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A Historical Account of the Conceptual Evolution of Satan in the Abrahamic Belief Traditions

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A Historical Account of the Conceptual Evolution of Satan
in the Abrahamic Belief Traditions

A senior thesis (or project) submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts
in Humanities and Cultural Studies (or Religion)

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Abstract

This paper shows a historical account of the development of the Satan persona in the Abrahamic belief traditions beginning with early Judaism in which Satan evolves most vastly from beginning as merely an action verb to ending as a tempter of man, then moving into the Christian New Testament evil entity personified as a direct opponent to Jesus, and finally ending with Islam's perspective of a leader of the Jinn.

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Thesis Statement: This paper shows a historical account of the development of the Satan persona in the Abrahamic belief traditions beginning with early Judaism in which Satan evolves most vastly from beginning as merely an action verb to ending as a tempter of man, then moving into the Christian New Testament evil entity personified as a direct opponent to Jesus, and finally ending with Islam's perspective of a leader of the Jinn.

Introduction

In order to understand the Satan of today we must first look at his history, we must follow his journey. Satan's story is one of humanity. The development of the Satan persona over hundreds of years in the Abrahamic belief traditions beginning with early Judaism in which Satan evolves most vastly from beginning as merely an action verb to ending as a tempter of man, then moving into the Christian New Testament evil entity personified as a direct opponent to Jesus, and finally ending with Islam's perspective of a leader of the Jinns; reflects the historical events and evolved religious perspectives and can be seen as an attempt on the parts of Jews, Christians, and Muslims to greater understand and explain the God of Abraham. In this journey Satan must become everything that God is not, in order to provide the followers of this belief tradition with a greater motivation to struggle for good and to simplify the explanation of evil.

In the gradual rejections within the Abrahamic belief tradition that all things, good and bad, extend from God, and a movement towards all things good extending from

God alone, possibly as a result of the Exodus pact made between the children of Israel and the God of Abraham, there was an increasing need to explain where in fact bad things came from. If God is good, then someone or something must be bad. If men are intrinsically good and made in the image of God, then someone or something must cause the decay in humanity. Essentially, the increasing development of an evil persona fulfilled two growing needs of humanity which were that of needing someone to blame, and the other was in needing to support the evolving belief in a God who is purely and entirely good. It may be that this also mirrored human struggles of the time. According to T.J. Wray and Gregory Mobley's book The Birth of Satan, Satan can often be seen in parallel to the fall of man (e.g. in the Genesis story of Adam in the Garden of Eden, both Adam and Satan are punished) "It is as if Satan is an allegorical representative of the human race" (177).

Satan, his name is often used in churches as a means of warning to the faithful to stay on the right path; he is the predator who is both enticing and dark. His name has been invoked for political gain, religious riots, and childhood obedience. Within the Abrahamic religious tradition, beyond the basic agreement that he is the angel of God who fell to the lowest status of God's creations due to his own narcissism and pride, whose present and eternal goal is to outsmart God and punish all of humanity, there is little other thought put into who he is and how he has come about. The concept of God is explored at length, "Who is God?" is a question that is asked and analyzed by even the most non-religious citizens of the world, but the question of Satan is something that is rarely encouraged. In fact we tend to ostracize people who are seemingly fascinated with the being of Satan. Perhaps there is a fear that in so doing one would encounter

the slithering dark entity and be damned for all of eternity, stripped of skin, trapped in an entrancing addiction, and thrown in the fiery pits of hell. Of course there are those who have pursued Satanic worship, and yet even in this socially shunned pursuit, the practitioners have often accepted the Abrahamic definition of Satan as a basis or at least a loose parallel to their own theistic beliefs.

It is possible that in studying Satan and all that he represents we can learn more about our own culture, our world, our history, and humanity as a whole, because we blame him for the parts of humanity that we don't want to acknowledge exist. Through a historical analysis of Abrahamic texts, it is apparent that Satan became a necessary element/entity which explains the aspects of humanity that we cannot accept come from God.

