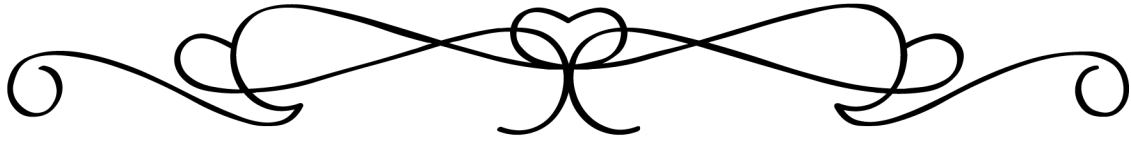


THE BIBLICAL SATAN

(Part One: the Hebrew Scriptures)



Satan in the Old Testament



BY

A SITE FOR THE LORD

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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 (שׁ) or our letter S, teth (ט) or our letter T, & nun (ן) or our letter N; שׂטן is believed to be pronounced as sawtawn; with the definite article before it one would add the letter heiat the end (remembering Hebrew is right to left): שׂטןה

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.

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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 Zerul'iah.
- 3) 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...
- 4) 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.

5) 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.

6) 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...

7) 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 super-natural 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. 9 6/22/14

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