

# On Satan and Demons

By Frank Selch

## Evidence from the T<sup>e</sup>nakh

The basis for a belief in supernatural forces is actually found in Genesis 1:1 where the reader is introduced to an invisible creative power, called Elohim which is commonly translated as 'God'. All kinds of people have tried throughout the ages of giving some kind of shape to this invisible force which is recorded as having communicated first with Adam and subsequently with various people throughout history. Whether we like it or not, there is an invisible world in close proximity to us that cannot be understood or accessed by normal human means. I firmly believe that if we deny its existence we are one the one hand depriving ourselves of possible blessings (in terms of our communication with God), and on the other hand even putting ourselves in a peril by denying its existence. There is much we do not understand in the Scriptures with our natural minds, but if we carefully combine all the pieces of this enormous jigsaw puzzle, a picture begins to emerge which shows that responsible life on earth, guided by the Scriptures, demands an interaction between the invisible world of the Elohim - and that which is our domain. There is simply too much evidence for it to brush it aside or explain it as imagination or superstitious thinking of a non-scientific world!

The underlying issue on this topic is the hypothesis, '*Are there external forces, which are intent on influencing us for good or evil?*' This is juxtaposed with the propensity of Christians to place an exaggerated emphasis on the involvement of the supernatural in human affairs and the dominant Jewish view that human beings are basically responsible for everything.

The opening salvo on this already hits us in Genesis 3 when we are introduced to a talking serpent with a bent on corrupting the work of the Creator Elohim, viz. '*Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that YHWH Elohim had made. He said to the woman...'* (v.1a). As part of this process the reader learns for the first time that there is allegedly an option in the universe between good and evil; viz. '*your eyes will be opened, and you will be like Elohim, knowing good and evil...*' (v.5). One of the consequences of this is the perennial 'blame-game'; part of which is to blame the devil for everything!

The next encounter with (so it seems) supernatural forces opposed to God is the affair human females have with the Nephilim (Hebr. *fallen ones*). It appears from the Biblical narrative that the outcome of these encounters produce some kind of a super-race, of giant beings, that vanishes again in the flood. However, the Hebrew text leaves some questions unanswered, for the term 'sons of God' could easily be applied to the descendants of Seth. We are told that after the birth of Enosh, '*men began to call on the name of YHWH*' (Gen 4:26). Therefore, it could just as easily be argued that the descendants of Seth's line were the sons of God and the rest of the human race were the 'fallen ones' – the Nephilim. The Biblical narrative does not supply us with sufficient argument to assume that either the sons of God, nor the Nephilim were of supernatural origin.

So, up to the flood there is never again a mention of a Satan or fallen angels. In fact, in my view, the angel concept needs to be rejected outright, whether we talk about good or bad angels. The word/term 'angel' comes to us from Greek/pagan folklore, but in the Hebrew the word simply means messenger, to which the transliteration of the Greek word *angelos* has been linked through the LXX. Christian theology has built a powerful spiritual basis through an intense study of these mystical (pagan) beings. Because the church, from its earliest days, has used the LXX (and Latin translations thereof) almost

exclusively, the concept of angels in and out of God's realm has become a fact. It seems utterly inconsequential to Christian teachers that the *Angelology* of Christendom is developed on false premises. In other words, most of our beliefs about angels are based in fantasy and mysticism.

The term Satan is Hebrew and means adversary, or accuser! This understanding is used powerfully by Yeshua in Matthew 16:23, literally saying to Kepha (Peter), "*Get out of my face, adversary! You are seeking to deflect me (from the cross), for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men...*". The term *satan(ic)* is clearly used here as a human condition or action!

In the Hebrew Bible (the T<sup>e</sup>nakh) we encounter the term Satan for the first time in 1 Chronicles 21:1, viz. '*Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel...*'; then 15 times in Job and thrice more in Zechariah. The verbal-noun form, however, occurs several times and is usually translated as 'accuser'; i.e. '*Set a wicked man over him, and let an accuser (hebr. Satan) stand at his right hand. Ps.109:6.* Surprisingly though, 2 Sam 24:1 carries the same passage as 1 Chronicles, but here we find the 'LORD' as the instigator of the disaster! Which is right? Why are there two accounts?

