

# **Authorities and Powers**

by

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## Preface

When St. Paul described Christ Jesus as the agent by whom God created all entities in the universe, he spoke of the things "in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (Col. 3:16). It is doubtful if Paul was attempting some sort of rigid hierarchy by these various terms. Rather, he was referring to the invisible cosmic powers, including angels and demons, that inhabit the "heavenlies" (Ep. 3:10; 6:12). For Paul, these spiritual entities were realities, unseen yet powerful. Paul himself had been the recipient of grace by a ministering angel on his voyage to Rome (Ac. 27:23-24), and more than once Paul warned his Christian converts to be aware of their spiritual enemies. Thus, in calling this study "authorities and powers," I intend no more than Paul--a general reference to those spiritual entities of which the Bible speaks in both testaments.

At the outset, I should also remark upon a very insightful comment by C. S. Lewis in which he suggests that there is a common misperception on the part of most people with regard to the polarity between God and Satan. Most folks, Lewis points out, think of God and Satan as being polar opposites, while the angels and demons are aligned behind them on either side. In fact, the opposite of Satan is not God, but rather, Michael, since both the arch demon and the archangel are created beings. Satan, who himself is a created but fallen creature, could hardly be the polar opposite of God, who is eternal, uncreated and sovereign over the universe. To put Satan as the polar opposite of God smacks of the *yin* and *yang* in oriental thought, but hardly the Bible. In fact, it would suit Satan only too well to be regarded as God's opposite, because when he is so regarded he gains a status that does not rightly belong to him. As always, he is a liar and the father of lies.

With the increased general interest in the spiritual world that follows in the wake of neopaganism and postmodernism, it seems appropriate to explore what the Bible actually teaches about the unseen world of angels, Satan and demons. It is particularly important that Christians derive their theology from Holy Scripture rather than from the culture at large, since the prevailing culture often is shot through with eclectic ideas drawn from many sources. This series of studies is an attempt to engage the biblical text faithfully and thoroughly.

## Ministering Angels

Anyone who is remotely aware of the surrounding culture is bound to notice the contemporary marketability of angels. You can buy angel pins for your lapel, and angel cards for your friends. You can watch *Touched by an Angel* during prime time, or read about the heavenly contests between angels and demons in the religious fictions of Frank Peretti. Angels have become eclectic religious symbols of divine help in a postmodern world so that whether one is Christian, New Age or something else, angels can be embraced.

Is all this attention to angels justified? What does the Bible actually say about angels? This study will explore the biblical theology of angels, what they are and what they aren't, and how they fit into the pattern of biblical Christianity.

## The General Nature of Angels

### Angel Vocabulary

There is a rather wide range of terms in the Bible for spiritual creatures who attend God in the heavenlies and do his bidding. The most basic words rendered "angel" are *mal'ak* (Hebrew) and *angelos* (Greek), both of which mean messenger or agent. In fact, these words do not always refer to supernatural beings but can also be applied to human messengers or agents (e.g., 2 Sa. 2:5; 2 Kg. 1:2; Ja. 2:25). The context clarifies which meaning is intended. Beyond these basic words, however, there are a number of other terms that should be recognized. In the Hebrew Bible, these terms are:

*Bene 'Elohim* or *Bene 'Elim* (= sons of God)

*Qedoshim* (= holy ones)

*Avadim* (= servants)

*Mesharetim* (= ministers)

*Tsavaoth* (= hosts, armies)

*'Elohim* or *'Elim* (= gods)

*'Irim* (= watchers)

*Sod* (= council)  
*'Edat* or *Qahal* (= assembly)  
*Seraphim* (= burning ones)  
*Kerubim* (= cherubs)

To these may be added the following New Testament terms, though it should be noted that outside of Colossians 1:16, these terms seem to refer to evil powers rather than good ones:

*Archai* (= rulers)  
*Exousiai* (= authorities)  
*Thronoi* (= thrones)  
*Kyriotetes* (= dominions)  
*Dynameis* (= powers)

## **The Creation of Angels**

The creation of the angels is not described in the Hebrew Bible, though everywhere their existence is assumed. In the Psalms, they are categorized with the other created entities (Ps. 148:2, 5). In the New Testament, St. Paul clearly says that all existing entities were created by God through his Son, and Paul specifically enumerates "things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities" (Col. 1:16). His statement surely must include angels. In Job, it is clear that the creation of angels predates the creation of the world, for when the earth's foundations were laid, the angels "shouted for joy" (Job 38:7).

The nature of angels is ambiguous. In general, they are simply depicted as embodiments of their mission, God's "servants who do his will" (Ps. 103:21). They are described as "winds" and "flames of fire" (Ps. 104:4//He. 1:7). They could be mistaken for men (Ge. 18:2, 16; 19:1; Zec. 1:8-10, 14), though there is no passage that describes them appearing as women. Jesus' statement that they do not marry suggests that they are without gender (Mt. 22:30//Mk. 12:25). At a popular level, they were believed to be beautiful and wise (1 Sa. 29:9; 2 Sa. 14:17; 19:27). In general, the popular imagery that they are winged has only marginal support in that they are said to "fly" (Da. 9:21; Re. 14:6), though of course, two special classes of angels, Seraphim and Cherubim, are described as having wings (Is. 6:2; Eze. 1:5-6; 10:5). On the other hand, the idea that the manna of the exodus was "angels food" is supported in the Psalms and the Apocrypha (Ps. 78:24-25; Wisdom 16:20; 2 Esdras 1:19).

## **The Heavenly Council**

In the poetical books, there appears the description of a heavenly council that attends Almighty God and is accountable to him. This council of heavenly beings, the "myriads of holy ones" (Dt. 33:2) or "council of holy ones" (Ps. 89:5-7), is presided over by God himself, who calls the angels to account (Ps. 82:1), and when necessary, passes judgment on them (Ps. 82:6). In the Book of Job, Satan himself is called to account along with all the other heavenly creatures (Job 1:6-7; 2:1-2). In one of the most bizarre passages in the Old Testament, the prophet Micaiah described a vision of the heavenly council in which God inquired if one of the heavenly beings might lure Ahab to his death on the battlefield. One of the spirits agreed to become "a lying spirit in the mouths of all his [Ahab's] prophets," and in response to their false prophecies, Ahab would go to war and be killed (1 Kg. 22:19-23). One of the signs of a true prophet was to have "stood in God's council" to hear his words (Je. 23:18, 22; cf. Is. 6:1ff.; 2 Co. 12:2-4; Re. 4:1ff.), while the purveyors of false prophecy and false wisdom were those who had not done so (Job 15:8).

Glimpses of this council engaged in heavenly liturgy are to be found in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation. At the call of Isaiah, the prophet saw the divine throne and the attendant seraphim chanting the refrain of God's holiness. That the seraphim were involved in a kind of temple worship is suggested by the smoke of incense and live coals (Is. 6:2-7). Ezekiel, in a similar vision, saw the cherubim called "living creatures," each with four faces and four wings and an appearance like burning coals (Eze. 1:5-14). At the voice of God, the cherubim stood still and lowered their wings (Eze. 1:24-28). These creatures, also, were involved in heavenly temple worship (Eze. 10:2-8). In Daniel, the divine throne is surrounded by "thousands upon thousands" of heavenly attendants (Da. 7:10). In the Revelation of John, the heavenly liturgy once again is conducted by ranks of angelic beings, including the four living creatures described by Ezekiel (Re. 4:6b-8), a class of heavenly elders (Re. 4:9-11), and the myriads of angelic worshippers (Re. 5:11-12, 14). Here, too, there are depictions of temple worship with the offering of incense (Re. 5:8; 8:3-5), the presence of a sacrificial lamb (Re. 5:6), the ark of the covenant (Re. 11:19), and an angel attending the fire on the great altar (Re. 14:17-18). Thus, the psalmist can say, "Praise him [the Lord] all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts" (Ps. 148:1-2).

## **The Fall and Judgment of Rebellious Angels**

If Psalm 82:1 says that God "gives judgment" among the heavenly creatures, Job indicates that on one occasion he "charged his angels with error" (Job 4:18), and further, that he "places no trust in his holy ones" (Job 15:15a). Some incident

in the heavenlies caused defilement, though we are not told what (Job 15:15b). If the symbolism of "stars" in the Revelation of John are taken to refer to angels, then perhaps this defilement of heaven came at the fall of Satan (Re. 12:4). On the other hand, we know that the Jewish pseudepigrapha interpreted the strange passage in Genesis 6:1-2, 4 as referring to angels who invaded the earth in order to take human wives and spawn children (1 Enoch 6-8). Later, this pseudepigraphical tradition is echoed in the New Testament (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).

Two passages about historical potentates from Babylon and Tyre have long been interpreted as metaphors reflecting the fall of Satan himself (Is. 14:12-15; Eze. 28:12-19), and if so, then Satan was once a "guardian cherub" (Eze. 28:16). However, the interpretation has about as many who reject it as who accept it.

Thus, our knowledge about the angels who fell is fragmented and incomplete. We know that Jesus referred to "the devil and his angels" (Mt. 25:41), but the circumstances of their fall is shrouded in mystery. While Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk. 10:18), it is unclear whether he refers to a primeval rebellion, the then present defeat of Satan in the Galilean mission, or the anticipation of what was yet to come. In the New Testament, Paul declares that in the church Christ Jesus intends to display the manifold wisdom of God to the hostile "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Ep. 3:10).

### **Ranks and Classes of Angels**

It seems apparent that all angels are not equal. In the New Testament, one angel, Michael, is described as an "archangel," suggesting superior rank (Jude 9; cf. 1 Th. 4:16), and in Daniel, he is called "one of the chief princes" (Da. 10:13), which implies that there are others like him. In Revelation he is depicted as the leader of the army of angels (Rv. 12:7). Perhaps Michael is the unnamed "commander of the army of the Lord" who appeared to Joshua (Jos. 5:13-15). One other angel is named in the Old and New Testaments, the special messenger Gabriel, who appeared to Daniel (Da. 8:16; 9:21), and who announced the births of John and Jesus (Lk. 1:19, 26). In the annunciation passage, he is described as one who stood in God's immediate presence. In the Apocrypha, there are said to be seven archangels (Tobit 12:15), and along with Michael and Gabriel, these include Raphael, who accompanied Tobias on his journey (Tobit 5:4-5), as well as Uriel and Jeremiel, who appeared to Esdras (2 Esdras 4:1, 36). In the Jewish pseudepigrapha, the idea of angelic ranks appears frequently, and other archangels are named, such as, Suru'el, Raguel and Saraqa'el (1 Enoch 20:1). The idea of seven archangels may lie behind the New Testament phrase "the seven angels who stand before God" (Rv. 8:2).

However, even within the Old Testament, there is some evidence of angelic



rank associated with the nations of the world. This idea comes from two passages. In the LXX version of the Pentateuch, God divided the nations among the angels and gave them authority to rule (Dt. 32:8, LXX).<sup>1</sup> As such, angels seem to have served as protectors of the seventy nations listed in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10. The idea of angels serving as protectors over the nations anticipates the language in Daniel, where an angelic protector of Persia and one of Grecia resist Michael, the angelic protector of Israel (Da. 10:13, 20-21; 12:1).

The ranks of seraphim and cherubim seem such that they are especially associated with God's intimate presence (Is. 6:2; Eze. 10:3-4). The cherubim, especially, are significant in that they stood as sentinels over the way to the tree of life in Eden (Ge. 3:24). Sculpted images of cherubim graced the lid of the ark of the covenant, and between them, Yahweh was enthroned (Ex. 25:18-20; 37:6-9; Nu. 7:89; 1 Sa. 4:4; 1 Kg. 6:23-28; 8:6-7; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Is. 37:16). Mounted on cherubim, Yahweh travels through the heavenly realms (2 Sa. 22:11//Ps. 18:10).

If the messengers to the seven churches of Asia are accepted as angels (Rv. 1:20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14),<sup>2</sup> then it is possible that individual congregations have angels who represent them in heaven.

## **The Angel of The Lord**

The capacity of God to reveal himself is fundamental to the possibility of covenant. Early in the patriarchal narratives, God takes the initiative to reveal himself. At the same time, the pure essence of God is not immediately accessible to humans, for as God declares to Moses, "No one may see me and live" (Ex. 33:20; cf. Ex. 24:9-11; Ge. 32:30; Jg. 13:22). God's self-revelation is governed by principles that are paradoxical. God was invisible and spiritual. He was also near rather than remote.

When God manifested himself, it is to be understood that no one actually saw the pure essence of God, but rather, the viewers saw a form in which God clothed himself so as to be temporarily visible. To Moses on Sinai, God says, "You will see my back; but my face must not be seen," and in fact, God covered Moses with his hand so that Moses would be protected from seeing God's face (Ex. 33:23). Beginning in the Book of Genesis, the reader encounters a special revelation of

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<sup>1</sup>Thus, the LXX reads, "When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God" (Dt. 32:8). This reading is supported by the Dead Sea Scrolls, which reads "sons of god," and is assumed in the Apocrypha (Sirach 17:17). It is followed by some English versions (so RSV, NEB, NAB). However, the Masoretic tradition reads "sons of Israel," and the alternative reading is followed by other English versions (so NIV, KJV, ASV, NASB).

<sup>2</sup>Because of the ambivalence of the term *angelos*, which can also be used of humans, it is debated whether these passages refer to angels, pastors or couriers who carried the letters.

God through an angel variously called the *Mal'ak Yahweh* (= angel of the LORD), the *Mal'ak ha-Elohim* (= angel of God) or the *Mal'ak Panim* (= angel of the face).

The Angel of the LORD is a special theophany of God who comes to perpetuate God's covenant, to protect the covenant people, and to deliver judgment. As a messenger of the covenant, he appears first in the Hagar stories (Ge. 16:7-13; 21:17), later in the binding of Isaac narrative (Ge. 22:11-18), later still as the guide to Abraham's slave in finding a wife for Isaac (Ge. 24:7, 40), and finally in the burning bush account (Ex. 3:2). Though the title "Angel of Yahweh" is not in the Genesis narrative of Jacob's wrestling match at Peniel (the text simply calls the figure "a man"), Hosea certainly understood the story in this way (Ho. 12:4). The Genesis text suggests as much when the mysterious wrestler affirms that Jacob had "struggled with God" (Ge. 32:28). At times the Angel of the LORD seems to be distinguishable from God and at other times the figure merges into God. The figure can speak on behalf of God in the third person, i.e., "Yahweh has heard of your misery" (Ge. 16:11; 21:17; Jg. 6:11-12), and he can speak as God in the first person, i.e., "I am the God of your father" (Ex. 3:4-6//Ac. 7:30-32; Jg. 2:1-4). When one has seen the Angel of the LORD, he/she can claim to have looked upon God (Ge. 16:13; cf. Ge. 32:30; Jg. 6:22; 13:22).<sup>3</sup>

It is in the interests of the covenant and the protection of the covenant people that the Angel of Yahweh intervenes to warn and to defend. He warned Jacob when he should leave Padan-Aram (Ge. 31:11). On his deathbed, Jacob could summarize the activities of God during his lifetime, as well as during the lives of his father and grandfather, as being under the providential care of "the Angel," and the term "the Angel" stands in apposition to the term God (Ge. 48:15-16). The Angel of Yahweh traveled with the children of Israel as the leader of their army (Ex. 14:19; cf. Zec. 12:8). It is doubtless to the Angel of Yahweh, the leader of Israel's army, that the ascription is made, "Yahweh is a man of war" (Ex. 15:3). When Moses rehearsed the events of the exodus, he said, "Yahweh sent an angel and brought us out of Egypt" (Nu. 20:16; cf. Is. 63:9). The promise was held forth that God's "Angel" would lead them all the way to Canaan, driving out the Canaanites before them (Ex. 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2). Finally, it was the Angel of the LORD who opposed Balaam, the pagan prophet, who was on his way to curse the Israelites (Nu. 22:22-35).

