

## The Biblical Satan (Part One: the Hebrew Scriptures)

According to modern-day dictionaries, *satan* is defined as a being who's the foe of both God and man. But exactly how true is this definition? Let's do some digging starting at the beginning.

The Hebrew term for *satan* is based on the Hebrew letters *shin* (ש) or our letter **S**, *teth* (ט) or our letter **T**, & *nun* (ן) or our letter **N**; שטן is believed to be pronounced as *sawtawn*; with the definite article before it one would add the letter *hei* at the end (remembering Hebrew is right to left): הַשָּׂטָן.

According to Hebrew lexicographers like Strong (Strong's #7854), it refers to an opponent or enemy; according to Wilson, it refers an adversary; according to Gesenius, it refers to an adversary as in war, an enemy; and according to Girdlestone, it refers to an adversary or plotter or one who devises means for opposing another.

Here are some related terms:

The verb *sawtam* (Strong's #7852) means to lay snares, follow hostilely, persecute, oppose.

The verb *sawtan* (Strong's #7853) means to accuse or attack, to be an adversary.

The noun *sitnaw* (Strong's #7855) refers to opposition or accusation.

I also found it very interesting that the translators of the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament from which Jesus and His disciples most often quoted) chose—89% of the time, mind you—to NOT translate the Hebrew *sawtawn* with the Greek term one would expect. In other words...

Although in the Greek we have *satan* as the equivalent for the Hebrew *sawtawn* (both referring to an *adversary*) 24 of the 27 times in the Hebrew Scriptures they rather chose to employ the term *diabolos* (referring to an *accuser* of another) or *epiboulos* (referring to someone who schemes against another in order to *accuse* him, cf. Acts 9:23-24 & 23:27-30).

The only three verses that actually retain the Greek *satan* for the Hebrew *sawtawn* are First Kings 11:14, 23, & 25, and all of these are about the single subject of literal, human enemies in war against Solomon, indicating to me that these two terms were understood by ancient Hebrews to be definite synonyms of *diabolos* &/or *epiboulos*—they were that interchangeable; so to understand one would be to essentially understand the other, and we'll get to the Greek terms more a little later on in these studies. So...

The Hebrew term *sawtawn* carries with it two primary types of individual: accuser (one who attacks by word) and adversary (one who attacks by word &/or more tangibly), and these two types would, of course, include those who follow others around with hostile motives and persecute them, those who prowl around like private investigators or police detectives searching for evidence to use against someone, and even those who do the prosecuting itself against others; so we might say we have enemy-adversary, prowler-plotter, and accuser-prosecutor.

The Hebrew term *sawtawn* is found 27 times in the Hebrew Scriptures (aka the Tenakh or the Old Testament): Num. 22:22 & 32; 1 Sam. 29:4; 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kgs 5:4, 11:14, 23, 25; 1 Chr. 21:1; Job 1:6, 7,(2x), 8, 9, 12(2x), 2:1, 2(2x), 3, 4, 6, 7; Psa. 109:6; & Zec. 3:1-2(2x). Except for in the cases of Job and Zechariah, none of them have the definite article before them; in other words, in those two cases the Hebrew reads "the *sawtawn*."

Let's consider the cases without the definite article, of which there are essentially only seven.

In First Samuel 29:4, we come across a case in which Philistine lords chose to use the term *sawtawn* in reference to King David.

In Second Samuel 19:22 we come across a case in which King David chose to use the term *sawtawn* in reference to the sons of Zeru'iah.

In First Kings 5:4 we merely read of how that, at the outset of his reign, King Solomon had no *sawtawn* to worry about. But that was soon to change, for...

In First Kings 11:14, 23, & 25 we begin to come across something a little more interesting in our study: here we have statements about "the Lord" raising up two enemies against King Solomon: *sawtawn* Hadad the Edomite and *sawtawn* Rezon Bar-Eliadah with their respective armies.

In Psalm 109:6 we read David praying (again) for vengeance against some folks; this time he was asking that those who had made false accusations against him would have someone he called a *sawtawn* to make false accusations against them.

Now I'm going backwards because I wanted these various incidents to be placed in a specific order. So let's go back now.

