

Speaking of the Devil **Satanology: Who is the Devil?**

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

Speaking of the Devil: Satanology: Who is the Devil?

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: Ezekiel 28:11-19; Isaiah 14:12-15; Genesis 3; Matthew 4; 26:41; 1 John 2:15-17

Introduction

Two of the greatest epic poems of the Western world, *Paradise Lost* and *Faust*, have the Devil as their most arresting character. C.S. Lewis entertained and sobered his readers with *Screwtape Letters*, divulging the stratagems of his infernal majesty. Flooding the media with movies like *The Exorcist* and *The Omen*, the post-modern entertainment syndicate rocked the lingering shackles of modernity at the turn of a decade. Forty years later, interest in the supernatural has mushroomed as evidenced by weekly TV offerings (*Medium*, *Ghost Whisperer*, etc.). Curiosity about what lies beyond death is matched by the deeper awareness that the world is more than matter, energy, time, space, and chance. What the Enlightenment promised by way of a full explanation for everything based on reason and observation has failed to materialize. Worse, some of the greatest horrors of the last century grew out of the expert technologies which gave us the ability to destroy the world many times over.

Ironically, discussions about the errant *use* of science include references to the demonic and to evil. When commercial airplanes flew into skyscrapers, a shocked American public started talking seriously about “the problem of evil.” Of course, that “problem” has been with us for a very long time, and the immediate reaction of the West to this national violation bristled with threats to “hunt down and kill the evil-doers.” Welcome to the real world, fellow human travelers!

A culture which has downplayed more than once the existence of moral evil in the universe — due to a post-Enlightenment bias — suddenly gets religion and wonder aloud if maybe, just perhaps, something deeper and darker lies within the fabric of things, infesting human efforts with an alien agenda. Tempting though it might be to pin all of this on a single religion (Islam, for example) or political system (Communism, at one time), doing so only plays into the hands of scapegoating. Might we not we better served to re-examine how the world is put together and what powers actually share in the various outcomes, good and evil, throughout history?

The point here is that if we pay attention, we can feel the awful presence of evil in our midst. As the examples of evil accumulate, they take on a numinous quality, especially when they are presented by a good writer who helps us to see them in all of their disturbing power. Evil is in, with, and under human experience; it is an anti-sacrament that, in its twisted way, witnesses to the Holy. It does this by making us hunger for an ordered, moral universe. We want moral order because we desperately want to interpret human experience, including the experience of suffering, as meaningful.¹

Evil is real, and the suffering it causes is horrific. We are inclined to side with Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*: “It’s not God I refuse to accept, but the world...” Less helpful was his pouty tantrum “I want to give back my ticket and get off.” He wanted justice — don’t we all — but found no relief for the agony of living with a world so hospitable to gratuitous evil. Unfortunately, human beings don’t have the luxury or the incentive to “get off.” This doesn’t mean we are without recourse, however, or that evil has made belief in God impossible. What it does mean is that the world is a bit more complicated and unpredictable than we at first

¹ Walter Sundberg, “Whistling Past Hades,” Review of *The Death Of Satan: How Americans Have Lost The Sense Of Evil*, by Andrew Delbanco, *First Things*, No. 63 May (1996), 62.

imagined. Could it be that behind the scenes a real war rages which is more threatening and dangerous than international terrorism? Might God have allowed for this conflict when he made more than one form of rational creature in his universe and then endowed them all with free will? Might the universe itself operate on the principle of freedom and not just the creations living within it?²

Words like “Satan, Devil, demons, prince of darkness, and the Dragon” fill the lexicons of theologians and occultists alike. Great literary masterpieces, like those referenced above, spin the tale of how evil made its first appearance in the world. Colorful art with lurid images flooded the Middle Ages and the subsequent Renaissance. Satan wore many disguises, ranging from the grotesque to the “angel of light” who was seductively attractive (compare 2 Corinthians 11:14). Much of what we *think* evil is about has been influenced by these powerful images. Who can soon forget the word art of Dante in his *Inferno* or the panorama of Michelangelo in *The Last Judgment*?

One writer reminds us:

Someone says "God" to us and we see a tall old man with a white beard; Michaelangelo's Eternal Father thundering in the violent heaven of the Sistine Chapel. Someone says "Devil," and we see a leering and horned demon skulking in the dark, animated by the worst intentions. These inner optical reflexes prove nothing about God, nor about his existence. But curiously enough, they appear to us to prove something about Satan: in particular that he does not exist, except as an accessory in medieval mysteries.

...

Satan wishes to make us believe that there is no other world. If we believe him, immediately we find ourselves unable any longer to believe either in God or in Satan! If there is no heaven, as Satan tells us, neither is there any hell, nor any master of hell. If there is no judge, neither is there any fault nor any author of evil. If there is no truth, neither is there any lie or liar. If, finally, there is no one, neither is there he!

Thus, the more he prevails in our lives, the less we are able to recognize him. The more effective he is, the less dangerous he appears.³

When evil is caricatured in these ways — the devil in a red suit with tail and pitchfork, for example — it becomes trivialized in the minds of many. Can you really take seriously the idea of a personal devil when he is so easy to poke fun at? Couple that with an uneasiness we all have about making somebody else responsible for the burdens we ourselves ought to shoulder. Remember Flip Wilson: “The devil made me do it.”⁴ How do you salvage a non-caricatured view of Satan from the cultural flotsam and jetsam of contemporary culture?

One place to start is the Bible. That doesn't mean simple proof-texting, pulling a text here and there and then fitting them into a tightly built system of theology. Historically, the church has properly studied the available texts and then worked out a few defensible claims about angels, good and evil. This branch of theology is called *Angelology* while *Satanology* is a sub-branch.

Whatever we find in the Bible once grew out of the soil of the Ancient Near East, and to that garden plot we must go. The ancients told stories about villains and heroes of supernatural proportions, such as the goddess

² The advocates of “open theism” have consistently explored the issues at stake when accepting this scenario. John Sanders is a prominent thinker in this movement. His ideas appear in *The God Who Risks*. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity), 1998. The “war” motif receives a thorough treatment in Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997). Especially helpful for this series is Gregory A. Boyd's, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2001).

³ Denis De Rougemont, *The Devil's Share*. Tr. by Haaken Chevalier (Washington, D.C.: Ballinger, 1944), 19, 46.

⁴ In 1970, Wilson won a Grammy Award for his comedy album *The Devil Made Me Buy This Dress*. This belonged to one motif of his screen career embodied in the Reverend Leroy Jenkins, pastor of the 'Church of What's Happening Now,' and his most popular character, Geraldine Jones, always referring to boyfriend 'Killer' and whose line “The devil made me do it” became a national expression.

