

Satan & Devils in the New Testament

Satan

Hebrew: *satan* (saw-tawn), as a noun, "opponent"; as a verb "attack, accuse" (Strong's 7853-4). Interestingly, *satam* (7852) means "to lurk for to persecute." Thus as a verb, it means to prowl (as did Jewish opponents of Jesus) in search of a chance to attack, accuse, and persecute. (Hence "satan" is a transliteration of a Hebrew term.)

Greek: *satan* (It's of Hebrew origin, says J. Strong, meaning the Greek term is the transliteration of the Hebrew term and therefore means &/or refers to the exact same thing. [The Greek term is #4567.]])

(Read more details in my PDF entitled *Satan In The Old Testament*.)

Devil

Hebrew: There are no cases of "devil" singular in the Old Testament, but there are four cases in which "devils" (or demons) plural are found from two terms. *Shed* (shade, 7700), a demon or devil (Deu. 32:17 & Psa. 106:37). *Sa'ir* (saw-er, 8163), a he or hairy goat, a devil (Lev. 17:7 & 2 Chr. 11:15), same term as used of Esau who was a hairy man; this term is from *shood* referring to a tempestuous storm, devastation, or waste. So the term "devils" (or demons) in the Old Testament was always used in reference to idol worship (idols such as in the form of goats) and the devastating consequences such would bring upon those worshippers at the hand of the one true God (cf. Deu. 32).

Greek: Devil (demon) and Devils (demons) are used numerous times in the New Testament, translated from two main words. *Diabolos* (dee-ab'-olos, 1228) from which we get our term "diabolical." Strong says this word refers to a "false accuser, devil, slanderer." (This was the Greek term chosen by the Septuagint in Num. 22:22 & Psa. 71:13 for *satan*.) And *daimon* (dah'ee-mown, 1142) from which we get our term "demon," and a term used in Acts 17:18 of idols (*daimonion*).

Here's what's interesting about the term "satan" (which means "enemy") and its use in Scripture. Not only is it used for something or someone who opposes the Lord (such as in Zec. 3:1-2), but it's also used of the Lord Himself (via one of His angels) for someone who occupied the role of an opponent (cf. Num. 22:22 & 32). In another case we find God occupying the role of "a satan"—an opponent (via a man this time [1 Kgs. 11:14 & 23-25]). Whether we understand how God played the adversary in these next two cases or not, doesn't mean that they aren't more legitimate examples.

Firstly, comparing the parallel accounts of 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chr. 21:1, we find that God is satan and that satan is God: in Chronicles it tells us that satan moved David against Israel (to number them), while in Samuel it tells us that God moved David against Israel.

Secondly, while Job chapters 1 & 2 speak of a satan (an enemy) of Job, Job knows what's going on, for later he said to God, "with the strength of Your hand You oppose me" (30:21); i.e., "You're acting as a satan or an enemy against me" (cf. Job 1:21, 2:10, 19:21, & 42:11). (By the way, I've been wondering lately if the story of Job isn't actually another picture of God's relationship with Israel; i.e., Job &/or his family might be equal to Israel.) Then...

Like the case when God stirred up a man (Hadad) against Solomon, there's the case when Peter attempted to stir up Jesus against God: after he tried to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross, Jesus said to him, "'Get behind Me, satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God'" (Mat. 16:23); the point being that Jesus wasn't talking to some spiritual being or a monster, but to a good human being—Peter! Likewise...

In John 6:70 Jesus said, "'Did I choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil.'" Just as in Mat. 16, Jesus wasn't talking about a superhuman or spirit being in red clothing, but to an ordinary mortal man; the term "devil," as the term "satan," can merely be used for a wicked man or to a man who is acting wickedly, whether he knows it or not.

In another similar case, Paul wrote about how elders' wives were not to be devils, i.e. slanderers (1 Tim. 3:11) or false accusers (Titus 2:3); likewise, Paul warned that, "in the last days .. men would be ... false accusers or devils" (2 Tim. 3:1-3), which tells us that he wasn't saying that human beings would turn into superhuman or spirit beings, but that they'd increase in their wickedness. So...

Such passages as these clearly indicate that the term "satan" (as well as the term "devil") is not a proper name for a specific (metaphysical, supernatural, spiritual) individual with horns, a tail, and a pitchfork; rather, satans and devils are terms used in reference to opponents, whether good or bad, though usually bad, such as the following. When Peter warned, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," I believe Peter was alluding to anti-Jesus Jews, for such even corresponds to Zep. 3:3 in which God described them not only as wolves, but also as "roaring lions." And if you wonder if that chapter is about the time of the end of Judaism, just read the rest of it. Later in Revelation these Jews were called the synagogue (a Jewish term) of Satan (2:9 & 3:9).

