

“Readers of this book should prepare to be surprised and to have their presuppositions shaken. Kelly, clearly a good teacher, leads us through the Bible’s gradual development of an understanding of the figure of Satan from Genesis to Revelation, as well as the interpretations of early Christian writers. His conclusions are challenging but very important for believers. An added bonus is the clarification of the book of Revelation, what it says and what it doesn’t. For that alone, the book is worth reading.”

— Irene Nowell, OSB
Mount St. Scholastica
Adjunct professor
Saint John’s School of Theology

“Joseph F. Kelly has written an excellent study on the role of Satan in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Satan is a multi-fold character with complicated lineage, and this book brings many sources together to produce a thorough synthetic analysis. Kelly examines biblical sources, Jewish and Christian commentary, rabbinic and patristic texts, and contemporary theological discourse on Satan and the problem of evil. Kelly’s book will be of interest to scholars and students interested in this topic.”

— Jeanne-Nicole Saint-Laurent
Assistant Professor of Theology
Marquette University

Who Is Satan?

According to the Scriptures

Joseph F. Kelly



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

Nihil Obstat: Reverend Robert Harren, *Censor deputatus*.

Imprimatur: ✠ Most Reverend John F. Kinney, J.C.D., D.D., Bishop of Saint Cloud, Minnesota, June 10, 2013.

Cover design by Jodi Hendrickson. Cover image: Thinkstock.

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible* © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© 2013 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kelly, Joseph F. (Joseph Francis), 1945–

Who is Satan? according to the scriptures / Joseph F. Kelly.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8146-3516-2 — ISBN 978-0-8146-3541-4 (e-book)

1. Devil—Biblical teaching. I. Title.

BS680.D56K46 2013

235'.47—dc23

2013014300

To my children-in-law:

Jung-A Kelly, Bradley Klein, and Robert Wagoner

Contents

Preface ix

CHAPTER ONE

The Problem of Satan 1

CHAPTER TWO

The Problem of Evil in the Old Testament 12

CHAPTER THREE

Jewish Apocryphal Literature 38

CHAPTER FOUR

The Devil in the New Testament: The Pauline
Epistles 54

CHAPTER FIVE

The Devil in the Gospels: Mark and Matthew 64

CHAPTER SIX

The Devil in the Gospels: Luke, John, and Acts
of the Apostles 75

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Devil in Later Epistles 86

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Book of Revelation 102

viii *Who Is Satan?*

CHAPTER NINE

The Early Christian Creation of Satan 115

CHAPTER TEN

Satan Today 136

Bibliography 153

Preface

During more than four decades of teaching religion, I have encountered many questions about Satan, especially when my courses deal with the problem of evil. The students generally want their beliefs to harmonize with those of the Bible and their churches. They wonder what the Bible says about the devil and also belief *itself* in the devil when psychology and other modern scientific disciplines seemed to have driven him into the realm of myth. They are also confused about a number of issues, such as the following: Why does 666 signify the devil? Is Satan the Antichrist, or does that term mean a human?

These are legitimate questions because many popular writers and filmmakers have mashed a number of diverse traditions into a semi-comprehensible whole, even though what they usually do is distort Christian teaching and tradition about Satan.

This little book will certainly not stop someone else from writing something titled *Satan and His Brother Antichrist* or, in a less patriarchal vein, *Is the Antichrist a Woman?* What this book will do is introduce the reader to what the Bible actually says about Satan and other evil biblical figures.

Why just the Bible? Because the Christian satanic tradition is immense. America's foremost scholar of

Satan, Jeffrey Burton Russell, needed four volumes to explicate it. Treating Satan in the Bible will make this book more accessible to those not able to delve into twenty centuries of traditions and theology about Satan.

There is another reason for focusing on Scripture. Liturgical Press has a strong Roman Catholic orientation, but it is an ecumenical publisher, and this book is by an ecumenical Roman Catholic. Christian churches agree and disagree, fraternally, on any number of issues, but all accept the authority of Scripture. I hope to make this book more ecumenical by treating the one source all churches accept as authoritative.

Many people helped to make this book possible. First and foremost is Hans Christoffersen, publisher, academic and trade division, at Liturgical Press, who was open to the idea of an introductory book on Satan and who has provided support and encouragement throughout.