Tiamat vs. the god Marduk in a bloody battle for the creation of the present world.⁵ Living beings inhabited the world of the Bible to such an extent that the stories we find there make reference to God *above all gods*, and “gods” in this case refer to just such beings. Where did they come from? How did they relate to God? Why are they allowed to meddle in human life? When will they come to an end?

Angels were among the first intelligent creatures created by God. As immaterial beings they inhabited that part of God’s creation known as “heaven.” Genesis 1 suggests the creation of both “heaven and earth,” but gives us no details about heaven as the abode of God and his angels. Instead, the focus is on earth and how it came to be in its present form. Old and New Testament writers refer to angels as messengers of God, leaders of worship, soldiers (“hosts”) in the divine army, and the “eyes and ears” of God in the world. Usually appearing in human form when bringing messages to human beings, they may also assume other forms, including composite ones (Ezekiel 1; Isaiah 6; Revelation 4-5). In their original state, the angels formed a divine council around God. However, the fall of some angels revealed a division within this council that would eventually lead to a spiritual battle (Revelation 12). The idea of Satan, the Devil and demons (evil spirits) emerges from this storyline. So does the problem of evil.

The Bible doesn’t spend a lot of time theorizing about the origin of evil. When it speaks most clearly, the responsibility falls squarely on the moral choices of human beings. Still, behind the scenes “something evil this way goes.” Our purpose during this new series is to consider the practical side of evil in the form of *temptation*. To do that we will need to devote our first study to the sorts of issues raised above. After all, “Who is the Tempter?” must be considered along with “What is the temptation?” Then, at some point, we’ll need to explore the “wiles of the devil” and something about the “mechanics” of temptation itself. Our interests take us beyond these points, however. The Gospel has a great deal to say about the problem of evil, and how God finally plans to deal with it. This draws us into a serious discussion about Jesus and the cross: what happened there, how Jesus went to war with the “powers of evil,” and what happened when he did.

Personal Face of Evil: Speaking of the Devil

We believe in One God, the Creator of all things and their supreme ruler. The Apostle’s Creed calls Him, “Maker of heaven and earth.” This is *creational monotheism*: God is the Creator of all existing things. Yet, the Bible acknowledges the existence of “other gods” as part of the created order. The underlying generic word for “God” in the Old Testament is *’elohîm*, the plural form of the more basic term *’el*. Why plural? When the Hebrew language uses the plural form of certain nouns, it is to emphasize the supreme and majestic nature of the being in question. Thus, Genesis 1:1 tells of the supreme God (*’elohîm*) creating the universe. However, 1:2 implies that as part of God’s creation of His world was an implied battle with Chaos described by the Hebrew words *tohu* and *bohu*, “formlessness” and “emptiness.” The writer borrows these words from the names of pagan deities while refusing to accept the prominent role they played in the pagan account of origins. At some point during the long-term formation of the universe, God did battle with intelligent forces opposed to His efforts. Who were these?

The Bible does not deny the existence of the gods of the nations. As early as Exodus 12:12, we hear how Yahweh wages war and defeats “the gods of Egypt.” He does this through the ten plagues. Later, Yahweh is said to be “greater than all gods” (Exodus 18:11), and Israel must not bow to any of them (Exodus 20:3, 23:24). These gods have images cast from stone or precious metal by the hands of human beings, as illustrated by the story of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32). These gods are directly connected to intelligent beings called the *šēdîm*, a term usually translated as “demon.” This is a Babylonian loan word and refers to powerful beings, whether good or evil. It also occurs in Psalm 106:37. A fine line separates the idea of a powerful being (*’el*, a god) from the notion of a malevolent supernatural being (demon). These “gods” are really “mighty ones” whose existence and power as *angels* originated with God but who, due to some catastrophic event, became God’s enemies.

⁵ Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Battle Between Marduk and Tiamat," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* Vol. 88, No. 1 Jan-Mar (1968): 104-108.

Scholars usually make the association between these gods and evil “angels” (*mal’ak*, “messenger, angel, one sent”).

These angel-gods assemble together and form a heavenly “council of God” (Hebrew: *‘ēdat-’ēl*), a sort of divine court where all such intelligent beings, good and evil, are called before God (see Psalm 82:1). Later in the same psalm they are called “gods...sons of the Most High” (82:6). Yahweh is called the “Great God, King above all gods” (95:3). The gods must worship Yahweh (97:7) who is exalted above all the gods (135:5). These beings constitute the audience which hears the psalmist sing praise to Yahweh (138:1). That the gods are created beings is evident from their limited non-creative role (Jeremiah 10:11).

Sometimes Scripture speaks of the “hosts of heaven,” a phrase which refers to the invisible armies who must ultimately submit to the will of the One true God. Included among these “hosts” are the astronomical bodies: sun, moon, and stars (see Deuteronomy 4:19; 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18). The “hosts” in heaven are somehow related to those on earth:

In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below (Isaiah 24:21).

Notice the correlation between powers in the heavens and the earthly rulers on earth. Such a correspondence eventually grew into the idea that earthly powers have behind them a supernatural entity “god” or “angel” whose battles in the heavens were mirrored by what happened on earth.

From the book of *Daniel* comes the notion of such national angelic powers, especially in the classic text from chapter 10. An angel visits Daniel in a vision (10:1-12) and proceeds to tell him how “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” interfered with this visitation (10:13a. Aided by the angel Michael, “one of the chief princes,” he finally broke free and came to Daniel (10:13b-14). Later, the angel tells Daniel about a future engagement with “the prince of Greece” (10:20). Thus, in addition to the terms “god” and “angel,” is the further expression *śar*, meaning “chieftain, ruler, official, captain, prince,” which also refers to beings within the cosmos whose actions affect the visible world of human beings — in this case political powers like Persia and Greece. Then in 10:21, Michael is called “your prince,” an idea confirmed in 12:1 where he is additionally called “the great prince who has charge of your people.”

The Jewish world of the exilic and post-exilic periods included such understandings of supernatural realities operating behind the scenes. Human power structures which were hostile to Israel cooperated with the “princes” of the unseen world. Evil was not impersonal or abstract, but belonged to the working agendas of the “evil hosts.” That is why Daniel wrote about the unseen “prince of Persia” while also describing “the kings of Persia” (10:13). The former represents the unseen dimension while the latter refers to earthly rulers. These are correlate concepts in the Old Testament. Some scholars perceive in this correspondence the Persian idea of a government “agent” who acted as the “eyes and ears” of the king. These agents were called *shatans* and they often visited with regional rulers (*satraps*), tempting them in order to test their loyalty.

