
**A MISREPRESENTATION OF THE THEOLOGY OF SATAN IN NIGERIAN
RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP**

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ABSTRACT: *This article examines the nature of Satan through the various names that he is called. It also looks at the role religious leaders in Nigeria play in propagating wrong ideologies about Satan. The methodology adopted consists of the theological approach to some Biblical passages, using Reader Response hermeneutical principles to examine the different names of Satan. The result shows that Satan is more than an excuse for people to do wrong and Church leaders in Nigeria need to teach a more holistic message on who Satan is.*

KEYWORDS: Satan, Leadership, Christianity, Church, Wasteful Prayers, Responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Satan is a well-known being in today's world. He is always blamed for almost every human mistake in the world today. Even those who deny the existence of Satan understand when others mention the name "Satan". In Philosophy of Religion, it is easier for the philosophers to deny the existence of God than to deny the existence of Satan. This is attested to by Murray and Rea whose agreement imply that it is not uncommon to deny the existence of God.¹ It is otherwise called "evil." This is possibly because the name or title "Satan" means "adversary" or "enemy" in its Hebrew use. In Arabic, it means "astray", "distant" or "something evil". In the Christian in usage, it means, Satan is an accuser of brethren and an adversary. He is an enigmatic and notorious being in the bible bears many names even some of which are not his: Satan (Matthew 4:10), Liar (John 8:44), Devil (Matthew 4:1), Beelzebub (Matthew 12:24), Belial (II Cor. 6:15), Adversary (1 Peter 5:8), Dragon (Rev. 12:3,7, &9), Serpent (Rev.12:9), Tempter (Matthew 4:3), Accuser of brethren (Rev.12:10), Prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), Prince of this world (John 12:31), and God of this world (II Cor. 4:4). He is also sometimes called Lucifer, the mythological figure in Isaiah 14:12. This means that Satan is not simply an angel or demon but a god to his worshippers².

The Background to this Topic

It is noticed that people blame Satan for almost every bad thing they are accused of and this needs to be corrected at least among religious people. This paper is will focus on the role of the clergy in dispersing such unhealthy ideologies about Satan. People assume Satan's

presence where he is not, and assume his absence where he is present. Let us consider the following instances.

The 49 year old Pastor of “The Mountain of Breakthrough Deliverance Ministry”³ was arrested in 2014 for producing and circulating fake Nigerian currency. It was reported on the internet that the Department of State Services (DDS) in Lokoja, capital of Kogi State was able to announce the arrest of so called pastor Godson Akubuiro who corruption is not limited to just him but included his children and nine others.⁴ In a video⁵, the boyfriend of his daughter was also involved in the crime. At the end of it all, the pastor blamed Satan for his crime. Shamelessly, he said: “it is Satan, even Judah, Judas Iscariot, is a good man of God, he is a good man to Jesus but when Satan pushed him, he fall. See also Peter, Peter was also good to Jesus, but at that time, he denied Jesus.”⁶

Leadership News Paper reported the case of Prophet Eli- Wakuku who was caught with human heads and body parts in Ilorin.⁷ He was reported to have conspired with Gabriel Moyosore, Yinusa Sa’ad Ayinla, Alfa Alaba Isiaka etc. for unlawfully gaining entrance into the Muslim cemetery at Osere area, Ilorin and removing human skulls, to be sold at the rate of N8,000 each.⁸

A Church usher who was caught sleeping with his brother’s wife also said it is the work of Satan. A Christian parent who subjected their only son to fasting and praying against WAEC failure close to examination dates and was forced to attend a vigil in the night preceding the examination; when the child failed, the failure was attributed to Satan and house-hold enemies. Sometimes, Pastors persuade to be holy that by abstaining from sin God will automatically “bless” them, they pray and rebuke the spirit of poverty which was created by Satan.