Satan has historically been the catch-all for parts of human nature that are too horrible to really understand. After all, how could it be possible that a fellow human being, made of the same materials as ourselves, raised down the street from us, who attends the same school, who eats at our favorite restaurants, and have even married and had children, could also be a serial killer, a human trafficker, a tyrannical dictator? For some it may be easier to imagine that a supernatural evil force would be the mastermind behind such horrors as Nazi concentration camps, Rwandan genocide, and Jeffrey Dahmer. We have been told by the religious leaders of the world that these acts came to us because we have turned from God, we have succumbed and left ourselves wide open to the temptations and travesties that the Prince of Darkness promises to bestow. Certainly it is much easier to blame Satan, the age old character for our wrong doings. In this belief contract followers of the Jewish religious texts, Bible, and Q'uran

have found an appeasing answer to the atrocities that haunt humanity, and perhaps in this way it allows for a greater sense of faith in a “master plan”.

It is important to analyze Satan in the context from which he came, in order to do so we must start at his earliest historical account which is early Judaism. This next section looks at the development of Satan both etymologically and conceptually beginning with Satan as a verb form and following him through his birth into a spiritual being in opposition of God. This section also addresses the societal shifts which may have driven the conceptual evolution of Satan within the Jewish belief system and religious texts.

Satan in Judaism

In the beginning there was no Satan. In fact, in the beginning there was no Genesis, or creation story, that came much later. The books of Numbers and Job were written long before the book of Genesis. This is significant because there are appearances of Satan in his earlier forms in this first book of the Jewish religious texts. According to Henry Kelly's "Adam Citings before the Intrusion of Satan: Recontextualizing Paul's Theology of Sin and Death" the first recorded account of the Adam and Eve creation story is known to be around 200 BCE in which Satan appears as an active tempter ("Adam Citings" 13). That is astoundingly late if you consider that the generally accepted historical timeline for the development of the Torah is 500-300 BCE (Cooke 76). It should also be noted that this is the second creation story in the Jewish religious tradition; the first creation story did not include Adam and Eve or the infamous tempting snake and was written around 300 BCE, in the Hebrew Torah the snake was not initially thought to be anything more than a talking animal ("Adam Citings" 14).

According to The Origin of Satan written by Elaine Pagels the story of a traveler named Balaam is told in the book of Numbers. In the story of Balaam, Satan appears as an angel of the Lord put in Balaam's path to rebuke him for beating his donkey. However, in the context of this story the word "satan" is used to describe an action of the angel of the Lord as can be seen in the text "but God's anger was kindled because he went; and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the road as his satan"(Origin of Satan 40-41). In fact, at that time in Jewish history the word satan was used in reference to human action as well, as in you can "satan" someone. This meant to either

do wrong to someone or more commonly to put yourself in one's way, to deter. At this point in the Abrahmic belief tradition Satan was not a being, he was a word with nearly no negative connotation. In the story of Balaam, the angel who was taking the role of a satan was really acting as a hand of God as the "derailer, he was in essence putting himself in Balaam's way in order to protect Balaam from a path leading to injury or destruction (Satan A Biography 17).

We can see a progression in the book of Job moving towards the more familiar form of Satan in an identifiable being form. In this story Satan was not necessarily depicted as an evil adversary to God, but rather a challenging associate, and even an "aspect of God" (Malone 15). Satan wanted to wager a challenge with God concerning the steadfastness and commitment of God's faithful servant, Job. It is nearly a friendly bet. Satan, certainly, is not going behind God's back, he is not yet the slithering snake of Genesis at this point in the Jewish text, rather Satan looked to God for his approval of the testing of Job's faith and God agreed to this wager. In Job Satan took on the role of the "Tester" and was not considered a "Tempter".

In more ancient Jewish stories of Job, Satan was not even a "Tester" but rather still a "Derailer" of sorts, he was the angel who tried to dissuade people from going down the wrong path. Whether seen as a "tester" or "derailer" in the story of Job, Satan was still acting as a hand of God to deliver a test of faith and a lesson of steadfastness with God's blessings (The Origin of Satan 39). At this time Satan was seen as an angel (whether fallen or not) whose sole allegiance was to God, and who demanded full worship and devotion to God from man. It is with this perspective that Satan was seen as a helper to God.

