

Advent: *What the Devil is Satan About?*

Ken Wilson 12.1.19

Last Sunday Emily began series on monsters of Bible. Covered some doozies— like Rabisu, the crouching demon. These strange figures pop up to our great mystification/consternation ... and a little modern **condescension**. *What would we expect from ancient people and their primitive belief systems--* forgetting monsters have always been a staple of literature and art, to present day.

We're all in a little over our heads, trying to make sense of a world with terrifying elements. So we are fascinated by vampires, zombies, orcs, snakes and other mythical creatures that pop out of our psyche to scare the living daylights out of us.

This has to serve some function. As if by naming the monsters we're trying to **face** in our **waking hours** the things that terrify us at night. Sounds stupid to have to say but art & literature are legitimate ways of dealing with real things beyond our understanding— especially having to do with mystery we call evil.

Today not messing with minor monsters; going for **Big Kahuna**: In Hebrew, *satan*, in Greek, *diablos*, devil. **Where the devil did Satan come from and what reality in our world is Satan about?**

Begin with a brief history of *satan* in Scripture. Has to be brief because there's no origin story for a being named Satan. Italian poet **Dante** in his 14th century fantasy fiction called *The Inferno*, spawned much of popular imagination about Satan. Dante portrays Satan as a giant demon, frozen mid-breast in ice at the center of Hell. Satan has three faces and a pair of bat-like wings affixed under each chin. But in Scripture, all remarkably sketchy.

Original term is *satan*, in Hebrew, simply translated, **accuser**. Greek equivalent (NT written in GK) is *diablos*, **devil**

In OT mostly refers to a **function**, not a **proper name**: *hasatan*, the satan—an accuser, sometimes a prosecutor in a court room scene.

Book of Job (not historical) begins with such a scene. Another in Zechariah, a minor prophet. Job opens with an **imaginary scene**: heavenly court, where one member functions as an

accuser. The heavenly-vision scene is then **mirrored** in what happens on earth, between Job and his so-called friends. They understand his misfortune as punishment from God, and so their “support” is pointing out to Job how he must have sinned to deserve this.

(Like having a roommate, you say, “I woke up with a cold” they say, “Did you use that hand sanitizer I gave you?)

Problem with fixating on Satan as Scary Spirit Being (like Dante’s Satan) we lose Hebrew focus on **function**—the it-ness, the thing-ness, not the who-ness of *hasatan*. Real question is not “**Who is Satan?**” – but, **What does *hasatan* in Scripture signify, what does it reveal about us? What reality in our world is *satan* about?**

PSLAM 109

*God of my praise, do not be silent. For the wicked’s mouth, the mouth of deceit, has opened against me, they spoke to me with lying tongue. And words of hatred swarmed round me—they battle me for no cause. In return for my love they **accuse** [Heb. *satan* in verb form] me, though my prayer is for them. And they offer me evil in return for good, and hatred in return for my love. (VSS. 1-5)*

There follows a long speech of accusation—quoting a group of people close to him, who have become an accusing mob.

*They say, “Appoint a wicked man, let an **accuser** [Heb. *satan* noun form] stand at his right. When he is judged let him come out guilty, and his prayer be an offense. Let his days be few ... his children become orphans, his wife a widow...may his children wander and beg, driven out from the ruins of their homes”—and so for 13 vss.*

These words of accusation are seared in memory of psalmist. Why do they register so powerfully? Because our belonging to groups is key to our survival so our brain is specially attuned to **accusing words** that **signal threat** to **belonging** (survival).

In remainder of the Psalm the besieged psalmist is cries out to God to help him, to save him from this accusing mob.

So PS 109 is a **scapegoating psalm**, written by someone being scapegoated, recounting the terrifying words of the accusing mob.

PS 109 is applied to Jesus as he was undergoing this experience. In John 15, as day of crucifixion nears, John quotes ***“They encircle me with words of hate, and attack me without cause”***

PS. 109 is **foundational** for understanding **function** of *hasatan*.

LUKE 4 is tutorial on *hasatan* as the agent of scapegoating

Luke, author of Luke – Acts. Acts features Paul’s being a ringleader of scapegoating, then leaving behind his scapegoating ways—as if that’s heart of the Jesus-induced transformation. So Luke sees **especially attuned to the dynamics of scapegoating.**

SCENE 1: Judean Wilderness where Jesus has a mystical experience of *hasatan* in what was probably a series of visions.

Now I get to say, “I was there!” Judean Wilderness within eye shot of Jerusalem. **Barren**, not like deserts in SW US. **Beautiful** (rolling hills, valleys) and **Stark** (hot in day, cold night, blazing sun, pitch dark). Ultimate place to **unplug** from **overstimulation**. A place of **sensory deprivation**. A place to have visions.

