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The Devil and Satan

Christianity is concerned with the life, work and teaching of Jesus Christ. Yet we cannot possibly appreciate what he accomplished unless we understand what the Bible means by its use of the words Devil and Satan. The apostle John declared: '[For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil](#)' (1 John 3.8). Paul said that Jesus shared the nature of his brethren in order '[that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil](#)' (Heb. 2.14). In the course of his ministry Jesus gave exceptional powers to a number of his disciples and sent them out to preach the gospel and to heal the sick. When they returned, rejoicing in the success of their mission, Jesus said to them: '[I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you](#)'. (Luke 10.18,19).

All these passages clearly show that the Devil, though a great power, is ultimately to be destroyed through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The enemy of mankind

An understanding of the meaning of 'the devil and satan' is necessary not only for an appreciation of the mission of Jesus but also for an understanding of the effect of this power on ourselves. Throughout the New Testament the devil is portrayed as the enemy of mankind. For example, Peter exhorts the believers to '[be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith](#)'. (1 Peter 5.8,9). Paul told the believers: '[Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil](#)'. (Ephesians 6.11). James said that if they resisted the devil he would flee from them. (James 4.7). Even Jesus felt the full force of this adverse power, being led into the wilderness and '[being forty days tempted of the devil](#)'. (Luke 4.2). It is clearly very important for the servant of God to understand what the Bible means by the words Devil and Satan.

Who or What is the Devil?

Presented with this question most people would immediately think of an evil spirit being - an angel who has rebelled against God and whose primary aim is to turn men and women from obedience to God. A modern dictionary sums up this view: '**Satan**' is defined as '**The chief fallen angel; chief evil spirit, adversary of God and tempter of men, the Devil**'. (Chamber's 20th Century Dictionary.) This is the conception of the Devil which was taught

for centuries in the name of Christianity and which gave rise in the hearts of millions to an unreasoning and abject fear. Associated with fear of the Devil himself came fear of his supposed ministers, demons and evil spirits on every hand, and at death the horror of everlasting fire in hell where the devil and his angels reigned supreme. It cannot be disputed that down the centuries the power of the church has been upheld as much by the preaching of such doctrines as by the hope of salvation.

Most people have now rejected all such ideas, but in the main that rejection has come about not as a result of a proper understanding of Bible teaching but as a consequence of accepting the modern denial of all that savours of the supernatural. A minority still hold to a belief in the personality of the Devil, sincerely believing this to be the only way to understand Bible teaching on the subject. It will be the aim of this booklet to show that the Bible knows nothing of such a monster of evil but that in the terms Devil and Satan we have the very descriptive names given to that principle of sin and wickedness which is inherent in human nature.

What the Bible says

There are certain facts on which all students of the Bible should be able to agree. The Devil has the following characteristics:-

- a) It is opposed to God.
- b) It is manifested in many forms and is very strong.
- c) It not only affects every man and woman very personally but has wrought havoc throughout the whole creation.
- d) Only Christ could overcome this power.
- e) The death of Christ was essential to this victory.
- f) Ultimately the Devil is to be utterly destroyed.

In seeking to understand Bible teaching it would be helpful to look at the actual meaning of the words Devil and Satan.

Satan - Adversary

Satan is a word which has simply been taken into the English language from the original Hebrew of the Old Testament. Had the word been translated it would have been rendered 'adversary'. Indeed, there are a number of instances where this has occurred. For example, we read that ['the Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite'](#). (I Kings 11.14). Again, the Philistines feared to take David with them into battle lest, they said, ['in the battle he be an adversary to us'](#). (I Samuel 29.4). In these cases the original Hebrew word is 'satan'. Nowhere in the Old Testament is the word associated with a fallen angel or any other such supernatural agency. It is worth noting that apart from the first two chapters of Job there are only three direct references to Satan in the whole of the Old Testament, and no references to 'the Devil'. Bearing in mind that the Old Testament covers the first 4,000 years of the development of God's purpose with man this is very remarkable if Satan really is an angel who fell in the beginning and is responsible for all the sin and evil which has existed in the world ever since. Israel, for example, were continually being reprov'd for sin and repeatedly punished by evil but the sin was their responsibility and the evil was from God. (see Isaiah 45.7). No other agency was held responsible. This is an important point which will be developed later. The first chapter of the book of Job is frequently quoted as an example of Satan at work. But the words tell us nothing about this Satan. He was an adversary, as the word means, but who he was we do not know. There is no reason to think

he was supernatural or had any exceptional powers. This, again, will be considered in greater detail later.