During the period of the judges, it was the Angel of Yahweh who called Gideon into service as a deliverer (Jg. 6:11-24). The same angel announced the birth of Samson as a mighty warrior for Israel (Jg. 13:2-25). Much later, when

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<sup>3</sup>It may be significant that the Hebrew phraseology can be translated, "I saw the back of the one who saw me," thus emphasizing the mystery of God. The phraseology is very similar to the language in the story of Moses on Sinai, who saw the back of God (Ex. 33:23).

Jerusalem was attacked by the Assyrian army, the Angel of Yahweh slaughtered 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in order to protect his holy city (2 Kg. 19:35//2 Chr. 32:21//Is. 37:36). The psalmist can generalize about the protective role of the Angel of Yahweh by saying he "encamps around those who fear him" (Ps. 34:7), and he drives away their enemies (Ps. 35:5-6). When Joshua, the post-exilic high priest, was threatened by the slander of Satan, the Angel of the Lord rebuked the devil and predicted the future salvation of God's elect (Zec. 3:1-10). Angelic patrols who observe the events of the world report to the Angel of Yahweh (Zec. 1:11-12).

The Angel of Yahweh also appears as a dispenser of divine judgment. He announced to the Israelites that due to their failure in Yahweh War, the Canaanites would remain in the land as snares to them (Jg. 2:1-4). Deborah described the Angel of Yahweh as cursing the people of Meroz for their refusal to join in the war of liberation from Sisera (Jg. 5:23). This same angel dispensed a plague of judgment for David's sin (2 Sa. 24:15-17//1 Chr. 21:14-19) and instructed Elijah to tell Ahaziah he would die (2 Kg. 1:1-4, 15-17).

Since the Angel of the LORD frequently appears in a protective or redemptive role, the figure seems to express the nature of the covenant God who reveals himself to save his people. On one occasion, when the returned exiles were suffering great hardship, the Angel of Yahweh is even depicted as interceding for the people (Zec. 1:12-13). When the final writing prophet of the Old Testament predicted the coming of the Messiah, he called him the Angel of the Covenant, a designation that probably refers to the one who would establish the new covenant foreseen by Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Mal. 3:1; cf. Je. 31:31-34; 32:36-41; 33:19-26; Eze. 16:60-63; 34:25; 37:24-28). It is this redemptive aspect of the Angel of the LORD which led many of the earliest Christians to view the figure as an early manifestation of the preexistent Son of God. The interchangeability between the Angel of the LORD and God himself, sometimes speaking as God and sometimes speaking for God, seemed to be a temporary preincarnation of the second person of the Trinity, the *Logos*, who was with God but who at the same time was God (cf. Jn. 1:1-2). The fact that the figure disappears altogether in the New Testament might suggest that the ancient theophany was no longer appropriate after the incarnation of God's Son. Who does appear on rare occasions to New Testament Christians is the resurrected figure of Jesus Christ (cf. Ac. 9:3-5//22:6-8//26:13-15//1 Co. 9:1; Ac. 7:55-56, 59-60; Rev. 1:10-18).

## **Angels as Ministering Spirits**

A basic functional description of angels is that they all are "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (He. 1:14). On the one hand, angels

are superior to humans, for humans are "lower than the angels" (Ps. 8:4-5; He. 2:6-7). As spirit beings and "winds" (Ps. 104:4), they are not bound by the physical limitations of space. Though not omniscient, their knowledge seems to be of a higher order than that of humans (2 Sa. 14:20; Mt. 24:36; 1 Ti. 5:21). Though lacking omnipotence, they are greater in power than humans (2 Pe. 2:11). Unlike humans, they are not a race and do not procreate. Though created beings, there is no indication that they die.<sup>4</sup> Even with their greater knowledge, they still do not have the personal experience of salvation in the sense of humans, but rather, they "long to look into" the wonders of salvation (1 Pe. 1:12b). As far as human life is concerned, angels are described as "watchers" (Da. 4:13, 17).

On the other hand, the very description of angels as "ministering spirits" denotes a servant-role with respect to God's people. As servants of God, they are often called to minister to believers. Still, their servant-role is not one of free agency, such as popularized by Hollywood, but one of doing God's bidding. Everywhere in the Bible angels serve God's people by God's commission. At no time do they take initiative to act on their own, except when they are described in rebellion against God. Furthermore, humans must be careful that they do not unduly elevate angels. A prophet from Judah was killed by a lion because he believed an angel had contravened God's instructions (1 Kg. 13:7-10, 18-19, 23-24), and Paul corrects some of the Colossian believers over the worship of angels, a pseudo-spirituality that betrays a disconnection from Christ, the head of the church (Col. 2:18-19).

## Angels in the Old Testament

In the Hebrew Bible, the majority of references are to the Angel of Yahweh of which there is only one such entity. In fact, only a handful of passages in the Torah describe the angelic host (Ge. 19:1, 15; 28:12; 32:1; Dt. 33:2; 32:8), and some of them are debatable.<sup>5</sup> This may well be the reason that the Sadducees in the time of Jesus did not believe in angels (cf. Ac. 23:8), since they regarded the Torah

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<sup>4</sup>Some have suggested that angels only exist when and if they have a mission, i.e., they have temporary existence to accomplish a divine function. This view, based largely on the metaphor that angels are "fire" and "winds," is doubtful. First, some kinds of angels clearly seem to have longevity, such as, Michael the archangel, who appears both in the Book of Daniel and centuries later in the Book of Revelation. Furthermore, angels who are bound over until the day of judgment (2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6) seem to have longevity as well. Descriptions of angels being in submission to the resurrected Christ (1 Pe. 3:22) and angels "longing to look into" the things of salvation seem more compatible with longevity rather than temporary existence. If the church is God's display of wisdom to "the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Ep. 3:10), then it seems to follow that angels must have longevity in order to appreciate God's purposeful work.

<sup>5</sup>In Dt. 32:8, the expression "sons of God" (i.e., angels) only occurs in the Septuagint (the Massoretic Text has "Sons of Israel"), while the expression "holy ones" in Dt. 33:2 carries with it considerable translation difficulty, cf. A. Hayes, *Deuteronomy [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 38-399.

as having supreme authority. To be sure, the Prophets and the Writings, the second and third collections within the Hebrew Bible, contain references to angels, but it is in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of post-exilic Judaism that the ideas about angels developed and proliferated among the Jews, and the Sadducees probably did not regard any of these writings as commensurate with the Torah.<sup>6</sup>

Those references which do speak of angels generally depict them in the role of protectors. When Jacob fled from his brother, Esau, he dreamed of the angelic host ascending and descending from heaven to earth at Bethel, a sign that God would watch over him and bring him back to his native land (Ge. 28:10-15). Later, Jacob was guarded by angels when he faced the wrath of his brother, Esau (Ge. 32:1). He named the site "Two Camps" (*Mahanaim*) in reference to his own camp and the camp of God's angelic host. Many years later, Elijah was sustained by an angel during his flight from Jezebel (1 Kg. 19:3-8). When Elisha was trapped by the Arameans in the city of Dothan, God allowed Elisha's servant to see past the veil of mortality so he could view the "hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kg. 6:15-17). An angel protected Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego during their ordeal by fire (Da. 3:24-28), and an angel shut the mouths of the lions during Daniel's ordeal in the den (Da. 6:21-22).

On rare occasions, as with the Angel of Yahweh, one sees angels acting in the role of destroyers. Angels destroyed the five cities of the plain (Ge. 19:1-13), and one of the Psalms attributes the plagues against Egypt to the work of "a band of destroying angels" (Ps. 78:49).<sup>7</sup> On one occasion, an angel is depicted in the role of an intercessor. Elihu, in his conversation with Job, described an angel pleading for the life of a man who was on the verge of dying (Job 33:23-25), but whether this description should be taken as accurate or simply speculation on Elihu's part is unclear. Finally, in Zechariah angels are described in the role of visionary guides and interpreters. Zechariah's night visions were explained by an angel in much the same way as the visions of John in the Revelation (Zec. 1:9, 13-14, 19; 2:3; 4:1, 4, 11; 5:5, 10; 6:4-5).

### **Angels in Intertestamental Jewish Literature**

Two important collections of Jewish literature come down to us from the intertestamental period, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha. Inasmuch as they

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<sup>6</sup>Some of the church fathers indicated that the Sadducees, like the Samaritans, did not hold the Prophets or the Writings as canonical (cf. Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, ix.24; Origen, *Contra Celsum* i.49), but the validity of this testimony is debated.

<sup>7</sup>Incidentally, there is nothing corresponding to the popular phrase about "the angel of death" destroying the first-born of Egypt. In the Passover narrative, it describes, "The LORD going through the land to strike down the Egyptians" (Ex. 12:23), though it also mentions "the destroyer" as one different than the LORD (Ex. 12:23).

lie between the Old and the New Testaments, the information they contain about angels is pertinent to understanding the background, not only of the Jews in the time of Jesus, but also of some traditions that have endured into the present. Many if not most scholars believe that the development and proliferation of ideas about angels in the post-exilic period owes a good deal to Jewish contact with Persian Zoroastrianism, since angels feature prominently in this religion, and the Jews were exposed to it while in exile. Whether or not this is true, the fact remains that in the intertestamental literature the conception of angels undergoes significant development.

In the Jewish Apocrypha, one meets for the first time the angels Raphael (Tobit 5:4) and Uriel (2 Esdras 4:1) and the idea that there are seven archangels who present the prayers of the saints to God (Tobit 12:15), an idea later echoed in the Apocalypse of John (Rev. 8:3). In 2 Maccabees there are several anecdotes in which heavenly beings act as protector-warriors to defend the Jews (2 Maccabees 3:23-40; 5:2-4; 10:29-30).

The Jewish Pseudepigrapha, which comes somewhat later, burgeons with references to angels, both good and evil. Angels are controlling spirits of natural phenomena, such as, the weather, the seasons and the stars (1 Enoch 60:1ff.; 72:1; Jubilees 2:2; 2 Enoch 4:1-2). They have jurisdiction over such abstractions as peace, mercy, healing, strength and repentance (1 Enoch 40:8-10). Their role as intercessors for humans is expanded (1 Enoch 15:2; 99:3; Testament of Levi 3:5), and they report to God about human sin (Jubilees 4:6). Various angels are named in addition to the Old Testament's Gabriel and Michael (1 Enoch 20:1-8), and an entire class of hostile angels, including Satan, are described at length (1 Enoch 6-9). God, who is sovereign over all, is often referred to as the "Lord of Spirits."<sup>8</sup>

## Angels in the New Testament

Angels appear very early in the New Testament narratives. The birth narratives in both Matthew and Luke describe the activity of angels in association with the incarnation of Christ. The annunciation of John's birth by Gabriel, an angel who "stands in the presence of God" (Lk. 1:11-20), along with the annunciation of Jesus' birth to both Joseph (Mt. 1:20-21) and Mary (Lk. 1:26-38), mark the birth of Jesus as a critical juncture in salvation-history.<sup>9</sup> These annunciations recall similar annunciations made in the Old Testament concerning the births of Ishmael (Ge. 16:7-12), Isaac (Ge. 17:1-3, 15-21; 18:1-2, 9-15) and

<sup>8</sup>For a more detailed description of the angelic developments in Jewish Apocalyptic, see D. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 235-262.

<sup>9</sup>The expression "an angel of the Lord" is anarthrous (i.e., without the definite article), which discourages any identification with the angel of Yahweh in the Old Testament (cf. Lk. 1:11; 2:9; Mt. 1:20; 2:13, 19).

Samson (Jg. 13:2-21).<sup>10</sup> On the night of Jesus' birth, an angel informed shepherds of the event (Lk. 2:8-12), and his announcement was celebrated by a host of angels (Lk. 2:13-14). To protect the young messiah, an angel instructed Joseph to flee into Egypt (Mt. 2:13, 19-20). The flurry of angelic activity surrounding the birth of Jesus is unparalleled in biblical history, and it emphasizes the centrality of the messianic event.

The appearance of angels in association with Jesus did not cease with his birth, however. At his temptation in the desert, he was "ministered to" by angels (Mt. 4:11/Mk. 1:13), a statement that probably implies the provision of food, since the experience of Elijah seems to be recalled (cf. 1 Kg. 19:5-8). The privilege of being sustained by angels that Jesus refused to abuse during his temptation by Satan (Mt. 4:5-7/Lk. 4:9-12; cf. Mt. 26:53) was now given in an appropriate way. No other appearances of angels are described in Jesus' life until his passion, when in Gethsemane an angel strengthened him (Lk. 22:43), though on one occasion some of the crowd mistook the voice of the Father for that of an angel (Jn. 12:28b-29).<sup>11</sup> Angels appeared in order to roll away the stone from the empty tomb (Mt. 28:2-4) and to announce Jesus' resurrection to the women on Easter (Mt. 28:5-7; Lk. 24:22-23; Jn. 20:10-13).

In his public teaching, many of Jesus' references to angels are eschatological. When Jesus returns to the earth at the end of the age, he will be accompanied by his mighty angels (Mt. 16:27; 25:31; Mk. 8:38/Lk. 9:26; cf. 2 Th. 1:7). He will commission them to separate his holy people from the evil ones of the age (Mt. 13:39-43, 49-50), gathering his saints from the extremities of the earth (Mt. 24:31; Mk. 13:27). At that time, Christ will acknowledge his righteous people before the angelic host (Lk. 12:8-9). Still, the precise time of Christ's return has not been shared with the angels (Mt. 24:36/Mk. 13:32), so even though they will figure significantly in the event, they must wait, just as humans must wait, without knowing the time.

In the history of the early church, one finds that angels continue their service

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<sup>10</sup>Annunciations generally follow a stereotypical pattern, i.e., 1) the appearance of an angel, 2) fear and/or prostration of the one who is confronted, 3) divine message in which the person is saluted by name and urged not to fear, a pregnancy is promised, the child is named in advance, and the significance of the name is explained, 4) some indication of the future for the child is offered, and 5) a sign is given to confirm the validity of the promise, cf. R. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1977) 156.

<sup>11</sup>In some later manuscripts, however, there is the record of a popular legend in which an angel was purported to disturb the water in the Pool of Bethesda so that the sick might be healed (Jn. 5:3-4, KJV). However, this textual variant is absent in the earliest and best Greek texts of the New Testament, and most scholars consider it to be a gloss. Most major English Versions omit it due to lack of early manuscript support (so NIV, NASB, RSV, NEB, ASV), cf. B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Society, 1975) 209.

of protection to God's people at critical junctures. The apostles, after being jailed, were released by an angel and instructed to preach the message of Jesus in the temple courts (Ac. 5:19-20; 12:6-11). Philip, a Christian evangelist, was instructed to travel on the Gaza Road (Ac. 8:26), where he met an Ethiopian and shared with him the gospel. Cornelius, a Roman military officer, was informed by an angel to send for Peter (Ac. 10:3-6), who then came to preach the message of Jesus (Ac. 10:22; 11:13). An angel visited a judgment upon Herod Agrippa I when he took to himself inappropriate adulation (Ac. 12:21-23). Finally, an angel stood by Paul and encouraged him on his voyage to Rome (Ac. 27:22-24). The general advice to Christians that they should be hospitable to strangers is reinforced by the reminder that some people have "entertained angels without knowing it" (He. 13:2).

The New Testament book that features angels most prominently is the Apocalypse of John. Here, angels serve as guides (Rv. 17:3; 19:9; 21:9, 15; 22:1) and interpreters (Rv. 17:7, 15; 18:21; 22:6; 22:16) to the heavenly visions as well as heralds announcing the judgments of God (Rv. 5:2; 7:2; 10:1ff.; 14:6ff., 14ff.; 18:1; 19:17). Similar to some Jewish apocalyptic references, some angels are elemental, such as, the "angel of the water" (Rv. 16:5), the angel having "power over fire" (Rv. 14:18), the angels in charge of wind (Rv. 7:1), and an angel who commands the birds (Rv. 19:17). The seven "angels" of the churches in Asia Minor (Rv. 1:20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) seem to be either guardian angels, a cryptic name for pastors, or the personification of the churches. Angels participate in the liturgy of heaven, serving as censer bearers (Rv. 7:3-5) and members of the worshipping community (Rv. 5:11-14; 7:11-12). Angels are the heralds and dispensers of God's judgments on the earth (Rv. 8:2, 7-12; 9:1, 13-14; 11:15; 15:1; 16:2-17; 20:1ff.). They serve as warriors in God's battle with the minions of evil (Rv. 12:7; 19:14, 19) and guardians of the gates of heaven (21:12). Still, as powerful as they are, humans are strictly forbidden to worship them (Rv. 22:8-9).