In popular ideology Satan is the cause of all misfortune. But is Satan just the cause of all misfortunes? Is this accusation correct? What else can we know about Satan? This paper therefore examines more closely the nature of Satan through the various names he has in the Bible. It also addresses some other wrong beliefs about Satan.

The Old Testament Names of Satan

The Biblical people directly and indirectly refer to Satan with about forty names. Each of these names slightly differs in meaning. Examination of the names helps to understand how the bible people perceived Satan because we deduce what Satan does from the names and from what he does it is easy to deduce theology. It is worth noting that the names applied to Satan in the bible are more than that of any other person except Jesus Christ.

Accuser

“Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser bring him to trial” (Ps.109:6 RSV)⁹. The word accuser necessitates the accused. An accuser in this context is the one who confront someone with a charge of having acted wickedly or point accusing finger on him for doing something illegal. Therefore if Satan is an accuser, Satan is not the offender but the accuser of the offender. It is wrong therefore to say Satan is wrong for accusing the wrong-doer. In fact, Satan’s accusations are usually right. His accusations might be exaggerated but he always has basis on which he can make accusations. For instance, it was wrong for Joshua the High Priest to wear filthy garments into God’s presence. Satan rightly accuses Joshua and demands justice (Zech 3). Though the sovereign God dismisses Satan’s case, Satan was right.

In the New Testament, Satan is also called the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10). But as noted earlier, an accuser is not necessarily negative and Satan does not accuse without a reason. This name reflects one of the roles of Satan but the name “accuser” is not exclusive to him. Prosecutor is also similar to accuser.

Prosecutor or Accuser

“Satan stood at his right hand ready to bring an accusation against him.” (Zec. 3:1). “Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ... the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.” (Rev.12:10).

A prosecutor is the one who initiates a legal prosecution against criminals; they are responsible for all aspects of criminal prosecution to seek justice. Read suggests that a prosecutor in a trial aims both to persuade the jurors of the government’s case that the defendant has committed a crime, and also to assure that no innocent person will be wrongly convicted.¹⁰ It is very easy to misunderstand the role of the prosecutor for the following:¹¹

- A prosecutor does not have a “client” in the conventional sense
- He is not a legal adviser
- He ensures that the criminal is punished for their crimes
- He presents the case fairly but skillfully and firmly
- He can test, and attack the case

It should be understood that a prosecutor can be corrupt or just depending on his personality not his position. It is not surprising that Satan stood at the right hand of Joshua the high priest ready to bring an accusation against him. He is only performing his duties as the prosecutor of humans. Whether the accusation is against Joshua or Israel represented as Joshua, Satan is only interested in making the offender pay for his crime. The soul that sins must die (Ezk.18:4; Rom.6:23).

Serpent

“Now the serpent was more subtle than any other animal...” Genesis 3:1.

In Genesis, Satan is not clearly identified as the serpent. This identification was a later development in Christian theology (see Rev 20:2). Moreover, it is difficult to ascertain the historicity of this passage. If this story was in fact a myth, then equating the serpent to Satan is only because of the similar characteristics they share and not because the serpent in reality is Satan.

The major characteristic shared by a serpent and Satan is their deception. Most snakes are dull coloured to blend with their surroundings. This makes them less obvious to their predators and preys. In this way, Satan is cunning and people have to be vigilant and wise to escape Satan’s attacks (1Pet 5:8). The name however only describes some of Satan’s activities.

Lucifer

Anointed covering cherub, King of Tyre and or King of Babylon

"Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "You were the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty ... You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones." (Ezk. 28:12,14).

"That you will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say: 'How the oppressor has ceased, The golden city ceased!... How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ' I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'¹⁵ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit". (Isa. 14:4).

The assumption that Satan fell was what led to the teaching that he was formally created to be a good angel rendering services to God. Ezekiel 28:12ff was believed to be the story of how beautifully he was created and was the head of all the other heavenly beings. Isaiah 14 describes how Satan plans to overthrow God because of all his beauty and how he was cast down to earth because of his pride. Both passages however, clearly state that it was talking about the King of Tyre and King of Babylon. This automatically nullifies beliefs that Satan was described here.

