

## The Biblical Satan (Part One: The Hebrew Scriptures)

According to current dictionaries, "satan" is defined as a (singular) spiritual being—the foe of both God and man. But how accurate is this definition? Let's do some digging starting at the beginning.

The Hebrew term for satan is based on the Hebrew letters *shin* (ש) or our letter **S**, *teth* (ט) or our letter **T**, & *nun* (ן) or our letter **N**; שטן is believed to be pronounced as *sawtawn*; with the definite article before it one would add the letter *hei* at the end (remembering Hebrew is right to left): הַשָּׂטָן.

According to Hebrew lexicographers like James Strong (#7854), it refers to an opponent or enemy; according to Wilson, it refers to an adversary; according to Gesenius, it refers to an adversary as in war, an enemy; and according to Girdlestone, it refers to an adversary or plotter, one who devises means for opposing another.

Here are some related terms:

The verb *sawtam* (Strong's #7852) means to lay snares, follow hostilely, persecute, oppose.

The verb *sawtan* (Strong's #7853) means to accuse or attack, to be an adversary.

The noun *sitnaw* (Strong's #7855) refers to opposition or accusation.

I also found it very interesting that the translators of the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament from which Jesus and His disciples most often quoted) chose—89% of the time, mind you—to NOT translate the Hebrew *sawtawn* with the Greek term one would expect. In other words...

Although in the Greek we have *satanas* as the equivalent for the Hebrew *sawtawn* (both referring to an *adversary*) 24 of the 27 times in the Hebrew Scriptures they rather chose to employ the term *diabolos* (referring to an *accuser* of another) or *epiboulos* (referring to someone who schemes against another in order to *accuse* him, cf. Acts 9:23-24 & 23:27-30).

The only three verses that actually retain the Greek *satanas* for the Hebrew *sawtawn* are First Kings 11:14, 23, & 25, and all of these are about the single subject of literal, human enemies in war against Solomon, indicating to me that these two terms were understood by ancient Hebrews to be definite synonyms of *diabolos* &/or *epiboulos*—they were that interchangeable; so to understand one would be to essentially understand the other, and we'll get to the Greek terms more a little later on in these studies. So...

The Hebrew term *sawtawn* involves two primary characteristics of a "being": {1} accuser (one who attacks by word) and {2} adversary (one who attacks by word &/or physically), and these two types would, of course, include those who follow others around with hostile motives and persecute them, those who prowl around like private investigators or police detectives searching for evidence to use against someone, and even those who do the prosecuting itself against others; so we might say we have enemy-adversary, prowler-plotter, and accuser-prosecutor.

The Hebrew term *sawtawn* is found 27 times in the Hebrew Scriptures (aka the Tenakh or the Old Testament): Num. 22:22 & 32; 1 Sam. 29:4; 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kgs 5:4, 11:14, 23, 25; 1 Chr. 21:1; Job 1:6, 7,(2x), 8, 9, 12(2x), 2:1, 2(2x), 3, 4, 6, 7; Psa. 109:6; & Zec. 3:1-2(2x). Except for in the cases of Job and Zechariah, none of them have the definite article before them; in other words, in those two cases the Hebrew reads "the *sawtawn*."

Let's consider the cases without the definite article, of which there are essentially only seven.

In First Samuel 29:4, we find the incident in which Philistine lords chose to use the term *sawtawn* in reference to King David.

In Second Samuel 19:22 we find incident in which King David chose to use the term *sawtawn* in reference to the sons of Zeruah.

In First Kings 5:4 we merely read of how that, at the outset of his reign, King Solomon had no *sawtawn* to worry about. But that was soon to change, for...

In First Kings 11:14, 23, & 25 we begin to come across something a little more interesting in our study: here we have statements about "the Lord" raising up two enemies against King Solomon: *sawtawn* Hadad the Edomite and *sawtawn* Rezon Bar-Eliadah with their respective armies.

In Psalm 109:6 we read David praying (again) for vengeance against some people; this time he asked that those who had made false accusations against him would have someone he called a *sawtawn* to make false accusations against them.

Now I'm going backwards because I wanted these various incidents to be placed in a specific order. So let's go back now.

Turn to Numbers 22. Due to a conversation a prophet named Balaam had with the Lord, he was expected by the Lord to NOT go with the Moabites to see their king, Balak, who wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites. By reading **verses 22-34**, we can see a clear case of Yahweh being the Instigator by sending an angel (which merely means "messenger" or "delegate") to be His agent through whom He fulfilled His purpose; so the Lord was the *sawtawn* of Balaam. Lastly in this list...

