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Bible Correspondence Course

Supplemental Lesson Part I: Satan in the Old Testament

Introduction

The word *Satan* occurs in both testaments of our Bible and is frequently misunderstood. It is commonly believed to describe a powerful, evil angel who has rebelled against God; but a careful biblical investigation reveals a very different reality. Let us begin by analysing the use of the word in the Old Testament. We shall refer principally to the King James or Authorized Version of the Bible, but students are encouraged to study all the passages mentioned as they are translated in different versions of the Bible to test the validity of the analysis presented here.

The Hebrew word *satan* translated into English

The English word *Satan* is an anglicized form of the Hebrew *satan*, meaning adversary, enemy or accuser. It occurs 33 times in the text of the Old Testament. Although the English word is often written with a capital "S", *satan* is not a name at all. It is a common noun (occasionally occurring also in a verb form) which means "adversary," "enemy," "accuser," and is often translated in these or similar ways, depending on the version of the Bible. Generally the term *satan* is used to refer to human beings, but there are a couple of interesting exceptions! Here are a few examples:

1. In **2 Samuel 19:22** David says: "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah, that you should this day be _____ (Hebrew *satan*) unto me?" Here *satan* is translated "adversaries," and refers to the sons of Zeruah, Joab and Abishai, who opposed David by insisting that Shimei be put to death.
2. **1 Kings 11:14** states, "And the LORD raised up an _____ (Hebrew *satan*) against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite..." In this passage the word *satan*, translated "adversary," refers to the pagan king of Edom, whom God had made an enemy of Solomon.
3. In **1 Samuel 29:4** the Philistine princes were worried by David's presence among them, saying, "Let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an _____ to us" (Hebrew *satan*). The princes feared that David, who had recently gone over to the Philistines, would turn against them and become a *satan* or enemy to them in the battle because they would be fighting against David's own people, the Israelites.

Obviously *satan* represents some kind of adversary, but it can be a good adversary, as in the case of David, or an evil adversary, such as the pagan enemies of Solomon. In the cases mentioned above *satan* refers to human beings. This is the norm in the Bible, but there is at least one case where *satan* refers to an adversary of another kind.

4. In the story of Balaam in **Numbers 22, verse 22** tells us that the angel of the LORD stood in Balaam's way "for an _____ (Hebrew *satan*) against him." Further along, in **verse 32**, the angel says to Balaam, "Behold, I went out to _____ thee (RSV margin: to be an adversary (*satan*) unto thee)."

In this case the *satan* is the angel of the LORD! Not a rebellious angel but one who is doing the will of God, standing in the way of the prophet Balaam to prevent his going to curse the Israelites. It may be

a surprise to some to discover that the word **satan** is used to describe an obedient angel but never a rebellious one!

The word **satan** is given its English meaning an additional 10 times in the Old Testament of the King James Bible. In all places it represents some kind of adversary or accuser, usually a human being, but the word does not imply anything good or bad about the individual who is called a **satan**.

The following are the remaining Old Testament passages in which the Hebrew word **satan** is translated into English in the Authorized Version:

Passage	Translation	Passage	Translation
I Kings 5:4	adversary	Psalms 71:13	adversaries
I Kings 11:14	adversary	Psalms 109:4	adversaries
I Kings 11:23	adversary	Psalms 109:20	adversaries
I Kings 11:25	adversary	Psalms 109:29	adversaries
Psalms 38:20	adversaries	Zechariah 3:1	resist

The reader is urged to consult each of these passages, both in the KJV and other versions, in order to fully understand the way in which **satan** is used in the Bible.

The word **satan** left untranslated and rendered as Satan

There are only four passages of the Old Testament in which the King James Bible has left the Hebrew word **satan** untranslated, rendering it directly into English as our word "Satan." These are 1 Chronicles 21:1, Psalms 109:6, Zechariah 3:1,2 and the first two chapters of the book of Job.