The language of the Hebrew word *satan*⁶ shares a lexical history with the Persian term *shatan*. The book of *Job* introduces the existence of Satan into the biblical narrative as a being who attended the council assembled by God. His role in this story is as an *adversary* of God who seeks to discredit one of God’s people, Job, by removing the man’s wealth and prestige and thereby break his loyalty to God. On two separate occasions Satan appears before God and seeks to undermine Job. In each case he requires permission from God in order to implement his adversarial schemes. Under no circumstance will God allow him, however, to take Job’s life.

There is no clear evidence that Job or his friends were aware of the hidden dimension influencing the plot of their shared drama. However, after Job’s health fails him, he curses the day of his birth (he does not curse

⁶ The Hebrew word usually appears with the definite article *ha* yielding *hasatan* as the actual name or title. Literally, the word means “the adversary” and has both legal and military nuances.

God), and then makes an oblique reference to the “rousing of *Leviathan*” (see also Job 41:1; Psalm 74:14; 104:26). This term is closely connected to both the mythological dragon as well as the sea monster. The prophet Isaiah also mentions it in this way:

In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea (27:1).

Notice the association of Leviathan with “serpent,” “coiling (twisted) serpent,” and “monster of the sea.” The book of Job also identifies two other mythological beings: *Rahab* (9:13; 26: 12-13; see also Psalm 89:10; Isaiah 51:9) and *Behemoth* (40:15) who is mysteriously referred to as “first of the works of God” (40:19). Underlying each of these “monster” archetypes is the same ruling idea: the powerful opponent of God who actively works within the world but whose future doom has somehow already been determined. Each figure reflects some feature of Satan, the one who wages war against Job and thereby against God Himself. Serpent imagery draws the reader back to Genesis 3 where such a creature actively tempts the human race and through them brings sin into the world (see also Amos 9:3).

About Behemoth and Leviathan, Elmer Smick observes:

By telling of his dominion over Behemoth and Leviathan, perhaps by means of a subtle double entendre, Yahweh is celebrating his triumph in the moral sphere. The Satan, the Accuser, has been proved wrong though Job does not know it.⁷

Near the end of the Old Testament, the figure of Satan appears when the Jewish people were about to restore their priesthood in a newly rebuilt temple at Jerusalem. The prophet Zechariah sees Satan in a vision:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. ² And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" ³ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. ⁴ And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments." ⁵ And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by (Zechariah 3:1-5).

The language of this scene mirrors a courtroom scene where an accused is about to hear the charges read against him. In this case, Satan (“the accuser, adversary”) assumes that role but is prevented from proceeding — the equivalent of having the case thrown out. Joshua is about to be installed as High Priest but his appearance is that of someone who has gone through a fiery ordeal which left him covered with soot. Apparently Satan intended to discredit him because of his defilement. God’s response is to cleanse Joshua’s sin and clothe him with clean garments worthy of his new office. God’s forgiveness overcomes Satan’s accusations.

The role of Satan as accuser appears in the New Testament as well. As if to gather together rich symbols used by the Old Testament in its description of evil personified, the writer of *Revelation* summarizes Satan’s work in this passage:

⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world - he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God (Revelation 12:9-10).

In the expressions “accuser of our brothers” and “accuses them day and night before our God” is contained the same concept as we see in Zechariah 3: Satan seeks to undermine and bring charges against the people of God in an effort to discredit both them and God. Terms like “dragon, serpent, devil and Satan” are bundled together from their various usages in the Old Testament into a single personal being. You are encouraged to read the Revelation 12 in its entirety and follow the storyline presented there. We will deal with that material in a later study.

⁷ Elmer B. Smick, "Another Look at the Mythological Elements in the Book of Job," *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 No. 2 Spring (1978): 227.

Evil wears a personal face, though he is known by several different names. We frequently call him “Satan” and “the Devil,” words which convey the ideas of adversary, accuser, and enemy. He belongs to the backplane of history, that unseen dimension of the world nevertheless active and real, where a great battle wages between God and evil personified. Corresponding to the invisible war is a myriad of earthly conflicts found within nature itself as well as between human beings. Evil is a complex aspect of the world and does not easily admit of instant explanation. However, the biblical material takes seriously this invisible war, even as it uses multi-faceted language to express how the battle is fought.

Background and Foreground: The Devil and the Nations

Had you asked Jewish people in the 6th century B.C.E. who their adversary was, they would have spoken with one voice: Babylon. With unmitigated fury Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded the southern kingdom of Israel (Judah) and took into exile scores of its people. He did this on at least three occasions, climaxing with the destruction of the Hebrew capital (Jerusalem) and its temple (586 B.C.E.). In his wake, this ruthless king left rubble where once there had been glory, a grim testimony to his scorched-earth policy.⁸ The pagan king was Israel’s great destroyer, adversary and *Satan*. Evil wore a human face — a deadly face. In the aftermath of such horrors, one hardly has the patience for theological niceties. Nebuchadnezzar and his military leaders were emissaries of evil; they were, for all intents, “the devil and his angels.”

Of course, as we noted in our discussion above, a deeper narrative was being played out in the backplane of history. Its story was closely connected to the human one. Who better to interpret that elusive parallel than a prophet of Israel, in this case, a man named Isaiah. Prophets are gifted by God to *see* the realities which exist behind what we ordinarily see. They see the world from God’s point of view. What Israel saw was only death and destruction, along with the agony of war and exile. What the prophet saw was something deeper and darker: the Satanic reality lying behind the surface features. In Isaiah 13:1 he commences an *oracle* — in Hebrew a *maššā’* — against Babylon which takes the form of *hāzāh*, a “vision” — something *seen more deeply*. The word for “oracle” literally means a “burden” or, better, “something *weighty*,” referring to the richer significance of events than *meets the eye* — in this case they *meet the spirit*. How does Isaiah communicate this mysterious *vision*?

1. In chapter 13 the audience hears about a coming war which Yahweh Himself is preparing to wage against Babylon. He commands “his holy ones” (13:3), that is, angels who belong to His “heavenly hosts.” Recall that the word “hosts” actually means “armies” in Hebrew (from *tsāba’*). When God goes to war, He announces the “Day of Yahweh” (13:6, 9). He summons the powers of the heavens to fight, symbolized by the darkening of sun, moon and stars (13:10). The heavens “tremble” and the earth “shakes” (13:12). His twin objective is to end the reign of the proud and to restore the oppressed (13:11; 14:4). As Isaiah reveals his vision, we see the parallel events “above” (God, heaven) and “below” (earth and the nations). What happens in the visible world of human beings parallels what God is doing in His invisible realm.
2. Then, in 14:9-11, an unexpected speaker suddenly breaks the silence from “below” where yet another world shows interest in the events taking place on earth:

⁹ Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come; it rouses the shades to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth; it raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations. ¹⁰ All of them will answer and say to you: ‘You too have become as weak as we! You have become like us!’ ¹¹ Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps; maggots are laid as a bed beneath you, and worms are your covers (Isaiah 14:9-11).

