

Satan or the Devil in the Bible

There are many who are ignorant of or deny the existence of a supernatural evil being who influences people and events on our planet. The only information we really have about this being is in the Scriptures. To make matters more interesting, in many instances this being has confused and disguised the truth about himself to his own advantage and to the disadvantage of the true God.

I make a point of asking our Jewish friends, when I have the opportunity to, about the existence of such a being. They have a consistent answer whether I am asking on the streets of Israel or Calgary or Red Deer. The answer is along these lines. There is enough evil in each one of us. We do not need a devil which is an invention by Christians to absolve themselves of their guilt.

So let us consider the evidence from both the Old Testament or Hebrew Tanakh, and the Christian New Testament.

Satan or the Devil in the Old Testament

The word "Devil" does not appear in the Hebrew Old Testament since it comes from the Greek "diablos" which means accuser or slanderer. The Hebrew word "Shattan" appears in 3½ places in Old Testament if we read the ever popular King James or Authorized Version.

The ½ is because, in the King James Version the word "Satan" is used in one passage but other translations use "accuser" in its place. Notice the following.

Psalms 109:6 (KJV) "Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand."

Psalms 109:6 (NIV) Appoint and evil man to oppose him; Let an accuser stand at his right hand.

Jewish teaching also suggests that God has a dark side-the *sitra ahra*-and so the following statements appear:

Isaiah 45:7 "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster, I, the LORD, do all these things."

and

Deuteronomy 32:39 "See now that I myself am He! There is no God beside me, I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand."

This did not mean that they believed in dualism but that there was an evil in God himself that God had to battle. The surrounding nations, however, had gods which were in conflict with each other. Here are some examples.

Warring deities from Nations Surrounding Israel.

Humbaba battles with Gilgamesh in Mesopotamian legend.

Mot must be subdued by Baal in Canaanite legend.

Habayu defiles El with excrement in Canaanite legend.

Set murders Osiris in Egyptian legend.

Ahriman is perpetually at war with Ahura Mazda in Persian legend.

Hades kidnaps Persephone in Greek legend. (<http://www.realdevil.info/1-1.htm>)

The God of the Hebrews was supreme and had made everything and thus there was no enemy that could threaten him. So they never had the problem of the supernatural conflict between gods that the surrounding nations had. As an aside, the Greeks loved paradoxes and their God paradox was as follows: If God is omnipotent then he cannot be good since evil is present, or if God is good then he cannot be omnipotent since evil exists.

The Vulnerability of Love.

Both the Hebrews and the Greeks missed the vulnerability of God's love which means that God can be influenced by those he loves. So God can be all good and omnipotent and if he is also love then creatures can over-ride God's will and cause evil to prosper. Thus it may be seen then that love is the cause of the delay in the eradication of evil in the universe. If God did not love his creation then he could simply remove those who disagree with him and voila we have a perfect universe. He could also remove all memory of this evil, modify our memories and exclude any trace of what had happened. To allow evil to exist means God must value the freedom that love results in to an unbelievable degree.

In Jewish understanding, God is responsible for everything super natural so the Old Testament tells the stories of supernatural chaos and mayhem and because they are supernatural they are caused by God. They do not believe the serpent in Genesis chapter three is being used by the devil or Satan but simply a story, like the parallel story about Balaam's donkey. This first story shows that Eve was willing to blame an animal for her wickedness. This is one way that Satan has disguised his role in the Old Testament.

While we may have some confusion over the existence of the devil from the Old Testament the real information comes from Jesus' revelation about this supernatural being. If we read only the Old Testament we would never have known about the devil in the way that Jesus has revealed him.

Satan has thus disguised himself in the Old Testament and God was blamed for Satan's work in many instances as the following passages illustrate.

Numbers 21:6 Then the Lord sent fiery serpents (venomous snakes) among them
...

1 Samuel 16:14 The spirit of the Lord had forsaken Saul, and at times an evil spirit from the Lord would seize him suddenly.

