter then reasons that as God immediately punished the 'angels' that sinned, so the judgment and damnation of the Judaizers would not be long delayed.

If the angels were super-human beings who still have the liberty to go about tempting us to sin, and have had such liberty since the garden of Eden 6,000 years ago, then their day of judgment *has* lingered, it *has* been a long time coming, and therefore Peter's use of the angels that sinned as an example of God quickly punishing sin in v. 4 does not apply. Jude was writing against a background of belief that sinful Angels were roaming the world and inciting people to sin. He surely is attempting to debunk this idea by stressing that "the Angels who kept not their first estate" – whoever we understand them to be – are safely locked up in chains, unable to influence anyone on earth today.

Suggested Explanations

1. We have noted that this incident is probably concerning human "angels" at some point in the history of Israel, probably on the wilderness journey, and that it would be well known and documented in Jewish history (i.e. the Old Testament Scriptures). It also involved a great public punishment of the wrongdoers which set them "forth as an example". The rebellion of the 250 princes of Israel in the wilderness led by Korah, Dathan and Abiram, as recorded in Numbers 16, seems to fit quite well.

2. "Angel" can mean "minister", "messenger" (as John's disciples were messengers or ministers to him, Lk. 7:24). Numbers 16:9 describes the rebels as "ministers" of the congregation. The Septuagint uses the word *aggelos* for "ministers", which is the same Greek word translated "Angel" in 2 Peter 2:4. They left their first, or original, "principality" (Jude 6, A.V. margin); the rebels were princes, but wanted to be

priests as well (Num. 16:2,10). Because of this, the ground opened and swallowed them (Num. 16:31–33), as a dramatic example to everyone of the fate of those who rebel against the Word of God. It was especially dramatic in that it is emphasized that this was the first time that such a thing had happened (Num. 16:30). Thus they are now dead, “in everlasting chains under darkness”, in the heart of the earth, to be resurrected and judged at “the judgment of the great day”. Jude 8 implies that “likewise”, i.e. like the angels that sinned, the Judaizers “speak evil of dignities”, e.g. Jesus and Paul. The rebels spoke evil of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:11–14).

“Cast them down to hell” (2 Pet. 2:4). “Hell” in this verse is *tartaroo* in the Greek and is used only once in the New Testament. It was used in pagan Greek mythology to describe a subterranean place of darkness for the dead. “Chains of darkness” is rendered “pits of darkness” in the R.V. The Greek word *serius* (pits) indicates an underground granary or prison, which corresponds with Korah, Dathan and Abiram’s destruction when they “went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them; and they perished” (Num. 16:33).

3. That they were destroyed and were not left alive is shown by a comment on this incident in Psalm 73. Here Asaph describes how “my steps had well nigh slipped” (v. 2) because the wicked seemed to be prospering so much. Then, “I went into the sanctuary (tabernacle) of God; then understood I their end” (v. 17). This was because the brass censers of the 250 rebels were melted down after their death and beaten into plates with which the altar was covered – another example of the angels that sinned being publicly “set forth as an example” (Jude 7). Asaph would have seen these and reflected on the fate of the wicked men. Thus he reflects upon the rebels, the angels that sinned, “surely thou didst set them in slippery places: Thou castedst them down (by the earth swallowing them) into destruction” (v. 18) – therefore they are not alive, but in the same way as Sodom was destroyed with eternal fire, i.e. totally, so, too, were these “angels” (Jude 6,7).

4. The language of being cast down to the underworld and the darkness of the grave all features in the record of Egypt’s judgment in Ez. 31:16–18. Yet Egypt was not literally cast down from Heaven. The allusion to Egypt is to show how the apostate Jews in the wilderness were treated as if they were actually Egyptians – because in their hearts they turned back to Egypt.

5. We must understand the immediate context in which Peter uses the idea of God having judged ‘angels’ [whoever they refer to]. He

reasons that *if* God didn't spare 'angels' who sinned in the past but judged them; and *if* God punished sinners by a flood but saved Noah; and *if* God overthrew the wicked in Sodom but saved Lot... *then* we can be assured that God knows how to rescue the Godly and to judge the wicked in a future day of judgment (2 Pet. 2:4–9). The example of angels being judged must be seen as a warning and a comfort to us in our day. The implication would surely be that just as the flood and the destruction of Sodom were well known Biblical examples of Divine judgment, so must the judgment of the 'angels' be. And therefore the interpretation which associates them with Korah and his rebellion in the wilderness would seem to be most appropriate. And note that there is *no* Biblical record of rebellious Heavenly angels being judged and thrown down to earth.

5-30 The Body of Moses

Jude 9: "Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the Devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee".

Popular Interpretation

This is quoted in very vague terms, with the implication that the Devil must be a personal being, and that this describes an argument between the Devil, as an angel, and an archangel.

Comments

1. There is no implication that "the Devil" here is an angel. Seeing that it is stressed that all the angels are united in doing God's will and are all obedient to Him (Ps. 103:19–21; 148:2; Heb. 1:14), it is not possible for there to be an argument in heaven between angels.
2. We have shown in chapter 2 that the phrases "Devil" and "Satan" can be used about ordinary men.
3. This Devil is concerned with the body of Moses not the so-called "immortal soul" of men (which is not Biblical teaching anyway).
4. There are many similarities between Jude and 2 Peter 2. Jude 9 has a parallel in 2 Peter 2:11: "Whereas angels, which are greater in

power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord". Peter's equivalent of "the Devil" is "them" – implying that the Devil in Jude 9 is not an individual, personal being, but a group of people. 2 Peter 2:10–12 clearly indicates that the "them" was a group of men.

5. As with Jude 6, this verse is in the context of Jude 5 – "I will therefore put you in remembrance". Jude is therefore reminding them of incidents in Israel's history from which they should learn lessons. Thus Jude 9 must be a reference to an historical incident recorded in Scripture. There is no such incident concerning an angel called the Devil arguing with another angel.

6. Michael the Archangel asked God to rebuke, or "forbid", the Devil. If there is a super-human person, power or agency, called the Devil causing men to sin and creating trouble, then there is no evidence that he was ever effectively forbidden, seeing that sin and disaster are progressively increasing.

Suggested Explanations

1. The reference to the Devil here is incidental. The purpose of the passage is to show that angels speak in a gentle, humble way, even about people they know are in the wrong. They do not show personal vindictiveness, but say "The *Lord* rebuke you". The Judaizers "speak evil of dignities; yet Michael... durst not bring against him (the Devil) a railing accusation", i.e. he did not resort to bitter speaking as they did. Similarly Exodus 33:9–11 says that the angel spoke to Moses "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend", i.e. In a relaxed, friendly way. It should be remembered that it was with this voice that the "fiery law" of Moses was given by the angel, not in a harsh manner, as can be wrongly inferred from some parts of the narrative. Similarly the "still, small voice" that Elijah heard was probably the quiet, unassuming voice of an angel (1 Kings 19:12 cp. Job 4:16).

2. There are so many points of contact between this verse and Zechariah 3 that that chapter must surely provide an historical background to the verse, which would be appreciated by Jude's readers:

Zechariah 3:1–2: "And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O

Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

The most evident similarities are:

Zechariah 3	Jude
The angel of the Lord	Michael the archangel
Satan	The Devil
The Lord rebuke thee	The Lord rebuke thee
A brand plucked out of the fire (vv. 1,2).	Pulling them out of the fire (vv. 9,23).

The context in Zechariah 3 was that of the restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem from Babylon under Ezra and Nehemiah. They were trying to rebuild the temple and re-establish a system of worship there. However, "the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building" (Ezra 4:4), i.e. they acted as Satan – adversaries – to the Jews. They are actually called "the adversaries of Judah" in Ezra 4:1. They wrote "an accusation against the (new) inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem" to the king of Persia (Ezra 4:6). The Hebrew word for "accusation" is related to that translated "Satan"; שטנה Zechariah 3:8 clearly tells us that the characters of vs. 1 and 2 are "men of sign" (A.V. margin), i.e. we have to interpret them. So the satans – the adversaries – stood before the angel along with Joshua the High Priest, who "was clothed with filthy garments" (v. 3) – without a mitre on his head (v. 5 implies).

The implication is that the inhabitants of the land, the Satan, were complaining to God, manifested in the angel, that the new Jewish high priest was not really valid, as he did not wear the proper clothes (they had probably been lost during the captivity). The angel tells Satan, "The Lord rebuke thee", and proceeds to clothe Joshua with a set of priestly clothes and a mitre (vs. 4,5), thus showing God's acceptance of him. The inference behind the complaint was that God had not really chosen Jerusalem for the Jews to rebuild, and that therefore they were going ahead with their plans without God behind them. But the angel says that "the Lord...hath chosen Jerusalem", in the same way as He had chosen Joshua to be high priest. Thus Joshua represented Jerusalem. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" the angel asks Satan concerning Jerusalem. This is quoted in Jude 23 concerning saving repentant sinners. Thus the angel is in effect saying, "Jerusalem has repented, therefore I have plucked them out of

the fire of judgment and destruction; you should not therefore be implying that Jerusalem and the Jews are so sinful that they cannot be restored to their land with Me behind them”.

Jude says that the dispute between the angel and the Devil – those opposed to the rebuilding of the temple – was “about the body of Moses”. This phrase can therefore either refer to the Jewish people generally, in the same way as the Christian church is “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27) because we look to him for guidance, rather than being in the “body of sin” (Rom. 6:6) because we follow sin, or to Joshua the high priest. Joshua was the “body of Moses” in the sense that “body” can be a figure of speech for a “slave”, e.g. Revelation 18:13; Hebrews 10:5; Psalm 40:6; and Exodus 21:2–6, and Romans 6:6 where having a “body of sin” probably means being a “slave of sin”. The High Priest was thus the slave of Moses.

3. Another suggestion is that the “body of Moses” was Moses’ literal Body; Michael the archangel was the angel of Israel (Dan. 12:1) who led them through the wilderness in the cloud and fire (Ex. 23:20–21). The dispute may have been between the angel and a group of Jews – “the Devil” – who wanted to take the body of Moses with them. But the angel had buried Moses’ body and would not tell anyone where it was (Dt. 34:6). Remember that the body of Joseph was carried up into Canaan by the Jews (Josh. 24:32) as were the bodies of Jacob and the twelve patriarchs from Egypt (Acts 7:15–16 R.V.); and we know that the bodies of the kings of Israel were used in wrong worship rituals (Ez. 43:7); it is to be expected, therefore, that some of the Jews would also want to take the body of Moses, their great leader, with them. The Jews laid great store by having the remains of their leaders physically with them – they are condemned for keeping the corpses of their kings in the temple (Ez. 43:7–9).

5-30-1 "The wicked one" in 1 Jn. 5:18,19

"The wicked one", *ho poneros*, can refer to ordinary human beings. The phrase doesn't have to refer to a supernatural being. Consider how the Lord Jesus uses it in the Sermon on the Mount. He warns that *men* will do evil against us (Mt. 5:11). And He goes on to warn in Mt. 5:39: "Resist not the evil one; but whoever smites you on the one cheek, turn to him the other". The "evil one" simply referred there to an individual who did evil. God makes the sun rise upon 'the evil ones' as well as the good (Mt. 5:45- the same Greek phrase is used, although in the plural). He even refers to some in the audience hearing the Sermon on the Mount as being in that category: "You, being evil

[Gk. 'wicked ones']" (Mt. 7:11). Yet within the Sermon, we find Jesus advising us to pray "Deliver us from the evil one" (Mt. 6:13). The evil ones, in the context of the Lord's Sermon, were the human beings whom He foresaw would persecute His followers. The context gives no hint that the Lord had in view any supernatural being. His later teaching suggests that He saw the 'wicked ones' in the first context as being the Jews who persecuted His earliest followers. He called them 'evil ones' (Mt. 12:34), and He traces the root of their 'evil' to the wicked heart of man [the Biblical 'satan'] being allowed to function without opposition: "An evil man [s.w. "wicked one"] out of the evil treasure [of the heart] brings forth evil things" (Mt. 12:35). And so the Jews of the first century were an evil or wicked generation (Mt. 12:39,45; 16:4; Lk. 11:29; Jn. 7:7). The 'evil ones' were the Jews who were in opposition to the work of Jesus and the preaching of His message; we find the same phrase used about the Jews who opposed Paul's preaching in Acts 17:5. The AV translates the phrase as "certain lewd fellows", but again, *poneros* is used- 'evil ones' would be a fair translation. This is all the background for the Lord's teaching that there would be an 'evil one' who would sabotage His preaching of the Gospel, sowing weeds amongst the wheat (Mt. 13:19,38,49). John's Gospel tends to speak of "the world" with specific reference to the Jewish world of the first century. The Lord parallels that "world" with "the evil one" in Jn. 17:15: "I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one".

John's letters use language in the same way as his Gospel record. When John writes of the wicked one not 'touching' the believer, he is surely alluding to the Lord's prayer of Jn. 17:15: "I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should *keep them* from the evil one". When John writes of "the wicked one", he surely has in mind the same 'wicked ones' of the Gospel records- the Jewish opposition to the message of Jesus. And this was indeed what John was up against, as under Divine inspiration he wrote his letters to his converts who were being troubled by Jewish false teachers. We see in 1 Jn. 5:19 the same parallel between the world, and the wicked one- because "the whole world lies in the wicked one". It's likely that John came to personify those many 'wicked ones' as one 'wicked one'. But the

context provided by the Gospels is of wicked *men*, adversaries, satans, to the Gospel; who were like that because they brought forth 'wicked things' from their 'evil heart' (Mt. 12:35). No supernatural being is in view here at all. John goes on to heighten the contrast in 1 Jn. 5:20: Those wicked one were 'in' the wicked world, but the believers were 'in' Christ: "The whole world lies *in* the power of the evil one. But *we* know that the Son of God came, and has given us an understanding so that we truly know him that is true; and *we* are *in* Him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ". John's converts had come out from being *in* the Jewish world, and were now *in* Christ.

5-31 The Synagogue of Satan

Revelation 2:9–10, 13,24: "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of these things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the Devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life". "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr,

who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth". "But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden".

Popular Interpretation

These passages are taken to mean that there is a powerful being called Satan waging war against Christians, at times working through civil powers to do so.

Comments

1. We have seen several times in these notes that "Satan" often refers to the Jewish and Roman adversaries of the church in the first century. There is no indication here that there was a super-human being working through those Roman and Jewish systems. If it is argued that those systems received power and direction from the Devil in the sense of a super-human being to persecute the church, it must be remembered that Jesus told the Roman governor: "You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above", i.e. from God (Jn. 19:11). Thus it is God, not the Devil, who gives power to human governments to persecute His people, as He gave them power to do so to His Son.

2. Daniel 4:32: "The most high rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will". Thus God was the power behind the Roman Satan, or system, that was persecuting the Christians in the first century.

3. For comment on Revelation 2:9 see section 2-4 "The Jewish Satan".

4. The Devil that gave the ecclesia at Smyrna "tribulation ten days" was clearly the Romans. It was only they who could cast them into prison. The casting into prison (place of punishment), tribulation and afterwards being honoured (physical reward), recalls the experiences of Joseph and Daniel who were persecuted by the civil powers of Egypt and Babylon, as those at Smyrna were by the civil powers of the Roman "Devil". It has been shown that there were several ten-year periods of special persecutions of Christians in the Smyrna area: under Domitian, A.D. 81-91; under Trajan, 107-117 and under Diocletian, 303-313. The Septuagint in places uses the term *diabolos*,

false accuser, to translate the Hebrew 'Satan'. 'Satan' therefore carried the sense of both an adversary and also a false accuser. "The synagogue of Satan" in Smyrna may well refer to not only Jewish adversarial opposition to the Christians, but also that they falsely accused them to the Roman authorities. There could also be the suggestion that the Jewish synagogue in Smyrna was in fact working with the 'Satan', the Roman empire, against the Christians. Kraybill considers that the phrase "synagogue of Satan" is "a way of highlighting commercial or political relationships some Jews had with Rome". He also gives evidence that Jews in the provinces of the empire cooperated with the Roman government in order to ensure that they continued benefiting from the Roman legislation that exempted Jews from doing military service and paying taxes to the imperial cult ⁽¹⁾. In Domitian's time, a tax was levied to support the emperor and the imperial cult. Jews were exempted from this, and Christians refused to pay it. The "synagogue of Satan" in Smyrna loudly "say they are Jews" (Rev. 2:9), in order to avoid this tax and get benefits from the Roman empire at the time; but probably denounced the Christians to the Roman 'Satan' because of their refusal to pay that tax. So "synagogue of Satan... who say they are Jews but are not" was an appropriate description of them ⁽²⁾.