God as an adversary (Satan)

It will be helpful to look at other examples of the occurrences of the word *satan* where it cannot possibly refer to a monster of evil. In the first book of Chronicles we are told that '[Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel](#)'. (I Chronicles 21.1). In the parallel record of the same incident in the second book of Samuel we read '[And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah](#).' (II Samuel 24.1). God, then, was an adversary - a Satan - to Israel, his people; and there were other occasions when, because of their wickedness, God said He was against (or adverse to) them.

There was also the notable occasion when an angel of the Lord was an adversary to Balaam. Balaam had been hired by an enemy of Israel to prophesy against God's people. Though warned by God not to attempt to carry out his mission he persisted and set out. But '[God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary](#) (Heb.: Satan) [against him](#):' (Numbers 22.22).

Peter as an adversary

Soon after Peter made his remarkable confession of faith in Jesus as '[the Christ, the Son of God](#)', Jesus began to warn his disciples that there was an aspect of his mission which, as yet, they did not understand. He said plainly that 'he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day'. Peter protested, '[Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee](#)'. But Jesus reproved Peter: '[Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men](#)'. (Matthew 16. 16-23). At that time Peter was an adversary to Jesus. Notice particularly that Peter himself was the adversary (Satan). Jesus did not say he was 'possessed by Satan' as if Satan were an external power. It is to be noted, however, that there was an occasion when Jesus did seem to speak to Satan in this way. He said to his disciples, '[Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat](#)'. What this means will be considered later together with other passages which seem to suggest that *satan* is a title of a powerful being opposing God and leading man astray. For the moment we note that the Hebrew word in itself carries no such connotation.

The Devil

This is another word which is not a translation of the original language but which is derived from the Greek word '*diabolos*'. This is a compound of '*dia*' meaning 'through' and '*ballo*' meaning 'to cast', and means literally 'to dart or strike through'. In the New Testament, according to Dr. Young in his Analytical Concordance, it means an accuser or calumniator. In the Authorised Version it has sometimes been translated as '[slanderer](#)'. (e.g. I Timothy 3.11). On most occasions it has not been translated; as, for example, when Jesus said to his disciples: '[Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?](#)' (John 6.70). As with the word '*Satan*', the word '*Devil*' in itself gives us no indication of precisely who or what is referred to. This must be learned from other considerations. However, it needs very little

knowledge of the New Testament to appreciate that in many cases the title of 'Devil' (and occasionally that of 'Satan') is applied to one particular Slanderer and Adversary.

'The Devil sinneth from the beginning'

Earlier we listed the characteristics of this power. It will be helpful now to list a number of passages bearing on these characteristics. During his ministry Jesus was in continual conflict with the religious leaders of the Jews and on several occasions he showed them their position in no uncertain terms. For example, he declared: 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it'. (John 8.44). The apostle John wrote 'He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil'. (I John 3.8). Jesus himself, very early in his ministry, felt the effect of this power. Matthew records: 'Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.' (Matthew 4.1). Jesus addressed this same power as Satan (v. 10). At the end of his ministry the devil operated through Judas to betray him: 'And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him. . . : (John 13.2). Again, later on, this power is referred to as Satan (v.27). The apostle Paul warned against this power: 'Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.' (Ephesians 6. 11). Jesus himself exhorted his followers: 'Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried: (Revelation 2. 10). Yet this power is to be destroyed completely, and this destruction was made possible by the death of Jesus on the cross: 'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he himself likewise took part of the same: that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.' (Hebrews 2.14).