Turn to First Chronicles for a verse that we'll connect to one in Second Samuel.

In this general story, the Lord is again upset with His wife, Israel, for her lack of love for (and hence faith in) Him, essentially treating Him like dirt; so in First Chronicles 21:1 we find the following: "*Sawtawn* stood up against Israel, moving David to number Israel" (which simply means to take a census, in this case of his armies). Now...

Turn to Second Samuel 24:1. In this record of the same incident, we find this: "The anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, so He moved David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" So, according to Second Samuel, who actually played the role of *sawtawn*? Right—the Lord! 'Tis much like some of the preceding cases:

In Psalm 109 David asked *the Lord* to use someone as a *sawtawn* against his haters.

In First Kings 11 *the Lord* used Hadad-Rezon as a *sawtawn* against King Solomon.

In Numbers 22 *the Lord* sent an angel (or an agent) as a *sawtawn* against Balaam.

And now here in Chronicles and Samuel *the Lord Himself* is clearly indicated to have been a *sawtawn* against His wife, Israel, for not exhibiting her alleged love/faith.

Before we move to *sawtawn* passages with the definite article, let me say two things:

Firstly, relative to the definite article or lack thereof, scholars are at odds because some say that if the definite article is present, then it's a reference to "the" specific enemy of God and man called "the devil," while without the article it's merely a reference to any given enemy in general; but others say that with the definite article it's referring to a specific enemy in a given context, while without the definite article it's referring to the name of the devil they say is "Satan." So this is practically a no-win situation.

Secondly, here's my current thinking: from my studies right now, it seems to me that just because the cases we considered so far don't have the definite article doesn't really mean anything in contradistinction to the passages which do include it as some would make a big deal out of. See, think about this:

Had David turned on the Philistines and begun to war with them, then, IN THAT CASE (without other variables involved such as other enemies) he would've been fulfilling *the functional role* of "the" *sawtawn* of the story; had Zeruah's sons turned on David and begun to war with him, then IN THAT CASE they would've been fulfilling the functional role of "the" *sawtawn* of the story; had there been a story about a war between Solomon and Hadad, then IN THAT CASE Hadad would've been fulfilling the functional role of "the" *sawtawn* of the story. See, in the case so far,...

Not only has there not been the semantics which would call for the definite article, but there also hasn't been a narrative which would've called for the definite article; for there to be a *sawtawn* specific enough to call for the definite article in any given narrative, not only would the correct semantics need to exist of course, but also the *sawtawn* of that story would have to have his counterpart: if the *sawtawn* is an accuser, for example, then there'd need to be the accused in the story.

One more thing: Since the two definite article instances in the Hebrew Scriptures are both prophetic in nature (yes, Zechariah's vision AND the story of Job, I believe, are foreshadowings), then these two narratives don't lend much at all to the popular doctrine of "satan"; but let me share with you what I mean.

Let's consider the cases with the definite article, of which there are essentially only two.

In Zechariah 3:1-2 we read of a vision of two individuals standing before an angel of the Lord in a court-like setting: Joshua, the high priest, and "the" *sawtawn*, Joshua's accuser: the accused and the accuser before God. Such makes perfect sense without making the *sawtawn* of this passage refer to one specific metaphysical being created by Yahweh to cause chaos everywhere as most of Christendom today seems to believe.

This passage tells us that Zechariah saw "Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and the *sawtawn* standing to his right to accuse him. Then the Lord [in this case this angel] said to the *sawtawn*, 'The Lord rebuke you, the *sawtawn*.'"

Firstly, how do we even know that the *sawtawn* of this passage was any more supernatural than Joshua? We don't. So—and this is what I'm now thinking—maybe what Zechariah *the prophet* was seeing were two people denoting two parties: {1} Joshua representing sinful (yet God's remnant) Israel as she became sinless Israel in/through Christ (the true Israel) and {2} the *sawtawn* representing the rest of Israel who, as a collective, rejected Christ and became known as "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10). But, until all things were said and done, that old, rejecting Israel wouldn't admit that Christians were—as Zechariah 3:3-5 go on to demonstrate—the cleansed and accepted ones of God (see Rom. 8:30-39 [as well as Dan. 7:22]).

