

The Devil and Satan Defined

“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:8)

The Importance Of The Subject

The above quotation from the Bible, stresses the importance of a sound understanding of what constitutes the Devil and Satan. As Christ was manifested to destroy the work of such, it is obvious that we will not understand God’s plan of salvation, unless we have a clear and proper comprehension of what is meant by these terms.

Unfortunately, current ideas upon the subject are astray from the Bible.

It is taught that the devil is a superhuman monster, a fallen angel, who dominates the minds of humanity, inducing mankind to sin. The teaching induces fear of the devil, and also provides an excuse for sin by blaming it on him.

The doctrine is not only unscriptural, but is also a reflection upon God’s love and omnipotence. Would a God of love allow weak, mortal man to be dominated by a powerful, depraved fallen angel if He has the strength to destroy him? And as God is omnipotent, why does He not rid Himself of the devil, if he be a fallen angel in heaven?

Thus logic would set aside the normal teaching of the devil as unsound and unscientific.

And the teaching of the Bible is in conformity with this statement.

It reveals that the devil is a more familiar figure than is normally recognized: not a fallen angel, but a synonym for human nature in its various forms. It teaches that we are responsible for the sins we commit; but proclaims the means whereby sin can be forgiven, and human nature controlled. This is essential for the salvation of each one.

Obviously, therefore, it is necessary for us to know what constitutes the devil, if we are to successfully resist its power.

How the Bible Defines the Devil

The mission of Christ is expressed as follows:

“Forasmuch then as the children (i.e. those Christ came to save) are partakers of flesh and blood, he (Jesus Christ) also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

This important declaration of Scripture teaches that:

1. Christ came to destroy the devil.
 2. The devil is that which had the power of death.
 3. Christ partook of human nature and died in order to destroy the devil.
 4. In doing so, he delivered others from the power of the devil and of death.
- If we can scripturally define that which Christ came to destroy, and that which has the power of death, we shall know what constitutes the devil.

As far as the Bible is concerned, these two lines of investigation lead to one answer: SIN!

Consider the evidence:

(a) CHRIST CAME TO DESTROY SIN. “He put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). “Christ died for our sins” (I Corinthians 15:3). “His own self bare our sins in his body on the tree” (I Peter 2:24). “He was manifested to take away our sins” (I John 3:5).

(b) SIN WAS THE ORIGINAL CAUSE OF DEATH. “The wages of sin are death” (Romans 6:23). “By one man (not a supernatural devil) sin entered the world and death by sin” (Romans 5:12). “The sting of death is sin” (I Corinthians 15:56).

From this evidence it is obvious that Christ came to destroy sin, and also that the power of death is in sin. It logically follows, therefore, that the devil is a synonym for sin.

The fallacy of the idea that the devil is a fallen angel is clearly illustrated by the definition of the Apostle in Hebrews 2:14 above. How could the death of Jesus encompass the destruction of a powerful, superhuman fallen angel?

It would leave him more powerful than ever!

But once it is recognized that the devil relates to sin, and that sin comes from within, it will be acknowledged that the atoning blood of Jesus is a powerful weapon to defeat and

destroy it! It defeats the power of sin by providing the means of forgiveness; it conquers death through the promise of a resurrection to life eternal (I Corinthians 15:20-26).

What Is Sin?

Primarily, sin is disobedience (I John 3:4). The first sin was punished by man becoming related to death (Genesis 3:19), so that mortality became incidental to human nature.

But sin is also used in the Bible with a secondary meaning. Men are said to have been “made sinners” (Romans 5:19), Jesus is described as being “made sin for us” (II Corinthians 5:21), as having “died unto sin” (Romans 6:10), and as about to return “without sin” (Hebrews 9:28).

This secondary use of the word “sin” implies the state of physical imperfection that resulted because of actual transgression in the first instance (Romans 5:12). Men are not “made” transgressors of the law; they become so by actual wrong-doing. Jesus did no sin though he was born into a state of mortality, with fleshly desires that could have led to sin if he had permitted them to gain the ascendancy.

Though this state of physical imperfection has been inherited by all (Romans 5:17), men are not held responsible for it. It is not their fault that they possess weak, sinful natures. This is an inheritance from Adam. Men are only held accountable, if they recognize what it is but reject the help of God in controlling and conquering it.

It is weak, human nature to which the Apostle refers when he declares “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), and when he wrote that the devil is “that which has the power of death” (Hebrews 2:14). Thus human nature is styled “sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3), for servitude to it leads to sin.