Another suggestion by Hartom is that the Temple imagery in Ezekiel 28:14 could be allusion to parallel images in the anointed alluding to the olive oil industry of the area, the unassailable island position of Tyre being like the guardian cherubim, the shrine of Ai Mina being likened to the mountain of God, and the glasswork to Urim and Thumim. Then the prophecy in Ezekiel 28:12-19 would be an example of the principle of "measure for measure". That is, as the rulers of Tyre gloated in the downfall of the beautiful sanctuary in Jerusalem (26:2), so their beautiful commercial sanctuary on Tyre will be destroyed.¹²

However, people are quick to assume Satan as the subject in this passage because of the name Lucifer. It is an Hebrew expression for "Son of the Morning" or the "Morning Star." Lucifer is more like a nickname and it is not exclusive to Satan. Lucifer was used to refer to the planet Venus because its appearance was like a morning star. In Isaiah, the term was used as an ironic reference to the King of Babylon who was like a morning star (Lucifer) shining brighter than others. But Isaiah mocks them, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning".

There is no verse in the Bible that say Satan was the morning star, it was Jerome who first linked Isaiah's Lucifer with the Devil in the Early Church and the other Fathers also held that Jesus implicitly refer to the same when he said, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18) and as a result of this, Lucifer is used as a synonym for Satan in Patristic literature. The term is used in the N.T. to refer to Christ in Peter 1:19 as the "Day Star", and in Revelation 22:16 as the "Morning Star."

Leviathan

Leviathan was mention only in few places Job 3:8; Job 41:1; Psalms 74:14; 104:26 and Isaiah 27:1. Isaiah's mention that Yahweh will crush Leviathan is usually linked to a myth found throughout the Ancient Near East where the creation is represented as the victory of the creator-god over a monster of chaos. Job, 3:8; Psalms 104:26 and Isaiah 27 accounts of

Leviathan clearly indicate that it is a sea monster and therefore, it cannot be Satan since Satan does not live in the sea.

Universal Patrol Officer

“The Lord said to Satan, ‘Whence have you come?’ Satan answered the Lord, ‘From going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it’” (Job 1:7).

Patrol Officer can be described as a “Security Police” who is specially trained in the force to be responsible for the enforcement of the law and the protection of force property and personnel. A primary duty of the Security Police is security. They are concerned with the welfare and conduct of their personnel within the civilian community so they work closely with local civilian police.

Summary of Old Testament Satan

The idea of the Old Testament Satan is different from what we have today. The advanced knowledge of demons we have is possibly from the Babylonian exile. Satan was mentioned three times explicitly in the O.T, in the books of Chronicles, Job and Zechariah. Chronicles and Zechariah are definitely post-exilic books. Job’s date is debatable but it is most likely post-exilic as well.

In Job, people assume Satan was an enemy of God who intruded into divine premises to attend the meeting of the Sons of God. This assumption is not correct. “Sons of God” is used to refer to Angels (Greek *angelos*), and in Hebrew it is *malak* meaning messenger. The term was used for humans in the New Testament (John 1:12).¹³ In Job,

- The meeting was meant for the “sons” of God
- The Sons of God are of course not biological children
- Satan was in the meeting as one of the “Sons” of God
- The question put forward shows no indication of enmity between God and Satan
- He was invited again to another meeting and he gave report of his activities according to God’s permission.
- This is an indication that he has access to the presence of God for executive meetings.

In the book of Zechariah, he appeared again as a legal accuser to Joshua. It is absurd to think that Satan would be able to attend such meeting without prior invitation. Does it not suggest God did not know Satan would come, or God did not have the power to prevent Satan from coming, or God could not send Satan out of the premises? There is simply no evidence of enmity between God and Satan in the Old Testament.

