

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 135

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Editorial

Dear Brethren and Sisters and Friends, Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

I think one of the most straightforward prophecies regarding our present times is given in Ezekiel's prophesy, chapter 37 and the first 14 verses, in the parable of the Valley of Dry Bones.

The dry bones are the Jews and the graves are the countries where they have been scattered for centuries, cut off from one another and without hope of the Promises made to Abraham.

Of these "bones" God said, "I will lay sinews upon you and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live." (verse 6). This is descriptive of the re-establishment of the nation of Israel in their Promised Land.

Verse 7: "there was a noise" – and I suggest has reference to World War 1 when the Turks were driven out of Palestine by the British army and Great Britain promised the Jews they would have a homeland there. However, when Jews began arriving in Palestine there was much opposition from the Arabs and it fell to the lot of the British army to try to keep the peace between the returning Jews and the Arabs for the next 30 years.

"And behold a shaking" I suggest refers to events surrounding World War II which forced greater numbers of these "bones" to go to Palestine and by 1947 Great Britain had had enough of trying to administer this trouble spot and in May 1948 withdrew all their armed forces expecting the ill equipped Jews to be wiped out by the overwhelming number of Arabs, but on the 14th May 1948 the Jews declared Israel to be a nation. These "Dry Bones" had been covered over with sinews, flesh and skin and were now a body of people, a new nation.

What of the breath which God said He would put in them that they should live? I see this is yet to happen. For 44 years we have seen Israel without their God; they do not in the main acknowledge Him and have yet to learn that they cannot go on trusting in themselves. "The time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7) will, I believe, result in their conversion and acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah, and from that time on "they shall serve the Lord their God" (verse 9). What follows on after this will eventually be the establishment of the Kingdom and Jesus Christ's rule of righteousness throughout the whole world, reigning from Jerusalem. "Even so, come Lord Jesus."

With Sincere Love to all, in the Master's service,

Russell Gregory.

THE TWO GARDENS

There are two gardens mentioned in the Word of God, each of great importance with respect to man's relationship to God, especially man's reaction to temptation. The Garden of Eden, where sin first entered into the world with all its dire consequences, and later, Gethsemane, where the second Son of God, by resisting temptation paved the way to man's redemption from death for sin.

Let us first consider Eden. Come to think of it, the temptation of Adam and Eve was nothing out of the ordinary. It was the sort of thing we all experienced in our younger days, or perhaps not so young. Just imagine God saying "Don't eat of that tree, don't touch it." And then comes along the serpent saying "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" So God is questioned, a doubt enters into Eve's mind. And then the lie "Ye shall not surely die," that wicked lie which persisted to our day in the form of the doctrine of the immortal soul. I often compare the situation in Eden with that of bringing up a child - father says "Don't touch that kettle, you will get burned." Now previously the child probably took no particular notice of the kettle, and very likely did not even know what getting burned was like. But now curiosity is aroused. He sees his parents handling it without coming to any harm, so he is tempted to touch it. He says to himself "Why shouldn't I, look at Mum and Dad, they are none the worse for it." So here we see father's command questioned. Doubt, curiosity and temptation have entered the child's mind. How right was Paul when he wrote to the Romans (Romans 3:20) "by the law is the knowledge of sin." It is happening throughout one's childhood days - tell a youngster not to do a thing and he will do it out of sheer curiosity or delight in playing a prank. Say nothing, and whatever you prohibit will probably never be attempted anyway. Coming back to the child, he does not, of course, realize that when his parents handle the kettle it is not hot, but one day the child touches it when it contains boiling water. Now he found out what will happen and what it feels like being burned. He has now discovered the hard way that Dad was right after all. Perhaps worse to come, there may well be punishment in store, too. But after things have calmed down, the dressing of the burn and forgiveness by the parents with the admonition not to do it again.

Now, is there not an exact parallel with the happenings in Eden? Just as the child did not know what being burned is like, so the first pair never saw or experienced an inflicted death. They might, but we cannot speculate about this, have seen animals and birds dying a natural death. Now, after the forbidden act, a guilty conscience, shame, experience of sin. They have now discovered the consequences of God's law being flouted. And worse to come, an animal, or animals, killed, blood poured out. What fear this must have struck into the minds of Adam and Eve. They may have thought to themselves "Oh dear, am I going to be next? Looks very much like it." But then, after the storm has calmed down, the temporary covering of their sin and the promise of some future redemption when God said to the serpent (Genesis 3:15) "It (the woman's seed) shall bruise thy head."

Just how much of God's plan of redemption the first pair understood we do not know, except that there evidently was held out some hope of better things to come, just as in the case of a child the parents forgive without condoning the child's misdeed, and without allowing a recurrence.

