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THE APOSTLE EYORE

In 1926 the British author and playwright A.A. Milne introduced us to the 100 Acre Wood and its citizens. The main character was based on a real Canadian black bear that had been a military mascot that was left to the London Zoo. His original name was Edward but Milne renamed him Winnie the Pooh. Winnie had another name that hung over his doorway. Do you remember what it was? I'll tell you at the end of this article. Pooh was not too bright and his one mission in life was to find, store and eat "hunny" to "fill a rumble in his tumble". He was sure to do his exercises in the morning and then seek adventures with Christopher Robin and his best friend Piglet, or as Pooh was wont to call him, Pig-a-let. Pooh must have been from Texas, always wanting to add a syllable to any word.

Other inhabitants of this magical land include the no-nonsense Rabbit; and Tigger, the bouncy tiger who insists that he is special because, "I'm the only one!" Owl is called upon by Pooh for life's countless questions, and dispenses his pearls whether asked or not. The only female in this male dominated world is Kanga who cares for and worries about baby Roo. The master of this world is Christopher Robin who can always be counted on to help his friends out of trouble.

Lastly there is everyone's favorite, Eeyore. He roams the wood with a nailed-on tail with a bright pink bow attached. His one flaw is that he views life from a very pessimistic point of view. Perhaps that's why he is a favorite among the readers of the Pooh books.

This brings me to the main subject of this article, the Apostle Thomas. Thomas is named along with Philip, Matthew, Bartholomew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus. His other name is Didymus, which means twin. It is interesting to note that James and Matthew were sons of Alphaeus. It is possible that these three were indeed brothers, one of the others being his twin.

It is from three passages in the gospel of John that we learn his character: slow to believe, always bringing up the difficulties in each case, usually seeing the dark side of every subject, and yet fiercely loyal to Jesus. Sounds a lot like Eeyore doesn't it?

In Jn 11:16, Jesus announced His determination to go to Jerusalem. The others reminded Him of the danger in this action. Jesus knows He must go. So our friend

Thomas says, "Well fellows lets go and die with Him!" Or, "Ok Pooh, what ever you say."

In chapter 14 of the book of John, Jesus tells them that he is going away to prepare a place for them and that they already are aware of where He is going and how to get there. Thomas, probably voicing the sentiments of the others, says, "Excuse me, Jesus, but we haven't a clue as to where you are going much less how to get there!"

The rest of that night is written in the minds of all the apostles. Their chance to defend Jesus and "die with Him" is forgotten as they all flee for their lives. The next time we see Thomas is in the upper room. Jesus has risen and has visited the 10 in that room. For whatever reason Thomas was absent from that eventful meeting. Perhaps, being Thomas (or Eeyore) he was so devastated by the death of Jesus that he felt that everything was now over, so what's the use! Eeyore's favorite term was, "Oh, well."

Then it happened! Jesus appeared a second time in a closed room. Thomas was there that time. Jesus merely offered Thomas the chance to do what he wished, place his fingers in His hands and His side. Without doing what he said he wanted to do he was convinced. We lose Thomas to scripture here. Tradition states that he went to India to spread the Gospel, and there met his death.

How about us? The evidence is there in front of us. It starts back in the OT and culminates in the NT. Prophecy-fulfilled evidence placed in front of us. It's all there and like Thomas we don't have to put our fingers into the wounded hands or thrust our fists into the gaping hole in His side. All that is left is for us to confess, "My Lord and my God."

By the way the name written over Pooh's door...Mr. Sanders.

Marcos Romero

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THE DEVIL, YOU SAY

It is amazing how many things we know are in the Bible just are not in there, or at least are not in there as we know them. These range from the harmless (“God helps those who help themselves.”) to the potentially dangerous (the doctrine of “the Antichrist”). They reach into all aspects of our spiritual lives and worship. Thus we have congregations who think the elders have responsibility for the budget and physical operations, such as deciding whether or not to start construction of a new building. There are people who think that a preacher who is not an elder is a pastor. Some people think that the story in *Paradise Lost* about the devil’s rebellion can be found in the Bible.

Most of these are pretty harmless. It probably won’t mean you are going to hell if you add to the duties of the elders (unless by so doing you take them away from their true duty of watching over the spiritual growth of their flock). You won’t endanger your soul if you think the concept of immersion (baptism) began with John.