The power of sin

This last passage enables us to identify beyond doubt the great enemy of God and man. For if we ask what has the power of death and what it was that Jesus came to destroy there can only be one answer, as the following passages make very clear:

- 'The wages of sin is death'. (Romans 6.23).
- 'Sin hath reigned unto death'. (Romans 5.21).
- 'Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death'. (James 1.15).
- 'The sting of death is sin'. (I Corinthians 15.56).

Death is the direct result of sin, and nowhere is this more clearly stated than in the following passage:- 'By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned'. (Romans 5.12).

Sin and death are related as cause and effect. If Christ came 'to destroy him that hath the power of death' then he came to take away or destroy sin. None would question that this was the primary object of his first coming. A few passages confirm this as the essence of his mission and show clearly that it was accomplished through his death on the cross:-

- 'Once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself'. (Hebrews 9.26).
- 'Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree'. (I Peter 2.24).
- 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures'. (I Corinthians 15.3).

- This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'. (Matthew 26.28).

By one act, his death on the cross, he destroyed that which had the power of death, the devil, and put away sin, the cause of death. To put away sin is to destroy the devil. If then we can discover the origin and nature of sin we shall have found the origin and nature of the devil.

Whence came sin?

This is the crux of the whole matter; and on this the teaching of the Bible is perfectly clear. Man must take full responsibility for introducing sin into the world. There is no need and no room for any other agency. Man introduced sin and has been responsible for keeping it in being ever since: 'By one man sin entered into the world'. (Romans 5.12). Because death was the inevitable result of the sin which man introduced it is also true that 'by man came death'. (I Corinthians 15.21).

Man continues to be a sinful creature and therefore subject to death; not because he is under the sway of a powerful monster of evil, but simply because he gives way to his own sinful thoughts and desires: 'Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death'. (James 1.14,15). Jesus expressed the same truth: 'Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man'. (Matthew 15. 18, 20). This is in complete accord with the experience of all who try to keep the law of God. They need no external tempter-their own heart and mind is more than sufficient to lead them astray. Paul wrote powerfully of his own experience: 'For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me'. (Romans 7.14-21). Paul was conscious of a tremendous conflict, not between himself and an evil monster, but between the law of God which he wanted to keep and a powerful inclination within himself to disobey that law. He describes this conflict as a war: 'For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members'. (Romans 7.22,23).

Here then is a great power operating against God and man, a power associated with man himself, yet a power which he cannot overcome unaided. Only Christ could overcome this power, as Paul appreciated: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord'. (v. 24, 25). This power residing in man himself accords completely with all that is written concerning the Devil and Satan.

The carnal mind

These innate human characteristics are all comprehended in an expression used by the apostle Paul-'the carnal mind'. He wrote: 'For to be carnally minded is death; but to be

spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be'. (Romans 8.6,7).

The free expression of this mind leads to 'the works of the flesh'. Paul lists these as: 'Immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like', and adds, 'I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God'. (Galatians 5.19,21 R.S.V.). In a world uncontrolled by divine law these characteristics come to the fore, so that society as a whole becomes the expression of the carnal mind: 'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world'. (I John 2.16). Any such society becomes the enemy of God and of the servants of God. Paul describes this 'carnal mind' as 'sin that dwelleth in me'. Man is his own adversary, Satan and Devil. He is tempted from within by his own desires, he is prompted from without by a world which is the expression of the carnal mind. There is no need and no room for any other tempter.

Man's responsibility for sin

It cannot be too strongly emphasised that throughout the Bible full responsibility for sin and its consequences is placed upon man. He and he alone is accountable before God for his actions. This is well emphasised in the history of Israel. Here was a people given special privileges and consequent responsibilities in the sight of God. They consistently failed to rise to those responsibilities. Again and again they were reprov'd and warned of inevitable punishment. They alone were responsible for their failure. There is no hint of some monster of evil continually leading them astray. The word devil (singular) is not found in the Old Testament and the word Satan only occurs fifteen times, twelve of these in the first two chapters of the book of Job. Jeremiah plainly stated the reason for Israel's failure, which is the reason for all human failure: 'But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.' (Jeremiah 7.24).

This is the consistent teaching of the scriptures.