Turn to Numbers 22. Due to a conversation a prophet named Balaam had with the Lord, he was expected by the Lord to NOT go with the Moabites to see their king, Balak, who wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites. By reading **verses 22-34** we can see a clear case of the Lord being the instigator and an angel being merely the agent through whom the instigator fulfilled his purpose; after all, the term "angel" means "messenger." So the Lord was the actual *sawtawn* of Balaam in this story. Lastly in this list...

Turn to First Chronicles for a verse that we'll connect to one in Second Samuel.

In this general story, the Lord is again upset with His wife Israel for her lack of love for (and therefore faith in) Him, essentially treating Him like dirt; so in First Chronicles 21:1 we find the following: "*Sawtawn* stood up against Israel, moving David to number Israel" (which simply means to take a census, in this case of their armies). Now...

Turn to Second Samuel 24:1. In this record of the same incident, we find this: "The anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, so He moved David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" So, according to Second Samuel, who actually played the role of *sawtawn*? Right—the Lord! 'Tis much like some of the preceding cases:

In Psalm 109 David asked *the Lord* to use someone as a *sawtawn* against his haters.

In First Kings 11 *the Lord* used Hadad-Rezon as a *sawtawn* against King Solomon.

In Numbers 22 *the Lord* sent a heavenly agent as a *sawtawn* against Balaam.

And now here in Chronicles and Samuel *the Lord Himself* is clearly indicated to a *sawtawn* against His wife, Israel, for not exhibiting her alleged love/faith.

Before we move to *sawtawn* passages with the definite article, let me say two things:

Firstly, relative to the definite article or lack thereof, scholars are at odds because some say that if the definite article is present, then it's a reference to "the" specific enemy of God and man called "the devil," while without the article it's merely a reference to any given enemy in general; but others say that with the definite article it's referring to a specific enemy in a given context, while without the definite article it's referring to the name of the devil, "Satan." So this is practically a no-win situation.

Secondly, here's my current thinking: from my studies right now, it seems to me that just because the cases we considered so far don't have the definite article doesn't really mean anything in contradistinction to the passages which do include it as some would make a big deal out of. See, think about this:

Had David turned on the Philistines and begun to war with them, then, IN THAT CASE without other variables involved such as other enemies, he would've been fulfilling *the functional role* of "the" *sawtawn* of the story; had the Zeru'iah's sons turned on David and begun to war with him, then IN THAT CASE they would've been fulfilling the functional role of "the" *sawtawn* of the story; had there been a story about a war between Solomon and Hadad, then IN THAT CASE Hadad would've been fulfilling the functional role of "the" *sawtawn* of the story. See...

In the cases so far, not only has there not been the semantics which would call for the definite article, but there also hasn't been a narrative which would've called for the definite article; for there to be a *sawtawn* specific enough to call for the definite article in any given narrative, not only would the correct semantics need to exist, of course, but also the *sawtawn* of that story would have to have his counterpart: if the *sawtawn* is an accuser, for example, then there'd need to be the accused in the story.

One more thing: Since the two definite article instances in the Hebrew Scriptures are both prophetic in nature (yes, Zechariah's vision AND the story of Job, I believe, are foreshadowings), then these two narratives don't lend much to the popular doctrine of "satan," but let me share with you what I mean. So...

Let's consider the cases with the definite article, of which there are essentially only two.

In Zechariah 3:1-2 we read of a vision of two individuals standing before the angel of the Lord in a court-like setting: Joshua the high priest and "the" *sawtawn*, Joshua's accuser: the accused and the accuser before God. Such makes perfect sense without making the *sawtawn* of this passage refer to one specific metaphysical being created by Yahweh to cause chaos everywhere as most of Christendom today seems to believe.

This passage tells us that Zechariah saw "Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and the *sawtawn* standing to his right to accuse him. Then the Lord [in this case this angel] said to the *sawtawn*, 'The Lord rebuke you, the *sawtawn*.'"

Firstly, how do we even know that the *sawtawn* of this passage was any more supernatural than Joshua? We don't. Only the Lord's angel is called an angel here. So, and this is what I'm now thinking, maybe what Zechariah *the prophet* was seeing were two people representing two parties—Joshua representing sinful (yet God's remnant) Israel as she became sinless Israel in/through Christ (the true Israel) and the *sawtawn* representing the rest of Israel who, as a collective, rejected Christ and became known as "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10). But, until all things were said and done, that old, rejecting Israel wouldn't admit that Christians were, as Zechariah 3:3-5 go on to demonstrate, the cleansed and accepted ones of God (cf. Rom. 8:30-39). So...