This “other world” is a place the Hebrews called *še’ōl* (Sheol, “the grave”), their word for the unseen world of the dead. Like *hadēs* to the Greeks, Sheol was a shadowy and mysterious realm where few human beings wanted to enter but which Death required of all. Isaiah paints a graphic picture here of once dead rulers rising from their thrones and forming a welcoming party to the defeated rulers of Babylon whose own death

⁸ David Schloen, Assistant Professor of Syro-Palestinian Archaeology, Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, has written extensively about the evidence left at Ashkelon in southern Palestine. The data confirms this scorched earth policy and the brutality with which Nebuchadnezzar carried out his military campaigns. See http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/pubs/nn/spr95_ash.html (May 8, 2010) for his article on this subject.

brings them down to the grave. They do not offer joyous greetings, but instead serve up a strong dose of reality, telling the defeated Babylonians, “You have become as weak as we! You have become like us!” Pride meets death, “pomp is brought down to Sheol.”

3. The tone of Isaiah’s oracle changes dramatically in 14:12-15 which comprises a new poetic unit. Introduced by a question — “How are you fallen from heaven...?” — the poem uses language of a higher order than previously. Sheol and its dead still speak in 14:9-11 using these key phrases:
 - a. Heaven
 - b. Morning star
 - c. Son of the dawn
 - d. Ascend to heaven
 - e. Raise my throne
 - f. Above the stars of God
 - g. Enthroned on the mount of the assembly
 - h. Utmost heights of the sacred mountain
 - i. Tops of the clouds
 - j. Make myself like the Most High

Whereas the oracle had previously addressed the *visible* dimension of evil in the person of the king of Babylon, now in 14:12-15 the *invisible* dimension appears dramatically and is queried by Sheol. Death seems puzzled by what it sees: a powerful being of the invisible world who aspired to rise up through the cosmos until it finally took its place on the throne of God but then suddenly fell down to Sheol (14:15). This being is supposedly called “Morning Star” (Hebrew: *hēylēl*) and “Son of the Dawn” (Hebrew: *ben-šahār*). English translations sometimes render the first term as “Lucifer,” a word which means “bearer of light.” This is based on a Latin word used by Jerome when he translated the Hebrew to Latin in his version of the Bible known as the *Vulgate* (405 C.E.). However, this translation of *hēylēl* has little to do with the original root of the Hebrew verb, *hālal*, which usually means “praise.” That is its *positive* connotation. In Isaiah’s oracle the tone is *negative* which suggests another meaning: “mad, foolish, or boastful” (see 1 Samuel 21:13; Psalms 102:8; Ecclesiastes 2:2; 7:7; Isaiah 44:25; Jeremiah 25:16; 50:38; 51:7; Job 12:17; Psalms 75:4; Psalms 5:5; 73:3; 75:4; Jeremiah 46:9; Nahum 2:4; 1 Kings 20:11; Psalms 10:3; 34:2; 44:8; 49:6; 52:1; 97:7; Proverbs 20:14; 25:14; 27:1).

This other meaning fits better with the context. A boastful being who claims to be “son of the dawn” has deceived the nations, resulting in their devastation (14:12). His boast is itemized in the various “I will” statements which follow in 14:13-14. He is the power behind the evil actions of the king of Babylon, but his activities will come to naught, as will those whom he has misled by his boasts. Just as the serpent in the garden deceived human beings by his boastful claims about being as wise as God, so the being in Isaiah 14 does the same to the chief ruler of the ancient near east. The wreckage of this being’s failed agenda takes the form of the fallen Babylonian empire (see 14:16-23).

What we have in Isaiah 14, then, is a good example of concurrent realities which interoperate. Yes, there is a real king of Babylon who conquers nations, including Israel, and who thereby is the adversary (the Satan). However, operating in the invisible realm is this other being who wages his own war with God and whose actions inspire the agenda of the Babylonian king. Put simply, this being *tempts* the king of Babylon who yields to the temptation and embarks on world conquest. However, in his efforts to subvert the purposes of God, this being *fails* and thereby *falls*. In the failure of Babylon is revealed the fall of Satan. We are given no further insight beyond the immediate circumstances of Babylon’s demise in this chapter.

A second related text is found in Ezekiel 28 where the visible dimension has to do with the king of Tyre. In the “word” which Yahweh gave to Ezekiel, he denounced the “pride” found in the city of Tyre, a famous, prosperous and rich commercial center on the eastern Mediterranean coast north of Israel. Phoenician Tyre was “queen of the seas,” an island city of unprecedented splendor. She grew wealthy from her far-reaching colonies

and her industries of purple-dyed textiles. But she also attracted the attention of jealous conquerors, among them the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander the Great. Phoenician expansion began about 815 B.C. when traders from Tyre founded Carthage in North Africa. Eventually its colonies spread around the Mediterranean and Atlantic, bringing to the city a flourishing maritime trade. But prosperity and power make their own enemies. Early in the sixth century B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, laid siege to the walled city for thirteen years. Tyre stood firm, but eventually the residents of the mainland city abandoned it for the safety of the island.

Tyre's purple-dyed textiles worn throughout the ancient world as a mark of royal rank brought fame and fortune to the city. One gram of pure purple dye was worth ten or twenty grams of gold, so it is not surprising that some of the beautiful sarcophagi of the necropolis belonged to wealthy purple dye manufactures of Tyre. The ancient Tyrians extracted the dye from the Murex, a marine snail that still lives along Tyre's shores deep among the rocks and sunken archeological remains.

In Ezekiel 28:2, Tyre was said to live “in the heart of the seas” and boastfully claimed to be “a god” and to be “as wise as a god.” The basis for its boast lay with the success of its commerce: “you have gained wealth for yourself” (28:4). As a consequence, God tells Tyre, “your heart has grown proud” (28:5). Countering this pride is the coming invasion of the Babylonians and the eventual loss of Tyrian prestige: “You will be but a man, and not a god” (28:9).

All of this applies quite literally to the history of Tyre. But Ezekiel's prophecy becomes a true oracle which peers into the heart of Tyre and sees behind the scenes the ever-present activity of that being who misled Babylon. The poetry of 28:12b-19, like that of Isaiah 14:12-15, assumes a deeper aspect. Suddenly we are hearing about a being 1) who once lived in Eden (28:13), 2) the anointed cherub (angel) (28:14), 3) perfection turned to corruption (28:15), and 4) eventually expelled from “the mount of God” (28:16) because of pride (28:17) and perverted wisdom (28:17). Such language echoes the themes of Genesis 3 where the first human pair encountered the serpent whose misleading suggestions resulted in expulsion from Eden. Of special note is the list of precious stones in 28:13: ruby, topaz, emerald, chrysolite, onyx, jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and beryl — all set in gold and given to this being on the day of his creation. These precious stones were included among those found in the breastplate of the high priest of Israel (see Exodus 28:17; 29:10) and would later appear as foundation stones symbolizing the apostles of Christ in Revelation 21:20. This fascination with precious stones has to do with their value and the magical way they filtered light, creating a beautiful luminosity. This is the closest Scripture comes to describing the original vocation of this being who later became the epitome of evil in the invisible realm.

