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What about the Devil and Satan?

The last two chapters have looked at Bible teaching about the end of this world. We have considered what the coming of God's kingdom will be like, both for those who are ready and who have prepared for it, and for those who do not believe the promises of God and who do not think that anything will happen, one way or the other.

This was a view being held in New Testament times as well, as the apostle Peter points out, when he taught about the worldwide flood that occurred in Noah's time. He says that people didn't believe Noah's warnings. They argued that such a disaster had never overtaken the world before, and in a similar way people were now arguing that the return of Jesus Christ would never happen either.

❖ Flood Disaster

In fact the apostle Peter teaches quite a lot about the Flood in his two letters.¹ He understood that it happened for a very good reason. God brought the flood as a punishment for sin. A commonly held view is that sin is something that is provoked inside us by the action of the Devil or Satan. Yet the Book of Genesis says nothing about that. If you read the account of the flood, in Genesis chapters 6-9, you will notice that there is no mention of the Devil or Satan anywhere. Instead, this is why destruction came:

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them’ ... Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth

¹ See 1 Peter 3:20-21; 2 Peter 2:5 and 3:1-14.

was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, ‘I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth’” (Genesis 6:5-13).

There is a mention of the “sons of God” inter-marrying with the “daughters of men” (in Genesis 6:1-2) which some people have said refers to fallen angels, and out of that mistake they have spun a web of confusion. But we are now well-enough equipped to sort that out if we give it a moment's thought:

- **Angels dwell in the presence of God**, being His messengers, and as only holy and righteous beings can survive in that situation it is impossible for angels to sin;²
- **Angels do not marry** (Matthew 22:30), which is a verse you will come across as you work through the Bible Reading Planner suggested earlier;³
- **The passage in question does not say that angels married the “daughters of men”, but that the “sons of God” did.** As Genesis has been tracking two family trees in chapters 1 to 5 – the one a faithful group of believers and the other an unfaithful group, who were rebelling against the purpose of God – it is clear that Genesis 6:1-2 is telling us that those two sets of people intermarried.

Originally there had been two groups of people:

- a. mighty men and women of God, and
- b. violent and evil men and women.

When inter-marriage took place a blend of both characteristics came about and, sadly, the offspring were:

- c. mighty men who were both violent and evil.⁴

² Remember that the reason why we cannot see God and still live is that we are sinful and His glorious presence would consume us (Exodus 33:20; 1 Timothy 6:16; Hebrews 12:29).

³ Chapter 3, pages 34,35.

⁴ Genesis 6:4.

❖ **Man's Wickedness**

God destroyed the entire civilization of Noah's day because of the way that mankind had corrupted everything; they were violent, godless, heedless and thus worthless. Paul made the same observation in Romans about the way that the 1st century world was deliberately ignorant about God's existence and purpose and preferred impurity to holiness (Romans 1:18-32). And if you have worked through Peter's comments about the flood, in his two letters, you will have noted the same diagnosis.⁵

Paul has had a lot to say in Romans about the problem of sin and the great work God and the Lord Jesus Christ have accomplished in making a solution possible so that we, who struggle with sin, can become right with God. But have you noticed what Paul has said about the Devil and Satan? Absolutely nothing! There is no mention of the Devil at all in Romans, even though it contains the most detailed consideration of what God has done and is doing to save men and women from destruction. And there is only one passing reference to Satan in the entire letter when Paul says:

*"For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. **The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (Romans 16:19-20).*

This is a reference back to the first promise God ever made about the destruction of the serpent in Eden – that Eve's offspring would crush the serpent, but be bruised in the process.⁶ So why does Paul make no mention of the Devil and all its supposed influence, if it is really important? It would seem that Paul understood the real problem and saw no need to refer to the Devil; that term was superfluous so far as Paul was concerned. In other letters Paul did use Devil language but not in Romans. Instead he wanted his readers to concentrate on the real problem with which we have to grapple – that of our *sinful nature* and its

⁵ *"They deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished" (2 Peter 3:5,6).*

⁶ *Genesis 3:15 which we looked at in Chapter 12.*

powerful personal effects.