We see from all this that there is no need for a supernatural Satan. Temptation originates from external circumstances and then matures in the mind if we allow it. Just as we read in James' epistle (1:14,15) "But every man is tempted when; he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

And this is when we come to consider the trial that took place in the second garden under consideration. The temptation of Jesus, in principle, was no different from the ones described above, but on a far, far larger scale. External influence, followed by the mind processing it. But in Jesus' case He did not allow it to take hold. And how did He conquer it? By constant meditation of the word of His Father, and reference to it when needed. And how great trials He suffered! First in the wilderness, then during His ministry, being sneered at by hostile crowds and the Pharisees, forsaken by His disciples except the twelve, and finally Gethsemane. And how did He conquer temptation? Let those who say that on account of His miraculous birth He was able to resist temptation in a way we can't, having been equipped with special strength not available to us, consider these two points:

1. He constantly used the Scriptures as His guide by constant meditation, absorbing it in His mind, which practice, by itself, keeps evil thoughts out. Impossible for us? No! There is some good practical advice on many things in the Old Testament. Let us look only at the Psalms and the Proverbs to realize that, and we have in addition the New Testament at our disposal; just look at Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 13 as examples.

2. Jesus was a man of constant prayer. Impossible for us? No! We can, with God's help, master many a task or awkward situation if we put it to God in prayer. But let us remember to thank Him when we have got out of it. And also don't forget, Jesus spent many hours in prayer. Do we at least pray regularly, even when not in immediate danger? Do we follow Christ's example in this respect?

No, the miraculous birth was not for the purpose of giving Christ extra strength. Had this been so, this would not have been a fair trial. But the miraculous birth was to raise up a second Adam with a free life unforfeited to sin, and so be able to provide a ransom for those who accept Him. Adam forfeited his life, he let temptation get the better of him. And how little a trial compared with Christ's! Only not to eat of a certain fruit, that was all.

The Israelites promise on Mount Sinai did not last so long, either. They got panicky when Moses was delayed. Saul's was similar when Samuel was late. And let us admit, we do silly things when we get worried and panicky. But Christ never let these things beat Him.

And finally to His temptation in Gethsemane. This was different and much more severe than all trials of history. His life kept sin-free, unlike Adam's. No need for Him to die. He had legions of angels at an instant command. What a temptation it must have been to say just a word to His Father, and He could have been well and away. But no! This would have been disastrous for all of us. He knew that His Father would wish Him to go through with it, and with an incredible will power, sustained by prayer. He made it.

And what of us? We all know that the concept of sin-in-the-flesh, or original sin, provides a good escape for many a misdeed. We, by the mercy of God, know better. But we nevertheless make excuses for ourselves, similar to the ones just mentioned. What about the phrase "I couldn't help it?" Often it is true, but not always. If we are honest, frequently it is us who just don't try hard enough to help it. And finally, let us count our blessings of having had our eyes opened to the truth, and prophecy being fulfilled in our day. And when we fall, our Great High Priest will intercede if we sincerely repent.

As a fitting conclusion, another piece of sound advice as found in 1 Corinthians 10:13 "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

Brother Leo Dreifuss.

"CHAT SECTION"

Compiled by Brother Harold Dawson.

Who would have thought that the USSR would have changed and disintegrated the way that it has? Although we have not really seen the whole saga yet, or the repercussions that will bring to light an even more dangerous scenario than we had before.

Israel, too, is moving more centre stage and recent incidents could ignite much of Islam against them militarily. Once one of the Arab nations does have an operational atomic or nuclear bomb then the temptation may become too great to try and eliminate Israel once and for all.

Of course Israel has been making sophisticated nuclear devices for over twenty years under the Negev desert, and Islam knows it.

We certainly live in stirring times but the fulfilment of Ezekiel 38 and 39 may be very near and the return of Jesus Christ must be related and linked to the peril and extremity of Israel's situation. If Israel is in their own estimation, in danger of being overrun then they will do doubt use nuclear weapons, and it would be the end of humanity without those days indeed being shortened - as Jesus said they would be, for the elect's sake.

There is nothing we can do about all this and it wont be much good shutting our doors about us either, so we hope that if we are alive and remain we may be removed from the carnage, that the conflict between good and evil will bring.

Islam denies the right of Israel to exist and reserves the right to take innocent hostages, and attack Israel when they wish to - but no one must retaliate against Islam.

But this is the Promised Land which God promised to Abraham, "To thee will I give it and to thy seed for ever."