A figure called ***diabolos*** (devil, accuser-slanderer) comes to Jesus in his visions, to dissuade him from his mission. Turn these stones into bread, etc. Final vision in Luke 4: *diabolos* takes Jesus up the temple mount and urges him to throw himself off the cliff.

Common form of scapegoating in ancient world—a mob driving an accused person off a cliff to their death; no single individual responsible because that’s how scapegoating mobs roll.

Wilderness prepares Jesus for public ministry—exposing and confronting the tendency of human beings to resolve conflicts by scapegoating a member of group, or minority within group.

He will endure fate of a scapegoat—come under a cloud of accusation—and be **raised** from **dead** as a sign of his **innocence**, and the innocence all victims thought to be guilty by accusing mob

SCENE 2: Jesus is his hometown synagogue in Nazareth.

In Israeli city north of the **West Bank** (West of Jordan River, Eastern side of Israel) ... Today Arab-Palestinian town, 2/3 Muslim, 1/3 Christian. Bethlehem in West Bank, surrounded by wall, occupied territory. (Palestinians pay taxes, don't vote) More like Nazareth in time of Jesus, under Roman occupation.

“And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and as he was accustomed to do, he entered the synagogue on the day of the Sabbath”

Jesus spent his childhood in Nazareth, then a village of 150 people or less. We stayed at Sisters of Nazareth, convent. Beneath convent, ruins of small home from period of Jesus.

What unfolds in Nazareth is a scapegoat event: **Jesus is driven from his home by people he knew and loved and grew up with.**

Common experience in messed up world. Here in our congregation many people have been driven from their homes-families. Or not welcome in certain parts of the State, because of color of skin.

Unwanted attention, being under suspicion, subjected to accusation, are the dynamics that drive this group hostility.

SCENE 2 is a tutorial in the fickleness of crowds—how they can go from **friendly** and **festive** to **hostile** in heartbeat.

Steve Bartmann Incident, 2003 Postseason. Cubs advancing in playoff after long drought. 4 outs from winning when Marlins hit fly ball into foul territory. Cubs outfielder reaches for the ball, but it's deflected by a Cubs fan, Steve Bartmann ... Marlins rallied win game, went on to win the series. Poor Cub fan had to be escorted out of the part by police for his own

protection—his personal info posted online, he had 'round the clock protection **In 2016 Cubs invited him to throw out game ball**—he declined, didn't want the attention; instead, gave him a championship ring for all abuse)

Read this with a sensitivity to crowd dynamics. I picture this happening not in a staid, frosty, English speaking church-like setting, but in a more expressive/bordering on **raucous** event with people who all knew each other. In his remarks, Jesus is responding to things he's hearing from the crowd

LK. 4: 17-30

SCENE 3: Ruckus in the Capernaum synagogue LK. 4: 31–36

To be under occupation is to be under **scrutiny** (unwanted attention) **suspicion**, subjected to **false accusation**. In NYC, "STOP & FRISK"—black men stopped and frisked at much higher rates. What does that say? You're under suspicion, authorities keeping an eye on you, always under threat of accusation.

Anthropologists have noted people under occupation develop symptoms like this man had: Internalizing the accusation of occupation forces [name of "demon" would be occupation force)

Man says, "**Have you come to destroy us?**" Clue that he has internalized accusing-mob voices—either of occupation forces, or his hometown synagogue. And Yes, Jesus has come to destroy, to disperse, scapegoating mobs. (Woman caught in adultery)

TAKEAWAY: Focusing on Satan as a proper name for a scary spirit being can distract from more important question: **what in human dynamics-society does *satan* signify?**

The MONSTER of *satan* is us when we are operating in accusing-mob mode ... something comes over us in groups that is beyond us and we have to resist not yield to it.

Groups of humans do this: subject certain people to unwanted attention, suspicion, accusation ... heart of systems of oppression.

Spirit of God is on Jesus to lead us out of bondage to this—so we don't perpetrate, cooperate with it, and when we're subjected to it, we have a voice-power of defense in our hearts. To follow Jesus is to get with that program.

In John's gospel, Jesus gives a special name to this Spirit of God on him: *paraclete*. Defender of the accused. Undoing the work of unwanted attention, suspicion, accusation

QUIET REFLECTION: Invoking Holy Spirit

"And you O Lord, act on my behalf, for the sake of your name, for your kindness is good. O save me!"

Picture yourself, if you can, identify being subjected to that; if not, picture someone you know/love who has faced it; pray it as if you were that person. [anointing, dab on hand beautiful smell]

Luke 4: The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³ He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” ²⁴ And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. ²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷ There were also many lepers^[d] in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.