It is because human nature is the cause of sin that Jesus “took part of the same,” as taught by Paul, that “through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

He did this by rendering perfect obedience even unto death, and his spotless righteousness ensured his resurrection unto eternal life (Philippians 2:8-9; Acts 2:24). Thus both in life and in death he conquered the devil (weak, human nature), and opened the way for a similar conquest (through forgiveness of sins) on the part of those who come unto God through him.

Sin In Relation To Human Nature

That sin and human nature are closely related is clearly shown in Romans 7 where Paul discusses these matters at length. There is not the slightest hint to the existence of a supernatural devil tempting mankind; instead, he writes of:

“Sin which dwelleth in me” (Romans 7:17)

“The law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:23)

“I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing; I can will what is right, but how to perform it I find not” (Romans 7:18) R.V.

Paul found himself constantly exposed to a mental conflict. He desired to perform the will of God, but this brought him into conflict with his own desires, and so strong were the latter that he found himself sometimes succumbing to them. He wrote:

“The good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Romans 7:19).

He blamed his failings on the weakness of human nature: “O wretched man that I am!” he exclaimed, “who shall deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24) RSV.

The Gospel supplied the answer. He thanked God that victory was assured through Jesus Christ. Through him he could receive forgiveness of sins, the strength to overcome the flesh (Philippians 4:13), and an assurance of a resurrection to eternal life at his coming (I Corinthians 15:22-23, 53-54). No longer did he live in bondage to sin and death. The spirit of Christ in him (II Corinthians 13:5) triumphed over the devil in him (the “law of sin in his members” (Romans 7:23)), and faith replaced fear.

That can be our experience also.

How Sin Originated

At the epoch of Creation, God looked upon all that He had made, “and, behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Even the serpent was “good” after its kind, for, at that stage, it had not tempted Eve to sin.

But if the description of “very good” applied to all that God had made, where was the devil?

It was non-existent!

Even human nature was then different to what it afterward became.

There is no mention of the devil in the early chapters of Genesis which record how sin entered the world.

They do reveal, however, that man did not remain in his original “very good” state, but developed “evil” inclinations (Genesis 6:21).

What caused the change? The answer is, Sin.

The simple story of Genesis tells how God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, taught them the principles of righteousness, placed them under a law, and set before them the hope of life eternal as the reward of obedience to Him.

But Eve, drawn away by the seductive reasoning of the serpent, broke the Divine law and sinned (Genesis 3:1-7); and afterwards induced her husband to do likewise. Was this caused by a supernatural devil? On the contrary. When all parties were arraigned before the angel of God to answer for their crime, each blamed the other. Adam blamed his wife; Eve blamed the serpent; but the serpent had nobody to blame (Genesis 3:12-14).

It was held solely responsible for the introduction of sin!

If otherwise, why did it not say so? It had a tongue; it possessed outstanding reasoning powers!

It could have blamed the devil!

But it had no one to blame.

Some who recognize the difficulty that this presents to their theory of a supernatural devil, claim that he was there in the form of the serpent.

The fallacy of such a statement, however, is illustrated by the punishment meted out to the serpent, which proves beyond all doubt that it was only an animal:

“Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed ABOVE ALL CATTLE, and above EVERY BEAST of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life” (Genesis 3:14).

By no stretch of imagination could such language apply to a fallen angel.

Through hearkening to the voice of the serpent, the propensities were inflamed in Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:6), and have actively worked in the flesh of man ever since, leading him to sin. Because this was caused through the teaching of the serpent, it became the symbol of sinful flesh (Matthew 23:33); and the atoning death of Jesus (through which the devil can be destroyed – Hebrews 2:14) proclaimed that flesh must be controlled. It is significant that the Lord's crucifixion was symbolized by a serpent lifted on a pole (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14), for it prominently displayed what is figuratively required of his followers; obedience to God's law, resulting in crucifixion of the affections and lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:24).

Christ showed the way. His sinless life was a victory over sin's flesh (John 6:62), and his death upon the cross silenced its impulses as far as he was concerned (Romans 8:3).

In that way he put to death the devil.

Sin Arises From Within

Though originally sin was induced by temptation from without, since then its strongest impulses have been stimulated from within.