1 Chronicles 21

5.1 According to **1 Chronicles 21:1**, who stood up against Israel by inciting David to number them? _____

5.2 But on the other hand, in **2 Samuel 24:1** (a parallel passage about the same incident), who is said to have incited David? _____ In this case God Himself is referred to as Satan. But how can this be? It is simply because on this occasion God became an adversary or enemy to His people Israel, as He often threatened to do: See Isaiah 63:10; Jeremiah 30:14; Lamentations 2:4,5.

Psalm 109

6. In **Psalm 109:6** the psalmist David is complaining about his enemies. Speaking of one of them in this verse he says: "Set thou a wicked man over him: and let _____ (Hebrew **satan**) stand at his right hand."

Here the word **satan** should probably best be translated accuser, as it is in the Revised Standard Version and many other translations of the Bible, given that David is apparently referring to a human accuser. The same Hebrew word **satan** appears 3 more times in the text of the psalm, being translated as "adversaries." David does not state which of his enemies he is referring to, but there is

no reason to take them as anything but human beings. Psalms 109 does not give any support to the idea of Satan's being a fallen angel.

Zechariah 3

7.1 **Zechariah 3:1–2** reads "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and _____ standing at his right hand to _____ him. And the LORD said unto _____, The LORD rebuke thee, O _____; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

It would appear that in these cases the word *satan* should be translated "accuser," as appears in the margin of the AV and in the text itself of many other versions of the Bible. To understand who Joshua's accuser or adversary is, we must examine the historical context in which Zechariah has been prophesying to Joshua and the rest of the Jews. The book of Ezra describes the efforts of the Jews under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua to rebuild the Jerusalem temple after returning from the Babylonian captivity. They had to face the determined opposition of Judah's neighbours, particularly the Samaritans to the north, who were not pleased that Judah might regain its former power.

7.2 **Ezra 4** says in **verse 1**: "Now when the _____ of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel ... **verse 4**: Then the people of the land (Samaritans) _____ the hands of the people of Judah, and _____ them in the building."

It was the task of Zechariah to encourage the Jews to persevere in rebuilding the temple despite the Samaritan opposition.

7.3 **Ezra 5:1,2** says: "Then the prophets Haggai the prophet, and _____ the son of Iddo prophesied unto the _____ that were in Judah and _____ in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and _____ the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem and with them were the prophets of God helping them."

So in the context of Zechariah's ministry, the *satan* or adversary that the LORD reproves in the vision in Zechariah 3 would seem to be the Samaritans who were trying to intimidate Joshua the high priest and the rest of the leaders of Israel so that they would cease rebuilding the temple. In later times one of the tactics they used against the Jews was to falsely accuse them of rebellion against their Persian overlords (Ezra 4). There is no indication that the adversary is a rebellious angel and no such being is mentioned in the historical accounts of the period or anywhere else in the Old Testament, for that matter.

Satan in the book of Job

The fourth and last section of the Old Testament which contains the English word "Satan" in many (though not all) versions of the Bible consists of the first two chapters of the book of Job.

8.1 **Job 1:6** states: "Now there was a day when the _____ of God came to present themselves _____ the LORD, and _____ came also among them."

The passage goes on to describe how this "Satan," whoever he may be, persuades the LORD to test Job's faith by taking away his belongings, his children and finally his health.

As we read these chapters we naturally wonder who the Satan might be; the narrative does not identify him, but up to this point we have learned two important facts:

- The Hebrew term **satan** is a common noun, often translated into English in the Bible and used to refer to any type of adversary, whether good or evil.
- In the majority of occurrences of the word **satan**, it is obvious who the term refers to; in a few other cases it is not obvious but can be determined with a fair degree of certainty by carefully studying the context. The term commonly refers to human adversaries, and in the one case where it has been seen to refer to an angel, it is not a rebellious angel but the faithful angel of the LORD.

