



## **BIBLE FACTS ON THE WORDS “DEVIL” AND “SATAN”**

Our aim in these notes is to consider this subject, using the Bible to define the meaning of the words “devil” and “satan”. We will take the stand of one who is looking into the matter without a preconceived or biased view of what the words refer to. To do this we will first look at every use of the word “devil” and “satan” in the Old Testament. In this way we will gain the understanding that those who believed and studied the word of God would have held in Jesus Christ’s day; for what we know as the Old Testament was the Scriptures to them.

### **The “Devil” in the Old Testament**

The word “devil” **does not occur at all** in the Old Testament. Nowhere in the Bible from Genesis to Malachi (a period of 4000 years), is the word “devil” found. This **Bible Fact** may come as a surprise to many who have been taught that there is a supernatural devil that tempts men and women to sin. There is no place that even infers that man is tempted by a supernatural power which is the enemy of God.

The word “devils” occurs four times in the Old Testament and relates to pagan gods. These references are considered at the end of this lesson under the heading “Devils and Demons”.

### **Old Testament Teaching on the Source of Temptation and Sin**

As has been well documented in earlier lessons, the root of temptation to sin comes from the mind or heart of man himself. The following references clearly demonstrate God’s teaching in the Old Testament on this point. They show that the root cause of sin lies in man himself. Consider the following:

- “**God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually**” (Genesis 6:5)
- “**The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth**” (Genesis 8:21)
- “**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?**” (Jeremiah 17:9)

From these quotations we see that the “heart of man” represents man’s mental thought process. God shows that it is *man’s own imagination* that produces the temptations that lead to sin. Nowhere in the Old Testament is it taught that these sinful desires are to be attributed to a “superhuman evil devil”, as suggested by some religions. For 4000 years from creation to the time of Jesus, not one person, enlightened by the word of God, attributed temptation to such a “devil”. God treats man as a rational being who is responsible for his own thoughts and actions.

### **“Satan” in the Old Testament**

Following is the list of **all** the places where the Hebrew word for “satan” occurs. This list is taken from *Englishman’s Hebrew Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament*. The Hebrew word is given, followed by the English translation from the 1611 Authorised Version (AV).

From the above list several points become very obvious.

- The Hebrew word is not used very frequently throughout the Old Testament. When you consider how many examples of sinful behaviour are recorded, it is remarkable that satan does not come into the picture more often, if indeed the popular teaching about satan was true.
- On more than half the occasions where the word occurs in the 1611 Authorised Version of the Bible, the translators have translated it as “an adversary”, “to resist”, “to withstand” and “an accusation”.
- In the four passages of Scripture where they have left the Hebrew word *satan* untranslated, they have, in three of these, made a marginal note that the word means “an adversary” (ie in Job 1:6; Psalm 109:6 and Zechariah 3:1).

Let us now look at a selection of these passages where the Hebrew word *satan* occurs.



The first time the word is used in the Bible is in Numbers 22:22,32. As we read this section through we realise that the “adversary” that “withstood” or “opposed” Balaam, the wicked prophet, was an angel of God. Thus the word simply means “one who stands in opposition to another”. Yet the Hebrew word in these verses is the word *satan*. Therefore the angel doing God’s will is called “satan” because he is “opposing” or is “an adversary” to a wicked man.

The next occurrence in 1 Samuel 29:4 refers to David who, the Philistines feared, would act against them in battle and therefore be their opponent or “adversary”. Thus David would be a “satan” to the Philistines.

In 2 Samuel 19:22 David says that two of his soldiers who caused him trouble were “adversaries” or “satans” to him.

By following the same procedure through we note that the references in the book of Kings all refer to nations around Israel that were “adversaries” to them. We read: **“The Lord stirred up an adversary** (Hebrew *satan*) **unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite”** (1 Kings 11:14). Again: **“God stirred him up another adversary** (Hebrew *satan*), **Rezon the son of Eliada”** (1 Kings 11:23). Here we see that it is *God Himself* who stirs up these people to afflict Israel, because Israel had forsaken Him. The “satan” is named in each case—he is a mortal man who led military opposition against Israel. These adversaries to Israel were not sent to make Israel sin at all. They were sent as God’s method of punishment because they had sinned.

