

The Devil and His Angels

The Master Artificer of Lies

One Biblical commentator from across the Atlantic has said, “For Paul the devil was real, an actually existing, very powerful and very terrible opponent! Those who deny the real and personal existence of Satan should be honest enough to admit that they do not believe the Bible!”

This may seem very strong language in the light of current theological thinking, for there are few doctrines which unite the modern cults with the historic denominations so effectively as the denial of the personality of the devil. To them all, he is simply the representation of the concept of evil, a principle and not a person. No-one, of course, is more delighted with this state of affairs than the devil himself, for the situation gives him scope to develop and execute his designs of evil quite unsuspected and unopposed.

But is our opening quotation justified, or is it a little severe? Should the prevailing attitude in Christendom be treated with more respect, and more charity? There can only be one way to assess such a situation correctly, and that is to examine for ourselves just what Holy Scripture has to say upon the matter.

One thing is very clear, the difference of judgement is not due to paucity of reference, for from the opening chapters of Genesis to the closing chapters of Revelation the devil appears all too frequently upon the page of Holy Scripture, and upon the stage of human history.

The Scriptures do employ the figure of speech known as personification, but the consistent maintenance of this figure on such a scale right throughout the Word of God would be absolutely unparalleled. The idea is surely unrealistic, and contrary to every canon of sound and sober Scriptural interpretation. For from Genesis to Revelation the devil is presented as a personal being, and all evasions of this easily demonstrated fact can only descend into trifling with the inspired Word of God. By every sane and honest principle of interpretation Satan is as real a person as God (Job chapters 1 and 2; Zech. 3:1,2; John 8:42-44; 1John 3:8-10), as Christ (Matt. 4:1-11 etc.; 13:37-39), as the archangel Michael (Jude 9; Rev. 12:7), as Peter (Luke 22:31), as Paul (2Cor. 2:11) etc.

Yet modernism scorns the idea of a personal devil, and regards it as a medieval barbarity and ignorance. It is said to be a perpetuation of the ancient error of dualism, i.e. two gods (or companies of gods), one good, one evil, in opposition. But as with much of modern rationalism's superior knowledge, it is a mere ignorance. The fact of a personal devil was revealed in Scripture long before the captivity of the Nation of Israel to the Babylonians around 600 BC, in which the idea is supposed to have been born.

To be quite fair, however, we have to acknowledge a number of factors which might make the study of the subject somewhat difficult. Firstly, the devil appears in so many different guises, and is known by so many different names, that it is little wonder if he is difficult to recognize. He may be anything from *"an angel of light"* (2Cor. 11:14) to *"a roaring lion"* (1Pet. 5:8). Secondly he has an immense number of agents, both in *"the heavenlies"* and on earth, so that what is attributed to him may seem beyond the capacity of a single person (Eph. 2:2; 6:11,12; 1John 5:19). And

thirdly he is often addressed or described in the guise of his agents, so that his personal involvement may pass unrecognised. For example, he first appears on the scene in the garden of Eden in the form of a serpent, and while we must realise that this is no ordinary reptile, it is not until we reach the New Testament that we are specifically told that *"that old serpent"* is none other than *"the Devil"* (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). Once we appreciate this principle of addressing or describing Satan through his agents, we may learn much about the deep mysteries of his origin and history.

The one passage in which we may learn most of his origin is that which is addressed to his tool, the King of Tyre, in Ezekiel 28:11-19. It is more than evident that the language of this passage far surpasses what might be written of the King of Tyre personally, and that it must apply to the spiritual power behind him, namely Satan. This may be deduced from a number of considerations. Firstly the language can only find reasonable fulfilment in such an application. Secondly it accords with analogous passages, notably the lament over the King of Babylon in Isaiah 14, which again can only find fulfilment in Satan. And thirdly what is said is consistent with what is said of Satan in passages where the reference is direct and specific, as we shall seek to show.

The passage refers to *"the day that thou was created"* (Ezek. 28:13,15), so that Satan is a creature. He might aspire in his pride to exalt his throne above the throne of God, to be like the Most High, but he is not God; he is neither self-existent nor absolute. He is mighty but not almighty, wise but not all-wise, mobile but not omnipresent. He may possess authority, but he is not sovereign. As a creature under the sovereign hand of God he can only do what he is permitted to do, and move within the limits appointed by God. This is clearly seen in the first two chapters of the book of Job.

That he was *"the anointed cherub that covereth"* (v14), indicates that just as the cherubim in the earthly sanctuary covered the mercy-seat, so Satan in his pristine glory was the holy custodian at God's heavenly throne. The exalted language describing both his person and his office (e.g. vs. 12 and 14) gives good

reason for supposing that Satan was the very greatest and most glorious of all God's heavenly host, i.e. the greatest of all His creatures, And with this accords the language of Jude verse 9 (cf. 2Pet. 2:11), for this verse indicates that the devil was regarded as a "dignity" (lit. "glory") by none less than the archangel Michael; which suggests that in his original state he was superior even to the archangel.