Nevertheless, it is sometimes stated that the Satan of the book of Job is an evil angel who wished to harm Job. This assertion appears to be based on the following three suppositions:

- A. That the sons of God mentioned in Job 1:6, and of whom Satan is one, are angels;
- B. That when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, this means that they appeared in heaven where God dwells;
- C. That the sufferings of Job were caused by the power of Satan, a capacity that only a supernatural being could possess.

Surprisingly, we are going to discover that even though these affirmations may appear reasonable, **each one of them is in fact wrong**. We will now consider them one by one.

Supposition A

The idea that the sons of God must be angels has no biblical support. God often calls His human followers his "sons" in both Testaments. Here is an example from each:

8.2 **Isaiah 43:6**: " I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring my _____ from afar, and my daughters from the ends of the earth"

In the Old Testament, God's "sons" are usually Israelites. See also: Exodus 4:22–23, Deuteronomy 32:19, Isaiah 45:11, and Hosea 1:10.

8.3 **Romans 8:14**: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the _____ of God"

Here again the sons of God are human believers, and not angels. There are many other examples in both testaments. (See also 2 Corinthians 6:18; Galatians 4:6; Philippians 2:15; Hebrews 2:10 and 12:7, and I John 3:1–2).

Supposition B

The fact that the group of worshippers presented themselves "before God" does not imply that they entered into the dwelling place of God. This expression and other similar ones frequently appear in the Bible to express the fact that even while we are here on the earth, we human beings can enter into the presence of God by turning to Him in worship. In many cases the idea of presenting oneself before God refers to the occasion when an individual or a congregation goes to a specific place to worship God and offer prayers and sacrifices. The following are some examples:

- 8.4 **Genesis 18:22**: "And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet _____ the _____." Abraham was on the earth, in a place called Hebron. He was "before the LORD" because he was in the presence of God's angel.
- 8.5 **Leviticus 4:15**: "And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock _____ the _____: and the bullock shall be killed _____ the LORD." The elders of Israel did not present their sacrifices in heaven, but rather here on the earth (See also: verses 17 and 18).
- 8.6 **Leviticus 16:7**: "And he shall take the two goats, and present them _____ the _____ at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." The tabernacle was not in heaven, but here on earth.

We see then that the fact that the sons of God presented themselves before the LORD in Job 1:6 does not imply that the meeting took place in heaven, or that the sons of God were angels.

Supposition C

It is commonly believed that Job was afflicted by the power of Satan. However, the narrative states clearly that it was the LORD, not Satan, who caused Job's misfortunes:

- 8.7 **Job 1:11**: "But put forth _____ hand (of the LORD) now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." Here Satan is asking God to devastate Job. That would not have been necessary if Satan could have done it with his own power. (See also: Job 2:5.)
- 8.8 **Job 1:21**: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the _____ hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." Job himself had no doubt whatsoever about who had harmed him; he clearly understood that it was God. Otherwise he would have said, "The LORD giveth and Satan taketh away."
- 8.9 **Job 1:22**, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged _____ foolishly." Job would have had no reason to criticize God if it had not been Him who had caused his misfortunes.
- 8.10 **Job 2:9 –10**: "Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse _____ and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the _____ of God and shall we not receive _____?"

Both Job and his wife were well aware that he had been afflicted by God, and no-one else. The rest of the book describes the effort that Job made to bring God, whom he had served so loyally, to account for having treated him in what he regarded as such an unjust fashion:

8.11 In **6:4** Job complains: "For the arrows of the _____ are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit; the terrors of _____ do set themselves in array against me."

8.12 **Job 7:20** says: "I have sinned; what shall I do unto _____, O thou preserver of men? why hast _____ set me as a mark against _____, so that I am a burden to myself?"