#### **The Four Places where Satan is Left Untranslated**

As has been mentioned, there are only four places in the text of the Authorised Version of the Old Testament where the word has been left untranslated and appears as “Satan”. This in itself should cause the rational Bible student to examine the matter very carefully to see why this is so. We should remember that in all cases to this point we have seen that the word “satan” has referred to:

- an angel acting on God’s behalf **to oppose** someone,
- men who **oppose** the ways of another.

The *satan* is not necessarily morally wrong—simply **in opposition** to another. In none of the above cases could it be suggested that an evil supernatural being is referred to.

We will now look at the places where the word is untranslated and left as “*Satan*”.

This first reference is an interesting one: “*Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel*” (1 Chronicles 21:1). Now if we compare this with the parallel record of the incident in 2 Samuel 24:1 we read: “*The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah*”. Here we find that the one who was the “adversary” or “Satan” to Israel on this occasion was *God Himself*. God is here acting as an “adversary” (Hebrew *satan*) to the nation because they were trusting in themselves and had turned from Him.

The second place where the word has been left untranslated is in the book of Job. The Authorised Version translators have made the marginal note that the word means “adversary” (Job 1:6). Who then is this adversary to Job?

We are told, “*Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan [Hebrew meaning “the adversary”] came also among them*” (Job 1:6). To this point in the Bible we have not seen one reference to an independent supernatural “satan” leading men to do evil, so we need to evaluate what is being said here. Is God really, for the first time in His word, introducing us to such a being? When we consider how God has spoken of the angels in His presence, it is impossible to imagine or accept such a discussion as this taking place in heaven. We read: “*The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure*” (Psalm 103:19-21). Thus in heaven in the court of God there are the angels who obey him and do His will. Further in the New Testament we are again told of the angels and their work: “*Are they [the angels] not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*” (Hebrews 1:14). The Bible is clear—the angels minister



to those who are the heirs of salvation. The satan or adversary of Job wanted God to take away all Job had so “*he will curse thee to thy face*” (v11). This satan wanted a test put on Job that would ensure he lost his salvation.

Although we are not told specifically who the adversary is here in Job, the only scripturally logical conclusion is that the “*sons of God*” who gathered were the believers where Job lived. They had come to worship God, but among them there was a man who was envious of Job and the material things he possessed (Job 1:9-11). As we read through the book of Job we realise that Job understood, and so did his acquaintances (Job 42:11), that it was God who brought the trials upon him (Job 19:21). Job’s words show without doubt that he that he understood this when he said: “*The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*” (1:21); and again, “*Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*” (2:10). It was through these trials that Job showed the quality of his faith and patience (James 5:11).

Envy is one of those evils which the followers of God must always guard against in their thinking. It is listed among “the works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19-21). James says: “*If ye have **bitter envying** and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth...For where **envying and strife** is, there is confusion and every evil work*” (James 3:14-17). It was “envy” in Christ’s day that caused the Jewish leaders to demand the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ: “*Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him **for envy***” (Mark 15:9-10).

The third place is Psalm 109:6. In this psalm it is difficult to understand why the translators have left only one of the four places where the word *satan* occurs untranslated. We note that verses 4, 20 and 29 are translated “adversary”, while verse 6 is left as “Satan”. However there is the marginal note “adversary” to guide us in our understanding. As we read through this psalm we see that it is prophetic of Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. Judas was encouraged by the chief priests and rulers to betray Jesus, for they were an “adversary” or “satan” to Jesus. They stood at Judas’ right hand, as the psalm says (v 6). Peter quotes verse 8 of the psalm in Acts 1:20, where he mentions that Judas “*was guide to them that took Jesus*” (v 16), confirming that this psalm is speaking of Judas.

The final place where *satan* is left untranslated is in Zechariah 3:1-3. Here, as the history of the times shows, those who were opposed to the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem under Joshua and Zerubbabel were the Samaritans. The account of their opposition is recorded in Ezra 4:1-6. In verse 6 Israel’s opponents wrote “an accusation”, a word derived from *satan* meaning “an adverse letter” (a letter expressing opposition), in which they made false charges against the Jews. Thus the “satan” here in Zechariah is clearly identified as the Samaritan opposition to the work of the Jews.

From the above detailed analysis of all the references to “Satan” in the Old Testament we see that the word means nothing more than “an opponent, an adversary”. There is *no evidence* in these references, read in context, for a supernatural, God-defying being who leads people to sin. If we look factually at every reference in the Old Testament **there is not one place where Satan tempts a person to sin.**

#### **Conclusions Drawn from the Old Testament on “Satan” and “Devil”**

As can be clearly seen, there is no basis or foundation in the Old Testament to support the view that there is a supernatural evil power that tempts man to sin. We have shown the sense in which the word “satan” has been used, and noted the fact that the word “devil” is not mentioned once in the Old Testament. More than that—it is clearly obvious that the Old Testament teaches that temptation to sin comes from the heart of man himself.