5. Pergamos being "where Satan's seat (throne) is", shows that the Satan referred to is not a personal super-human being. If it is, then his throne was literally at Pergamos, for all to see. It has been shown that the Roman administration of the area was based here, thus Jesus commends the ecclesia for holding to the Truth, despite being in close proximity to the source of persecution. Thus "Satan" again refers to the Roman authorities. It is also significant that a huge throne dedicated to the Greek gods has been discovered there.

6. "The depths of Satan as they speak", refers to the false teaching of the Judaizers, the Jewish Satan, who were pretending to offer deeper spiritual understanding through their false doctrine. They spoke evil about deep spiritual things which they did not understand (Jude 10), speaking words which seemed superficially impressive spiritually (Jude 16). The Judaizers' reasonings about keeping the law and worshipping angels, "intruding into those things which he hath not seen" (Col. 2:18; i.e. "which they know not", cp. Jude 10), had "a shew of (deep, spiritual) wisdom" (Col. 2:23). There are many other such examples.

7. It's significant that Pergamon is the city described as having "Satan's throne" (Rev. 2:13). I.T. Beckwith claims that Pergamon was the first city in Asia to have a temple devoted to emperor worship ⁽³⁾.

However it must also be noted that Pergamon was a centre for snake worship associated with the shrine of Asclepius ⁽⁴⁾. Revelation speaks of 'Satan', the adversary, as being characterized by the serpent (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). "Satan's throne" may also be a reference to the altar of Zeus in Pergamon. or the special throne-seat of Dionysus in the theatre there. "The city featured various Pagan sites of worship, including a monumental altar to Zeus, and a temple dedicated to Augustus and Rome, which served as the centre of the cult of the Roman Emperor in Asia Minor. Pergamum was in fact the capital of the Roman Province of Asia" ⁽⁵⁾.

Notes

(1) J. Nelson Kraybill, *The Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) pp. 170, 186.

(2) This whole matter is discussed in some detail in Mark Bredin, 'The Synagogue of Satan Accusation in Revelation 2:9', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* Vol. 28 No. 4 (Winter 1999) pp. 160–164.

(3) I.T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967) p. 456.

(4) J.A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1976) p. 228.

(5) H.A. Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 144.

5-32 Michael and the Great Dragon

Revelation 12:7–9: "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him".

Popular Interpretation

This is one of the most popular passages used to suggest that there was a rebellion in heaven amongst the angels, resulting in the Devil and his angels being thrown down to earth, when, in the form of the serpent, they began to create trouble and sin on earth.

Comments

1. All that we have learnt so far in this study must be brought to bear on this passage. We have seen that angels cannot sin and that there can be no rebellion in heaven. Thus this passage - which is the only one of its kind - must be interpreted in a way that does not involve angels sinning or there being sinful angels making people sin on earth, seeing that sin comes from within us, not from outside of us (Mk. 7: 20-23).

2. The serpent is cast out of heaven, implying it was originally there. But the literal serpent in Eden was created by God out of the dust of the earth (Gen. 1: 24-25). There is no implication that the devil came down from heaven and got inside the serpent. The language of “cast down” and “cast out” does not require literal downwards movement- Babylon is “thrown down” in Rev. 18:21. The O.T. basis of “cast out” is in the nations / beasts being cast out from God’s presence in the land of Israel. In Rev. 12 we have another woman in the wilderness, who enters the Kingdom [cp. the land] once the beast is cast out. In Dan. 7:9 the thrones of the beast / kingdoms are “cast down” before the Kingdom is established on earth, just as the beast is cast down before the establishment of the Kingdom in Rev. 12. The idea of being cast out of Heaven was and is common in Semitic languages and even wider culture for a loss of power- thus Cicero comments about Mark Anthony: "You have hurled your colleagues down from heaven".

3. Note carefully that there is no reference here to angels sinning or rebelling against God, only to a war in heaven.

4. After the drama of vv. 7-9, v. 10 says that there was “a loud voice saying in heaven, *now* is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night”. If vv. 7-9 occurred at the beginning of the world, before the time of Adam and Eve, how could it be said that after satan’s fall there came salvation and the kingdom of God? After Adam’s sin, mankind began his sad history of

slavery to sin and failure - a state hardly to be described as “salvation” and the kingdom of God. There is rejoicing that the devil - the accuser - has been cast down to earth. Why should there be rejoicing if his coming to earth was the start of sin and disaster for man? If a fall from heaven to earth is understood figuratively rather than literally, as representing a fall from authority (as Is. 14:12; Jer. 51:53; Lam. 2:1; Matt. 11:23), much more sense can be made of all this. If all this happened before the time of Adam, or at least before the fall of man, how could the devil have been accusing “our brethren”, seeing they did not then exist?

5. There is nothing indicating that all this happened in the Garden of Eden. A vital point is made in Revelation 1:1 and 4:1 - that the Revelation is a prophecy of “things which must shortly come to pass”. It is not therefore a description of what happened in Eden, but a prophecy of things to happen at some time after the first century, when the Revelation was given by Jesus. Any who are truly humble to the Word will see that this argument alone precludes all attempts to refer Revelation 12 to the Garden of Eden. The question has also to be answered as to why the identity of the devil and information about what happened in Eden should be reserved until the end of the Bible before being revealed.

6. “The great dragon was...that old serpent” (Rev. 12:9). The dragon had “seven heads and ten horns” (v. 3), therefore it was not literally the serpent. It being called “that old serpent” shows that it had the characteristics of that serpent in Eden, in the sense of being a deceiver, as the serpent was. Thus the devil is not literally the serpent. If it is, then the dragon is the snake. But the dragon is a political power, manifesting sin (satan). Pharaoh is likened to a great dragon (Ez. 32:2) but we can’t reason that therefore he was a literal dragon. Similarly, “the sting of death is sin” (1 Cor. 15:56), but that does not mean that death is a literal snake. It has the characteristics of the snake, through its association with sin.

7. The devil was cast down onto the earth and was extremely aggressive “because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (v. 12). If the devil was cast down in Eden, he has had the

opportunity to torment man throughout his long history - which is hardly having only “a short time” in which to wreak havoc.

8. How could the devil have deceived “the whole world” (v. 9) before he was thrown out of heaven seeing that there was no one in the world before Adam?

9. Verse 4 says that the dragon drew a third of the stars of heaven to the earth with his tail. If this is read literally - and Revelation 12 has to be read literally to support the Popular Interpretation - the sheer size of the dragon is immense - a third of the whole universe (or solar system at least) could be contained just on his tail. There is no way the planet earth would be big enough to contain such huge creature sprawling over it. Most of the stars of the solar system are bigger than our earth - how then could a third of them land on earth? And remember that all this happened, or will happen, after the first century A.D., when this prophecy was given.

10. In view of this and many other things in Revelation 12 (and the whole prophecy) which are just incapable of any literal fulfillment, it is not surprising that we are told first of all (Rev. 1:1) that this is a message that has been “signified” - i.e. signified - put into sign language, or symbol. As if to emphasize this in the context of Revelation 12, Revelation 12:1 describes the subsequent action as “a great sign” (A.V. margin).

11. In reading of what the devil does when he is on the earth, there is no description of him causing people to sin; indeed, vs. 12-16 show that the devil was unsuccessful in his attempts to cause trouble on earth once he arrived there. This contradicts the popular interpretation.

12. One of the key questions in understanding whether this passage supports the idea of a literal war in heaven, is whether the “heaven” spoken of here is literal or figurative. We explained earlier that “heaven” can figuratively refer to a place of authority (see [“Suggested Explanation” No. 7 of Eph. 6:11-13](#)). Revelation being such a symbolic book, we would expect this to be the case here.

13. In their eagerness to show that Rev. 12:7-9 refers to fallen angels at the beginning of the world, apologists for a personal satan have rather overlooked the context of the passage. A woman in Heaven, in the agony of childbirth and resting her feet on the moon, is faced by a dragon, whose tail throws down a third of the stars of Heaven to earth (Rev. 12:4). She gives birth, and the child "was caught up unto God, and to his throne" (Rev. 12:5). Clearly enough the "heaven" where all this occurs isn't the "heaven" where God lives and where His throne is. Next we read of a power struggle "in heaven", and the dragon and his angels are "cast out" (Rev. 12:9). The dragon throws one third of the stars of Heaven to earth- are these Angels? If so, how come the dragon and not God casts them to earth? That's quite the opposite of the scenario painted in *Paradise Lost*. How can a literalistic reading of this passage cope with the *two* episodes of Angels being cast down to earth? At the very least, care in thought and exposition is clearly lacking in the orthodox reading of this passage. The woman, who is never recorded as leaving "Heaven", then flees "into the wilderness" (Rev. 12:6). Once the dragon is cast to the earth, then he starts persecuting the woman by hissing huge volumes of water at her (Rev. 12:13). The earth opens and swallows this water (Rev. 12:16)- even though the woman is never recorded as losing her "in heaven" status. All this is reason enough to not interpret "heaven" and "earth" in this passage in any literal manner. The appearance of the woman and dragon "in heaven" is described as a *semeion*, a "sign", something that needs to be interpreted, rather than a literal fact (Rev. 12:1,3).

14. When we read that the devil-dragon "deceives" people, this is defined more specifically in Rev. 19:20 as referring to deceiving people in the very last days by false miracles worked in conjunction with the "false prophet". Thus the deceit is not to be understood as a general inciting of humanity to sin in their hearts- the deceit is specified as occurring only in the last days, immediately prior to the Kingdom of God being established.

15. The Greek word *ballo* translated "cast out" doesn't necessarily mean to throw *down*- Greek has words for this specific idea and it's significant that they're not used here. Here

are a few examples of the usage of *ballo*, showing that it really means to expel or re-place:

- A wind "arose" (Acts 27:14); a crowd "threw" dust *up* into the air (Acts 22:23); a sword is "put *up*" into a sheath (Jn. 18:11) imply the word can mean to throw *up* as well as to throw *down*.

- Men "cast" stones (Jn. 8:7,59), "strike" another man on the face (Mk. 14:65), "put" fingers in the ear (Mk. 7:33), people "lay" upon a bed (Mt. 8:6,14; 9:2; Mk. 7:30)- horizontal movement.

- We "put" bits into the mouths of horses (James 3:3)- no vertical movement there. Thomas "thrust" his hand into the Lord's side (Jn. 20:27).

- Believers were "cast" into prison (Acts 16:24,37; Rev. 2:10)- the idea of vertical movement isn't there. Likewise love "casts out" fear (1 Jn. 4:18).

- The dragon casts water out of his mouth (Rev. 12:15,16), horizontally along the ground. Here the word clearly doesn't mean to throw *down* from a height- and the same word is used in that context for the devil being "cast out", i.e. ejected, from Heaven.

- Men "cast" dust on their own heads (Rev. 18:19).

16. The language of 'war' is surely metaphor rather than literal description. What begins as a literal battle ends as a legal one, as the metaphor changes to the law court, with accusers, judge and Satan's case rejected. If the legal language isn't to be taken literally, why should the 'war' language be so literal?

The Chronological Problem

The woman of v. 1 is "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars". These heavenly bodies, as well as the woman, apparently suspended in heaven, cannot be literal. She could not literally be clothed with the sun, or have stars as big as the earth on her literal head.

Another sign appears in heaven in v. 3 - a red dragon. This is commonly taken as a literal heaven, but why should it be, seeing that the same heaven is referred to in v. 1 and that is clearly figurative? Verse 4 shows the dragon casting a third of the stars of heaven to earth. We have seen that because of the size of the stars and earth, this cannot therefore refer to literal stars or heaven. The Kingdom of God is to be established on earth (Dan. 2: 44; Matt. 5:5), which will not be possible if the earth is destroyed (which it would be) by huge stars falling onto it.

The woman in “heaven” then delivered her child, who was “caught up unto God and to his throne” (v. 5). God’s throne is in heaven. If the woman was already in heaven, why would her child have to be “caught up” to heaven? She must have been a symbol of something on earth, although in a figurative “heaven”. She then flees “into the wilderness” (v. 6). If she was in literal heaven, this means there is a wilderness in heaven. It is far more fitting for her to be in a figurative heavenly place, and then flee to a literal or figurative wilderness on the earth.

We then come to v. 7 - “there was war in heaven”. All other references to “heaven” in Revelation 12 having been figurative, it seems only consistent that this was war in a figurative heaven. This must be the case, as there can be no rebellion or sin in literal heaven (Matt. 6:10; Ps. 5: 4-5; Hab. 1:13). The common view claims that wicked angels are locked up in hell; but here they are in heaven. They are not therefore literal angels.

I sometimes ask those who believe in the orthodox idea of the devil the following question: ‘Can you give me a brief Biblical history of the devil, according to your interpretation of Bible passages? The response is highly contradictory. According to ‘orthodox’ reasoning, the answer has to be something like this.

- a) The devil was an angel in heaven who was thrown out into the garden of Eden. He was thrown to earth in Gen. 1.
- b) He is supposed to have come to earth and married in Gen 6.
- c) At the time of Job he is said to have had access to both heaven and earth.
- d) By the time of Is. 14 he is thrown out of heaven onto earth.
- e) In Zech. 3 he is in heaven again.
- f) He is on earth in Mt. 4.

g) He is “cast out” at the time of Jesus’ death, according to the popular view of “the prince of this world” being “cast out” at that time.

h) There is a prophecy of the devil being ‘cast out’ in Rev. 12.

i) The devil is “chained” in Rev. 20, but he and his angels were chained in Genesis, according to the common view of Jude v 6. If he was bound with ‘eternal chains’ then, how is he chained up again in Rev. 20?

From this it should be obvious that the popular view that the devil was cast out of heaven for sinning cannot be true, seeing that he is described as still being in heaven after each occurrence of being ‘cast out’. It is vital to understand both heaven and the devil in a figurative sense.

"That old serpent"

"That old serpent" (Rev. 12:9) is often misread to mean that the original serpent in the Garden of Eden is now a dragon in the sky. But care in thought and Biblical exposition is lacking in such a view. The orthodox understanding is that Satan sinned in Heaven, and was thrown down to earth, where he tempted Eve in the form of a serpent. But Rev. 12:9 is a prophecy of the *future*, just prior to the return of Christ to earth, saying that *then* there will be a conflict "in heaven"- which we understand to be figurative language. The orthodox interpretation does violence to the obvious chronology, and is evidently an opportunistic grabbing hold of Biblical phrases with no attention at all to their context, and stringing them together to justify popular Christianity's adoption of Jewish and pagan myths about the Devil. In passing, note how Gen. 3:15 prophesies that God *will* put hostility between the serpent and the woman. This is not what we would expect to hear if this were indeed speaking of a pre-existent Christ and Satan. According to the orthodox understanding, the enmity between them occurred in Heaven *before* Satan supposedly came down to earth. Notice, too, that according to the Biblical record in Gen. 3:15 it is God who created this hostility, whereas the common view implies it was Satan's hatred of God which was the original enmity. We read that the dragon / serpent's "place" was not "found" in Heaven as a result of the final struggle (Rev. 12:8). The same term is to be found in Rev. 20:11, where we read that the 'Heaven and earth'

had no place found for them in Heaven as a result of Christ's final sitting in judgment. Clearly, 'Heaven and earth' are figurative- used here, as so often in the Bible, to refer to a system of things. Notice how the Devil / dragon / serpent are thus paralleled with the 'Heaven and earth'. This worldly system of things in the last days, the dragon / serpent power, will be no more after the final judgment seat of Christ. We see all this prefigured in how the rejected Esau came before his father Isaac, typical of the rejection of the wicked at the final judgment, and "found no place", despite his tears and gnashing of teeth (Heb. 12:17). The rejected *people* at the final judgment will "not be able" to enter God's Kingdom then (Lk. 13:24)- and the same Greek word is used in Rev. 12:8 to describe how the serpent / Devil system of people will not "prevail". Clearly the reference of Rev. 12 is to the very last day, when Christ returns to earth in judgment. The serpent 'not prevailing' and 'finding no place' with God in 'Heaven' refers [in the light of the same terms used in other Bible passages] to what happens at the final judgment, at Christ's second coming, and it is therefore *not* descriptive of some past events in Eden. It's also noteworthy that the serpent / Devil is 'cast down' from Heaven to make "woe" for "the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea" (Rev. 12:12). This hardly sounds like the orthodox Satan of *Paradise Lost* being thrown down to earth to make trouble for just Adam and Eve. The people who inhabit "the sea" rather than the earth surely indicates that we are to understand all this literally. And it is "the serpent" who is thrown down from Heaven to the earth / sea. Orthodox thinking holds that Satan was cast down and became a serpent here on earth rather than being a serpent "in Heaven" as Rev. 12 requires. In any case, the woman in Rev. 12 is persecuted by the serpent rather than being charmed and tempted by him; and she escapes from him by fleeing into "the wilderness", which makes the serpent mad with her (Rev. 12:13-17). None of this Biblical testimony fits the orthodox interpretation of the passage- it directly contradicts it.