Several people at John Carroll University likewise provided support. I received a reduced teaching load to write this book, and my thanks to my (then) chairperson, Dr. John Spencer, for recommending me for the reduced load. My thanks also to the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Jeanne Colleran, who supported my request, and Dr. John Day, academic vice president, who formally awarded me the load reduction.

To carry out the necessary work, I needed specific resources. My thanks to Dr. Lauren Bowen, associate academic vice president and chair of the University Committee on Research and Service, who granted me funds to purchase needed materials.

Helping me with my initial work on Satan in the New Testament was Jurell Sison, my graduate assistant in 2011–12; my thanks to him for his fine work. Helping me with the later work and doing a great deal of proofreading was my current graduate assistant Kristen

Pungitore. She did thorough work, did it quickly, and was never hesitant to suggest some helpful alterations to the text. I am grateful to her for making this a better book.

Any deficiencies in the book are the sole responsibility of the author.

This book is dedicated to my three children-in-law: Jung-A Kelly, wife of my son Robert and mother of my granddaughter Marion Yena Kelly; Bradley Klein, husband of my daughter Alicia; and Robert Wagoner, husband of my daughter Amy and father of my granddaughters Hannah Laine and Jenna Grace Wagoner.

As always, my deepest gratitude goes to my wife, Ellen Marie Kelly, a loving partner of forty-five years who has always encouraged my work and made sacrifices so that I could write. No words could ever say what she means to me or what I owe to her.

Joseph F. Kelly
John Carroll University

CHAPTER ONE

The Problem of Satan

In his *Christian Doctrine for Everyman: An Introduction to Baptist Beliefs*, Jimmy Millikin says, "We know they [demons] are real personalities. They are capable of intelligent, voluntary actions. . . . We know also that they are spiritual beings . . . with great power. Demons are 'unclean spirits,' which means they are depraved and wicked in their nature. . . . The work of demons is essentially the same as that of Satan. Their main occupation is . . . opposing the will and purposes of God" (134).

Davis Britton in his *Historical Dictionary of Mormonism* says Satan is a "real spirit personage who leads the forces of evil and tries to defeat God's purpose. In the pre-mortal existence this spirit, also a child of God, rebelled and took with him a portion of the host of Heaven. . . . Since then Satan has tried to frustrate the Plan of Salvation" (214).

The web site catholic.com says that the "Catholic Church has always held that the devil is real, not a mythical personification of evil." The site then quotes a 1975 Vatican document, *Christian Faith and Demonology*: "It is a departure from the picture painted by the Bible and Church teaching to refuse to acknowledge the devil's existence."

The fundamentalist web site christcenteredmall.com teaches that "Satan and his cohorts have lied, sinned, murdered, persecuted, and made war against God's creation since the Garden of Eden," and "one of the reasons the devil exists is so the children of God can grow up into the full stature of Jesus Christ."

Clearly the people behind these statements believe in the devil and take him very seriously. Yet in heavily Catholic northern New Jersey, the local professional hockey team is named the Devils. In conservative-Protestant North Carolina, college sports fans can root for the Duke University Blue Devils and the Wake Forest University Demon Deacons. In very conservative-Protestant Mississippi, fans can root for the Mississippi Valley State University women's athletic teams, which are called the Devilettes! This lack of concern about taking Satan lightly extends beyond the range of sports. Consider the San Antonio, Texas, firm, Lucifer Lighting Company. If you need heat as well as light, you can call Lucifer Furnaces, Inc., of Warrington, Pennsylvania. You can even eat demonically because the Food Network can teach you how to make Satanic Fudge Brownies.

What is going on here? How can people believe that the devil is a thoroughly evil being, roaming about the world seeking the destruction of souls, and simultaneously believe there is nothing wrong with naming athletic teams and business companies after him? Would people name teams or companies after people or groups that they truly loathe and fear? Can anyone seriously picture a team named the Tacoma Terrorists or a food company named Nazi Nachos?

