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THE ANGEL OF DEATH

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
Graduate Rabbinic Program  
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Referee: Professor Leonard Kravitz

Dedicated to Jeffrey,  
Who fills my life with  
adventure,  
excitement,  
and love.

In Memory of Grandma Anne.  
May her memory and  
her life be for a blessing.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are two types of evil in the world. There exists a type of external evil. This kind of evil is experienced through terrible natural events, e.g. hurricanes, floods, drought, etc. One can blame this evil for causing miscarriages, or accidents. One can accuse this evil of instigating political upsets and disasters such as the Babylonian exile, the Crusades and the Holocaust. The ultimate result of this external type of evil is the termination of human life.

The second category of evil is an internal evil which is referred to by the Rabbis as the evil inclination. This evil resides in every human being. The evil inclination turns us towards sinful deeds. It causes us to act irrationally and selfishly. Internal evil evokes disobedience and rebellion towards authority. The evil inclination demands that human beings act on the desires of their bodies and disregard moral boundaries. There are times when this evil inclination is so active in an individual's life that the evil urge seems to have an uncontested power over one's behavior. The most powerful outcome of this internal evil is its disregard for the quality of human life.

Both the external type of evil and the internal evil inclination act against man's perception of order and good in the universe. Throughout the centuries man has attempted to understand the evil in the universe and the evil within himself. In an attempt to understand the evil forces of the world,

man has created a demonic character. This demonic myth is the motivating force behind both kinds of evil. This evil character is understood as being responsible for moral decline and physical death.

The Rabbis express some of their intellectual, social and moral concerns through midrash. It is through midrash that one sees the development of the character the Angel of Death (also referred to as Satan and Samael.) The midrash portrays the Angel of Death in many different settings promoting evil, corruption and ultimately death. The Rabbis created such a character as a reaction to their own fear of evil, sin and disorder in the world. The character's existence helps to answer questions dealing with disobedience towards God, uncontrolled behavior, and physical weakness. The midrash has developed a character who is the personification of all that is evil and deadly in the world.

The Rabbis interpret death as connoting far more than just physical death. The Angel of Death's function is not only to destroy life, but to destroy moral codes as well. The Angel of Death is responsible for the destruction of Judasim since he entices people to move away from the mitzvot. By activating an individual's evil inclination, the Angel of Death is the cause of the desintegration of obedience and good deeds. The Angel destroys the individual who is complacent and irrational. Satan is the destroyer of good in the world. He destroys good intentions. He corrupts blind faith and he challenges the depth of each person's righteousness.

Satan does not act independently from God. Satan has been given his mission through God's authority. God instructs the Angel of Death as to



where and how he should strike. Sometimes God wishes to test a victims faith, so the Angel of Death is sent to lure the person into sin. Occasionally, God wants a an individual punished for the sin of disobedience to Him. Satan is ordered to torture the person with the threat of death until that person repents. And there are also times when God wishes to assert His ultimate authority in the world. So the Angel of Death is summoned to take lives without explanation given to the victims.

This thesis is an investigation of the Angel of Death through the midrash. The following material is divided into two sections. The first section addresses the Biblical stories of Adam and Eve, the Golden Calf, and the Book of Job. Following each of these chapters is another chapter that is a compilation of the midrash that mention the Angel of Death in connection with the Biblical stories. The first two Biblical accounts contain no mention of the Angel of Death. The character is developed through the Rabbis embellishment of the Biblical story in the midrash.

It was necessary to begin with the Biblical accounts and their midrash because later descriptions of the Angel of Death will make direct references back to the Bible. By inserting the role of Satan into the midrashim on the Bible, the Rabbis hoped to prove that the character and the presence of evil had existed since the beginning of time.

The second part of the material deals with the Angel of Death's characteristics. There are four chapters in this section they are: Characteristics, Vulnerability, Enticement to Sin. Warding off the Angel of Death and Luz and the Day of Atonement. Through a collection of different

midrashim, these chapters give a broader understanding and analysis of the Angel of Death and his function in the world. The midrashim in general depict the Angel as an evil adversary who is constantly tempting, prodding, and torturing human beings with evil and death.

In the final chapter conclusions will be drawn as to what the general role of the Angel of Death was as perceived by the Rabbis. The Rabbis intent was to create a character whose function and meaning exceeded the mere execution of mortals. The Angel of Death, according to the Rabbis, is God's antithesis in the world. The Angel was created to warn individuals of the consequence of their irrational actions and to persuade the individual to turn back to righteousness, good deeds, rational thoughts and life.