The "old serpent" may be a reference to the characteristics of the serpent whom we meet in Genesis. The serpent-Eve incident played itself out in history, and still does, in that the children of the woman [God's people] are tempted and now threatened by the powers of sin and sinful organizations. Thus Paul could say

that in the same way as the serpent tempted Eve, so Jewish false teachers in the early church were tempting the true bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:3). So it was again in the persecution of true Christians by the Roman empire, which Rev. 12 initially refers to; so it was throughout history; and so it will be in the time of the final tribulation before the second coming of Christ. My specific suggestions as to the fulfillment of Rev. 12 in the latter day tribulation can be found in [The Last Days Chapter 12-7](#).

The Greek *archaios*, translated "old" in Rev. 12:9 and Rev. 20:2, can easily be misread as meaning simply 'the archaic / very old' serpent. But *archaios* is a form of the Greek root *arche*- the dragon power of Rev. 12 is the arch-serpent, the archetypical serpent. It doesn't necessarily mean that the serpent is very old. For the serpent who tempted Eve suffered from the curse which came upon all other "beasts of the field" (Gen. 3:1), and died. We see serpents today eating dust and crawling on their bellies, living and dying like any other creature. The *arche* serpent doesn't therefore mean 'the very very old serpent, the animal who tempted Eve, is still actually alive'. We meet the word *arche* elsewhere in the context of meaning 'archetype' rather than 'having been in existence from the beginning of Biblical history': "The *principles* (Gk. *arche*) of Christ" (Heb. 6:1); "the first (Gk. *arche*) principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5:12); and quite commonly *arche* is simply translated as "magistrates", "rulers", "principalities"- the ordering, *arch*-principles and foundations of society (Lk. 12:11; 20:20; Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10,15; Tit. 3:1). In line with this understanding, I think we could fairly paraphrase Rev. 12:9 as: "The great dragon, the classic, typical serpent, the thinking and behaviour of Eden's snake played out all over again in classic role, the Gentile / Roman Devil and the Jewish Satan, an evil system adversarial to God's true people".

Austin Farrar coined the term "a rebirth of images" (1) to describe what's going on in Revelation. Old Testament images are taken up and given a new focus; and this is what's happened with the images of the serpent. It's not a reference to *the same* serpent as was in Eden- but a rebirth of that image. G.B. Caird has commented on the very common error of interpretation made with Rev. 12: "Later Christian tradition, by the fallacy of

misplaced concreteness, treated this as a precosmic event... quite failing to recognize that John's imagery had an earthly referent" (2). What Caird is saying, in dense theological language, is that Christian folk have over literally interpreted the reference to the serpent, assuming that Rev. 12 is talking about something happening before creation, when in fact it is referring to things happening on earth in John's own generation.

The Deception Of The Devil (Rev. 12:9)

The dragon power is associated with "the false prophet" and the doing of fake miracles (Rev. 13:14; 19:20)- this is the basis upon which the dragon / Satan / adversary of God's people "deceives" the world (Rev. 12:9). There are multiple connections between the Lord's Olivet prophecy and the prophecy of the book of Revelation. Almost every commentary on Revelation brings these out, and I have listed many of them in [The Last Days Chapter 12](#). The Lord Jesus repeatedly warned His followers not to be "deceived"- using the same Greek word as in Rev. 12:9 about the dragon / Devil 'deceiving' unbelievers. But He warns time and again that the source of this deception will be from "*men...* false prophets... false Christs... false prophets" doing false miracles (Mt. 24:4,5,11,24). Jesus says nothing about some fallen-Angel 'Satan' being behind these men. He simply warns His followers to beware of *human* deceivers- and Rev. 12 fills out the picture by specifically painting these *men* as part of a massive *human* system called Satan, the adversary, who would have all the characteristics of the serpent in Eden, just as the adversaries of God's people always have had. This system of opposition, in the first century context, was both Jewish and Roman- hence the dragon is called both "the devil and satan" in Rev. 12:9- *diabolos* being the Greek term for the Hebrew *satan*. They are practically interchangeable- but both terms occur here, I suggest, in order to show that the opposition to Christianity was coming from both Jewish and Gentile sources. Time and again the New Testament writers warn the Christians of both Jews and Gentiles, *men* [not demons, spirits, fallen Angels, Satan etc.- but *men*] who "seek to deceive you" (1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; James 1:16). "Be not deceived" is a watchword of Paul (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7). It is the *world* which is deceived by wicked men (1 Tim. 3:13; Tit. 3:3; 1 Pet.

2:25)- just as Rev. 12:9 says that the dragon / Satan system will deceived "the whole world". That system was thus composed of wicked *men*. In all these passages, the very same Greek word occurs which is translated "deceive" in Rev. 12:9. Again we have to ask- why did Jesus, Paul, Peter, James and John not spell out to their converts that it was really *Satan* who was tempting them and likely to deceive them? Why do they repeatedly stress that it is *men* and the human heart (Heb. 3:10; 1 Jn. 1:8) who are the deceivers? Why do we have to wait until the very last book of the Bible to be told that actually, it's Satan who's doing this? How can belief in a personal Satan be so crucial to many churches, when the earliest Christian converts [made before Revelation was given] had been taught nothing about any Angel falling from Heaven and being responsible for temptation? Was there one Gospel for them, but another for the 21st century church?

The Serpent In God's Presence (Rev. 12:10)

The 'accusation' of God's people "before God" by the serpent / Devil doesn't mean he has to be literally in Heaven (Rev. 12:10). The same term is found in Jn. 5:45 where the Lord Jesus states that the long-dead Moses 'accuses' the Jews to God. Our own thoughts accuse us to God (Rom. 2:15). What all this surely means is that things done on earth, good and bad, even thoughts and feelings, are somehow represented before the throne of God, perhaps by representative Angels there, and God [to continue the figure] 'judges' those reported accusations. But this doesn't require our literal presence in Heaven to do this. The first century mind, especially those from a Jewish background, would likely have picked all this up with no problem; it is the European insistence on literalism in semantics which has lead to so many of the problems in interpretation which these verses have given rise to. We have to somehow shed our slowness and hesitancy to accept that figures [e.g. of a judgment court replete with literal books, throne, accusers, witnesses] are just that-figures.

Suggested Explanations

1. To try and expound this chapter fully is out of the scope of our present notes. A full explanation of these verses requires an understanding of the entire book of Revelation in order to get them in context.
2. The conflict in figurative heaven - i.e. a place of authority - was therefore between two power groups, each with their followers, or angels. Remember that we have often identified the devil and satan with the Roman or Jewish systems.
3. That the devil-dragon represents some kind of political power is indicated by it having "crowns upon his heads" (v. 3). Revelation 17:9 -10 also comments on this dragon: "Here is the mind that hath wisdom" - i.e. don't try and understand this animal as a literal being - "The seven heads are seven mountains...these are seven kings". One of the kings continuing "a short space" perhaps connects with the devil-dragon having "but a short time" in Revelation 12:12.

Revelation 12: Deconstructing Pagan Myths

Various scholars have shown that this passage is full of allusion to contemporary pagan myths (3). This is in keeping with what we have seen elsewhere in the Scriptures- pagan myths are alluded to in order to deconstruct them. Surely the point of all the allusions here in Revelation 12 is to say: 'Take your attention away from all these myths of what supposedly is going on out in the cosmos. Get real. Here on earth, you are going to be persecuted by Rome [or some other adversary]. Prepare for it in your hearts. The real enemy isn't a dragon in the sky. It's Rome'. Other scholars have demonstrated that Revelation 12 and 13 contain many allusions to contemporary Jewish writings- e.g. Rev. 12:9; 13:14 speak of the beast / Satan "leading astray those that dwell on the earth", quoting from the *Apocalypse Of Abraham* and *Enoch* 54.6 about the armies of Azazel / Satan who "lead astray those that dwell on the earth". The point is that pagan Rome and the Jewish 'satan' were those who were leading astray, and who would be punished in the cataclysm of AD70; and in a last days context, it is the latter day Satan / beast who

will lead astray many and be destroyed by the second coming of Christ.

For 15 years Dr. David Pitt-Francis applied an exceptional mind to trying to get to grips with the book of Revelation (4). His conclusion, written up in chapter 9 of his book, was that not only does Revelation 12 not teach the existence of a personal Satan, but it actually is a parody of the whole belief in a sinful Satan figure existing in Heaven. He follows the approach that Revelation 12 alludes heavily to pagan myths of a Satan figure existing in Heaven, and that the whole idea of the chapter is to show that given the victory of the Lord Jesus over all evil, those pagan ideas are just no longer tenable in any form. The idea of a Satan figure in Heaven has been 'cast down' for the serious believer in Christ: "Satan was imagined to have dominated at least a third of heaven in pre-Christian times. Babylonian, Zend and Teutonic thought assumed 'Satan' or his equivalent to be in possession of about a third of heaven. Jewish apostate thought (as in Enoch) also imagined a third of heaven to be in the possession of rebellious angels. The vision of a dragon occupying a third of heaven, and specifically defined as the 'devil and Satan' is provided at this stage, not to indicate some literal fact, but to summarise the preconceptions about the devil which had existed in pagan thought before the coming of Christ, and that had even crept into Judaism... It was primarily the task of Christianity to show the world that evil could have no place in heaven, that it did not occupy a place in heaven except in the imagination of mankind, and that it could be vanquished by the grace of Christ, and the Word of His testimony... the casting forth of Satan from heaven is a powerful symbol of what would happen to the human concept of evil as a result of the teaching of Christ. The woman and the dragon cannot coexist in heaven... Could there have been such a literal 'devil' or even a 'literal' dragon, who perverted a third of the angels in heaven and cast them to the ground, as Jewish apocalyptic writers had actually believed? If we adopt this literalistic stance, we not only fall into the error of those books against which the Revelation was written but miss the main message of the chapter, that since the advent of Christianity to disprove the concept of imagined evil in heaven, no 'devil' has ever had any place there". He goes on to suggest that 'Satan' in post-Christian religions [e.g. Islam] has

always been envisaged as a being living under the earth, in a supposed "hell", rather than in Heaven. Whether or not we feel happy with this kind of 'spiritualized' interpretation of Revelation, the allusions of Revelation 12 to material in the book of Enoch about Heavenly rebellions, Enoch being caught up to God etc., cannot be gainsaid. And I suggest that such allusions are indeed, as David Pitt-Francis suggests, in order to deconstruct these wrong ideas.

Revelation 12: Judgment On Rome

It may be helpful to take this line of thought further. Revelation is a description of events on earth from the perspective of what happens in Heaven- encouraging the early Christians that God and His Son and His Angels are in fact intensely aware of the crises going on, and actually the whole scenario is playing itself out in the court of Heaven. All powers and individuals and organizations on earth have in Heaven their Angelic representatives, and the situations are tried by God before His throne- with the result that it is those on the side of Christ who are vindicated. The language with which John's Apocalypse achieves this is shot through with allusion to earthly realities, often deconstructing the claims of pagans. Rome was the great reality of the first century world; it was appropriate for the Jewish mind of the time to understand the "serpent" / adversary figure as referring to Rome. According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, "the Serpent is spoken of as *Harasha'*, "the Wicked One," in Gen. R. xx., Bek. 8a (compare Targ. Yer. Gen. iii. 13); and Rome as the wicked kingdom, *Malkut ha-resha'ah* (Gen. R. lxxvi.)" (5).

Roman coins depicted the goddess Roma, THEAN ROMEN, as queen of the gods and mother of the world's saviour. John speaks of she who claims to be the queen of the earth (Rev. 18:7)- and portrays her instead as nothing but a prostitute, who is soon to be destroyed. The fact Revelation alludes to the goddess Roma in this way doesn't mean that 'she' actually existed in Heaven in reality. And the way John in Rev. 12 likewise alludes to myths about dragons and beasts doesn't mean they exist either. The material in Rev. 12 has some twists in it which debunk the legends- thus it is not emperor of Rome who

slays the dragon, it is the victory of Christ on the cross, through His blood, which is the real means of victory against all opposition on earth. The telling paradox is that the escape for the persecuted child is through *death*, through blood, rather than through some dashing heroic victory in battle. When Jeremiah compared Babylon to a dragon gulping down Jerusalem whole, we don't for a moment think that Babylon was a literal dragon (Jer. 51:34); likewise when Ezekiel calls Pharaoh a dragon lying in a stream (Ez. 29:3). The message was that the real dragon / chaos monster was earthly powers- and God would break them. And so it is with Revelation's message, although more attention is given to the idea of those earthly powers having Angelic representatives in the court of Heaven.

The language of judgment is really common throughout the Bible. In fact we could say that legal language is disproportionately common in the Bible. The idea of a Divine, heavenly court is common. God is the judge who upholds the weak, those who are condemned by human judgment (1 Sam. 24:15; Ps. 9:4; 43:1; 140:12; Lam. 3:58; Mic. 7:9); He is even portrayed as the one appealing for justice (Ps. 74:22). If God is the only and ultimate judge, then *His* judgment is all that ultimately matters, and in this sense human 'sentences' or judgment from the court of human opinion are reversed by Him (Prov. 22:22,23). Yet the pain of being judged by those around us is highly significant to us mortals; and time and again, Scripture is reminding us that we should not pay deep attention to this, because God's judgment is what ultimately matters; and the Divine court is sitting in session right now, at the very same time as those around us are judging us with their meaningless human judgments. This, then, is the ultimate answer to the pain of being slandered and defamed, being misunderstood and misrepresented, or feeling that persecution by worldly powers is not noticed by God.

The traditional reading of Revelation 12 makes out that there was a rebellion in Heaven, the Devil came down to earth, and then trouble started down here. But the whole idea of Revelation's visions of 'heaven' is that we are being given snapshots of the 'throne room' of Heaven, the Divine court... which is a reflection of what is actually going on here on earth,

and what will subsequently follow from this in the future. I wish to stress this point, because I think it's fundamental to understanding Revelation. Those visions aren't historical descriptions of what happened before creation, before human history. They are insights into how God right then in the first century viewed what was going on there in the Middle East on planet earth, showing us how He judged the situations and Governments and individuals involved, and what would follow from this. Thus when we read that no place was found for the opposing forces in Heaven (Rev. 12:8), we are to imagine the representative of those forces, the barrister as it were, being thrown out of court. They would simply disappear from the Heavenly court room, thrown out of court as it were, perhaps reflected by the Angel representing them leaving the court. What makes interpreting Revelation so confusing is that there are so many layers of allusion going on in the text at one and the same time. Thus Rev. 12 alludes to the surrounding myths, and yet also on multiple further layers to Old Testament themes. The vision of Rev. 12 clearly has in mind Pharaoh pursuing the escaping Israelites as a dragon pursues (Ex. 14:8), Israel like the early church carried on eagles' wings to some safety (Ex. 19:4), Pharaoh trying to destroy Israel by drowning them in the water of the Nile, God providing for His people in the desert. Again, these allusions are to a real historical situation that happened here on earth- and not to some Biblically unrecorded drama somewhere out in the cosmos.

Deconstructing Jewish Myths

Revelation not only deconstructs pagan myths, but Jewish ones too. The obvious question is: 'Why does Revelation 12 appear to use language so similar to the idea of cosmic conflict, dualism and sinful Angels if in fact these things do not exist?'. My answer is that the passage is clearly alluding to the Jewish myths expressed in 1 Enoch 10, where we have the Angel Raphael binding the Angel Azazel, the Angel Gabriel destroying the children of the Watchers, and the Angel Michael binding the Angel Semjaza and his followers. I have noted elsewhere, especially in *The Real Christ*, that because early Christianity was Jewish-based, the roots of many false doctrines were actually in Jewish myths which entered into the early church.

The way the New Testament writers often deal with this problem is to allude to the ideas and deconstruct them. Because they do not use the system of quotation marks and footnoted references which we do, we from our distance can easily miss the fact that allusion or even quotation is going on. We can easily make the mistake of thinking that the uninspired literature being alluded to is in fact being quoted as true- when in fact the context requires us to understand that actually, that literature is being quoted and deconstructed. In Revelation 12, the simple message is that the conflict between Christians and their oppressors is not unnoticed by God in the very throne room of Heaven itself; all that happens here on earth is played out before Him by the Angels who are representative of the entities on earth who are persecuting God's people. And thus there is a refocusing of attention away from the Jewish myths of Angelic conflict in Heaven- back onto the earthly realities which were so painfully relevant to the first readers and listeners.

Notes

(1) Austin Farrar, *A Rebirth Of Images* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

(2) G.B. Caird, *The Language And Imagery Of The Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1988) p. 55.

