



DEMONS AND SATAN

Reading: Matthew 8:14-34

DEMONS

The Bible words for 'devil' and 'demon' are quite different and this is clearly shown in modern versions. Unfortunately the Authorised Version can be confusing. We shall consider the devil in the next lesson.

God is all-powerful and created all things. There are no invisible living beings called demons that cause trouble. In some Bible passages the word 'demon' refers to idols; in others it refers to illnesses. We shall look at both of these and show how they are linked.

Demons as idols

Psalm 106 talks about Israel's sins and God's mercy and care for them. The people of Israel had not kept themselves separate from the nations around but had instead copied their wicked practices and worshipped idols. They thought that false gods ruled over them and influenced their lives. In verses 36-38 we read that Israel sacrificed their children to idols.

Psalm 106:36-38 They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan ...

Notice that these verses talk about sacrificing

"to the demons" and "to the idols". This is because 'demon' is another way of talking about an idol. The demons mentioned here were the idols of the surrounding nations. Deuteronomy 32:17 also links demons and idols (false gods).

1 Corinthians 10:18-21 again shows that 'demon' is another word for 'idol'. The Christians at Corinth worshipped the only living and true God. All other gods were idols, here called demons – lifeless objects which people worship in vain.

Demons as illnesses

Jesus healed people with many different medical conditions. For example, he gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf and made the lame walk. He also cured many people suffering from mental illnesses, including complaints like epilepsy.

In those days people knew very little about medical science. They could see why a person with a swollen ankle could not walk properly, but there seemed to be no reason for illnesses like epilepsy, schizophrenia and other mental conditions. These illnesses also made the sufferers behave strangely. So people thought that these illnesses were caused by demons entering into the sufferers and controlling their lives to change them. When Jesus healed such people, he is described as casting out demons (Mark 1:34,39).

The following passage is about the healing work of Jesus:

"That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases' "
(Matthew 8:16,17).

This passage states that people with demons came to Jesus and he cast out the spirits. It also tells us that the prophet Isaiah prophesied that this would happen. But Isaiah talks about illnesses and diseases, not demons and evil spirits. **Demons and evil spirits are a way of talking about illnesses and diseases.**

Luke 9:42 shows that demons and evil spirits are the same, and that they can be healed:

*"While he (Jesus) was coming, the **demon** threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the **unclean spirit** and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father."*





Matthew 17 describes the same miracle but does not mention a demon. Instead verse 15 describes the boy as an epileptic. The Greek word here means 'moon struck'. The translators did not suggest that the boy had been struck by the moon but looked at the symptoms and realised that he was suffering from epilepsy. In the time of Jesus people did not know that epilepsy is a medical condition. If Jesus had told them this, they would not have understood and would probably have thought him very strange for suggesting it. Today, epilepsy is controlled with medical drugs. When Luke talks about a demon and unclean spirit he is using language that would be understood by the people of the time.

Matthew 9:32,33 also uses the ideas of the time to describe Jesus healing a dumb man. The people thought he had a demon. It was not easy for them to understand how someone with a mouth and tongue was unable to talk.

When Jesus healed a blind and dumb person who was thought to have a demon (Matthew 12:22,23), many people recognised his great power, but the Pharisees wickedly said that it came from Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Jesus showed how foolish this idea was.

Demons, idols and illnesses

1 Kings 18 gives a glimpse of the way people worshipped false gods. The idol (demon) worshippers lost control of their actions because they had worked themselves up into a state of excitement, having spent many hours leaping and shouting to their false god. 1 Kings 18:28,29 says:

*"they cried aloud and cut themselves **after their custom** with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on".*

A person having an epileptic fit or a lunatic might look like these idol worshippers. This may be why people with illnesses that caused strange behaviour were thought to be possessed by a false god (demon).

Since idols, or demons, have no real existence (1 Corinthians 8:4), the evil spirits thought to be associated with them do not exist. **There are no evil spirits that cause trouble and illness.**

Jesus spoke to lifeless things

Because Jesus appears to speak to demons, some people think they must be living beings. But when Peter's relative was ill with a fever, Jesus spoke to the fever. He also spoke to the wind and sea (Mark 4:39-41) and to a fig tree (Matthew 21:19-22). We know that the dead cannot hear but Jesus spoke to Jairus' daughter and to Lazarus when they were dead. Jesus speaking to these lifeless things is similar to his talking to demons, which also have no life. By speaking to these things, Jesus showed that he had the power to perform the miracle. (See also Numbers 20:8, where Moses was instructed by God to speak to a rock.)

Luke 4:38-39. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. And he stood over her and **rebuked the fever**, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them.

A person with a demon had a medical problem that was not understood at the time.

SATAN

'Satan' is an ordinary Hebrew word that means 'adversary'. In the Old Testament it appears 18 times as 'satan' while seven times it is translated 'adversary'. An adversary is someone who opposes (tries to stop) a person from doing something. We will look at some occasions where the translators have used the word 'adversary'. These will help us to understand the meaning of 'satan'.