The above indicated text is a very interesting one, because when David gave in to the LORD's/Satan's instigations, Israel was delivered a punishing blow from God and seventy thousand people died (1 Chronicles 21:14-17a). There is nowhere in the text involving a human agent/counsellor of David. Those who will argue against supernatural agency in this case will find themselves hard-pressed to prove that the Satan was David's own rebellious nature pitting himself against God by pressing through his own will after being counselled by Joab (v.1-4)?

However, how should we interpret the account of II Samuel?

Well, if we try to read the Bible like a novel or a University textbook, we are in deep trouble indeed and we will find ourselves deeply disappointed. Simply, because both readings cannot be right – unless, of course there is a deeper lesson to be found there. If so, what is the lesson?

Let us look at Pharaoh's dealings with Moses! Here we find fourteen references to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart – seemingly by the hand of God. Read superficially, one must draw the conclusion that the God of the Hebrew is highly capricious, where first He blocks the king from responding and then punishes him in the bargain. The rest of the T<sup>e</sup>nakh teaches us that this is not part of God's revealed character. Therefore, another explanation must be found to explain this riddle, because similar situations are found throughout the Scriptures, even used by the writers of the New Testament, e.g. "*Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy...lest they hear, see understand...*" Isaiah 6:10; c/f. Matth.13:15; Mark 4:11-12; Acts 28:27. As I said earlier, if we read these texts like an instruction from an assembly manual we are bound to end up in trouble. For a start, there are few manuals that can be used in a failsafe way by complete novices, for all include an unwritten assumption that the assembler has some understanding of the operation involved. Indeed, some manual clearly state that the process needs to be carried out by a qualified person. In fact, in the case of many Computer Software Manuals, a considerable knowledge of computer terms is taken for granted by the authors of such manuals.

When we come to the Bible, and accept that its text is not of pure human origin, but a divine (supernaturally inspired) document, we need to find the humility of admitting that more than a cursory reading of the text is required to make sense of some of the more complex passages – short of dismissing them as erroneous!

In the case of Pharaoh, we need to understand that he was considered to be (a) god by his people and kept in that belief by the priests (for their benefit). Therefore, when Moses comes with a message from ‘another’, purportedly more powerful deity, Pharaoh’s hackles (as well as those of his priests) must have gone up. The evidence from Scripture shows that God works with people, rarely against them – be it for good or bad. In other words, it is God who strengthens our disposition, either for or against him. Since Pharaoh, obviously did not cherish the idea of being thumped by a rival deity, he resolved from the very beginning to come out winning. How could he not pursue that, since his life, career and kingship depended on showing himself invincible before his people. Since God created man with a free will, and therefore knew what was in Pharaoh, God could be said to have hardened the king’s heart, whereas in fact it was Pharaoh’s obstinacy that did it in- the same way that Adam and Eve sinned. The Genesis dialogue indicates that Eve reasoned to know better through the serpent’s counsel and thus misled her husband. Pharaoh reasoned (highly likely) that, since he was (a) god, he was invincible and consequently led his nation into a catastrophe! Freewill has the propensity to produce rebellion against God in human beings, thus they become satanic, or adversarial towards the Creator. However, due to the impartation of fresh meanings in Christian usage through Hellenism, the word ‘satan’ has taken on meanings not found in Hebrew usage.

The Bible does not record every detail of the lives of people mentioned for the simple reason that no library could contain it (c/f. Jn.21:25). For this reason we need the counsel of the entire book and the lives and the experiences of the people whom it deals with.

In the case of David and the two conflicting passages mentioned above, we have a similar situation. The story tells us that David had built himself a powerful reputation at the head of his band of fighters. With reputation also comes pride and the propensity to sin. God wanted David to discover that his true strength was not in or with himself or his fighting men, but in God. As a military tactician, David therefore understood the significance of numbers. As God had demonstrated centuries earlier through Gideon – and again many centuries after David through Yehoshaphat, numbers are of little significance with God, what is important is the implicit trust of his people. The experience was a powerful lesson for both David and Israel. David, by trusting his military prowess and therefore in numbers, became the ‘Satan’, or Adversary of God. It was essentially, David’s pride, the Yetzer HaRa, or sin living within him (Rom 7:21-25) that moved him to do what demonstrated a total lack of faith (trust) in God.