(3) Neil Forsyth, *Satan And The Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) chapter 13. For example, the Greeks believed that the dragon Python attempts to kill the new born son of Zeus but is stopped the escape of the child's mother, Leto, to the island of Delos; Apollo then comes and slays the dragon. For the Egyptians, Set the red dragon hunts Isis but is then killed by her son Horus. In other myths, the dragon of darkness tries to kill the sun god but is killed by him. There are other examples of the sun god myth being alluded to in Revelation. Take the description of Jesus as having eyes as a flaming fire and feet of pure bronze (Rev. 2:18). This is said to the Thyatira ecclesia- and the god of Thyatira was Apollo, the sun god, known locally as Tyrimnos, who appeared in this very form on the city's coins. The point of the allusion was that

actually, there is no sun god- for the Christians in Thyatira, that means Jesus.

(4) David Pitt-Francis, *The Most Amazing Message Ever Written* (Irchester, UK: Mark Saunders Books, 1983).

(5) Jewish Encyclopedia, article on Ahriman [available online at www.jewishencyclopedia.com].

5-33 Devil and Satan Bound

Revelation 20:2,7,10: "And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years". "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison". "And the Devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever".

Popular Interpretation

These verses are taken to indicate that the serpent in Eden was the Devil, and that this is a personal being which is responsible for spiritually deceiving the world.

Comments

1. Verse 10 says that Satan is to be thrown into the lake of fire for ever. Eternal fire represents total destruction (Jer. 17:27; Jude 7) – it is not to be taken literally. Thus Satan is to be totally destroyed. Angels cannot die or be totally destroyed (Lk. 20:35,36), therefore Satan is not an angel. Death is also "cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14). Death is not a being or person, it is an abstract concept. Death being cast into the lake of eternal fire, shows that it is going to be totally ended/destroyed. The beast and false prophet are also there. From what we learn earlier in Revelation these are human organizations, and according to this verse are also to be destroyed. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death"; those who commit sin will be punished with death, not eternal fire, therefore the lake of fire where they are must represent total destruction and death. Revelation 20:14 says as much: "the lake of fire...is the second death".

2. We have seen in Comment No. 6 on Revelation 12:7–9, that the Devil being called "that old serpent" means that whatever is

represented by the Devil – be it our evil desires or a political system – has the characteristics of the serpent in Eden.

3. We have seen in our Comment on Revelation 12:7–9 that the dragon is not a literal dragon, therefore the serpent is also to be taken figuratively.

4. We have seen that sin and spiritual deception come from our own evil heart (Mk. 7:21–23; James 1:14–15). Jeremiah 17:9 says that our heart is too deceitful for us to fully appreciate just how deceptive it is. We have also often seen that this evil heart is sometimes termed “Satan”; but Satan is not a force outside that evil heart – it is the heart itself.

5. Notice that Satan’s deceit of the nations and all of his powers were totally in control of God (Rev. 20:2,3,7). Satan is not a free agent to act as he wishes, without regard for God.

6. If the Devil in the sense of a personal being is caught hold of and bound at the start of the 1000 years, i.e. at the return of Christ, how then are we to understand that the Devil was “destroyed” by the death of Christ, and by the fact that a perfect Jesus had human nature (Heb. 2:14)? How come he is still running free at the time of Christ’s return? Further, Jesus had prophesied how in His death, He would “bind” [same Greek word] the “strong man” and enable us to spoil the Devil’s house (Mt. 12:29). The Devil in the sense of sin and the power of sin was indeed bound by the Lord’s death. The parable of the wheat and tares helps explain things further – the tares, the people and systems who follow the Devil in the sense of the desires of sin, grow together with the wheat, until the Lord comes and the Angels go forth and “bind them in bundles to burn them” (Mt. 13:30). Here in Rev. 20:1,2 we have an Angel binding the Devil and then burning him in the lake of fire. There’s an evident connection here. Surely the idea is that those *people and systems* who have followed the Devil / the flesh / sin will be exposed for whom they are, bound by the Angels, and destroyed by the end of the 1000 years. The Lord uses the same figure of ‘binding’ to describe how the condemned *people* at the final judgment will be ‘bound hand and foot’ by the Angels and then destroyed (Mt. 22:13).

7. I suggest that here again we have an example of Scripture alluding to contemporary incorrect ideas and deconstructing them. The Jews until about 150 B.C. believed that Messiah would return and establish His Kingdom on earth. But influenced by their humiliation under the Romans, they came to believe that the world was too evil for Messiah to return to, and that it required a 1000 year period of purification by the Jews before Messiah could return. Slavonic Enoch 22–23, which has been dated at around 50 A.D., stated this specifically. Revelation

was therefore written with this idea current in the surrounding Jewish world. I suggest that this incorrect view is being alluded to and deconstructed, by stating that Messiah will come at the *beginning* of the 1000 years and 'purify' the earth forcibly by figuratively 'chaining' Satan. Thus Messiah is to come and purify the earth Himself, rather than the Jews having to purify the earth for 1000 years before Messiah could come.

Suggested Explanations

1. Revelation 20:2 has clear links with Revelation 12:9 – “the great dragon...that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world”. We have interpreted this as having some reference to a political organization which epitomizes the Devil, i.e. man's evil desires. The fact that it is “bound” for the 1,000 years of Christ's Millennial reign (i.e. the first part of this Kingdom which He will set up on earth at His second coming), shows that this organization is very much in evidence in the last days before His coming – i.e. now.

This organization is “bound” during the Millennium. It then reappears, with God's permission, at the end of the 1,000 years (v. 7) and inspires a political confederacy of nations to attack Christ (v. 8) – “God and Magog, to gather them together to battle”. This has many echoes of the confederacy against Christ in these last days before the second coming (cp. Ez. 38:2; Rev. 16:14,16). The same kind of political system will, perhaps, be allowed to develop again at the end of the 1,000 years. However, it is totally destroyed, v. 10, along with the other political systems – “the beast and the false prophet” – that meet their end at Christ's second coming. The whole book of Revelation is full of allusions to the Old Testament prophecies. Rev. 20:1–3 is surely based upon Is. 24:21,22, which prophesied that the kings of the earth will be gathered together, imprisoned in a pit and punished. It is these very human “kings of the earth” who are described in the more figurative language of Revelation as “Satan”.

2. From what we know of conditions in the Millennium (the 1,000 years reign of Christ at the start of the Kingdom of God), the “Devil and Satan” here clearly also represent the evil desires within man and the expression of those desires in sin. In the Millennium, the curse that was put on the earth in Eden will be greatly reduced. The deserts will be fertile (Is. 35:1), there will be no more famine (Is. 35:7; Ps. 67:6; 72:16) and therefore man will not have to work so much in the sweat of his face to stay alive (Gen. 3:17). However, man will still have to till the ground and “sweat” to some extent (Is. 65:21). Although

people will live much happier and longer lives, there will still be death – if a man dies at 100 years of age he will be thought of as a mere child (Is. 65:20). This is why, at the end of the 1,000 years, there will be a second resurrection (Rev. 20:5,6) for those who die during that 1,000 years.

Sin brings death (Rom. 6:23). The curse on the earth came because of sin, and to some degree is perpetuated because of our continued sinning – “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all (men) have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). The reduction of the curse will therefore be because man is sinning less, although it will still be there to some degree because the people are still sinful descendants of Adam. an accurate way of saying that man is sinning less is to say that the Devil – the evil desires and sins of man – is bound for 1,000 years, but resurges at the end, leading to a rebellion against Christ.

If this was the fault of an evil being outside of people, he should be punished, but *they* are punished (Rev. 20:9) because they have given way to the Devil within them. When the Devil is cast into the lake of fire, so is death (Rev. 20:10 cp. v. 14), implying that the Devil and death are closely connected – which they are, because “the wages of sin (the Devil) is death” (Rom. 6:23); the Devil “had the power of death” (Heb. 2:14). Thus the Devil here in Revelation 20 is also our evil desires; they deceive the whole world, seeing that “the whole world lieth in wickedness” and is obedient to the lusts of the flesh (i.e. the deception of the Devil) – 1 John 5:19; 2:16.

Digression 8: “The man of sin” (2 Thess. 2)

However we understand the “working of Satan” (*energeian tou Satana*) in 2 Thess. 2:9, it was under the control of God – for it was part of the “strong delusion” (*energeian planes*) which God sent (2 Thess. 2:11). The repetition of the word *energeian* is missed through the mask of translation through which most read this passage, but in the original Greek it stands out clearly. The ‘Satan’ isn’t working *against* God but is being used by God in *His* working in the lives of others. It is “evil” and “the work of Satan” which deceives the wicked (2 Thess. 2:9,10); but God works through this, it is *He* who sends the delusion... an indication that ‘Satan’ here is not radical evil, i.e. evil that is free and independent from God, lurking free in the cosmos as it were, but is sent by God, under His control. But of course, we want to know more about this ‘Satan’; and in section 2–4 we analyzed the way

in which Jewish opposition to the Christian Gospel was a significant adversary or 'Satan' in the first century.

Like the majority of New Testament prophecy, 2 Thess. 2 has application to both AD70 and the last days, although this does not preclude a reference to the Papacy down through the years between those times. It was inspired at a time when apostasy had already set in within the ecclesia, largely due to the inroads of the Judaizers. We can be sure that the Jewish opposition which attended Paul's first visit to Thessalonica would have continued well after he left. They were under pressure from "them that trouble you" (2 Thess. 1:6), who are defined in Gal. 5:11–13 as the Judaizers ("they... which trouble you"). The Thessalonians are comforted that these troublemakers would be destroyed by the Lord's second coming in fire, "taking vengeance on them... that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (preferring that of Moses): who shall be punished with everlasting destruction (cp. Gehenna) from the presence of the Lord" (1:9). This sounds very much like the punishment of the responsible at judgment day (Jude 24) – and the Judaizers fit that category. Significantly, the only occurrences of the Greek idea of a "man of sin" in the LXX describe Jewish apostates (Prov. 24:22; Is. 57:4).

A Specific Individual

This prophecy speaks of a specific "man of sin" who would arise within the people of God [be they Israel or the ecclesia]. It seems that there may have been such an individual in the first century:

- "You have heard that antichrist shall come" (1 Jn. 2:18)
- "Who [singular] did hinder you... a little leaven [that] leaveneth the whole lump...he that troubleth you..." (Gal. 5:8–10)
- "He that is of the contrary part" (Tit. 2:8)
- "Who (which individual) hindered you?... (Paul's) letters, saith he, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:7,10 A.V. mg.).
- The world – the first century Jewish world, in John's usage of the term – was under the power of a 'Satan', a Prince or leader (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 1 Jn. 5:19) – perhaps the High Priest?

– A “stranger” to the flock and a “thief” would come to harm the flock of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 10:5,10).

– The existence of such an individual would make special sense of the Lord’s request for the Father to keep the disciples safe from “the evil one” (Jn. 17:15). 1 Jn. 2:13,14 alludes to this prayer and shows it to have been fulfilled in the first century – the true believers had been kept safe from “the evil one”. And there appears some connection with the promise of Rev. 3:10, given just prior to the cataclysm of AD70, to keep the brethren safe from “the hour of trial”.

– John seems to speak, at least in the Greek text, of one specific individual – e.g. “The one [singular] saying he is in the light” (1 Jn. 1:9). “Who, then, is *the* liar?” (1 Jn. 2:22) has evident connection with the lying antichrist figure of 2 Thess. 2:8,9; and “the deceiver” (2 Jn. 7) connects with that same figure who will follow “deceit” (2 Thess. 2:11). John saw the singular antichrist as being heralded by many antichrists who had, he felt, already arisen in the first century. They belonged to the [Jewish] world (1 Jn. 4:5) – an indication that the antichrist is somehow Semitic, at least in its first century application. John’s reference to “many false prophets” (1 Jn. 4:1) connects with Mt. 24:11, which in an AD70 context predicts that “many false prophets shall arise”. This indicates to me that the singular antichrist had some fulfilment in the first century. And the same will be [is?] true in our last days. The likes of Saddam Hussein and Hitler are perhaps such antichrists who presage the coming of the specific person who will be the latter day antichrist. They had some similarities to him, but were not the actual person. Significantly, John seems to have understood this person as someone who would nominally accept Jesus, but deny that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed Messiah (1 Jn. 2:22). This would fit a Moslem position far better than it would a Catholic – for Catholics believe that Jesus is the Christ. Likewise in the first century, the Jewish antichrists believed Jesus had existed, but denied He was the Christ.

It is noteworthy that this individual is not named. Martin Hengel comments, correctly: “One of the riddles of Jewish and early Christian polemic is that it hardly ever really names its opponents, but tends to use derogatory paraphrases. This is [also] true of Essene polemic, which conceals its opponents in ciphers” ⁽¹⁾. In this context we recall the references to Babylon and Egypt in the Old Testament as, e.g., “Rahab”. Paul likewise doesn’t seem to refer to his enemies by their names but rather hides behind almost taunt phrases (2 Cor. 11:5,13; 12:11; Gal. 5:12; Phil. 3:2; and see too Gal. 1:7; 3:1,10; 4:17; 2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2; Rom. 3:8; 15:31). The references to the prophetess

“Jezebel” in Rev. 2:20 and “the teaching of Balaam” (Rev. 2:14) don’t actually name the individuals concerned, but rather give them a kind of code name.

It is against this background that 2 Thess. 2:2 warns them not to be “soon shaken in mind, or be troubled (cp.1:6; Gal. 5:12), neither by Spirit, nor by word (from those claiming the Spirit gift of prophecy), nor by letter as (if it were) from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand” (R.V. “here”). This all indicates Judaist activity; they had elsewhere used the tactic of forging letters in Paul’s name (Gal. 6:11; Heb. 13:22; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 3:1). Thus Paul concludes this second letter to the Thessalonians with “the salutation of me Paul with mine own hand which is the token in every epistle, so I write” (2 Thess. 3:17). Their reasoning was that the day of Christ, i.e. the Kingdom, was already present. This was a basically Jewish argument – hence the Judaist cancer at Ephesus had lead to Hymenaeus and Philetus “saying that the resurrection (and therefore the Lord’s return) is passed already; and overthrown the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:18).

The Jewish nature of the man of sin ⁽²⁾ which Paul warns the Thessalonians of is also suggested by a careful reflection upon 1 Jn. 2:11,19: “He that hateth his brother... walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth... they went out from us, but they were not of us”. This is all alluding back to the example of Cain going out from God’s presence and wandering in the land of Nod with no direction to his life. Cain is a type of the Judaizers and the Jewish system (Jn. 8:44); the primary reference of John’s letters was probably to the Judaizers. These people are described in 1 Jn. 2:18 as “antichrists” whose presence heralded the full manifestation of “*the* antichrist”. This is why the New Testament repeatedly stresses that the appearance of false teachers and fake Christs will be a sign of the end. If these antichrists of the first century were Jewish, then “the antichrist” probably also was. There is ample evidence that John’s letters were primarily intended for ecclesias facing this Judaizer problem. The copious links with his Jewish-based Gospel should make this evident. Note too that the Qumran Essenes described the apostate High Priest as “the man of lies”. Tertullian’s interpretations of John’s letters clearly understood the “antichrists” to be referring to contemporary false teachers.

Paul warns that the Lord’s coming will not be until there has come a marked further apostacy, and the full public revelation of the man of sin, whose “mystery of iniquity” was already quietly at work. It would be fully revealed once God’s withholding patience had ended. At this stage the man of sin would show “lying wonders” which would deceive

many; but he would soon be destroyed by “the brightness of (the Lord’s) coming”. This “mystery of iniquity” was the Judaist false doctrine undermining the ecclesia, resulting in many believers being influenced by them, until in the immediate prelude to Christ’s ‘coming’ in AD70 the Jewish system seemed to have the upper hand over the true believers. We know from Heb. 6 and elsewhere that the Judaist elders were able to do miracles. Such a bout of impressive miracles to be done by false teachers in the last days is predicted in the Olivet prophecy and parts of Revelation. The events of AD70 then totally destroyed the Jewish system.

The following verse by verse commentary seeks to interpret 2 Thess. 2 from these two perspectives – of AD70 and the last days. The fact that “the man of sin” appeared in the first century in the form of Judaist false teaching within the ecclesia means that “the wicked one” sitting in the temple is to be read on a figurative level – as referring to the temple of the ecclesia. Indeed, most N.T. usage of “temple” is with reference to the ecclesia. The Lord’s mysterious reference to an idolatrous abomination sitting in the holy place in the last days (to which Paul is alluding) must therefore also have at least some reference to a gross evil within the latter day ecclesia.

v.3 “That day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition”.