So we can relax. God's word cannot be broken whatever happens before God's Kingdom comes on earth as it is in Heaven. For the Seed of Abraham is Christ and Spiritual Israel, and if we be or belong to Christ then we are also Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promises made by God to Abraham.

We must each do our best to strengthen the things that remain - of a spiritual link in our lives, and I appeal to each of you of the Nazarene Fellowship to indeed write in to our Editor and let us create together a meaningful and mutually encouraging voice in the Circular Letters.

Where two or three are gathered together certainly applies to the Nazarene Fellowship now, so the effort should be made and the responsibility accepted to do what we can through the C. L. and our personal contacts in life generally.

Brother Harold Dawson.

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From Brother Phil Parry:-

A previous issue of the C.L. asked for comments and opinions on the burning of weapons referred to in Ezekiel 39:9,10. From what Brother Russell expresses as his opinion he seems to infer that owing to the change in the USSR situation recently the Gog and Magog of Ezekiel may not have ever referred to Russia as generally supposed by Christadelphians and others. I myself formed a different opinion when a Christadelphian and even more recently in an article to the Circular Letter I expressed my views that the Gog and Magog confederacy of Ezekiel 38 and 39 was the one mentioned in Revelation and would include nations north of Israel, including Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq and nations around the Black Sea. The facts concerning the burning of weapons is understandable when, during the Millennium, nations have beaten their swords into plow-shares and spears into pruning hooks, no longer learning war and no factories producing weapons of steel for that purpose. I pointed out the reference in Ezekiel 39:9,10 where it says the people will not need to cut wood out of the forest nor take wood out of the field seeing there will be enough for their needs for warmth and cooking amongst the weapons used. It is obvious that they could not use steel for this purpose and I believe this to be the clue which the Prophet was empowered to give. I also asked the question in my article on the subject. If the Revelation was to indicate things that were to come to pass hereafter, why was not two mentions made of Gog and Magog by name and at two separate times, seeing that we are still waiting for the fulfilment of Ezekiel with no distinct clue to date, and yet John gives a clue at least as toward the end of the Millennium when Satan is no longer restricted, but released to deceive the nations that are in the four quarters of the earth Gog and Magog? How can it be said there are two Gogian events when only one mention is made by name, as happening after John's vision on Patmos? True, there may be a destruction of warring nations as seen by

the prophet Joel and could be confused as with Ezekiel's Gog, but this will be the introduction of God's judgments and subjection to His rule, when the inhabitants will learn righteousness through faith and through sight. Revelation 17, 18 and 19 speaks of the Beast Power being destroyed but John does not name the Beast Gog and Magog; this comes later on as I said.

Brother Phil Parry.

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Brother and Sister Linggood write:-

We should like to make a further comment on what has been written concerning the last few verses of 1 Corinthians 15. We believe the context should decide the meaning and there is no doubt that practically the whole of the chapter is about the resurrection of the physical body and change to spirit nature - not a change of status, as implied. See verses 42-44. [42. "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: 43. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: 44. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."] Presumably the Corinthian Brethren had already changed their status and were in Christ by faith and obedience but some were not clear on the subject of the resurrection and so in verse 54 [54. "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."] Paul sums up his explanation by saying that when the change of nature is accomplished "then shall come to pass (future) the saying that is written death is swallowed up in victory." Physical death is not yet swallowed up for we still die. This cannot refer to legal death. Neither do we think that Isaiah 25:8 [8. "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it."] applies to believers now. We believe it refers to the remnant of the nation of Israel in the day of their deliverance, when God will remove the rebuke of His people which they have suffered for nearly 2,000 years.

Brother Harvey and Sister Evelyn Linggood.

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"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. (See Isaiah 64:4).

For the spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." 1 Corinthians 2:9 to 12.

Brother Harold Dawson

TIMOTHY WHOM PAUL KNEW

Looking up various commentaries regarding Timothy one could well be dismayed by the things that have been written about him for typically he is described as "a weakly person"; that he was "handicapped by a sensitive and shrinking nature"; "of delicate health"; and "easily led astray by youthful lusts," and other such like nonsense.

We say, such like nonsense, because this could hardly be the impression to be gained by a regular reader of the Scriptures for it does not fairly describe the Timothy whom Paul knew.

So what can we find out about Timothy from the Bible seeing there is nothing recorded of anything he said or wrote?

The first reference to Timothy is in Acts 16 recording Paul's second visit to Lystra. Timothy, we are told, is a disciple, the son of Eunice, a Jewess, and a Greek father. While still a youth he seems to be well known and active in the Church not only in Lystra but also in Iconium, some forty miles away. We are told in 2 Timothy 3:15 that he had a good knowledge of the Scriptures and no doubt the seeds of faith would have commenced to grow at an early age encouraged by his mother, Eunice and his grandmother, Lois. The new teaching about Jesus Christ and Him crucified had spread throughout this part of Asia only a few years earlier and doubtless prayerful search was made of the Scriptures by this family and now they were convinced of the truth of these matters.