The book of Job is a different story altogether. Although the book is totally unconnected with the rest of the Bible, it nevertheless forms an integral part of the Scriptures in its philosophical approach to suffering. Here we have a powerful interaction between the supernatural and human realms. Here we find the Satan intruding into a meeting of the sons of God with the Most High. The Satan did not emerge from the heavenly realm, but from the earth. On both accounts of Satan’s appearing before God, we are told that he came from the earth, ‘*from going to and fro...*’ (Job 1:7; 2:2). Although the narrative informs us that it was (the) Satan who caused all of Job’s troubles with God’s permission, beyond 2:7 there is no more mention of him throughout the book as the cause of Job’s afflictions.

The Apostle Paul highlights a conflict that rages within every human being, a conflict between a desire to do good and a seemingly inherent inability to carry it out; where we find ourselves often yielding to evil impulses although to do good was what we wanted. In Jewish thought this is referred to as the struggle between the ‘Yetzer HaTov’ and the ‘Yetzer HaRa’; the creator of good and bad! The book of Genesis informs us via the ‘serpent event’ that being like God includes knowing ‘good’

and 'evil'. How true! The argument that comes to us from silence is that Adam and Eve had no need to know both, because everything was 'very good'. Therefore we must assume that a fundamental shift took place in the Garden endowing the human race with the perpetual struggle between these two forces.

Some sectors within Judaism, like some Christian denominations, reject any spiritual connections here and claim that everything originates from within man himself and that we cannot blame some evil super-power for the wrongs of this world. To some extent they are right! However.....

### **Evidence from the Prophets:**

The Hebrew prophets (Isaiah 14 & Ezekiel 28) are deemed by Christian scholars to be alluding to a supernatural Adversary (Satan) of God and are consequently frequently referred to by preachers. Whilst it seems acceptable to read these passages as referring to human rulers, there are segments within them, which clearly seem to refer to a supernatural being that is intent on replacing the Most High as the universal object of worship (c/f. Matth.4:9-10).

### **Evidence from the History:**

If we then, based on the above, want to argue that the Satan (Adversary of God and man) is purely the Yetzer HaRa – our evil inclination – I feel strongly that we are moving onto very thin ice in trying to explain evil behaviour patters within and among human beings.

A lot has to do with how one understands the concept of 'spirit'<sup>1</sup>; i.e. the Nazis, Mao Tse Tung, Pol Pot, et al. The hypnotic power of Hitler's oratory was such that an entire nation became entranced in his evil message. If the theory of 'total human responsibility' held true, then every German who put on a Nazi armband is as evil as Hitler himself and NO mitigating factor can deliver him from utter condemnation. If, however, we are subject to the object in focus, then I have the choice of re-focussing if given the opportunity. Such is the message of Repentance! Hitler DID NOT follow someones call to destroy the Jewish People – he generated the concept and was therefore the source and became HaSatan to the Jewish People and others who did not fit into his scheme of things. As such it can be said that, 'he created a spiritual condition in Germany that inspired others to follow his biddings!'

Anecdotal evidence has it that Hitler found much comfort in the realm of the occult! Was he himself inspired by dark forces of evil? Who is able to argue for or against it? Consider this, the Jewish People and the Hebrew Bible are the ONLY real evidence to the existence of a Creator as told in the Bible and their utter annihilation would also eradicate that evidence!<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The concept of '*spirit*' is very much part of human conceptual language. For example, it is not uncommon to hear a phrase, like '*such conduct contrary to the spirit of the founder...*'; etc. Gen.1:26-28 clearly shows that mankind was destined by the Creator to rule the earth. It is therefore not all that inconceivable that the Satan is the product of Global human rebellion throughout the ages!

<sup>2</sup> Is it co-incidence that Hitler's greatest allies were leaders from the Islamic world?

## New Testament Evidence:

The origin of a *supernatural* Satan, or Adversary of the Most High God, is virtually impossible to establish and prove from Scripture. Yet, there seems to be sufficient evidence to show that both God and mankind have a supernatural enemy. I believe that it is important to hold several things in tension on this subject, viz. there is a world of the supernatural, but at the same time we must not negate our own responsibility in terms of following the teaching of Scripture.