Clearly, modern people, including modern believers, have conflicting views of the devil. Part of that derives from a lack of knowledge about what the church teaches about the devil and, more fundamentally, what the Bible says about him. For example, on June 6, 2006 (the sixth

day of the sixth month of the sixth year—666), newspapers, television stations, and the web carried stories about people who feared a day numbered 666 since that was the number of the devil. In fact, it is not. The number 666 appears in only one place in the Bible, Revelation 13:18, and that verse says, “it is the number of a human being, the number 666.” But Christian tradition teaches that the devil is a spiritual being, a fallen angel, and since 666 refers to a man, it simply cannot apply to Satan.

Such confusion is not unusual. The Bible has the distinction of being the one book people do not read but are still convinced they know what is in it. Some widely known and often quoted “Bible” verses simply do not exist. For example, a famous image of a peaceable kingdom is one in which, the Bible supposedly says, “the lion will lie down with the lamb.” This famous verse, Isaiah 11:6, actually reads, “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion shall browse together, and a little child will lead them.” Over centuries of misquoting, this verse metamorphosed into the now-familiar one.

Along those same lines, many people believe that the Gospel of Matthew tells us that three kings named Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar rode on camels to give gifts to the infant Jesus. Actually all the gospel says is that “magi” came from the East. The gospel never gives their names, calls them kings, says they rode on camels, or even mentions how many of them there were.

In this book our focus will be to specify, examine, and sometimes clarify biblical teaching about the devil, since the scriptural teachings are the essential ones that all churches refer to. Then we will take a brief look at postbiblical developments that magnified the devil’s role in Christianity—often leaving Scripture behind in the process—and we will finish with a consideration of modern attitudes and teachings about Satan.

But before we start, let us deal with several important preliminary matters.

“Satan” or “Devil”?

Who exactly are we talking about in this book?

In the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) we find the word *satan*, meaning “adversary,” a word sometimes used to refer to human beings. For example, when the sons of a man named Zeruah challenge King David, he asks them what right they have to play the *satan* against him (2 Sam 19:22). Gradually the word *satan* was transformed to spiritual beings and then to evil spiritual beings. Eventually it came to stand for just one being, a particularly powerful one.

When this word was translated by ancient Jews into Greek—the language of the New Testament—it was rendered *diábolos*, the Greek word for “adversary.” From there it became *diabolus* in Latin, which became *diavolo* in Italian, *diablo* in Spanish, *diable* in French, *Teufel* in German, and *devil* in English. Thus Satan and devil are equivalent terms. Later in the book we will see where other names such as Lucifer and Beelzebub came from.

Modern Biblical Study

Since we are focusing upon what the Bible says about the devil, we need to know something about modern biblical study or, to use the technical term, exegesis.

Biblical exegesis has become very controversial today, largely because a sizeable group of very conservative Christians, generally called fundamentalists, practice a literal understanding of much of the Bible. Their strongest focus has fallen upon the opening chapters of the book of Genesis, those dealing with the creation, the Garden of Eden, the Fall, and Noah’s Flood, all of which they take as actual historical events. Since most

high schools and all accredited colleges and universities teach about biological evolution and billions of years of existence for the universe, many fundamentalists have objected to what their children are learning in school, believing that modern science challenges and even mocks the Bible. Fundamentalist groups have lobbied for the teaching of creationism or intelligent design in schools, and they have established their own biblical institutes and other intellectual centers such as the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky (founded in 2007).

Let me say, with all goodwill, that I admire the faith of the fundamentalists and their great ardor to protect the Bible from what they perceive to be malicious attacks upon its veracity. But I am a Roman Catholic, and in this book we will take the approach to the Bible used by Catholic, Jewish, and mainline Protestant scholars. Obviously members of these traditions do not always agree with one another's interpretations of the Bible, but they also disagree among themselves. It is not uncommon for a Catholic scholar to propose a certain interpretation of a biblical passage, only to find another Catholic scholar disagreeing while a Jewish scholar agrees with the former and a Protestant scholar disagrees with them both. This is modern exegesis!

While modern scholars may disagree with one another about particular biblical verses, they do not disagree on the overall method of understanding the Bible. Founded mostly by the German Protestants in the nineteenth century, modern exegesis seeks to understand the world in which the Bible was written on the logical grounds that if we do not understand the place, time, environment, and worldview of the biblical writers as well as the literary genres they employed, we will never understand the biblical text.