What Ezekiel's prophecy does is compare the mercantile exploits of Tyre and its subsequent collapse with the primordial activities of the being we have come to call Satan. What do we learn? This being was once an angel charged with specific roles in the earthly paradise called Eden. He was a perfect being: in beauty, wisdom, and wisdom. Then a willful act of prideful rebellion led to acts of violence and a corruption of wisdom. With regard to Tyre, this fallen being tempted an entire culture to employ its great wisdom in the acquisition of wealth and then to boast about itself “as a god,” forgetting its human frailties.

To summarize: the prophetic portrait of Evil in the Old Testament becomes focused on an angel (cherub) originally created perfect by God, but later lost that perfection through pride and ambition. In its original office, this being was a key player in the early days of creation and in the garden of Eden. The association of this being with Eden has led scholars to connect it with the serpent who deceived the first human pair. By the time we reach the end of the Old Testament, this portrait has grown to include the name “Satan” and to see this angel as still a member of God's council who regularly engages in personal accusations against human beings. He also leads hosts of other angels in invisible warfare opposing the initiatives of God and threatening His people. Satan does this through the intermediary function of earthly rulers like the king of Babylon and the king of Tyre

whom he tempts to become just like himself: proud, boastful, violent, covetous, and deceptive. For Satan to tempt human beings means that he seeks to shape them after his own image.

Satan Between the Testaments

In the writings which cover the period of Jewish history between the Old and New Testaments, Satan takes on the role familiar to people today.⁹ Evil was portrayed as something which was outside the will of God, and began to be attributed to Satan (who also became the “obstructor” (the *satan*, *hasatan*), preventing God's will from being done, and the “accuser,” calling people away from God and ridiculing those who obey God. Likely taking their lead from the adjacent nations (like Persia) and religions like Zoroastrianism, Jews began to understand the cosmos as divided into both good and evil. Those nations who had stood against the Jews, were considered to be evil and under the control of Satan. The Jews, as the chosen people (see Genesis 12:1-2), also saw themselves on the side of God and goodness.

Furthermore, conflicts between various Jewish groups arose based what they believed “standing for God” meant. This led to the outcast groups being branded as “Satanic.” An example of this is the Essenes (the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls), who believed that Satan had taken control of the world through the occupying forces, and through other Jews who often welcomed their oppressors. Their withdrawal from the world was literally, for them, a withdrawal from Satan's kingdom. It was also during this time that the story of Satan's fall from heaven was more fully developed.

It is during this period that the story of Satan as a fallen angel who led a rebellion against God and was cast out of heaven enters the literature (2 Enoch 29:4). Satan is now seen also as the initiator of the first sin among human beings, bringing death into the world (Wis. 2:24; 2 Enoch 11: 74-80; 22:42), and is responsible for subsequent evil as well as sickness.

During the period between the Testaments there arose a new kind of writing within Judaism called *apocalyptic literature* and the concept *kingdom of God* came into popular usage. The hope of the apocalyptic writers was for a heavenly kingdom which would end this present evil age. A new world would break into the present world and bring the rule of God. The belief was that Satan dominated this present evil age; it was under his rule. When Antiochus Epiphanes unleashed his persecution on Israel (175-164 B.C.E.), this view began to flourish. This horrific deluge of evil could only be the result of a cosmic conflict. This view of the kingdom saw God himself ushering in his kingdom and reversing the evils of Satan. Good would triumph, healing would occur, the demonic would be defeated.

The Devil and D-Day

Jesus and the Gospels

By the time we come to the New Testament Gospels, the doctrine of Satan and demons has grown substantially in Jewish thought. The role of angels, both good and evil, helped explain the ongoing invisible conflict in the cosmos. Such creatures heralded the arrival of the newborn king in distinct annunciation narratives involving Zechariah (Luke 1, birth of John), Joseph (Matthew 1) and Mary (Luke 1). “Heavenly hosts” appeared to the shepherds of Israel (Luke 2). Yet, sinister forces threatened to destroy the baby, enlisting the jealous paranoid tendencies of Herod the Great (Matthew 2). This theme of the Evil One trying to “devour” the Christ-child receives dramatic treatment in *Revelation* where a Dragon figure takes the stage opposite God's woman in chapter 12, preparing to consume her child once it is born. We will examine that text in more detail later in our study.

More pressing for Jesus is the temptation by Satan in the wilderness following his baptism by John, an account found in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 and also alluded to in Mark 1. The dominant terms in these accounts are

⁹ A helpful summary appears in James Kallas, *The Real Satan* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 27-48.

“Satan” (*satanos*) and “Devil” (*diabolos*), and they refer to a personal being capable of communication with Jesus. This being claims that all the kingdoms of the world have been given to him, and that he has the authority to give them to whomever he “wills” (Luke 4:6). Jesus refuses his offer and ultimately defeats Satan’s efforts to discredit him with the words “Be gone, Satan...” (Matthew 4:10).

During the course of his public ministry, the opponents of Jesus from the Jewish leadership allege:

It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons (Matthew 12:24 (9:34); see also Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15).

In response, Jesus says:

23 And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end (Mark 3:23-26; Matthew 12:26; Luke 11:18).

Notice the equivalence of the name Beelzebul and the term Satan. Some translations, following different manuscript readings of these texts, have Beelzebub instead. The *Testament of Solomon*¹⁰ (6.2; 6.7) teaches that Beelzebul is prince of the demons and was once a leading heavenly angel associated with the planet Venus as the evening star. Beelzebul claims to cause destruction through tyrants, to cause demons to be worshipped among men, to excite priests to lust, to cause jealousies in cities and murders, and to bring on war.

Scholar Lloyd Gaston thinks that the name is a compound of the Old Testament designation *Ba'al* prefixed to a word meaning “exalted abode”, an alternate form of a Canaanite deity. He suggests that the Jewish conception of evil angels and demons was tangential to the ancient mythologies, and that pagan gods become demons in later Jewish thought.¹¹ Of course, none of this analysis diminishes the truth of Satan’s existence but does shed light on the sources for the language used to talk about him. Satan is here depicted as lord of a domain, once exalted, but in Jesus’ words, now faces a certain “end” at the hands of Jesus.