#### **“Satan” in the New Testament**

When we come to look at the word “Satan” in the New Testament we realise that the word has been brought from the Old Testament across into the New. We know that in the Old Testament *satan* means “an adversary”. It obviously carries this same meaning into the New Testament.

It can be used of people who oppose the way of God, as Jesus used it of the apostle Peter when he said to him: “*Get thee behind me, Satan*” (Matthew 16:23). Jesus then explained why he spoke like this to Peter—“*for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but of men.*” Though well



intentioned, Peter's thoughts were contrary to God's will and because he tried to influence Jesus by this thinking, he was an adversary to him.

The word can also be used of those thoughts which oppose or are adverse to God's way, and it is used this way by the apostle Peter when Ananias and Sapphira decided to steal money for themselves. Here we read that Peter said to Ananias, "*Why hath **Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit***", which he explains in the following verse, "*Why hast **thou conceived this thing in thine heart?***" (Acts 5:3-4). As we have seen in the Old Testament it is *the imagination of the thoughts of the heart* of man that produces temptation and sin as we have shown above (Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9) Ananias allowed those evil thoughts that were adverse to God's ways to deceive him into thinking he could lie and steal. So Peter quite logically calls those deceitful lusts "Satan", as they oppose God's ways.

We see then that the word *Satan* in the New Testament only means "an adversary", and can be applied to either a person or those who oppose another in doing God's will, just as it was in the Old Testament. It can also be applied to the deceitful desires in our nature that tempt us to oppose God's will.

The following quotations show how the word *satan* is used of both political and religious powers that are opposed to those who are walking in God's ways.

It is used of the **political opposition** that the believers faced in Pergamos. Jesus was well aware of this opposition and said: "*I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, **even where Satan's seat is**: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, **where Satan dwelleth***" (Revelation 2:13). Pergamos was the capital of the province of Lydia in Asia (now Turkey) and the "seat" of government for Pagan Rome was there. The believers were suffering for their faith and one, Antipas, had been killed. The "Satan" or "adversary" Jesus speaks of was a way of describing the political leaders who persecuted believers—he was certainly not referring to a supernatural being living in Pergamos and persecuting them.

It is used of the false believers in Smyrna. Jesus says: "*I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, **but are the synagogue of Satan***". Here **religious opposition** to the believers is spoken of, and Jesus calls such adversaries "*the synagogue of Satan*" (Revelation 2:9).

Paul uses the word "Satan" when speaking of those who opposed his preaching in Thessalonica. The Jews had forbidden him to speak and had incited the civil authorities to prohibit him from preaching there, causing him to flee from the city (Acts 17:5-10). He calls those who now hindered his return "Satan" or the adversary: "*Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but **Satan hindered us***" (1 Thessalonians 2:18)

The word *satan* meaning adversary is sometimes used interchangeably with the word *devil* in the New Testament. This can be seen in the parable of the sower. The seed that fell by the wayside was taken by "Satan" in Mark 4:15, but in Luke 8:12 we are told that it was taken by "*the devil*". Thus we find a close correlation between these words. The word *devil* is explained a little later in this lesson, as is the connection between the use of "devil" and "satan".

### **The Root of Temptation and Sin Defined in the New Testament**

In the New Testament Jesus and the apostles clearly describe how we are tempted to sin.

- "*For **from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man***" (Mark 7:21-23). The Lord Jesus Christ describes where sin comes from—"out of the heart of man".
- "*Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away **of his own lust, and enticed***" (James 1:13-15). The natural inclination of every one of us is to satisfy self. This urge is strong and leads to sin. James goes on to point out that sin then brings forth death.
- Paul, in Galatians 5:16-21, lists "*the works of the flesh*", which are "*adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like*", stating that



“they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God”. Those who are associated with Christ strive to think and act differently. They “*have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts*” (v 24). Paul, like Jesus Christ, is teaching that the promptings to sin come from within—from “**the lust of the flesh**”. In another place Paul calls the source of such promptings “*the carnal mind*” (Romans 8:7), or, the mind of “*the flesh*”. We do not need a supernatural tempter to cause us to sin. As descendants of Adam, we are all prone to sin.