## **Popular Questions About Angels**

With the current popularity of angels, a host of publications are appearing, both in books, periodicals and the visual media. A quick browse through one's local library or bookstore will demonstrate a plethora of material. *Guideposts* magazine recently began publishing (since 1996) a bi-monthly periodical called *Angels on Earth* with the stated purpose of presenting "true stories about God's angels and humans who have played angelic roles in daily life." Their definition of "angels," as can be seen, is sufficiently broad to include both heavenly emissaries (supernatural angels) and humans performing acts of grace (metaphorical angels). Books on angels vary greatly. Some books, like Sophy Burnham's *A Book of*



*Angels*,<sup>12</sup> adopt an uncritical posture toward angel phenomena, equally accepting descriptions of angels from the Old and New Testaments, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Jewish mysticism. Many books are simply collections of anecdotes in which people believe they have been helped by angels. Other authors rely on some unifying viewpoint, such as, *Angels Over Their Shoulders*, a book that offers angel stories in the experience of children,<sup>13</sup> and *Angels of Love*, a work about angels who specialize in romantic match-making.<sup>14</sup> Still others, like Billy Graham and Timothy Jones, appeal to the Christian canon of Scripture alone.<sup>15</sup>

Suffice it to say that in a world of religious pluralism, the range of opinions, beliefs and reported encounters with angels is extremely varied. For the most part, these accounts accentuate the positive. (It is rare to the point of non-existence to hear a report about angels delivering God's judgment, for instance.) Furthermore, most literature is eclectic, drawing from a variety of religious sources rather than a single one (such as the Bible). Finally, most literature presses the claim that their reports are "true," even though there is little in the way of applying any criteria for determining truth.<sup>16</sup>

It should not be surprising, then, to discover that people entertain many questions about angels, especially with reference to the pop culture and its various avenues of thought. Following are several such questions answered from the standpoint of the Bible. For evangelicals, the Bible is the final authority for all faith and practice. While Christians might provisionally explore or even accept ideas about which the Bible is silent, they cannot accept as true those ideas which the Bible contravenes.

### **Do angels have souls?**

The term "soul" (*nephesh* in Hebrew and *psyche* in Greek) is never used of angels in the Bible. While human beings were created as souls (Ge. 2:7) and animal life is described as "creatures of living soul" (Ge. 1:20), such descriptions presume material life. Soul is integral to earthly life rather than heavenly life.<sup>17</sup> In

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<sup>12</sup>(New York: Balantine Books, 1990).

<sup>13</sup>B. Steiger and S. Steiger (NY: Fawcett Columbine, 1995).

<sup>14</sup>B. Steiger (NY: Pinnacle, 1995). It might be worth pointing out that Steiger shows more than a passing interest in the paranormal, since he has also published the books *Kahuna Magic*, *Astral Projection*, *Indian Medicine Power* and *True Ghost Stories*.

<sup>15</sup>B. Graham, *Angels* (Waco, TX: Word, 1994); T. Jones, *Celebration of Angels* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994).

<sup>16</sup>Burnham's work, for instance, speaks of angels and "true stories," while the periodical *Angels on Earth* also presents what it labels as "true stories." Such sub-titles smack of pulp literature, such as, *True Detective*, *True Confessions* and *True Romance*.

<sup>17</sup>C. Robeck, Jr., *ISBE* (1988) IV.587-589.

fact, in St. Paul's discussion of the resurrection at the end of the age, he denotes the difference between human life on earth and future life in heaven by the change from a "soul-body" to a "spirit-body" (1 Co. 15:44-49). His expressions *soma psychikon* (= soul-body) and *soma pneumatikon* (spirit-body) seem to make clear that soulish life is earthly life as opposed to heavenly life. If so, then angels, by definition, do not have souls.

### **Are there such things as guardian angels?**

One of the most popular ideas in song, painting and poetry is the belief that some angels are assigned to be guardians of individual humans and that every woman, man, girl and boy has a personal guardian angel. With the popularity of this idea in the Christian community, one might suppose that there is considerable material in the Bible about it, but in fact, only a few passages suggest this possibility, and then in the briefest way. In the Old Testament, Psalm 34:7 and 35:5-6 indicate that the Angel of Yahweh camps around God-fearing people and drives away their enemies. In the New Testament, the clearest statement is in Jesus' declaration about children that "their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven" (Mt. 18:10). Why does Jesus use the possessive form "their angels?" It has long been proposed that this possessive form indicates that children have heavenly representatives before God. The language that they "always behold the face" of the Father means that in heaven's court every child has an advocate with constant access to God. Some have even suggested that the passage intends that all humans have angelic "spiritual doubles," that is, counterparts who have access to God at all times.<sup>18</sup> If this latter view is accepted, it might explain why when the girl Rhoda saw Peter, just released from prison, she kept insisting that it must be "his angel" (Ac. 12:15). There is some indication that in first century Judaism the idea of guardian angels was held by some Jews, including the covenanters at Qumran, who believed that angels were the protectors of the meek, the needy, the despised and the orphans (1QH v.20-22).<sup>19</sup> The general rabbinic opinion was that God could not be seen even by the angels, so Jesus' statement was particularly striking if the angels who oversee the welfare of children always "see" the face of God. To "see" God is ancient Near Eastern court language for access to the presence of a sovereign (i.e., "You may now 'see' the king."). When this is added to the idea that some angels seem to be viewed as protectors of nations (cf. Da. 10:13, 20), the idea of guardian angels for individuals seems plausible.

It should be acknowledged, however, that the brief phrase in Matthew 18:10 is not a very strong foundation upon which to build a doctrine. Some interpreters,

<sup>18</sup>R. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 176.

<sup>19</sup>A. Argyle, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963) 138.

including John Calvin, have suggested that this passage means only that angels have been given the commission to promote the care of the entire church, which is somewhat less than the popular idea that "every person has his own angel."<sup>20</sup> Even more restricted is the interpretation that "their angels" refers to the spirits of deceased children, i.e., that the destiny of children is "the unshielded glory of the Father's presence."<sup>21</sup> This explanation places considerable weight on Rhoda's statement about Peter (see below for further discussion.)

In summary, then, the popular idea of personal guardian angels is plausible. However, it is not the only plausible explanation, and since there is little else in the Bible about it, whatever Christians believe about personal guardian angels should not be elevated to a doctrine of the church.

### **Do people become angels when they die?**

This question relates to the same verses as the former one, though the emphasis is more on Acts 12:15. Why did Rhoda say she thought she had seen Peter's angel? On the one hand, we know that in Persian Zoroastrianism there was the belief that the *fravashis* could assume the bodily appearance of the person they protected, and some believe that the whole idea of guardian angels is to be derived from the Jews' contact with Zoroastrian theology during the exile.<sup>22</sup> The Persians believed the *fravashis* were pre-existent eternal souls of all good men and women. This theory of borrowing from Persian theology, of course, is incompatible with evangelical Christianity, so the idea must be discarded. On the other hand, just what did Peter mean?

Some interpreters appeal to the belief (unsubstantiated by the Bible) that when a person dies his/her guardian angel appears. In this case, the appearance of such an angel would indicate that the church's prayers for Peter's release had not been granted and that he had been executed. On the other hand, some take the term *angelos* in its least sensational sense--that what Rhoda thought she heard at the door was not Peter but some human messenger Peter had sent on ahead and who was speaking in his behalf.<sup>23</sup>

That the critical speech comes from the lips of a slave girl, who even though she was a Christian may not have relinquished all her cultural beliefs, should serve as a caution about placing too much weight on this passage. The Bible records historical speeches, but they are not always intended to serve as a theological

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<sup>20</sup>W. Hendriksen, *Matthew [NTC]* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973) 692-694.

<sup>21</sup>D. Carson, "Matthew," *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 8.400-401.

<sup>22</sup>D. Russell, 259.

<sup>23</sup>Matthew Henry, loc. cit.

ground for building a doctrine. In any case, there is no biblical ground for the popular lore that people become angels when they die. If angels are created entities apart from the human race, which the Bible everywhere seems to indicate, then the notion of humans transposing into angels at death must be rejected.

### **Is there any relation between angel activity and the work of psychics?**

The advertisement for adult enrichment in the 1998 brochure for Troy Continuing Education, Troy, Michigan, lists a class in "Have a Talk with Your Angel." The class, carefully guarded with the disclaimer that it is not offered for any "spiritual or religious service" but is only "for demonstration and entertainment," is described as follows: *The time has come to make their presence known. Our psychic will channel your heavenly angels providing you with the information they so lovingly want you to know about them. Angels are here with us on earth in vast numbers at this time. Find out why and how they can assist you in any area of your life. An opportunity to ask the angels questions will be part of this exciting session.*<sup>24</sup> So, what about psychics? Can they "channel" information from (good) angels, or do (fallen) angels help them tell the future?

The whole field of channeling through psychics has become a pop phenomenon and a decided money-maker, at least if the television ads for psychic connections is any indication. A psychic is a person who is responsive to such paranormal phenomena as extra sensory perception (ESP), telepathy, clairvoyance, automatic writing, spoon bending, poltergeist activities, channeling and other paranormal occurrences outside the range of normal sensory or scientific explanation. Psychics are spirit mediums, that is, persons believed to be able to contact spirits of the dead (or in this case, angels) through seances, Ouija boards, tarot cards and trances. In channeling, a person enters a deep trance and permits a spirit to speak to a client, after which the channeler returns to normal consciousness, often without knowing what the spirit has said.<sup>25</sup> Traditionally, channeling has been associated with the spirits of the dead, but the current fascination with angels has opened the door to angelic channeling as well.

A channeler is a modern term for the biblical words *'ov* (= medium, necromancer, or in the old English versions, one with a "familiar spirit") and *yidd'onni'* (= wizard, lit., "a knowing one").<sup>26</sup> Such a person contacts spirits, usually the spirits of the dead, in order to procure information (1 Sa. 28:3, 9; 2 Kg.

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<sup>24</sup>Troy Continuing Education bulletin (Winter '98), offered by the Troy School District, Troy, Michigan.

<sup>25</sup>C. Strohmmer, *The Gospel and the New Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996) 254, 257.

<sup>26</sup>The word is very old (earlier than the second millennium B.C.) and is to be found in other ancient Near Eastern languages besides Hebrew, cf. H. Hoffner, *TDOT* (1974) I.131.

21:6//2 Chr. 33:6; 2 Kg. 23:24; Is. 8:19). The Torah strictly forbade consulting channelers (Lv. 19:31; 20:6). Mediums, common in the Canaanite religious world (Dt. 18:9-13), were to be executed by stoning (Lv. 20:27).

While there is no direct reference in the Bible to angelic involvement in psychic channeling, the idea is not far from Paul's statement that "the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons" (1 Co. 10:20). If pagan religious rituals could be a kind of fellowship with demons, then the idea of fallen angels as the power behind psychic phenomena is not a long stretch. Furthermore, Paul's warnings about angels "preaching" another gospel (Ga. 1:8) and Satan being transformed into an "angel of light" (2 Co. 11:14) might leave open the possibility of a connection between angels and psychics.

Whether fallen angels have knowledge of the future is another question altogether, however. While angels know more than humans, their knowledge is limited. Whatever their connection with psychics, if any, it seems more likely that their predictions about the future are more along the lines of shrewd guesswork rather than actual knowledge. There is no evidence that psychic channeling can occur through the elect angels. Angels carry out whatever missions they have from God, but there is no indication that on their own initiative they respond to human queries.

### **Do angels still appear?**

At the other extreme from those who are completely fascinated with the possibility of present day interaction with angels are those who believe quite the opposite, that is, that "the visible activity of angels has come to an end, because their mediating work is done; Christ has founded the kingdom of the Spirit, and God's Spirit speaks directly to the spirit of man."<sup>27</sup> Here, angelic interaction with humans, like the law of Moses, is viewed as a temporary expedient until Christ came. Angels may still exist, but if they do, they exist to praise and adore God in the heavenlies, not to serve as intermediaries between God and humans on earth. Such mediation takes place through the Holy Spirit alone now that the Spirit has been given.

While there is logic in this position, it does not seem to accord very well with several passages in the New Testament. In the first place, there are some actual incidents recorded after the gift of the Holy Spirit in which angels appeared (i.e., Ac. 5:19; 8:26; 10:3, 7, 22; 11:13; 12:7-11, 23; 27:23-24). To be sure, there are no accounts which approximate what happened when the law was given at Mt. Sinai through angelic mediation (Ac. 7:53; Ga. 3:19; He. 2:2). Still, angels do appear.

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<sup>27</sup>J. Wilson, *ISBE* (1979) I.126.

Second, the advice to be hospitable to strangers, since in this way some have entertained angels without being aware of it surely suggests that angels might still appear (He. 13:2). Finally, the angelic guides throughout the Apocalypse of John, even though visionary, still imply that interaction between humans and angels is possible. Probably, the present role of angels is somewhere between the two extremes of expecting angelic visitations as a common experience as opposed to rejecting angelic activity altogether.

### **Do humans have authority over angels?**

This question follows along two avenues. The first is in regard to belief in guardian angels. If the existence of guardian angels is granted (see earlier discussion), do Christians have the right to "order" their angels? This question seems easily answered. The Bible never offers any indication that believers can give orders to angels. Angels are directly responsible to Christ (1 Pe. 3:22), not to us. Furthermore, the notion that humans can control spiritual entities is presumptuous and reckless. Humans are fallen creatures with limited knowledge and a horrendous record of the abuse of power. If they had the authority to order angelic activity, it would almost certainly end in disaster. If power corrupts, this level of power would lead to unmitigated corruption. It is true, however, that angels are careful observers of Christians and their lives (1 Co. 4:9; cf. 11:10).<sup>28</sup> It is also true that in the end Christians will judge angels in the sense that in the future age believers will be crowned with glory and honor and will rule over everything (1 Co. 6:3; He. 2:5-8). However, this place of honor does not belong to the present life, for as the writer of Hebrews puts it, "At present we do not see everything subject to him (i.e., to humans)."

The second avenue is in regard to what is sometimes called "dominion theology," or the charismatic belief that Christians are called upon to engage territorial spirits in spiritual warfare. This theology advocates that cities and/or countries are ruled over by territorial evil spirits or demons whose power must be broken before Christian evangelism can be successful. In order to break the stranglehold of such territorial spirits, one must engage them in spiritual warfare by 1) discovering the name of the demon (in order to render him more vulnerable), 2) mapping out his strongholds (i.e., the institutions in society where he controls the spiritual lives of people), 3) confessing the corporate sin of a city or area through identificational repentance (i.e., identifying with the central evils of a city or area and petitioning God for forgiveness in its behalf), and 4) engaging the territorial

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<sup>28</sup>While interpreters have long struggled to understand what Paul meant when he said women ought to bear a sign of authority by covering their heads "because of the angels," it at least must mean that angels are watching human behavior.

demon in warfare by advancing against him with prayer in order to "bind the strong man." This technique is sometimes referred to as "strategic-level spiritual warfare."<sup>29</sup>

The basis for this theology comes from a correlation of several biblical passages. First, some Old Testament passages seem to support the idea that angels are associated with nations, and in particular, that there were fallen angels associated with the ancient empires of Persia and Greece (Da. 10:13, 20-21; cf. Ps. 82; Dt. 32:8, LXX). Furthermore, the patron deities of pagan nations are in reality demonic (Dt. 32:17; Ps. 96:5; 106:37-38; cf. 1 Co. 10:20). Since Jesus implied in his parable of the strong man that he came to "bind the strong man" (Mt. 12:29//Mk. 3:27//Lk. 11:21-22), and since he gave to his apostles "authority to drive out evil spirits" (Mt. 10:1//Lk. 9:1; cf. 10:17-18-19), and especially, since it is the task of Christians to "demolish strongholds and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Co. 10:4-5), then the mission of the Christian church is to engage territorial spirits, naming them and mapping out their evil strategies so they can be effectively defeated for the cause of God's kingdom.