The natural thoughts and inclinations of the flesh must be disciplined if we would please God. They form what Paul describes as "the law of sin in our members" (Romans 7:23). In another place, he explains it thus:

"Christ died ... that they which live SHOULD NOT HENCEFORTH LIVE UNTO THEMSELVES, but unto him which died for them and rose again" (II Corinthians 5:15).

To 'live unto ourselves' is to live in sin; to be under the power of the devil! Christ taught:

"Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing come from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him ... that which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from WITHIN, OUT OF THE HEART OF MEN, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evil things COME FROM WITHIN and defile the man" (Mark 7:18-23).

If all these failings come from within, it leaves precious little for any external devil to do! Notice, also, that Christ taught that mankind are defiled by internal thoughts, not external

influences. Obviously he did not believe in a superhuman devil, but warned his hearers against the evil propensities within. Paul likewise taught:

“The works of the flesh are hatred, variance, wrath, strife, seditions, envying, murders, drunkenness, and such like” (Galatians 5:17-21).

This being the state of man, why blame sin on the temptations of a supernatural devil? And that this is the state of man each one can test for himself by a little sober heart-searching. Why do we sin? To gratify self! That is the cause of the world’s ills today. Men do evil things because they *want* to do them, and not because of the influence of a superhuman monster.

On the other hand, the truth in Christ is designed to transform believers mentally and morally in preparation for the physical change that will take place at Christ’s return, and which will perpetuate those characters in a nature of imperishable glory (Philippians 3:21).

“If ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye, through the spirit (the truth – I John 5:7) do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live” (Romans 8:13).

What the Words “Devil” and “Satan” Signify

The word “devil” has been used as a translation for two entirely different Greek words *diabolos* and *diamonion*.

The first word is found in those verses used to prove the existence of a superhuman devil. As a word, it signifies “adversary”, “traducer”, “false accuser”, and “slanderer”. Though it has been generally translated “devil,” it has also been rendered “slanderers” (I Timothy 3:11), and “false accusers” (II Timothy 3:3; Titus 2:3).

In no instance does it relate to a fallen angel, as a careful consideration of the evidence will show.

Diamonion is likewise translated “devil” but signifies “demon”. It is an entirely different word to *diabolos*, and is used to describe a person possessed with a disease, as we shall show.

On the other hand, *satan* is a Hebrew word, transliteration into the English language, and meaning “adversary”. The word is often properly translated in that way, in certain Bible

passages, but belief in a supernatural devil caused biased translators to render it as Satan in other parts of the Bible.

An example of this bias is found in Psalm 109:6 which reads: “Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand.” The bias even extended to turning Satan into a proper noun with a capital initial.

Yet the same Hebrew word is rendered “adversaries” in vv. 4,20,29 of the same chapter! (Psalm 109:4,6,20,29)

It should be so rendered in verse 6. In fact, in the Revised Standard Version the verse reads: “Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser bring him to trial.”

In that version, “Satan” becomes “accuser”, a word that conforms to the English meaning of the Hebrew expression.

Bible usage of the word “satan” shows that it is used of both good and evil adversaries, though the translators have only rendered it as “Satan” where the adversary is obviously a wicked one.

For example, the word appears in Numbers 22 in relation to the angel sent to rebuke the wicked prophet Balaam, but there it is rendered “adversary” and “withstand” (Numbers 22:22,32). In I Samuel 29 and II Samuel 19 it is translated adversaries (I Samuel 29:4; II Samuel 19). In I Kings 5, it occurs in the statement: “There is neither adversary (Hebrew *satan*) nor evil occurrent” (I Kings 5:4).

The Hebrew word *Satan* should be rendered consistently as adversary wherever it occurs; in no instance does it relate to a fallen angel.

When God Was Satan

In one event recorded in the Old Testament, even God appeared in the role of satan, or adversary. The incident is described in two places (II Samuel 24:1; I Chronicles 21:1). The former place states:

“The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah.’”

However, the parallel account in the latter place records:

“Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.”

In the first quotation, the action is attributed to God; in the second, to satan!

What is correct?

Those who teach that the word satan signifies a fallen angel tempting mankind to sin are faced with a contradiction, or the expediency of teaching that God worked through His arch-enemy!

Both explanations are quite unsatisfactory; and also quite unnecessary.

Let it be understood that the word “satan” means “adversary”, and let it be acknowledged that God was adverse to Israel at that time, and the difficulty is removed.