Then came the time when Paul had had a disagreement with Barnabas who had sailed off to Cyprus with Mark and it is possible that he, Paul, was now looking for someone to replace Barnabas on his travels. In Timothy Paul saw a capable young man held in high esteem by all who knew him and someone who would accept the great responsibilities of keeping the true teachings of the Gospel and would energetically resist the false doctrines already threatening the ecclesias.

So now Timothy left his mother and father and accompanied Paul and Silas as they travel throughout the towns of Phrygia and Galatia, going on to Mysia, Troas and then to Macedonia and Philippi, encouraging the Churches on the way. It is at Philippi where they experience mob violence and Paul and Silas are arrested and put in prison. It may have been that Timothy was considered too young to be a ring leader and so he escaped arrest. On this we can only speculate. However this was to be the first of many such experiences for Timothy and later he too was arrested and imprisoned, for we read in the letter to the Hebrews (Chapter 13, verse 23): "Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty." But back to the events of that night - the earthquake, the prisoners release, the conversion and baptism of the jailor and his family, could only strengthen Timothy in his conviction and resolve to follow Jesus Christ and to proclaim the Gospel message. There is no doubt that Timothy spent much of that night in prayer along with other members of the Church at Lydia's house, and what joy they had next day when Paul and Silas told their story of how they had been released. These things would hold Timothy in good stead for trials he was yet to face.

For the next two years Timothy became Paul's closest companion giving Timothy a greater strength and purpose to his life as they worked together, along with so many others, such as Erastus, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus and Trophimus and later with others, named and unnamed. Naturally Timothy would assimilate Paul's methods of preaching and to some extent, even perhaps his way of thinking. He became known to all the Churches where Paul preached and was no stranger to the Corinthians when Paul wrote to them "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every Church." (1 Corinthians 4:16,17). And later Paul wrote: "For... Jesus Christ... was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus..." (2 Corinthians 1:19). And in his letter to the Philippians Paul wrote, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man like minded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with his father, he hath served with me in the Gospel." For he has "no man like minded." What a testimony from the apostle!

Paul recognised Timothy's genuine interest in the welfare of others, his faith having withstood rigorous tests alongside him, and these things gave Paul the confidence to instruct Timothy with specific directions regarding the affairs of the Churches, as in 1 Timothy 1:3,4, "...as I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine. Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edification which is in faith: so do."

Timothy was a young man and care was needed to avoid causing offence when giving instruction to older people. This Paul recognised when he wrote “Let no man despise thy youth.” Nevertheless, he gave Timothy many things to “command and teach.” (1 Timothy 4:11,12), and entrusted to him the continued guidance of the Churches in his absence. A responsibility we can be sure was willingly accepted and wisely fulfilled. Tactful sincerity was called for: “Rebuke not an elder but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; the elder women; as mothers; the younger as sisters...” (1 Timothy 5:1,2). Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.... giving attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all...” (1 Timothy 4:12-16).

We cannot be sure how many years lapsed before Paul wrote the second letter to Timothy but it was written from Rome while Paul was a prisoner, and again Paul recalls Timothy’s family background: “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned saith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.” (2 Timothy 1:5). Paul is keen to encourage Timothy because already the apostasy of which he warned in his first letter is now getting a hold and it is to this man of unfeigned faith to whom Paul writes “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.” (verses 6 - 8).

The tone of this second letter is different from the first in that it appears to be given more as advice, as one gives to an equal, and Timothy is asked, in his turn, to pass on again “the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2), and the exhortation continues, “Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine... but watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.” The reason being that “the time will come when they shall not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (2 Tim. 4:2 - 6).

So what can we conclude about Timothy whom Paul knew? From what Paul wrote about him and to him we see Timothy as a courageous, God-fearing man, full of integrity, love and faith. It seems Paul wanted him, after being his protégé, to carry on where he left off “to fight the good fight of faith,” to “command and teach,” “to preach the word,” and of Timothy he said “I have no one like minded whom I can send.”

And so the exhortation comes down to us to our time, to all the “Timothys” of today, to continue “in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.” “Be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent you Timothy.”

Russell Gregory

Further Extracts from

THE DEVIL AND HELL OF THE BIBLE

Chapter Two

THE DEVIL OF THE BIBLE

The words Satan and devil as used in the languages in which God spoke to men, have no such ideas as are attached to them by theology.

