

SATAN THE DEVIL

Before God made the world, Christians say that God created the angels. The angels are pure spirit, beings which have no parts. The angels were tested by God. Those who would pass would be accepted into eternal happiness. Satan and many others failed and rebelled and became evil spirits. They were allegedly flung into the everlasting pains of Hell. There Satan reigns supreme and he will never be free. Satan was the first to be eternally damned. Because he was the most powerful angel and had the highest dignity he is now the king of Hell. It makes no sense to argue that he was the angel in Heaven with the highest rank because Heaven is being one with God and knowing him face to face and gives so much happiness that no one can leave it. The Devil is alleged to have miraculous powers and to be able to entice people to rebel against God and lure them into Hell forever. Jesus in the New Testament claims to cast out demons and destroy the Devil's reign and he and the apostles warned against the Devil's temptations. The Lord's Prayer that Jesus gave goes, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." This is what you read in the Bible.

As an angel, God must have tempted Satan to get him to sin which means that God is bad if he tempts. James 1:13 in the Bible which claims to be God's word says that God cannot tempt anybody for has no use for it and forbids sin. God must have made the feelings that lead to temptation. God must have made temptation. If there is a Satan then God is no better. God is a hypocrite for condemning Satan for what he inspired him to do.

A small sect, the Christadelphians, insist that this frightening Satan is not in the Bible. The references to the Devil and demons in it are held to be symbolic references to sin and temptation.

It is important to tackle this doctrine because if there is no Devil or demons according to the Bible and it teaches Hell then it is either being incoherent or it is misunderstood.

Let us think about the texts which Christians incorrectly see references to their own Devil in.

Adam and Eve were led into sin by a serpent. The Book of Revelation says that the Devil is an old serpent (12:9; 20:2,3). It is wrong to conclude that the Devil is the same serpent. When you call a child "Old John", because he reminds you of his father then you are not saying that he is his father. Revelation is full of symbolism and indeed is notorious for it and overdoing it. Genesis says that the serpent will crawl on his belly all his life and eat dust so he is not the Devil. He is just a talking snake. It is wrong to assert that the snake was possessed by the Devil or was the Devil because God told it that it was cursed above the other animals. The Devil would not be an animal but a fallen angel.

Satan, one of the sons of God, according to the Book of Job suggests that Job would sin against God if he were tortured. God tells him to go and torment him to see. We can't prove that the Satan in Job is the Christian Devil or that he is not. We don't know if he meant to do good by tempting for God told him to tempt or if he meant to do evil but God let him do it for a purpose. Considering what we know about temptation and free will we would have to conclude that both God and Satan are evil but the Bible rejects this conclusion and what we know, so theologically they are no help.

Satan means the adversary. In Zechariah 3, the adversary or the Satan tries to sabotage the good works of Joshua. This Satan could be a bad man. There are some parallels between this material and Jude. In Jude, Satan becomes the Devil who is snapped at by Michael the Archangel who tells him he hopes that the Lord rebukes him. It is thought that Jude is calling Satan the Devil and a personal being who fights with the archangel. But the similarities mean only that Jude used them not that he thought this way.

Now, to the verses that seem to speak of the Christadelphian symbolic Devil.

1 Chronicles 21:1 says that Satan got David to number the army while 2 Samuel 24:1 says that God got him to. The solution may be that God caused Satan to do it. In Isaiah 29:3, God says he will do things to Israel though he could not do them himself. He did them going through people. Satan here is an adversary and so need not be the Christian Devil. It is nonsense to argue that if you think that Satan is the latter then you have a contradiction between both verses for God cannot use Satan. If he uses evil men for his good purposes then why can't he use Satan? To prove the contradiction you need to refute the free will defence (the doctrine that we create evil out of free will not God so it is not God's fault) being a biblical doctrine. But when the two verses are the same with Satan substituted for God it is most likely that they are in contradiction for it implies that they mean that God and Satan tempted in the same sense.