The Serpent in Eden

It is frequently asserted that the serpent in Eden was an incarnation of the devil, who thus brought about the downfall of our first parents. There is no warrant for such an assertion. The Genesis record is perfectly clear; the serpent was simply a beast of the field which the Lord had made. The same record tells us that it had greater reasoning power than the other creatures and that it had the power of speech. (Genesis 3.1).

Beyond this it was no different from any other creature. There is no suggestion that its subtlety came from any power outside itself; not a hint that it was the incarnation of an evil spirit being. Paul, in commenting on the incident and drawing the lesson for the followers of Christ, said simply: 'I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety (R. V. craftiness) so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (II Corinthians 11.3).

The power of speech possessed by the serpent need present no problem. Other creatures can imitate human beings. Balaam's ass was given the power of speech for a special purpose. (Numbers 22.28). Moreover, the punishment meted out to the serpent was related

simply to his animal characteristics: 'And the Lord God said to the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life'. (Genesis 3.14). The only difference between the serpent and other creatures was that he was able to reason and to express his thoughts in words which were intelligible to the woman. It might be asked, Why did God permit the serpent to tempt the woman in this way? The answer is that man had to be tested. He had to develop character. He had to learn from experience to choose between right and wrong: to use his free-will to the glory of God and not merely to gratify his own desires. At that stage it would not have occurred to him to disobey God. The suggestion that disobedience might be to his advantage came from a creature with no moral sense or responsibility. Through this test man developed character. Man was not to be a machine or robot with no choice but to operate in the way its Maker desired. It was God's desire that Adam and Eve should willingly choose to obey Him. In this they failed, and that initial failure resulted in man's nature of an innate tendency to rebel-the 'carnal mind'. The temptation which originally came from the serpent now comes from the carnal mind within, and from outside influences which are themselves the expression of this same mind.

However, because of the part played by the serpent in initiating sin, it is subsequently used in the Bible as a symbol of sin and all that resulted from the original serpent's lie. As such it is sometimes associated with the words 'Devil and Satan'. Before looking at those passages which are often quoted to support the idea of a personal devil we must complete our study of the positive teaching of scripture by considering the question of the origin of evil.

The origin of Evil

Those who believe in the existence of a supernatural monster of evil generally trace all the evils in the world disease, natural catastrophes, death and even accidents - to the operation of the devil and his agents. This is quite contrary to the teaching of the Bible. Man introduced sin into the world; evil is the result of that sin. It may be the direct result, as, for example, war and other evils resulting from man's greed and lust for power, or it may be the indirect result, having been introduced by God as a punishment and corrective for sin. Thus disease and death were God's judgments on his creation.

This is quite clear from the record in Genesis and is confirmed by later passages. For example God said through Isaiah: 'I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord will do all these things'. (Isaiah 45.6, 7). To Israel God said, 'Behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it'. (Jeremiah 6.19). Or again, 'Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?' (Amos 3.6). Once again, it is clear that there is no need and no room for any superhuman agency of evil antagonistic to God.

Devils

The existence of an evil spirit world is argued by some because of the New Testament references to the casting out of devils by Christ and his disciples. The original Greek word in these passages is not 'diabolos' it is the plural of 'daimon', which has a completely different meaning from 'Diabolos'. Daimon was the name given by the Greeks to beings imagined by them to exist in the air, spirit beings intermediate between the gods and man acting on behalf of the gods for good or evil. Such beings are a figment of man's imagination and have no place in God's purpose. The angels are the only spirit being, other than God himself and

his resurrected Son, who have any place in God's purpose. Again, it must be emphasised that all evil is the result of man's sin and is under the direct control of God. The positive teaching of the scriptures leaves no room for a spirit world opposed to God. If it is asked why did Christ himself frequently refer to these demons as if they were realities we reply: What else could he have done? This was the only language known to the people of his day to describe the symptoms they saw. To have used any other language would have served no purpose. In the same way we today might refer to a person as a lunatic, a word which literally means 'Moonstruck', without in any way committing ourselves to the medieval belief that madness is the result of the influence of the moon. It is significant that in the few places in the Old Testament where the English translation uses the word 'devils', there is a clear allusion to the false gods of the nations, and the recognition and worship of such is roundly condemned. (see for example Leviticus 17.7; Deuteronomy 32.17; Psalm 106.37).