In order to understand Satan's journey in Judaism, we must first visit his conceptual birth and infancy. As mentioned previously in the story of Balaam, initially in Jewish texts the word "satan" was a verb, as in you satan someone (Caldwell 32). This verb was meant to dissuade someone or to be a deterrent, this was the birth of Satan. "The root 'stn' means 'one who opposes, obstructs, or acts as adversary.' The Greek term '*diabolos*', later translated 'devil', literally means 'one who throws something across one's path'" (The Origin of Satan 39). Since Greek was the language most widely accepted as the international literate means of communicating, much like the language today, so it makes sense that "*diabolos*" or "devil" made its way into the Biblical texts. According to T.J. Wray and Gregory Mobley it was common that as new religions took the place of old religions (such as Christianity in place of Greek mythology) the new religions would demonize the old religion's deities (25).

The next stage in Satan's evolution was that of moving from a verb to a pronoun. It was common for the Jewish people to demonize other tribes by referring to them by the name of that tribe's most evil demon. At one point there began to be disagreements between Jewish tribes, at this time the Jewish people did not have an evil entity, but of course there was now a need for one, and so the personification of Satan was born. Since Satan was not yet a reference to a demon this was a much lesser evil than the evil names given to other tribes (The Origin of Satan 39).

We can track Satan from being a verb, to a demonization campaign against fellow Jewish tribes, to an actual character in the old Testament as a "derailer". In other words, he went from being evil to a tester of faithful men. In actuality Satan is the offset of God:

...the negative aspects of *Yhwh* are cast out and assigned to alternative beings, such as the Destroyer (*Mashit*), the “smiting angel” (*hammal’ak hammashit*), and, of course, *hassatan*. Eventually it is *Hassatan*, “the Advesary”, who will become the embodiment of evil, but this, too, is a slow, evolutionary process, with many more twists and turns to explore. (Wray & Mobley 51)

Unlike the Satan of Christianity, the Jewish Satan never quite makes it to the full blown leader of the evil empire, at least in written scripture. Rather, he is nearly always seen as a derailer or obstructer. Viewing Satan from these Old Testament stories, excluding the later added depiction of the snake in the Garden of Eden, Satan could be viewed as a guardian of man assigned with the task of protecting man from his own evil tendencies as opposed to the traditionally accepted role of enemy to mankind which he has been given over the years.

There is, however, a time in Jewish history, a time between the finishing of the Hebrew Scriptures and the commencing of the Biblical writings, when the Satan myth began to evolve throughout Jewish culture separate from the religious texts. This time is called the “intertestamental period”, and it is believed to span from approximately 420 BCE to 70 BCE. It should be noted (as previously stated) that there were still some Jewish writings being done during this period, namely *Genesis* and some *Ketuvim* (which were stories and wisdom writings), however most of the *Torah* (Jewish Law) and *Nevi'im* (messages from the prophets) had been completed by 500 BCE. Much of the changes that took place in the Jewish Satanic myths during this time were a result of influence from neighboring tribes (Wray & Mobley 96-97). It has been speculated that neighboring cultures and religions may have played influential roles on the Jewish tribes as they interacted in various ways. Perhaps the most influential religion was Zoroastrianism of ancient Persia. In Zoroastrianism’s belief in cosmic dualism of good and bad, represented by “*Spenta Mainyu*” the good spirit and “*Angra Mainyu*” the evil

spirit, two forces separate from their omnipotent creator “*Ahura Mazda*” who was seen as all good, which are part of a higher spiritual struggle. These two beings were able to offer the Jews with missing pieces to their Satan myth (Applegate 187).

It is interesting to note that during the time in Jewish history that is referred to as the “First Temple Judaism” marking the erection and existence of the King Solomon Temple (approx. 962 BCE- 567 BCE), Satan was mostly referred to as “*Hassanat*” or the “Adversary”. However, by the “Second Temple Judaism” (approx. 530 BCE – 200 BCE) which loosely coincided with the “intertestamental period”, Satan started to become referred to as the “Devil”. And along with the name shift also came a more mighty role of an apocalyptic Satan. So it makes sense that during the time that Genesis was being written there is a notable shift in Satan’s role in which he takes on an intentional identity (Wray and Mobley 72).

In Genesis 6:1-4 a story is told of a new breed of beings called “*nephilim*” or “fallen ones” (possibly demons) as a result of the rather unholy pairing of lustful angels and human women. In this story angels are referred to as “*benay Elohim*” or “watchers.”