Paul wrote that he delivered two men over to Satan so that they might learn not to insult God (1 Timothy 1:19, 20). Some say, "If Satan is an evil supernatural being, then he would not teach these persons not to blaspheme. Paul would not hand these men over to a wicked spirit. This Satan is a symbol and not a person." Suppose Satan is a personal being. Paul

believed that they belonged to Satan already and was merely saying that if they wanted him they could have him and he them. He hoped that their sin would lead them back to God - that Satan's acceptance of them now would lead to Satan losing them. He held that Satan makes mistakes enabling God to win. The same reply suffices for 1 Corinthians 5:5. There Paul tells the people to deliver a sinner over to the Satan for the destruction of his flesh that his spirit might be saved when Jesus comes back. The Satan or adversary here is death for a personal Devil would kill nobody to save them. Paul sounds sure that death is the answer. He is telling the people to plot the murder of the sinner to save him from everlasting doom. (We don't know if he meant murder by prayer or murder the natural way. Since Paul believed that prayer cannot influence God it seems he meant the latter.)

In Acts 5:3,4, Peter says that Satan filled the heart of Ananias so that he would sin and then that Ananias contrived the sin in his heart. It is claimed that Satan is the same as temptation or as human wickedness for Peter wouldn't contradict himself by saying that Satan got him to sin and then that he got himself to sin. But the two did it together.

Revelation 2:13 says that the throne of Satan is at Pergamum. Christadelphians think that this could not be if Satan was a personal being and ruler of Hell and that this verse implies that Satan is a symbol of wickedness and not such a creature. But if the verse can mean that this city is where the throne of wickedness is then it can mean that it is where the invisible spiritual throne of a personal Satan is. This city did not rule the world of evil so the expression, "The throne of evil or Satan is there", only means that it is the worst place on earth and where Satan does most of his work.

Jesus called Peter, "Satan," when he told him that he must not die on the cross (Matthew 16). This does not prove that Satan is a symbol for sin and Satan can be translated adversary.

Hebrews 2:14 needs to be quoted. Jesus "by [going through] death He might bring to nought and make no effect him who had the power of death - that is the Devil." Some translations say that he destroyed the Devil. Christadelphians argue that this verse means that Jesus had the Devil in him in the form of temptation and that when he died this stopped - he killed the Devil for he was free from it even when he rose again. They say that it cannot mean he killed a supernatural Devil because the scriptures say that the Devil is in us. They say that a supernatural Devil would not have power over death for he would rather people lived to do wrong. But he may have this power and not want it. The Bible says that death is a side effect of sin. But the death the author meant may have been spiritual death - the state of separation from God. Destroyed does not mean literal annihilation in the Bible. What it means depends on the context.

Jesus says he watched Satan or the adversary, fall from Heaven (Luke 10:18). Heaven is where God is and God is everywhere so there is no literal fall meant here. Jesus made this remark when the disciples returned to him and said they could expel demons. If Jesus meant mental illness caused by demons then he is saying that the adversary, mental illness, has been put out of God's presence. He was saying that they were right, "Yes you can expel demons because I put mental illness out of God's presence and that is why I can say I saw it leave."

Jesus said that he could cast out the prince of this world by his death in the John Gospel. A prince is not a king and the Bible says that Satan rules in Hell. And elsewhere he is called the king of the world. The prince is a symbol. It could well represent sin and not a spirit of evil. But he could be the personal Satan for from Jesus' perspective God was the true king and Satan a prince of this world though Satan acted like a king and was treated as such by the world.