At first glance, this does not seem to present problems, not even to fundamentalists. For example, the

Bible speaks constantly about slavery. God gave Abraham slaves. Hebrew legal codes in the books of Exodus and Leviticus take slavery for granted. Israelite monarchs owned slaves. The apostle Paul not only accepted slavery as an institution but actually told slaves who had converted to Christianity not to be concerned about being slaves (1 Cor 7:21), while the author of the First Epistle of Peter told slaves to be subject to their masters with reverence, even if the masters were abusive (1 Pet 2:18).

All modern believers must accept that most ancient Jews and Christians saw nothing wrong with slavery and accepted it as part of social and economic life. Yet what modern believer would claim that these passages justify slavery today (as nineteenth-century supporters of slavery in the United States did)?

But the important point that fundamentalists and mainline believers recognize is that this ancient practice, validated throughout the Bible, was an *ancient attitude not binding on contemporary believers*. Fundamentalists would denounce and repudiate anyone who claimed that the Bible justifies slavery for modern believers.

Mainline exegetes would agree, but they would go further. They would study how the ancient economy worked. They would point out that everyone who wrote in favor of slavery, or at least who did not condemn it, was not a slave himself (all the authors were male). Modern scholars would note how slaves were often prisoners of war or descendants of them; they would also note that men did most of the purchasing of slaves and that female slaves were often bought for sexual purposes. They would also point out that the slaves were considered property—rather like animals—and thus the owners could demand that slaves do whatever they wished. Grasping facts like these enables exegetes to understand why biblical writers could support and even defend slavery.

But modern scholars apply this same method to all of the Bible in order to understand what the biblical writers meant, because if modern believers do not know what the Bible *meant*, they cannot understand what it *means* to them.

And this is where modern scholarship parts company not just with fundamentalists but sometimes with many believers. Let me give some examples.

At the end of his gospel (24:51) and the opening of his second book, the Acts of the Apostles (1:9-10), the evangelist Luke recounts the ascension of Jesus into heaven when Jesus literally rose up into the air and disappeared into a cloud. In thousands of churches, this scene has been reproduced in stained glass, paintings, and statues.

But, modern scholars ask, how could this have happened? Luke tells us that Jesus entered heaven by going up into the air. But how can heaven be above the clouds when science has demonstrated that beyond our earth is almost all empty space with the occasional star? Modern scholars—and even a conservative theologian like Pope John Paul II—teach that heaven is a state of being, not a physical place above the sky.

So modern biblical study negates the ascension? Not at all.

Modern scholars would point out that Luke had a theological point to make. Jesus had finished his mission on earth and would now return to his Father so that the Holy Spirit could come to earth to continue Jesus' work. But in Luke's day, people believed heaven to be above the earth, a view that persisted until the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What modern believers must do is accept that Luke was a man of his age and that the views of his age should not be imposed on us. We can accept Luke's point that Jesus returned to his Father in heaven; we cannot accept his supposition that heaven is a place above the clouds.

This is a good example of how modern scholarship works: trying to understand what the biblical writer wrote *and why*, interpreting the biblical passage for the modern world, and demonstrating that this modern approach does not corrupt the Bible but in fact saves it.

Saves it by denying it happened physically? Yes. If moderns are told that they must accept that heaven is a place above the clouds because twenty centuries ago in a prescientific age Luke said that it was, their response will not be belief but skepticism and ultimately rejection. Biblical truth need not be literal truth.

If we can sum up the different approaches in one sentence, it would be: *Modern exegetes are willing to let the biblical writers be who they actually were while others want to force the Bible into the modern world.*

To return to the scriptural text, since Luke's account of the ascension reflects his view of the cosmos, are there other areas in which modern scholars doubt the literalness of a biblical account? Absolutely.

Modern believers want to state their religious beliefs in highly intellectual theological propositions and, where possible, back them up with facts. Ancient believers certainly did that, but they were also willing to express their beliefs in legends and even myths. Consider the account of the Exodus.