Demon Possession

As we touched on above, Israel couldn't seem to avoid getting involved in the worship of demons, devils, gods, or idols according to passages like Deu. 32:17.

Due to rebellion and idolatrous waywardness, God delineated numerous curses that would be visited upon them for such insolence and disrespect for Him: In Deu. 28:28, 35, & 65, for examples among various physical punishments, Moses via inspiration said to the people that "'The Lord will strike you with madness, blindness, and confusion of heart... [He] will strike you in the knees and on the legs... [He] will give you an anxious heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul.'"

But Isaiah 35:5-6, for one prophetic example, predicted that when the Messiah came, "The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing...."

And when John the Baptizer sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus about His being the Messiah, isn't this exactly to what Jesus referred when He replied saying, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear...." (Mat. 11:4-5)? And aren't such things the very stuff He was talking about when He said to some Jewish leaders, "You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times" (Mat. 16:3).

Something interesting I read by one writer is this: Based on his belief that demon possession is another way of referring to the curses of God upon His people for idol worship per Deu. 28, he wrote, "Let it be noted that the language of demons is associated with illness, not sin. We don't 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" (Duncan Heaster, *The Real Devil*, p. 197).

Psa. 106:36-39 says that Israel "serve their [the Canaanites'] idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons ... whom they sacrificed to the idols.... Thus they were defiled by their own works, and played the harlot by their own deeds." So Israel's worship of demons was described by God as worshipping their "own works ... their own deeds" because their belief in demons was a result of human imagination; in fact, the term for "idols" literally means "no things," stressing that they have no existence outside of man's imagination. In a passage dealing with God's anger in such matters (Deu. 32:15-24), we read God saying that Israel "'provoked Me to ... by what is not God!" (The LXX of Is. 65:3 says that demons do not exist & 1 Sam. 12:21 says that they are nothing [Jer. 14:4].) Anyway...

Although at this time I don't have all the answers, based on this information I am *much* more open to the idea that demon possession wasn't actually a person's body being literally overcome by some metaphysical being; rather, it's seems to be nearly an overwhelming possibility that those referred to as demon possessed were actually suffering the curses of God predicted in Dt. 28ff.

Demons As Idols

Earlier we touched on how that the Bible equates demons with idols; well, let's focus on that just a little more by first of all establishing the Bible's teaching about Yahweh as being the source of all power. Isa. 45:5 has God saying, "I am THE Lord, and there is NO OTHER; there is no god besides Me" (and I'm told that the Hebrew term used here for "god" essentially means "power"; i.e., "there is no power outside of Me"). This teaching is found over and over again in the Old Testament (e.g. Isa. 44:8, Deu. 4:35, et. al.), and this is why God get jealous when His people believe in other gods or powers outside (especially opposite) of Him.

What's worse is that His people are worshipping something that's literally nothing. This reminds me of this scenario that I've heard sometimes: A wife discovers her husband and has been running around on her. When she approaches him, he says, "But she means nothing to me." To this the wife gets even more irate because he, thinking he had a decent reply, is then asked, "So you ran around on me with someone who doesn't mean anything to you! I'd actually feel better about it if she meant something!"

In Bible times, because they believed entities outside of God were the cause of tragedies, etc., people believed demons to be lesser gods who could be worshipped to stop problems coming into their lives; so, they made models to represent them and through which to appease them, explaining why Paul used the terms "demons" and "idols" interchangeably (cf. 1 Cor. 10:20 & 28).

Paul said in 1 Cor. 8:4, "an idol [or demon] is nothing ..., there is no other God but one"; i.e., an idol or a demon has no existence at all, for there is only one true God or power. He then went on to write, "Even if there are so-called gods..., yet for us there is only one God ... of whom are all things." If God is not with them or in them, then they cannot have existence.

This corresponds with some passages in the Psalms which speaks of idols or demons IF they exist (Psa. 29:1-2 & 10 & 97:78); i.e., demons & such no more truly exist in some realm than the (mythical) gods of Greeks.

The Serpent

We recently studied Genesis One from an allegorical perspective, viz. that it employs literal/physical things/events to paint a picture of the history of God's scheme of redemption of man through Israel. Well, likewise...

I believe chapter two (which began the Eden saga) was meant to teach not only a general occurrence concerning the origin of Israel, but also, by employing the type/anti-type method of teaching, eventual readers would recognize certain concepts via representation (e.g. that this first Adam was the counterpart to the second Adam [i.e., that he, in one sense, represented the coming Messiah], the tree of life also represented that Messiah, the garden represented a place where man could be in God's presence [which could also be seen as the Messiah], Eve represented the bride—the church of Christ, and so on). By the way...

While I believe that Adam & Eve were real people (the beginning of Israel), I'm not convinced that every other item (e.g. the trees & the animals) in this narrative was literal.