Paul's approach to all this is exactly the same as that of other inspired writers and teachers. Here's a selection of New Testament Scriptures:

(Jesus) said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:20-23);

"Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Romans 5:12);

"Sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me" (7:11);

"I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand" (7:18-21);

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21);

"You have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds" (Ephesians 4:21-23);

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he

himself tempts no one. But **each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.** Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers” (James 1:13-16);

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that **your passions are at war with in you?**” (James 4:1).

❖ Old Testament Confirmation

So far we have looked only at what the New Testament says about our nature, but you could easily build up a similar dossier from the Old, an exercise you might like to try. Here are some passages to start you off and if you look for cross-references in the margin of your Bible, if you have that sort of Bible, you will quickly build up an impressive list:⁷

“Solomon did **what was evil in the sight of the LORD** and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done” (1 Kings 11:6);

“**There is a way that seems right to a man,** but its end is the way to death” (Proverbs 16:25);

“Behold, **I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me**” (Psalm 51:5, spoken by King David);

“**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick;** who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9);

“I know, O LORD, that **the way of man is not in himself,** that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:25).

This is intriguing. In all the Old Testament, which comprises two-thirds of the Bible, there is no mention of the Devil at all – not once! *Satan* gets a mention or two; *Lucifer* is referred to once in some versions of the Bible (though not in the ESV); but “*the Devil*” is completely absent. Such lan-

⁷ If not, here are two more references to look up (Psalm 58:3 and Ecclesiastes 9:3).

guage appears only in the New Testament and is not that frequent there either; as we have seen, it never occurs in the whole of Romans. Instead, time and again, the Bible attributes the problem facing mankind to mankind itself. We are our own worst enemies! Our nature – human nature – is the root problem and it is that which needs to be changed, as we have already seen many times, and as Paul has argued throughout the Letter to the Romans.

❖ Old Testament Investigation

We need to do a little bit of personal research if we are to find out more about the Devil and Satan. We have already discovered that immortal souls and continual torment in a fiery hell are myths, not truths. They are human ideas and the same is true about the Devil as the supposed supernatural mastermind of evil. No such being exists. Think about this in relation to a few examples, including some Bible passages that people say teach the existence of a supernatural Devil.

❖ Eden

Who was to blame for what happened in Eden? Was it the fault of the Devil or Satan? Of course not! We know from what Paul said in Romans that Adam was to blame,⁸ and the serpent was also responsible for its part in the proceedings because punishment was meted out to it.

If the serpent had been just a stooge, or if some external power was manipulating it to make it lure Eve and then Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, it would have been most unfair of God to have held the serpent responsible. But it most certainly was held responsible for its own actions and the New Testament both acknowledges the serpent’s role and warns us against being deceived in the same way.⁹

❖ Job’s “Satan”

The earliest occurrence of the term “*Satan*” in Scripture comes in the poetic Book of Job, the events of which probably occurred during the time the chapters of Genesis were

⁸ “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin” (Romans 5:12); and the serpent (a) was said to be crafty (Genesis 3:1) and (b) was cursed by God for its misdeeds (3:14,15). We may have never encountered an animal that could speak and think, but there is another Scriptural example – Balaam’s ass (Numbers 22:28-30; 2 Peter 2:16).

being written, though Job does not feature directly in its recorded histories. The Hebrew word “Satan” – which means ‘adversary’ or ‘opponent’ – occurs 14 times in the first two chapters of the Book of Job but nowhere else in the book. Indeed there are only four other occurrences of the word in the English Standard Version of the Bible, though the Hebrew word “Satan” occurs in another 9 places where it is translated “adversary”, “opponent” or “accuser”.

The opening chapters of the Book of Job set the scene for the trying times which will befall Job as he is tested to see:

- 1 whether or not he is good just because he is materially blessed by God, and
- 2 how he would react if those things were taken away.