בְּרֵאשִׁית 6 Chapter Genesis

- | | |
|--|---|
| א פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה; וּבָנוּת, -הַחֵל הָאָדָם, לְרַב עַל-כִּי וַיְהִי א יִלְדוּ לָהֶם. | 1 And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, |
| ב בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם, כִּי טִבּוֹת -הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת-וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי ב ה; וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים, מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בְּחָרוּהֶן. | 2 that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives, whomsoever they chose. |
| ג יְדוֹן רוּחִי בָאָדָם לְעֵלָם, בְּשָׂגָם, -וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה, לֹא ג | 3 And the LORD said: 'My spirit shall not |

הָיָו יָמָיו, מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה הוּא בָּשָׂר; וְ

abide in man for ever, for that he also is flesh; therefore shall his days be a hundred and twenty years.'

וְכִי-הִנְפְּלִים הָיוּ בְּאֶרֶץ, בְּיָמֵים הָהֵם, וְגַם אַחֲרֵי ד
בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם, וַיֵּלְדוּ-אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל
{פ} הַמָּה הַגְּבֻרִים אֲשֶׁר מֵעוֹלָם, אֲנָשֵׁי הַשָּׁמַיִם. לָהֶם:

4 The Nephilim were in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bore children to them; the same were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown. {P}

יָצָר-וַיִּרְא יְהוָה, כִּי רַבָּה רַעַת הָאָדָם בְּאֶרֶץ, וְכָל ה
הַיּוֹם-מִחֻשְׁבֹּת לְבוֹ, רַק רַע כָּל

5 And the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

הָאָדָם בְּאֶרֶץ; וַיִּתְעַצֵּב, -עָשָׂה אֶת-וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה, כִּי ו
לְבוֹ-אֶל

6 And it repented the LORD that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.

בְּרָאתִי מֵעַל-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר-וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה, אֲמַחֶה אֶת ז
עוֹף-רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד-בְּהֵמָה, עַד-פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה, מֵאָדָם עַד
כִּי נִחַמְתִּי, כִּי עָשִׂיתֶם הַשָּׁמַיִם:

7 And the LORD said: 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and creeping thing, and fowl of the air; for it repenteth Me that I have made them.'

{פ} וְנֹחַ, מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה. ח

8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. {P}

(Mishne Torah trans. Mechon Mamre, Gen 6.1-8)

The story of these fallen angels mating with human women and producing demonic offspring is no doubt the origin of many fabled stories and even horror movies such as “Rosmary’s Baby” in which a demon or even Satan himself fathers a demonic baby.

In the book of Enoch a story is told that these angels become disgraced and cast away by God, and from them comes a leader “Azazel” (sometimes also referred to as “Semihazah”). In Robert Helm’s journal “Azazel in Early Jewish Tradition” he writes that Azazel may in fact be a demon separate from Satan who was the entity that was

blamed for embodying the snake and causing the fall of Adam and Eve; however, over time the Biblical character came to be thought of as just another reference to Satan (219). This story is unique in that Enoch gives an explanation for the origin of evil as coming from actual beings. The story goes on to reflect the cultural attitudes of the time by telling the reader that these *benay Elohim* taught their human wives how to perform magic and beautification amongst other evil introductions, while *Azazel* teaches men about war, weapons, and violence. By the end of Enoch the name *Azazel* was replaced with the name Satan (Mobley, 98-101).

In both of these stories of Genesis in the Jewish texts the existence of demons is present. With this comes an organized group of evil beings, a whole population of human half breeds to be blamed for any wrong in human society, who in fact actively spread sinful practices such as magic, beautification and war. It is interesting that the writers of these texts chose to create these demons as a result of inter-being relations between angels and human. In one way this could resolve the Abrahamic theological conflict that if God is good and everything he creates is good then why does evil exist in man. It could also be seen as a possible warning against inter-tribal marriage. Certainly this is a precursor to many superstitions and myths of demonic possession amongst humans, not to mention stories and modern movies about women who birthed a demonic child.

Ultimately, this shift to the apocalyptic Satan did not last within the Jewish tradition. By the end of the intertestamental period, this view dropped off in the Jewish belief tradition and returned to the earlier belief in the adversarial Satan. However, as Christianity began to form, the early Christians embraced the apocalyptic Satan myth.