I see Genesis chapters two and three as the writer creating sort of a mosaic for Israel to see what God did for them from the very outset and how that she was rebellious from the get-go. (After all, a picture is worth a thousand words: Genesis 1—3 is a painting in which, as with most paintings, most of the details represent something.) I.e....

The details of this story depict assorted concepts: for examples, the plant life and rivers depict God's physical care for A&E, while the animals, from among which Adam could find no comparable partner, depicted the idea that God's people just aren't (or at least aren't supposed to be) complementary of one another—like oil and water, they just don't mix. So...

Speaking of the animals and Adam, what happened in chapter three? Yes, an animal (something representing that which is essentially at odds with Adam, as well as Eve [perhaps even due to feeling insulted that he wasn't found to be good enough for a partner]) was chosen to represent a rival. For who did he come after? Eve, the one chosen instead. Anyway...

This now-an-enemy decided to try to put the hurt on Adam and Eve by tempting them to do that which would put them at odds with ... essentially ... their husband (God being Israel's spouse). So...

When Adam and Eve (Israel) sinned, God cast them out of His den of protection until they could be successfully brought back into a right or righteous relationship with Him via the Messiah who would crush the enemy of God which is ... sin and, of course, anything or anyone associated with it such as those who tempt His people to sin (i.e. to go astray) or would otherwise try to hurt or destroy them.

The serpent of Genesis chapter three then ... to me ... is a symbol of a very despised adversary (or one who is at least supposed to be despised).

Revelation 12:9 says, "The great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the accuser and adversary, who deceives the whole world." In this specific case, the dragon, the accuser, the adversary, and the serpent represent the enemy of Christians in the first century (the OC Jew). Just as the dragon represented Pharaoh &/or Egypt at one point in time against God's people (Eze. 29:3), now here in Revelation it's pseudo-Israel against true-Israel. In case it isn't clear, my point is this:

I believe the serpent in Genesis three specifically represented the enemy of the Israelites, i.e. the non-Israelites who constantly tempted them to sin against their God by committing spiritual adultery with them politically and in idolatrous worship; and for such, God divorced them (the northern ten tribes ca. 700 BC) and cut them down (the southern two tribes AD 70) at which time the Messiah established true/full righteousness via the remnant and then with all who wished (and wish) to ally themselves with God.

Demons and Sickness

We should find it interesting, to say the least, that a Mr. G. Lamsa, a scholar who grew up around and knew very well the Aramaic language (the language we're told that Jesus spoke), wrote that the phrase "cast out" in Aramaic means "to restore to sanity or to remove the cause that produces insanity," such as the trichina parasite (which we'll come back to later). See...

From what I've read in my research, it was the language of the day to say that any disease which couldn't be understood was the fault of demons. One G.P. Gilmour said, "So far as the [first century] populace was concerned, any disease involving mental disturbance, delirium, or spasms was attributed to demons, believed to swarm in the air." So...

To say that demons were cast out of someone was to say that he/she was cured of a mental illness or a sickness which wasn't understood in their time. The association between maladies and demons is seen in Mat. 8:16-17: "They brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, healing all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah: 'He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses [not demons].'"

Likewise, when we read Acts 8:7 of unclean spirits crying out, the Eastern (Aramaic) text interestingly reads, "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out," and this corresponds to Mr. G. Lamsa also saying that "unclean spirits is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics." Even Philo commented concerning how demon-possessed people were laughed at and mocked, indicating that these folks were actually mentally ill rather than physically sic.

When Mr. Legion in Mark 5 was cured of his "demons," we read of him as being "in his right mind" (v. 15); i.e., possession was linked to madness, which is why many said Jesus had a demon (John 10:20, 7:19-20, & 8:52). Anyway...

As we already said, folks who were considered demon-possessed in those days (and even still in some places around the world today, which we'll talk about in a moment) were said to be found in their right minds once healed (Luke 8:35), implying that being possessed was another or their way of saying that someone was mentally unhealthy, i.e. *not* in his right mind; in fact, those possessed were said to be "healed" or "cured" (Mat. 4:24, 12:22, & 17:18). When the twelve went out at the behest of Christ to heal the sick in Luke 10:9, what did they come back rejoicing? They said, "even the demons are subject to us in Your name" (v. 17)!

Here's something else interesting: There are a lot of parallels between the language used of "casting out" demons and that used about healings. Jesus not only rebuked demons (Mark 9:25), but He also rebuked a fever (Luke 4:39) and the wind (Mat. 8:26). Not only were demons spoken of as having "departed" (Mat. 17:18), but also leprosy and other diseases were spoken of as departing (Mark 1:42 & Acts 19:12). So I'd say it's more than likely that all the demon-possessed of those times were actually carriers diseases such as epilepsy and schizophrenia. Think about this:

Everyone who believes demons exist must ask himself, "When I'm ill, is it caused by a demon?" If he thinks the NT references to demons are about gods going around doing evil, then he must answer "Yes." But, in that case, how can we explain the fact that so many diseases, once blamed on demons, can now be cured (or at least controlled) by drugs today? Malaria is a classic example: many Africans believed until recently that malaria was caused by demons, but now they see that malaria can be cured by quinine and other drugs. Some of the diseases that Jesus cured have been identified as tetanus or epilepsy, both which can be relieved by drugs today.