The mission of the O.T. Satan was to accuse the criminals and generally speaking, criminals do not like the law enforcement agents of any kind all over the world. In normal circumstance, criminals never like the Police. In the case of Joshua, the comment of the Lord only indicated an illegal favour against the offender; He was not interested in hearing the case against Joshua not because Satan was His enemy and the comment Satan gave about Job was possibly due to his finite knowledge of what man can do. Satan is not omniscient.

The Theology

It seems that God is not convenient with the Deists definition of Him that limits His divine activity to the initial act of creation¹⁴, so He must prove that His creation is not running itself without being checked. Therefore, God deliberately appointed Satan to be in charge of people as the patrol officer, prosecutor or whatever, just to caution the freedom to sin. The intention of God for creating Satan was a good one. A society without Police will be lawless even if law is introduced. God knew that human beings are not convenient with rules and regulations. Many of our prayer points against Satan are ignored by God because we are like criminals prosecuting the Police in the court of Justice. If we pray against Satan and the prayer is answered, it is just an act of illegal mercy because God is sovereign.

Modern Names and the New Testament Satan

Apollyon and Abaddon: Both means destruction. Abaddon is the Hebrew while Apollyon is the Greek "... the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek ... Apollyon." (Rev. 9:11) It is obvious in Rev 20:1-3 that Apollyon is another strong angel that will arrest the great dragon (Satan), throw him into the bottomless pit and sealed it over him. This in the actual fact means that this Apollyon is stronger and more terrifying than Satan!

Tempter

"Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.'" Matthew 4:3

The tempter is the one who tempts somebody else to do something wrong or unlawful. This can be expected from an enemy and not only from Satan.

Adversary

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Peter 5:8

Adversary is another word for an enemy; it is used for an opponent in conflict and it is of no difference in the parables "the enemy who sowed them (bad seeds) is the devil" (Mt.13:39). In common law system, adversarial approach is used in most cases to investigate and declare guilt or innocence because it is assumed that the truth can be revealed from the open competition between the prosecutor and the defendant. The adversarial approach presumes that the accused is innocent, and the burden of proving guilt rests with the prosecution. Through counterargument and cross-examination, each side is expected to test the truthfulness, relevancy, and sufficiency of the opponent's evidence and argument. Satan is an enemy to man not to God. It is both insulting and wrong to say that Satan is an enemy of God. No wonder, Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light simply to deceive man (2Cor 11:14; Rev.12:9). It is better to see Satan as Prosecutor or Accuser of the saints rather than an enemy of God. It would be an insult on the being of God to say that Satan is an 'enemy of God' in the way we usually assume it. He can only be enemies of man and there are biblical evidences mentioned earlier e.g. "Satan stood at his right hand of Joshua the high priest, ready to bring an accusation against him." (Zec.3:1).

From the foregoing, we see that the names for Satan are not exclusive to him. Satan is not always the cause of the misfortune of human beings. His role and activities are varied. It is not logically true that Satan is blamed for everything or situation that is unpleasant to us. A major reason why we have this wrong ideology is the wrong teachings of the clergy. This paper examines the failures of the clergy but before that, let us first consider what the role of the clergy or Christian leader is.

The Role of a Christian Leader as a Spiritual GP

This term GP is used for General Practitioners, especially in medicine. They are doctors who are not specialists in any specific area of medicine but are qualified to provide routine health care. According to Swierzewski, they can perform physical examinations, immunization and treat many different conditions including illnesses and injuries.¹⁵ The gospel leaders (consciously or unconsciously) decide the life and future of their members they deal with their physical, emotional and spiritual diseases, he plays the role of a both GP, the minister, like the medical doctors, are usually the first point of contact in matters of spiritual, mental or personal matters, they coordinate the care of church members and refer them, when necessary to appropriate specialists such as to the prayer warriors for deliverance, and the like offices. His leadership role and care is also related to member's work, family and community,