CHAPTER ONE  
THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF THE  
GARDEN OF EDEN

We know that later Rabbinic literature uses the Bible as its point of departure. And the Angel of Death is a character that is developed much later in the Bible. So in order to understand the character fully, it is necessary to review possible incidences and occurrences in the Bible that might point to a source for the Rabbis' later creation.

There is no mention of the Angel of Death in the Old Testament. The names Satan, slaughterer, Death etc are given; yet there is not a specific character as the Angel of Death. There are various angels mentioned in the Old Testament; the Angels that met Sarah and Abraham, the one that fought with Jacob, the ones that guided the Israelites through the dessert. But there is no specific mention of an angel whose sole purpose is to destroy life. Messengers of God answer to and through God, so there is no personality, in the Bible, which acts independently to destroy God or God's creatures.

The Angel of Death, as portrayed in Rabbinic literature, is seen as evil, devious, dangerous, ugly, and cunning. In looking backward into the Biblical text, I have focused on a few stories that will help to analyze the Angel's later personality development. The following stories will help answer questions dealing with the Angel's sense of evil and will to destroy. They are: the Garden of Eden story, the Golden Calf incident, and the book of Job.

### The Garden Of Eden

One of the preliminary questions concerning the Angel of Death is, "Why is death considered evil, a punishment or a threat?" The simplistic response that nobody wants to die because we enjoy life, is too superficial, subjective and circular in its reasoning to be of much help. Consider that perhaps death represents the unknown and that is why it frightens us. Perhaps it means that we are giving into that part of us that represents idleness, unproductiveness, and disassociation with life. Perhaps we feel guilty for wanting to die, to return to rest, to acquiesce to self-indulgence and self alienation. It is important, therefore, to look at our primitive fears and anxieties and attempt to sort out the impact they have on our view of our mortality. The Garden of Eden story, with the threat of death and the personality of the Serpent, is our first glimpse into the minds of the Jewish people.

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall certainly die.'" Mot tamut. Evil and death are both possibilities from the outset. If man eats from the tree he will know evil. If man knows evil he will also know death as a result.

Evil is there simply in order to increase man's chances; because God wanted man to be free He ordained the real existence of evil, that he

(man) might prove his moral strength  
in overcoming it.<sup>1</sup>

Evil is an element that is created by God. The use of evil is man's choice. Neither evil, nor the punishment of death exist without God's input. When man realizes that knowledge of evil leads to death, then death becomes a foreboding element of life. There is no mention as to what this evil is, or for that matter what good is<sup>2</sup>. The temptation of not knowing is enough for God to test man.<sup>3</sup>

Mot tamut is the first mention of death in the Bible. Because of the repetition it is a phrase that has translators puzzled. Adam and Eve are not killed instantly so Mot does not seem to imply an immediate bodily death. Cassuto enumerates several possibilities for this phrase. He states that it could be an affliction that would haunt human beings that would be as cruel as death. It could mean that man would not attain the full measure of his life, namely one thousand years. Immediate death could have been threatened, but then the decree was tempered (hence the reason man does not die immediately after eating the fruit.) Mot tamut could imply that "Death" the spirit, individual, or even angel would eventually catch up to him

<sup>1</sup> Scholem, Gershom. Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> It is not important for man to know what the actual evil is or what is meant by good. Man is totally indifferent as to whether his condition is bad or good. These terms only arise when one makes subjective choices as to how one should conduct one's life. At this point man does not have a desire to change his innocence and thereby have the power to judge between what he feels is good or evil in his life. Evil then becomes the desire to disobey God.

<sup>3</sup> The International Critical Edition of the Bible. "Genesis" p. 73.

and over take him. Or, finally, the phrase could mean that once Adam was immortal and now he is mortal.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the interpretation might be, it is clear that the change in the human status was a negative one.

Life, then, becomes meaningful for Adam in a different way. It is against the back drop of the threat of death that Adam yearns for companionship, fulfillment in life, and a stake in the future.