The Lord's angel here left it up to the Lord Himself to rebuke this *sawtawn*. Does this little story sound like another? Listen to Jude 9: "Michael the archangel, in contending with the *diabolos* [the LXX translation of *sawtawn* in Zec. 3] when he disputed about the body of Moses [which I personally think is equivalent to Joshua, both representing God's people of Israel], dared not bring against him [the *diabolos* or the *sawtawn*] a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you.'" (Cf. Zec. 3:3-5 with Jude 9 & 23.) So...

There's nothing here to support the belief/teaching of one specific fallen angel who's THE ACCUSER of mankind before God; in fact, in Second Peter 2:11 we're taught that a plural number of angels had the ability to accuse humans before God: "angels, who are greater in power & might, aren't even bringing a reviling accusation against" the unjust men of verses 9-10. OK...

Now for the last case in the Tenakh: Although the *sawtawn* of Job is expected to be seen throughout the entire story, we only find the *sawtawn* specifically mentioned in **Job 1:6-12 & 2:1-7**; so let's read those paragraphs.

Firstly, these two cases are the only cases I can think of in all of Scripture related to accusations made by a supernatural being to his Creator, the Lord; and since we just read what we did in Second Peter, it's very possible that "the *sawtawn*," the accuser in Job, isn't the same one as found in Zechariah (not just because multiple angels had the power to accuse, but also because we can't even be sure the *sawtawn* of Zechariah was any more supernatural than Joshua was).

Secondly, we ask, Who were these "sons of God" in Job who presented themselves before the Lord? I believe they were a group of angels: in Daniel 3, for example, when Nebuchadnezzar said in verse 25 that he saw what looked like "a son of God" (no def. art. in the orig.), verse 28 then has him defining what he meant by that with the term "angel." One can find in many historical writings that angels were often called "sons" or "children" since they were or are God's creation. (I say "were or are" because, with the overall way this seems to be working out, I'm actually beginning to think that the angels were created for the very purpose of aiding God in fulfilling His strategy for man's redemption: Hebrews 1:14 specifically says that the angels were ministering spirits sent to minister for those who would inherit salvation). Anyway, so...

I'm convinced that "the *sawtawn*," Job's accuser who showed up in this gathering of angels, was also an angel, one who obviously wasn't locked out of such meetings and perhaps was even expected to present himself in these councils to be interrogated concerning the fulfillment of the responsibility for which he was created; in fact, the Lord did that very thing in 1:7 to which he replied by essentially talking about how he had been roaming to and fro in the land. Now...

Does that response remind you of another statement somewhere? In First Peter 5:8, before the accuser was cast out of God's presence (Rev. 12:10), Peter warned his Israelite Christian audience to "Be sober, be vigilant, because the adversary [from an actual court term, *antidikos*] the *diabolos* [the accuser] walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." And who this accuser? Zephaniah 3:3 prophesied that the princes of Jerusalem's would become roaring lions. So...

How is Job prophetic? Well, that would take up an entire talk of its own for sure, but in short I now believe Job is a story picturing the history of Israel from its beginning to its glorious end, and so as what happened in the life of Job represented what had and would happen in the life of Israel, so the *sawtawn* represented the prowler, accuser, and enemy of God's people, many times being found within her own ranks. Oh, and as with anything relative to God's work in all of this, He used the enemies to suit His purposes, which is why Job could constantly attribute to God what was happening to him (2:10, 42:11, etc.). So in summary...

Presently I leaning toward the belief that God created angels to fulfill His work of redemption through Israel, thus at times He employed these supernatural beings to execute His bidding from things as harsh as taking human lives to freaking out a donkey.

I believe all the narratives about *sawtawn* without the definite article are to be taken at face-value as referring primarily to the Lord Himself, though what He desired to accomplish was through the agency of angels or men. And I believe the narratives about *sawtawn* with the definite article were meant to be prophetic pictures of what had happened, was happening, and what would happen in the course of God's strategy of man's reconciliation to Him.

So was or is there a negative/evil spirit realm out there opposite of God? I don't believe that at all, at least not yet; but I have much more studying to do in the Greek Scriptures. ☺ 6/22/14