

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

SATAN AND THE DEVIL

The Bible does not support the commonly held belief that Satan, otherwise referred to as the devil, is a fallen angel who, supported by other evil spirits, works to alienate man from God.

The Bible does speak of Satan and the devil as though they are beings. However, a careful reading of the whole of Scripture shows that either one specific person or a particular group of humans is being referred to, or a figure of speech is being employed, namely personification, in which a characteristic, a tendency or an idea is represented as a person.

SATAN

The word 'Satan' appears in both the Old and the New Testaments of the Authorised Version of the Bible.

The Old Testament

Here it occurs 19 times (1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:6,7 [twice], 8,9,12 [twice]; 2:1,2 [twice], 3,4,6,7; Ps. 109:6; Zech. 3:1,2 [twice]), and on every occasion the Hebrew word is *satan*, showing that this is not a translation but the transference of the Hebrew word directly into English (transliteration). On 14 occasions the same Hebrew word is translated. The references and their translations are: Numbers 22:22 (adversary), 32 (withstand); 1 Samuel 29:4 (adversary); 2 Samuel 19:22 (adversaries); 1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25 (adversary); Psalm 38:20; 71:13; 109:4,20,29 (adversaries); Zechariah 3:1 (resist).

Thus the basic idea of the Hebrew word is that of an adversary, one who resists, opposes or withstands.

Examples of its use in the Old Testament

1 Chronicles 21:1. "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel". 2 Samuel 24 also records this event and shows that it was the Lord Who was angry with Israel and was acting as an adversary towards them.

Psalms 109:6. "Set Thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand". The word *satan* appears four times in this psalm: v. 4 (adversaries), v. 6 (Satan), v. 20 (adversaries), v. 29 (adversaries); so verse 6 would appear to be an example of the translators' inconsistency and Satan ought to have been rendered 'adversary'.

Job 1 and 2. In the Hebrew the definite article 'the' is associated with *satan* here, indicating that a particular or specific adversary is being spoken of. This is true also of Zechariah 3, where *the* adversary is 'resisting' (Heb. *satan*) the high priest because the high priest is behaving in an unseemly manner.

The New Testament

In the New Testament Satan appears 37 times, each time reflecting the Hebrew word found in the Old Testament, *satan*, and carries with it the same idea of an opposer or adversary. For example, Jesus spoke of Peter as Satan, or adversary, when Peter suggested Jesus should not go to Jerusalem (Mt. 16:21-23). He was opposing the declared intention of Jesus.

In Acts 5 Peter used the same idea in talking to Ananias when he said: "why hath Satan filled thine heart . . . ?" (v. 3). The next verse shows it was in fact Ananias who was being an adversary to himself, preventing himself from doing what he had declared: "why hast *thou* conceived this thing *in thine heart*?"

THE DEVIL

The Old Testament

There is no specific reference to 'the devil' at all in the Old Testament. The word 'devils' appears four times. Twice it is translated from a Hebrew word which on 51 other occasions is translated 'goat[s]' or 'kid[s]'. On the other two occasions it comes from a word with the basic meaning of 'to ruin' or 'to spoil'. Thus there is no *direct* reference in the Old Testament to the devil who is supposed to be a supernatural being in opposition to God.

The New Testament

There are 45 references in the New Testament to 'the devil'. Twelve of these are translations of a group of words (*daimonion, daimōn, daimonizomai*) used to describe mental illness or false gods. The rest are translations of the Greek word *diabolos*, which is also translated 'false accusers' (twice) and 'slanders' (once).

Other associated terms are 'the evil' ('the evil one' in the RSV), 'the wicked one' (six times; Mt. 13:19,38; 1 Jno. 2:13,14; 3:12; 5:18), 'the god of this world' (once: 2 Cor. 4:4).

That personification is being used in the case of these terms is suggested by the comparison to be found in the following selection of verses:

"Him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14)	"Sin . . . bringeth forth death" (Jas. 1:15)
"Overcome the wicked one" (1 Jno. 2:14)	"Overcometh the world" (1 Jno. 5:5)
"Keep them from the evil one" (Jno. 17:15, RV)	"Keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27)
"The children of the devil" (1 Jno. 3:10)	"The children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2)
"Neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27)	"Make not provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14)

In these passages "the devil", "the wicked one" and "the evil one" stand for sin, or for that inclination in individuals and in society to disobey or act in a manner which, like Eve, doubts God's Word, accuses Him of misrepresentation, and chooses to behave in such a way as to malign His character and His principles or to treat Him as irrelevant or non-existent.

Some unScriptural misconceptions

1. Satan is a fallen angel

- The Bible uses the word 'Satan' to refer to the disciple Peter (Mt. 16:23), enemies of Paul and opponents of his preaching (1 Thess. 2:18), Jews opposed to Christ's followers (Rev. 2:9,13) and even God Himself (compare 1 Chron. 21:1 and 2 Sam. 24:1).

2. The devil is immortal

- The Bible states that only God has immortality (1 Tim. 6:16), and has bestowed it upon His Son.
- The Bible states that the purpose of Christ's death was to destroy the devil (Heb. 2:14).

3. The devil dwells in hell

- The Bible never states this.
- In the Old Testament hell is the grave, and in the New Testament hell refers either to the grave or to destruction.

This leaflet is produced by The Testimony Magazine, 26 Tiercel Avenue, Norwich NR7 8JN, to encourage personal and ecclesial study of Bible principles. Further copying for distribution is encouraged.