

Satan and Related Figures

In Early Judaism, a figure often called Satan forms a stock character in the religious drama of God and the salvation of humankind. Satan appears as a mythological, supernatural personification of enmity toward the righteous and as the great opponent of God.

The concept of Satan has its roots in the Hebrew Bible, where the HEBREW noun *śātān* (שָׂטָן, “adversary, opponent”) refers either to human or to celestial beings. In Numbers 22:22–35, the heavenly being referred to as Satan is YHWH’s messenger and acts as an “opponent” of Balaam in preventing the prophet from cursing Israel. A few more texts create the mythological idea of a heavenly opponent of God who is a member of the heavenly council. In Job 1:6–12; 2:1–10 and Zechariah 3, the Satan acts as an accuser against the righteous Job or the JERUSALEM HIGH PRIEST JOSHUA, respectively. In 1 Chronicles 21:1 Satan provokes King DAVID to order an (obviously sinful) census of Israel. Thus a concept of Satan emerges in which the being functions as a tempter of the righteous on earth and as their accuser in the divine council. Yet as a member of the heavenly council, he is unambiguously subordinate to God. There is a scholarly debate about the question of whether the molded idea of Satan is a late or early development (Schmidt 2015; Zappia 2015).

In Early Jewish writings the EVIL figure undergoes increasing literary use. Its terminology is broadened significantly: While the Septuagint’s translation of the Hebrew *śātān*, διάβολος (*diabolos*, “adversary, antagonist, opponent”), is rather common (e.g. in Apoc. Mos., a rewriting of the story of the Fall of Man), the GREEK transliteration σατάν/σατανῶς (*satan/satanas*) is rarely used. Other names (and ideas) used are *MASTEMAH* (“hostility”; primarily in Jub.), the more common *BELIAL* (בְּלִיעַל, “wickedness”; DEAD SEA SCROLLS) or the alternate form *Beliar* (T. 12 Patr.), and, in the Christian Gospels, *Beelzebul*. Satan seldom appears in 1 Enoch (53:3; 54:6; 65:6) and is not even mentioned in 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch; thus, he is not necessarily a stock figure in eschatological discourses in Early Judaism.

Generally, the devil’s task is to tempt and to ruin humankind by leading people to fulfill unlawful and wicked deeds. He is part of a demonological worldview, being depicted as the leader of a host of evil spirits, the demons. In some texts he acts in an eschatological (1QM; 1QH^a) or “ethical” dualism (T. Levi 19:1; T. Ash. 1:3–9; and throughout T. 12 Patr.). Theologically, the figure of Satan serves to remove evil from God. This process is meant to structure the cosmos, and God is discharged from effecting evil. The first instances where the serpent of Genesis 3:1–7 is interpreted as the devil or his instrument are WISDOM OF SOLOMON 2:24 and APOCALYPSE OF MOSES 15:1–30:1.

Protection against the devil is found in obeying the Mosaic law and keeping God’s commandments, i.e. staying in the COVENANT and practicing a Jewish way of life focused on the Jewish identity markers (Jub. 15:32–34; T. Dan 5:1; 6:1–8; Apoc. Mos. 23:3; 24:3; 28:4; 30:1); in the community of the Scrolls, it is crucial to belong to the *Yahad* and to observe the priestly oriented identity markers (CD vi 11–vii 9; xvi 1–8; 1QM xiv 8–10). By contrast, the eschaton is characterized by the annihilation of the devil and his evil forces, which bears the hope that Israel (or the righteous) will be rescued and vindicated. When the influence of the devil is broken, it will be a period of blessing, welfare, and an undisturbed relationship with God (Jub. 19:28; 23:29; 50:5; 1QM i 1–16; 4Q504 1–2 iv 8–13; As. Mos. 10:1; T. Levi 18:10–12; T. Dan 5:10–11; T. Jud. 25:3; Apoc. Mos. 39:2–3; Rev 20:10).

In this way, the devil also fulfills a sociopolitical function. He frequently appears as the heavenly counterpart of powerful earthly opponents of a certain Jewish group, providing a clear concept of a supernatural enemy behind the present temptations threatening the group's identity. Such temptations included the attraction of Hellenistic culture (Jub. 15:32–34; Jos. Asen. 12:9–10; perhaps Apoc. Mos.; cf. Schreiber 443: 447–8), the Roman emperor and his cultural achievements (Sib. Or. 3.63–67), or a wicked priest and an opposing priestly group at the Temple in Jerusalem (1QS i 16–ii 9; iii 20–25; 1QM xiii 10–12; cf. the “sons of Belial” in 4Q174 1 i 8; et al.). A similar threat for some Galilean villages seemed to be the Jesus movement, as the *Beelzebul* controversy in Mark 3:22–27 par. reveals. Conversely, in Matthew 13:36–43 the devil functions as a paradigm of the opposing Jewish majority refusing to accept Christ (cf. John 8:44).

The earliest Christian writings took over the concept of the devil prevailing in the larger Jewish environment. Specific to them is the conviction that in the heavenly realm the eschatological extermination of the devil has already begun (Luke 10:18; John 12:31; Rev 12:7–10). As a result, Jesus as the empowered representative of God's kingdom is able to cast out demons (Luke 11:20). Nonetheless, the devil remains active by tempting and leading the righteous to SIN (1 Cor 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 11:3; 1 Tim 3:6–7; Rev 12:12; 20:3; et al.). Jesus, as a paradigm, had proved able to overcome temptation by Satan (Matt 4:1–11 par.; 1 John 3:8–10). It is the disciples' faith, i.e. their loyalty to Christ, which protects them from the temptations and persecutions of the devil (Luke 22:31–32; Acts 26:18; Eph 6:16; 1 Pet 5:8–9; Rev 12:11).

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RELATED ENTRIES: Baruch, Second Book of; Demons and Exorcism; Enoch, Ethiopic Apocalypse of (1 Enoch); Eschatology; Ezra, Fourth Book of; Fallen Angels; Greek Versions of the Hebrew Bible and Other Writings; Jesus Movement; Jesus of Nazareth; Job, Book of; Kingdom of God; Serpent.