In Scripture and literature the role of the Adversary (heb. HaSatan) is given many names, such as Apollyon, Beelzebub (hebr. Baal Zvuv, or lord of the flies), Semihazah, Azazel, Belial, and Sammael. Nicknames include the Tempter, Evil One, God of This World, Father of Lies, and Prince of Darkness. But in the New Testament it is Satan, with its Greek equivalent *diabolos* (the Devil), which came to dominate, displacing or demoting other names and figures. It seems that it was not until the Middle Ages and the days of the Inquisition, that Satan really came to prominence. He is a figure that was born out of Zoroastrianism and later Gnostic lore. It is therefore significant to note that the T<sup>c</sup>nakh, upon which the NT is based, knows very little about such figure (some NT scholars identify Satan or Lucifer with several passages in the prophets).

An inescapable reality is that Yeshua acknowledged the existence of a literal Satan and as a spiritual entity. Although the T<sup>c</sup>nakh knows little about a supernatural Satan in a direct sense, it would seem that an understanding of a supernatural Adversary of God had developed during the Inter-testamental period; the years between last 'writing prophets' of Israel and the appearance of Yeshua.

The casting out of demons was a major healing activity of Yeshua, 'to set the prisoners free'! For example, all three Synoptics record an event where Yeshua cast out a demon from a Mute. It says that once the demon was gone, the person was able to speak. However, instead of glorifying God, superstitious elements among the crowd accused Yeshua of using witchcraft to perform that act, despite the fact that the casting out of demons seems to have been widely practiced at the time (Lk.11:19), " *He casts out demons by Beelzebub (a poor transliteration of the hebr. Baal Zvuv, or Master of Flies), the ruler of the demons.*" (Matt. 12:25-30; Mk. 3:22-27; Lk. 11:15-23).

As I said above, the event in the Garden at the beginning of human history, impacted the world in a way incredibly difficult for us to comprehend. *See footnote 1*

There is a major factor we need to come to terms with, and that is the testimony of Yeshua in conjunction with the reports about the miraculous demonstrated by two of Israel's most revered prophets – or Holy Men: Elijah and Elisha. The combined work of both can easily be seen as foreshadowing Yeshua in terms of the miraculous. During their ministry dead people were restored to life, kings of distant countries had their secrets revealed to the kings of Israel, lepers were cleansed, food was multiplied, axe-heads were made to float, scavenger birds shared their food with Elijah and the heavens were rent asunder to reveal God's armies standing in readiness to fight the enemies of Israel. People have problems with the Ascension of Yeshua, but they ignore the Biblical record that Elijah did not die, but was taken up in a whirlwind! The entire Bible is full of the miraculous and thus indicate another, superior world parallel to ours.

The question of a (possibly supernatural) Satan should therefore never be an issue for Christians!

Whether the Satan is an entity created by God at the beginning of time, or whether it is a spiritual entity generated by thousands of years of human wickedness through the Yetzer HaRa like some 'Sci-Fi blob' from outer space, the fact is that humanity is faced with an invisible Adversary, which seems

to be moving it to an ultimate destruction. As Paul puts it, there are spiritual forces of wickedness in high places, both human and ethereal, that are influencing human thinking (<sup>12</sup> *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places..*). Ephes. 6:12). This is a clearly observable factor through the decline of Godliness in the world and a corresponding rise in humanistic/pagan thinking. Increasingly, human beings are demanding more and more adoration of self than ever before in recorded history. There is an observable decline in (a) healthy individualism (independent, objective thinking) corresponding to a rise in (a) herd-mentality or team spirit; e.g. *“I love the Earth, but I hate people!”* At the same time there is also a fracturing of society with a steep rise in (an) unhealthy focus on individualism (e.g. five family members – five TVs, etc.) as well as a concentrated focus on self (I, me and myself) with a decline in attention to true community. Behind all this seems to be a negative, clearly evil, unifying spirit, which causes people to focus on the wrong issues.

## **Mental Illness:**

The Middle Ages are largely responsible for much of the confusion that exists in Christian circles concerning demonic/satanic infestations in human beings. Mental illness was barely understood as a real illness even as late as the post WW II era. Many times it was regarded superstitiously as physical defect, or the consequence of demonic activity and sufferers were treated accordingly; usually in an incredibly shameful way. Indeed, anyone who has ever had occasion to visit or work in a ward for Schizophrenics will understand the horror of that world and how easy it is to ascribe all that to the work of demons. Sadly, however, modern medicine denies today any possibility of demonic activity and so a possible deliverance is virtually ruled out for these sufferers.