As an adversary to Israel, God overruled events to bring about circumstances that made David fear opposition against his regime. This caused him to set about numbering his fighting men, which resulted in him placing confidence in them rather than in God. So he fell into sin.

As this incident shows, the word “satan” means “adversary” and the context of each reference determines whether the adversary in question was good or bad, or whether the term related to a person, a government, the lust of the flesh, or an adverse experience. All are represented in the Bible as Satan, but in no instance does it teach that the term defines a superhuman monster tempting men to sin.

The difference between “devil” and “satan” can be summed up by recognizing that whereas the former relates invariably to an evil adversary, the latter signifies merely adversary, the context determining whether it is good or bad.

Manifestations of the Devil and Satan

Though the devil basically relates to human nature, or the lusts of the flesh, it is manifested in various forms. For instance, a government can become a political manifestation of the flesh, if it stands in opposition to the ways of God. Thus Peter wrote:

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8).

In this verse, “devil” is *diabolos* in the Greek, and signifies “false accuser”, and the word “adversary” is *antidikos*, meaning “an opponent at law”. The “opponent at law”, a “false accuser” of the Christians was not a supernatural devil, but the persecuting civil authorities of the day. They are likened to “a roaring lion” because of their rapacious fierceness. For a similar reason, Paul wrote that he was “delivered out of the mouth of the lion” (II Timothy 4:17). In other words, he escaped the imprisonment that was threatened against him.

Christ also referred to civil authorities as “the devil”. He told his followers: “The devil shall cast some of you into prison; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

Certainly this “devil” was not a fallen angel, but those civil authorities who opposed the spread of Christianity.

Concerning the same false-accusing opponents, Paul wrote:

“We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities (or governments), and against powers (or authorities), against the rulers of the darkness of this world (Greek *ages*), against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

This statement is frequently used to prove the existence of the devil as a fallen angel, but the greatest adversary and false accusers of the Christians in those days were the Jewish and Pagan authorities. They bitterly persecuted believers, leading Paul to warn them to be on their guard against the “wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11) or false accusers. He had in mind the unscrupulous stratagems of men in authority who were prepared to use any means to obtain a conviction against them. “We are not ignorant of his devices,” he declared (II Corinthians 2:11). He could well write thus, for he, himself, once held such a position, falsely accusing followers of the Lord, “entering into every house, and hailing men and women committing them to prison” (Acts 8:3). However, his conversion to Christ changed all that.

The pagan world often slandered, or falsely accused the followers of Christ, and therefore is identified in Scripture as the devil. The unscrupulous opposition believers received from their pagan neighbors could easily have incited them to actions that would not have reflected credit on the Lord whom they attempted to follow. The Apostles recognized the danger, and exhorted them not to succumb to the hostile environment in which they lived. They urged them to talk circumspectly towards those that “are without”, and to use discretion even in the appointment of officials in their congregations. They drew attention to the dangers of setting up a novice in a position of importance in the community: “lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (I Timothy 3:6-7).

Would the devil of theology “condemn” one lifted up with pride? By no means. Such a monster would rather induce him to “stand on his dignity”, and would seek to increase his pride. On the other hand, would not “outsiders” be disposed to condemn followers of the Lord for acts of inconsistency? Of course they would and do. They slander and calumniate those who attempt to maintain a right course of action, and yet momentarily fall. And because this gives occasion “to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme” (II Samuel 12:14), Paul warned believers to be on their guard.

The “devil” against which he warned them constituted the pagan, social and political world which was ruled by the flesh.

The term “devil” has also been applied to individuals. Christ called Judas Iscariot a devil (John 6:70), and described Peter as “satan” because “he savoured not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33). According to this statement, to savour the things of men (the flesh) is equivalent to being a “satan”.

When the flesh dominates a person to the exclusion of the things of God, he will show opposition to all that Christ stands for. He will be like Judas: a devil, a bitter opponent to ways of righteousness and truth. He will be justly termed “a child of the devil”, a product of the flesh (Acts 13:10). The Jewish leaders in the days of the Lord, provided an example of this. They claimed to be the sons of faithful Abraham and to worship God in truth, but Christ declared: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye do” (John 8:44).

They were men of flesh, being dominated by its lusts, and therefore the progeny of the devil.