Exodus (7:14–12:30) tells us that God inflicted ten plagues upon the Egyptians because Pharaoh would not let the Hebrew slaves leave. If taken literally, we are supposed to believe that Pharaoh's stubbornness literally wrecked Egypt and harmed its people—but there was no revolution or at least a palace coup? Everyone in Egypt stood docilely by while Pharaoh did nothing to stop the destruction?

There is also a strong moral argument—the tenth plague. God is angry with Pharaoh, but instead of afflicting him with leprosy or blinding him until he re-

lents, God murders several hundred thousand innocent Egyptian children. Does anyone today really believe in God the mass murderer? No, but you must if you take this account as a historical one.

The problem with taking so much of the Bible as absolutely factual ranges even into its very wording. Luke (11:2-4) and Matthew (6:9-14) have different versions of the Lord's Prayer, Matthew's being the familiar one. They also have different versions of the Beatitudes (Luke 6:20-23 and Matt 5:3-9), and again, Matthew's is the familiar one. It is difficult to say that we have pure historical accounts when Jesus' very words differ in the gospels.

But even this is not a problem for modern exegesis because we know that in the ancient world, much was passed along orally. Abraham lived around 1800 BC, but accounts of him, his sons, the twelve tribes, the Exodus, and so much more of early Israelite history were not written down until literally hundreds of years later. The people passed the accounts along orally, and no doubt the occasional word or phrase became lost or modified, so that the writers of the Bible would sometimes have to re-create what happened and what was said. Furthermore, what might have been important in 1500 BC may not have meant much to people living in 500 BC, and so the biblical writers worked with the accounts to make them clear to their contemporary audiences and occasionally to add material for purposes of comprehension and interpretation. We must never forget that every author writes for an audience.

This brief description of modern exegesis and of the difficulty of taking some biblical passages as factual accounts hopes to prepare the reader for the Bible's account of Satan, whom the ancient Jews and Christians believed to be an existing being but who is not a historical figure in the sense that, for example, Solomon

and Peter were. When we look at biblical accounts of Satan, we will use modern exegesis, considering the historical situation, the type of written material in which Satan appears, and the intent of the writer in speaking about him.

Origins and Development

The greatest modern scholar of Satan is Jeffrey Burton Russell, who wrote a four-volume history of Satan between 1977 and 1986. In this still-invaluable work, Russell studied how people understood Satan from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia to the modern world. He put much stress on the development of the traditions about the devil, especially within Christianity.

He proposes “that a concept is *not* best understood in light of its origins, but rather in light of the direction in which the tradition is moving.” He rejects what he calls “the genetic fallacy: that the true meaning of a word—or an idea—lies in its pristine state” (*The Devil*, 49–50).

This is a common notion among historians, but it is also a Christian idea because Christians believe that God did not just drop off some revelatory package, leave us to decipher its contents, and then tell us that our first understanding of the revelation is normative for all times. Christians believe that God continues to act within the community, within the church, and that ideas and doctrines that emerged later than the Scriptures have validity, although any subsequent development must be grounded in Scripture.

To use a prominent example, the doctrine of the Trinity as three persons who participate in the one divine substance or essence is a product of the first ecumenical council of Nicea of the fourth century and reflects the theology of the Greek-speaking and Greek-thinking theologians who produced it. This theological

and doctrinal formulation does not appear in the Bible, but no Christian can envision the faith without the Trinity. In fact, when Nicea proclaimed its teaching, some bishops complained that this teaching was not in Scripture, but the leading theologian of Nicene trinitarianism, Athanasius of Alexandria, replied that the Nicene formula represented the essence of Scripture—that is, the theology of the Trinity grew out of scriptural words and teachings on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We will take that same approach with Satan and not presume that the devilish figure who first appears in the Bible around 500 BC is the normative Satan for all time. As we shall see, the Jewish idea(s) of Satan kept on developing well after 500 BC, and the Christians, who borrowed heavily from these Jewish ideas, understood Satan as he related to their belief in Jesus Christ—that is, they developed ideas and concepts of Satan that differed from the initial Jewish one but that looked back to it.

Development of ideas and teachings is both normal in Christianity and good for Christianity, protecting it from becoming fossilized and irrelevant to the never-ending numbers of new believers, and development is still going on in the twenty-first century.