There are some serious reservations to be held with regard to this teaching, however. In the first place, while there is a bare minimum of passages which suggest such things as territorial spirits associated with nations, this idea is never prominent in either the Old or New Testaments. It is at best a minor note. Nowhere does the Bible advocate anything like naming, mapping, or evicting such spirits. To be sure, Daniel was told of heavenly conflict (Da. 10:12-14, 20-21), but it is equally clear that Daniel was not a conscious part of that conflict himself. Had he not been told of it, he would never have known about it. In the New Testament, the apostles preached the gospel in Judea, Samaria, Syria, Asia, Galatia, Cyprus, Greece, Rome and quite a number of other places, but not a single time is there the slightest hint of this "strategic-level warfare." Rather, Paul declares that it is the preaching of the gospel itself which is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes (Ro. 1:16). Jesus does not engage territorial spirits in the cities of Galilee, and Paul does not do so in the cities of the Greco-Roman empire. This total silence in the New Testament about such techniques does not bode well for a theology which views territorial warfare as a mandate for the Christian church. Finally, there are at least some warnings in the New Testament which seem to discourage such attempts to take authority over fallen angels. Peter speaks of arrogant leaders who "are not afraid to slander celestial beings" (2 Pe. 2:10).<sup>30</sup> While we do not know the exact form which this slander took, Peter plainly warns

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<sup>29</sup>C. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) 143-150.

<sup>30</sup>Peter's actual word is *doxas* (= glorious ones), but the context makes clear that he refers not to the faithful angels but to fallen ones.

those involved that they are reckless and foolhardy, for even righteous angels, who have far superior power to humans, are not so reckless as to treat such creatures with contempt (2 Pe. 2:11; cf. Jude 9).

In summary, then, Christians are to engage in spiritual warfare through truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, the Scriptures and prayer (Ep. 6:10-18). There is no biblical warrant for the idea of engaging territorial spirits in a naming, mapping, and evicting strategy.<sup>31</sup>

## **Your Adversary, The Devil**

The name Satan, which means "slanderer," has come to represent the malignant, personal force of evil which stands behind the disruption in our world. His primary aim is to rebel against God and to embroil the entire cosmos in his rebellion. Two attitudes are currently popular with regard to this personage. One is a flippant dismissal of the very idea of Satan as medieval, fantastic and naive. The other is a preoccupation with him, both by Christians and non-Christians, through mysticism and spiritual activity. Both these extremes are inadequate.

In this study, we will examine the biblical hints concerning the origin of Satan. We will explore his character and works, his ability to adapt culturally, and the subtleties and trends toward evil in our society, especially its fascination with the occult, superstition and mysticism. We shall also address the relationship between the sovereignty of God, the power of Satan, and the freedom of human volition. We will address what has popularly come to be called "spiritual warfare." Finally, we will look at the defeat of Satan, an outcome that the Bible promises will surely happen.

In this exploration, we will seek to be biblical and balanced. In an era when too many Christians get their theology from novels, and too many undisciplined interpreters import into the biblical text unwarranted conclusions and unproven speculations,<sup>32</sup> it will be important to carefully interpret what the biblical texts say in order to avoid exaggeration as well as understatement.

## **The Invisible War And The Unseen World**

The Bible describes two kingdoms in irrevocable conflict with each other, the

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<sup>31</sup>For a fuller discussion of this theology and some of its weaknesses, see the lengthy treatment in Arnold, 150-199.

<sup>32</sup>In the opinion of this author, works like Frank Peretti's novel, *This Present Darkness* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1986), are too often read by laypersons as books of theology instead of what they really are, fictional stories similar to science fiction but with a mystical Christian motif.



kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan (Col. 1:13).<sup>33</sup> While the war between these two forces is an invisible one, it has extensive ramifications in the physical world of history and events, people and society. The Bible is clear that the conflict is not an eternal one, but rather, it had an origin and it shall have a conclusion (Is. 45:7; Re. 20:2, 7-10).<sup>34</sup> In the Old Testament, the antithesis is already evident in the temptation of the woman by the snake (Ge. 3:1-5; cf. Re. 12:9). There are poetic hints that the conflict was present even in the divine act of creation, when God separated light from darkness (Ge. 1:3-4). Later, the biblical poets described the creative process as a divine triumph over the chaotic forces of an evil being described as dragon-like creature (Job 9:13; 26:12-13; 38:8-11; 40:15-19; Ps. 65:6-7; 89:9-10; 104:7-9; Pro. 8:29; Is. 27:1; Je. 5:22).<sup>35</sup>

The identification of this destructive personage as Satan is not easy to pinpoint in Old Testament theology,<sup>36</sup> but various passages demonstrate that the idea of his existence was certainly in the background, and in some cases, the foreground of the biblical narratives. The trials of Job were the direct result of an attack from a powerful spirit-being called "the accuser" (Job 1-2). The contest between Moses and Pharaoh, which culminated with Israel trapped against the banks of the Red Sea, was a contest not merely between two persons, but between Yahweh, the true God, and the false gods of Egypt (Nu. 33:4). The victory at the Red Sea was recited in the language of symbolism in which Pharaoh, the great water dragon, was crushed by the power of God (Ps. 74:12-14; Is. 51:9-10; Eze. 29:3-6; 32:2). When David numbered the people, his action was incited by Satan (1 Chr. 21:1). The opposition to the rebuilding of the temple had a spiritual counterpart in a spirit-being called "the accuser," who stood to prosecute Joshua, the high priest (Zec. 3:1-2). Not only were there kings on the earth below, there were powers in the heavens above which were arrayed against God (Is. 24:21). An interplay existed between earthly politics and heavenly warfare (Da. 10:12-13).

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<sup>33</sup>D. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979) II.131ff.

<sup>34</sup>The biblical doctrine, then, is in opposition to the metaphysical dualism of Zoroastrianism as well as the monism of Hinduism.

<sup>35</sup>Of course, critical scholars have long suggested that these references are simply borrowings from the then current stock of mythology in the ancient Near East. However, it is unnecessary to put such a construction on the matter. Rather, there is a good case to be made that the Genesis account in particular and its poetic counterparts are correctives to a faulty ancient Near Eastern view of cosmology, cf. G. Hasel, "The Significance of the Cosmology in Gen 1 in Relation to the Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *AUS* 10 (1972) 1-20 and "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *EvQ* 46 (1974) 81-102, summarized by G. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15 [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987) xlvii-l.

<sup>36</sup>This difficulty is especially due to the fact that the name Satan is not used as a proper name until late in the Old Testament (1 Chr. 21:1). In Hebrew grammar, proper names are not preceded by the definite article, and while the Hebrew word *satan* (= accuser) appears in Job and Zechariah, in both cases the definite article is present. Though some English versions translate these usages as proper names, these are interpretive translations.

The unseen world not only involved God and Satan, but also the hosts of heaven, those created spiritual beings who are part of Yahweh's heavenly court (1 Kg. 22:19-23; Ps. 82:1, 6; 89:5-7; 104:4). They are variously described as *'elohim* (= gods), *mal'akim* (= messengers or angels), *qedoshim* (= holy ones), *bene 'elim* or *bene 'elohim* (= sons of God), *'abidim* (servants) and *mesharetim* (= ministers).<sup>37</sup> This array of spiritual beings may well lie behind the popular name for God, *Yahweh Tsebaoth* (= Lord of armies).<sup>38</sup>

By the time of the intertestamental period and the beginning of the New Testament, the theology about Satan and his minions had become very pronounced.<sup>39</sup> That New Testament writers received this theology as at least partially correct is evident in their quotations of and allusions to the Jewish pseudepigrapha (1 Pe. 3:19; 4:6; 2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6, 8-9).<sup>40</sup> Especially in the gospel stories about Jesus, the antagonism of Satan and demon spirits in the war with heaven appears regularly. In the writings of Luke, Paul, John, Peter, and Jude, the conflict with the powers of evil is readily discernible. The final book of the New Testament, the Apocalypse, is filled with the imagery of the invisible war.

The question remains, then, as to how Christians should take this thoroughgoing description of spiritual conflict. At one extreme are those theologians, like Rudolf Bultmann, who view all such language as mythological.<sup>41</sup> His conclusions seem the logical end of a process that began with the Enlightenment. This process was the gradual supplanting of the biblical world view of moral dualism by a world view of monism in which the devil was demythologized to refer to human ignorance and disregard for God's law. Such views can be traced through William Blake, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Emanuel Kant, Walter Rauschenbusch, Albrecht Ritschl and up through the modern era. While neo-orthodoxy, in the earlier part of this century, allowed more for the reality of the demonic than classical liberalism, still, as Donald Bloesch says, even here it was an uneven mixture of Reformation and Enlightenment motifs.<sup>42</sup> At the other extreme are those sincere Christians who make no distinction between poetic literary genre and straightforward reporting. As such, the characterizations of the great red dragon in the Apocalypse are

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<sup>37</sup>See extensive discussion in G. Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (London: SCM Press, 1950) 9-16.

<sup>38</sup>E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. A. Heathcote and P. Allcock (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 54-55.

<sup>39</sup>Scholars have observed considerable development in the apocalyptic writings of the intertestamental period concerning the world of spirits. For more extensive discussion on this development, see D. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 235-262.

<sup>40</sup>Pseudepigraphical backgrounds to these passages appear in 1 Enoch, Baruch, and the Assumption of Moses.

<sup>41</sup>R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1958).

<sup>42</sup>Bloesch, 142-146.

understood to be physical descriptions rather than the imagery of heightened language. Between these two extremes, the one which dismisses the reality of a personal arch-enemy of God called Satan and the other which lapses into in a crass literalism which does not take into account the various uses of biblical language, lies the evangelical position. Here, as Bloesch says, "The devil is not simply the manifestation of chaos, but a superhuman intelligence with a strategy and purpose of his own."

## **The Origin of Satan**

Since the world view of the Bible does not admit any eternal dualism between good and evil, the question of the origin of Satan and his hosts arises. Clearly, the Bible teaches that all entities in the universe, other than God himself, are created (Jn. 1:3), and this includes the entire range of invisible entities, both good and evil (Col. 1:16-17).<sup>43</sup> From the Genesis account, we may assume that all God's creation was good (Ge. 1:31). The idea that God might have created a malignant being and a host of evil cohorts seems to fly in the face of everything else the Bible says about God's nature. So, we are left with the conclusion that Satan and his minions are fallen creatures, once good but now evil. When we meet the snake in the garden (Ge. 3), we see the presence of an opponent against God who has already reared his head. As to how his rebellion occurred, we have only the barest hints in the Scriptures. There are a few passages which traditionally have been used to explain it.<sup>44</sup>

## **The Fall of Lucifer (Is. 14:3-23)**

The first of these passages involves a taunt song against the ruler of Babylon. The taunt song, as a literary form in Hebrew poetry, often appears as a direct address to an opponent. It ridicules his pretensions and scoffs at his destruction. Various passages in the poetry of the prophets and elsewhere include taunt songs (e.g., Jg. 5:28-31; Eze. 32:1-6, etc.). In this passage, the ruler of Babylon, who is the opposer to the people of Israel, is taunted in a song which describes his ultimate destruction by the power of Yahweh (14:3-8). His descent into Sheol, the place of

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<sup>43</sup>The Pauline expression "thrones or powers or rulers or authorities" probably has reference to cosmic powers, not earthly kings. These same words are used in the intertestamental Jewish literature to refer to angelic beings of the highest order, cf. P. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982) 46-47.

<sup>44</sup>I am deliberately omitting the explanation associated with the so-called "Gap Theory," supported in the Scofield Reference Bible, which proposes that there was a huge interval between Ge. 1:1 and Ge. 1:2, during which Satan fell, the earth was devastated in judgment due to his fall. In this view, the creation account of Ge. 1:3ff. was, for all practical purposes, a restoration and involves a second earth. The theory, which in the opinion of this author fails on grammatical grounds as well as theological, can be traced in such works as D. Barnhouse, *The Invisible War* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965).

the dead, is vividly portrayed (14:9-11). In powerful imagery, his claims to deity are derided (14:12-15), and at last, he finds himself in Sheol, no greater than anyone else in the world (14:16ff.).

Within this taunt song, the king of Babylon is addressed by the title Daystar, Son of the Dawn (14:12),<sup>45</sup> which has become famous as an acronym for Satan. Not all exegetes are convinced that the metaphor of the Daystar is a reference to Satan, but it may well be that the fall of Satan lies behind the metaphor. There is general agreement that behind this passage lies a poetic reference to the attempt to usurp the throne of God (14:13-14).

### **The Expulsion of the Cherub (Eze. 28:11-19)**

In a passage similar to the previous one, a taunt was composed by Ezekiel against Ithobal II, the ruler of Tyre in Phoenicia (Eze. 28:1-10). He made claims to deity (28:2, 6, 9), but his claims were to be shattered by his death (28:10). Immediately following this taunt, Ezekiel composed a further taunt against Ithobal II in which the poetic imagery of the primal creation is used to portray this ruler's ostentatious claims. Ithobal II is addressed as the Guardian Cherub, the model of perfection who lived in the primal Eden on God's holy mountain (28:12-14).<sup>46</sup>

Many interpreters think that behind this taunt against the Phoenician ruler lies a metaphor of the expulsion of Satan from God's presence. If so, then, once again, there is the idea that Satan was originally created as a good angel (28:12, 15). He was associated with the worship of God in the heavenlies but exercised his will against God, attempting to usurp God's position. Because of this rebellion, he was cast out of heaven in disgrace.

### **The Fall of Satan (Lk. 10:18; Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn. 3:8)**

When Jesus saw his seventy disciples returning from their preaching tour, he exclaimed, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk. 10:18). What did he mean? Did he refer to their triumph over the power of sickness and demons in their ministry among the Jewish villages (cf. Lk. 10:9, 17)? Did he mean that in the ministry of his disciples he now could preview the end of spiritual warfare against evil which would eventually culminate in the defeat of Satan? Or, did he

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<sup>45</sup>The name Lucifer is the KJV translation (via the Latin Vulgate) of the Hebrew *heylel* (= Daystar). Though this is the only place in the Hebrew Bible containing this name, the appellation has become a popular one for Satan.

<sup>46</sup>This interpretation follows the Masoretic Text in viewing the primordial creature as the cherub (so NIV, NASB, KJV), as opposed to the LXX which views the primordial creature as the first human who was driven out of the garden by the cherub (so NEB, RSV, NAB). The difference between these two recensions of the text hangs upon the translation of the Hebrew *'et* as either the preposition "with" or as a direct object marker, cf. see the commentaries.

mean that triumph over evil in the ministry of his disciples was the natural consequence of the expulsion of Satan from God's presence in primal history? Each of these interpretations finds supporters. While the context favors the first interpretation, it may well be that there are overtones of the others in Jesus' statement.

On another occasion, Jesus stated that the devil was a murderer "from the beginning" (Jn. 8:44). Whom did he try to murder? Does the statement refer to the snake's temptation of Adam and Eve, which resulted in their death, or does it refer to the source of Cain's malignant hatred against his brother, when he became the first murderer? Could the statement be an oblique reference to Satan's attempt to usurp God's throne?