Job's Adversary

It has already been pointed out that although the first chapter of the book of Job is frequently quoted as an example of Satan at work, in fact the words tell us nothing about this Satan. He was an adversary but who he was we do not know. There is no reason to think he was supernatural or had any exceptional powers. On the contrary it is evident that he himself had no power to afflict Job; he could only ask God to do so: 'But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath. . .' (Job 1.11). Job himself recognised that God was responsible for his sufferings, not the satan or adversary: 'Have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me'. (Job 19.21). The only question at issue throughout the book is, why had God so afflicted Job? After the first two chapters no further reference is made to Satan, and the book concludes with the words: Then came there unto him all his brethren. . . 'and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him' (Job 42.11). After the initial suggestion that Job should be tested the adversary (Satan) played no further part. The suggestion could have come from a jealous acquaintance. Whoever the adversary was he was remarkably limited in power and bore no resemblance to the medieval conception of Satan.

Lucifer

This title occurs only once in the whole of the Bible yet a great deal is made of it by some. At first sight what is said of Lucifer accords very well with what some affirm of Satan: 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! . . . for thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit' (Isaiah 14.12-15). However, there is nothing at all in the record to associate Lucifer with Satan. On the contrary, when we enquire of whom the prophet was speaking we are told quite plainly in verse 4, 'Thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon'. Other verses confirm that this was simply a prophecy against Babylon couched in symbolic language. For example, we are told that 'he ruled the nations in anger', that he 'weakened the nations'; that he was 'the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms', and that at last he should be dishonoured in death, in being refused the rite of burial' (verses 6, 12, 16 and 20). There is here, then, not a shred of evidence for the existence of a supernatural monster.

'The anointed cherub'

This is taken from another Old Testament prophet. The words are found in Ezekiel 28. This chapter contains such phrases as: 'Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; . . . thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; . . . thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; . . . thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee . . . therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God'. (w. 13,14,15,16). There is nothing at all in the chapters to associate these words with either the Devil or Satan. On the contrary we are told quite plainly that this is 'a lamentation for the king of Tyre' (v. 12 R. V.). No further comment or explanation is necessary.

That so much is made of such references as these is a clear indication of the total lack of scriptural evidence to identify the Devil with a fallen angel.

The fallen angels

There are two passages in the New Testament which refer to 'fallen angels', but neither lends any support to the idea that the Devil is an angel who rebelled and was cast out of heaven down to the earth, where he has plagued mankind ever since.

The passages are: 'For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment. . . The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished'. (1 Peter 2.4 & 9). 'And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day'. (Jude 6). The following points should be noted:

1. The verses do not say the angels had been in heaven;
2. They were not cast down to the earth but to 'hell', 'under darkness';
3. They were not free to roam about and trouble mankind but were kept in 'chains'.

Once again it is quite evident that these verses lend no support to the concept of the devil as a fallen angel.

'That old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan'

These words are a quotation from Revelation 12, verse 9. There can be little doubt that many of the commonly accepted ideas of the Devil have been derived from this one verse and its context, which reads as follows: 'And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him'. (Revelation 12.7-9).

Reading this description as a piece of literal history it provides a basis for traditional views on the origin of the Devil and Satan. But the book of Revelation itself makes it clear that the words were never intended to be read as literal history.

In the first place John was told that what was revealed to him had to do with the events of his own day and subsequently. Chapter 1, verse 1, reads: 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass'.

In chapter 4 verse 1 the invitation is given to John: 'Come up hither, and I will show you things which must be hereafter'. The Revelation as given to John by Christ to reveal to God's servants details of the events to take place from the first century down to the coming of Christ and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth, with a brief glimpse of the eternity beyond. It has nothing to do with events of millennia past, real or imagined.