- “*I know that in me (that is in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing*”. Speaking from the heart, Paul tells of his constant personal struggle to overcome sin. He points out that it is in his own flesh that the desires reside which prompt him to sin (Romans 7:15-25).

The way to overcome temptation is to develop a mind that puts the will of God first. Jesus Christ is the supreme example for us in this. Like him, we must reject temptation to sin. As Paul says, we must “*crucify the flesh*”, or put to death “*the [mind or thoughts of the] flesh*” with its promptings to sin (see Romans 8:13; 6:6; Colossians 3:5).

As we consider these few verses in their context we see that the New Testament is in complete agreement with the Old regarding the root cause of temptation and sin. Not only so, but if we are honest with ourselves we will find that this is true of our own experiences in life.

### **Man’s Capacity to Sin Personified as “the Devil” in the New Testament**

Man’s sin-prone nature, the root cause of sin, is common to all mankind as descendants of Adam, **including Jesus Christ**. Those desires in our nature that can lead to sin are described in the New Testament by the Greek word *diabolos*, which in most places has been rendered “devil” in our Bible. Let us first look at the Greek word and its meaning. Vine in his *Dictionary of New Testament Words* states: “*diabolos* means an accuser, a slanderer (from *diaballo*, ‘to accuse, malign’). This is, in fact, the way that the word is rendered by the translators in the following passages:

“Even so must wives be grave, not **slanderers**” (1 Timothy 3:11)

“For men shall be...without natural affection, trucebreakers, **false accusers**” (2 Timothy 3:3)

“That the aged women be...not **false accusers**” (Titus 2:3)

From the way this word has been translated we can grasp its meaning. It expresses the idea of “making a false statement about another”, whether of a man or of God. The first example of such a “false accusation” or “slander” in the Bible was when the serpent lied to Eve saying: “*Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil*” (Genesis 3:4-5). This is a blatant example of “false accusation” against God. God had said: “*In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*” (Genesis 2:17). Eve listened to the serpent’s “slander” or “false accusation” against God and His word, and sinned by disobeying God and eating of the fruit. If we were to use the Greek word to describe what took place we could say that the serpent was a *diabolos* or “false accuser” of God.

### **The “Diabolos” or “False Accuser”**

Let us look at some of the places where *diabolos* occurs but is translated as “devil”.

“*Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?*” (John 6:70). Here Jesus speaks of Judas Iscariot and uses the word *diabolos* to describe him. If the word had been correctly translated it would read: “and one of you is a **false accuser**”. As we know, Judas Iscariot is the one who betrayed his Lord through his false accusation against him. He confessed: “*I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood*” (Matthew 27:3-6).

- “*Ye are of your father the devil [Greek *diabolos*]*” (John 8:41-44). As we read the context we see that there was an intense discussion taking place between Jesus and the Jews in the Temple in Jerusalem. The discussion centred on Fatherhood. The Jews protested that God was their Father, whereas Jesus claimed that he was the Son of God. It is in this context that Jesus shows the contrast between himself and them. Whereas he did the will of God, they were by their words and deeds clearly “the seed of the serpent” that had been foretold in Genesis 3:15. This seed would follow their own desires and sin against God. Therefore, personifying the word *diabolos*, he says that they were the children of the *diabolos*. Jesus, and all who do the will of God are the sons of God. Thus Jesus points out that there are only two classes of people,



those who do the will of God or those who follow the desires of the flesh that lead to sin who are the seed of the *diabolos*, or “devil”.

- In Acts 13:10 Paul describes Elymas the sorcerer in the following terms: “*O full of all subtilty [like the serpent in Eden—Genesis 3:1] and all mischief, thou child of the devil [diabolos], thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*” Elymas was acting in exactly the same way as the serpent had in Eden. He “perverted” the right way of God. Using personification for those sinful desires that motivated him, Paul describes him as a “*child of the devil*”.
- “*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil [diabolos], and he will flee from you*” (James 4:7). James has already pointed out that all temptation comes from within man (James 1:13-15), but if we commit our ways to God and resist sinful temptations, then we will overcome them.

We can see now that this word is used in the New Testament to summarise that sinful propensity that is part of all human nature. Following Adam and Eve’s transgression, it passed through to all mankind (Romans 5:12). It is that sinful tendency that Paul spoke of saying: “*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth **no good thing***” (Romans 7:18).