### **The Casting Out of the Great Red Dragon (Re. 12:3-4, 7-9)**

In the Apocalypse, John describes the casting out of the devil from heaven into the earth. The passage uses the vivid imagery of a great red dragon, but the identity of this creature is not in question (12:9, 12). He represents the devil. More to the point is the question of when this action takes place. Does the passage describe an event in primal history? Does it refer to something that is still to happen in the end of the ages? Does it refer to the victory of Christ over death, hell and the grave in his resurrection and ascension? Much hangs upon the interpretation of the woman who is persecuted by the dragon. Does she represent the people of God as a whole? Is she the church? Is she the Jewish community? Once again, each of these interpretations has supporters.

In summary, it must be conceded that the passages which may tell us something of the origin and fall of Satan are not as clear as we could hope. The language is poetic and highly laced with imagery. Perhaps this ambiguity is intentional, for God may not desire that we know all about the origins of this evil personage who stands against him. Perhaps this is one of those areas where now we see only dimly and must await a future time to gain the full picture (cf. 1 Co. 13:12).

At the same time, one thing is very clear from these passages. It is clear that the ultimate victory of God over the devil is not in doubt. Believers can be assured that the downfall of Satan is as certain as God's infallible promises!

### **The Presence of Demons in the Universe**

Closely related to the origin of Satan is the question of the origin of evil spirits in the universe. The Old Testament does not directly address this question, but in the intertestamental period, it was answered by Jewish theologians in a

couple of ways. Either the existence of evil spirits was attributed to creation, or their existence was explained as the aftermath of Ge. 6:1-4, when angelic beings mated with mortal women to produce offspring who were demons.<sup>47</sup> While the intertestamental literature is not canonical, it does bear upon a couple passages in the New Testament where there are apparent references to the intertestamental idea of fallen angels being "bound" until the day of judgment (2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6).

In the Apocalypse, the Great Red Dragon is described as sweeping a third of the stars with his tail (Re. 12:4; cf. Da. 8:10), and this description is sometimes believed to hint at angelic rebels who joined Satan in his opposition to God.<sup>48</sup>

In the end, the Bible certainly depicts Satan as being accompanied by a host of demons, called "the devil and his angels" (Mt. 25:41), but it is speculative to say what is their precise origin. Most interpreters assume that the devil's angels are one and the same with the demons. In any case, we know that Jesus' encounter with demons in the gospels was frequent, and they are variously described as "evil spirits," "unclean spirits," and "deceitful spirits." We also know that Paul considered pagan deities to be demons masquerading as gods (1 Co. 10:20-21; cf. Re. 9:20; Dt. 32:16-17; Ps. 106:36-37). We assume that these demons are the same as the "power of the air" over which Satan is prince (Ep. 2:2; cf. Mt. 9:34; 12:24; Mk. 3:22).

## The Names and Titles of Satan

There are a many names and titles used for Satan in the Bible, and such names reveal a considerable amount of information about his character. We have already looked briefly at the names *Satan* (= Slanderer), *Lucifer*, *Son of the Dawn* (= Daystar) and *cherub* (= burning one), cf. Job 1-2; 1 Chr. 21:1; Zec. 3:1-2; Is. 14:12; Eze. 28:14. For the Hebrew, names were more than just labels; they were designations which depicted character. Some names, like Satan, are to be found in both testaments. Others are found only in one or the other.

### Rahab, Leviathan, Behemoth, Tannin<sup>49</sup>

These four names are poetic designations for a powerful enemy of Yahweh,

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<sup>47</sup>In some viewpoints, God was believed to have created all spirits (*Jubilees* 2:2; *Aboth* 5.6). In other viewpoints, evil spirits were angelic beings who fell prior to the creation. Most popular of all was the viewpoint that they were the *Nephilim* (= giants) of Ge. 6:4, cf. D. Aune, *ISBE* (1979) I.920.

<sup>48</sup>G. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 199. It is from this passage that the notion derives that a third of the angels fell with Satan.

<sup>49</sup>G. Hasel, *ISBE* (1979-1988) I.990-991; R. Harrison, I.452; G. Hugenberger, III.108-109; H. Sun, IV.368-369; T. Gaster, *IDB* (1962) I.376; III.116; IV.6. It may be noted that in the Hebrew text, the names Rahab and Leviathan are proper names (i.e., used without the definite article), whereas the names Behemoth and Tannin are not.

an enemy depicted as a demonic monster. The name *Rahab* (= afflicter, arrogant) describes the sea dragon over whom Yahweh triumphed in the creation and at the Red Sea (Job 9:13; 26:12; Ps. 89:9-10; Is. 51:9). The name *Leviathan* (= the coiled one) also describes the sea dragon (Job 3:8; 41:1ff.; Ps. 74:13-14; Ps. 104:25-26; Is. 27:1), though at times the line is blurred between a large aquatic creature, such as the crocodile, and a demonic monster. *Behemoth* (= beast, monster), like Leviathan, depicts a huge, marsh dwelling creature, possibly a hippopotamus (Job 40:15-24), but sometimes also represents a demonic monster opposing Yahweh (2 Baruch 29:4; 2 Esdras 6:49, 52; 1 Enoch 60:7-8). *Tannin* (= whale, dragon, sea monster, serpent), like the previous names, also describes a sea monster (Job 7:12; Ps. 74:13; Is. 27:1; 51:9). As is apparent from a comparison of the above texts, more than one of these names sometimes are used in a given passage to describe the same figure (e.g., Ps. 74:13-14; Is. 27:1; 51:9).

## The Snake

The term *nahash* (= snake) is not a proper name, but from the account of the temptation in Genesis 3, the reader can see that the figure depicted is more than simply a reptile. In Job, the "gliding snake" is the equivalent to Rahab (Job 26:13; cf. Am. 9:3), and in Isaiah it is equivalent to Leviathan (Is. 27:1). Certainly there was no doubt in the mind of John in the Apocalypse that the ancient serpent was none other than the devil himself (Re. 12:9; 20:2).

## Son of God

In the trials of Job (Job 1:6; 2:1), Satan is numbered among the *bene ha-'elohim* (= sons of God). This designation, which some translations render as "angels" (so NIV),<sup>50</sup> indicates that God was their Creator.<sup>51</sup> They are accountable to him as a council of unseen spiritual entities (cf. Ps. 82:1; 89:5, 7; 97:7).

## Azazel

In the ritual of *Yom Kippur*, a scapegoat was dispatched into the desert and consigned "to Azazel" (Lv. 16:8, 10, 26).<sup>52</sup> The traditional interpretation, which relies upon the LXX, is that the designation "to azazel" simply means scapegoat; however, most modern commentators believe it refers to a demon inhabiting the desert, since in the intertestamental literature, Azazel is depicted as a ringleader of

<sup>50</sup>Or, "members of the court of heaven" (NEB)

<sup>51</sup>R. Anderson, *Job* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1976) 81-82.

<sup>52</sup>Because of the prefix, it is not immediately clear whether the name *Azazel* is a proper name or not. The Masoretes pointed it as though it were not a proper name, but most modern scholars feel that it is, cf. T. Gaster, *IDB* (1962) I.325-326. It appears as a proper name in many modern versions (RSV, ASV, NEB, NAB, NASBmg).

rebel angels who work to seduce humankind.<sup>53</sup>

## **The Tempter**

In the temptations of Jesus in the desert, Satan is called "the tempter" (Mt. 4:3), and later, Paul uses the same title (1 Th. 3:5). In both cases, the work of the tempter is to overturn one's trust and reliance upon God.

## **Beelzebul**

This proper name (rendered Beelzebub in the KJV and NIV, following the Latin Vulgate) was used of Satan by both Jesus and his opponents (cf. Mt. 10:25; 12:24, 27; Mk. 3:22; Lk. 11:15, 18-19). The name and its variations appear in other literature of the ancient Near East, carrying such meanings as "Dung God," "Lord of the Dwelling," and "Lord of the Flies." The name may well have originated as an appellation for one of the pagan gods of the Philistines (cf. 2 Kg. 1:2ff.).<sup>54</sup>

## **Belial, Beliar**

In Jewish apocalyptic and the Qumran literature, *Belial* (= worthlessness, perversion) was a name given to Satan and/or the antichrist (Book of Jubilees, Ascension of Isaiah, Sibylline Oracles). It is used by Paul to refer to Satan (2 Co. 6:15).<sup>55</sup>

## **Devil, Accuser**

The most common New Testament title, other than the name Satan, is *Diabolos* (= slanderer).<sup>56</sup> In both the Old Testament story of Job and in the vision of Zechariah, Satan's role is described as accusatory (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5; Zec. 3:1). Thus, John describes him in the Apocalypse as "the Accuser of the brothers" (Re. 12:10).

## **Prince, Ruler, God of this Age, the Strong Man**

Several of the titles for Satan either imply or directly assert that he is the

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<sup>53</sup>Keil and Delitzsch state that "the words, one lot for Jehovah and one for Azazel," require unconditionally that Azazel should be regarded as a personal being, in opposition to Jehovah. We are not to think, however, of any demon whatever...but of the devil himself, the head of the fallen angels, who was afterwards called Satan...", *KD* (loc. cit.). For parallels in the ancient world, see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus [AB]* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 1071ff.

<sup>54</sup>T. Gaster, *IDB* (1962) I.374; D. Aune, *ISBE* (1979) 447-448.

<sup>55</sup>V. Furnish, *II Corinthians [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985) 362; R. Harrison, *ISBE* (1979) I.454-455.

<sup>56</sup>The name Satan appears as a transliteration from Hebrew some 34 times in the New Testament. The title *diabolos* appears some 36 times.



leader of a host of evil powers arrayed against God during the present age. Jesus calls Satan the *archon* (= *prince, ruler*) of *this world* (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Paul calls him the *god of this age* (2 Co. 4:4) and the *Archon of the authority of the air* (Ep. 2:2).<sup>57</sup> The "air," the space between heaven and earth, refers not to the scientific definition of air, but rather, to the spiritual realm which Paul describes as the "heavenlies," a realm where spiritual warfare takes place (Ep. 3:10; 6:12). John later says that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19; cf. Ga. 1:4). In this realm, Satan claims much (cf. Lk. 4:5-6). His arena of power is what Paul calls the "authority (or kingdom) of darkness" (Col. 1:13). Its headquarters is the bottomless pit, so John calls the devil the *Angel of the Abyss* (Re. 9:11).

In the parable of the *Strong Man* (Mt. 12:29//Mk. 3:27//Lk. 11:21-22), Jesus depicted Satan as a powerful tyrant who armed himself to guard his own domain. No one could break his stranglehold except one who was stronger yet. Jesus, God's Son, was the stronger One, and in his ministry of the kingdom of God, he overpowered Satan, the defiant strong man (Lk. 11:20).

### **Father of Lies, Deceiver**

The basic character of Satan is well described by the Lord when he calls him the *Father of lies* (Jn. 8:44b). In the very beginning, the reader's first encounter with him is when he flatly contradicted the word of God (Ge. 3:4). John can well say that he "leads the whole world astray" (Re. 12:9). His claims are exaggerated, and they can be resisted with firmness because they are not the truth (Lk. 4:5-12).

### **Enemy, Opposer<sup>58</sup>**

In the parable of the tares, Jesus called Satan *The Enemy* (Mt. 13:39), the opponent of God's kingdom who sows darnel among the wheat. Satan is the enemy of God's kingdom (Lk. 10:19) and God's people (1 Pe. 5:8), and he uses slander as a primary weapon (1 Ti. 5:14).

### **Murderer, Thief, Sinner, Abaddon, Apollyon**

Jesus labeled Satan as a *Murderer* from the beginning (Jn. 8:44), a malignant enemy of God who came to kill, steal and destroy (Jn. 10:10). Later, John says the devil was a sinner from the beginning (1 Jn. 3:8). All these destructive

<sup>57</sup>It may sound amusing to us today, but this title at one time caused some Christians to oppose aviation, cf. M. Green, *I Believe in Satan's Downfall* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 45.

<sup>58</sup>Several words in the Greek New Testament which are used of Satan can be translated as *Enemy*, e.g., *Echthros* (= personal enemy), *antikeimenos* (= opponent), and *Antidikos* (= prosecutor).

characteristics are captured in the Hebrew and Greek names *Abaddon* and *Apollyon* (= Destroyer), Rv. 9:11.

### **The Evil One**

Satan is the embodiment of evil, and thus, the *Evil One* (Mt. 13:19, 38; Ep. 6:16; 2 Th. 3:3; 1 Jn. 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19). In the prayers of Jesus, the expression *tou ponerou* (= the evil) is probably best translated *The Evil One* (Mt. 6:13; Jn. 17:14). In the Christian document called the Epistle of Barnabas (late 1st century), Satan is described as *The Black One* (Barnabas 4:9).

### **Great Red Dragon**

John's description of the devil in the Apocalypse as the Great Red Dragon (Re. 12:3ff.) draws from the imagery of the sea monster in the Old Testament, variously described as Rahab and Leviathan. His primary goal is to destroy those who are loyal to God.

### **The Development of the Theology of Satan**

Any study which moves freely between the Old and New Testaments must take into account the concept of progressive revelation. Within the chronology of the Bible, one finds the growth and development of ideas. By progressive revelation, Christians simply mean that God gradually made known to his people the nature of spiritual reality through the process of time. As God continued to interact with humans in history, and as the inspired documents of the Old and New Testaments gradually accumulated, God's people were able to understand more fully things that were only dim shadows early on.<sup>59</sup> Progressive revelation is more obvious in some areas, such as, in the nature of God as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit or in the eternal purpose of the Father through Christ's death and resurrection. However, other issues are equally affected by progressive revelation, and the doctrine of Satan is one of these.

### **Satan in the Old Testament**

We have already seen that the Old Testament uses mythological imagery to describe Satan (i.e., Rahab, Leviathan). While this imagery need not be construed to mean that Satan is not real (see footnote #4), it does mean that the character of Satan is not as clearly defined by such images as in later biblical passages. As the power behind the snake in the garden, Satan shows himself to be a liar, an aggressive antagonist against God, and a creature under judgment. In particular,

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<sup>59</sup>B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 101-102.

the reader finds him as the prosecutor in the heavenly court, slandering Job and Joshua, the High Priest. He incites David to sin, also. In poetic imagery, Satan stands behind Pharaoh in his efforts to enslave once more the Israelites at the Red Sea. However, apart from these brief mentions, Satan does not figure in any comprehensive way in the theology of the Old Testament.<sup>60</sup>

### **Satan in the Intertestamental Literature**

It is in the intertestamental period that the ideas about Satan began to develop in earnest. Some scholars suggest that this fascination with Satan resulted from Israel's exposure to Zoroastrian dualism from Persia, since they were under Persian rule from 539 to 330 B.C. In general, however, Jewish thought did not capitulate to Persian dualism. Satan is consistently viewed as a being with limited power but definitely under the sovereignty of God and hardly his equal in power and influence. A better explanation is that under the oppression of the various foreign rulers, the Jews began to explore reasons why God did not give his people freedom. The paramount question was, "How can a just and omnipotent God let His righteous people continue to be oppressed by foreign, evil rulers?" In answer to this question, Jewish thinkers began to look more closely at the Old Testament figure of Satan and to see him as immediately responsible for the evil in the world at large, and in particular, their own dilemma of oppression. In the Qumran community, for instance, it was believed that the "children of falsehood" were ruled by the "Angel of Darkness." All their sins and wicked deeds were caused by him. Evil had ascendancy on the earth during the present age, but in the messianic age to come, God would destroy forever the powers of evil.<sup>61</sup>

While such literature is not canonical and should not be appealed to in the same way as inspired Scripture, nevertheless a number of ideas within it are substantiated in the New Testament. Jesus taught that Satan rules over an evil kingdom of demons (Mt. 12:25-28), though this idea appears earlier in Jubilees 10:8.<sup>62</sup> The claim of Satan that his rule extends to all the world (Lk. 4:6) finds an earlier precedent in the Martyrdom of Isaiah 2:4. The idea that Satan could enter

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<sup>60</sup>Some scholars can say, for instance, that "our idea of a fallen spirit, namely, that he is filled with hatred of God Himself, and an eager desire to counteract His designs, is nowhere visible in the Old Testament," A. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1910) 303. This is, in the opinion of the present author, an overstatement; however, it must be conceded that the information we have about Satan in the Old Testament is quite limited.