Psalm 2:12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in your way . . . for His wrath can flare up in a moment.

Before we focus on Job chapters one and two, the first of the three passages where Satan is revealed, it is helpful to remind ourselves of the summary of this book.

Summary of the Book of Job

Firstly, blameless Job suffers great tragedy and chapters 1&2 show the cause of his suffering is Satan not God. Strangely Satan is never mentioned again in the book and Job always believes God is causing his suffering and his “friends” believe God is punishing him for his wrong doing and wants him to confess the error of his ways.

There is a Walt Disney ending after Job prays for his “friends.” The account of Job is a similar genre to “Plato’s Dialogues.” Both attempt to illuminate truth through debate.

Three Usages of “Satan” in the Old Testament

In the first two chapters of the book of Job Satan is revealed as a malicious accuser and destroyer. He will kill and cause suffering to prove his point. He has no morality or ethics. “Shattan” is Hebrew for accuser. In legal terms he is the public prosecutor and God is the defence for Job. In Hebrew thinking this does not make Satan an evil person but one who is doing his accusing well and helping to expose the truth.

The second passage in which the term Satan appears is a parallel passage to

Samuel 24:1 Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.” Here is the

parallel passage.

1 Chronicles 21:1 Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.

Chronicles is one of the last books written in the Old Testament and the author wishes to encourage the exiles with a highly revisionist account of God’s care for the Israelites. The author focuses on the successes and minimizes the failures of Israel and her leaders. Thus Satan is the cause of the problem in Chronicles while in Samuel it is the LORD. In the Hebrew mind there was no problem with this change in agent since Satan is “the public prosecutor” not a supernatural evil being and God is the Creator of all—including any evil beings. Of course we know from the New Testament account that demon possession was recognized by the Jews by

the time Jesus arrived. This probably came from Jewish interaction with Greek and Roman culture where demons were recognized as part of reality rather than calling them evil spirits from the LORD.

The final passage in which the term Satan is used is:

Zechariah 3:1-2 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan!

The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?”

From the rest of the passage we know that Joshua is clothed in clean raiment and given a clean turban. We understand from the passage that this means that the righteousness of Christ is given to Joshua including the ability to think (turban) like one of the noble princess of the Royal Family of the Universe.

We also know from the New Testament that Jesus came and lived the life we were meant to live but were unable to do so because of the intrusion of the virus of sin. He puts His merit to our account because of His grace and compassion. We are clothed with His righteousness, the fine linen of Revelation 19.

That is it! We have covered all the instances in the Old Testament that refer to Satan directly.

Satan or the Devil in the New Testament

Now we move to the New Testament. First we notice the many different appellations or names given to this supernatural evil being.

Various Names for the Devil or Satan

Abaddon (Hebrew) or Apollyon (Greek) or Destroyer (English) (Revelation 9:11)

Accuser of the Brethren. (Revelation 12:10)

Adversary (Luke 12:58; 1 Peter 5:8; Luke 18:3; 1 Timothy 5:14)

Beelzebub or Baalzebub (Matthew 10:25, 12:24-27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15-19)

Belial (2 Corinthians 6:15)

The One Deceiving the Whole World (Revelation 12:9; 2 Corinthians 4:4)

Devil, used 38 times and is from Greek “diablos,” (Matthew 4:1-4)

Dragon, used 13 times in Revelation and is equivalent to serpent or sea-monster (Revelation 12:13-17; 13:1-4).

Enemy (Matthew 13:25, 28, 39; 25; Luke 10:19)

Evil one (Matthew 6:13)

Father of Lies (John 8:38, 41, 44)

God of this Age (2 Corinthians 4:4, Galatians 1:4)

Lawless one (2 Thessalonians 2:3)

Murderer (John 8:44; 1 John 3:15; Genesis 4:8; Revelation 11:7)

The Prince of the Power of the Air (Ephesians 2:2)

The Prince of this World (John 12:31; 14:30, 1 John 2:15)

Roaring Lion (2 Peter 5:8, 9)

Satan, used 35 times (Matthew 12:26; Luke 10:18; 2 Corinthians 11:14; Revelation 20)

Serpent (2 Corinthians 11:3; Revelation 12:9, 14, 15; 20:2)

Tempter (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5).