In considering the literal personification of God in the Christian belief tradition, it would seem that this new faith would also take evil very literally as well. Perhaps this is due to the social and political climate for the Jewish people at this time in dealing with both Roman oppression and internal tribal divisions. Among the spiritual resistance group, the Essenes, which Jesus was believed to be associated with, there was a belief that worldly struggle was closely related to spiritual struggle. So approaching the religious text written at that time with this understanding, it would make sense that Satan would become a more literal character since the Essenes and other peaceful resisters may have perceived the Romans also as evil. Thus a battle for religious freedom within the Roman empire may have been also seen as a battle with Satan.

Satan in Christianity

Christian religious texts pick up where the Jewish religious texts left off in regard to Satan. Starting with what is referred to as “the Gospels” which includes the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are accounts of Jesus’ life, doctrine, and death.¹ The Satan in these books is still merely the “Tempter” though he has taken on a more marked individual form. Perhaps the most prominent appearance of Satan in “the Gospels” is in the story of Jesus spending forty days and forty nights in the wilderness willingly and through the urge of the Holy Spirit. There he submitted himself to a test of his strength against temptation. This story is similar to that of Job’s, however, the temptations that Jesus resists are those of the flesh, pleasure, power, and food, whereas Job’s was more that of faith in the face of disaster. While in the desert Jesus converses with Satan, which confirms him as a singular character in the Bible. During this conversation Satan offers Jesus power and glory if Jesus agrees to worshipping Satan, Jesus refuses this proposal. Of course this story begs the questions if Jesus is God embodied how then is he able to be subjected to the temptations of Satan, but that is for a different analysis altogether. In this story Satan is a very useful character in solidifying the divine nature of Jesus as a supreme leader for his Jewish followers.

Even a separate individual in this story, Satan is still acting as an arm of God in testing Jesus’ devotion to God and God alone. And yet, this is a marked shift for Satan from the traditional Jewish belief system, in which Satan has (or at least claims to have) powers independent of God (Malone 18). Though he is not yet the full blown fire

¹ It should be noted that just like the Jewish religious texts, the Christian religious texts were not organized within the New Testament in the order they were written, however, this paper will not be dealing with this matter in detail.

inhabiting dragon that he will eventually become in the book of Revelations, in “the Gospels” he has become a powerful individual seemingly more independent of God than his previous Abrahamic forms.

Just as the Christian religious tradition personified the goodness of God in a man they also personified evil into a being. With this came a much more polarized belief system of true good and true evil leading to the eventual battle at the end of the Earth. The faithful are warned that you must pick a side, and be sure that it is the right one:

Revelations 3:15-16 “**15**I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would that you were cold or hot. **16** So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.”

In this verse the reader is warned that he must choose a side, good or evil, cold or hot, and that God will reject anyone who has not chosen sides. It seems that God is less tolerant of someone who chooses neutrality, therefore it is inferred that God prefers a polarized society.

This was one way for the early Christians to set themselves apart from their Jewish predecessors. With the growing dark and powerful presence of Satan in the Biblical New Testament text and the introductions of Jesus as purity and perfect goodness in human form, the Abrahamic belief tradition takes a much different direction. The prophets of the Old Testament could often be seen departing from the righteous path and later asking forgiveness, but Jesus is the epitome of goodness, and his forty day spiritual battle with Satan solidifies that.

In the book of Matthew, one of the books which helped evolve Satan into an individual character, Jesus is quoted as using the word “Satan” as a demonizing

description of one of his friends Peter: Matthew 16:23 “Get behind me, Satan. You are an obstacle in my path because the way you think is not God’s way but man’s.”

This is similar to the “Derailer” character of Satan in the earlier Jewish texts. Jesus and his followers continued the practice of naming their Jewish enemies “Satan”. The book of Mark along with the rest of the Gospels aligns Jesus’ Jewish enemies solely with Satan, drawing a parallel between both physical and perceived spiritual battles; of course the most notable was Judas (The Origin of Satan, Pg. 11-12).

We again see Satan as an independent being when in the book of John Jesus is found rebuking a Jewish audience who claims Abraham as their forefather:

“Devil is the father you are from, and it is the desires of your father that you wish to do. He was a man-killer from the beginning and did not stand in the truth, because Truth is not in him. When he speaks falsely, he speaks of what is his own, for he is a liar and the father of lying.” (John 8:44)

This verse is reminiscent of the much older Jewish practice of demonizing other Jewish tribes. This verse is an important reminder that while Jesus was the namesake of a whole new world religion, he was in fact Jewish, and thus carried on the cultural practices of Judaism, even in regarding Satan not only as a moral opponent in the desert, but also a slanderous term.