Jesus said it was ridiculous to say that he could put out evil spirits by the power of the Devil (Mark 3). He says that Satan cannot expel his own. Christadelphians claim that he is only telling the Jews that their belief is ridiculous if there is a personal Satan and is not saying that he thinks there is a personal Satan. Jesus would have corrected the Jews who said there was a personal supernatural Devil. When he didn't he must have agreed with them. It is a sin to promote error unnecessarily through silence. Jesus would not have done this for he was impeccable. It only took a minute. Mark would have put it in his gospel for the sake of being clear and in case somebody would be led astray. Jesus gave no hint of thinking that there was no personal Satan. He, in fact, talks as if there was.

It is imagined that Isaiah 14:12-19 speaks of the fall of Lucifer - the angel who became Satan. The Lucifer here is the king of Babylon. The text calls him a man not an angel. It says he will die and not be buried for he destroyed his land. Christians argue that it refers to the Devil because it says he felt he could put his throne above the stars of God and become like God and because he made the world a waste. They argue that this proves he was not a literal man but an angel. That is not logical because the man could have angelic powers so problem solved! The whole world refers to the whole known world. Rome was said to have ruled the world though literally it did not. It is a mistake to take whole world literally. The king believed he would be a god after his death and become the highest god and be a star in Heaven, the biggest and brightest star. Lots of pagan kings did the same.

Ezekiel 28:13-19 speaks of an angel in the Garden of Eden who lost his perfection and was rejected by the Lord. Traditionally, this is taken to be about the Devil. This material is figurative because it is spoken about the king of Tyre. The king is symbolised by the angel.

We cannot pay much attention to the talk about the Devil in the Book of Revelation for it is full of characters who are nothing but symbols. In the chapter about the Devil being thrown out of Heaven, a woman appears who gives birth to a child that he in the form of a dragon wants to eat! A flood comes out of its mouth to get her!

Romans 16 says that the God of peace will bruise Satan under our feet shortly. God told Eve that her offspring would do this to the snake. We cannot take Paul's declaration as proof that he believed in a personal Satan and that Satan was the snake in Genesis for he is talking symbolically. God would not literally bruise Satan under our feet. It is an expression for our triumph over evil symbolised by the Serpent or represented by it.

1 John 3 says that all sinners belong to the Devil, who sinned from the start probably meaning the start of the human race when the Serpent became a sinner. The Devil here is the serpent and not necessarily a supernatural Devil. The serpent no longer exists but we can still belong to him. The serpent was a sinner. Whoever sins is the child of the snake in a spiritual sense.

Jesus said that whoever lies belongs to the father of lies, the Devil, who was a murderer from the beginning (John 8). A supernatural Devil would not approve of all lies so all lies are not from him. The father of lies is the lying snake who talked Eve into sin and its penalty: death.

Psalms 103 says that God rules over all. Christadelphians argue that this refutes the Devil's existence but it only proves that the Devil like evil men on earth cannot get the better of God. Kings rule on earth so Satan can rule in Hell. The psalm only means that God is the ultimate ruler.

The adversary who pretends to be a holy angel (2 Corinthians 11) could be the evil Roman Emperor. The snake pretended to be good in Genesis and an angel testifying against the craftiness of the creator.

Christadelphians claim that 1 Peter 5:8,9 which tells Christians to resist the Devil who is prowling like a roaring lion by being firm in their faith and courageous in suffering is about the Roman Emperor (page 18, The Real Devil, Christadelphian Bible Mission). But the stress on faith and fighting temptation suggests a supernatural temptor. The Emperor does not go about like a lion but the Empire might – the Emperor works through the Empire so he could go about like a lion but not personally. The fact that Peter commanded obedience to the Emperor suggests a spiritual foe who can influence you psychically.

James says that if you resist the Devil he will flee for he is a coward. But this is silly given the fact that Christianity says we are biased towards sin. Perhaps we are to believe he flees when we put up resistance to his wiles and then he tries something different? That's the strangest kind of fleeing I've ever heard of. And why is it that some people can have to struggle with one temptation for a very long time and others get peace quicker? Because the Devil does not exist though the Bible thinks he does for if what James says were true he would be not that hard to get rid of. If Satan is a coward why does he do evil knowing God will get him for it.