The “Interpreter’s Dictionary” defines Satan as “the arch-fiend; chief of the devils; instigator of all evil; the rival of God; the Antichrist,” and comments:

“The Hebrew root from which the name Satan derives, means primarily “obstruct, oppose.’ It is used in the Old Testament of obstructing a man’s path (Numbers 22:22,23), opposing in war (1 Samuel 29:4), preferring charges in a court of law (Psalm 109:6), and playing the part of an adversary in general (Psalm 38:20)... “Nowhere in the Old Testament does Satan appear as a distinctive demonic figure, opposed to God and responsible for all evil... It is simply an appellative, not a proper name - i.e. it merely defines the role which the being in question happens to play in a particular situation.”

The word Satan is from the Hebrew root ‘*stn*’ meaning ‘to block, to attack.’ The Old Testament term ‘devil’ has its origin in Hebrew judicial terminology as the ‘adversary,’ especially in the sense of the accuser at court (Zechariah 3:1).

Much religious thinking and false teaching has attached to the word, ideas which it was never meant to convey. The Bible itself does not teach the existence of a literal devil that tempts men to do wrong. False teaching has mystified the meaning of the original word and given countenance to pagan demonic theories which the Bible does not support.

In the Bible, the term Satan is applied to ‘an adversary, an opposer.’ Wicked men and women opposing God and His plans are called Satan. In Bible terminology the person performing evil is a Satan, a devil. In Matthew 16:23, Jesus showed clearly how a man becomes a devil: by opposing His words, by being His adversary, Peter said to Jesus: “Lord: this shall not be unto thee; and Jesus said unto him: Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me.” Peter became a Satan, an adversary of Jesus, by opposing His words.

The Greek word ‘*diabolos*’ is the equivalent of the Hebrew ‘*stn*’ and means “an accuser, calumniator,” one who defames or reviles. It was this word *diabolos* that Jesus employed in John 6:70 when He said of Judas, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” - note again that Jesus does not say one of them is possessed of a devil but one of them is a devil.

A devil is a wicked man, not a spirit of evil that may possess a man or a monster whose all-pervading powers and influence may overcome him. Peter became a Satan by opposing Jesus; Judas became a devil by betraying his Master, by allowing his covetousness to dominate him. And we ourselves become Satan in the sight of God when we oppose the words of Jesus.

Bible Devils

Paul had a longing desire to visit his brethren at Thessalonica, and he wrote to them in the following manner: “Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us” (1 Thessalonians 2:18). Who obstructed Paul’s travels? Perhaps it was a government official. Or it may have been a sect of the Jews; on several occasions they watched the gates of the city to take his life. Once they stoned him and left him for dead; at another time, forty men vowed they would neither eat nor drink until they had taken his life. Any such Satan could have prevented his travel in this case.

But whoever this Satan may have been, of one thing we may be certain: it was not the devil of popular theology.

These same devils hindered Paul and Silas in their travels, when they cast them into the “inner prison,” and made their feet fast in the stocks (Acts 16).

This same devil or agent of evil is spoken of in Revelation 2:10, “Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried.” No monster from the infernal regions would have come forth to cast the followers of Jesus into prison. Nor would a disembodied evil spirit have such a power. The devil in this instance is someone with authority, someone opposing the religion of Jesus, having power to open and close prison doors, as did Herod when he imprisoned John the Baptist.

God and the Devil?

If we accept belief in a literal devil or power of evil, we are recognizing a second deity with a second dominion. In the Divine Record, the Bible, all power and all dominion are clearly and unmistakably ascribed to Jehovah and to Him alone. God is the First Cause and has no rivals. Through His prophet Isaiah He says, "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me" (Isaiah 46:9). Also through His servant Moses, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4). He is the One, Supreme God; He has no equal.

If we recognize a devil as a being of authority, he must have obtained that authority and power from the great Creator - for "there is no power but of God" (Romans 13:1). Why would a good wise Creator give power to a being that would continually thwart His purposes and designs and perpetrate all manner of evil?

But no, God is the one and only God. He will not share His dominion with any other. "My glory will I not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8). If the theory of a powerful devil were true, then God would share His power with another - in fact, if that be the case. He much more than shares His glory with another, for the devil of popular belief gets ten adherents to the Almighty's one.

Sin Personified.

The literary device known as personification is repeatedly employed in the Bible. For example, riches are personified in the following manner: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Wisdom is personified and termed "she": "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom... She is more precious than rubies... Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand are riches and honour" (Proverbs 3:13 - 17). Again she is represented as a Tree of life to them that lay hold upon her" (Verse 18). "Wisdom is justified of all her children" (Luke 7:35) - a clear case of personification.