“The son of perdition” was Judas (Jn. 17:12), the epitome of sin and the Jewish Devil (Jn. 6:70,71 cp. 8:44). We will see that throughout 2 Thess. 2 there is frequent reference to the events surrounding our Lord’s suffering and death; as we also note in the Revelation passages concerning the saints’ final sufferings. Judas was concealed among the disciples until he finally flew his true colours at his betrayal of Christ, which marked the beginning of His passion. The Judaizers were only revealed for what they really were in the traumas of AD69/70. And if the man of sin has a latter day equivalent, this group of false teachers will only show their hand immediately prior to the second coming, at the beginning of the tribulation, which matches the beginning of Christ’s final sufferings which began after Judas’ betrayal. This indicates that any witch hunt for this group is doomed to failure. The disciples tried to expose Judas, “the man of sin”, before his proper time to be manifested; and ended up accusing each other of fitting the role. Such is the inability of human nature to make accurate judgment in this respect. There were three and a half days from the time of Judas being openly revealed for what he was to the

end of Christ's sufferings, marked by the resurrection. It may be that there will be a three and a half year tribulation period for the latter day believers, beginning with the open revealing of the "man of sin".

The N.I.V. (correctly) translated "man of sin" as "man of lawlessness", highlighting the contradiction in the fact that the law-crazy Judaists were actually law/ess. Because lawlessness abounds in the last days, the majority of the ecclesia will lose their love (Mt. 24:12). The beast is epitomized by a man – "the number of the beast...is the number of a man" (Rev. 13:18) ⁽³⁾, in the same way as the system described in 2 Thess. 2 is personified as a man of sin. The figure of Rev. 13:5,6 is clearly based around an Old Testament 'man of sin', Goliath – a real, historical person. Rev. 11:4,13 draw a contrast between a god of the earth / land of Israel, and the true God of Heaven. The "god of the earth" has two olive trees and two candlesticks standing before him, with evident allusion back to Zech. 4:14; 6:5, where the Lord / King of the earth / land appears to refer to the King of Babylon.

These passages all imply that there may well be one specific "man of sin" in the last days. Judas, the prototype "son of perdition", influenced the other disciples, as shown by the complaint concerning Mary's 'waste' of ointment being described as made by Judas in Jn. 12:4, but by the whole group in Mt. 26:8. Jude's letter is a warning against the Jewish-influenced apostasy of the first century. He cites "the gainsaying of Korah" as typical of the false teaching that was infiltrating the ecclesias. He could have spoken of "Korah, Dathan and Abiram", but instead he focuses on Korah, as if he was the outstanding influence. By doing so, was Jude suggesting that there was one specific individual in the "last days" who was to be resisted?

The connection with Judas would suggest that the man of sin being in the temple may refer to the presence of this individual or system within the ecclesia. But there is a clear link with Mt. 24:15, concerning the abomination of desolation standing in the temple as a clear sign that Christ's return is imminent, just as Paul says the man of sin in the temple is the clear sign of the second coming (2 Thess. 2:3). The Lord's words are looking back to Daniel's prophecy that a desolator (RV) is to appear in the temple, and also to Jeremiah's description of Nebuchadnezzar as a 'desolator' of God's people and His cities, who achieves his 'desolation' by a fake theophany, coming with clouds and chariots just as the Lord Jesus will (Jer. 4:7,13). The language used by Jeremiah in that section is very similar to that used in Ezekiel 38 about the individual named as 'Gog'. The abomination that desolates is at the hands of an individual desolator – the man of sin of 2 Thess. 2. The likely application to an abomination within the ecclesia

notwithstanding, one is tempted to look for a physical temple to be built in Jerusalem in order to ease the fulfilment of this prophecy. It cannot be insignificant that the right wing Rabbis are enthusiastic for this, *and have already drawn up the plans for one!* It could be that Rev. 13:14,15 predict that the man of sin will set up a literal image of himself there in the temple. And as has been pointed out, Caligula had ordered a statue of himself to be erected in the temple, and although this never actually happened, this would've been an enduring memory amongst the New Testament readership. This background again points to the personality cult of a specific individual being developed in the temple.

v.4 “Who opposeth and exalteth”

This is used in 2 Tim. 2:25 concerning the Judaizers and Jews, and it is translated “adversary” in the same Judaist context in Lk. 13:17; 21:15; 1 Cor. 16:9; Phil. 1:28 and 1 Tim. 5:14. Their arrogance is well described as exalting themselves above anything that is ‘worshipped’, whether Christian or otherwise. This is the same word as “devotions” in Acts 17:23 concerning pagan idols. They made themselves “as God”, perhaps by imitating Moses, the god of this (Jewish) world” (2 Cor. 4:4 and context); James 4:11,12 is just one example of the Judaist-influenced eldership making themselves equal to Moses. There are two Greek words translated “temple”, one referring more to the physical building and the other to the spiritual dwelling place of God, i.e. the ecclesia (1 Tim. 3:15). It is this latter one which is used here – the man of sin sits down (Gk. ‘takes his place’) in the ecclesia, showing himself (Greek ‘demonstrating’) that he is God. This word is translated “approved” in Acts 2:22 concerning Christ’s approval as God’s representative by His miracles. This indicates that the man of sin is an imitation of Christ – a true antiChrist. The showing that he is God would be through the pseudo miracles of v.9 – in the same way as Moses was made as God to Pharaoh through the miracles he did (Ex. 7:1). The Judaist-influenced elders of the Jewish ecclesias seem to have retained the power of the miraculous gifts for a short time after their apostacy (Heb. 6:4–6); the Jews also had their false miracle workers (Acts 13:6; 19:14). The beast of Revelation also works impressive miracles. Thus as the man of sin did false miracles in the first century through the Jewish miracle workers and their Judaist friends within the ecclesia, so both in the beast system of the last days as well as in the ecclesia, the latter day “man of sin” will work false miracles.

v.5,6 “Remember ye not, that when I was with you, I told you these things? And *now* ye know (appreciate) what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time”.

There is a definite allusion here to Lk. 24:6: “He is... risen; remember *how* (with what earnestness, the Greek implies) he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee”, concerning his sufferings and resurrection. The connection runs deeper; as the Angel spoke those words in Lk. 24, the disciples were about to turn back, to capitulate to the reasoning of the Jewish Satan, due to their failure to truly appreciate earlier prophecy. The believers of AD70 and the last days have parallels with the position of those men. They had frequently heard about the coming sufferings of their Lord, but somehow turned a deaf ear to them. We too can let the reality of these warnings about our future suffering just pass us by.

Paul says that these things had previously been explained to the Thessalonians, perhaps in 1 Thess. 5:3–5; there they were told that the pre-eminent sign of the Lord’s coming is the “peace and safety” cry within the ecclesia. Now in 2 Thess. 2 Paul puts it another way: “that day shall not come, except there come a falling away *first*”, or most importantly, as the most obvious sign. “Withholdeth” is also translated as “stand fast” and also “keep hold”, often in the context of resisting Judaist infiltration by retaining true doctrine. This would imply that the spiritually strong within the ecclesias were withholding the revealing of the man of sin and the Lord’s return (“that he might be revealed in his time” can neatly refer to either, cp. 1 Tim. 6:15). However, it was only a matter of time before the falling away was so widespread that they would be “taken out of the way”; “for the mystery of iniquity (literally ‘law-breaking’, another pun on the Judaizers’ position) doth already work” (v.7). This is the opposite to “the mystery of Godliness” (1 Tim. 3:16), and refers to the Judaizers claiming to be so spiritually deep that the Truth was a “mystery” known only to them (cp. Jude 19; Rev. 2:24). That which hindered the revealing or coming (cp. 1:7; a false second coming) of the man of sin would be taken out of the way. “Out of the way” here is normally translated “from among them” – the spiritually minded members of the ecclesia were to be taken away, so that God’s punishments could come upon the rest of them. In the first century this was shown in the command for the faithful to flee the Jerusalem ecclesia (Lk. 21:21), to come out of Babylon (Rev. 18:4), which is a common symbol of Israel and apostate Jewry in the prophets. The word for “mystery” is also used in a negative sense in Rev. 17:5,7 concerning the woman of sin riding the beast – hinting at a specific individual who will be the figurehead of the
beast?

v.8 “And then shall that wicked (one) be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming”.

It was the Jewish system which was destroyed by the ‘coming’ of AD70; there is a close connection between ‘the evil one’, i.e. the Devil, and the Jewish system, as discussed in section 2–4. The Spirit and brightness of the Lord’s coming parallels the description of judgment on the Judaizers in 1:6–9: “...mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance...punished...from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power”. This judgment is against “them that trouble you” (1:6), i.e. the false Judaist ‘brethren’ who were leading the early church astray (Gal. 1:7). The link with 2:8 shows that it is such false brethren *within the ecclesia* (temple) who are “the wicked one” which will be destroyed by the second coming. 2 Thess. 1:6–9 also recalls the description of coming judgment on the apostate Jews in Rom.1:18: The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness”. Paul’s words in Thessalonians can also be traced back to Is. 11:4: “He (Christ) shall smite the earth (Heb. ‘*eretz*’ – land, of Israel) with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked” in Israel, primarily. The Greek for “wicked” is translated “without law” in Romans, again making a play on the Judaizers who were claiming to keep the Law. There is a parallel between “the mystery of iniquity” in v.7 and the “wicked one” of v.8 – the revealing of “that wicked” is therefore the revealing of a mystery, which mimics the ‘revealed mystery’ of the true Gospel (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3; 6:19; Col. 1:26). The wicked one was to be “destroyed”, the Greek for which is also translated “abolish”, “do away”, “make of no effect”, “vanish away”, “make void” etc., all in the context of the doing away of the Jewish Law and the system which supported it. This was only fully done with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD70.

“The spirit of his mouth” looks forward to Rev. 19:15,21 concerning Christ’s destruction of the beast, which has close links with the man of sin. The emphasis on the destruction of the man of sin by Angels and fire recalls Dan. 7:10,11 concerning the beast’s destruction by the Lord’s return. Perhaps the man of sin will appear associated with the latter day ecclesia, the temple of God, but he will be linked with the political ‘beast’ which will then be in control of the world.

v.9 “Him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders”.

‘Satan’ in the New Testament frequently refers to the Jewish system. “Coming” can be translated ‘coming in’, referring to the subtle entry of Judaist agents and ideas into the ecclesia (Gal. 2:4 etc.). The coming of Christ was associated with miracles, and this would be matched by ‘Satan’s’ miracles at *his* ‘coming’. The Greek for “working” is often used concerning the working of the Holy Spirit. “Power, signs and wonders” is a phrase always used concerning the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 2:22,43; 4:30; Rom. 15:19; Heb. 2:4); and in 2 Cor. 12:12 concerning the qualifications of an apostle. This would portray the man of sin as a false apostle (cp. 2 Cor. 11:13–15) doing false miracles to accompany a false Gospel; he is “the son of perdition” after the pattern of Judas. The Greek for “lying” is used about the apostate Jews in Jn. 8:44; Rom. 1:25; 1 Jn. 2:21.

Jannes and Jambres were another prototype of these Judaizers (2 Tim.3:8). Perhaps these magicians who replicated Moses’ miracles were apostate Jews. Israel’s experience in Egypt points forward to ours at the time of the second coming. Perhaps the beast, symbolic ‘Egypt’ of the last days, will also have a group of renegade Jews in tow, who match the miracles performed by the latter day Moses. Showing “signs and lying wonders” is an evident allusion back to Mt. 24:24, concerning this happening in the last days of AD70 and our own times. If the miraculous gifts are possessed by some of the faithful in the last days, e.g. In connection with the Elijah ministry, the ability of the apostate believers to do miracles will seem the more credible. There are many links between 2 Thess. 2 and the Olivet prophecy:

Matthew 24	2 Thessalonians 2
Lawlessness will abound (v.12)	The man of lawlessness
Men saying “Lo, here is Christ” (v.23)	“Be not soon shaken... by word... that the day of Christ is here” (v.2 R.V.)
“Believe it not” (v.23)	“Let no man (of sin) deceive you” (v.3).
“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders” (v.24).	“With all power and signs and lying wonders” (v.9)

“Insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (v.24); implying the non-elect <i>will</i> be deceived.	“All deceivableness... they (shall) believe a lie... but you, brethren beloved of the Lord, have from the beginning (been) chosen to salvation” (v.10,13) – i.e. it was impossible for <i>them</i> to be deceived.
“Behold, I have told you before” (v.25), as Christ prophesied His sufferings.	“When I was yet with you, I told you these things” (v.5)
“As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (v.27)	“The brightness of his coming” (v.8)
“The Son of man coming in the clouds of Heaven (Angels) with power and great glory” (v.30)	“With his mighty Angels... The glory of his power” (2 Thess. 1:8,9 cp. 2:8)
“Shall gather together his elect” (v.31)	“Our gathering together unto him” (v.1)
“I am Christ... shall deceive many” (v.5)	“Strong delusion, that they should believe a lie... all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish” (v.11,10).
“Iniquity shall abound” (Greek: ‘multiply’, i.e. convert more people to it)	“The mystery of iniquity does... work” (v.7)
“The love of many shall wax cold” (v.12)	“They received not the love of the truth” (v.9)

The description of those deceived in 2 Thess. 2 is amplifying that of the judgment seat in 1:6–9, which is concerning those responsible to judgment, i.e. those who know Christ. We therefore conclude that the many who are deceived by false claims of miracles are actually within the ecclesia. Only the elect will not be deceived. This was what happened in the run up to AD70, and must presumably be seen in our last days too. The establishment of the beast’s power in Jerusalem, accompanied by powerful miracles and the support of some Judas-like brethren within the ecclesia for it, will persuade some in the church to think that Christ is back. The connections between Mt. 24 and 2 Thess. 2 indicate that many (Gk. The majority, Mt. 24:12) within the ecclesia will be deceived, egged on by a subtle group of false Christians who will be the counterpart of the first century Judaizers.

v.10 “With all deceivableness (used concerning the Judaizers in 2 Pet. 2:13) **of unrighteousness** (used about the Jews in Rom. 1:18,29; 2:8; Heb. 8:12; 2 Pet. 2:13) **in them that perish** (cp. 1 Cor. 1:18 – about the Jews?); **because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved”**.

This implies that they received the truth, but not the love of it. Is this true of the latter day church?

v.11 “For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie”.

This same word for “lie” is used in v.9 about “lying wonders”. This implies that the beast / false prophet / man of sin is somehow allowed by God to do the lying wonders; they will be sent by God to test the faithful. God deluded the unfaithful within the first century ecclesia into false doctrine and alienation from Him; and it seems, if we are interpreting correctly, that He will do the same in these last days.

Who Will He Be?

We have seen that the latter day man of sin will have some association with the people of God, after the pattern of Judas. He may be partly Jewish. He may even have Christian connections. Or it may be that he is an Arab, a half Jew, who will enthrone himself as the head of the Arab beast and make his capital and temple in Jerusalem. Nah. 1:15 RV describes the leader of the Assyrian invasion as “the wicked one”, the “wicked counsellor” (1:11), “*he* that dashes [Israel] in pieces” (Nah. 2:1). Further evidence for a charismatic Arab antichrist is provided in my study of the revival of latter day Babylon in *The Last Days*. Of particular significance is the way that the man of sin exalts himself “against all that is called God or that is an object of worship” (2 Thess. 2:4 RV mg.). This is exactly relevant to Islam, whose insistent belief in one God leads them to be aggressively against any icon, idol or object of worship. This is the very opposite to the Catholic way of venerating objects of worship.

Notes

(1) Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (London: S.C.M., 1996 ed.), p. 41.

(2) This is explored in detail in section 2–4 ‘The Jewish Satan’.

