

Is There A Devil?

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SINCE it is said in the Bible that Christ came to destroy the devil and his works, the answer must be "Yes": but what is the devil to be destroyed? He cannot be the fiend of old-fashioned theology, or the spirit of evil which has come vaguely to take the place of this mythical being in modern ideas. Could any kind of superhuman being be destroyed by the dying of Jesus? Yet it is said that Christ shared human nature for the very purpose that "through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). It is also written: "For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). These passages should make two facts clear: (1) That the subject is vital to any understanding of the work of Christ; and (2) that they cannot be reconciled with traditional ideas.

While modern views may be less crude and grotesque than those of fifty years ago, the two are sufficiently akin in principle to make an examination of the older teaching worth while. To dispose of one will largely dispose of the other.

First, then, how did the devil come into existence? Was it by the rebellion of an archangel who was in consequence expelled from heaven, as described in Milton's Paradise Lost, and who is now using his god-like powers in opposition to God?

1. The answer is "No". All the passages in the Bible that are supposed to indicate such an origin for the Devil can be shown by the context to refer to other matters altogether.

The tempter in the garden of Eden was an animal -- a serpent -- possessing the power of speech (Gen. 3:1, 14; 2 Cor. 11:1). "Lucifer, son of the morning", who, in the language of political metaphor, "fell from heaven", was the king of Babylon, a man who ruled the nations (Isa. 14:12,15,4,6,16,22, compare verses). The "anointed cherub, corrupted by reason of his brightness", was the Prince of Tyre, a man (Ezek. 28:11-15, compared with verse 2). The war in heaven, in which Michael prevailed over the great red dragon, and expelled him (Rev. 12:7), was a prophetic forecast in hieroglyph of events to transpire in the Roman Empire (Rev. 4:1; 17:9). The seven headed and ten-horned monster, labelled "the Devil and Satan", was the symbol of human antagonism, politically incorporate.

See the argument on these points elaborated in the pamphlet on The Evil One, by R. Roberts.

2. What the Bible has to say concerning the devil is inconsistent with the idea that a supernatural being is meant.

In the first place, he is said to put people in prison (Rev. 2:10). In the second place, Judas was said to be one (John 6:70). Peter is addressed as Satan (Matt. 16:23). In the third place, women are advised not to be devils--the word is translated "slanderers", but in the original, it is the same as that translated devil (1 Tim. 3:11; Tit. 2:3). In the fourth place, he is declared to have been the public persecutor of the saints (1 Pet. 5:8, 9). Fifthly he is to be bruised under the feet of the saints shortly (Rom. 16:20). Sixthly, he is said to bind people with disease and death (Luke 13:16; Acts 10:38). Seventhly, Christ is declared to have destroyed him by submitting to death (Heb. 2:14).

All these allusions are brought into harmony by the view defined in the next paragraph.

3. "Satan", which is a Hebrew word, means adversary; "Devil", which is a Greek word, means false accuser, slanderer, or liar. Having these meanings, the words are used to Personify that which has proved man's great adversary and God's great slanderer in the history of the human race, namely, SIN, whether considered abstractly as a principle, or finding expression through a person, an institution, or the evil world as a whole.

"Sin bringeth forth death" (Jas. 1:15) parallel with "The devil hath the power of death" (Heb. 2:14).

"He put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26) parallel with "That through death he might destroy the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

"Why hast thou conceived this In thine heart" (Acts 5:4) parallel with "Why hath Satan filled thine heart?" (Acts 5:3).

"According to the course of this world" (Eph. 2 : 2) parallel with "According to the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2).

"The desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Eph. 2:3) parallel with "The spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2).

"Every man tempted is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:14) parallel with "Taken captive by the devil at his will" (2 Tim. 2:26).

"The children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2) parallel with "The children of the devil" (1 John 3:10).

"Put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4:22) parallel with "Stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11).

"Loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10) parallel with "The god of this world hath blinded their minds" (2 Cor. 4:4).

"Deliver us from this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4) parallel with "Deliver us from the evil one" (R.V. Matt. 6:13).

"The children of this world" (Luke 20:34) parallel with "The children of the wicked one" (Matt. 13:38).

"Overcome the world" (1 John 5:5) parallel with "Overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14).

"Keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27) parallel with "Keep them from the evil one" (R.V. John 17:15).

"The lamb shall overcome them (the ten kings)" (Rev. 17:14) parallel with "He laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan" (Rev. 20:2).

The fact is that Jesus shared human nature so that he might conquer it. Overcoming its tendencies throughout his life, he completed his triumph by the sacrifice of himself in death, and was raised up to a new and incorruptible life. By sharing this life as he shared theirs, men may share in his victory over sin and death: and in that way Christ destroys both the devil and his works