In the second place the whole book is couched in highly figurative language-the language of symbol. This is obvious just from reading this 12th chapter. In the first verse we read of 'a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun'. 'The Devil and Satan' is described as 'a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads; and his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to the earth' (verses 3 and 4). Is this an actual description of a real creature? Clearly not; all this is symbolic language, and later on in the Revelation some of the symbols are interpreted for us: 'And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains. . . and there are seven kings. . . and the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings which have received no kingdom as yet'. (Revelation 17.9-12). It is evident that this is purely a symbolic creature. It is also evident that it is symbolic of a political system, and it is not difficult to show that the various beasts of the book of Revelation stand for the power of Rome which was the great adversary of the Christians. In the same book the Christians at Smyrna were warned: 'Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried'. (Revelation 2.10). It was the Roman authorities who cast the Christians into prison. Doubtless Peter was referring to the same power when he wrote: 'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour'. (I Peter 5.8).

Why should such political power be symbolised by the Devil and Satan and that Old Serpent? Because they are the expression of the Carnal Mind, and when they oppose God's servants they are acting as the serpent did in the beginning. We have typical examples in those who opposed Christ as he went about Israel preaching the gospel. To the Scribes and Pharisees he said, 'Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of Gehenna'. (Matthew 23.33 R. V. m.). On another occasion he said to them, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. . . he is a liar, and the father of it'. (John 8.44). In both passages Jesus was clearly alluding to the serpent in Eden, whose lie sowed the seeds of sin and led to man's condemnation to death. All who similarly set themselves against God are figuratively the serpent's offspring and his descendants, or, as described in Genesis, 'his seed', and are destined to be destroyed by Christ, the 'seed of the woman'. (Genesis 3.15). In all this we have symbolic language soundly based on the actual events which took place in Eden, where God was first opposed and sin first introduced; not by an immortal monster, but by man at the instigation of the serpent. We do not need to look beyond the human race to find 'that Old Serpent, the Devil and Satan'. In the human race we have this power in us and around us, in ourselves, in individuals, in communities, in authorities, both civil and ecclesiastical. All such power is destined to be destroyed by Christ.

Why personification?

It may still be asked why should this power so often be referred to as if it were a person? The answer is that such figures of speech are common in the Bible; partly because they are part of the natural warmth and expression of the languages in which it was written and partly because the use of such figures makes a far greater impression than a simple statement of facts. There are many examples of personification in the Bible. Sin, as well as being represented as the great adversary, is described as a master, (John 8.34 and Romans 6.16

&. 18) and even as a ruler (Romans 5. 21). The Spirit or power of God is given personality (John 16.13).

Wisdom is likened to a woman (Proverbs 3. 13-18). The nation of Israel was likened to a woman-when faithful to God, a virgin (Jeremiah 31.4); when unfaithful, a harlot (Isaiah 1.21). Similarly with the church of Christ (II Corinthians 11.2; Revelation 19.7; Revelation 17.5). The use of these figures of speech conveys far more than can be conveyed in abstract ideas. It is the same with the Devil and Satan. Error arises when we allow this figure of speech to lead us into a totally wrong conception, and to look for a powerful spirit being when we ought to be looking to ourselves.

Conclusion

This emphasizes the importance of right conclusions on this matter. 'I know,' wrote Paul, 'that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing'. (Romans 7.18). It is highly significant that in the whole of the first ten chapters of his letter to the Romans, there is not one reference to the devil or satan. Yet these chapters deal exhaustively with sin, its origin, its effect on mankind, the mission of Christ to take it away, and the results of this great victory. As with the Old Testament, the argument from silence is far more effective than the quotation of isolated passages out of their context. The apostle's emphasis is on 'sin that dwelleth in me', 'the motions of sins which. . . work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death'. The carnal mind which is enmity against God' (Romans 7:20, 5:8.7). Here is the real enemy, within ourselves. This is the devil to be resisted, the adversary to be overcome. We are engaged in mortal combat with our own thoughts and feelings. Left to ourselves we must fail. But God has provided a way of victory through his Son, through belief of the gospel he preached and baptism into his name. Those who accept this way, though conscious, like Paul, of their weakness, may yet say with him, 'Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (I Corinthians 15.57).

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