<sup>61</sup>D. Fuller, *ISBE* (1988) IV.341-342. For further information in Jewish literature about angels, demons, Satan and their role in the present age, see Russell, 235-284. Also, for an insightful discussion concerning the doctrine of Satan in intertestamental Judaism and its implications for the Gospels in the New Testament, see G. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 48-53.

<sup>62</sup>In this passage, nine-tenths of the demons have been bound by God in the place of judgment, but one tenth have been allowed to go free to serve Mastema (an apocalyptic name for Satan).

the "heart" of humans and work his will through them is also in the Martyrdom of Isaiah 3:11. Jewish apocalyptic describes Satan as a tempter with many wiles to deceive people and lure them away from God, and in one passage, Satan masquerades as an angel, singing God's praises (Apocalypse of Moses 17:1; cf. 2 Co. 11:14). Finally, like the New Testament, the intertestamental literature anticipates the final punishment of Satan (1 Enoch 54:6; Mt. 25:41).

## **Satan in the New Testament**

By the time one begins reading the gospels in the New Testament, the ideas about Satan and his minions had already received considerable development since the close of the Old Testament canon. In his ministry, Jesus confronted a well-organized attack from Satan, both through his personal temptation in the desert (Mt. 4:1ff./Mk. 1:12-13/Lk. 4:1ff.) as well as in the demonizing oppression of people whom he encountered (Lk. 13:16). It was entirely within the scope of Jesus' incarnational mission to "destroy the works of the devil," of which the greatest was death (1 Jn. 3:8b; He. 2:14-15). Apparently the mission of the Son of God was known within the hierarchy of evil, for the demons identified Jesus as the one who had come to "destroy them" (Mk. 1:23-24/Lk. 4:33-34; cf. Mt. 8:28-29). In his death and resurrection, Jesus was triumphant over the powers of evil and death (Col. 2:15). In fact, the event of the cross was a terrific conflict between Jesus, the Son of God, and Satan, the Prince of the World (Jn. 12:31; 13:17; 14:30; 16:11; Ac. 2:25-35; Ro. 10:6-7; Re. 1:18). Though Satan was defeated by Jesus' death and resurrection, the battle still continues. The risen Jesus, ascended into the heavens and seated at the Father's right hand, awaits until all his enemies have been subdued at the end of the age (1 Co. 15:25-26; He. 1:13; 10:13).

In the meantime, Satan traverses the earth, trying to destroy anyone he can (1 Pe. 5:8). He employs every strategy at his disposal to keep people out of God's kingdom (2 Co. 2:11; Ep. 6:11; 2 Ti. 2:26): he blinds them (2 Co. 4:4), terrorizes them (He. 2:14-15), snatches the gospel from their hearts (Mt. 13:19), and persecutes them (Re. 2:10). He places counterfeit Christians alongside genuine ones in order to provide occasion for God's people to stumble (Mt. 13:38-39), sometimes even disguising himself as an angel of light (2 Co. 11:14). In the end, as the age draws to a close, he will launch a last-ditch effort against God and his people headed up under one called "the man of lawlessness" (2 Th. 2:3-12; Re. 13).

## **Satan and Jesus**

Reflecting upon the mission and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the writers of the New Testament plainly assert that a primary part of that mission was to

confront and defeat the forces of Satan.

*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power; he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

*Ac. 10:38*

*The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.*

*1 Jn. 3:8b*

So, Jesus entered the world, not only to demonstrate God's love and mercy, but also to join battle with evil and the Evil One. From the very beginning of his incarnation, Jesus was set against the powers of evil. In the Revelation, John uses apocalyptic imagery to describe the arch fiend ready to devour the messianic child at the moment of birth (Re. 12:4).<sup>63</sup> From the time of his baptism by John in the Jordan to the events of his passion and resurrection, Jesus repeatedly encountered the Enemy. He entered a world enslaved by Satan, and he entered with the authority of God. If Satan was a strong tyrant, armed to guard his domain, Jesus was the one stronger yet, willing and able to bind the tyrant and spoil his house (Mt. 12:29//Mk. 3:27//Lk. 11:21-22). In his own words, Jesus described his mission:

*If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.*

*Lk. 11:20*

## **The Temptations in the Desert**

The Synoptic Gospels record the temptations of Jesus in the desert immediately after his baptism by John.<sup>64</sup> This occasion seems to have been Jesus' first great confrontation with Satan, and in fact, it is noteworthy that the circumstance of these temptations was initiated by the Holy Spirit. Mark says that the Spirit "drove him out into the desert," while Matthew and Luke say the Spirit

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<sup>63</sup>Of course, the more straightforward historical account is given by Matthew in Herod's slaughter of the innocents (Mt. 2:7-8, 16-18).

<sup>64</sup>The fourth gospel does not describe the temptations at all unless there may be an allusion to Jesus' assistance by angels at the time of the temptation (cf. Mt. 4:11; Jn. 1:51). In general, the synoptic gospels pay more attention to the work of Satan during the public ministry of Jesus, while John's Gospel emphasizes the conflict with Satan in Jesus' passion.

"led him into the desert to be tempted by the devil" (Mk. 3:12; Mt. 4:1; Lk. 4:1).<sup>65</sup> James is quite correct in asserting that God tempts no one with evil (Ja. 1:13), but Paul is equally correct in saying that God allows his people to be tested and will give to them the strength to persevere (1 Co. 10:12-13). Temptation by Satan and testing by God may come, as here, in the very same circumstance.<sup>66</sup>

Though there may have been many temptations during Jesus' forty days in the desert (cf. Mk. 1:13) and certainly some afterwards (cf. Lk. 4:13), Matthew and Luke focus upon the three temptations which occurred at the end of the period. The accounts can only have come from the Lord himself. Satan first confronted Jesus concerning his self-identity, "If you are the Son of God..." Each temptation had its own character. The temptation to turn stones into bread was an assault upon Jesus' priorities, a temptation to doubt the power of God to provide. The temptation to cast himself headlong from a high elevation was an invitation to sensationalism, a challenge to force God to prove himself. The final temptation<sup>67</sup> was a supreme enticement toward the will to power, a short-cut to lordship over the world in exchange for worshiping the Enemy. In the desert, ancient Israel had faced these same challenges concerning priorities, doubt, obedience, trust and faithfulness to Yahweh, and the nation had failed. Jesus, in whom was the embodiment of all that Israel was intended to be, faced each temptation fortified by the Word of God (cf. Dt. 8:3; 6:16//Ex. 17:2-7; Dt. 6:13-15).<sup>68</sup> In the end, the real temptation was not to satisfy hunger or to ask for protection, but rather, to wrongfully use his power for his own ends rather than God's purposes.

In each temptation, Jesus triumphed over the insinuations and invitations of the devil. Later, the author of Hebrews would write that Jesus "was tempted in

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<sup>65</sup>It should be pointed out that the verb *peirazo* (= to put to the test) generally signifies testing rather than temptation to commit sin. To be sure, it was the devil's objective to lure Jesus into sin, but it was also God's purpose to allow Jesus to be tested concerning his messianic vocation as the Son of God, cf. R. France, *Matthew [TNTC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 96. This circumstance is similar to God's initiative in raising before Satan the name of Job (Jb. 1:8; 2:3). Even though the devil is malignant and thoroughly evil, God still uses him for his own divine ends, some of which are the testing of his people.

<sup>66</sup>This may well be the best explanation of David's great failure in conducting an inappropriate census, where in one passage it indicates that Yahweh incited David (2 Sa. 24:1), and in another it says that Satan "rose up and incited David" (1 Chr. 21:1). From God's perspective, it was a test of David's faith; from Satan's perspective, it was a temptation to sin.

<sup>67</sup>I am following Matthew's order, since most scholars concur that it is probably the original one.

<sup>68</sup>Many scholars have noted that the synoptic writers depict Jesus as the embodiment of the true Israel. The temptation narratives are particularly a case in point, where the forty days in the desert parallel the forty years in the desert, the temptations of Israel parallel the temptations of Jesus, and the failure of Israel contrasts sharply with the triumph of Jesus. God's command to Israel had been to follow God's decrees, neither adding to nor subtracting from them (Dt. 4:1-2). The desert sojourn was a time of testing for them to see whether or not their hearts were truly set upon Yahweh (Dt. 8:1-2). It is no surprise, then, that Jesus' quotations to Satan from the Torah are taken from passages regarding these same ancient events.

every way, just as we are--yet was without sin" (He. 4:15).

## The Conflict Narratives

The synoptic gospels each contain sections which describe early opposition to Jesus' ministry, sections which are sometimes labeled "conflict narratives." They detail the tensions which Jesus' ministry aroused between himself and the scribes, Pharisees, synagogue officials, John's disciples, Herodians, Nazarenes, Samaritans, the crowds and Jesus' own relatives. One of the important contexts for some of these conflict narratives was Jesus' obvious success in delivering sufferers from demonization.

There are two primary expressions used in the gospels to describe the affliction caused by demons. One is the verb *daimonizomai* (= to be demonized) and the other is the coupling of terms such *daimonion* (= demon) and/or *pneuma akathartou* (= unclean spirit) with the verb *echo* (= to have).<sup>69</sup> Traditionally, these expressions have been translated as "being possessed by a demon or evil spirit," though some have argued that the traditional translation can be misleading if it is taken to mean that possession implies ownership.<sup>70</sup> Certainly the various expressions *ekballo* (= to cast out), *eiserchomai* (= to enter), and *exerchomai* (= to depart) imply that such a condition involved the residence of a demon spirit in the afflicted person (cf. Mt. 12:43-45).

In these conflict narratives, eight specific cases are recorded where Jesus exorcised demons from the sufferers.

- 1) The man in the Capernaum synagogue (Mk. 1:21-28//Lk. 4:31-37)
- 2) Mary of Magdala and other women (Lk. 8:2-3)
- 3) A blind and dumb man (Mt. 12:22)
- 4) The insane man (in Matthew, two men) at Gadara (Mk. 5:1-17//Mt. 8:28-34//Lk. 8:26-39)
- 5) A dumb man (Mt. 9:32-34//Lk. 11:14)
- 6) A Greek woman's daughter in Phoenicia (Mk. 7:25-30//Mt. 15:22-28)
- 7) A man's son, deaf, mute and stricken with seizures (Mk. 9:17-29//Mt. 17:14-18//Lk. 9:37-42)

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<sup>69</sup>The two expressions seem to be used more or less interchangeably. Matthew prefers the verb *daimonizomai* (cf. Mt. 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22), while Mark, Luke and John use both expressions (cf. *daimonizomai*: Mk. 1:32; 5:15-16, 18; Lk. 8:36; Jn. 10:21; and *echo daimonion* or *echo pneumatou akathartou* or an equivalent: Mk. 1:23; 3:22; 7:25; 9:17; Lk. 4:33; Jn. 8:49; cf. Ac. 8:7; 16:16).

<sup>70</sup>The argument is that demons own nothing. They are squatters, at best, even though they attempt to exert control over the one with whom they have taken up residence, cf. C. Dickason, *Demon Possession & the Christian* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989) 38.

## 8) The woman with the crippled back (Lk. 13:10-21)

Several things can be observed from these incidents. Foremost is that Jesus' exorcisms were a sign of his authority over the realm of Satan and the coming of the kingdom of God (Mk. 1:27//Lk. 4:36; 11:20-22). His obvious supernatural power immediately raised the possibility that he might be the messiah (Mt. 12:23). Jesus' exorcisms created amazement and delight in some, but fear in others (Mt. 9:33//Lk. 11:14; Mk. 5:17//Mt. 8:34//Lk. 8:37; Lk. 9:43; 13:17). Second, several of the exorcisms were associated with debilitating physical conditions, such as blindness (Mt. 12:22), deafness (Mk. 9:25), dumbness (Mt. 9:32; 12:22; Mk. 9:17; Lk. 11:14), scoliosis (Lk. 13:11) and seizures (Mk. 9:18//Mt. 17:15//Lk. 9:39).<sup>71</sup> It is not, of course, that all sickness is directly attributed to demonization, for many examples of Jesus' healings occur without any reference to demon activity. In some cases there is even an implied distinction between sickness and demonization (cf. Mt. 4:24; Mk. 1:32).<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, demonization and debilitating conditions apparently often come together.<sup>73</sup> Third, a person can be demonized by more than one evil spirit. Mary of Magdala had seven (Lk. 8:2; cf. Lk. 11:26), and the insane man at Gadara had many (Mk. 5:9//Lk. 8:30).<sup>74</sup> Fourth, demons are able to exert sufficient control over the person in whom they reside to speak and to direct bodily movements (Mk. 1:23-24//Lk. 4:33-34; Mk. 5:6-12//Mt. 8:29-31//Lk. 8:31). Fifth, demons sometimes seek to destroy the beings they inhabit (Mk. 5:5, 13//Mt. 8:32//Lk. 8:33; Mk. 9:22//Mt. 17:15//Lk. 9:39). Finally, demons sometimes seek transference, as when the demons in the insane man at Gadara asked permission to go into the pigs (Mk. 5:12//Mt. 8:31//Lk. 8:32).

In each of the cases described in the gospels, Jesus expelled the unclean spirits and restored the victims to health and sanity. He explained that the key factors were faith (Mt. 17:17, 19-20//Lk. 9:41) and prayer (cf. Mk. 9:29).<sup>75</sup> The

<sup>71</sup>The term *seleniazomai* used in Mt. 17:15 literally means "moonstruck," and it is not clear that this means epilepsy, though that is a traditional translation (so NIV, NEB, NASB, RSV, ASV, NKJV), cf. D. Hagner, *NIDNTT* (1978) III.734. It may simply mean lunacy (so NAB, KJV).

<sup>72</sup>In the Markan passage, the categories of those "ill" and those "demonized" are governed by separate definite articles in the Greek text, which in turn suggests distinction.

<sup>73</sup>Some Jews ascribed all diseases to demons, and there was a popular superstition "that the backbone of a person who did not bow down to worship God became a Shed or demon," J. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939) 128.

<sup>74</sup>A Legion was a main division of the Roman army comprising between 4000 and 6000 soldiers. In general, the term is used figuratively to describe a great number (cf. Mt. 26:53).

<sup>75</sup>Many of the manuscripts also contain the word "fasting" in Mk. 9:29. Most textual authorities consider this a gloss which found its way into these texts due to the increasing emphasis on fasting in the early church. The word is not found in the important codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, cf. B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: UBS, 1975) 101. Thus, the word has been omitted in the NASB, NIV, RSV, ASV, NEB



same authority which Jesus demonstrated against the kingdom of Satan he conferred upon his twelve apostles (Mk. 3:14-15; 6:7; Mt. 10:1, 8; Lk. 9:1). Later, Jesus extended this authority to a group of seventy disciples (Lk. 10:1, 17).<sup>76</sup>

### **The Passion Crisis**

While Jesus' authority over Satan and his minions demonstrated his rightful claims as the messiah and his mission to inaugurate the kingdom of God, the greatest conflict was yet to come in his passion and death. Jesus described it this way:

*I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.*

*Luke 13:32*

His goal, of course, was Jerusalem and the trial and death which awaited him there. Even before he arrived in Jerusalem, Satan managed an insidious suggestion through Simon Peter that Jesus avoid the cross altogether (Mk. 8:31-32//Mt. 16:21-22), but Jesus recognized that his apostle had become the sounding board for the enemy (Mk. 8:33//Mt. 16:23). While Satan's effort to foil Jesus through Peter failed (Lk. 22:31), in Judas Iscariot the arch-deceiver found a more susceptible ally. At Satan's instigation, Judas arranged with the chief priests and the temple guard to betray his Lord (Lk. 22:1-6). On the night of the last supper, Satan entered into Judas to complete the betrayal (Jn. 13:27). It is in John's Gospel that this final conflict is mentioned explicitly. Jesus told his disciples that in his coming passion, the prince of this world would be driven out (Jn. 12:31). He was obviously speaking of something much more comprehensive than an exorcism. It is equally clear that he expected to meet this evil foe during the events of his passion, though he also knew that Satan had no hold over him (Jn. 14:30). Behind the men who acted as Jesus' prosecutors and judges stood the great adversary, Satan, the prince of the world. In the end, Satan would be overpowered and condemned, and the coming of the Holy Spirit would verify to the disciples that the victory had been won (Jn. 16:7-11).