This is the charge someone made when the “sons of God” met together to worship and God agrees that Job will be tested to discover the quality of his obedience and faithfulness.¹⁰ Thus it is that God allows various calamities to befall Job and what follows is about the reaction of Job, his three friends who offer their analysis and a young man who offers a different and more helpful point of view. Finally God appears to challenge Job and then rewards him for his response to everything that he had endured.

Who could have been acting as the adversary to challenge Job’s integrity? Who suggested to God that Job was only worshipping Him for what he could get out of it (see Job 1:6-2:10)? There are different views about who made those allegations and we can get some help from seeing who other adversaries (or “Satans”) are elsewhere in Scripture:¹¹

⁹ “I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

¹⁰ There is no way that God could have entered into discussion with an evil being, for God is “of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong” (Habakkuk 1:13).

¹¹ In all the references that follow the same Hebrew word “Satan” is used to describe quite different opponents. This shows that the word itself does not describe a supernatural devil. It merely describes someone in opposition to God or to someone who worships Him.

Reference	Adversary
Numbers 22:22,32	When Balaam was prevented from going to prophesy against Israel it was <i>an angel</i> who opposed him
1 Samuel 29:4	When David joined the Philistine army to fight against his own people, the Philistines feared that <i>he could become their adversary</i> whilst the battle is taking place
2 Samuel 19:22	David himself calls <i>some of his relatives</i> his adversaries or ‘Satans’
1 Kings 11:14,23,25	God raises up several <i>political adversaries</i> against King Solomon to try to reform his conduct
1 Chronicles 21:1; 2 Samuel 24:1	<i>God Himself is described as an adversary</i> acting against King David
Zechariah 3:1,2; Jude 9 ¹²	<i>The enemies of Israel</i> , who tried to stop the walls of Jerusalem being built, are described as ‘Satans’ and the apostle Jude calls these opponents ‘ <i>the devil</i> ’

Now we can see how wide-open the options are! In this dramatic opening to the Book of Job the adversary – the “Satan” – could have been an angel acting out a part, a fellow-worshipper who was envious of prosperous Job, or an enemy who wanted to see Job suffer loss and who prayed to God for that to happen. Once the challenge had been made, God responded by allowing a chain of events to occur which brought Job to his knees and showed the true quality of Job’s obedience.

¹² Jude says that the opponents of Israel were challenged by the archangel Gabriel (as described in Zechariah 3:1-2, where he is called the LORD), and were told to leave the people (whom he called “the body of Moses”) alone, in case God rebuked them. Jude’s point is that not even the angel would rebuke them – he regarded that as God’s prerogative.

So the eventual outcome was good for Job as well as for us, for we learn a lot from the book about the ways of God. Through it all Job never once thought there was a supernatural being who was bringing calamity upon him: he knew all the time that what was happening was directly under the control of God, and the book says many times that this was the case.¹³ There was no Satan in control, only God! That was what Job believed at the outset and that was what the writer of the book said had happened at the end:

*“Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.’ But (Job) said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. **Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?**’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:9,10);*

*“Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him **for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him.** And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold” (42:11).*

When the challenge was over and Job was greatly rewarded for his steadfastness, despite the loss of everything, there is no further mention of the adversary. Job prays for his three unhelpful friends, however, and the narrator tells us that Job lived happily afterwards. The Satan has served his function at the start of the drama and nobody is bothered about the adversary’s reaction to the fact that Job was hugely blessed in the end.

❖ Other Old Testament “Satan” passages

There are two other passages which are sometimes thought to teach that a supernatural monster of evil exists and they will form a helpful test to see how your Bible reading skill has developed. Have a look at them and then see whether your analysis matches that given below. They are Isaiah 14:3-23 and Ezekiel 28:11-18.

¹³ In addition to 2:10 and 42:11, see 6:4; 9:17,22; 13:20-22; 19:21; 22:3,4 and 27:2,3.