The Wicked One (2 Thessalonians 2:3 GNT, otherwise “lawless one”)

Thief (John 10:10)

Some passages in which the above names appear

Here are some of the passages in which this evil being appears.

Matthew 6:13 NIV And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

Mark 4:15 (NIV) Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

Luke 4:2 (NIV) where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread. 5 The devil led him up to a high place . . .

9 the devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple . . .

13 When the devil had finished all this tempting he left until an opportune time.

Luke 10:18 (NIV) He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

Luke 22:31 (NIV) Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.

John 8:44 (NIV) You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

John 8:48 (NIV) The Jews answered him, “Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?” 49 “I am not possessed by a demon,” said Jesus, “but I honour my Father and you dishonour me.”

John 10:10 (NIV) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

The Clearest Self-revelation by Jesus Christ

This last passage is the clearest revelation by Jesus of the issues in the battle for the minds of the universe. He clearly identifies the destroyer and the life-giver? He identifies the One who works continuously for the good of the universe and the one who is bent on its destruction? These could be empty words apart from the cross where Jesus is clearly giving life to all those around him even as the evil one is bent on destroying him. In the most stressful moments of his life Jesus does not neglect his executioner's wellbeing. This is unmistakable evidence that the words of Jesus, “that they may have life” was the consuming passion of his life.

Acts 26:18 (NIV) to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

Paul is explaining to King Agrippa what he understood on the Damascus road. God's sovereign forgiveness is hidden from men by Satan, in order to prevent sinners from turning from the darkness to the light, from the power of Satan to the power of God. He also explains:

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 (NIV) If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

From this passage it is clear that Satan destroys us with guilt. He outwits us when we do not live in the sovereign forgiveness of God but needlessly succumb to the weight of our guilt

Hebrews 2:14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

The author of Hebrews understands that the devil is the author of death and James explains the mechanics of this consequence of sin and evil.

James 1:15 . . . Sin when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Peter's metaphor below is wonderful in its accuracy for those who understand the hunting habits of a lion. The males roar to cause anxiety and confusion in the potential prey while the females do the killing as the animals flee.

1 Peter 5:8 (NIV) Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

The Nature of the Devil

Apparently the devil's nature is such that falsehood and violence are natural for him.

1 John 3:8 He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

The devil, according to John 8:44-48 has been lying and murdering from the beginning. "To destroy the devil's work" means that Jesus Christ must reveal the truth and give life to those murdered by Satan. This Jesus certainly did. He revealed the truth about God and promised, for instance, four times in chapter six of John that he would raise believers up at the last day.

Revelation 12:9 (NIV) The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Revelation 20:2 (NIV) He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, the devil, or Satan and bound him for a thousand years.

Notice the synonyms: dragon, ancient serpent, the devil, and Satan. It is because of this verse that we unmask the serpent in the garden.

Revelation 20:10 (NIV) And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

This passage unmasks the false trinity and predicts their complete destruction.

Conclusion.

We can now read the Old Testament with greater insight. The deceiving serpent in Genesis 3 is identified. The King of Babylon in Isaiah 14 is seen as a parallel to the mighty angel that was cast out of heaven. This is also true of the king of Tyre referred in Ezekiel 28. Instances such as 1 Samuel 16:14 where the evil spirit is said to “come from the Lord” we now understand was Satan himself who was possessing the individual.

We also understand that we are engaged in total warfare (Ephesians 6:12) and our only hope is to be vigilant in prayer. We pray for ourselves and each other that we are not deceived by Satan or the devil or the evil one.

We need to be settled into the truth that Jesus taught us,

John 10:10 (NIV) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Now may the peace of God fill your hearts to overflowing for we are guaranteed victory in the love of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ and ministered in our hearts by the Spirit of God.

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