Job continues to attribute his sufferings to God throughout the rest of the book (see 10:2 and 19:6). Satan does not reappear after chapter 2, nor is he even mentioned. Job's complaints to God would make absolutely no sense if in fact his misfortunes had not been caused by God but by someone else. Finally, God answers Job in chapters 38–41. He never denies that it is He who has afflicted Job, but declares that a mere man is not competent to question the actions of the Almighty, and Job humbly accepts this pronouncement. At the end of the book, God restores to Job all that He had taken away from him and much more, and Job receives comfort from his family and friends.

8.13 **Job 42:11**: "Then came there unto him all his brethren and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house, and comforted him over all the evil that _____ had brought upon him." Further clear testimony that Job had been tried by God himself.

A biblical investigation has shown that there is no evidence to support the idea that Job's Satan is a fallen angel. In fact, some versions of the Bible totally avoid the use of the word "Satan" in the book and simply translate the Hebrew word, in accordance with its meaning, as "accuser" or "adversary." The book does not identify who Job's adversary is, but it appears to have been a member of Job's community who, out of envy, persuades the Almighty to test Job's devotion and faithfulness. In the rest of the Old Testament the word *satan* nearly always refers to a human being, and there is no good evidence that this case is different.

The myth of the fallen angel

We have seen that the word *satan* means adversary, enemy or accuser. Generally it refers to a human being, although on one occasion it refers to God Himself and on another occasion to an angel of God. There is no reference to a fallen angel, and in fact the Old Testament maintains a complete silence on the subject of fallen angels. However it is commonly asserted that there are three passages that speak of them, and so we will examine Genesis 6:2–4, Isaiah 14:12 and Ezekiel 28:12–15.

Genesis 6

Genesis 6 verses 2 and 4 state that the sons of God took wives from among the daughters of men and had children by them. Some have proposed that this refers to a union between angels and women, but such an affirmation makes absolutely no sense and is quite contrary to the Bible evidence. We have seen that the term sons of God refers not to angels but to human beings. In addition, there is no biblical evidence to indicate that angels can procreate children, much less with human beings; cohabitation between divine beings and human women is an idea completely foreign

to the Bible and found only in pagan mythology. The passage simply states that at this early time some men who were servants of God married pagan women, as was frequently to occur in later times as well.

Isaiah 14

- 9.1 **Isaiah 14:12** says, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" It is sometimes claimed that the prophet is referring to an angel named Lucifer who was expelled from heaven after rebelling against God.
- 9.2 But in **verse 4** of the same chapter God says to the prophet, "take up this proverb against _____" So the prophecy is plainly directed against a human king.
- 9.3 "Lucifer" was not really in heaven, because **verse 13** says of him, "For thou hast said in thine _____, I will ascend into heaven . . ." This is a poetic way of describing the pride and exaggerated aspirations of a human king.
- 9.4 **Verse 16** states, "They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the _____ that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?", and verse 18 makes it clear that he was one of the kings of the nations around Israel.

A study of the whole of Isaiah 14 reveals that the prophet was not speaking of an angel, but of the powerful and vainglorious king of Babylon, whom the God of Israel intended to humble. The term "Lucifer" is a poetic and ironic name for this proud king. It comes from the rendering in the Latin Vulgate Bible of the original Hebrew word, which means "bearer of light" and is generally considered to be a reference to the planet Venus. Instead of Lucifer, the RSV translates "Day Star," while the NIV has "morning star." Other modern versions have similar renderings. (**Amplified Bible quote)

Ezekiel 28

Ezekiel 28:13,14 reads:

Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God.

This is claimed to be an allusion to a fallen angel who was in the garden of Eden, but we will see that such an affirmation is unjustified. The Bible never claims that there was a rebellious angel in the garden of Eden, or that Eve was tempted by him. The text only says that there was a serpent who was counted as one of the "animals of the field that the LORD God had made" (Genesis 3:1).

- 10.1 In **Ezekiel 28:2**, God tells the prophet: "Son of man, say unto the _____, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am _____, I sit in the seat of _____, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a _____, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God".
- 10.2 **Verse 9** goes on, "Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am God? But thou shalt be a _____ and no God, in the hand of him that slayeth thee."