It is also claimed by this sect that Jesus did not bind a personal Satan when he said he did that in Mark 3. But Jesus must have meant a person for that was what his hearers would have understood him to have meant.

1 Corinthians 10 says that idols are really nothing and then that what is offered to idols is really offered to demons. Christadelphians think that this proves that the demons are nothing. But the idol can be nothing and the worship given to one can still be taken by demons. It is like how God might take the worship offered to Mr X under the mistaken belief that he is God though he is not. The word demons actually means god (page 26, The Real Devil). But the Bible makes it clear that these are gods only in the sense that they are gods to the pagans but not real gods. They are actually evil spirits.

Deuteronomy 32:39 says that only God can take life. This is supposed to prove that when the Bible called Satan a murderer there can't be a personal Devil. This is too stupid an argument to bother answering. The same goes for the insistence that Exodus 4:11 proves that only God makes people dumb and blind and so there can't be any demons to do it. If we can do it so can demons and God gives us and them the power to do it so God does it in a sense.

When Jesus cured the Gerasene demoniac it was reported that the victim had an evil spirit but Jesus cast out a whole legion of spirits. Christadelphians insist that the reference to spirit and then spirits implies that the demon is really just a mental illness for a real spirit cannot be one spirit and many at the same time. So if spirit means sickness then it means one sickness and not a legion so there is still a contradiction. It is absurd to imagine Jesus being asked by a sickness to enter pigs and him obliging! Also, the spirit was told to leave the man and did not until after Jesus asked it its name which suggests that this is really just a performance to make Jesus look good and was not a real exorcism. The spirit wanted to promote Jesus for both were evil. Jesus simply thought that there was one demon in the man and the demon's reply is just a sarcastic way of letting him know that it was worse than he thought. But no demon would try to make Jesus look better by

telling him there were many demons for he wanted to know that to show off by ejecting them all.

Christadelphians deal with verses like Luke 8:33 which say that Jesus made the demons come out of a possessed man and put them into swine which then drowned themselves by saying that Jesus did not mean literal demons. But it is Luke who is calling them demons not Jesus for Jesus did not write this story. They say it is like us calling people lunatics while believing that the moon does not make people mad. But lunatic is a word that means insane person today though it used to mean people maddened by the moon in the past. It is different to calling demons demons implying they are personal if that was what people thought demons were. And they say Jesus called them demons for the people were too unlikely to believe that they were not demons but mental ailments. But Jesus could have said that if they were not demons and there were no demons he could cast them out to prove it. He could have used the more ambiguous expression "evil powers." Jesus gave many teachings that generation hated.

They point to the fact that Jesus was said to have met the man who had an unclean spirit and later in the text Jesus tells it to come out and unclean spirits leave in Mark 5. They argue that spirits are not personal beings when they were one and several spirits at the one time. But perhaps a legion of demons came to help the spirit that Jesus was going to cast out? Perhaps there was only one demon there at the start.

Some say that the demons of the New Testament were just forces and not personal beings because Jesus rebuked the fever that Peter's mother had and told the wind to be still. But some healers did that and did not believe that what they spoke to could hear them. It was a magic rite. Also, it was obvious that Jesus did not think the fever and the wind could understand him but it is not so obvious with the demons so they could be personal beings.

Christadelphians argue that people believe in Satan so that they can say their sins were not all their fault but happened because of the tempter. But they say we are tempted by ourselves and our flesh. If we can blame Satan we can blame our unruly passions.

There is no clear Bible statement that the Christadelphian Satan exists. The Bible never says he is a symbol. Rather, it speaks of him in personal terms so he probably is a person. The need for a small and uneducated Church to avoid such symbols in case there is confusion would imply that Satan is a real person. Satan should be sick of being bad by now so it appears he can't repent and must be in ceaseless anguish in Hell and will suffer forever in its future form as a lake of fire.