(3) The following table shows the evident links between the personal “man of sin” spoken of in 2 Thess. 2, and the beast systems of Revelation. I am grateful to Phil Edmonds for tabulating these connections:

2 Thessalonians 1 & 2	Revelation
2:3 – son of perdition (see also John 17:12)	17:8 – Beast goes into perdition
2:7 – mystery of iniquity (Gk. <i>anomia</i>) (a reference to the son of perdition)	17:7 – Babylon associated with mystery
2:8 – wicked (lit. ‘lawless’ – Gk. <i>anomos</i>) one revealed (see also v. 7 where “iniquity” = Gk. <i>anomia</i>)	1:1 – The revelation of Jesus Christ
2:8 – Lord consumes him [the wicked one] with the spirit of his mouth (ref. To Isaiah 11:4)	19:11, 15 – Christ destroys the beast (ref. To Isaiah 11:4)
1:8 – Lord Jesus in flaming fire	19:12 – Christ’s eyes “as a flame of fire”
2:11 – those who perish believe a lie (a reference to the wicked one of 2:8)	19:20 – “false (or lying) prophet”
2:11 – strong delusion (or working of deceit) (a reference to the wicked one of 2:8)	13:14 – deceive
	19:20 – deceive
	<i>(references to the second beast and the false prophet)</i>
2:9 – signs (Gk. <i>semeion</i>) (a reference to the wicked one of 2:8)	13:13 – wonders (Gk. <i>semeion</i>)
	19:20 miracles
	<i>(Gk. semeion) (references to the second beast and the false prophet)</i>
2:4 – temple	11:2 – temple

The Beast and the Man of Sin

There are some connections between Mt. 24 and 2 Thess. 2 which show that the “man of sin” has specific reference to the last days, as Mt. 24 does:

Matthew 24	2 Thess. 2
“Then shall many be offended” v.10	“A falling away first” v.3
“The love of many shall wax cold” v.12	“They received not the love of the truth” v.10
Many deceived v.11	“Deceivableness of unrighteousness” v.10 cp. Rev. 13:4
“Iniquity shall abound” v.12	“The mystery of iniquity” v.7

It seems reasonable to equate this “man” with the specific “antiChrist” of 1 Jn. 2:18. The beast / horn system is also an imitation of Christ. It breaks in pieces the whole earth (Dan. 7:23) – the same word used in Dan. 2:40,44 to describe Christ’s breaking in pieces of the nations at his return. The little horn will “think to change times and laws”. This is clearly alluding to Dan. 2:21, where God alone is described as changing the times and seasons. The little horn thus makes himself as God – the man of sin “as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4). This man of sin will be destroyed by the brightness of the Lord’s second coming (2 Thess. 2:8). He will therefore be actively in existence in the last days. This man of sin will be revealed during a falling away from the Truth just prior to the return of Christ (2 Thess. 2:2,3). Thus whatever fulfilments of this power there may have been over history, it has to be accepted that it will have a particular manifestation in the last days.

The man of sin is “the son of perdition”, clearly alluding to Judas (Jn. 17:12). This associates this power with the apostate element within the ecclesia. Through infiltrating the ecclesia, he will sit “in the temple of God” (2 Thess. 2:4), i.e. the ecclesia. Judas was a betrayer; we have seen from the Olivet prophecy that there will be betrayers within the ecclesia in the tribulation period. The link with Judas surely teaches that there will be a ‘Fifth column’ within the latter day church, who are connected with the latter day Babylon / beast / man of sin.

However, it is possible that these prophecies refer to a specific individual who claims that he is Christ – a real ‘antiChrist’, possibly associated with a renegade Christian (after the pattern of Judas being one of the twelve). It may even be that he builds a literal temple, which would then be the abomination which makes desolate standing in the holy place. Remember that the horn / beast blasphemes the temple (Rev. 13:6), and in their manifestation as the King of the North, “he shall plant the tabernacle of his palace... In the glorious holy mountain” of Zion (Dan. 11:45). 2 Thess. 2:8,9 point the contrast between the Lord’s coming and that of the man of sin – as if the latter is a replica of the former. This new power will break in pieces opposing nations just like Christ will (Dan. 7:23 cp. 2:44); he will institute a new set of laws world-wide as if he has God’s authority (Dan. 7:25 cp. 2:21).

Some may be duped into thinking that Christ has come back, when actually it is the ‘antiChrist’ of the beast. The beast may have its adherents within the ecclesia who will promulgate this view. The beast has a mouthpiece in another beast that speaks like a dragon – i.e. like the beast – but has horns like a lamb, i.e. a fake Christ. This beast “does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on earth in the sight of men (i.e. this is conscious exhibitionism), and deceives... by the means of these miracles which he had power to do” (Rev. 13:11–14). Bringing fire from Heaven means that this is a conscious imitation of Elijah, implying that the Elijah ministry is active during the tribulation. It will be opposed by the publicity stunts of the beast system.

The idea of an anti-Christ as a replica of the real Christ also occurs in Proverbs, where there is a designed contrast between the woman of wisdom (representing Christ, the seed of the woman, 1 Cor. 1:24), and the “foolish woman” who does the same external things as “wisdom” (e.g. Prov. 9:1–5 cp. 9:14–17). This prototype antiChrist is a whore, which is a symbol associated with the dragon / Babylon / beast of Revelation. Thus the antiChrist and the beast are closely linked. Because of the false miracles, the weak believer will worship the image of the beast and join the 666 system (Rev. 13:14–18). This is based on the image in the plain of Dura, which many of God’s people were duped into worshipping. Only the three friends seem to have refused to do so. Perhaps the furnaces which were the means of punishment for those who refused to worship the image are related to the furnaces of the concentration camps, which we may well see repeated in the future.

“A time of trouble”

We have suggested that the blasphemous power building his palace on the temple mount in Dan. 11:45 is the man of sin of 2 Thess. 2, and thus also the little horn power. This is immediately before the second coming of Christ and resurrection described in Dan. 12:2. It is during this period that “there shall be a time of trouble such as never was” for God’s people, natural and spiritual – the time of Jacob’s trouble that occurs after Israel’s present regathering to the land. “That day is great, so that none is like it” (Jer. 30:7). Those who are written in the book experience it, but are saved from it. This group must surely be true believers. Seeing that this will be a time of trouble for God’s people such as never was, the previous sufferings of the Jews and the tribulation of the second world war will be nothing compared to this. It will be so bad that it will seem that every one of us will perish – “there should no flesh be saved” (Mt. 24:22). But for those who doggedly hold on to the patience and faith of the saints, the glorious, miraculous deliverance will come. Even an Angel was so amazed by the extraordinary nature of this time of trouble that he asked: “How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?”. The answer was “For a time, time and an half (i.e. three and a half years); and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished” (Dan. 12:7,8). The Hebrew for “the holy people” is literally ‘the people of the holy ones’ – i.e. all those among natural and spiritual Israel who belong to their holy guardian Angels. “All things” being fulfilled in Dan. 12:8 is probably alluded to in the fig tree parable – the generation that see the revival of Israel (fruit instead of leaves on the tree, as a result of Christian preaching) during that three and a half year tribulation will live to see the end of all things. The holy people are to be scattered (Dan. 12:7). The Hebrew means ‘to break in pieces’, and is also used regarding the beast / horn breaking in pieces the whole earth / land (Dan. 7:23). As it treats God’s people, so it will be judged, seeing that the little stone breaks in pieces the beast / image.

The horn who scatters God’s people in the last days, the “he” of Dan. 12:7 is the “King of the North” of Dan. 11:45 – suggesting that the beast / horn has something to do with latter day Assyria and Babylon, the historical / Biblical “King of the North”. The faithful will be “tried” (Dan. 12:10) by this invader, as Israel were by the Babylonian invasion of the past (Jer. 9:7). The same word is used in Zech. 13:9 and Mal. 3:2 concerning the faithful remnant in Jerusalem enduring their future sufferings.

There are a number of similarities between Daniel 11 and the prophecies concerning the persecution of the saints by the horn / beast / man of sin:

There are too many similarities here for this to all be coincidental. The primary fulfilment of Dan. 11 appears to be in the persecution of the Maccabees. The effective tribulation which they went through then, preparing as it did a faithful remnant who accepted Jesus as Messiah at His first coming, must be a dim shadow of what the church and natural Israel are to undergo in the last days. Note that Dan. 11:33 and 12:10 emphasize that only those who understand will spiritually survive the persecution. This should serve as the ultimate inspiration

Daniel 11	The Latter Day Tribulation
v.31 "Shall pollute the sanctuary"	The beast's blasphemy against the temple
v.32 "Such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries"	Some of those in the covenant will be deceived by the flatteries of the beast (cp. Dan. 8:25)
"Such as do wickedly"	"The wicked shall do wickedly" (Dan. 12:10)
v.32,33 "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... instruct many"	Zealous preaching by the faithful during persecution.
v.33 "They shall fall by the sword"	The beast kills the saints with the sword and leads them into captivity in the tribulation (Rev.13:10). "They shall fall by the sword" is quoted in Lk. 21:24 concerning the tribulation.
"Many days"	1260 days

v.35 "Some of them of understanding shall fall" (in death)	"Some of you shall they cause to be put to death" (Lk. 21:16) – the faithful remnant are characterized by their "understanding" – of the prophecies?
"To try them, and to purge, and to make them white"	" Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried" (Dan. 12:10)
"Even to the time of the end; because it is yet for a time appointed"	The tribulation continues right up to the end – the Lord's coming. The time appointed – 3.5 years of Dan. 12:7?
v.36 "The King...shall exalt himself"	As the horn did over the other horns. If this verse is a continuing description of Antiochus Epiphanes, then it just isn't all true. Rather it seems do we have another gap / jump in chronological fulfilment, as happens elsewhere in Daniel, until the latter day antichrist.
"And magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods"	The man of sin exalts himself above all that is called God (2 Thess. 2:4); the horn speaks blasphemy against God.
v.38 "He shall sit in the seat of the Almighty God" (A.V. mg.)	Sitting as God in God's temple (2 Thess. 2:4)

to zealously apply ourselves to the study of prophecy, rather than give up because it seems too difficult. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

The Old Testament Basis

In searching for an Old Testament basis for "that wicked one", we find that very phrase used in the Septuagint of Esther 7:4 to describe Haman. He too was 'revealed' for who he was – the Persian leader plotting the total destruction of Jewry, from which they were saved by grace. The entire story of Esther can be read as a detailed type of Israel's latter day weakness, persecution and deliverance by grace. The idea of a "man of sin" within the temple of God surely has its source in the Ezekiel passages (e.g. Ez. 8:8–16) which describe the idolatry ("abomination") which occurred within the temple in the days just prior to the invasion of Israel by the Babylonians. These passages lead up to the vision of the purged, perfected temple of the Messianic Kingdom in Ez. 40 – 48. The 'men of sin' which Ezekiel saw within the

temple were the “elders of the house of Israel”, the corrupted priesthood. The connection with 2 Thess. 2 suggests that in the last days, before the final neo–Babylonian holocaust, the elders of both natural and spiritual Israel will practice corruption in the temple / ecclesia of God.

There is an incident in the experience of Nehemiah, Governor of Jerusalem (a type of Christ, Mt. 2:6) which points forward to all this. Nehemiah (cp. Jesus) returned to the Emperor to have his authority over Jerusalem confirmed (cp. Christ to God, Mt. 25:19; Lk. 19:12,13). He then returned to the holy land, to find Israel indifferent to the state of God’s house, taken up with the petty materialism of daily life, with the result that the Arab Tobiah had been permitted by the elders of Israel to live in the chambers of the house of God (Neh. 13:6–9). Nehemiah in fury expels him and “cleansed the chambers”, throwing out all his things, after the pattern of Christ cleansing the temple (Mt. 21:12). Along with the type of Moses returning from the mount to a corrupted Israel, this points forward to the state of affairs at Christ’s return.

Is. 8:5 speaks of an “image of jealousy” being placed in the temple by the Jews just prior to the Babylonian invasion. This was the original image behind the Lord’s prophecy of the abomination of desolation being placed in the temple by the Romans. And yet His prophecy has a distinct latter day reference. All this points to a similar literal fulfilment in some way, in a literal latter day temple.

The Antichrist in Daniel

Without doubt, Daniel’s prophecies repeatedly refer to a specific, evil individual of the last days. These prophecies have largely, in my view, been misinterpreted through seeking to limit their fulfilment to Antiochus or some other person who persecuted the Jews *before* the time of Christ. Daniel 7:25 speaks of an individual who will persecute the Lord’s people for three and a half years, and change “times and law” – as if he is a fake Jesus Christ, who likewise changed the Law. This person arises in *the time of the end* (Daniel 8:23) – and this phrase in Daniel always has some reference to the time of the Lord’s return. He is to arise out of the Syrian Kingdom, i.e. part of the divided empire of Alexander the Great. The time when he will arise will be the time when “iniquity is come to the full” – which fits most comfortably with the very last days. Daniel 8:17,19 make it clear: “The vision pertains to *the time of the end*... The final period of indignation... The

appointed *time of the end*.” Note that Antiochus Epiphanes didn’t reign at the end of the Syrian dynasty [as sometimes claimed].

Daniel 9

Daniel 9 gives more detail about this person. Keil translates Daniel 9:26,27: “The city, together with the sanctuary, shall be destroyed by the people of the prince who shall come, who shall find his end in the flood; but war shall continue to the end, since destruction is irrevocably decreed. That prince shall force a strong covenant for one week on the mass of the people, and during half a week he shall take away the service of sacrifice, and borne on the wings of idol abominations [cp. Ps. 18:10, where the true God is also borne on wings] shall carry on a desolating rule, till the firmly decreed judgment shall pour itself upon him as one desolated” (*Commentary* p. 373). Antichrist’s destruction with *the* flood [note the definite article] comfortably connects with the Lord’s usage of the flood as a symbol of the latter day judgment upon His enemies (Mt. 24:39). The person spoken about will be involved in war until the end of his days; he will die at the end of his military campaign against God’s people. This was certainly not true of Titus in AD70.

Very similar language to Daniel 9:26 occurs in Is. 10:23: “For a complete destruction, one that is decreed, shall the Lord of Hosts execute in the midst of the land”. The context is speaking of “the Assyrian”. The same language of the last days is found in Is. 28:22: “a final destruction on all the earth.” The latter day antichrist is therefore modelled upon the “Assyrian” of the Old Testament. Note that “the man of sin” of 2 Thess. 2:8 alludes to “the wicked one” of Is. 11:4 LXX, who is, again, “the Assyrian”! So it would appear very likely that the antichrist figure is somehow associated with ‘Assyria’. And what’s going on in Iraq and the territory of ‘Assyria’ right now is gripping the whole world’s attention. Note how the Assyrian is described in Is. 30:31–33 as being thrown into a lake of fire – just as the future beast will be (Rev. 19:20).

Daniel 11 and 12

But Daniel 11 and 12 [which are one vision, chapter 12 explaining the details of chapter 11] provide yet more insight. The antichrist rages against God’s people for 1290 days after he sets up the abomination that makes desolate – until he is destroyed by the Lord’s coming (Dan. 11:31, cp. 12:11). The Lord Jesus specifically interprets the

“abomination that makes desolate” as occurring in the last days. Therefore Dan. 11:31 – the first reference to this abomination – must refer to a time *after* the time of Jesus in the first century. The whole section Daniel 11:31 – Daniel 12:11 gives more detail about this “abomination” and the person and power who places it. That whole passage therefore speaks of the final tribulation – defined as three and a half years in Daniel 12. Yet it’s clear enough that the events in Daniel 11 *prior* to verse 21 speak of things in Old Testament history. There’s therefore, I suggest, a sudden jump in fulfilment at Dan. 11:21, reaching ahead to the last days. This is the section which starts speaking of the “vile person” who places the “abomination that makes desolate”, and finally meets his end in the final conflict of Dan. 11:45. But this kind of ‘sudden jump’ is not at all uncommon in Old Testament prophecy; in fact, it’s a fairly common feature of Daniel’s prophecies in particular! Daniel 2 presents an outline of the powers that would dominate Israel, and then jumps to the very last days. And the later prophecies in Daniel which expand upon that opening vision do just the same.

The evil man who places the desolating abomination meets his end in war (Dan. 11:45) – just as the same individual does in Dan. 8:23. And this leads in to the resurrection and judgment at the Lord’s return (Dan. 12:1,2). Likewise the Lord predicted that the final tribulation – which He says is that prophesied in Daniel – would be followed “immediately” by His return (Mt. 24:29). So the Lord’s own interpretation of Daniel 11 leaves us with no doubt that the whole section about the abomination and the individual responsible for it applies to our last days. Any partial fulfilment it may have had in Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero or Titus only makes those men prototypes of the final abuser yet to come.

So who is he?

As with so many prophecies, the intention of this prophecy is surely so that when the prophecy is fulfilled, then we will know. It’s not intended to pinpoint the individual far ahead of time. What we do know from Daniel 11 is that the “vile person” is also called “the king of the north”, and this is a common title for the ruler of Assyria – present day Iran / Iraq / Kurdistan / Syria. And we’ve shown above that Old Testament passages about the ruler of Assyria are the basis for other ‘antichrist’ prophecies of the New Testament. The phrase “vile person” in Dan. 11:21 is interesting in itself. If the first usage of a word in Scripture is significant, then Gen. 25:34 is indeed helpful here – because it is used of Esau, father of many of the Arab tribes. And it recurs in describing

Edom in Obadiah 2, Goliath the Philistine / Palestinian (1 Sam. 17:42), "Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arabian" (Neh. 2:19), and Haman the persecutor of the Jews (Esther 3:6). All these men were Arab prototypes of the "vile person", the ruler of Assyria, who is to again persecute God's people.