Primitive people living in close contact with nature consider the liquid substance of the body as the ingredients of life; blood and semen are such substances. The marrow of the bones were considered the seat of vitality and sexual capacity.<sup>5</sup>

Woman is created for man so that together they might fulfill their life desires: procreation and sex. There is neither evil nor shame in their desire for each other. They are, at the end of chapter 2 arumim, אָרֻמִּים, naked, unashamed and very much alive.

It is at this point that the catalyst of evil appears. The serpent enters the story by being described as arume, אָרֹם, cunning. This is an obvious play on the word arumim. The pun suggests that the act of sexuality will be changed not only from an innocent good act, to a compromising intimacy, but also the desire to know, to have knowledge, דַּעַת, and to have sex, will be the nemesis of humankind. The serpent entices the woman to eat of the tree by convincing her that she will not die.

<sup>4</sup> Cassuto. A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. p.44.

<sup>5</sup> Thass-Thienemann. The Interpretation of Language. p.274.

The demonic character of the serpent appears in his possession of occult divine knowledge of the properties of the tree in the middle of the garden, and his uses that knowledge to seduce man from from his allegiance of his creator.<sup>6</sup>

The main purpose of this tempter is to implant the seeds of distrust in the mind of the woman causing her to doubt God's power to cause death. "You will not die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and evil." (Gen. 3:4-5)

This becomes the first glimpse into the personality of an evil being who consciously wills death the of his victims. There is a portrayal of the serpent in an earlier legend as a god or a demon possessing divine powers. <sup>7</sup> Mot, in ancient literature, was God's chief foe, the Lord of the sea. He was a force that revolted against God. The sea rebel became the symbol of the force of evil for the Israelites.<sup>8</sup> This character is not only cunning, and shrewd, but he also has the ability to take on a recognizable form. He can speak, and he can reason. He seems to be animated by his hostility towards God.<sup>9</sup> The serpent has a will and a desire to bring about the fall of man.

The serpent tricks Eve and Adam, and thus brings about their moral and physical fall. Death now has a place in the world. What is now considered "natural death" did not exist for the ancient thinkers. Man would

<sup>6</sup> The International Critical Edition of the Bible, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.72.

<sup>8</sup> Cassuto. p.49.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.49.



not have died had it not been for the external input of the agent of death, namely the serpent. For the early thinker, man was put to death by some agency be it disease, old age, a god, death was not understood as part of the life process.<sup>10</sup>

Ironically, the life process as depicted in the Garden of Eden epic, intimately tied to the process of death. As stated before the serpent originally appears as a reaction to the man and woman having sex. And the scene is completed with the description of how the woman will bear her children in pain. On the one hand, death is portrayed in this story as something that alienates us from that which is good and innocent in our lives. And on the other hand, it acquaints us with the future. It forces us to acknowledge our desire for immortality. It is through that desire to live forever that we procreate, strive for success, and strive to combat our evil desires.

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<sup>10</sup> Thass-Thienemann. p. 269.

CHAPTER TWO  
MIDRASH ON ADAM AND EVE  
AND THE ROLE OF SATAN

The Midrash on the story of Adam and Eve, helps us to understand how the Rabbis interpreted the role of death, and the Angel of Death. The Biblical story leaves the reader with many questions. It is hard to understand the function of this evil event, i.e. the enticement of Adam into disobedience. It is difficult to imagine what made the character, the serpent, in the Bible, and the Angel of Death, in the Midrash, so angry as to disrupt the lives of the happy couple. One is also left with the feeling of ultimate vulnerability after the fall of Adam. One cannot help but wonder whether one has any defense at all against the Angel, against evil, and/or against sin.

There seems to be a question as to what is the actual physical status of the human beings in the garden, were they mortal, i.e. destined to die, or were they immortal, able to live forever. The issue arises out of a contradiction in the text. On the one hand, God uses the threat of death, mot tamut, if Adam disobeys God. The message is, that man is immortal and that death would be a punishment. But on the other hand, God puts the Tree of Life in the garden, which if consumed, would bestow immortality to the consumer. The message here is, man is mortal and the Tree of Life would grant him immortality. This question may be answered in part by the following midrash:

...God created him (man) with four attributes  
of the higher beings (i.e. angels) and four

attributes of the lower beings (i.e. beasts).  
 The four attributes of the higher beings are:  
 he stands upright, like the ministering angels  
 he speaks, like the ministering angels; he  
 understands, like the ministering angels; and  
 he sees, like the ministering angels.....He has four  
 attributes of the lower beings: he eats and drinks,  
 like an animal; procreates, like an animal;  
 excretes, like an animal; and dies, like an animal.  
 R. Tifdai said in R. Aha's name: The celestial beings  
 were created in the image and likeness of God and  
 do not procreate, while the terrestrial creatures  
 procreate but were not created in God's image  
 and likeness. Said the Holy One, blessed be He:  
 'Behold, I will create man in My image and  
 likeness, so he will be like the celestial beings,  
 while he will procreate, after the nature of the  
 terrestrial beings. 'If I create him of the celestial  
 beings he will live for ever and not die and not live  
 [in the future life]. Therefore I will create him  
 of the upper and of the lower elements: if he sins he  
 will die; while if he does not sin, he will live.<sup>1</sup>

Human beings, therefore, are celestial, God-like, in their ability to discern evil, but they are terrestrial in the respect that they must procreate and die. It is interesting that that which makes us God-like has to do with our intellect, and that which makes us human is our ability to procreate. The answer to the above question concerning our mortality is, on the one hand we do die physically. Yet procreation allows part of us to live on in this world. And on the other hand, although we die in this world, our divine characteristic of reason will lead us to an existence in the world to come.

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<sup>1</sup> Bereshit Rabbah. 8:11, p.62.

The act of performing good deeds, i.e. being obedient, is a central issue in this story. Adam and Eve's disobedience lead them to the evil deed of disregarding God's law.

For him who lays up precepts and good  
deeds lo, there is the Angel of Life; while  
for him who does not lay up precepts and  
good deeds there is the Angel of Death.<sup>2</sup>

Life is connected with goodness, and death is connected with misdeeds.

Still the question of the creation of the Angel of Death persists. There is one midrash that states; when it is said in Genesis 1:25, "And God made the beast of the earth...." that the text enumerates four souls; living creatures, cattle, creeping things and wild beasts. But later on the text only mentions three bodies; wild beasts, cattle of every kind, and creeping things. The midrash says that the extra soul refers to demons whose soul God created but He didn't have a chance to create their bodies.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the demon, the Angel of Death, does not have a physical body. And in connection with the above midrash on procreation, it would follow that if the Angel does not have a body neither does he have the ability to procreate. Given that his body was neglected at the time of his creation, it is logical that he would be angry enough to destroy other physical bodies.

Another interpretation of the actual creation of the Angel of Death comes from the midrash explaining *אֱלֹהֵי הַמָּוֶת*.

When God created the world there was

<sup>2</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 9:10, p.69.

<sup>3</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 7:5, p52.

no Angel of Death in the world, on this account מלאך מות was spelled fully. But as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, God made defective all the מלאך מות mentioned in the Bible.<sup>4</sup>

The "l" in the word toldot signifies wholeness, and obedience to God. The "l" is removed when Adam sins. The world from that point on is no longer whole, it is lacking, and in need of repair. From this midrash it would appear that the Angel of Death arrived when sin arrived and the Angel persists through generations because of the sin of Adam and Eve.

A similar possibility is, from the beginning of the Bible until Genesis 2:21 there is no "O" written [א'ו'ע'ר], but as soon as Eve was created Satan was created with her.<sup>5</sup> Here the Rabbis are playing on the sound of the "ע" and the "O". According to the Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Brown Driver and Briggs, עו and עו both have the same meaning, that is they are both nouns, and they both mean swerver, or revolter, those who fall away to deeds of falsehood. The Rabbis are thus creating a correlation between Satan with a "sin", and Satan with a "samach".

There is also a midrash that states that the Angel of Death was created on the first day as seen in Genesis 1:2 "...with darkness over the surface of the deep...." The darkness is the Angel of Death. Adam is to blame for causing that darkness to descend on human kind.<sup>6</sup> The over all-consensus is

<sup>4</sup> Exodus Rabbah 30:3, p349.

<sup>5</sup> Bereshit Rabah 17:6, 30b.

<sup>6</sup> Tanuhmah Nidpas V'yoshev:4.

that Satan, this force of evil, and death existed since the beginning of the world.