In Luke Jesus is shown talking about an incident in which he is being accused of casting demons out through demonic powers, in this we can see the old practice of demonizing by using the name of a different (non-Jewish) tribe’s demon was still in practice.

“Luke 11:14

And he was casting forth a demon, and it was dumb, and it came to pass, the demon having gone forth, the dumb man spake, and the multitudes wondered,

Luke 11:15

and certain of them said, 'By Beelzeboul, ruler of the demons, he doth cast forth the demons;'

Luke 11:16

and others, tempting, a sign out of heaven from him were asking.

Luke 11:17

And he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, 'Every kingdom having been divided against itself is desolated; and house against house doth fall;

Luke 11:18

and if also the Adversary against himself was divided, how shall his kingdom be made to stand? for ye say, by Beelzeboul is my casting forth the demons.

Luke 11:19

'But if I by Beelzeboul cast forth the demons -- your sons, by whom do they cast forth? because of this your judges they shall be;

Luke 11:20

but if by the finger of God I cast forth the demons, then come unawares upon you did the reign of God.”

(Young’s Literal Translation, Luke11.14-20)

The word “*Bellzeboul*” also translated as “*Beelsebub*” can be found in the Old Testament as a Jewish reference to the “chief of demons”. However, this name was found in it’s proper name form as “*Zabullus*” in an alter in an ancient mosque in Tremesen in dedication to *Dii Manes* (an ancient deity). This is an example of the ancient Jewish practice of demonizing other culture’s gods (Aitken 42).

It is clear that in the New Testament there is a battle brewing, and the Jewish people are being warned against evil and toward godliness. This is very reflective of the general attitude of a Jewish non-violent resistance movement called the “*Essenes*”.

The *Essenes* were a group of Jews who began to view their occupation and oppression

by the Romans as a spiritual battle, and the only cure was to be faithful followers of God. The battle was not only against the Roman occupation but against Satan himself, as can be seen in a letter from St. Paul.²

“Be empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength. Put on the full armor [“panoply”] of God, to be able to resist the wiles of DEVIL. For our conflict is not against flesh and blood but against the Principalities, against the Powers, against the World-Rulers [Kosmokratores] of this Darkness, against the Spirituals of the Heavens.” (Eph. 6.10-13) (Kelly, 124)

It is in the book of Revelations that the story of Satan is most clear and concise. The story is told of Satan the red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven “diadems” (crown). In this story Satan the Dragon draws down a third of the stars in the sky to Earth, these stars are representative of Angels, thus Satan is believed to have taken a third of the Angels to rebel with him against God (Sinclair 2014). The Dragon tried to “devour” a pregnant woman who seems to be described as the Biblical character Mary the mother of Jesus. The Dragon fails to do so and the baby (Jesus) was sent to be with God at his throne and rule the world. And at this point the Dragon goes to war with Michael the Biblical angel and the Dragon loses and is cast out of heaven and sent to Earth along with his army of fallen angels. In this is a clear explanation of why there is evil on Earth and also possibly a support to the thought that that which is worldly is evil because while Jesus and God are sitting on thrones with Heaven surrounded by their good army of angels lead by Michael, the Dragon Satan and his share of the unruly disobedient angels were sent to roam the Earth. These verses also refer to Jesus’ ascension to Heaven and deistic reign at which point Satan is cast out of Heaven.

There is a reference to the Old Testament serpent at this point:

² It is probable that Paul did not actually write the book of Ephesians, however, it is accepted as a part of the Pauline epistles in the Christian tradition.

“...and the great dragon was cast forth -- the old serpent, who is called `Devil,' and `the Adversary,' who is leading astray the whole world -- he was cast forth to the earth, and his messengers were cast forth with him.” (Young’s Literal Translation Bible, Rev. 12.9)

It should be mentioned that in the midst of Satan being cast to Earth and searching for the blessed mother of the ascended son he raises from the sea a powerful beast “with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads.” (English Standard Version Bible, Rev 13:1) and of course this is the final product of evil, Satan’s prodigy, the anti-Christ.