This latter day "king of the north" will be troubled by "ships from the West", will have a conflict over the land of Israel with his opposite number, "the king of the south"; will sit at a conference table and be deceitful; and will persecute God's people, and receive assistance from those of them who deny the faith. He will rise to power in the name of "peace" (Dan. 11:21); connecting with the 'peace and safety' cry which there will be just prior to the Lord's return, according to 1 Thess. 5. He will rise to power suddenly from a weak and broken people [Iraq?] (Daniel 11:23). During all this, there will be energetic preaching of the Truth (Dan. 11:33; 12:3). Quite how all this will work out is impossible and futile to speculate upon. But when it happens, those who understand Daniel, as the Lord bids us to, will understand. And this is the purpose of this study – "let him that readeth understand" was the Lord's comment about studying these very prophecies!

CHAPTER 6

SOME CONCLUSIONS

6-1 The Real Devil: Some Conclusions

A Network Of Bible Truth

'Satan' in the Bible is a role, not a personal individual. It's simply impossible to force every Bible reference to Satan to apply to a personal being of supernatural evil. There must be another approach or hermeneutic - and I suggest that this is in accepting that 'satan' simply means an adversary, and can refer to both good and bad adversaries of specific things at specific times.

One true understanding tends to lead to another, just as one erroneous understanding leads to another false interpretation. Newton scholar Steven Snobelen concludes that Isaac Newton's rejection of the Trinity and his firm belief in only one God led him, in turn, to reject the idea of a personal Devil. I've written elsewhere of the error of the Trinity, particularly in [*The Real Christ*](#). Both heresies, of the supposed three "persons" in the Trinity and of a personal Satan, hinge around a refusal to accept the plain Bible teaching that all existence is bodily existence. No other form of existence is known to the Bible. If God is indeed the only God, the only source of power, then quite simply there's no room for the Devil, at least not in the way 'he' is commonly understood. But beyond this- our view of the Devil affects our view of God in more practical ways. The assumption that God will not permit the innocent to suffer has led to the need to create the idea of a personal devil in order to explain away the awful vistas of suffering and injustice we see all around us. But however we understand it, or try to understand it, the fact is that the God of the Bible *does* permit the innocent to suffer- the extraordinary mental and physical sufferings of His beloved Son being perhaps the clearest example. As ants are to a man, so are we to God. We can never hope to understand exactly why He

permits sin and evil to be as they are. But ultimately we believe that somehow, some when, in the return of Jesus Christ to earth, His Kingdom will triumph. Then we will finally understand, only then will we join the dots and see the full picture, in every dimension of its beauty- and that for me is one of the Kingdom's joys I look forward to the most. For me, the good news of God, of His Son and His Kingdom, runs as a thread throughout the Bible; each truth dovetails with others.

This network of Bible truth sadly has its opposite- a network of false understanding. The further one goes into that, the more seriously unanswered questions and contradictions arise, which in turn lead to the desperation and frustration so many feel when they think deeply about the problem of sin and evil. Here are a few of them:

- Our trials and problems are designed by God to result in our spiritual development. Yet if the devil supposedly brings them, how can he also be seeking to stop our spiritual growth and hinder us from salvation?

- Likewise it is supposed that the Devil brought about the death of Jesus, and some of the early church 'fathers' claimed that the blood of Christ had to be paid to the Devil as a kind of ransom for souls (although the Bible is utterly silent about that). Yet clearly enough, the death of Jesus is the source of our salvation and forgiveness; indeed it was through the death of the cross that the Devil was destroyed (Heb. 2:14). So how could the Devil bring about the death of Jesus if this was exactly what was required for human salvation? Moreover, the death of Jesus was part of God's plan from the beginning, foreshadowed back in Eden by the slaying of animals to provide a covering for Adam and Eve (cp. Rev. 13:8). The death of Jesus was by "the determinate will of God" (Acts 2:23; Heb. 10:9; Gal. 1:4). So, does the Devil do God's will, or not? The classical answer is that no, the Devil works against the will of God. And yet why then claim that the Devil brought about the death of Jesus and demanded His blood? For the death of Christ was in fact the very apex of the will and purpose of God.

- The concept of the Devil requiring a ransom, namely the blood of Jesus, arose from the idea that the ransom could not be the life of a mere man, but it had to somehow be God's life. Hence was encouraged the tragically wrong idea that Jesus is God. This idea was pushed by Basil and Gregory of Nysa. Augustine faced the 'hard question' as to why exactly Satan hates Christ by saying that this was "inevitable" because Jesus was God. I see no logical reason why this was "inevitable" - for me it reflects how one wrong concept [e.g. that Jesus is God Himself] leads to another [i.e. that Satan therefore hates Jesus].

- The idea [pushed by Clement and Origen, developed by Milton in *Paradise Lost*] that Jesus and Lucifer were somehow brothers, part of a dualist cosmos in the beginning, split between good and evil, required Jesus to have personally pre-existed - an idea without support in the Bible. It should be noted that the Persian dualist myth that there was a god of good balanced by an evil god also stated that the two gods were originally twin brothers- and this clearly influenced the thinking of the "fathers" on this point.

- It has to be noted that many of the pagan myths about gods in conflict featured a hero, who was a god, fighting an adversary who was also a god, and winning. The fact standard Christianity became influenced by this thinking set up a tendency to think that the hero, Jesus, was also God and therefore personally pre-existed at the beginning of time, when the conflict supposedly occurred. Several times in this study we have had to comment that the development of the non-Biblical idea of the Trinity was both influenced by, and in turn influenced, the development of the extra-Biblical idea of a superhuman Satan figure. A classic example of the connection between these two false doctrines would be the way that Dante's *Inferno* features a Satan with three faces, as a parody of the Trinity.

- Plutarch, a first century writer, defines the view of demons prevailing in the first century Mediterranean world as being that demons are intermediaries between gods and humanity, who speak through the oracles and prophecies of their priestly representatives on earth. He says that demons are a form of human 'immortal souls' (1). The schizophrenic at Gadara "dwelt

among the tombs"- presumably because of his conviction that he was actually incarnating a dead person. When cured by Jesus, he ceased hanging around those tombs. The doctrine of demons and that of the immortal soul hangs together; and 'immortal souls' are definitely not part of Biblical revelation. If we read the New Testament references to the surrounding idea of 'demons' and conclude that therefore those surrounding religious views are correct and demons exist, we are signing up to belief in immortal souls. Josephus brings out the same connection between the 1st century demon belief and immortal souls in *Wars Of The Jews* 1.47,82,84; 6.47. P.G. Bolt likewise traces the connection between Jewish beliefs in ghosts, and demons (2). Significantly, on the two occasions the disciples lapsed back into their old beliefs and thought that Jesus was a ghost, their own transcripts of the incidents prove how wrong they were- existence is in bodily, actual terms, and not as disembodied spirits (Mk. 6:49; Lk. 24:39).

- False understandings of Satan are connected with erroneous views of hell. If the wicked are to be tormented in hell, then who torments them? Thus the idea of the Devil and demons with pitchforks, tridents etc. had to be created. Yet the Biblical understanding of hell is simply of the grave; and the punishment of the wicked is the "second *death*" (Rev. 2:11)- and Biblical death is without any question a state of unconsciousness. Origen especially stumbled from error to error regarding hell. Because he believed in the false doctrine of an immortal soul, he reasoned that if Satan succeeded in obtaining literally eternal punishment for sinners, then Satan would ultimately have won. On this very basis he therefore argued that ultimately, Satan would be redeemed, and thus there would have to be universal salvation for all. The Bible nowhere teaches this- there is a very real sense of the eternal future we may miss because of sin.

- Justin misused the Genesis 6 reference to sons of God marrying the daughters of men to mean that Angels sinned and left Heaven, and the offspring of these unions were demons, and that these were the gods and rulers of the Roman empire (3). As someone once said, "truth is political". Bible verses were misused by the 'fathers' to demonize their enemies. Just as a few centuries earlier, the Jewish *Book Of The Watchers* had claimed

that the offspring of the "sons of God" in Gen. 6 were the "evil priests". The 'evil priests' in the earthly sanctuary were thought to reflect the supposedly 'evil Angels' in the Heavenly sanctuary. But this error went further than a convenient demonization of enemies- it was then concluded by Augustine that seeing there was now a "gap" in the Heavenly ranks, this must be filled by the righteous going to Heaven to take the places left by the supposed 'fallen Angels' (4). Yet the Bible says nothing of immortal souls going to reward in Heaven on death, instead clearly teaching death to be a state of unconsciousness, with the reward of the righteous being a place in the Kingdom of God when it is established fully on earth at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the error of 'fallen Angels' leaving Heaven led to the idea of Christians 'going to Heaven' to take their place.

- Perhaps worst of all, the idea that there is a dualistic universe [a good God and an evil one] has become so entrenched in the minds of some that to take away the existence of the devil, is to say God doesn't exist. John Wesley famously wrote: "No Devil, no God". This, surely, is why so many mainstream Christians today are so *insistent* that acceptance of a personal Satan's existence is utterly vital to the Gospel, and is almost a salvation issue with them. To say the evil god doesn't exist is, for them, implying that the true One doesn't either. It's like the Middle Ages all over again- anyone who denied the existence of Satan was cast out as an atheist. This is how strong the network is within and between false interpretations of the Bible. In 1691 Balthasar Bekker published a book, *The World Bewitched*, in which he denied the existence of a personal Satan and criticized the idea of people being "possessed" by the Devil- and he was promptly tried for blasphemy and "spreading atheistic ideas about Scripture" (5). God *is*, an ultimately good God, who seeks to do us good in our latter end; and His Almightyness and supremacy disallows the serious existence of any cosmic 'god' in opposition to Him. That's not *atheism*- that's, if you like, *theism* as it should be.

Psychological Factors

We all have, I suggest, a very deeply rooted perception within us of how flawed is our world. Subconsciously perhaps, we long

for a better world, a life more free, unshackled by all that now holds us back. Our vision and hope for the future is related to our perception of the nature of the flaw in this present world. If we're convinced that the real problem is the existence of a cosmic Satan, then our hope will be for the day when Satan is dead. If we're convinced that the real problem is human sin [our own included] and the death that comes from this, then our hope will be for a world in which there is no more sin and death, where we are sinless, where the effects of sin are no more... and this hope is no mere pipedream, for it is exactly congruent with the Biblical gospel of the coming literal Kingdom of God upon this earth. The apostate Jewish *Book Of Jubilees* 19:28 is an example of this difference in perspective. *Jubilees* in this passage seeks to re-tell the Biblical record of the promises given to Isaac and Jacob- which involved a literal, physical inheritance of a sinless, cleansed earth. But that Biblical record of the promise of the Kingdom of God on earth is twisted by *Jubilees* into a promise of freedom from Satan: "The spirits of Mastema shall not rule over thee or over thy seed to turn thee from the Lord".

Psychologists suggest that there is something within the human psyche that needs to fear, that wants to fear. Just look at the huge success of terror stories, movies, images, Stephen King novels; and the way that the media realizes that their global audience laps up fear and sensationalism about terror. One common thread throughout all the pagan forerunners of the 'personal satan' idea is that the pagan concepts all involved the generation of fear and terror. True Christianity aims to "cast out" such fear through its revelation of the ultimate love of God (1 Jn. 4:18). So many control systems have played upon fear of the devil- to bring children into subdued obedience, flocks into submission to pastors, etc. It's now high time to realize that this is not how the true God works. "For fear has torment" (1 Jn. 4:18), and this is exactly what true understanding of the cross of Christ saves us from. God isn't a psychological manipulator, and He doesn't coax us into submission through fear. And yet it could be said that humanity is increasingly addicted to fear. People may mock fearing a Loch Ness monster, werewolves, funny sounds at night... but they still buy in big time to fearing a personal Devil. There's something in us that wants to fear

something; that just loves the popular idea of a personal Satan. This is why it's hard to budge this mentality. But hopefully these studies have helped you in that direction. As the tragedy of 21st century humanity unfolds yet further, it's more than time for a radically new way of thinking about Satan, and ourselves.

There's a tremendous psychological desire to believe in a personal Satan figure. We always want to externalize evil, to project our own internal sin and dysfunctions onto someone or something else. Psychologists have observed that so many life stories feature some kind of "adversary" figure, a nemesis, an archenemy. At least, such a figure looms large in the self-perceptions of people when they are asked to recount the story of their lives. Maybe a tormentor at school, a boss at work, a neighbour, a partner, a regime under which we lived, an ethnic group... usually, someone, somewhere, is perceived as their great enemy. This nemesis is involved in what the person under study would describe as battles with them. And those battles are felt to have frequently been lost; the archenemy won. Often those archenemies are nothing of the sort, and the battles no more than the passing trivia of life; but the person has unloaded their weaknesses, fears, their 'undesired self', onto this other person or system, thus demonizing them, giving them a larger than life profile within their own minds and self-perceptions. So it is not surprising that people have so often decided that there is actually a personal Satan 'out there', somewhere, somehow. People almost 'need' this figure; until they face up to the fact that they are transferring their own 'satans', their internal fears, doubts, inadequacies, onto something or someone external. Rather than facing up to those internal issues, and perceiving *them* as the real Satan.

The Changing Scene

The Barna Group, a research firm, found the following in a survey of American Christians in 2006 [published on www.barna.org]:

* 55 percent view Satan as symbolic of evil rather than a real entity.

* 45 percent of born-again Christians don't believe Satan is real.

* 68 percent of Catholics think of Satan only as a symbol and deny the word refers to a personal being. It should be noted that the latest edition of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* shifts away from viewing the Devil as an "external reality" and refers rather to it as a "symbol of psychological forces".

In 1997, the 114th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States directed the Council on Theology and Culture to study "the problem of a personal devil and demons," and to report the results of such a study. Their conclusions were that the Bible itself cannot support the idea of a personal Satan, although some Christians may find that idea helpful given their world-view. In our context, the following comment from their online report is interesting: "Christian theologians have always been puzzled by the contradiction between the assertion on the one hand that everything that is (all being) is given existence and reality by God, and the assertion on the other hand that evil "is" or "exists." How can we acknowledge both a good God who is the source of all being and then speak of the being of evil or of evil beings?". This is exactly the kind of difficulty in the common view of Satan which we have highlighted in this study. It seems that some are beginning to face up to the difficulties.

This general picture is independently confirmed by other research (6). And yet church leaders are full of talk about a personal satan, using it as a threat to get people to pay tithes, come to church, etc. But they're out of step with what people are really thinking. Seeing that flesh-pleasing, giving in to the Biblical 'devil', is more and more evident in Christian society, I don't take these figures as necessarily being good news. What I see is that people have seen through the absurdities of believing in a personal Satan. But they've not necessarily replaced it with anything better; let alone grasp the huge challenge which there is to realize that our own mind is indeed our major adversary, our satan, and we are to battle against it every moment in the power of God's Spirit.

Whilst belief in the Devil and demons as literal beings is in decline, I can't stress strongly enough that this doesn't mean that people understand the truth about these matters. The basic mythology lives on in new guises. Our modern culture, with its predilection for science, has replaced sinful Angels and demons with aliens coming to earth on flying saucers and violating women. Such 'science fiction' has gotten a deep grip within society and culture. And never before have we seen so much demonizing of others as 'the enemy', rather than an acceptance that it's our own human sin which is the essential enemy. Moslems are demonized by Christians just as they were at the time of the Crusades; just as Russians, Communists, black people, non-trinitarians, divorcees, those who chew gum in church etc. were at different times by the Christians of the 20th century. It seems we're ever seeking for a fresh way to externally define 'the enemy', 'Satan', and yet always missing the crucial, quintessential issue- human sin and self-deception.

We have spoken of the huge influence of dualism- the idea that there is a god of good and a god of evil. If there's a God, there has to be a Devil; if there are Angels, there must be demons; if there's heaven, there must be hell. And we've sought to show that dualism isn't at all what the Bible teaches, in fact it's the very opposite. One pleasing trend of the last few decades has been the now widespread recognition amongst many Christians that 'hell' refers simply to the grave; and that the reward and hope of the righteous is God's eternal Kingdom on earth, and not going to Heaven on death. It seems to me that the rejection of the Heaven / hell dualism must be taken further, to include the rejection of the idea of a personal Satan, and allowing God to be "all in all" in our understanding. Dualism is very attractive to our judgmental human minds; it lends itself to categorizing life and society in a simplistic binary manner, into Us and Them, Cowboys and Indians, Hero and Villain, Friend and Foe... whilst all the time missing the essential Christian point that the ultimate struggle is within the human mind, and that God is all powerfully in control. As Ben Witherington says, "The emperor and his minions rule by permission and empowerment from God. The emperor himself is not God. Even the devil is God's devil..." (7). In fact, just about every serious student I've read who has specifically engaged with the issue of Satan has come

to similar conclusions to what we've outlined here. We may at times need to stand with our backs to the world on a matter, letting God be true and every man a liar; and that is only right. But it's surely a comfort to know that many other careful and studious minds have arrived at the same conclusion we have.

