

CHRISTADELPHIAN BIBLE POSTAL COURSE

Tutor's Name: Date: Student's Name: Ref No.: 

LESSON 19 • The Devil of the Bible

WEEKLY READINGS
READING FOR STUDY PAPER

Exodus 21-26, Proverbs 3
Hebrews 2

I didn't do it!

A child had been playing, and had left a lot of torn paper lying untidily on the floor. His mother looked rather cross when she saw it. "Who did that?" she asked. The little boy answered promptly, "Daddy!"

We're all a bit like that little boy. We just don't like to admit when we've done something wrong. We like to blame someone else. But the apostle James tells us, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." (James, chapter 1, verse 14).

And we have to admit, if we are honest, that it is the evil thoughts in our own mind that make us do and say evil things. We cannot lay the blame for our sins on anyone else.

Who, then, is the Devil?

The Bible certainly speaks of a devil. If he is not a supernatural being, tempting men to do evil, we must ask the question, "Who is he?"

Let us see if we can find out from the Bible. First, look at I John, chapter 3, verse 8. This verse tells us why Jesus was sent. "For THIS PURPOSE the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

We have the same idea taken a little further in Hebrews, chapter 2, verse 14, where we read, "Forsamuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

This second passage tells us that Jesus came to destroy the devil, and it explains how He did it. He came as a frail human being, and died in order to destroy the devil.

How strange! If the devil was a very powerful and deceitful monster, that would have been impossible. No - the devil of the Bible - the devil that Jesus destroyed by dying on a cross, was sin. We read in Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 26, "Now...hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

We have emphasised in an earlier lesson ("The Cross") that Jesus inherited a nature like ours. It was a nature that could be tempted by sin. Jesus fought against sin all His life; and finally destroyed sin completely by destroying the very nature that could be tempted. It was because of this that God raised Him from the dead and gave Him a "glorious body", free from all sin, and immortal.

The Devil and sin

There is one simple way of showing that sin and the devil are the same thing. All that the Bible says about the devil, it says about sin.

The devil is the enemy of God - so is sin.

The devil is the tempter of man - so is sin. The devil is deceitful - so is sin. The devil causes death (Hebrews, chapter 2, verse 14) - so does sin. The devil was destroyed by the death of Christ - so was sin.

From these comparisons we can see that the devil and sin must be the same thing.

What does the word "Devil" really mean?

The word "devil" really means "slanderer", or "false accuser". In I Timothy, chapter 3, verse 11, we read, "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers."

The word translated "slanderer" here is the same word that is translated "devil" in other places.

The word "satan" is also used - usually in the New testament. A "satan" is an adversary - one who opposes. So when Peter tries to persuade Jesus to turn aside from the way in which God has said He must go - the way of the cross - Peter becomes an adversary, and Jesus says to him, "Get thee behind Me, satan" (Matthew, chapter 16, verse 23).

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Anything which works against God may be called "satan", so when Paul was prevented from going to see the Thessalonians, he wrote to them, "Satan hindered us" (1 Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 18).

There is one more passage - this time from the Old Testament - which we must look at, now, because some people think it teaches us that Satan is a fallen angel. It is in Isaiah, chapter 14, verse 12, and it reads, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!"

But if we read the whole chapter, we find that this "Lucifer" is the King of Babylon, and the prophet is foretelling his downfall. In verse 15, Isaiah speaks of this king's death, and goes on to say, in verse 16, "Is this the man that made the earth to tremble?"

Casting out devils

The writers of the New Testament, when telling us of the miracles of healing that Jesus performed, often use the expression, "He cast out devils". How are we to understand this?

In the days of Jesus, it is commonly thought that certain illnesses, and also afflictions, such as deafness and blindness, were caused by evil spirits which took possession of a man. It was natural, when the man was healed, to say that the "devil was gone out of him", and, in using this expression, the gospel writers were simply using a phrase which was common in those days. We do not imagine that, because they wrote in this way, they really believed that evil spirits dwelt in men.

The one great Creator

Belief in an evil being, who is God's great rival, is not new. In the days of Isaiah the prophet, the Persians believed in two great powers, corresponding to God and the devil. The first was supposed to be the creator of light and goodness, and the second of darkness, and all that is evil.

In answer to this wrong belief, God sent a message through the prophet Isaiah. We can read it for ourselves, in Isaiah, chapter 45, verses 5-7, "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside Me: I girded thee, though hast not known Me: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me. 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, do all these things".

(The word "evil" here must not be confused with sin. It means "trouble" - that God brings upon sinners).

This passage proves to us finally that there is one great power in the universe, ordering all things - one great Creator, the Lord God Almighty. There is no creature that can challenge His power, and there is no powerful and deceitful monster, called the devil, who can dare to oppose Him.

One final word: You may want to ask why the Bible so often uses the word "devil" instead of just saying "sin"; and why it speaks of this devil as if it were describing a powerful and deceitful person. It is surely so that we can understand how powerful and how deceitful sin is. We must learn this lesson before we can appreciate fully how much we need to be saved from sin.

What we have learnt

1. The devil is not a great evil spirit.
2. The devil, or Satan, are just Bible names for what we now call "human nature".
3. That is where temptation comes from - from within our own sinful, human nature.
4. Men who give in to temptation, and behave wickedly, are sometimes called "Satan", too.