Jesus tells parables in which Satan aggressively takes away the word as soon as it is soon in people’s hearts (Mark 4:15; Matthew 13:19), but in spite of this obstruction, the word eventually triumphs in the world where it results in an abundant harvest. The Devil is said to plant weeds among the good wheat in advance of the final harvest (Matthew 13:39). At the final judgment, Jesus tells his disciples that “eternal fire” — the biblical symbol for judgment — has been “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). This language refers to Satan’s ultimate defeat at the consummation.

The clearest profile of the Devil appears in John 8:44:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

The twin features of *murder* and *lying* dominate the nature of the Devil. Moreover, the Devil is said to have children among the human race, namely, the religious opponents of Jesus. They do what the Devil wants, including their plot to have Jesus *killed* by spreading *lies* about him (Matthew 26:60).

In very personal terms, Jesus warns Peter about the efforts of Satan to “sift him” (Luke 22:31). Under such unequal threats, Jesus promises to pray for Peter and for the other disciples (John 17:15). In the “Our Father” he teaches his followers to pray for deliverance from “the evil one” (Matthew 6:13).¹² On another occasion he addresses Satan *as if* he is speaking to Peter (Mark 8:33; Matthew 16:23). Judas, the betrayer of Jesus, becomes the “host” for Satan’s direct activity (Luke 22:3; John 13:2, 27; see also John 6:70 where this disciple is said to

¹⁰ This work belongs to the *Pseudopigrapha*, a collection of non-biblical writings claiming connections to the biblical text, either by way of pseudonymous authorship or subject matter. The *Testament of Solomon* was not written by Solomon, though attributed to him, and appeared no earlier than the 1st century C.E. and shows signs of Christian influence. Greek and other pagan sources are infused into the book, along with extensive activity of demons under the command of Beelzebul.

¹¹ Lloyd Gaston, "Beelzebul," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 18 (1962): 247-255.

¹² This is the literal rendering of the underlying Greek phrase *apo tou ponērou*.

be “a devil”). One specific healing story involves a woman with a “spirit” which produced a condition much like *hyperkyphosis* (Luke 13:11). Jesus refers to her as one “whom Satan bound for eighteen years” and whom he, Jesus, has loosed by healing her (13:16).

On another occasion, after hearing his disciples report on their itinerant healing and teaching ministry, Jesus declares, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). The theme of Satan’s final defeat seems to be taught in two distinct stages, starting with an initial defeat, followed by a final defeat. Each time Jesus or his disciples cast out demons or heal persons Satan is thereby being bound and his efforts to undermine God’s kingdom are defeated. We might well see these activities as a kind of “D-Day” in which the sign of Satan’s final defeat is given. In a similar vein, we hear Jesus saying:

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out (John 12:31).

...the ruler of this world is judged (John 16:11).

The coming death and resurrection of Jesus, in the Gospels, is *D-Day* in its ultimate form. Jesus speaks about the confrontation he will have with Satan at that time, saying: “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me” (John 14:30). On occasion he speaks ominously about the approaching trial and his death: “When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53).

Acts

Once the early church starts to take shape in the book of *Acts*, we see attempts to undermine it. One of these, told in the story of Ananias and Sapphira, involves lying and deception. Confronted by Peter, they hear him say, “... 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?” (Acts 5:3).

On a positive note, the process of people’s salvation involves, in the words of Jesus to Paul,

“...open[ing] their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:18).

Sick persons are “oppressed by the Devil” (Acts 10:38) are set free by the word of God. Elymas a Jewish magician, who opposed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, was confronted by Peter in this way:

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? (Acts 13:10).

Efforts to deal with evil spirits by a magical use of Jesus’ name lead to failure as illustrated by this account:

¹³ Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus, whom Paul proclaims.” ¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” ¹⁶ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded (Acts 19:13-16).

This reinforces the idea that human beings cannot effectively overturn the works of Satan without having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (see *Jude* below).

Paul

Human beings are born into a world ruled “by the *prince* of the power of the air” (Greek: *archōn*) who determines the “course of this world,” and is “the spirit presently working in fallen humanity” (Ephesians 2:1-2). “Passions of the flesh,” “desires of the body and mind,” and “angry natures” dominate human beings as a result of the prince’s administration of this world (Ephesians 2:3). Paul normally ties fallen humanity to its descent from the one man Adam, resulting in sin and death. In this case, he suggests that “the prince” remains the active agent in these conditions. He remains “the god of this world” who “blinds the minds of the unbelievers” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

However, in the experience of salvation, a fundamental change in citizenship takes place which affects a person's relationship to Satan and his kingdom: "He [God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

Yet, in ordinary things like travel plans, Satan still "hinders" the work of the kingdom (1 Thessalonians 2:18). To Paul Satan had his "messengers" who harassed Christians (2 Corinthians 12:7), who had "designs" (2 Corinthians 2:11), and "schemes" (Ephesians 6:11). Satan "tempted" Christians to sin but in conjunction with their own lack of self-control (1 Corinthians 7:5). No opportunity should be given Satan to gain a foothold (Ephesians 4:27). Young Christians are especially vulnerable to the "condemnation" of the Devil (1 Timothy 3:6), as are the leaders of the church who are the special objects his "snare" (1 Timothy 3:7; 2 Timothy 2:26). Like sheep Christians who are inattentive to their walk with the Lord can "stray after Satan" (1 Timothy 5:15). Satan's advantage lies with his deceptive ways, including his "disguise as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). When members of the church prove to be especially intransigent and unwilling to repent of sin, they are said "to be handed over to Satan" for the purpose of "destroying the flesh" and for "learning not to blaspheme" (1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20).

Paul calls Satan "the tempter" (Greek: *peirazōn*) and worries that the Christians at Thessalonica might be losing their faith because of certain afflictions faced by the apostles (1 Thessalonians 3:5). Drawing on the account in Genesis 3, Paul correlates present temptations with what happened to Eve when she was deceived by the serpent (2 Corinthians 11:3). To prepare for attacks from "the evil one" Paul counsels the putting on of the "whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11-17). In response God will "guard you against the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

In the present, God will "crush Satan" under the feet of Christ followers (Romans 16:20). The future brings the final days of Satan's earthly agency:

⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10).

The phrase "lawless one," coupled with the traits of "false signs and wicked deception," identify antichrist in one of his several instantiations throughout history. More probably Paul has in mind the final embodiment of Satanic agency before the Second Coming. The phrase "activity of Satan" has to do with the energy or power by which the earthly agent operates.