A Final Appeal

I've so often spoken in this book about the need to struggle against sin within us, to learn self-control, to realize that our greatest personal Satan / adversary is our own humanity and sinful tendency. And so indeed do I conclude this book. But I need to sound a caveat here. I believe I would have failed my readership if I left you with an invitation to merely repress your sinful desires in a kind of clinical, legalistic way. I'm no great fan of C.G.Jung, but he and other psychologists have validly pointed out that by repressing our destructive feelings, we can end up creating a "shadow" self, a kind of negative force within us which bursts out at times. An example would be the highly self-controlled Christian who at times gives vent to their aggression in screaming fits against their partner or co-worker, over a totally minor issue. Those repressed feelings don't just disappear because they're repressed- they can lead to anything from stomach ulcers to self-hatred (8). This repression of evil within the individual is related to denial or repression of our awareness of the huge amount of evil which there is in the world; and this can easily be done by those who shrug it all off onto the blame of some superhuman Satan. Solzhenitsyn reflected on this at length, concluding: "In keeping silent about evil, in burying it so deep within us that no sign of it appears on the surface, we are implanting it, and it will rise up a thousandfold in the future" (9). There has to be another way, what Neumann called a "new ethic" demanded by this realization. I submit that this 'other way' involves a complete submission to the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Master, and being baptized by immersion into Him, believing and acting as if we are "in Christ", with His righteousness and personality counted to us in what the New Testament calls 'imputed righteousness'. Our self-perception changes, so that although we sin, we perceive ourselves as being "in Christ", acting as He acted, thinking as He thought. Paul speaks in

Romans 7 of his miserable failure at self-control and repression of sin, explaining how he simply couldn't repress what was wrong because it was too strong... and he goes on in Romans 8 to thank God that the way of escape was through being "in Christ" and having the mind / spirit / indwelling personality of the Lord Jesus. And all this is in the context of his appeal in Romans 6 for us to understand baptism as a yielding of ourselves to Christ personally, "crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that hath died is justified [freed from] sin... even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ... for sin shall not have dominion over you... being then made free from sin, you become the servants of righteousness... but now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end- eternal life".

I have spoken repeatedly of the question of the ultimate origin of sin and evil, and the internal human struggle required against them. Be all that as it may, be it relevant, important, true, necessary. But the ultimate fact is that in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, "the devil", sin, evil, in all its forms and wherever it comes from and came from, was overcome, was triumphed over (Heb. 2:14-18). The atonement which was achieved through His death was no mere abstract transaction; it was not a theory but a real life gloriously lived, and a victorious death that was vindicated in an equally real resurrection. It means that you personally and I myself are ultimately free from the power of evil, sin and death itself. The way was opened to real, meaningful, felt forgiveness, and to the hope of eternity in an eternal Kingdom when evil is finally abolished. Faced with these realities, language starts to lose its power and meaning for us; all further commentary is bathos. The only response is not so much the mere adoption of another theory, a slightly changed intellectual understanding; but ultimately in a life lived in grateful response.

Notes

- (1) See Plutarch, *Oracles In Decline* in D. Russell, ed., *Plutarch: Selected Essays And Dialogues* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1993).
- (2) P.G. Bolt, "Jesus, The Daimons And The Dead", in *The Unseen World*, ed. A.N. Lane (Exeter: Paternoster, 1996).
- (3) Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, And The Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1989) xxiii.
- (4) Augustine, *City Of God*, translated by Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1950) p. 867. Other examples of this idea being taught by the 'fathers' are to be found in J.B. Russell, *A History Of Heaven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) p. 85.
- (5) Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1998) p. 930.
- (6) Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil* (New York: Farrar, 1995).
- (7) Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest* (Leicester: I.V.P., 1998) p. 202.
- (8) This phenomena has been portrayed and analyzed by many writers, not least concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963); Erich Neumann, *Depth Psychology And The New Ethic* (New York: HarperCollins, 1973); Antonio Moreno, *Jung, Gods And Modern Man* (Notre Dame: University Of Notre Dame Press, 1970) especially p. 41.
- (9) Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Monad Press, 1974) p. 178.

Digression 9: Suffering

About Suffering

To sufferers the gospel really is good news. Everyone is there at some time and longs to be reclaimed from the suffering pit. Comforters are impotent to heal suffering, but in the pit helping, they are part of the safety net with God in that place. God blesses them

both and His face shines there. Even in the exhaustion of suffering our reward is in heaven. We can *“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad”*, Matthew 5. Future joy is the reward for God dependent long sufferers.

Those Who Cause Suffering are Worse Off

Tormentors using inhuman behaviour are always worse off than their prisoners, for the tormented are free to make a personal decision on how to respond. A good spiritual response can transform an evil circumstance from darkness to light. We can also “see” Him, like Daniel’s 3 friends did, when all else fails. *“Look up, for I am here with you”*. There must be anticipation of joy and crown in *“suffering before the joy”*, and *“cross before the crown”*. Whatever the suffering, we are often not soon rescued from suffering and cross, but He will be there with us.

Long Suffering with God

We feel abandoned in long suffering, and for a time, like Job, unable to cast faithlessness aside. We may even be tempted to deny God. Job said, *“I go to the east ... I go to the west... when He is at work in the north... when He turns south, I catch no glimpse of Him”*. So it is that God decides the length and the intensity of our suffering. If we will, He guides us into the protection of the Most Holy *“hiding place”*, Psalm 32, where the body of Christ was there before us. In not abandoning God, suffering can have a meaning for us if we look forward and up, knowing that the answer *“no”* is only for a season, 1 Peter 1:6–9. Our understanding of suffering is a valuable opportunity to grow faith, for in Scripture long sufferers are regarded with great integrity, as good fruit, Galatians 5. We can be *“made perfect through suffering”*. Christ was perfected by learning *“obedience by the things he suffered”*. No darkness or gate of hell is too great for the transforming power of God when evil is turned into good, with a 4th Christ like man in the fire. Bitterness, transformed by God into sweetness of the soul builds understanding and improves our relationship with Him. If we become more like Him, in our relationship with others that is all He asks of us.

Disappointment

Disappointment clouds the forward view, and we need a fresh outlook of faith and hope to help us to look forward and up, otherwise the

human condition is unsupportable. Psalm 62:5, *“My soul, waits in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him”*. It is more than optimism, rather a living there with faith, courage and a determination that something good is ahead. God can use infirmity as He did with Jacob bringing perfectness. He is always there, watching and aiding the going forward process, even in the “no” answer.

God did make His way plain before David, John Baptist and Stephen, as He did for Jesus Christ. They made profound moral judgments, even saying, *“Forgive them”* of their tormentors. We will also suffer, as we can bear it, growing in wisdom, according to His purpose and His will. Our solutions are not God’s wise and far seeing solutions and if we invite God to be in our suffering, He will work individually with each one of us. So, blessed is the man who does not need to know the answers to every question.

Will it be disappointment WITHOUT God, or disappointment WITH God? Scripture never belittles anguish or despair and disappointment, for it is a sign that we hunger for the end. You cannot struggle with God, to your advantage, but to accept the continuity in our suffering will bring us blessings, as outlined in the Psalms and Job. We may never know God’s reasons, but we cannot risk rejecting the suffering. Suffering is a dark complex path to tread, forgiving the unforgivable and asking blessing upon the evil. Then we are like God, 2 Corinthians 1:3–7.

Get Close to God

Prayers are effective when there is a close relationship with God, whatever the outcome. *“Pray without ceasing”* is impossible, so *“without ceasing”* must mean that closeness with Him, walking with Him, in a Holy Place where He knows our request list before we ask. To struggle and reach that place is a bonus for Him, and the comfort of His presence over rides the suffering as we are held tightly in His hand. Then suffering is like a broadcasted message from God.

God does not guarantee peaceful deaths or swift end suffering, but He does offer us ways to overcome circumstance and apprehension. He has provided the afterlife of the Kingdom. But we still cry, *“When will the oppression cease?”* He answers, *“Be patient I am ever near”*, but *“not yet”*. We do not know when the *“yet”* will be, but our trust builds in the pit. *“Letting go and letting God”* works towards our release from the pit. Learning that is His offering to us in our suffering pit.

Overwhelming gifts and great blessings from God do not ensure there will be no suffering. Without a security with God, riches are useless as they are to the evil man. They were useless for Solomon, and he fell into great evil. It is often a tragic dilemma, getting what one wants, or not getting what one wants. God's people continued to cry in disappointment at His hiddenness, never hearing His answer that their repentance would restore them to Him. Our covenant also includes obedience, "*I will sanctify my name*", Ezekiel 36:22. God's mysterious ways began in Eden and ended with Paul's message to the Gentiles. There were some "*who were dead to trespasses and sins and were now quickened to receive the gospel*". This revealed mystery, in Ephesians 2, re emphasised the penitence and restitution focus.

Reconcile with God

With an unknown future, listening to God does give hope. After the failures of the past, God was not silent, renewing hope again, when He sent His son. Jesus gave answers. He reassured his listeners, "*anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*". But mostly they disregarded his claims to be king or saviour. He demonstrated the leading notion that sins forgiven are the great Kingdom preparation. No one else can truly assess my forgiveness. Only God knows. The people knew about walking lame men and seeing blind men, but the prime message of the re connection with God's forgiveness escaped them. With no hope or faith, they misunderstood and suffered faithlessness.

Doubters were not inspired by "*My kingdom is from another place*" and dismissed God's son, and in their misunderstanding they crucified that son. God did not intervene to prevent that, but that event opened the Most Holy Place for every man to walk with God. The cross was not a failure, for it paved the way for others. Some raise questions and others scoff, like, why do wicked people and depravity and poverty and injustice prevail, and why does He not send His son? Because that is the Way of God for now.

Jesus renewed the intimacy with God, destroyed in Eden, demonstrating that Way for us. If Jesus had disabled his enemies without his suffering, he could not now be one with us to redeem us. That renews our own belief that good will triumph. God has a loving concern for us, hating our evil ways, with merciful forgiveness and sharing the pain of our suffering in the good. As well, He gives us instructions in how to grow a church of believers as a new dwelling place for Him.

God was and is always present in the most unlikely places. We see Him in the face of His church. The temple is no longer a physical structure, but in *"the body of Christ"*. Paul reminds us, *"don't you know that you yourself are God's Temple, and that God's Spirit lives in you?"* It is impossible now to destroy this Godly edifice. God can do His own work perfectly, but in recruiting inadequate workers like us He teaches us more about Himself. Support those who Jesus loves, and we support Jesus, and others see Jesus in us, even though in our inadequacy we are a cost to God for we hardly represent Him with integrity.

Aligning ourselves to a group with a set of doctrines does not satisfy God's requirement for the individual commitment to Him. No sect can do that. God expects more of us individually in our difficulties, for the hard things can in turn glorify Him. We can feel safe when He says, *"I am here"*. It is not where God is when we are hurting so much, but where we are. God endorsed Job, (not Elihu) when Job demonstrated his steadfastness. One person does make a difference. The faith response of a single man counts very much to God. That individual response was/is God's reward, and we are blessed.

God's Measure not Ours

Goodness was in God's creation plan before sin, so after the sin God introduced a return, with choices of good over evil to which we can commit or not. Life does appear difficult. Job argued unfairness. But God does not follow Job's rules of fairness. Job could *"curse God and die"*. It is not our measure to understand how God teaches us. Justice is in God's hands and our own outcomes depend on our relationship with Him. The spiritual realities are greater than the physical pain, but God is no enemy in that pain for He knows that best.

Out of the darkness, Jesus Christ shone as a bright light. But his death and resurrection did not take away unfairness. Loving God does mean the hard task of asking for blessing upon detractors. That brings blessings revolving back to us. God does not answer or defend the charge of unfairness, Job 38–41. He gave a lesson on how He manages the physical and moral universe, and how Job could not do that. Job then understood, and every trace of resentment then disappeared. Casting ourselves on the Lord when we do not know the answers will eventually vindicate us and we will be more content.

We cannot understand the answers about our suffering and the workings of the universe, and God does not try us. In another life we

may understand but for now because we do not have that measure, we are entrapped in time and space and other mysteries which are not revealed. We cannot foresee and our perception is warped, but we may not call God unfair. We do not understand the success of evil, the unfair events, or unrighteousness overcoming righteousness and the sadness of it all. So we remain unsatisfied, yet trusting Him.

Abraham's (stars) and Job's (the universe) testing encouraged their faith in the unknown, and they truly walked in His image. God encourages our recovery to reflect His purpose, to be satisfied that we cannot grasp it all. He reassures us, "*The word is near you*". Abraham and Job knew that they knew not. That ungrasped condition can reassure us that God is in charge of it all. Our lack of wisdom leads us to better bring ourselves, in our incompleteness, to His feet and say "*take me*" for in my flesh and in my sin, I am nothing. "*Before the beginning of time*", before Creation, (difficult for us to fathom), God knew of our need for redemption. He did not hastily think up a contingency plan when sin came in. That plan was made ready for us.

Tragedy, Darkness and Triumph

God's record encourages us in His will, but there is still His apparent deafness. He has "*hedged us in*", Job 23, but even "*All things work together for good*" is not true now. The recorded worthies did hang on to the divine connection receiving strength from the unseen world of unfulfilled promises. Doubting times helped their faith to slip in. We can fertilize faith in the dark times and faith truly flourishes. Terrible uncertainty, toughened by testing, can be a growing of firmer faith, and though it is a hard faith to grow, it cannot be shaken. When God seems absent He may be closest, for He is also acquainted with grief. At His son's death everyone's disappointment set in. Even God seemed dead and immobile. But there was that Son alive again. "*He is risen*". So tragedy, darkness and then triumph seem to be the pattern, if only we can arrive triumphant. "*All things work together for good*", is the toughest and longest coming, but the best miracle.

When the "*word became flesh*", Jesus brought the physical and the spiritual worlds together. We can also be like him where He is in us, and we are in Him. We, made in "*the image of God*", are enhanced with His gifts, "*He descended... with gifts*". God responds to our doubts, fears, disappointments and faithfulness, Psalm 22, reassuring us that He will be there and not abandon the afflicted when our "*bones are out of joint*". He was for the arthritic Jacob, who cried out for God to be with Him in his sharpest trials.

God supports us working back to the positive from extremity, but we cannot ignore Him. None of the worthies ignored Him and we too have good or bad choices concerning God. Hiddenness does not mean that God is the enemy, with no concern for us. All God's faithful servants are encouraged in their limited vision when they see a distorted reality, and God reassures them and enhances their understanding. We also compare the natural and the supernatural worlds and can see He understands and helps us as we waver. We are not insignificant and our shattered personal dreams are small considerations in the big picture.

Later, choosing cheerfulness means a sort of daylight with peaceful serenity. Until the depression lifts and we reach that essential state, God promises us rest in His hand. Those worthies saw God's indication to them that they were special and they moved on in His name. To put oneself prayerfully in His care can always bring God to the discussion table. All is possible with Him, depending on the larger perspective. Our understanding of God helps the choices we make in our suffering towards healing.

The Physical and the Spiritual World

It does not happen for all of us that we get a Job like glimpse of the supernatural. We have a hard road to travel when God does not immediately reveal an answer. Some died terrible deaths but were delivered in hope "*unto death for Jesus' sake*". They see a sort of supernatural or spiritual vision. In these deaths there is meaning for us. We can also see the presence of God with hope in the future. When this life is hard to grasp and full of unresolved misery forward is the only way. If we have not that hope, we have no hope.

We understand the ability of God to conquer evil and restore the heavens and the earth to the original perfection with demonstrations of His love and power. If we do not believe that, it is not a failure on God's behalf, rather it indicates that we have moved away from God.

But still we are called, not to look back at our ungodly history, or to our miserable present, but to see beyond these calamities, to a distant place when we shall see God, face to face, like Job declared, "*in my flesh I will see God*". Our experience with this world makes it difficult to visualize the future world, for any burst of happiness is only an infrequent token, an earnest of what is to come. We can never fully appreciate the future, but we trust also in God's provision, that it will be a worthwhile portent for us. The struggle and anguish with

disappointment is endlessly consoled in Scripture and suffering is always embroidered with the word “*temporary*”. The eternal place to arrive is the Ideal of Creation. “*I saw a new heavens and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away*”.

If we believe God exists, and is not silent, then the question of suffering rests firmly on our faith. In faith the just shall live. We need to be perfectly clear that where God is, there need be no fear. Then, living with the certainty of God and always looking up to Him, might mean living with the disappointment also, but without fear. Adversity and suffering can try to claim us, but we can be immune when God surrounds us with His wall. We will not be harmed, for we are His, and He is in us. So “*Look outward and be distressed, look inward and be depressed, look upward and be at rest*”. Quite so.

Beverley Russell

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