When John wrote: “He that committeth sin is of the devil: for the devil sinneth from the beginning” (I John 3:8), he taught the same truth. It has been the lusts of the flesh that have driven men to sin from the beginning. Christ came to “destroy the works of the devil”. He came to destroy sin; and did so by opening a way for forgiveness and salvation. John’s comment should be aligned with the teaching of the Lord Jesus: “From within, out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts,” etc. The sacrifice of Christ is designed to reveal that the flesh must be figuratively crucified if mankind would server God acceptably. Thus Paul taught:

“They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts”
(Galatians 5:24).

Such deny themselves that they might serve Christ. In so doing, the devil is defeated, for it constitutes the unlawful lusts of the flesh, which war against the requirements of God (Romans 8:7-8; I John 2:15-16).

The world without is identified as Satan. In I Timothy 1, Paul wrote of two heretics: “I have delivered them unto Satan that they may learn *not to blaspheme*” (I Timothy 1:20). Would the “devil” of popular concept teach one *not to blaspheme*? Would Paul deliver anybody to such? By no means; rather the contrary. Paul was referring to the discipline of excommunication that he hoped might teach them a lesson, so that they would learn “not to blaspheme”.

Paul’s objective in excommunication were to correct and restore the erring parties, as well as to protect others from their false teaching. He hoped that his action would cause them to review and revise their theories, so that again embracing Truth in its fullness, they might be restored to the congregation (I Corinthians 5:1-5,13; II Corinthians 5:5-7; 7:8-12).

Again, to believers in Pergamos, Asia, Christ declared:

“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is ... where Satan dwelleth” (Revelation 2:13).

Satan’s seat! Satan’s dwelling place! In Pergamos? So Christ taught! How was that possible? Read the context. Notice how strong were the forces of error in that city (Revelation 2:14-16). It contained the headquarters of those who were adverse to the Truth through their errors. Another city, Smyrna, was noted for the “synagogue of Satan” found therein (Revelation 2:9). The term defines a religious community opposed to the truth; but if it is taught that Satan is a superhuman monster, such expressions would mean that he lived in Pergamos (Revelation 2:13), conducted a religious meeting in Smyrna, and also had charge of the prison (Revelation 2:8-13).

Job’s Satan

“Surely the Satan of the book of Job was a superhuman being!” we are often told. He is represented as “going up and down in the earth,” of presenting himself before the Lord, and being in company with other “sons of God.”

“How could he present himself before the Lord if he were not in heaven?” it is sometimes asked. Or, “Does not the term ‘sons of God’ relate to immortal angels?”

In reply, we stress that the book of Job clearly shows that Satan had no power to afflict Job; his sufferings were inflicted by God. God declared: “Thou movest Me against him, to destroy him without cause” (Job 2:3). Job himself, recognized that “the hand of God had touched him” (Job 19:21). The record clearly states that “the Lord brought his evil upon him” (Job 42:11).

In fact, there is nothing superhuman associated with the Satan described in the Book of Job.

This conclusion will be reinforced, when it is recognized that the term “sons of God” does not relate to angels, but is frequently used for mortal believers:

“As many as received him (Christ), to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God ... Now are we the sons of God” (I John 3:2).

These references (and others could be cited) clearly reveal that the term “sons of God” relate to mortal believers.

Further, a person is described as presenting himself before God when he engages in worship. An example is provided in Deuteronomy 19 where such is said to “stand before the Lord” when he came before the appointed priests and judges set up in Israel (Deuteronomy 19:17).

Now when these facts are combined together and considered in the light of the term Satan as meaning “adversary”, the first chapter of Job presents a picture of an unnamed adversary of Job, joining with others in worship before God, and accusing Job of hypocrisy. He appears to have been a much travelled man (Job 1:7) with an inferiority complex! A small-minded, jealous associate of the righteous Job, maliciously slandering his name.

The drama of Job has been frequently enacted since then. Even among the company of the Lord’s apostles, called “the sons of God” (I John 3:2), there was found Satan in the person of Judas Iscariot. The Lord described him as “a devil” (John 6:71), because of his impending betrayal of the Lord.

We have carefully examined personally every argument advanced from the Bible to prove the existence of a superhuman devil, and have found none of them conclusive. Such passages as Ezekiel 28:13-15, Isaiah 14:12-15, and Revelation 12:7-9 are constantly advanced, but fail to support the theory when the facts are considered. Ezekiel 28 is “a lamentation upon the king of Tyre” (Ezekiel 28:13-15); Isaiah 14 is a “proverb against the king of Babylon” (Isaiah 14:4,12-15); and Revelation 12 is a prophecy against Rome (Revelation 12).