General Letters

The writer to the Hebrews begins his homily-letter by declaring Jesus to be superior to the angels. He seeks to counteract a view which would make Jesus into an angel or which would privilege angels in ways which detract from the achievement of Jesus (Hebrews 1:4-7, 13; 2:2, 5, 7, 9, 16; 12:22; 13:2). On the other hand, he describes how Jesus by his incarnation and death destroyed "the one who has the power of death, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

James places priority on the defeat of temptation which involves "resisting the devil," and the confident promise that "he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

In *1 Peter*, the devil behaves like a predatory animal, the lion, prowling earth in search of human prey. The apostle counsels his readers to "be alert and watchful" as they "resist" the devil, relying on confident faith and accepting suffering when it comes (1 Peter 5:8-9).

The *letters of John*, as with the Gospel, underscore "birth" and human origins. Persons are either children of God or children of the devil (1 John 3:8, 10). The Son of God came "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Overcoming "the evil one" is the present task of the Christian community (1 John 2:13). The indwelling

word of God makes this possible (1 John 2:14). Cain was from “the evil one” and that is why he murdered his brother (1 John 3:12). Through the protection of God, persons born of God are shielded from “the evil one” (1 John 5:18). By contrast, “the world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Yet, a note of victory breaks through with these words of promise:

“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Recalling a non-biblical story about Moses, *Jude* tells how the archangel Michael did not directly address the devil but instead uttered the words “the Lord rebuke you” (Jude 1:9). This reinforces the idea that human beings who confront Satan must do so by the power of Jesus and not by their own volition (see Acts 19 above).

Revelation

If *Genesis* launches the provocative narratives about evil and the devil, *Revelation* takes the whole matter head-on. Consistent with the brightly colored images of apocalyptic literature, its depiction of Satan and the cosmic battle unites the several strands found earlier in the Bible. The world is a war-zone where the climactic conflict between God and evil has its final engagement.

The common terms, Satan and Devil, appear in a series of passages, starting with the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Before the writer presents the more dramatic scenes, he undertakes his pastoral role by counseling the Christian communities how to respond when attacked.

1. “The synagogue of Satan” (2:9; 3:9). Tribulation, poverty and slander assault the suffering church at Smyrna. Credit for these indignities goes to hostile Jewish synagogues who opposed the Christian Gospel. Synagogues were not only centers of worship, they were also the heart of community life for the Jews of the *diaspora*. Since maintaining group identity was important to displaced groups within the Roman Empire, the presence of the Christian church in the same cities where the synagogues were located constituted a source of conflict. Both Paul’s letters and the book of *Acts* document the interplay. Heavy-handed measures led to the arrest of Christ followers and their being handed over to Roman authorities on charges of sedition. One word characterized this behavior: adversarial, and “adversary” is the literal meaning of the word “Satan.” The role of the Adversary, then, was not only personal but also institutional, social and political. Early Christians faced Satan’s attacks through such structures as the synagogue.
2. “The devil is about to throw some of you into prison” (2:10). Prison, as used here, probably means confinement by secular authorities. The context says that, at minimum, this means suffering, but might also result in death. Using “ten days” as the term for “testing” likely borrows from Daniel 1:12, 14, and 15 where the three Hebrew youth in Babylon undergo a “test” involving a comparison to their Babylonians counterparts. Three times reference is made to “ten days.” Elsewhere the use of “ten days” as a waiting period suggests the idea of “a reasonable period of time,” not necessarily long but of sufficient duration for a fair determination to be made (see Genesis 24:55; Nehemiah 5:18; Jeremiah 42:7). In the present case, a sufficient period of time passes to allow for the Christian church to be tested and approved. Just as the devil tested Jesus for forty days, so he tests the followers of Jesus who will hopefully pass the test as Jesus did.
3. “Satan’s throne...Satan dwells” (2:13). Set in the city of Pergamon, the church who receives this letter is reminded that its city is, in some special sense, the place where Satan rules. How? The most significant artifact associated with this text is the famous *Pergamon Altar* built during the second century B.C.E. as part of the acropolis in Pergamon, measuring 117 feet wide and 110 feet deep. Visually the edifice has the appearance of a great throne and is decorated with friezes depicting battles scenes involving gods and demi-gods, as well as features of the city’s founding and history. Efforts of the German Carl Humann (1878) led to the rescue and reconstruction of the structure in Berlin where today it belongs to a museum located on Museum Island. No doubt the biblical writer was drawn to the imagery of this city and the correspondence between the images on the friezes and the true story of God’s cosmic battle with Satan. To accentuate this association, Pergamon worshipped Aesclepius, the god of healing, and Serapis, the Egyptian god of the underworld. In Roman times, the worship of the Emperor, starting with Augustus, achieved prominence.

As a consequence of his faithfulness to the Christian faith and rejection of such paganism, a Christian named *Antipas* became the first martyr in this city.

4. "...who have not known the deep things of Satan" (2:24). Spoken to the church in Thyatira, this description suggests that some Christ followers have adopted false doctrines while others have not. Beliefs not agreeing with Christian orthodoxy are tagged as *Satanic teaching*, suggesting that one way Satan undermines the church is through patently false belief. The New Testament identifies false beliefs as those which diminish the divine-human nature of Jesus, deny that he actually became a human being, impose a legalistic means of salvation, or simply "teach another Gospel."

The most sweeping of the cosmic scenes in *Revelation* is found in chapter 12. We find images of God's people ("a woman clothed with the sun...") and Satan ("great red dragon") filling the screen of the text. Combat is also prominent, as God's angels engage in war with the Dragon and throw him out of heaven, confining him to earth. A full list of names for God's enemy appears in this chapter: dragon, serpent, devil, Satan, and deceiver — the most complete of its kind in the Bible. According to storyline, the birth and subsequent ascent of God's "man-child," Jesus, to heaven are events which bring the war of God with his archenemy to a climax. In a decisive battle between Michael the archangel and the Dragon, Satan is decisively beaten but allowed to live, confined to the space-time universe. He no longer has access to heaven or the divine council as had been the case in the Old Testament. His demeanor is that of a sore loser who still has freedom to affect the cosmos, capable of implementing his own "scorched earth" policy against God's good creation.

According to Revelation 9, Satan is called *Abaddon* (Hebrew, *Apollyon* in Greek="destroyer").¹³ Aiding his efforts are warriors drawn from the Abyss.¹⁴ Once again, we note how the biblical text correlates the battles taking place on earth with the cosmic struggle of God and Satan. The image of "warriors" is simultaneously surreal and earthly; spiritual and physical; demonic and human.

From Revelation 20 we learn that the dragon (serpent, devil, Satan) is seized and bound for an indefinitely long period of time, as described by the phrase "thousand years." In this context, the Abyss belongs to the realm of the cosmos, including earth itself. The "binding" of Satan parallels his being cast out of heaven and confined to earth in chapter 12. Further, we are told, Satan will eventually be banished from earth itself to a place of judgment called "the lake of fire."