One such probably-harmless discussion centers around just who Satan is. Most would answer the question, “Is the devil Satan?” with a yes. Some would answer the question, “Is Satan the devil?” with a definite

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maybe. Just for fun, let’s look at this question of who Satan is.

The Adversary

The Hebrew word transliterated Satan simply means an adversary, one who opposes. A number of times in the standard translations of the Bible it is specifically translated as a general term. . In most cases it is a noun. Once it is even used as a verb.

There is a verb, based on a person’s name, that is not in common use in baseball, and its use is specifically forbidden in the city of Houston. That verb is “to biggio.” It means to intentionally move so as to be hit by a pitched ball while appearing to get out of the way. (Baseball rules allow an umpire to deny a batter hit by a pitch the right to go to first base if, in the umpire’s opinion, the batter intentionally moved into the path of the ball.) This verb is based on a great Houston Astros player, Craig Biggio, who holds the

National League record for being hit by a pitch. While most Houston fans disagree, many other people believe that he frequently got away with illegally ensuring that he was hit by a pitch that should have missed him. Thus some people have used his name as a verb. There is one instance in the Bible where Satan is used in a similar way. In the story of Balaam and his speaking ass, the angel says, “And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me.” (Num 22:32) Literally it reads, “I went out to Satan you.”

Just ten verses earlier, the scripture says the angel stood in his way “as an adversary against him.” Several other times the Bible uses the word in this very generic sense. Three times in 1 Kings 11 specific human kings are called adversaries of Solomon. In 1 Samuel 29 the rulers of Philistia fear lest David, who is not yet king and who has been living amongst them, might become a Satan (adversary) to them in battle against Saul. In 1 Kings 5:4 Solomon claims to be at peace, having neither adversary nor evil chancing to come his way.

Satan in the Old Testament

Other than those previously mentioned, the other uses in the Old Testament refer to a specific, probably angelic being. This is the person that most people think is the devil. Some rabbis, however, have proposed a different interpretation of this being.

In most, if not all, of the Old Testament references to Satan, he is a being that stands before God in the position of a prosecuting attorney. He is not necessarily an adversary of God, although he certainly stands in an adversarial position in relation to a person who stands before God.

In the English system of justice, of which the American system is a subset, we are quite familiar with this type of person. When an individual is accused of a crime, he has the right to have a lawyer (barrister in Britain) represent him in matters before the court. On the other side of the process a district attorney (in the United States) represents the interests of the state. The lawyers on both sides should be well versed in case law, in all of its nuances. The only significant difference between sides is the employer. The one is employed by the accused; the other is employed by the state. Significantly, crime dramas notwithstanding, neither is inherently good or evil. So it is with Satan in the Old Testament.

It should be noted that there is a pair of scriptures in which the name or title Satan does not appear. Isaiah 14:12 makes a reference to “Lucifer,” in connection with

the king of Babylon. Many people associate Lucifer with Satan, although this scripture (the only use of the word Lucifer) never does. In fact, most English translations of the Bible translate the word as “star of the morning” or “daystar,” rather than making it a name. The other misconception is that the serpent in Genesis 3 is necessarily Satan. It is conceivable that the serpent represents a being who, in his adversarial role, acts on God’s behalf to determine whether Adam and Eve will obey God’s law. It is also conceivable that the serpent represents the devil, specifically tempting our original forebears with the intent of causing them to sin. These are two different possible interpretations of the story, and so it is possible that the serpent fits the Old Testament example of Satan, or that he does not.

The best-known description of the Satan and his function in the Jewish scriptures can be found in the early chapters of the book of Job. If Satan is to be necessarily equated with the devil, then this causes some theological problems. How could an evil Satan come into the sinless presence of God (and why could not sinful man do so without benefit of forgiveness)? Or was this before the “fall” of Satan (and therefore Satan could not be the serpent of Genesis 3)? On the other hand, could this be an angel standing in the position of, and bearing a title rather than a name of, Satan in God’s court? As presented in Job, this individual acts more as a representative of God, an advocate for the state, rather than as an enemy of God and of Job. Everything in these early chapters of the book (indeed the whole structure of the book) is in the form of a court appearance. The Satan acts as the prosecutor, and God (in this instance) acts as the defense attorney rather than the judge. Satan’s purpose in Job is not necessarily the destruction of Job’s faith, but rather the testing, and therefore strengthening, of it.