It is true that Revelation 12 describes a “war in heaven” (Revelation 12:7), but the same chapter also speaks of a birth of a man-child “in heaven” (Revelation 12:1-2), so that the language is obviously symbolic. The devil (false accuser) and satan (adversary) is described as “a dragon” (v.9), “having seven heads and ten horns” (v.3), whose tail drew the third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth!

That this is highly symbolic language, relating to the political order of Rome, is proved beyond all doubt by the explanation given in Revelation 17, which identifies the system with “that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:9-10;18). The city that ruled the world in the days when the Revelation was recorded was the city of Rome.

Obviously, the devil and satan of Revelation 12 relate to the politico-religious system of Rome.

What About the Demons?

We pointed out previously that there are two Greek words translated “devil”, the second of which is the word *diamonion*. Parkhurst, in his Greek Lexicon, states that this word signifies:

“A lesser god, the spirit of departed human beings who had power to possess a person and so afflict him.”

The word was born of superstition, a superstition still current among many people. Some backward people still believe that certain kinds of illnesses are due to the malignant influence of the spirit of a departed human being, taking possession of the afflicted person.

In some eastern countries, the same idea persists, and doctors find that their use of modern scientific methods is often useless unless the hypothetical “devil”, the creation of imagination and superstition, is first “destroyed” or “cast out”. It is not unusual for modern medical men in the East to thus speak, in all seriousness, of “casting out a devil”

when referring to the healing of such an afflicted person. They accommodate their description to an expression which conveys something to the mind of the natives. ** Hippocrates, the physician of ancient Greece, wrote an essay on epilepsy, which was called the “sacred disease” because people believed the priests’ teaching, that epileptics were possessed, and because priests, magicians, and imposters derived considerable revenue from attempting to cure the disease by expiations and charms. The essay was written to expose this delusion, he seeking to prove that this disease was neither more divine nor sacred than any other.

** *Norman Lewis in a book on Burma entitled Golden Earth records that such ideas are common among the Burmese.*

The Bible, therefore in using such terms as “casting out devils”, merely accommodated its expressions to the current vernacular. To “cast out a devil” was to cure an illness. Thus such expressions occur as: “Jesus rebuked the devil ... and the child was cured” (Matthew 17:18).

Usually, the term to be “possessed of a devil” has relation to mental diseases. For example, when Jesus asked the Jews: “Why go ye about to kill me?”, they replied: “You have a devil (*diamonion*), who goes about to kill you!?” (John 7:19-20). The statement, “You have a devil,” is equivalent to the modern expression: “You are mad!”

Though the disciples used the term *diamonion*, it does not mean that they endorsed the pagan idea of the spirits of departed men inhabiting those on earth, any more than we endorse the literal meanings of words that have a colloquial significance. For example, the word “lunatic” signifies “affected by the moon,” but when we use it we do not have that meaning in mind. We speak of pandemonium reigning when any disorder takes place, but we do not endorse the literal meaning of the word which signifies that the disorder is due to the malignant influence of demons. We talk of somebody being “bewitched,” without believing in witches. We make reference to “St. Vitus’ Dance,” without heeding the actual meaning of the term.

So with the use of the word *diamonion*. It is used colloquially by the Jews to describe one “possessed” by a disease.

Christ used the language of his day, without necessarily accepting the superstitions involved. He made reference to Beelzebub, the god of the flies worshipped by the Philistines of Ekron, as though this god had a living personality (Matthew 12:27), merely to turn a point of discussion back upon his opponents. He certainly did not endorse belief in the god as a living being.

How To Conquer the Devil

We have shown that the devil relates to the sinful tendencies of the flesh. Such are only active in a living body, so that when Christ died on the cross, this died also. When he rose to life eternal, sin in the flesh had no place in the incorruptible nature to which he was changed (Romans 6:4-7; I Corinthians 15:54).

His sacrifice illustrates the way in which we can conquer the devil. We sin and are in need of forgiveness, and this is obtainable in Christ Jesus. Thus Peter exhorted when preaching the Gospel:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins ...” (Acts 2:38).

By making contact with the Lord Jesus through belief and baptism, we take the first steps in defeating the devil; for in Christ only can we receive forgiveness of sins. John wrote:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our us sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

The forgiveness of sins establishes the basis whereby we can build a life modelled upon that of the Lord Jesus. Through the strength derived from him, we can, in measure, conquer the flesh (Philippians 4:13). Paul taught:

“Christ died for all, that they which live (i.e. in newness of life through baptism – Romans 6:5) should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (II Corinthians 5:15).