1. David stayed with the Philistines to escape from King Saul, the first king of Israel, who was trying to kill him. When the Philistine commanders were preparing to go to battle against Israel, they thought that David might become an adversary and fight against them. They said,





*“He (David) shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an **adversary** to us” (1 Samuel 29:4).*

The word ‘adversary’ in this verse is the Hebrew word ‘satan’. **This shows that a human being can be a satan. It is not the name of a person.**

2. Solomon was a righteous king who loved God. However he became involved in idol worship. God was angry with him and sent adversaries against him. This word ‘adversary’ in 1 Kings 11:14 is the word ‘satan’:

*“And the LORD raised up an **adversary** against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite”.*

1 Kings 11:23-25 records that God sent a second adversary, Rezon. Both Hadad and Rezon acted as enemies or ‘satans’ by bringing trouble for Solomon and Israel. This should have made Solomon realise his foolishness and turn back to God.

3. In Numbers 22 we are told of a prophet called Balaam, who was going on a journey which God did not want him to make. Verse 22 says:

*“But God’s anger was kindled because he (Balaam) went, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as his **adversary**”.*

Again the word ‘adversary’ is ‘satan’. God sent an angel to block the path and oppose Balaam, to prevent him continuing his journey and doing wrong. The angel, who was doing God’s will, was a ‘satan’ or opposer to Balaam. The angel was a good satan!

4. Matthew 16:23 uses the Hebrew word ‘satan’. Because Peter did not want Jesus to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, he tried to stop him. Jesus said to him, *“Get behind me, Satan”*, because Peter was opposing God’s will. Peter was trying to stop Jesus dying for us and was therefore a ‘satan’ to Jesus.

A satan is an adversary, one who is in opposition, who may be good or bad. If someone stops a person from doing evil, he is a good satan, just as the angel was to Balaam.

There is no powerful evil being called Satan. God would never have created such a wicked being to frustrate His purpose. Jesus showed us how to understand the word ‘satan’ by using it to describe his disciple Peter when he made a comment which was opposed to God’s will.

Satan means ‘adversary’ or ‘one who opposes’. Anyone can be a satan by opposing another person. They can stop them from doing good or evil.

We are our own worst enemies

Our greatest adversary is our own sinful self. We give in to our own desires that stop us following the Lord Jesus. These desires oppose a godly way of life – they act as a satan to us. In this way the word ‘satan’ can be used for our own sinful desires. This can be seen by comparing Acts 5 verses 3 and 4:

Verse 3: “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has **Satan** filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...’ ”

Verse 4: “Why is it that **you have contrived this deed in your heart?** You have not lied to men but to God.”

‘Satan’ is used in verse 3 to represent Ananias’s sinful thoughts – his own sinful desires were opposing the things of God. Verse 4 clearly shows they were his own thoughts, and not put there by an evil being. God straight away punished Ananias with death because of his sin. If a wicked being called Satan really had filled Ananias’s heart then the punishment would have been unfair. We must overcome our wicked desires!

Who was Lucifer?

Isaiah 14:12-16 is often quoted by people who believe in a supernatural evil being. By comparing the ESV and the AV we see that Lucifer is just another name for the day star, or planet Venus.





Authorised Version of Isaiah 14:12	English Standard Version of Isaiah 14:12
How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer , son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!	How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star , son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!

If you read the whole chapter you will see that 'Lucifer' refers to the king of Babylon (see especially verses 4 and 16). This is a prophecy that the arrogant king of Babylon would fall from power. This would be as spectacular as if the planet Venus fell from the sky! Jesus uses similar picture language about the city of Capernaum (Matthew 11:23).

Similarly, Ezekiel 28:14-16 refers to the king of Tyre and not an all-powerful evil being.

Satan in the Book of Job

Job is described as "*blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil*" (Job 1:1). He was also very wealthy. Satan suggests to God that Job only worships God because of the blessings he receives from Him. So God agrees that Job will be tested to see if he will remain faithful when his blessings are taken away.

Who was this Satan? It is important to note that God, not this Satan, brought the trouble on Job (Job 42:11). Job and his wife knew this (Job 2:9,10; 19:21). We know that God would not work directly with a supernatural evil being (Psalm 5:4; Habakkuk 1:13).

The term 'satan' only occurs in the first two chapters of Job and the first reference is:

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them" (Job 1:6).

This verse has led some people to wrongly believe that 'satan' here refers to a wicked angel, but Lesson 28 shows that angels do not sin. The phrase "*sons of God*" (sometimes 'children of God') is used in Scripture of believers (e.g. 1 John 3:2) and "*present themselves before the LORD*" refers to people worshipping God (Deuteronomy 31:14; Joshua 24:1; 1 Samuel 10:19). We suggest that when one or more of Job's three friends came to worship God, they could have had jealous, evil thoughts about Job. The term 'Satan' is used to represent these thoughts because they are opposed to Job. The three friends bring no comfort to Job but instead wrongly tell him that his troubles must be the result of his wickedness. Significantly, there is no mention of Satan being condemned by God, but God is angry with the three friends at the end (Job 42:7). They were wicked, not Job.

Summary

1. In some Bible passages the word 'demon' refers to idols (false gods); in others it refers to illnesses.
2. In Bible times people with illnesses that could not be explained, particularly those which caused strange behaviour like mental illnesses, were thought to have a demon. Today, we know these people were suffering from medical conditions that can often be helped with medicines.
3. There are no invisible living beings called demons that cause trouble.
4. The word 'satan' means 'adversary' or 'one who opposes'. The adversary can be good or evil.
5. There is no supernatural evil being called satan.

Verses to learn: Matthew 8:16,17

That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases'.

Passages to read: Numbers 22; 1 Kings 18; Matthew 16:21-28

Christadelphian Bible Mission, Box CBM, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, BIRMINGHAM, B28 8SZ, UK