Sin is also personified and termed a master. In Romans 6 this device is employed a number of times: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.... For sin shall have no more dominion over you... Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that (though) ye were the servants of sin... ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you... For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness" (Romans 6:12,14,16,17,20). Again, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8; 34; see also 1 John 3:8).

By means of personification sin is also termed devil or Satan. When Jesus said to the Jews of His time, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44), He also was employing this type of personification. He said in effect, "Ye are of your fathers, a generation of evil men." Shortly before, John the Baptist had styled them a "generation of vipers." But no one would suppose he meant a generation of literal snakes!

At the time that Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a possession, keeping back part of the price, Peter questioned Ananias, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 5). Then three hours later Sapphira, not knowing of her husband's judicial death, came with the same story about the sale of the property. To her Peter said, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" The "Satan" that had filled their hearts was their own evil devices. They had agreed together to lie to the Lord. If a powerful being called "Satan" was the instigator of the lie, then the Lord showed criminal unfairness: He let the deceiver himself escape unharmed, while punishing the deceived.

Paul describes this same Satan, or devil, sin personified, in Acts 26:16 - 18. Repeating the words he had heard from Jesus at the time of his miraculous conversion, he says "Rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose... delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of

Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”

The author of the book of Hebrews also reveals who is the devil of the Bible. In Hebrews 2:14, speaking of Christ, he says, “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Now if we can find any statement as to what has the power of death, by it we can identify the devil, for that is one of his special features. “The sting of death is sin” (1 Corinthians 15:56). “The sting of death is sin,” here we have the same answer as we obtain from Hebrews 2:14. Sin and the devil are synonymous terms. The devil has the power of death, and sin has the sting of death; hence, sin and all sinners compose the devil.

Chapter Three

SATAN AND GENESIS

According to the majority of Protestant and Catholic faiths, the devil began his work at what is called the Fall. God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, a perfect world, free of sin, where they might have lived on forever had they not disobeyed the divine injunction: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou mayest not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” But also in the Garden was a serpent, a wily subtle serpent who deceived Eve with the enticing words: “Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4,5). The forbidden fruit did look tempting; and yielding to the serpent’s enticement. Eve partook. And she “gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”

What was the result of this transgression according to theology? We quote from a typical Protestant constitution:

“Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This, their sin, God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.

“By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation.” (The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. 1805-1952).

However, this is not the teaching of the Bible. His receiving the disapproval of God did not change Adam’s physical nature, and furthermore, the guilt of sin is not inherited. God does not condemn us for the sin of our father, or grandfather, or our greatest, greatest, greatest grandfather Adam. Every individual is responsible for his own sin. The divine principle is plain:

“The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for their fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin.” “Every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.” “Every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (2 Chronicles 25:4; Jeremiah 31:30; 2 Kings 14:6; Deuteronomy 24:16). Every man shall die for his own sin - not Adam’s. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20) - it shall die, and no other.

The Serpent in Eden.

According to the Genesis narrative, the serpent was responsible for this disastrous “fall of man.” But was this serpent the devil? Who or what tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit?

To understand this we must recognize that the first three chapters of Genesis are allegorical in part. We see Adam and Eve called to work in the garden of the Lord ((Isaiah 5:7) for the reward of life eternal. Thus Adam and Eve are typical of those men and women down the ages whom God calls to serve Him. They are children of God (1 John 3:1) in the process of development. They are told to obey the commands of the Lord, but how often they yield to temptation and transgress.

What tempts them to do wrong? A literal serpent? No, they are tempted in the same manner as you and I - "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:14). Every man - Adam and Eve, and all of their posterity - is tempted "when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

Man is a generic term including both men and women, and James says that men are tempted by their own lust. Eve was tempted in like manner. Her own desires, not a crawling serpent, tempted her. The subtle serpent, which was "more subtle than any beast of the field" was her own human heart which, says Jeremiah 17:9, is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." When Eve saw the forbidden fruit of the tree... she allowed her desires to lead her, rather than obeying the divine command. And then, "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15).

The apostle Paul tells us just how Eve was tempted. We may know how the serpent tempted Eve if we know how easily our own minds are corrupted by the promptings of our hearts. "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

The minds of the people of the church at Corinth were corrupted from the simplicity of the doctrine of Christ by their own tendency to cling to their former beliefs and notions - our minds are corrupted in the same manner today.

And this is the very way Eve was beguiled by the talk of the serpent. She listened to the promptings of her own mind. There was no more a literal serpent in the Garden of Eden than there is in our hearts now. Adam and Eve simply wanted their own way and were led astray from single-hearted devotion to God by their own fleshly minds.