Having worked as a volunteer in Mental Hospitals, as well as practiced spiritual deliverance in Ministry, I firmly believe that a dual reality exists here. There is definitely an illness that can affect the brain, which causes a person's faculties to fail in varying degrees. However, there is also such a thing as demonic contamination of a person's soul and spirit. Discernment is quite difficult, as there are overlapping symptoms, and only intense prayer with fasting may/can/will bring clarity to what the actual condition really is. Oftentimes, demonic activity will identify itself through blasphemous, filthy language and bizarre activity expressing hatred of one kind or another.

The interesting thing is that demonic activity will desist through prayer and an active obedience to the Word of God, whereas mental illness may not respond at all to healing prayer, simply because there is a defect to the physical wiring of the brain. Such a defect could be the result of injury, congenital issues, psychological torment or substance abuse. The latter are usually the most susceptible to demonic infestation because they afflictions of the soul (Gr. *psuche*).

## **Evidence from Black Magic:**

I do not wish to glorify *Black Magic* in any shape or form by acknowledging its existence, but to ignore it would be stupid and totally irresponsible.

Christians regard the Satan as an *Evil Force*, yet practitioners of Black Magic or *Devil Worship* have no such concept of the *Prince of Darkness*. To them the Satan is as vital a force as 'God' is to the Christians. What constitutes an immensely significant factor here is that to people involved in Satanic Cults the Satan HAS supernatural powers, whereas to many Christians who reject the *Supernatural*

God has no power at all – except in theory. Practitioners of Black Magic believe that Satan is empowering them, whereas many Christian denominations see the ‘power of God’ merely in a symbolic way and find it impossible, or at least very difficult to make room for the miraculous!

### *In Summary:*

Evidence has it that there are forces at work among (physically unconnected/non-aligned) human beings, which seem to produce observable patterns of conduct that are opposed to the Creator God described in the Bible. Primitive tribal people have little doubt about the existence of the supernatural as the usage of spells, etc clearly shows. Whether it is purely psychological or spiritual, Shamans and witch doctors exercise tremendous influence among their own people. Among the people of Haiti for example, the use of Black Magic or Voodoo, is well documented and experienced.

Evidence also has it that much sinful and negative human activity, especially among certain Christians denominations and sects, is ascribed to a supernatural Satan and the demons under his control. Often times, Satan and his demons get the blame for things that clearly have their origin in willful human disobedience and ignorance of the Scriptures.

What we need to hold in tension is this

- We serve an invisible, supernatural God
- Creation itself is a supernatural event and inexplicable by natural human means
- The entire Bible declares and testifies to supernatural activity of various kinds from creation until now
- The supernatural is a reality, for without it there would have been no ‘miraculous conception’ of Yeshua and therefore the New Testament would also be a hoax
- The Resurrection of Yeshua is a supernatural event, as are his many ‘comings and goings’ in the period leading up to his ascension
- Most Christians, and Jewish people, believe in a world to come. Therefore, our entry into that ‘World to Come’ is also a supernatural event.

Since we are surrounded by the supernatural, to reject the existence of an actual Satan, and forces under his control, is foolhardy. Simply, if we lack the humility to accept that we as frail humans cannot possibly assume to understand everything in heaven and on earth, we will set ourselves up for deception. The evidence of an actual, supernatural **Deceiver** on the prowl is vast and a wise person should accept the possibility of his existence.

However, at the same time it is an equally great fallacy to blame every human failure, sin and misery on a Satan. I do believe, that more often than NOT it is our own disobedience, rebellion and disregard of the Scriptures that bring about a given negative situation. Therefore, let us consider two examples for our learning and edification:

1. The first parents blamed everything on each other and Satan and we are paying the price

2. Yeshua declared “It is written” when the Satan (wherever he came from) came to tempt him and we are reaping the benefits.

He is the supreme example of what it means to take responsibility for one’s life and destiny, as well as what it costs to live a life of utter devotion and obedience to Almighty God.

Shalom!