Satan meets his destined end in the Bible beginning in Revelation chapter 20 when an angel of God comes down and bounds Satan in chains and imprisons him in a bottomless pit for a thousand years. Once the thousand years are up he is let loose to do one last battle and then finally he is thrown into a fiery lake along with the anti-Christ and other “false prophets” to be tormented for eternity. (Sinclair 2014)

The next phase of Satan’s journey is a major shift from the very literal persona of Satan and the spiritual warfare of Christian rhetoric to a leader of mystical beings called the Jinn who exist in a parallel universe to that of human kind.

Satan in Islam

إبليس - Iblis

شيطان - *Shaytan*

In the Islamic belief system Satan is referred to as “Iblis” which is translated as “he or it who causes despair”, which is believed to be derived from the Greek word “Diablos” (Silverstein, 21) or Shatyan which is just the proper Arabic translation for Satan. The Islamic perception of Satan, much like many other fundamental beliefs and practices in the religion, are a return to the original monotheistic traditional belief systems of Judaism while postdating Christianity. In order to understand the context within Islam in which Satan plays a role, it is important to first understand one huge doctrinal addition that Islam has added which is not present in either Judaism or Christianity, and that is the belief in the existence of what is called “*Jinn*”.

The concept of the “*Jinn*” dates back to pre-Islamic belief systems indigenous to the ancient Arabian world. Muslims believe, just as Jews and Christians do, that mankind (Adam) was created out of the Earth, out of dirt or clay and thus man is from the Earth. Muslims believe that the *Jinn* (it should be noted that the word *Jinn* serves as both the plural or singular form) are a whole population of beings which also exist on the Earth in a parallel universe of sorts, but that they were created from fire and smoke, so they are not visible to human beings. The *Jinn* are mentioned one hundred and forty-six times in the Q’uran, so they can be viewed as a very important, although mysterious, part of the Islamic belief system (Islam 232).

Jinn are believed to live and move in shared areas with human beings, they can often see us, but we cannot see them. *Jinn* can be good, but generally they are

mischievous and evil, and they are often blamed for mental illnesses and other perceived weaknesses and wrongs existent in humanity. It is not uncommon for domestic abuse to be blamed on *Jinn* possession in these instances the belief in *Jinn* could be likened to the belief in demons and demonic possessions within Christianity. The *Jinn* are said to be below humans in status, just as are Angels, but they are also believed to access magic much more easily than humans. I should say here that Muslims believe that “black magic” does exist, that there are ways in which human beings are able to use it, but it is a forbidden act in Islam. The fact that the *Jinn* access this “black magic” more frequently and easily is a part of what makes them more susceptible to evil (Islam 229).

It is not entirely clear in the Q’uran whether *Shaytan* is a fallen angel or a *Jinn* himself, but what is made clear is that whatever he was to begin with, he is now a part of the *Jinn*, if not the leader of many of the *Jinn*.

Surat Al-Kahf 18:50 :

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ كَانَ مِنَ الْجِنِّ
فَفَسَقَ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِ أَفَتَتَّخِذُونَهُ وَذُرِّيَّتَهُ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِي وَهُمْ
لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ بِئْسَ لِلظَّالِمِينَ بَدَلًا

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“And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate to Adam," and they prostrated, except for *Iblees*. He was of the *Jinn* and departed from the command

of his Lord. Then will you take him and his descendants as allies other than Me while they are enemies to you? Wretched it is for the wrongdoers as an exchange.”

(Qu'ran, Surat Al-Kahf 18:50)

The Islamic story of the fall of *Shaytan* has much to do with his arrogance and feeling of superiority to mankind. Muslims believe that when God created Adam he commanded all of the angels and *Jinn* to bow before him, and all of them did except for *Shaytan*. He reasoned that he had freewill and was made from fire, whereas Adam did not have freewill and was made from clay, thus *Shaytan* felt he was superior. When God rebuked *Shaytan* from Heaven *Shaytan* swore to have his revenge on humankind by tempting them to become evil, and he received God's approval. In Islam *Shaytan* is seen as an angry angel or *Jinn* who had his pride hurt and is jealous of man therefore out for his revenge. However, throughout Islam it can be seen that Satan still reveres God as an almighty ruler of everything and remains his servant. It is clear that the focus of his wrath is on humankind and not God.