Legion and the Pigs (Mark 5:1-17)

I'll be basing my comments on this event on what we've already discussed, viz. that the Bible uses the language of the day, speaking of things as they appeared in the eyes of the audience who viewed demons as demigods (beings with more power than mortals, but less than God) who were responsible for illnesses. (And speaking of demigods, by Jesus curing illnesses as He did, He demonstrated He was not a demigod, something that even those "possessed" understood.) Besides, a lot of what we've just talked about regarding demon possession applies here, of course. So...

As we just discussed, Legion had an "unclean spirit" which cried out, correspond to Acts 8:7 which, in Aramaic, is rendered as, "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out." Also, as just discussed, once Legion was cured of his "demons," he was found "in his right mind," indicating that they believed demons caused or were the force behind madness, that of which they accused Jesus (John 10:20).

Furthermore, it's interesting what can be discovered by comparing parallel passages: In Mark 5:7 it reads that "HE cried out ... 'Don't torment ME,'" while in Mat. 8:29 it reads that "THEY cried out ... 'Have You come to torment US?'" Also, in Mark 5:10 it reads that "HE begged" Jesus, while Matthew 8:31 reads that "the DEMONS begged" Jesus. In fact, in Mark 5:9 this man's own words explain his self-perception. Notice: "'MY name [singular] is Legion; for WE are many [plural].'" This is classic schizophrenic behavior/language. Related to this man's own words, notice also Mark 5:8 where we see Jesus saying "to HIM," as opposed "to them," to come out.

It appears to me that this incident occurred when the man was actually between episodes, as it were, for he came to Jesus and worshipped Him, asking if He, like others, was also going to torment or treat him badly. And Jesus responded by curing him and evidencing that cure by casting the illness into a herd of swine. Why? Perhaps because, as a Steve Keating pointed out, the madness of just such a man may have been from a brain infection of the trichina parasite, commonly found infecting the muscles of pigs and contagious to humans via undercooked pork (which, by the way, Jews weren't supposed to eat at all).

Consider this: Isn't it possible that this man either shepherded or even owned this herd of swine and ate of it? If so, isn't it also possible then that, when this man found himself lucid, he realized that the pig stampede wasn't only a miracle of the Lord, but also a judgment against illegal keeping and/or eating of unclean animals? Now...

How about a potential lesson from this incident for Israel (some members of whom were witnesses to this)? Here are some thoughts along this line from a John Allfree and an Andrew Perry. A case can be made that the man Legion was to be understood as representative of Judah in captivity, suffering for their sins but who, like this sick man, be healed of their sins upon repentance. So consider...

Israel, like Legion, was, as God said via Isaiah, "a people ... who sit among the graves, spend the night in the tombs, and eat swine's flesh" (65:3-4). Also like Legion who was "in the mountains ... crying out and cutting himself" (Mark 5:5), Israel committed their iniquitous idolatry in the hills and mountains (Isa. 65:7), not to mention the example of how they cried out to and cut themselves for their idols such as Baal (1 Kgs. 18).

And is it just coincidence that this man called himself Legion, reminiscent of Judah being under the ownership of the Legions of Rome? Perhaps as Legion was among and infected by pigs, so Israel was among and infected by Gentiles and that due to their sins against their God! Further...

Legion's comment that "we are many" is identical to the words of Ezekiel 33:24 about Israel: "Son of man, they who inhabit those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one, and he inherited the land. But we are many; the land has been given to us as a possession.' So say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "You eat meat with blood, you lift your eyes toward idols, and shed blood. Should you then possess the land?"'" Lastly...

For consideration in this probably typological event, the herd of pigs being "destroyed" in the water might recall the Egyptians being "destroyed" in the Red Sea when Israel was delivered from Gentile power before. So, interestingly, the Gadarene Gentiles, it says, "were afraid," just as the Gentile world was at the time of the Exodus (Exo. 15:14). The curing of Legion is termed "great things" (Mark 5:19); and Israel's exodus from Gentile power and the destruction of the Egyptians was likewise called "great things" (Psa. 106:21).

All coincidence? Perhaps, but seems very improbable to me.

{Tony E. Denton, 2010. By the way, Duncan Heaster's *The Real Devil* book may be read for free online or downloaded for free or of course purchased in book form: see <http://RealDevil.info> for more info.}