Taking the language of Revelation 12 and 20, we have a portrait of Satan as a defeated (*D-Day*) foe who spends his days resentfully attacking the work of God and His people in this world. The space-time universe remains the final battleground, as the kingdom of God advances through the preaching of the Gospel, reclaiming human beings and their institutions. New Creation is already underway, having begun when Jesus rose from the dead. But Satan continues his efforts to challenge it through temptation, spiritual blindness, and his many strategies to discredit the Church. Thankfully, in the end, *V-Day* arrives, and the New Creation becomes a wonderful unity of heaven and earth without Satan's presence ever again a factor (see Revelation 21-22).

Concluding Thoughts

A few words of wise reflection:

The problem, of course, is that words like Satan, Lucifer, Devil, and the like carry so much imaginative baggage with them that it is often easy to forget Evil as we demystify the iconography in which Evil appears. To see behind the iconographical inheritance of words like "satan" is not to erase the notion of evil but to detach it from the cultural baggage that adheres to it.¹⁵

Further:

¹³ The Hebrew term also appears in Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Psalm 88:11; Proverbs 15:11; 27:20. The main thought is the personification of Death.

¹⁴ The Abyss is "the deep" and has definite connections to the sea. The terms "pit" and "bottomless pit" are sometimes used to translate this term. However, the concept belongs to "this world." Earth is the location of the Abyss in the ancient cosmology.

¹⁵ Lawrence S. Cunningham, "Satan: A Theological Meditation," *Theology Today* 51 No. 3 October (1994): 365-365.

- (1) There is moral evil in the world caused by the human misuse of the will.
- (2) The evil of a person can ramify in a way that creates a structural presence of evil in culture. Such systems transcend private sin and give evil an urgent power greater than the free disposition of any individual, even though such systems are sustained by the free choice of their participants.
- (3) At times, we can personify the magnitude of that evil by reaching for quite concrete nouns such as "Powers" or "Principalities" or "Satan" or the "Evil One."
- (4) We need to be cautious in making such personifications that we do not shift the onus of responsibility away from the free choosing individual to the personified power: "The devil made me do it."

In the final analysis, the urgent and continuing task of the Christian is to affirm that there is evil in the world and that evil can mount to such a pressure point for a person or a culture that it seems to take on a personality of its own. Against that power (and let's call it by its true name: Evil) we stand with the assurance of the gospel that the redemptive power of Christ is greater than the evil palpably present in the world because God "has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13).¹⁶

Evil wears a personal face, whether human or super-human. Within the good creation God has made, a battle rages, and we are inexorably drawn into it by the historical connection to our first parents who heeded the serpent's voice. As we consider the more specific theme of temptation in the rest of this series, we must maintain a careful balance between the responsibility for our own choices and the challenges to our freedom mounted by Satan. Perhaps the greatest temptation of all is to relinquish responsibility and use the person of Satan as an excuse. Doing so yields far too much ground to evil. Doing so is paramount to conceding defeat in the larger battle of evil's bigger narrative.

Whatever we say about the biography of Satan must include the solid confession that "we renounce the Devil and all his wicked works." If the story of Genesis 3 tells us anything at all, it is that evil ought to have no more power over us than that of a slithering serpent. In Jesus' words, we ought to see "Satan fall like lightning from heaven." As Paul reminds us, Satan is "crushed beneath our feet," and we are "not ignorant of his schemes."

Luther's hymn grasps the gravity and the victory with both hands:

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us;
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us.

The Prince of Darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

"A Mighty Fortress," Martin Luther (1529)
("Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott")
Translated by Frederick H. Hedge (1853)

Glory to God! Amen.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 366.

Digger Deeper: *Speaking of the Devil: Satanology, Who is the Devil?*
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *Speaking of the Devil: Satanology, Who is the Devil?* carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. Think about the images of the Devil you remember from childhood. List those early impressions, and then comment about how they might have changed in your adult years. Why did they change? What is your current understanding of the Devil and his relationship to the problem of evil in the world?
2. Read Job 1 and 2. What information do these passages give us about Satan? How did he relate to God in the story of Job? What are we told about the latitude he had in afflicting Job's life? Does this tell us anything about the way evil operates in the world?
3. Discuss the meaning of Isaiah 24:21 as it pertains to the invisible causes of evil. What does this tell us about Satan? Read Daniel 10, and then note the role of angels, good and evil, in the affairs of the world.
4. Read Zechariah 3:1-5. What is Satan's role in this passage, and who is his intended target? How does God intervene? How is this text significant in our understanding of Satan and his activities?
5. Study Isaiah 13-14, focusing on 14:9-11. Though addressed to the king of Babylon, how does this passage reveal a deeper, darker source of evil in the world? What clues do we have that this passage is not talking about just the king of Babylon? Compare this text to Ezekiel 28, especially 28:12b-19, and answer the same questions posed above. Considering both passages, what do they teach us about the history of Satan?
6. Jesus begins his public ministry by being tempted by the Devil (see Matthew 4; Luke 4). Compare the temptation of Jesus with that of the first human pair (Genesis 3). What similarities do you see? How does the serpent act like Satan, and what are his strategies and ultimate goal? Why does he succeed with the first humans but fail with Jesus? Compare these stories with John 2:15-17, and discuss how we are affected by Satan in similar ways.
7. Using the following passages from the Gospels, what do we learn about Satan from the earthly life and ministry of Jesus? Mark 3:22-26; Mark 4:15; Matthew 25:41; John 8:44; Luke 22:31; John 17:15; Matthew 6:13; Mark 8:33; Luke 22:4; John 13:2, 27; Luke 13:11, 16; Luke 10:18; John 12:31; 16:11; 14:30.
8. What does Paul tell us about the person and work of Satan? Ephesians 2:1-3; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Corinthians 11:14; 12:7, 11; Ephesians 6:11.
9. What should be our response to Satan's activities? Ephesians 4:17; 1 Timothy 3:6-7; 2 Timothy 2:26; Ephesians 6:11-17; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9; 1 John 2:13.
10. What confidence do we have about the present and future judgment of Satan? 2 Thessalonians 3:3; Romans 16:20; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10; 1 John 4:4; 5:18.
11. For what reason did Jesus come? 1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14.
12. The book of *Revelation* gives a panoramic view of the Satan's war with God and his final destination. Read Revelation 12 and 20. Write a brief storyboard of the events these passages describe in the "life of Satan." What names are given to Satan, and why are they significant? In what ways do these two chapters overlap in what they tell us about Satan? How do these passages help us interpret the way history has unfolded since the earthly ministry of Jesus? Where is history headed? What happens to us in the meantime, thanks to Satan?
13. With regard to Satan's defeat by Jesus, how is the cross and resurrection like D-Day, and how is the Second Coming like V-Day?