Some people have noted a supposed contradiction between 2 Samuel 24:1 and its parallel in 1 Chronicles 21:1. In the Samuel passage God provokes David to take a census; in the Chronicles passage Satan does so. If Satan is necessarily the devil then there is a contradiction. If, on the other hand, Satan is representing God we have no such contradiction.

The other two Old Testament passages that mention Satan (Ps 109:6; Zech 3:1-2) continue the imagery of Satan in a judicial role. Both passages have Satan standing “at the right hand” of individuals in a courtroom setting. In the Zechariah passage God rebukes Satan, in essence passing sentence in favor of the defendant.

Satan in the New Testament

It is only in the New Testament that Satan acquires an absolute association with the devil. And yet, in some places the older view of a judicial representative of

God persists. In the accounts of the temptation in the wilderness it is clearly the devil who is tempting Jesus. Nevertheless, at one point Jesus says, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” (Matt 4:10; Lk 4:8) Jesus again uses the same phrase in reference to Peter, when Peter objected to the thought of Jesus being killed. (Matt 16:23; Mk 18:3) In these passages Jesus is using “Satan” in the sense of a title of one making a judicial argument, rather than as one in constant and intentional opposition to God. These passages are more a parallel to the passage in Zechariah than to many other New Testament passages. Even Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5:5 seems to use the title in this sense.

Nevertheless, Jesus and others frequently use the title as an alternate name for the devil. In Matthew 26:26, for instance, when Jesus asks, “Can Satan cast out Satan?” he is clearly responding to the accusation that he is acting on behalf of the devil. In the parable of the sower what Matthew calls “the wicked one” Mark calls “Satan.” (Matt 13:19; Mk 4:15) In Luke 10:18, Jesus says he beheld Satan “as lightning fall from heaven.” Paul and John continue using the term in this vein. John specifically equates the devil and Satan. (Rev 12:9; 20:2) While Paul

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never uses the titles devil and Satan in the same sentence as John does, he clearly attributes to Satan those things that belong to the devil. In Paul’s mind Satan is the opposite of and enemy of God.

Does this constitute a contradiction in the Bible? Is the Satan of the Old Testament an entirely different person than the Satan of the New Testament? Or is this more of a case of someone taking a familiar term and reapplying it in an unfamiliar, though similar, way? This latter is not unheard of in the scripture. John appropriates the Greek concept of “the Word” and applies it to Jesus. Jesus and the apostles take the Jewish practice of immersion and make it into a new concept (so much so, that many Christians thousands of years later forget that it was even part of Judaism). Perhaps Paul’s view of Satan is not so much a contradiction as an evolution. One thing is certain. Whether acting on behalf of God or in opposition to him, Satan has always been an adversary to man. Regardless of his original nature, the individual or position has never been good for us.

GOD GIVES

In discussions about whether God answers prayer, we sometimes hear someone say that he always answers prayer. "Sometimes the answer is yes; sometimes it is no; and sometimes it is wait a while." This statement is usually accompanied by the qualification that God answers prayer in the way that is best for his people. Did God not give you something you wanted? It must have been bad for you, so he withheld it. The idea is that God only gives good gifts to his people. Whether that is true or not is open to debate.

Certainly "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (Jas 1:17) Certainly God wants the best for his people. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28) The question is whether God sometimes gives things that are not necessarily good for people.

God blesses everyone, whether they follow him or not. Since all that exists comes from God, some of God's blessings are universal. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt 5:44-45) Here Jesus even says that God's example of providing good things for all people is one justification for praying for and forgiving those that abuse us. If people can reject God and he still sends rain and sun to them, then God's followers ought also to give good to those who reject them.

While some blessings may be universal, God has also provided less than a blessing for some who choose to reject him. Paul argues this at length in his introduction to the book of Romans.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections. (Rom 1:22-26)

More than this, though, God sometimes gives his own people what they ask for, whether it is good for them or not. What kind of God would do this? The kind of God who stands in the place of a parent to his people. Sometimes our children are going to be rebellious. (At least, children other than me.) Sometimes a parent has to give in and allow a child to have or do whatever the child wants, not out of frustration but out of love. Provided it will teach a lesson without lasting harm, there are times we must let them learn the hard way. God has been known to treat his people like this. "So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire." (Ps 78:29) So whether we ask for good or ill, we might do well to remember the old saying. "Be careful what you pray for. You just might get it."

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