Enmity Between the Two Seeds

In the Genesis account we read further of enmity which existed between the woman and the serpent. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

"Between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed" - what are the two seeds? Would the Lord be talking about enmity between the children of the literal woman and the offspring of the literal serpent? What foolishness!

But enmity has always existed between the children of light and the children of darkness, the children of evil. We read: "Wisdom is justified of all her children" (Luke 7:35)? and "Ye are all the children of light... we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:5). Enmity exists between those who walk as children of light/ or the seed of the woman, and those who walk after the flesh, governed by the serpent nature.

Let us look at the first case of enmity related in the Divine Record, the enmity which existed between Cain and Abel. The apostle John tells us the cause of this enmity: "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." Here was enmity between two seeds, and enmity which led to the death of one. The enmity was between a child of wisdom and a child of the flesh.

The enmity has been the same through the ages: between Jeremiah and his persecutors, Daniel and his adversaries, Stephen and those who stoned him, Jesus and those who betrayed Him. *(See Note below)

Chapter Four

DEVILS THAT TEMPT

Having identified the devil of the Bible as evil men and women, workers of iniquity, let us now study one of 'his' best-known activities: temptation.

Workers of evil have by their strong and ever-present influence repeatedly led nobler souls astray. The children of God were well acquainted with such devils as far back as the time of Job.

Satan and Job.

The presence of Satan in Job 1 is not definite proof that the Scriptures uphold the idea of a powerful being with powers of evil capable of subduing God's powers for good. Indeed, such a position, if it could be proved, would seriously discredit the Almighty's claim to absolute fairness, to "justice and judgement," as attributed by the Psalmist (Psalm 89:14).

Note: It is disappointing to find- the writer fails to see more in Genesis 3:15. In general terms he is correct but the "seed," plural is narrowed down to one "Seed" in the promises made to Abraham after offering up Isaac, his son. Genesis 22:18, compare Galatians 3:16. "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8.

Authorities on Scripture agree that Satan, as used in Job 1, should be a proper name, as "the Satan," hence "The Satan, the slanderer of man," '*diabolis*' (The Vulgate). In the margin of the Authorized Version of the Bible the word is rendered "the Adversary." Satan in Biblical usage denotes anyone in opposition; it is a Hebrew word "signifying an adversary, an enemy, an accuser."

We learn from the 'Interpreter's Dictionary' that "In the prose prologue to the book of Job (Chapters 1/2), the member of the divine entourage who impugns the integrity of the pious man of Uz and receives permission from Yahweh to put it to the test is described as 'the satan.' Here the name means no more than 'the one who acts as accuser, or prosecuting attorney, on a given occasion.' It is not implied that this is his constant name or role, nor even that he is inherently evil."

In Job 1 the Satan tries to withdraw God's approval from Job by attributing low motives to him. The terms employed are those commonly used in a court of law, Satan playing the role of "accuser" or "prosecuting attorney."

Knowing that in Bible phraseology the terms "satan" and "devil" are applied to men and women who oppose God and disobey His law, we can the more easily understand the Satan referred to in Job 1:6. "There was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them." This Satan was a man, not a demon or a man possessed with a demon.

Just as Judas was among the apostles who gathered with Jesus at the Last Supper before His crucifixion, so Satan was among these sons of God, or servants of God (1 John 3:2) who gathered in Job's day. Here is symbolized an ever-present truth: wherever God has servants. He has enemies. The Bible speaks of Cain and Abel. Ten of the spies Moses sent to spy out the land of Canaan proved satans, adversaries to God's will, and they brought back an evil report, while only two brought back a favourable report. There were Elijah and Ahab, Samuel and Saul, King David and his erstwhile companion who at one time had been his guide and close acquaintance, but who became his arch enemy. Of him David said: "We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company" (Psalm 55:12-14). Demas was even in the yoke with Paul, and then proved his traitor.

Wheat and tares grow together; sheep and goats share the same pastures; righteous and wicked attend the same meetings. It was true in Job's day, also in Jesus' day; and it is still true in our day. Wherever there are servants or sons of God, Satan, the adversary, is present.

Who Hardened Pharaoh's Heart?

The devil? A spirit of evil? Or what?

Seven times we are told that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, three times that he hardened his own heart. Once we are told that it was God's leniency that prompted him to harden his heart. Exodus 8:15 lists this once mentioned instance: "But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart and hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had said." There is one text that specifically states that Pharaoh hardened his own heart; it is the word of the Philistine lords: "Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he wrought wonderfully among them" (1 Samuel 6:6).