❖ Isaiah 14:3-23

The key to understanding the first passage is Isaiah 14:4, in which the object of this song is stated. It is a taunt against *the King of Babylon*, the ruler of a powerful nation that was to become a major threat to the tiny kingdom of Judah, and which would eventually take the entire nation captive. The prophecy declares that however great and mighty the king thinks himself to be, and however he might attempt to consort with his gods, he is a mortal man and will end up dead!

There are two especially interesting points in this poem. The first is that picture language is used throughout. The whole earth, including the trees, is pictured as singing happily about Babylon’s fall (14:7-8); those who are already dead are pictured as waking up to welcome the King of Babylon into their habitation (14:9-11); and the king is depicted as trying to place his throne in the heavens, as though he were lord of the universe! (14:12-14). The second thing to note is that the prophet uses the very language of Babylon as part of the satire:

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! ... ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High’”(14:13,14).

This is the very terminology Babylonians used when they were imagining their gods in heavenly places – much as the Greeks would later come to believe that their gods lived on Mount Olympus.

❖ Ezekiel 28:11-18

The Ezekiel passage has a similar key to its meaning, this time Ezekiel 28:12, where we are told that it is a taunt against the *King of Tyre*. It forms part of a section of the prophecy which is describing what will happen in the future to several Middle Eastern nations¹⁴ – Ammon, Moab, Seir, Edom, the Philistines and then Tyre (chapters 26-28). Tyre was an important trading nation at this time (about

¹⁴ Ammon (25:1-7); Moab and Seir (25:8-11); Edom (25:12-14); Philistines (25:15-17).

600 B.C.) and about 400 years earlier King Hiram of Tyre had formed an alliance with King Solomon to help him build God's temple at Jerusalem.¹⁵

This was more than just a trading arrangement for it seems that Hiram became a worshipper of the one true God. That meant that the entire nation could have allied itself with Israel and with the God of Israel. But they did not and Ezekiel now spells out the consequences for them. Once their king was in fellowship with God, associated with the work of the priests who ministered at the temple in Jerusalem,¹⁶ but they abandoned all that might have been and went their own disastrous way!

❖ New Testament Investigation

There is no reference to the Devil in the Old Testament and only very few mentions of "Satan". But when describing different adversaries or opponents, the New Testament writers use both terms.¹⁷ What had happened in the years¹⁸ between both Testaments to bring a new vocabulary¹⁹ into existence? The answer is quite straightforward, once you do a little digging around in ancient history.

After years of national independence, the nation of Israel became a subject people and the result was that they were brought into close contact with the religions of the Babylonians, Persians, Grecians and Romans – their various overlords. Those nations worshipped many gods and, in particular, they believed in rival gods of good and evil. Over time those beliefs influenced both the language of the Jews and the word pictures they came to use.

Here's an example to make the position a little clearer. On one occasion the religious enemies of Jesus accused

¹⁵ For the alliance in question see 1 Kings chapter 5.

¹⁶ There are references to Eden, the garden of God, the cherubim that were in the temple, the stones of fire being the altar where sacrifices were offered and the holy mountain: all these are allusions to the blessings that Israel enjoyed as the people of God and to Jerusalem's special position in God's purpose.

¹⁷ "Devil" occurs just 35 times in the New Testament and "Satan" 37 times. It is still infrequent.

¹⁸ There is a 400 year gap between the end of Malachi and the start of the New Testament, during which there was no revelation from God.

¹⁹ A close parallel is what happened during the 20th century and onwards with the arrival of radio and television. That introduced a new vocabulary including words like receivers, transistors, aerials and suchlike.

him of using trickery when performing his miracles, but notice how they made that accusation:

"When the Pharisees heard it, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.' Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house'" (Matthew 12:24-29).