In Job chapters 1 and 2, Satan is depicted as appearing before the Lord in the midst of *"the sons of God"*, so we see that he was a heavenly creature, one of the angelic orders, who has fallen from high estate. However we understand the Lord's words in Luke 10:18, whether as a historical reference to Satan's original fall or as a prophetic prediction of his ultimate doom, the basic fact still remains in the verse, his heavenly origin. And since he still possesses a following of angels (Matt. 25:41), fallen with himself, we see that he was in a position of authority and exaltation prior to his fall.

Ezekiel 28 not only states the fact of Satan's fall, it reveals the reason; *"Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness"* (v17). This agrees with 1Timothy 3:6 where *"the condemnation of the devil"* is said to be *"being lifted up with pride"*.

The time of his fall is less easy to determine. The reference to *"Eden the garden of God"* (v13) favours the idea that it was after the creation of Genesis 1. Some, however, feel that the Lord's description of him as *"a murderer from the beginning"* (John 8:44 compare 1John 3:8) teaches that he was already a fallen being when the worlds were made. If we suppose that he fell prior to the creation, we must suppose without any confirmation that the Eden of Ezekiel 28 is some heavenly paradise, whereas if we suppose he fell after creation we must assume that it was close enough to it to be still regarded as *"the beginning"*. Certainly he was fallen by the commencement of Genesis 3.

Although by his iniquity and rebellion he fell from heaven, the immediate presence of God, he yet, as a spirit being, has access to the heavenly court (Job 1:6 etc.; 1Kings 22:19-22), while both he and his hosts

operate in the sphere of “the heavenlies” (Eph. 6:12), so that he is termed **“the prince of the power of the air”** (Eph. 2:2) as well as **“the prince of this world”** (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

“Satan” means “adversary”, and another of his names is **“the enemy”** (Luke 10:19), for since his rebellion against God he has become the implacable and unrelenting enemy both of God and man. He accuses man before God (“Devil” means “accuser” – see Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10); and he is **“the tempter”** (1Thess. 3:5) who first tempted man to sin, so bringing sin and death into the world. Scripture warns that he has perfected the evil art of deception, so that he **“deceiveth the whole world”** (Rev. 12:9). The Lord Jesus taught that so complete is his fall that **“there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it”** (John 8:44). This dreadful moral state is expressed by his name **“the wicked (evil) one”** (Matt. 13:19; 1John 2:13).

He would seek to injure the bodies and the minds of men (Luke 13:16; Acts 10:38), and damn their souls (Luke 8:12). He is the unseen power behind all false religion (2Cor. 4:4; 1Cor. 10:20), and the explanation of all that is supernatural, but not divine (1John 4:1-6). Unregenerate man is completely in his power (Eph. 2:2; 1John 5:19), and only Christ and His gospel can deliver from his clutches (Acts 26:18). With the people of God he works to turn them from the paths of obedience, either by seduction (2Cor. 11:3,14) or by threatening and persecution (Rev. 2:10), in order to bring them into reproach (1Tim. 3:7).

Jesus the Saviour came to **“destroy the works of the devil”** (1John 3:8), in fulfilment of God’s ancient promise (Gen. 3:15). He triumphed over his temptations in the wilderness, and proceeded to accomplish the great work of redemption at the cross, where, by annulling both sin and death, He annulled the devil who by means of them had kept the human race in bondage (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14,15).

Satan still has a measure of freedom to operate on earth, but, as at the cross itself, all his rage against Christ and His people is overruled by God for the

believer’s ultimate good (1Cor. 5:5; 2Cor. 12:7-10). Because he is a defeated foe, the Christian is able in the power of the Spirit of God to refuse him place (Eph. 4:27), stand against him (Eph. 6:11,12), resist him and put him to flight (James 4:7), and so overcome him (1John 2:13,14).

Even this restricted scope will soon be denied him, for he will be bruised under the feet of the saints **“shortly”** (Rom. 16:20). In the last days he will be cast down from heaven, **“having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time”** (Rev. 12:12). All his prodigious efforts through **“the man of sin”** (2Thess. 2:9) shall be unavailing, for at the advent of Christ he will be incarcerated in the abyss for a thousand years. After his release he will raise a final desperate rebellion against God, when he will ultimately meet his doom, with his angels, and all the souls of men he has deceived through the ages, in the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

It would appear that there are two companies of fallen angels. Those who are specifically **“his (the devil’s) angels”** would most likely be those who fell with him, and these are free to serve him still (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:7,9). They are probably the same as **“the unclean spirits”** or “demons” of which Satan is the prince (Matt. 12:24). Another company has been punished by confinement in Tartarus for an unspecified sin, and remains in chains until the day of judgement (2Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).

The above brief yet adequate considerations from the Bible, the only reliable source of truth on such important issues, leaves no room for doubt that the devil is a real personage, an enemy of God and man, who is seeking mankind’s eternal destruction. Paul, an early Christian martyr, who was only too aware of the devil’s activity could write, **“we are not ignorant of his devices”** (2Cor. 2:11), and neither need we be. It would be folly to allow him to further deceive us!

Christ alone is able to save us from such a formidable foe because of His sacrificial death on the cross where He defeated and bruised the head of the **“old serpent”**.