Pharaoh was a tool in performing the Lord's purpose, but his action was entirely of his own volition. Every man is a free moral agent, free to choose his own course of action. God has the power to know what that action will be, and therefore He is able to fit that action into His overall divine plan.

Who Provoked David to Number Israel?

The Jehovah's Witnesses and others hold to the belief that the devil is a superbeing capable of provoking men to evil. However, such a theory cannot be the truth of the matter, for it flatly contradicts other plain Biblical statements.

If a superbeing called Satan stood up against Israel and provoked King David to number the people in defiance of God's orders, then Jesus told an untruth when He said that nothing from without entering into a man can defile him (Mark 7:20-23). And James also was mistaken when he said that "every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed," if a literal superpowerful devil can tempt men to do wrong.

To be sure, something provoked David to sin. Was it he himself or some other individual? The King's order was abominable to Joab, the chief captain of his army; hence he could not have influenced David to take the census. And there is no record of any other person influencing the King. We will let David speak for himself: "Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed" (1 Chronicles 21:17).

It was David's own ungoverned pride that was the Satan in the case; his own desire to know how great the nation under him had become, prompted him to number the people. "Even I it is that have sinned." The "Satan" who enticed David was virtually a personification of his own ego, his frailty and weakness.

Who Tempted Jesus?

The temptation of Jesus is frequently used to prove the certainty of the existence of a literal, personal devil. A moment's reflection, however, dissipates this impression. If Judas could be a devil, and yet be a man, why could not the tempter of Jesus be a man? Even Himself? We should observe that the temptation was real. The offer of a high position in this world would be a temptation to almost any man, and Jesus was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). To Jesus, with His superior powers, the offer of high position was a temptation, but He did not yield. In each instance He had the ready answer: "It is written." He yielded to His Father's will, not His own.

Who Was the Devil that Sowed Tares?

Jesus in His parable of the Tares (Matthew 13) describes another of the devil's mischievous designs. An enemy sowed tares among the wheat in a wheat field. After Jesus had sent the multitude away. He explained the parable to His disciples.

And "he... said unto them. He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one." (The word "one" is added, it does not appear in the original Greek manuscript. Two of the modern versions read: "The weeds are the wicked"; "the tares are the sons of evil.") "The enemy that sowed them is the devil" (Verses 37,38).

Like begets like, hence if the tares are the sons of evil, the devil that sowed them must be the fathers of evil. The answer is obvious: the devil represents evil men.

What Devil Contended with Michael?

According to the record of Jude (verse 9), a certain devil caused a contention with Michael the archangel in the days of Moses. Who was this devil?

We cannot believe the inspired Word pictures any altercation between a literal devil and an angel over the physical body of Moses at the time he died on Mount Nebo, for he was buried by the angels, no man knowing the place of his burial to this day. How dare we put an interpretation upon this occurrence and say that a corporate devil or Satan contended with an archangel over his body at the time of his burial?

In view of Bible teaching regarding devils, what could be the meaning of Jude 9? Why should we suppose that the contention was over the physical body of Moses at the time of his pre-arranged demise on Mount Nebo? There is not a single suggestion of such an experience in the short account in Deuteronomy 34.

A more realistic approach to the meaning of Jude 9 and one which does not conflict with the general teaching of the Bible, would be on this wise: Moses, as the archangel, "contended," that is, "argued" or "debated" (these last two terms are used in the newer versions) with the devil Pharaoh, over the freeing of the children of Israel, said to be Moses' body - his group of followers.

Now let us see how this approach fits into the picture. First, what does the name Michael mean? The name means "one like God." Can we ascertain that Moses was in God's place or like Him when the children of Israel were saved from the thralldom of Egypt? Yes, we can: "And the Lord said unto Moses, See I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land" (Exodus 7:1). We learn from this testimony that Moses was made a god to Pharaoh, or was to act in a place of authority. Again in Exodus 4:16, the Lord, speaking of Aaron, says to Moses: "And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God." Moses was acting in God's place; he was the god, or Michael, or chief one, to Pharaoh.

Now having shown who was the Michael, who was the adversary or devil? Certainly the great adversary to Moses in this transaction was Pharaoh. The entire contention was caused by this strong opposer to God. Moses' constant cry to Pharaoh was: "Thus says the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me." Michael, or Moses, the one acting in God's place, went to Pharaoh to demand that he let the people go; clearly Pharaoh was the "devil" in the case.

Who was the body of Moses over whom he, or Michael (one in God's place) and Pharaoh, the great adversary, contended? The answer is clear. It was the children of Israel. The troops under a military commander are commonly termed his body. Furthermore, in Biblical phraseology the church is called Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:23); on the same principle, Israel would have been Moses' body.

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