Again:

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

By following the example set by Christ we are led to a higher way of life, one that is dominated by Divine principles and not the desires of the flesh. In that way, we build into our lives *Divine characteristics* such as were manifested by the Lord Jesus, and are enabled to live in hope that, at his coming, we will be granted the divine nature that he now possess (II Peter 1:4).

Paul wrote:

“We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (from heaven); who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:20).

Immortal life in the Kingdom of God to be set up on earth (Daniel 2:44) is the hope set before us. To attain unto it we must conquer the devil, or sin in the flesh. The first step to that end is an understanding of the purpose of God in Christ, including his conquest of the devil. Let us clearly identify the devil and we will be better fitted to grapple with the problem of sin that faces us. Let us recognize our own weakness, and learn that we can conquer the flesh to the glory of God; and by so doing lay the foundation for eternal life at the coming of the Lord.

Appendix

THE WORDS “DEVIL” AND “SATAN” ANALYZED

Devil is used as the translation for two different words: *Diabolos* and *Diamonion*.

DIABOLOS signifies “false accuser”, “calumniator”, “slanderer”, etc.

It has been rendered “slanderers” in I Timothy, and “false accusers” in II Timothy and Titus (I Timothy 3:11; II Timothy 3:3; Titus 2:3).

In no place is it used of a superhuman being tempting mankind to sin.

It is translated “devil” in the following passages: Matthew 4:1,5,8,11; 11:39; 25:41; Luke 4:2,3,5,6,13; 8:12; John 6:70; 8:44; 13:2; Acts 10:38; 13:10; Ephesians 4:27; 6:11; I Timothy 3:6,7; II Timothy 2:26; Hebrews 2:14; James 4:7; I Peter 5:8; I John 3:8,10; Jude 9; Revelation 2:10; 12:9,12; 20:2,10).

In all other places where the words “devil” or “devils” appear, the word in the original is *diamonion*.

DIABOLOS is thus used to describe a person (John 6:70); slanderous women (I Timothy 3:11); false accusers (II Timothy 3:3); sin (Hebrews 2:14); the flesh (Acts 13:10); the antagonistic world (Ephesians 4:27); persecuting civil authorities (Ephesians 6:11; Revelation 2:10;13).

DIAMONION was the word used to describe a certain disease. It was so used because of the ancient superstition that diseases were attributed to the malignant influence of so-called spirits of dead heroes taking possession of a person. The Bible accommodates itself to the language of the times, without endorsing this false pagan teaching. "Casting out devils" merely signifies curing a disease.

SATAN is a Hebrew word, signifying "to oppose" or "to be an adversary." The word is translated "adversary", "resist", "withstand", and is also transliterated as "satan".

It is translated "adversary" in the following places: (Numbers 22:22; I Samuel 29:4; II Samuel 19:22; I Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25; Psalm 38:20; 71:13; 109:4,20,29).

It is translated "withstand" in Numbers 22:32.

It is translated "resist" in Zechariah 3:1.

It is translated "satan" in I Chronicles 21:1; Job 1:6-9,12; 2:1-4,6,7; Psalm 109:6; Zechariah 3:1,2; Matthew 4:10; 12:26; 16:23; Mark 1:13; 3:23,26; 4:15; 8:33; Luke 4:8; 10:18; 11:18; 13:16; 22:3,31; John 13:27; Acts 5:3; 26:18; Romans 16:20; I Corinthians 5:5; 7:5; II Corinthians 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; I Thessalonians 2:18; II Thessalonians 2:9; I Timothy 1:20; 5:15; Revelation 2:9,13,24; 3:9; 12:9; 20:2,7.

From the above it will be found that the term has been used to describe God when revealed as an opponent to Israel (I Chronicles 21:1), an "angel of the Lord" (Numbers 22:22,32), good and evil men (I Samuel 29:4; II Samuel 19:22; Psalm 38:20), an Apostle (Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33), adverse religious communities (Revelation 2:9), sickness (Luke 13:16), evil thoughts (Luke 22:3; John 13:27; Acts 5:3), the flesh (Acts 26:18), the world as adverse to God's ways (I Corinthians 5:5; I Timothy 1:20), governments (Revelation 12:9; Luke 10:18).