### **The “Diabolos” as a Political and Religious Force**

Because the word *diabolos* is used to represent that power that leads to sin, it is also used to represent those who are motivated by fleshly ambitions and desires. They can be either individuals or a group of people.

Following are some examples:

- “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried” (Revelation 2:10). Here John speaks of the persecution that the believers in Smyrna were suffering from the ruling Roman power.
- “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11-12). Here Paul warns the believers in Ephesus of the persecution that they faced from both political and religious opposition that would falsely accuse and slander them.
- “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8-9). Here Peter warns of the persecution that the believers were facing from the authorities. This pagan political power falsely accused them, bringing terrible afflictions upon them.

### **Death—the Inevitable Consequence of Sin**

The consistent teaching of the Bible is that death has come by sin. In the beginning Adam sinned and was sentenced to die (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:17-19), and we have all inherited that mortality that came by sin.

- “*By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin*” (Romans 5:12)

God, however, has provided the means by which sin can be forgiven through the perfect sacrifice of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, thus providing deliverance from that grim cycle ending in death.

- “*As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)
- “*As sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 5:21)
- “*The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 6:23)

### **Christ and his Crucifixion—Victory over Sin and Death**

From the preceding quotations we see that Jesus Christ is the one God has provided to give us the wonderful hope of eternal life, instead of the inevitable consequence of death because of sin. The ultimate victory over sin and death was achieved by the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross.

- “*Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures*” (1 Corinthians 15:3)



- “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5)
- “He bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24)
- “He put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26)

#### **How could Christ’s Crucifixion Bring Deliverance from Sin and Death?**

Jesus Christ shared the identical nature with those he came to save (Hebrews 2:14), and so was able to identify with mankind in the struggle against sin.

- “He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15)
- “In that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18)
- “God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3)

Unlike all other descendants of Adam, Jesus overcame every temptation to sin throughout his life and obeyed God perfectly. In his death upon the cross he rendered the final act which perfected his obedience: “He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). Thus he conquered sin, and destroyed its power in himself, and in his resurrection and raising up to immortality death itself was defeated. God provided him as the promised Redeemer who would save all those who believe in him (John 3:16). God’s gracious gift of eternal life is extended to all who show faith in what He has done in Christ and are baptised into his name (Romans 6:3–5, 23).

#### **Christ Destroyed the “Diabolos” or “Devil”**

We have seen the way that *diabolos* is used to personify the sin-prone propensity that all mankind share through their flesh and blood nature. This is that same nature that Jesus Christ shared with those he came to save. Consider how his work in overcoming sin by perfect obedience even unto death is described in the following passages:

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he 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 [*diabolos*]” (Hebrews 2:14). Throughout his life Jesus always did the will of his Father. In death he obediently submitted to public crucifixion, and finally destroyed that which had held sway over men from the time of Adam’s first transgression. In all other men that power had led to sin, but Jesus Christ gained the victory over sin and death. He has now been raised to immortality. Sin and death are no longer a threat to him—“death hath no more dominion over him” (Romans 6:9). In doing this in himself he has done it for all those who come to God through him. Through him there is forgiveness of sin and hope of eternal life. It is part of God’s wonderful purpose that ultimately death itself will be removed from the earth for ever (1 Corinthians 15:25-26; Revelation 21:4).

It is worth noting that the idea of a supernatural being spoken of in this verse would make the statement absurd. Clearly, whatever the *diabolos* is, it was destroyed in the death of Christ.

In 1 John 3 we again have the statement that Christ came to destroy the works of the “devil” or *diabolos*. Consider how John states this:

verse 5 “Ye know that he [Jesus] was manifested **to take away our sins:**”

**which is the same as saying:**

verse 8 “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, **that he might destroy the works of the devil (*diabolos*)**”.

Thus John is saying that the phrase “the works of the devil” which Jesus destroyed, is equivalent to saying that Jesus came “to take away our sins”. Our sins are the works that result from those lusts in our nature when they are unrestrained. Through Jesus we can have these sins forgiven (1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 Timothy 1:15).



**“That Old Serpent, which is the Devil [diabolos], and Satan”**

This expression is found in Revelation 20:2 and now we can understand what is meant by the combining of these three titles together. Sin entered the world through the lie of the serpent. He was the “adversary” to God and His teaching and also to Eve who accepted his lie. He was the “false accuser” of God and His truth. Through their sin Adam and Eve brought death into the world. All mankind have inherited that sin-prone nature that came through them, and death that came by sin. Thus throughout the New Testament these expressions, *satan* and *diabolos* or “devil”, have been used to describe this sinful power in our nature. On many occasions these expressions are personified.