To clarify, Satan is not considered an enemy of God, but rather a faithful servant whose downfall was in fact his refusal to bow to anybody but God. Some theologians have gone as far as to say that in fact God was testing Satan's commitment to worshiping no other but God, and in fact when Satan refused to bow to Adam he passed the test, and so he is in a sense a tragic hero damned for eternity. Even in the face of that damnation, Satan remains faithful to God. This perspective is an excellent example of the Islamic belief in absolute commitment to God and following the righteous path (Spronk, 254).

Islamic holy texts include both the Q'uran which is the equivalent of the Bible for Christians or Torah for Jews and the Hadith. The Q'uran includes a foundation of Biblical stories both Old and New Testaments with an addition of the stories of Mohamed and the first Muslims. As an accompaniment to the Q'uran in Islamic tradition there are writings called "Hadith". Hadith are not considered to be the equivalent of the Q'uran as the word of God, however, they are meant to be enrichments to the Islamic practices and expanded explanations of Islamic stories. The Hadiths were written by various well respected Islamic scholars throughout time. There are a few Hadiths that address Satan in more detail than in the Q'uran.

In the hadith titled "The Nature of Satan and his Method of Seduction: The Story of the Visit of the Devil." Satan is commanded by God to go to Mohammed and answer all of his questions honestly. It is in this story that Satan revers true followers of God as humble people who are not concerned with money or self, and it is these people who are safe from his reach. Yet there is contradiction even within that Hadith, because Satan also goes in detail describing to Mohamed his projected attempts of tempting true believers while in prayer (Spronk, 252).

The Satan of Islam is an adversary to humanity who is actively working to tempt men and women and lead them away from the righteous path. His goal is to gather as many souls to bring with him to Hell as a means of revenge. However, within the Islamic tradition not all evil comes from Satan himself. A fair amount of evil hoaxes and wrongdoings are believed to come from the power of human jealousy and bad thoughts. In this way Islam is particularly different that Christianity in that Islam holds a belief that human being do have the capacity to be evil purely through their own intent, and that

beyond that humans also have the power to impose wrong on others energetically. However, this is not to discount the belief in Jinn and their perceived effect on humanity. It is a certain duality that may be perceived in that Muslims believe evil comes from both evil entities outside of ourselves as well as humans themselves (Ahmad 106-107).

Conclusion

In observing Satan's role in the Abrahamic belief traditions and the evolving of his persona throughout this religious history questions begin to emerge. One may wonder why this concept of evil and later persona of evil has taken on so many forms and morphed from Jewish verb to noun; from Old Testament "Rebuker" of Balaam to "Tester" of Job; from New Testament tempter of Jesus to many headed apocalyptic Dragon of Revelation; and finally ending with the Islamic leader of the Jinn tragically ever faithful to the one true God. Certainly the myth stories of Satan are reflections of humanity throughout history. They are reflections of the need for explanations and the search for understanding of the darker aspects of human nature; but perhaps more importantly (and less adamantly) the Satanic myth stories evolved from verb and more innocent angel to the epicenter of evil as a means of depolarizing God. In an effort to understand a God more accessible to and fond of the Jewish people, along the emphasis on goodness as a trade for a promised land and destiny, God no longer could encompass control and credit of both all good and all bad. During their Exodus of Egypt the Jewish people gave their allegiance to the one true God, and in that they also gave their trust in the form of a pact, and so it could be that Satan's existence and evolution is truly more about fulfilling humanity's need to have a God who is only good.

However, if this textual evolution of Satan is accurate, then did Satan as we know him never truly exist? Was he only a creation of our own need to have a purely good God and purely good society? If Satan as we know him is truly just a creation of our own historical selves, then what does this say about us and where then does evil originate? Could it be that we alone, human beings, are solely responsible for the evil

that exists in the world? If so, how do we resolve this realization with the desire and belief that we are inherently good? These questions are perhaps amongst those that lie at the core of the quest for self-understanding and a greater understanding of humanity.

Whether or not Satan exists, he never the less holds an important role in the history of humanity. He defines and mirrors the people of the Abrahamic belief systems throughout wars and victories, shifts into new religions, and meetings of other cultures. He has served as a measure of human thought and continues to do so even today.

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