The accusation was made by Pharisees, who were a very strict religious group in Israel and who believed very firmly in the unity of God, and it is clear that they did not believe in "Beelzebul" as a god who had any power. They were just using this language to colour their accusation against Jesus, for Beelzebul (or Beelzebub) was the name of a disgraced god in Old Testament times – something that another nation had wrongly worshipped.²⁰

Notice that Jesus uses the same language back to them, but this time he uses the term "Satan." He paints the picture²¹ of Satan having a kingdom at his command and of demonic forces that fight with him. If that is the case, Jesus says, then the whole thing is absurd – evil is fighting against evil and the kingdom of evil must be about to collapse! He immediately changes the figure to that of a strong man under attack in his own home. To Jesus the term "Satan" was clearly just colourful picture language to describe the forces of evil that oppose the purpose of God.

²⁰ See 2 Kings 1:2. The different spellings – Beelzebul and Beelzebub – occur in different versions of the Bible. The ESV uses only the first of those spellings.

²¹ That this is indeed picture language is confirmed by Mark 3:23. Writing about this very same incident Mark says: "He called them to him and said to them **in parables**, 'How can Satan cast out Satan?'"

❖ **Picture Language**

We have come across this sort of thing before when considering “Hell” and “Hell-fire”. Then we found two helpful keys to unlock the puzzle.²² We looked at the underlying Hebrew and Greek words and we noticed the use of picture language to make things more vivid and thus more important to the reader or hearer. Both those keys will help us again. Jesus had just been baptized and was about to start his public ministry when he was tempted to use his newly-acquired powers to serve himself in some way, quite understandable temptations in the circumstances. God put him to the test in private, for the record says that he was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness and was tempted in three ways:

- 1 He fasted for nearly six weeks and in extreme hunger he was tempted to make stones into bread.
- 2 He was tempted to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem and let God’s angels catch him by way of an open display of his status in God’s purpose.
- 3 He was tempted to take the kingdoms of the world by force and establish a kingdom there and then.

Jesus resisted each temptation firmly and was then given angelic support and refreshment. If you read the gospel accounts of these temptations – in Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1-13 – you will see what vivid language is used. The writers describe the conflict between the Lord Jesus and the Devil or Satan and paint a graphic word picture of the contest.

A moment’s thought will show it to be something that was taking place in the Lord’s mind, for he could not be in the wilderness and at Jerusalem at the same time, nor is there a mountain from which “*all the kingdoms of the world and their glory*” (Matthew 4:8) can be seen instantaneously. In the mind’s eye all those things are possible, but not in actuality. Nor can we imagine God subjecting His Son to the wiles of a supernatural Devil, nor Jesus agreeing to converse with a supernatural being who was God’s enemy.

It is important to note that the very first use of the word

²² Chapter 23, pages 351-356.

‘Devil’ in the New Testament occurs in Matthew chapter 4, and concerns these temptations experienced by Jesus. The life of the Lord Jesus Christ was a battle between his inherited nature, which prompted him to do wrong, and what God wanted him to do. In this struggle against sin, which Jesus resisted right up to the point when he laid down his life (see Hebrews 12:3,4), we are to see how important it is for each of us to resist the natural human desires we have to please ourselves, rather than God.

Once we grasp the main idea that the terms “Devil” and “Satan” are ways of picturing all the forces that are in opposition to God, everything begins to make sense.

- *There is only One God, who is in control of everything, and He allows no power to oppose Him;*
- *Picture language is used to portray sin as an enemy of God so that we can see the battle that must be fought against sin in the clearest possible terms;²³*
- *In the end all forms of evil, and its terrible consequences for mankind, will be destroyed and goodness will reign supreme; this too is pictured for us when all forms of evil are destroyed in the “lake of fire” (Revelation 20:1-10).*

Here are some examples of the use of this terminology in the New Testament:

Ref	Adversary
Matthew 16:23	“(Jesus) turned and said to Peter , ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’”
Luke 22:3	“Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot , who was of the number of the twelve.”