When Christ returns, all those “in Christ” will be made alive. The power of sin and death for them will have been destroyed. Christ will then reign for a thousand years and during that time sin will be restrained for the mortal population of the earth. Thus there will be no more oppression by evil rulers or injustice from corrupt systems. Towards the end of the “millennium” some men will rebel and oppose the rule of Christ—for a short time sin will no be restrained. But finally, Christ and the immortal saints will triumph. All that is associated with sin, including death, will be finally destroyed (Revelation 21:8,3,4). This period is also described in 1 Corinthians 15:21-28, 52-57. In achieving this glorious purpose we have the graphic symbolic destruction of that sin power (Revelation 20:10) where the “diabolos” is destroyed. Only then will sin and death no longer blight men’s lives—for ever.

**Summary Points**

**Satan and the Devil in the Old Testament**

1. The word *devil* does not occur in the Old Testament **at all**. The expression “devils” occurs four times and refers to pagan gods.
2. The Hebrew word *satan* means “adversary”. The word *satan* occurs 33 times in the Old Testament. It is translated “adversary” 12 times, “resist” 1, “withstand” 1, and left untranslated as “Satan” 19 times, these 19 being in only four contextual places (Young’s Index Lexicon of the Old Testament). On this basis it is obvious that Satan is not the arch-enemy of God as widely taught by Christendom.
3. None of these references indicate an evil, supernatural, powerful being, driving men to sin. Church teaching of the devil and Satan cannot be established from these references.
4. In the Old Testament God states that all sin comes from the evil imaginations and lusts that come from the heart of man (**Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Jeremiah 17:9**).

**The Root of Sin Defined in the New Testament**

5. Jesus states that man’s evil ways come from the thoughts of his evil heart (**Mark 7:21-23**). James says man is tempted by his own lusts (**James 1:13-15**), and Paul likewise said that the sin that he committed came from his own sinful nature (**Romans 7:15-25**).
6. “Satan” is used in the New Testament to represent those who are “adversaries” or opposed to the ways of God. Jesus called Peter “Satan” when he opposed Jesus’ desire to do God’s will (**Matthew 16:23**).
7. The word *devil* in the Greek is *diabolos* and means “a slanderer, false accuser”. The word is so translated in **2 Timothy 3:3; Titus 2:3 and 1 Timothy 3:11**.
8. The word *devil* (*diabolos*) is used to **personify** those **evil lusts** that are part of human nature and tempt man to sin.
9. *Diabolos* is also used to represent those people, and political and religious authorities, who falsely accuse God and His ways (**Revelation 2:10; 1 Peter 5:8-9**).
10. Jesus Christ destroyed “the works of the devil” by overcoming temptation to sin (**1 John 3:8**). He completely destroyed “the devil” in his death (**Hebrews 2:14**).





**Appendix—Devils and Demons**

**Devils or Demons in Old Testament Times**

The word “devils” occurs four times in the Old Testament in the Authorised Version translation (Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; 2 Chronicles 11:15; Psalm 106:37). In most modern translations the word “demons” replaces the word “devils” which certainly does not convey the Hebrew meaning. These references relate to the pagan worship of the heathen nations around Israel. The first three quotations below are taken from the American Standard Version which uses the word “demons” instead of “devils”.

“They served their **idols**, which became a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto **demons**” (Psalm 106:36-37). The pagans, who worshipped idols, believed in these “demon” gods. Israel provoked God by imitating these vile practices.

“**They sacrificed unto demons, which were no God, to gods that they knew not, to new gods that came up of late, which your fathers dreaded not**” (Deuteronomy 32:17). Moses describes how that Israel went astray from the true worship of God and sacrificed to the *idol gods* of the pagans, here called “demons”, which were merely pieces of metal, wood or stone. See how they are described in Psalm 115:3-9 and Isaiah 44:9-20.

Paul takes up this point, showing that such “demons” or “devils” spoken of in the Old Testament were the gods of paganism: “**But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God**” (1Corinthians 10: 20). Here Paul uses the Greek word “daimonion” which is translated “devils” or “demons”. Obviously Paul is speaking of the pagan gods that were part of Greek mythology.

