



## Understanding Satanism

**By Lance King**

When it comes to a sensational topic like Satanism, our minds naturally conjure up occult imagery from popular movies, bizarre “X-Files” episodes and satanic crimes retold by Satanism “experts”. Ritual satanic abuse and other unspeakable acts come to mind. Some prominent Christian leaders have claimed that thousands—even millions—of people today are involved in a satanic conspiracy of unimaginable influence.

Rebecca Brown, Lauren Stratford, and Mike Warnke are among those claiming this. A self-proclaimed former high satanic priest, Warnke, told one such story. Warnke’s great popularity came to an abrupt end when Christian investigative journalists painstakingly uncovered the many deceptions on which he had based his entire ministry. Both Brown and Stratford were eventually exposed as frauds by Christians who cared about the truth more than making a fast buck in the religious book retail market.

The majority of these fraudulent stories portray a satanic movement that is overwhelmingly vast and powerful, even virtually inescapable. The pervasive message seems calculated to produce hopelessness, and the Christian believer is always reminded of the satanic influences that must be diligently warded off by various ritualistic means if we are to survive

But according to data gathered from various sources, estimates of the actual number of professing Satanists depend greatly on whom you ask. Some researchers estimate there are as many as 15,000-100,000 Satanists in the United States, while others say there are no more than 3,000 total worldwide. Because they are

generally elitist and secretive, it is difficult to say just how many Satanists there are. One thing is clear: there are nowhere near as many professed Satanists as there are Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, or any other “garden variety” cultist. (Mormons, for example, are currently preaching their “restored” gospel by means of a PR-savvy missionary force 10 times greater than that of Southern Baptists!)

Curiously, the Bible is silent on the subject of the subject of Satanism as a religion. That is not to say that the Bible does not tell us certain things about Satan; in fact, it has much to say about the devil. Nor are we saying that the Bible lacks information concerning Satan’s activities. We are sternly warned to guard against his lies in 1 Peter 5:8-9. We want to be clear in establishing 2 facts from this Scripture: 1) *There is such a being known as Satan, or the devil, described in the Bible;* and 2) *Satan seeks to deceive and devour those whom he can lead away from the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.* While few people are inclined to commit their lives to ritualized satanic worship, we are all vulnerable to the more subtle deceptions Satan offers us.

### ***The Development And Beliefs Of Satanism***

The main reason the Bible doesn’t mention Satanism as a religious institution is due to the fact that until the Enlightenment era, there really was nothing resembling it. One of the first philosophies that set the stage for contemporary Satanism was actually invented by a disenchanted Catholic priest named François Rabelais. In a 1535 novel, Rabelais created a literary paradise governed by what he called the *Law of Thélème*. The fundamental Law of Thélème was “do what thou wilt”, a phrase later commandeered by Satanists and Wiccans alike (although not without significant moral tempering by the more socially conscious Wiccans).

European “hellfire” or “anti-morality” clubs built upon Rabelais’ vision of self-indulgence in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. These groups celebrated the excesses of their carnal appetites, and mocked the sensibilities of the Church through elaborate “Black Masses”. It’s important to note that the ceremonies were not an expression of sincere belief, but were an open mockery of institutionalized religion. Anti-moralists were not espousing a belief in anything, except their own pleasure. This predecessor to Satanism didn’t develop a truly “spiritual” edge until Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) borrowed the language of Rabelais in formulating his own occult philosophy. Picking up where Crowley left off, Anton Szandor LaVey (1930-1997) founded the Church of Satan (CoS) in 1966. LaVey was a

former carnival worker, whose personal interactions with Christians led him to conclude that Christianity was hypocritical and morally restrictive. He summarized his philosophy in *The Satanic Bible* (1969) and modern Satanism essentially came into being.

It may surprise many readers to learn that the founder of the Church of Satan was fundamentally an *atheist*. While he did use occult imagery and celebrated his own version of the “Black Mass,” “Satan” to LaVey was a personification of his humanistic values, not a literal being to be worshipped or feared.

While the Church of Satan is undoubtedly the best-known satanic organization, there are other organizations, such as the Temple of Set, which have a more mystical orientation. *Setians* are a particularly elitist group, and draw heavily from Egyptian mythology in formulating their satanic philosophy. They see themselves as a truly spiritual and philosophical path, and express a general disdain for those who fail—for lack of intelligence or intuition—to meet their elite standards. Since Satanists are part of a highly diversified and individualistic movement, it naturally follows that there are innumerable lesser-known groups and solitary, eclectic practitioners with numerous, contradictory ideologies.

And Satanism exerts a powerful influence over insecure adolescents who often identify with the commercialized “Satanism” found in popular music (like Marilyn Manson) and occult movies. While we should be careful not to minimize these negative influences on our young people, it should be observed that these flavors of “Satanism” are usually passing fads birthed from young people’s sense of powerlessness in a rapidly changing world. While some self-described Satanists (primarily youths) do occasionally commit so-called “satanic crimes”, such isolated events are hardly indicative of a massive conspiracy.

### ***A Christian Response To Satanism***

While evangelicals have written countless manuals on how to present the Gospel to non-believers, there’s not a lot of credible material to aid the Christian in responding to Satanism specifically. When approaching Satanism, it is helpful to keep some key principles in mind:

*Satanism, while sensational, is **not** particularly widespread.* You are far more likely to meet a member of a pseudo-Christian cult or major world religion (such as Hinduism) than you are to meet

a Satanist. It is wise to spend time acquainting yourself most with the beliefs of those you are likely to meet in your geographical area, rather than obsessing needlessly about a handful of elitists.

*Satanists are not waiting for someone to come share Christ.* By virtue of his or her beliefs, Satanists are generally hostile toward organized religion, the Bible and Jesus Christ. Your approach to sharing your faith should begin with serious reflection on how your life reflects Christ in you. Beyond that principle, *you can generally approach the Satanist as a practical agnostic or atheist.* As has been said so well in the past, Satanism is actually secular humanism wearing a devil’s mask. Love and patience is vital!

*If you meet someone whom you believe is a Satanist, make sure that you understand his or her beliefs before making assumptions.* Since Satanists are fiercely individualistic, it is unwise to jump to conclusions regarding that person’s view of heaven, hell, God, Satan, magic, etc. Take the time to understand the important differences between Wicca and Satanism: the two are not the same! Much misinformation has been repeated by Christian leaders who ought to know better, but who have failed to take the time to really understand what Satanism is about.

We must be careful to acknowledge that spiritual warfare is a very real thing, and moreover is the privilege of every believer in Christ: (Ephesians 6:11). However, it is important that we not isolate Satanism as a special category of spiritual warfare. Notice that in the Scripture above, the “weapons” described in the following verses are not “magical” incantations, but the practical outworking of the Christian life. We put on the armor of God by living as people who are in Christ. The time has come, however, for us to come to grips with the deeper, seemingly mundane aspects of the Christian walk: prayer, discipline, studying God’s Word. The problem for most of us is that these things take work, and thought, and careful study. And the kinds of issues that have a lasting impact often aren’t reflected in the book titles that sell so well.

### **For More Information On Satanism**

**The Zondervan Guide To Cults & New Religions book *Satanism* (Zondervan 1995)  
*Countercultures* (St. Martin, 1995)**

**Read Lance’s full length article on Satanism:**

**[www.spiritwatch.org](http://www.spiritwatch.org)**