²³ A good example of this is in Revelation Chapter 12 where the enemies of God are pictured as being thrown down from their exalted positions of political power and influence and God’s chosen ruler is pictured as being exalted. This is sometimes said to be the Devil being thrown out of heaven by the angels of God, but it is a prophecy of “things that must soon take place” (Revelation 1:1), not of things that happened long before.

Ref	Adversary
John 6:70,71	Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil. "
Acts 5:3,4	Peter said, " Ananias , why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ... Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?"
Acts 13:6,10	"When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus ... and (Paul) said, 'You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?'"
2 Cor 11:14	"And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light". ²⁴
2 Cor 12:7	"So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated." ²⁵
Eph 6:11	"Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."
Rev 2:13	"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. ²⁶ Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

²⁴ This means that sometimes the opponents of God make out that they are the most righteous and upright of people.

²⁵ Paul had a disability of some sort and came to realise that it was God-given, to remind him not to trust in the flesh or in his native ability; it made him even more dependent upon God.

²⁶ This is part of a letter sent to the believers at Pergamum, in Asia Minor, and they were living in a city which was the centre of Emperor worship. The Roman Empire is seen as an opponent to Christianity in 1 Peter 5:8, where the specific reference may be to the Emperor Nero who had just begun to persecute Christians.

❖ **Original Language**

The second Bible tool we used earlier was to see if the word "Devil" or "Satan" had a meaning in the original languages. We have already discovered that "Satan" is a Hebrew word which just means "adversary" or "opponent" and that it has been carried over into the Greek New Testament without being translated. "Devil" however is a translation of the Greek word "diabolos". It means "slanderer" or "false accuser" and there are a few occasions where the word is translated just like that.²⁷ Thus the definition of the word is completely consistent with the way we have seen it being used already.

There is another way of getting a Bible definition of the word and that is by comparing one passage of Scripture with another. If one passage uses "Devil" or "Satan" terminology and the other does not, we can easily see what those terms mean when the idea is expressed in non-picture language. To an extent we have seen that already in Romans, where Paul spells out the problem of sin that we have to overcome with God's help without using the words "Satan" or "Devil" at all. And earlier in this chapter we noted that the real problem to confront us is variously described as "wickedness", "sin", "evil", "iniquity", "transgression", "disobedience" and suchlike.

All these attitudes and inclinations find a natural home in human nature. We are inclined towards them and have been ever since Adam chose to disobey God and thought that this was the easiest way through life. As we learned in Romans: "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (5:12). Now notice how the writer to the Hebrews says the same thing:

*"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he (Jesus) himself likewise partook of the same things, **that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil**" (2:14).*

Because the devil is described as that which "has the power of death", we can see straight away that the devil is another way of describing sin. This is where you can try applying a bit of simple logic to the question we are considering. The

²⁷ See 1 Timothy 3:11; 2 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 2:3.

writer says here that the devil “has the power of death”. Now ask yourself this simple question: “Who or what is responsible for death?” Remember that we have already found the answer to that, in Romans 5:12:

*“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and **death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned**”.*

We sin, therefore we die; so **SIN** is responsible for **DEATH**. If you want to check the comparison further then look up James 1:15 and Hebrews 9:26. The death of Jesus was a key part of God’s saving plan to rescue mankind from sin and death. If there had been a supernatural being somewhere, who was plotting to upset God’s purpose, the death of Jesus could not possibly have destroyed that being. But in dying Jesus dealt sin a death blow!

❖ **What about Demons?**

That leaves one remaining topic related to the Devil and Satan. If these terms are just a pictorial way of describing sin in its various forms, how do demons fit in as a part of that picture language?

We have already seen that demons are part of the picture language used both by Jesus and his religious opponents. The time when they accused him of acting by the power of Beelzebub was an occasion when:

“A demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to (Jesus), and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, ‘Can this be the Son of David?’ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, ‘It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons’” (Matthew 12:22-24).