So Paul says: “**Concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.** For though there be that are called gods, [Paul is speaking of the demon gods of paganism] *whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)* **But to us there is but one God, the Father**” (1 Corinthians 8:4-6). Paul is emphatic—these demon or devil gods of the Gentiles do not exist at all. Paul says there is but one God—the Father. To believe there is some other supernatural power apart from God is contrary to what the Bible teaches.

It must be noted that the Greek word “daimonion” rendered “devils” or “demons” is a completely different word from the Greek word “diabolos”, which is rendered “devil” or “false accuser” in the New Testament. A person reading the Greek language would see no connection between the words at all. It is the English translators who have connected the two words together in some English translations.

In the Old Testament **nowhere** where a person was cured of sickness is it said that a devil was cast out. This means that for the period of the Old Testament people who read the Bible and believed in God did not believe in such things.

Plato, the well known pagan Greek philosopher who lived some 400 years before Jesus Christ, explained what pagan religion taught regarding demons or devils. He wrote: “*Every demon is a middle being between God and mortal men*”. Plato further explained: “*All those who die valiantly in war...are made demons, and that we ought for ever after to serve and adore their sepulchres as the sepulchres of demons*”. These then were “good demons”. However there were also “evil demons” in pagan worship. They were those who, according to another writer Plutarch, had lived evil lives and after death became “*wicked and malignant demons who envy good men, and endeavour to disturb and hinder them in the pursuit of virtue, lest remaining firm in goodness, and uncorrupt, they should after death, obtain a better lot than they themselves enjoy*”.

This pagan teaching regarding demons is seen to be fundamentally flawed when we turn to the Bible. We have clearly seen that man is mortal and at death passes into the grave—the only hope of life after death is *the resurrection from the dead at the coming of Jesus Christ*. The idea of people living on after death, as the pagans believed, (and as is now taught by many Christian religions), is a denial of the word of God. *Sin brings death* (Romans 6:23). Deliverance from sin and death is **only** available through baptism into Jesus Christ. Greek mythology is certainly not Bible teaching.



**Devils and Demons in the New Testament**

The idea that there were such beings as these “demons” or “gods” was widely believed in the first century by the pagans to whom Paul took the Gospel. An example of this is seen when Paul visited Athens. There he was asked to address the people near the Parthenon—the very large temple to the gods on Mars Hill or Areopagus (Acts 17:19). Paul had spoken about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To them this sounded like their teaching of men becoming “demons” or “gods”. They were perplexed saying, “*He seemeth to be a setter forth of **strange gods or demons** [Greek daimonion]: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection*” (v18). If a person lived after death, they believed he was a demon or god.

This Greek idea of good and bad demons or gods had been introduced to the Jews before the time of Christ in the period when the Greeks ruled over the land of Israel—BC333-167. The Jews adopted this thinking by attributing diseases or disorders such as mental sickness, epilepsy, and deafness or dumbness to these devils/demons or evil spirits. They did not have the scientific medical knowledge that we have today whereby the root of many of these problems can be identified.

However we must understand that the fundamental root of all illness and degeneration of our bodies lies in the fact that we are descendants of Adam who, because of sin, was sentenced to return to the dust of the ground—to die. We have all inherited mortality that came by sin. Medical science may be able to identify problems—even relieve them—but it has no cure for death itself. That alone is available from God.

Let us look at some references to “devils” or “demons” in the life of Jesus.

On several occasions the leaders of the Jews claimed that Jesus had a devil or demon and therefore was mad: “*Many of them said, **He hath a devil [demon], and is mad; why hear ye him?***” (John 10:20); again: “*Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that **thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil [demon]**? Jesus answered, I have not a devil [demon]; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me*” (John 8:48-49). Because they did not understand Jesus, the leaders said he was mentally deranged, believing that some demon god had entered his mind.

Again we see that the Jews were affected by this idea of pagan gods or demons causing sickness. We read: “*Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil [demon], blind, and dumb: **and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw***” (Matthew 12:22). The person was blind and dumb and Jesus **healed him** by God’s power. “*But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils [demons], but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils [demons]*” (v24). The Pharisees would not acknowledge that Jesus was given this power to heal by God, for to do so would prove he was sent by God. This they could not accept so they attributed the healing to Beelzebub, a pagan god of the Philistines.

