



Lesson 29

DEVILS (DEMONS), AND SATAN

Reading Matthew 8:14 – 34

Devils and Demons

There are two Greek words that are translated 'devil' in our Bibles, and as they mean different things, we really need to know what each word means. They are:

daimon - which means 'evil spirit'

diabolos - which means 'slanderer'

We will consider the word devil (*diabolos*) in the next lesson.

The word *daimon*, is used in the Greek when we are told that Jesus "cast out devils". Jesus cured every kind of illness from which men suffer. He gave sight to the blind; he restored hearing to the deaf; he made the lame walk. He also cured many people suffering from mental illnesses, and complaints like epilepsy.

In those days, when an illness was hard to understand, people would say that the sufferer was 'possessed by a demon'. When Jesus healed such people, he was said to 'cast out the demon'.

Read carefully Matthew 8:16-17. It tells us that

"... the people 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."

Jesus said that Isaiah had prophesied about this when he said:

"Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses" (Isaiah 53:4).

This shows us that

"devil or demon" possession is the same as "infirmities" or illnesses

Idols that were 'demons'

In other places in the Bible where the word *daimon* is used, it often refers to the worshipping of idols. Turn to Psalm 106. This Psalm tells of all the wrong that Israel did, and how, in spite of it all, God continued to bless them. Read verses 36-38, where the Psalmist says of the Israelites:

"They served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils."

The word 'devils' here is the Old Testament equivalent to *daimon*, or demon. In verse 37 the accusation is repeated, but this time we are told that "their children were sacrificed to idols". Clearly, then, the 'devils' mentioned here were the idols of the nations surrounding Israel.

There is a similar use of the word in the New Testament, in 1 Corinthians 10:20. Paul tells the Corinthians that the Gentiles "sacrifice to devils, and not to God". If you look back to verse 19, you will see that these 'demons' were really idols.

The Christians worshipped the one true God; all other gods were idols, here called 'demons'; lifeless objects which people worship in vain.

Note: the word which means 'evil spirit' (*daimon*) is usually translated devils in the Authorised Version and should not be confused with devil. Other versions often have demons instead of devils.

Satan

Satan in the Old Testament means 'adversary' or 'one who opposes'.

1 Kings 11:14 says:

"And the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite."

11:23 says:

"And God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah... "

11:25 adds:

"He was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon."

Solomon started off well as a king and loved God, but then he became caught up in idol worship, so God sent him adversaries. This word 'adversary' in I Kings 11 is exactly the same word as is elsewhere translated 'satan'. Hadad and Rezon brought trouble for Solomon and Israel, and 'opposed' them because Solomon and Israel were sinning. They were 'satans' to Solomon and Israel.

A satan is not always an evil adversary. In Numbers 22:22 we are told of a prophet called Balaam, who was going on a journey which God did not want him to make. The record says:

"God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him".

The word for 'adversary' here too is the Old Testament word 'satan'; so here we have a faithful angel of God, doing God's will, called a 'satan'.

Clearly the word cannot mean an evil being. A 'satan' is an adversary, one who is in opposition. He may be good or bad.

SATAN MEANS ADVERSARY OR ONE WHO OPPOSES
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When Peter tried to turn Jesus aside from the way in which God had said he must go, he became an adversary, and Jesus said to him: "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23). Because he was trying to turn Jesus from God's way, Peter became a 'satan'. He was opposing Jesus.

So satan in the New Testament also means adversary. Man's greatest adversary is his own sinful self and so the word 'satan' can be used for this. This can be seen by comparing Acts 5 verses 3 and 4:

verse 3: "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost..."

verse 4: "Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."

It was Ananias' own sinful thoughts. 'Satan' is used in verse 3 to represent Ananias' sinful nature, which was opposing the things of God.

Who was Lucifer?

Isaiah 14:12-16 is often quoted by people who believe in a supernatural evil being:

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground which did weaken the nations..."

Quite clearly, if you read the whole chapter you will see that Lucifer is the king of Babylon (see especially verse 4). It was a prophecy that the king of Babylon would fall from power.

In the same way Ezekiel 28:14-16 is sometimes thought to refer to a supernatural evil being:

"Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God... thou wast perfect all thy days ... till iniquity was found in thee."

It is clear that this passage refers to the king of Tyrus (Tyre), as verse 12 shows, and is nothing to do with a supernatural being.

What happened in the Garden of Eden?

Do you remember what happened in the Garden of Eden? When God called Adam out of hiding and asked him if he had eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam answered:

"The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."

Adam was really trying to say that God was to blame for giving him the woman, and the woman was to blame for giving him the fruit. But it was his own fault.

Then God asked the woman what she had done, and she said:

"The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat"

- in other words, she put the blame on the serpent; it was the serpent's fault.

Adam and Eve were anxious to blame someone else, rather than to take the blame for their own wrong actions. We are all like that. We do not like being held responsible for our own wrong thoughts and actions. Perhaps that is why many people believe that there is a super-human being called 'the devil' who entices men and women to sin.

God allowed the serpent to speak, just as He allowed Balaam's ass to speak (Numbers 22:28). Adam should have been in control and kept the serpent in its place, but now God allowed Adam and Eve to be tested - and they failed. The serpent did not make them eat the fruit, it just provided the test. Adam and Eve decided for themselves that, they would eat of the fruit.

Summary

1. The devils cast out by Jesus were illnesses thought to be caused by evil spirits which took possession of people with certain diseases.
2. The word for devils or demons is different from the word for the devil (which will be considered next lesson).
3. 'Satan' means adversary - someone who opposes. The adversary can be good or evil.
4. Lucifer in Isaiah 14 refers to the king of Babylon, not a supernatural being.

Chapters to read

Matthew 16:21-28; Numbers 22

Verses to learn

Matthew 8:16-17

"When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: 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 the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.