Let’s analyse this passage together. Notice that:

- ✓ *There was no obvious cause for the man’s illness. When Jesus healed people who were obviously sick – people who were lame, had leprosy, suffered from a fever, or even those who were dead – we do not read of demons. But where it was not obvious what was wrong with a person who, for example, could not speak, it had become customary to use the language of demon possession.*

- ✓ *The record says that Jesus “healed” the man; not that he exorcised the demons! Sometimes when people have mental problems – such as those suffered by the mad-man Legion – healing the mental sickness is described as casting out the demons, as it graphically describes how Jesus could get rid of a disturbed mental state. Thus Legion was later to be found “clothed and in his right mind” (Luke 8:35).*
- ✓ *Just as the Pharisees did not believe in Beelzebub (the false god of Ekron) neither did they believe in a “prince of demons”; it was just a figure of speech. For the Old Testament used demon language to describe idol worship, and both Testaments insist that idols are no-gods – they do not exist.*

Here are some Old Testament references to demons and you will see how the same terminology has carried over into the New Testament as a figure of speech, not because people believed in demon possession as such:

*“So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to **goat demons**, after whom they whore. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations” (Leviticus 17:7);*

*“**They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known**, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded” (Deuteronomy 32:17);*

*“They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to **the demons**” (Psalm 106:37).*

The very same language is used by the apostle Paul, writing to believers in Corinth, about idolatry which was widespread in that city. So it is clear that whilst people talked about demons, many Jews and the followers of Jesus recognised that there are no such things in fact.

*“What do I imply then? **That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.** I do not want you to be participants with demons” (1 Corinthians 10:19,20).*

❖ Picture Power

One word of caution is needed. The Bible uses picture language for a particular purpose – to make things more graphic and dramatic than they would otherwise appear. So, for example, when Cain killed Abel he was immediately challenged by God in this way: *“What have you done? The voice of **your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground**. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has **opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand**”* (Genesis 4:10,11).

Biblical use of picture language to describe sin in its various forms has a similar purpose, to make us realise that sin is a powerful force that we need to really fight against, with God’s help. If it was merely referred to as an influence which needed our attention, we would not understand what a struggle it is going to be to overcome everything. The apostle Paul does not use Devil or Satan picture language in Romans, but he most certainly deploys other colourful figures. For example, when he pictures himself in a life and death struggle against his natural inclinations:

*“I see in my members another law **waging war** against the law of my mind and **making me captive** to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will **deliver me** from this body of death?”* (Romans 7:23,24).

There is a battle to be fought and won. The Lord Jesus Christ was engaged in such warfare and was marvellously triumphant over the combined forces of evil. Meanwhile we have to fight the fight of faith. This is how Paul expressed the challenge, vividly and pictorially, in another of his letters:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm” (Ephesians 6:10-13).

Things to Read

- 📖 Jesus was wonderfully able to resist temptation and it is said of him that “he did no sin”. Read the account of his temptations in the wilderness in Matthew chapter 4, when he conquered all the thoughts that occurred to him, whereby he could have used the power of God to rule the world, there and then.
- 📖 Read Mark chapter 7 about the confrontation between the Lord Jesus and his adversaries. In which he explained to them that the real problem we have to tackle is inside us. Note that later in the chapter two healings are described where the language used in the first (which happened in Gentile territory) is about unclean spirits and demons, and in the second is much more matter-of-fact.

Questions to Think About

- 24.1 There is a great deal of emphatic repetition in Hebrews 2 verse 14 about the nature of Jesus and the consequences of his death for us. What do you understand by the statement that when he died he destroyed the “one who has the power of death”? (Hebrews 9:26; James 1:15; Romans 6:23; 8:3)
- 24.2 Compare the terms used in these passages of Scripture and say whether or not you think they are both talking about the same thing. If so, what conclusions do you draw about the Bible’s use of picture language?
 - a Acts 5:3,4
 - b Ephesians 2:2,3
 - c 2 Timothy 2:26 and James 1:14
 - d Ephesians 6:11 and 4:22
 - e 2 Corinthians 4:4 and 2 Timothy 4:10