It is interesting to note that there is the account of a king in Israel who rejected God and sent his servant to Beelzebub to see if he would be healed of his illness: “*Ahaziah...was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron **whether I shall recover of this disease**. But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die*” (2 Kings 1:2-4). Here the king, who had rejected the God of Israel, turned to Baalzebub to seek help. God sent the prophet Elijah to tell him he would die. There is no mention of demons or evil spirits here. How ignorant the Pharisees were to claim that these demons actually existed and that Beelzebub was the ruler of them—for Beelzebub was a lifeless pagan idol.

That the casting out of devils or demons is synonymous with healing sick people is evident from the following quotation where Jesus sent the disciples out to the towns of Galilee saying, “***Heal the sick** that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you...And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, **even the devils [demons] are subject** unto us through thy name*” (Luke 10:9,17), meaning that they had healed the sick.



The healing of the man who was mentally deranged concludes with these words: *“Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, **out of whom the devils [demons] were departed**, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and **in his right mind**: and they were afraid. They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils [demons] **was healed**”* (Luke 8:35-36). The man who had been out of his mind, was now in his right mind—he was healed. In the speech of the day, the demons or devils were departed from him—whatever had caused his sickness was now cured by the power of God.

We see then that certain sickness, particularly mental sickness, was attributed to a strange power that had entered the person, which Greek mythology said was caused by evil demons or gods. However those who understand the Bible know that this is not true.

In Matthew we read about the wonderful healing that Jesus performed: *“When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils [demons]: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias [Isaiah] the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses”* (Matthew 8:16-17). Jesus healed that infirmity and sickness that people suffered because of their weak mortal nature, thus proving that he was the one sent by God who would finally heal man’s mortality and bring life eternal.

Jesus taught this principle when he healed the man with palsy. He said to him, *“Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee”*. However when he was questioned about forgiving the man’s sins Jesus said, *“Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house”* (Matthew 9:2,5-7).

Here is the wonder of the healing power that God gave to Jesus. It taught those who were thoughtful that God had sent him to heal the greatest disease of all, that which brings permanent death—sin. Through Jesus Christ we can obtain forgiveness of sins and look for that great day when *“this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory”* (1 Corinthians 15:54).

### **Demons and Patron Saints**

The belief that there are “saints” alive in heaven to whom people can pray for help is yet another pagan superstition that was adopted by early Christians who were ignorant of Bible teaching. You will recall the quotation from Plato, which we quoted earlier: *“Every demon is a middle being between God and mortal man”*. Plato’s theory was accepted with modification by the Church as it deviated from Bible Truth. Instead of maintaining Bible teaching that man is mortal and at death returns to dust, the early Church taught that man has an immortal soul that lives on after death. The supposed faithful went to heaven where some were elevated to “sainthood”—these had access to petition God on behalf of mortals on earth. Many churches and schools have been named after these so-called “saints” (such as “Saint Mary’s”, “Saint Anthony’s”, “Saint Ursula’s”).

Such teaching is not Bible teaching.

Man is mortal—he dies and in that day his thoughts perish (Psalm 146:3-4)

The dead do not know anything (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6)

In death there is no remembrance of God nor thanksgiving to Him (Psalm 6:5)

The dead do not praise God (Psalm 115:17)

The Bible teaches that the only hope for man is a resurrection from the dead at the return of Jesus Christ (Daniel 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). To believe that there are saints to whom you can pray, or that relatives who have died are now living in heaven and can affect your life and keep you safe is not Bible teaching. Jesus Christ is our mediator in heaven through whom we approach God in prayer: *“For there is one God, and **one mediator between God and men**, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Timothy 2:5-6)



Thus the fallacy taught by the Church that one can pray to Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, as Roman Catholics do in the “Hail Mary”, or to other patron saints, is based upon this wrong teaching. Mary and all the faithful are dead—asleep in Christ—awaiting the resurrection at his return to the earth. There *is not one place in the New Testament* where a prayer is offered to Mary or to any supposed saint.

**Lesson 24 – Questions**

1. What does the word satan mean?
2. In the Old Testament, where does God say sin comes from?
3. How does Paul describe how sin and death came into the world? (Romans 5:12)
4. Does the word devil occur in the Old Testament of the Bible?
5. What do the New Testament writers define as the root of temptation and sin?
6. What has the power of death? (Romans 5:21; 6:23)
7. How did Jesus Christ destroy “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil”? (Hebrews 2:14)
8. What is the word devil used to personify in the Bible?
9. Why did Jesus say to Peter: “Get thee behind me, Satan”? (Matthew 16:23)
10. What is the root cause of man’s sickness?
11. When Jesus cast out devils or demons from sick people what was he actually doing?