Later, New Testament writers would reflect upon Christ's victory over the powers of evil through his death and resurrection. Paul says that in the cross Christ "disarmed the authorities and powers" and "made a public spectacle of them" (Col. 2:15). In his exaltation, Christ has been raised up "far above all rule and authority,

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and NAB. It is retained in the KJV.

<sup>76</sup>In the longer ending of Mark, this same authority is extended to the whole community of believers (cf. Mk. 16:17).

power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (Ep. 1:21). In his death, he descended into the place of the dead (Ac. 2:27; Ro. 10:7; 1 Pe. 3:18-19),<sup>77</sup> but in his ascension, he led captives in his train (Ep. 4:8-9).<sup>78</sup> Though the rulers of the present age<sup>79</sup> did not comprehend what would happen when they instigated the crucifixion of the Son of God (1 Co. 2:8), the death of Jesus was the means by which God destroyed the dominion of the devil and his power of death (He. 2:14-15). When Christ arose from the dead and ascended into the heavenlies, Satan and his angels were forcibly expelled (Re. 12:5, 7-9). The messianic people have now been granted victory over the great accuser through the blood of the Lamb (Re. 12:10-11). Now, the living Christ holds forever the keys of hell and death (Re. 1:18). Through his church he perpetually displays his manifold wisdom to the spirit world (Ep. 3:10-11).

## **The Church and the War with Satan**

It is clear that the writers of the New Testament considered Jesus to have been victorious in his confrontation with Satan. In John's Gospel, Jesus indicated that Satan would be "driven out" through the events of the cross (Jn. 12:31; cf. 16:11). Later, Paul would say that Christ "disarmed" the spiritual powers and authorities (Col. 2:15). Satan's dominion over the realm of death was destroyed (He. 2:14-15), and the devil and his angels were expelled from heaven (Re. 12:7-9). However, this powerful invasion of Satan's kingdom did not mean that the war with evil was over. In apocalyptic language, John describes the devil as now "filled with fury" after his expulsion from heaven. He has been excluded from heaven, but he is still very active on the earth (Re. 12:13-17). Now, his primary goal is to make war with "those who obey God's commandments and have the testimony of Jesus."

A fitting analogy describes Christ's invasion of the kingdom of Satan and the spiritual conflict which still rages until the end of the age as the difference between "D-Day" and "V-Day." In World War II, the invasion of Normandy heralded the beginning of the end. The allied forces gained the critical foothold on the European continent. However, much fighting still remained, and total victory would not be for some time. In a spiritual sense, D-Day was Jesus' powerful

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<sup>77</sup>The early church consistently interpreted Jesus' descent into the lower world as referring to his entry into hades at the time of his death. This eventually gave rise to the phrase in the Apostles' Creed, "He descended into hell."

<sup>78</sup>Chrysostom, in the early church, included Satan as one of these captives, cf. C. Mitton, *Ephesians [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 146.

<sup>79</sup>While some interpreters confine the "rulers" to those human agencies responsible for Jesus' death, Bruce is probably correct in saying, "Paul is thinking rather of the powers in the spiritual realm by which the human authorities were impelled on their chosen course," cf. F. Bruce, *I and II Corinthians [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 38-39.

invasion of the strong man's house. V-Day, the total victory that will come at the end of the age (Ro. 16:20), will be preceded by heavy conflict in the spiritual realms.<sup>80</sup>

It is clear from any reading of the New Testament, then, that Christians must still be involved in this war with their great adversary. Both in attempting to rescue those who are in bondage to the powers of darkness (Ga. 1:4; 2 Co. 4:1-4) as well as in resisting the attacks of the enemy against those who are already in the kingdom of light (2 Th. 3:2-3; 2 Ti. 4:18), Christians are called to take their place in the struggle against evil.

### **The Spiritual Battlefield**

Since Satan has been expelled from heaven, he can no longer launch a frontal attack upon God. Therefore, he directs his attention toward God's children. The battlefield where God's people wage war with the enemy is in the spiritual realm, what Paul calls "the heavenlies" (Ep. 6:12) or "the air" (Ep. 2:2). This spiritual realm is not to be taken as the immediate presence of God, but rather, as the intermediate realm between heaven and earth.

Because of this Pauline language, and especially because of the tendency in the west to separate the realm of religion from the realm of human life in the physical world, westerners frequently ignore the implications of this spiritual warfare for everyday life. As Dr. Timothy Warner has well stated, "We have bought the assumption that belief in spirits, in general, and in the idea that spirits have any ability to affect the human/material world, in particular, is not compatible with our technologically advanced society."<sup>81</sup> However, the apostles were keenly aware that the war in the heavenlies intruded upon their daily lives in the Greco-Roman world. Paul, for instance, describes his repeated efforts to visit the Thessalonians, efforts which were foiled by the enemy (1 Th. 2:18). When persecution broke out against the church in Smyrna and some of the Christians were imprisoned, John understood this antagonism to be a work of the devil (Re. 2:10). Of course, there are many passages which warn Christians of the devil's snares at a personal level, too.

It seems, then, that all areas of life become the battlefield for Christians. Satan not only confronts them in traditional spiritual categories, he attacks God's people in the corporate world, in family life, and in personal life. He seeks to

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<sup>80</sup>O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, trans. F. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 84, 141.

<sup>81</sup>T. Warner, "Spiritual Warfare," (May 7, 1990), a paper written and distributed by the Church Ministries Department of the Evangelical Free Church of America.

subvert God's people with temptation, through the weakness of the flesh, and by the attractions of the world.

### **The Attacks of the Enemy**

The attacks of Satan are many, for he roams the earth seeking an occasion to destroy people (1 Pe. 5:8). He is a crafty enemy with multiple schemes (2 Co. 2:11; Ep. 6:11) and traps (2 Ti. 2:26). He can induce God's people to waste their time arguing about secondary theological issues instead of doing the work of the kingdom (2 Ti. 2:23-26). He can so fill a Christian's mind with greed that he/she will stoop to dishonesty (Ac. 5:3-4). Even in the midst of prayer, he will insert sexual temptation to lead believers astray (1 Co. 7:5). If he can cause Christians to shut up their hearts of forgiveness for each other, he gains a victory (2 Co. 2:10-11). He promotes leaders who, though they appear to be sent by God, are in fact in league with the other side (2 Co. 11:13-15; 1 Jn. 4:1). Likewise, he promotes teachings and doctrines which are deceptive (1 Ti. 4:1). Since he is himself the supreme slanderer, it comes as no surprise that he induces idle Christians to spend their time in slander, also (1 Ti. 5:13-15). Vices like envy, bitterness and selfish ambition, while often matters of indifference in the eyes of the world, are in reality sponsored by the enemy (Ja. 3:14-16). If he can trick God's people into failure, especially their leaders, he can then bring discredit to the whole church (1 Ti. 3:6-7). On the one hand, he intimidates Christians with persecution, attempting to induce them to turn away from the Lord (1 Th. 3:2-5; cf. He. 2:15). On the other, he amazes them with miracles and wonders to entice them to pay homage to his representatives (2 Th. 2:9-10; Re. 16:14).

While all temptation is not necessarily the work of Satan alone (cf. Ja. 1:14-15), there exists a triple source of temptation with which Christians do battle, the world, the flesh and the devil. Doubtless Satan uses the enticements of the world and the weakness of the flesh as primary allies in his war against Christians (1 Pe. 2:11). The world and all its structures are under the control of the evil one (1 Jn. 5:19; Re. 18:2). The present age is permeated with wickedness (Ep. 5:16; Ga. 1:4). When people bow their knee to other lords besides Jesus Christ, they are, in fact, worshipping demons (1 Co. 10:19-21; Re. 9:20). In all these ways, Satan attempts to secure a foothold in the life of the Christian (Ep. 4:25-32).

### **The Weapons of the Christian**

Given all these forces arrayed against the believer, the question as to the Christian's defenses is certainly an appropriate one. How does the Christian stand against such a formidable foe?

Of first importance is the fact that Christians are "in Christ." Not only has

Christ been raised from the dead and exalted above every other power in the universe, God's people have been spiritually enthroned with him (Ep. 1:3; 2:6). The same power which was effective in raising Christ from the dead is also "for us who believe" (Ep. 1:19-21). Thus, Christians do not stand against the enemy in their own power, but rather, in the power of the victorious Christ who has soundly defeated Satan through the cross. If Christ disarmed Satan in the cross (Col. 2:15) and destroyed his works (1 Jn. 3:8), and if he abolished the threat of death with which Satan intimidated God's people (He. 2:14-15), then Satan no longer has dominion over them (Col. 1:13; Gal. 1:4). God's people are truly free (Ro. 6:19-22; Ga. 5:1, 13). Through Christ, they have overcome the evil one (1 Jn. 2:13-14). Their new life in Christ is secure from the threats of Satan (1 Jn. 5:18; Ro. 8:38-39; 2 Th. 3:3; 2 Ti. 4:18). However, spiritual freedom, like other freedoms in life, must be maintained! To say that Satan is stripped of his domination of God's people is not the same thing as saying he no longer exists. If God's people are to maintain their freedom in Christ, they must arm themselves with spiritual armor.

The same Paul who so vividly describes the believer's exalted position in Christ also points out that Christians must take their stand against the devil's schemes (Ep. 6:10-11). They are to be "strong in the Lord and in his mighty power!" The forces of evil still pervade the present age (Ep. 6:12). The "god of this present age" still exerts tremendous influence over those who are not protected through their new life in Christ (2 Co. 4:3-4; Ep. 2:2). Protection from the onslaught of the enemy calls for the use of spiritual weaponry, such as, a lifestyle of truth and righteousness, the gospel, an active faith, the security of salvation in Christ, and the Word of God (Ep. 6:13-17; 2 Co. 6:7; 10:3-5; Ro. 13:12). Intercessory prayer is also critical (Ep. 6:18). Christians must care for their brothers and sisters who struggle with sin, but they must also guard themselves against the enemy's temptations (Ga. 6:1). They must carefully distinguish between spiritual forces that are allied with God from those which oppose him (1 Co. 12:10; 1 Jn. 4:1-3). If they continue to maintain a lifestyle of sin, they demonstrate that they have not received the new life of the Spirit (1 Jn. 3:8-10).

Still, when all this is said, Christians have the promise that when they resist the assaults of the devil, he will run (1 Pe. 5:9; Ja. 4:7). They are reassured that their temptations and trials, however severe, will not overwhelm them (1 Co. 10:13). Rather, by keeping their confession of faith clear and by maintaining their reliance upon the victorious death of Christ, they will overcome the great slanderer (Re. 12:10-11). Even if they are persecuted unto death (Re. 2:10, 13; He. 12:4), they will triumph in the end (Re. 2:24-27; 3:9; 20:7-10).

## Contemporary Warfare

The battle against Satan takes many forms in the modern world. Christians of every era confront evil in the power centers of the world, the flesh and the devil.<sup>82</sup> The world consists of the pervading culture that is against God (cf. 1 Jn. 2:15-17). While it is under the control of Satan (cf. 1 Jn. 5:19), it also consists of millions of human wills which, in varying degrees, are allied with Satan against God. Humans who are alienated from the life of God may not know that they are in league with the other side (cf. 2 Co. 4:3-4). They may not even admit that Satan is a real entity. They may only come to see clearly their participation in the great war after they have been rescued from the dominion of darkness (Ga. 1:4; Col. 1:13). Without a doubt, Satan, who controls the spirit of the world, uses the prevailing culture to his advantage. It seems likely that he adapts himself to the prevailing cultures in different parts of the world. The power-mongering of western, hard-driving materialists is no less motivated by Satan than the animism of the Aborigines or the practice of voodoo in the West Indies. Satan is the great deceiver, and if he can masquerade as an angel or as an apostle, he can surely put on the suit and tie of an American businessman. So, contemporary spiritual warfare is waged on many fronts, each of which may have conditioned factors in the various cultures of the world.

The flesh, as distinct from the world, is the human weakness which finds it hard to resist the evil that lies in the world. If the prevailing world culture is filled with a myriad of temptations, competing human ambitions and moral decadence, men and women in the world, who are characterized by the weakness of the flesh, are especially vulnerable. Satan plays upon the weakness of the flesh, and he entices women and men with the lure of worldly values.

So, the Christian faces a triple-alliance in this war, the world, the flesh and the devil. The battle takes many forms, ranging from third world primitivism to extreme western sophistication.

## Chaos, the Destruction of Order

One of the primary characteristics of Satan, evident from the very beginning of time, is that he works toward chaos and destruction (Jn. 10:10a).<sup>83</sup> While he has

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<sup>82</sup>For an extensive discussion, see H. Lindsell, *The World, the Flesh & the Devil* (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1973).

<sup>83</sup>In fact, it may well be that the poetic language of creation, which describes Yahweh's fight against the primal monster, may hint at the destruction forces of chaos which God subdued in the creation (cf. Job 26:6-14; 38:8-11; Ps. 69:6-7; 89:9-13; 104:5-9; Pro. 8:29). If so, then the creation itself, which proceeded along orderly lines, may have been the first great victory in the war between the Creator and the Adversary, cf. B. Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 147.

a kingdom, and while in this kingdom there are hierarchies of evil (cf. Da. 10:10-13), still the outcome of his work is chaotic. He has not been able to mobilize his forces with maximum efficiency, for in his very nature lies the cause of his own disarray. His greatest weakness is his pride (cf. 1 Ti. 3:6), and because of it, he constantly overestimates his ability (cf. 1 Co. 2:7-8). So arrogant is he that, in the end, he will marshall his forces to attempt to destroy God (Re. 16:13-14; 19:19--20:3), a goal that clearly demonstrates his insane obsession and lack of realistic judgment.

In the history of planet earth, the chaos promoted by the Enemy can be seen in the cataclysmic events of war and the horror of brutality in pogroms, slavery and imperialist exploitation. War, by very definition, is destruction. It seeks the devastation of one's enemy by any and all means. The aftermath of war is inevitably chaos. So, as C. S. Lewis pointed out with such insight, the competing egos within the kingdom of evil inevitably tend toward chaos and destruction.<sup>84</sup> This means that the prevailing world culture is, to greater or lesser degrees, always in a state of competition. Political entities, corporate strategies and fallen human egos all betray this intense will to power that is selfish, chaotic and destructive.

## Counterfeit Religion

One of the fronts on which the battle is fought is religious. The world is filled with many competing religious truth claims. The major world religions, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shinto and so forth, maintain strikingly different world views and theologies than the Christian faith. Paul does not hesitate to say that those who worship other gods are, in reality, worshiping demons (1 Co. 10:20-21; cf. 1 Th. 1:9). His assessment is grounded in the Hebrew Bible (Dt. 32:16-17; Ps. 106:36-39); cf. Re. 9:20). Most of these religions recognize a plurality of gods and goddesses, and it is not too hard to see how such religious thought plays into the egotistical power-seeking of Satan's minions.

At another level, however, there are the various religious expressions of animism, voodoo, superstition and spirit-world consciousness. Rodney Henry, an evangelical missionary in Cebu City, Philippines, has detailed the spirit-world belief system of the Filipino culture, which is analogous to other animistic expressions. The daily events of life are believed to be controlled by spirit-beings called *dwende*, or *agta* or *capri*. Witches, called *wakwak*, who can transform themselves from humans to spirit-beings, fly around in search of their favorite food, internal human organs.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>84</sup>C. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (rpt. New York: Bantam, 1982) 91-93.