The Lord's angel here left it up to the Lord Himself to rebuke this *sawtawn*. Does this little story sound like another? Listen to Jude 9: "The archangel, Michael, in contending with the *diabolos* [the LXX's translation of *sawtawn* in Zec. 3] when he disputed about the body of Moses [which I believe is equivalent to Zec. 3's Joshua, both representing God's people of Israel], dared not bring against him [the *diabolos* or the *sawtawn*] a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'" (Cf. Zec. 3:3-5 w/ Jude 9 & 23.) So...

There's nothing here to support the belief/teaching of some supernatural evil being who's "THE" ACCUSER of mankind before his Creator; in fact, we learn in Second Peter 2:11 that a plural number of beings (Gk. *angels*) were said to have the ability to accuse people before God, they just didn't. OK...

Now for the last case in the Tenakh: Although the *sawtawn* of Job is expected to be seen throughout the entire 42-chapter story, we only find the *sawtawn* specifically mentioned in **Job 1:6-12 & 2:1-7**; so let's read those paragraphs.

Firstly, as stated earlier, I believe Job, like Zechariah, was prophetic in nature. How? Well, that would take up an entire talk of its own for sure, but in short I now believe Job is a story picturing the history of Israel from her beginning to her glorious end, and so—as a living parable—what happened in Job's life represented what had/would happen in the life of Israel; thus, the *sawtawn* represented the prowler, accuser, and enemy of God's people, often or even most of the time being found within her own ranks. Oh, and as with anything relative to God's work in all of this, He used the enemies to suit His purposes, which is why Job could constantly attribute to God what was happening to him (2:10, 42:11, etc.). And...

Secondly, unless this is *truly* the only exception in all of Scripture, I no longer believe the *sawtawn* in Job was some unearthly being either; rather, as with the only other and similar case found in Zechariah 3 (where there's nothing to even imply that the *sawtawn* there was any more unearthly than Joshua), the picture provided in Job is merely of someone—a *faultfinder*—of God's children among a gathering of ... God's children. Concerning this *sawtawn*, consider the following: God had referred to this faultfinder as someone who had been "roaming to and fro in the earth" (Job 1:7). Does that remind you of another statement somewhere? In First Peter 5:8, before the accuser was cast out of God's presence (Rev. 12:10), Peter warned his Israelite Christian audience to be sober and vigilant, because their adversary [from an actual court term, *antidikos*], the *diabolos* [the accuser], was roaming about like a roaring lion, seeking who all he might devour. So who was this *antidikos diabolos* or this adversary-accuser? Well, is it merely coincidence that Zephaniah 3:3 not only prophesied that the leaders of Israel would be wolves, but also "roaring lions"? See...

As is the case so often, we once again have here the idea of a collective singular being expressed for a corporate group (like the singular "antichrist" was comprised of the plural "antichrists"); so Israel's leaders (high priest, sanhedrin, etc.) were lions plural, but they as a group were a lion singular (cf. 2 Tim. 4:17, Acts 22:30, 23:12, etc.). However, remember, Job's life story in this book is, like Hosea's life story in his book, a living parable which is why Job didn't say that some supernatural evil being did all those sad things to him or that leaders of Israel did all those sad things to him, but, realizing he was being used by God laid the source of his afflictions at God's feet (just read 1:21-22, 2:3, & 42:11). In 2:3 God said to this *sawtawn* that he influenced God to move against Job. So if this is some supernatural evil being, it begs the question: "Who's actually in charge?!" So...

In Summary: I believe all the narratives about *sawtawn* without the definite article are to be taken at face-value as referring primarily to the Lord Himself even if what He desired to accomplish was through the agency of someone else. And I believe the narratives about *sawtawn* with the definite article were meant to be prophetic pictures of what had happened, was happening, and/or what would happen in the course of God's strategy of man's conciliation to Him. See...

With all this Old Testament info before us, we really shouldn't be as dismissive of the Hebrew Scriptures as we've been influenced to be in our modern Christian world, for, as Paul conveyed in Romans 15:4, these things were written to learn from. You know, we've heard the motto that "The old covenant is the new covenant concealed, while the new covenant is the old covenant revealed"; but, since the new covenant is founded in/upon the old, then, especially since we've been influenced to be so dismissive of it, I've become convinced that the adage should be switched: for us today "the new covenant has become the old covenant concealed, while the old covenant is [if we study it] the new covenant revealed." For us today we learn from the OT that God and Israel knew of no ethereal evil being called "Satan." [Tony Denton, 6/22/14; Revised 4/22/18.]