Church members, like the sheep spend most of their lives eating and drinking, but they cannot distinguish the right from the wrong diet; they may not know the difference between poisonous and non-poisonous spiritual food (messages), they eat anything eatable. Jesus in John 21 hammered to Peter the importance of feeding the sheep if his acclaimed love was true¹⁶. Like the medical doctors, the minister of God cares for people of all ages over their life-time: Both sexes, Children, Adults. The Church as a Spiritual hospital – just as there are many kinds of sickness being treated in the hospitals, the ministers as the doctor deal with different kinds of spiritual sickness and diseases. The minister deals with physical, emotional and spiritual diseases, and like the medical doctors, they coordinate the care of church members and refer them, when necessary to appropriate specialists such as to the prayer warriors for deliverance, and the like offices. He cares for all forms of spiritual diseases, his wife must be careful not to administer the wrong medication.

The Failure of the Leaders

Unfortunately the clergy have failed in their role as GP and as a result have administered wrong treatments to people's illnesses. The word failure here, is not used for describing the lack of financial, academic or material success, it is used for the failure to fulfill the mandate of Christian leadership position. Rather than developing members intellectually, spiritually and positively, many Christian leaders are concerned with their own wellbeing by accumulating wealth for themselves. Hence rather than dealing with the main problem of people's carelessness and mistakes, they teach that Satan is to blame for everything evil.

The clergy fail because they are not educated or trained adequately for pastoral work. The medical doctor studies for 7 years only to become a GP but Christian leaders who are in charge of both physical and spiritual life of members enjoy crash programs. The worst is that the professors of Mathematics or Engineering in the ministry believe they can also automatically claim the professorship of Theology. They become nuisances to the body of Christ. Many are not even educated at all and believe theological education is a waste of

time. They forget that Jesus taught his disciples for at least 3 and half years in both theory and practice. As a result, the clergy lack knowledge and cannot prepare their members adequately.

Lack of proper theological education result in failing to teach members what Christian life is about. This results in a one sided doctrine, or a haphazard theology. They pick and choose what parts of the Bible they like and focus only on it. So they focus on prosperity forgetting that Jesus and his disciples lived a humble life. They pronounce miracles everywhere forgetting that Jesus and his disciples did not heal all the afflicted people in their time. They emphasize free salvation, unlimited grace forgetting that we also need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

These leaders attach mystery to what is not mysterious because they failed to seek knowledge. This is clear in the statement of Oyesile that religious people cannot distinguish between problems to be taken to God and those to be resolved by man.¹⁷

In the theology of time, since there is time for everything under heavens (Eccl.3); Jesus attests that there is "the hour of the power of darkness" (Lk.22:53). There is also a time for temptation, it happened to Jesus, the Christ, at that time, the Angels withdrew from him and when Satan was done, the bible stated that the Angels attended to him (Mt.4:11). The question could be, where were these Angels when Satan came with all sorts of temptations, and the answer is simply that, it was Satan's time to do his work. These leaders fail to teach their members that Satan has the permission to tempt them. In times like that, all the deliverance services held and all the prayers are wasted because God has appointed Satan to work in those hours. Christian leaders must teach their members this truth. So that they will not be embarrassed when their prayers are not answered in the time Satan is allowed to do his job as the "tempter"!

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have considered the different names given to Satan within the Bible. We saw that many of these names describe the activity of Satan but are not exclusive to Satan. Christian leaders are responsible for not dispersing correct and holistic ideologies about Satan. They do this because of their own failures to get proper theological education and their greed for money rather than their passion to develop their members spiritually. This paper advocates that a more complete picture of Satan has to be taught in churches. Satan is not the cause of all misfortune. Satan has other roles that he plays. Christians have to prepare themselves for Satan's tempting rather than fast and pray that Satan's tempting doesn't come.

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