<sup>85</sup>R. Henry, *Filipino Spirit World* (Manila: OMF, 1986). Other examples of animism, sometimes called pre-literary religions, can be found in the Ameru of Kenya, the Aborigines of Australia, and the Quechua of South America, cf.

Added to this is the western fascination with the occult and mysticism. Necromancy, extra-sensory perception, guidance theories, second vision and a whole range of parapsychological phenomena are rapidly filling the spiritual vacuum left by the emptiness of western rationalism. The New Age movement, with its susceptibility to eastern pantheistic thought, also counts as a religious structure in which Satan deceives the world and garners worship for himself.

### **Secularism and the Will to Power**

For those in the western world who continue to resist any notions of the supernatural, there still exist the remnants of philosophical rationalism which have been bequeathed to us through the Enlightenment, Modernism and Post-modernism. These trends have established secularism as the dominant cultural expression in the West, especially America. Secularists do not recognize God, nor do they recognize any reality beyond that which can be empirically verified by the scientific method. In the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, the late French existentialist, "Man can count on no one but himself; he is alone, abandoned on earth in the midst of his infinite responsibilities, without help, with no other aim than the one he sets himself, with no other destiny than the one he forges for himself on this earth." Of course, Sartre knows better than this now, but his world-view is shared by many if not most of the intellectual elite in the West.

Does secularism play into the subverting schemes of Satan? Surely it must! In his antagonism against God, Satan cares little whether he is personally recognized, for he knows that in subverting men and women away from the only true God, he gains them as casualties in the war. Power, wealth, freedom from absolute moral codes, and personal pleasure are the trends which drive the secular machine. The more women and men buy into such values, the more they contribute to the chaos of the Enemy.

### **Frequently Asked Questions About Satan**

The biblical teaching concerning Satan, the demons and the power of evil repeatedly raises questions regarding the relationship between the sovereignty of God, the power of Satan and the role of human volition. These questions are not always directly addressed in Scripture, and the solutions may be to some degree tentative, since they must be approached by inferences. Nevertheless, the questions should be addressed.



### **Can Satan read your mind? Can he inject thoughts into your mind?**

To overestimate Satan's power is just as debilitating as to underestimate his power. In the first place, the Scripture is quite clear that Satan is not omniscient. God was able to conceal from the devil his eternal purposes in Christ Jesus until after the fact of the resurrection (Ep. 3:9-11; cf. 1 Co. 2:6-8). There is no hint in the Bible that Satan has the power to read minds at will, though various Christians throughout church history have thought so. Several leaders during the church's first millennium, such as Augustine, Athanasius, Origen, Peter Lombard, Bede and Thomas Aquinas, even believed that demons could induce evil thoughts directly into human minds.<sup>86</sup> It may well be that humans should be careful how they verbalize their thoughts, for Satan can surely understand words, as is clear from Adam's and Eve's very first encounter with him. It may also be true that, as an observer of the human race for many thousands of years, Satan has a vast range of experience from which to generalize about human thought processes. Doubtless, he is a shrewd guesser. Finally, if people open themselves to Satan, he even is able to speak through their vocal instruments, as he did through the demoniacs in the gospels. It is difficult to determine whether such control is voluntarily relinquished to the evil one or forced upon them because they live under the power of the "god of this world." Judas Iscariot, at least, seems to fit the case of voluntary cooperation with the evil one (Jn. 13:27). Simon Peter, on the other hand, seems to have been temporarily deceived into becoming a sounding board for the devil's schemes (Mt. 16:21-23). Christians, as in the case of Ananias, may allow "Satan to fill their hearts" (Ac. 5:3). Simon the Sorcerer, who made at least an ostensible affirmation of faith, still evidenced that he was not free from the power of evil (Ac. 8:13, 18-23). Christians can allow their minds to be "led away" by Satan schemes (2 Co. 11:3). Perhaps Satan's most deceptive ploy is to suggest something to Christians and trick them into thinking it was their own idea.<sup>87</sup> However, Satan is not God, nor does he possess the omnipotence and omniscience of God. There is no clear biblical evidence that he can control the Christian mind without that person opening the way for such an exchange. He may present to them ideas which he wishes them to think about, but apart from their yielding their minds to him, there does not seem to be any reason to believe that he can overpower their thought life at will. For Christians, Paul says that their minds can be renewed (Ro. 12:2), and every thought can be brought into obedience to Christ (2 Co. 10:4-5). For non-Christians, Paul says that their minds have been blinded by Satan (2 Co. 4:4). Though this state may not be the same as full mind control, it surely implies a significant influence.

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<sup>86</sup>S. McClelland, *EDT* (1984) 307-308.

<sup>87</sup>N. Anderson, *Victory Over the Darkness* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990) 168.

In any case, the old cliché, "The devil made me do it," more often than not may be simply a flimsy excuse. James said that people are tempted when they are dragged away and enticed by their own evil desires (Ja. 1:14). As in the case of Eve in the garden, Satan suggests but humans exercise their wills to act upon his suggestion. His greatest ally is the weakness of the flesh. This is why Christians are urged to "live in the Spirit."

### **Is Satan omnipresent?**

The quality of omnipresence, like omnipotence and omniscience, belongs only to God. Doubtless Satan would like for us to think of him as omnipresent. Such a belief inflates his ego and increases his influence. However, what are often referred to as the personal attacks of Satan are probably indirect. The demons allied with Satan carry out his infernal purposes in the world, such as, the evil spirits who opposed the angel sent to Daniel (Da. 10:10-14). At very critical junctures, Satan personally launches the attack, such as, in the temptations of Christ or Jesus' confrontation with the prince of this world during his passion. However, there is no indication that he can be everywhere at once. C. S. Lewis is probably much nearer the truth when he depicts the activity of Satan in the world as being carried out by evil spirits who are subordinate to him.

### **Is insanity and/or disease caused by Satan?**

In an indirect sense, all sickness and evil can be attributed to the infiltration of Satan into the world. The fall of humans in the beginning opened the door to the terrible aftermath of sin, and sickness was surely one of those effects (cf. Re. 22:2-3). However, Satan is an evil spirit on a leash. He can do only what he is allowed to do. During Job's trial, Satan's attack was only accomplished with God's permission (Job 1-2). It must be conceded, of course, that in at least one case in the New Testament insanity seems to have been directly related to demonization (Mt. 17:15-18).<sup>88</sup> The ravings of Legion in the tombs must surely have resulted from insanity, also (Mk. 5:2-5). Jesus said that the woman with scoliosis had been "bound by Satan" for eighteen years (Lk. 13:11, 16). Paul considered his "thorn in the flesh" to be the messenger of Satan (2 Co. 12:7).<sup>89</sup> Still, there is no general inference to be drawn that all insanity or all illness is inevitably caused by Satan's direct attack. If this were so, then all Jesus' healings would have been exorcisms, and any thorough reading of the New Testament will show that such is not the case. Rather, the combination of sickness and demonization, while it certainly

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<sup>88</sup>See footnote #40 for the meaning of the Greek word used here.

<sup>89</sup>The exact nature of Paul's famous "thorn" is unclear. The majority of New Testament scholars understand it to have been a physical illness, but such a conclusion is debated.

occurred, seems to have been in the minority of cases. Modern medical knowledge demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that most illnesses, and in many cases even insanity, have clear physiological causes that are treatable through medical techniques.

### **Can Christians be demon-possessed?**

Certainly the Christians in the early church confronted people who were demonized (Ac. 5:16-18; 8:7; 16:16; 19:12; cf. 19:13-16). However, all of these cases concerned men or women who were not Christians. There are no such cases described in the Bible involving Christians. Various Christian thinkers have explored the question with mixed results. Some, on the basis of clinical observations rather than biblical evidence, argue that Christians can be demonized.<sup>90</sup> Others conclude quite the opposite on the basis of various New Testament passages (cf. 2 Th. 3:3; 1 Jn. 4:4; 5:18). Sometimes a convenient distinction is made between "possession" and "oppression," though admittedly such a distinction is not found in the Bible, and therefore, its value is limited.

Given the ambiguity of the evidence, especially the silence of the Bible, no firm conclusion can be given. Perhaps it is better to simply recognize that all people, Christians included, are liable to experience the attack of the enemy in some measure. Without trying to split theological hairs over the definition of demon-possession, Christians must at least recognize that their safety lies not in their own powers, but rather, in the power of Christ who has won the victory over all the powers of the enemy.

### **Should Christians be involved in exorcism?**

If Satan is real (and he is), and if demonization is real (and the Bible admits no other alternative), then the church should be willing to engage in exorcism. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is that of "discerning spirits" (1 Co. 12:10; cf. 1 Jn. 4:1-3). Such discernment was evident in the early church (Ac. 13:6-12; 16:16-18), though obviously it was not a ministry to be trifled with (Ac. 19:13-16).

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<sup>90</sup>Dickason, 149-213. Dickason, chairman of the theology department at Moody Bible Institute, frankly concedes that the biblical evidence, at best, is uncertain with regard to the question, 129-148. Moving to clinical observations, however, he concludes that "genuine believers can and indeed were inhabited by demons," 213. The same conclusion, based not on the Bible but on experience and personal testimony, is reached by Hal Lindsey, *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972) 159-162. This conclusion is not shared by all other theologians. While most conservative Christian thinkers agree that Christians are not exempt from demonic attacks (cf. Ep. 4:27; 6:10-18; Ja. 4:7; 1 Pe. 5:8-9), they equally are not prepared to concede that demons may actually have control of a true Christian, cf. M. Bubeck, *The Adversary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975) 87-88. Part of the ambiguity of the question has to do with the language of demonization. The expression "demon-possession" may not be a fair translation of the verb *daimonizomai* (see comments on pages 21-22).

In the post-apostolic church, a number of Christian theologians wrote concerning the ministry of exorcism, including Justin Martyr, Origen, Tertullian and Augustine. Some rituals of Christian baptism developed which were accompanied by exorcisms, and sometimes even the baptismal waters were exorcised. By the Middle Ages, superstition was so widespread that large-scale persecutions were launched against those thought to be demon-possessed, and many innocent people were brutalized and killed. The Protestant Reformation reacted against the severity of such abuses, and first the Lutheran Church followed by the Calvinists renounced exorcism by the end of the 16th century. Pope Paul V severely restricted the practice in the Roman Catholic Church in 1614.<sup>91</sup>

In more recent times, however, especially with the rise of the occult, Christians have begun to give a more positive assessment of exorcism. From a wide variety of traditions Christians now openly advocate the place of such a ministry, including Evangelicals, Anglicans and Roman Catholics.<sup>92</sup> A point of caution is in order, however. The power of deliverance resides in Jesus Christ, not in some assumed power in oneself or even in some assumed power in a technique, as the seven sons of Sceva discovered (Ac. 19:13-16). Even Michael the archangel did not oppose the enemy under his own power, but said, "The Lord rebuke you" (Jude 9).

**What did Paul mean when he said that disobedient Christians, for disciplinary purposes, should be "handed over to Satan?" (1 Co. 5:4-5; 1 Ti. 1:20)?**

This phraseology immediately implies that, under normal conditions, Satan's access to the believer is limited. The act of delivering someone over to Satan is, in effect, removing from that person the spiritual protection which is afforded to all who belong to the body of Christ. Since Satan is the agent of destruction *par excellence*, the removal of a person from the safety of the Spirit-filled community makes that person especially susceptible to the enemy's attack. This extreme disciplinary measure means that Satan will be able to physically attack the person, possibly even to the point of death, similar to what occurred in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac. 5:1-11). Such a judgment is a last resort, and it is issued only with the ultimate salvation of the person in view (1 Co. 5:5b). Furthermore, it is issued from the entire community, not from the authority of a single leader.

The idea of a Spirit-protected community is related to Paul's view of the

<sup>91</sup>S. McClelland, *EDT* (1984) 307-308.

<sup>92</sup>Consider, for instance, Michael Green's comments from an Anglican perspective, cf. 132-147. In a similar vein, Dr. Timothy Warner of the Evangelical Free Church writes that the church as a local community of faith needs to reach out with deliverance, healing and support for demonized people, 9.

Christian church as a holy temple indwelt by the Spirit (Ep. 2:21-22). The person who wishes to do without the Christian community is, in effect, doing to him/herself what for severely disciplinary measures Paul felt compelled to do to heretics and flagrantly sinning Christians.

## **The Final Defeat of Satan**

In the very first book of Torah, God's judgment upon the snake heralded Satan's ultimate defeat in a passage often called the protoevangelium. The crushing of the serpent's head is to be anticipated through the one born from the woman (Ge. 3:15). Christians through the centuries have looked upon this passage as the first declaration of victory concerning the conflict between Christ and Satan. The snake might strike at the heel of the woman's offspring, but in the end, his head would be crushed.

Earlier, we saw that the decisive struggle between Satan, the prince of this world, and Jesus, the Son of God, reached its climax in the cross. In his death and resurrection, Christ triumphed over the devil, destroying his power and stripping him of his access to heaven. The conflict that occurs during the present age between the first and second advents of the Lord is, for all practical purposes, a mopping up operation. The war is not over, but the end is in view. It is in this sense that Paul can confidently say, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Ro. 16:20). The world in its present form is already in the process of passing away (1 Co. 7:31). Christ has already been enthroned in the heavenlies above all the spiritual entities in the universe. Now it remains for all Christ's enemies to be subdued to him and his lordship to be established in finality at the end of the age (1 Co. 15:24-28). We know that this climax awaits the triumphant coming of the Lord at the end (2 Th. 2:8). We also know that God has planned a judgment for Satan and his minions, a place of banishment pictured as "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt. 25:41). We know that the angels who rebelled against God have been confined all this time in a place described as the dungeons of Tartarus while they await their final judgment (2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6).

The final conflict is vividly described in the Apocalypse of John. The evil intent of Satan, who has been stripped of his access to heaven, will be leveled against the people of God (Re. 12:17). His antagonism will be carried out by the one popularly called the antichrist (1 Jn. 2:18), an individual whom St. Paul describes as the "man of lawlessness" (2 Th. 2:7-12). John pictured him as a terrible beast who is empowered by the dragon (Re. 13:1-2) and aided by another beast-like figure, a spokesman called "the false prophet" (Re. 13:11-18). These three, the dragon (Satan), the beast from the sea (the antichrist) and the beast from the land (the false prophet) work their evil purposes in the kingdom of this world,

symbolized by a whore seated upon a scarlet beast (Re. 17:1-8, 18). The power of demons in the world will draw the worldly potentates together in defiant opposition against God (Re. 16:13-14; cf. 17:13-14).

At the return of Christ, the two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, which have been in irrevocable conflict through the ages, will collide in one final battle. Christ is depicted as a warrior on a white horse accompanied by the hosts of heaven (Re. 19:11-16). When he comes, he will destroy his enemies, casting the antichrist and false prophet into a fiery lake (Re. 19:19-20). The dragon will be bound for a thousand years in the Abyss (Re. 20:1-3), and ultimately, will be thrown into the fiery lake forever and ever (Re. 20:7-10).<sup>93</sup>

The triumph of Christ and his church in this final conflict was admirably captured centuries ago in Martin Luther's famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*. The third stanza is a fitting proclamation of triumph.

*And tho this world with devils filled,  
Should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear for God has willed  
His truth to triumph through us.  
The prince of darkness grim  
We tremble not for him--  
His rage we can endure,  
For, lo, his doom is sure:  
One little word shall fell him.*

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<sup>93</sup>Admittedly, the language of the Book of Revelation is apocalyptic and highly symbolic. Christians have not reached a consensus about how to interpret the details which are described, and several major systems of interpretation are followed, including postmillennialism, amillennialism, dispensationalism and historic premillennialism, cf. R. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1977). The literature on the subject is voluminous, nor is it not within the scope of this study to address it. Nevertheless, the main outlines of Satan's defeat are clear enough, and we will content ourselves to point it out with broad strokes.