Samael, or Satan, having abided in the world since the beginning of creation, had acquired a good deal of power. According to Yalkut Shimoni, Samael was one of the great rulers in the heavens.<sup>7</sup> He had twelve wings where the other beings had only four or six wings. Samael became enraged for two reasons. One midrash said that he was angry because Adam was closer to God than any other angel. Adam was permitted to name the animals, and this made Samael very angry and very jealous.<sup>8</sup> The second reason for his anger, is that he saw what Adam and Eve were doing, namely having sex. As the Rabbis said,

The creature inveigled them  
because he saw them engaged  
in their natural functions-he  
conceived a passion for Eve.<sup>9</sup>

The note on the Soncino addition states that the serpent/Samael wished to cause Adam's death so that he might have Eve. Samael was jealous of Adam and Eve's ability to have sex, (and even perhaps jealous of their intimacy, their bodily contact, and their ability to procreate).

Samael is intent on disrupting Adam and Eve's life. He uses the serpent as a means to introduce himself in their lives.

He took his band and descended and

<sup>7</sup> Yalkut. bet. p.16 Bereshit.

<sup>8</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 21:1, p.172.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 18:6, p.147.

saw all the creatures that God had created in His world, and he found among them none so skilled to do evil as the serpent, as it is said, "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast." Its appearance was something like that of the camel, and he mounted and rode upon it.<sup>10</sup>

His goal is to entice Eve with the evil of eating the fruit, to have her give it to Adam, and then to have Adam punished for the sin of disobeying God.<sup>11</sup>

Eve succumbs easily to the Serpent's manipulation. The midrashim vary as to when Eve actually saw the Angel of Death. One midrash states that she first ate the skin and when she felt fine, she continued eating the rest of the fruit. When she was done with the fruit she saw the Angel of Death coming towards her.<sup>12</sup> Another midrash states that the woman saw the Angel of Death/Samael when she touched the tree for the first time.<sup>13</sup>

After Eve saw the Angel she, according to one midrash, said,

"Woe is me! I shall die, and the Holy One will make another woman and give her to Adam-but behold I will cause him to eat with me; If we shall die, we shall both die, and if we shall live, we will both live."<sup>14</sup>

Eve was committed to not dying alone. She knew of her punishment, and she did not wish to bear it alone. In another midrash, Eve actually talks

<sup>10</sup> Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer Ch. 13 p.92.

<sup>11</sup> Yalkut Shimoni Berashit p16:B.

<sup>12</sup> Ginzberg. Legends of the Jews V:1, p.73-74.

<sup>13</sup> Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer 31-32, Ch. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Ch. 13.



back to Satan after she realizes her fate. Eve asks Satan what he has against them, what did they do to make him their enemy. Satan responds that Adam took away Satan's glory, for when Adam was created all of the angels were forced to bow down to Adam.<sup>15</sup> He continues.

But in my pride, I refused to worship  
young and inferior beings- Michael  
threatened me with God's anger-but I  
replied, "I will set my seat above the stars  
of the heavens and will be like the highest."  
(Isaiah 14:14)<sup>16</sup>

This is yet another illustration of Satan's jealousy towards human beings. Satan had been living with such animosity towards Adam and Eve. Eve, therefore, was utterly defenseless when she met with his wrath.

The midrashim on the interaction between Adam, Eve, and the Angel of Death explains and underscores some of the concerns and insights of the Rabbis. The issues of sin; death, and sexuality are all touched upon in these texts.

The Angel of Death is the personification of all that is evil. Disobedience and sin lead to death. This is clearly the message in both the Biblical account as well as in the midrashim on the story. Wanton desire, lust for the unattainable, and a rejection of authority all lead to death. When one steps outside the set regulations, in this case the prohibition of eating of the tree, one becomes vulnerable to evil and deceptive forces in the world.

<sup>15</sup> Bamberger. Fallen Angels p.35.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p. 35 It is said that this is the moment that Satan fell out of God's grace, and became a "fallen Angel" turned against the Divine.

He manipulates man's desire and entices him into actions that man knows are wrong.

The Angel of Death, in this case Satan/Serpent represents man's evil inclination. The evil inclination is that part of us that rebels against authority. The evil inclination searches for immediate gratification regardless of the consequences. Through the midrashim on Adam and Eve, the Rabbis are warning the people not to succumb to that evil inclination.

Once Adam and Eve have sinned, God is forced to punish them with death. Death and procreation are intricately entwined. Procreation is the only defense against death. Procreation is revealed in the story after Adam and Eve are faced with their punishment of death. Sex existed in the garden when there was no value placed on it. Sex outside the garden is no longer just a desire. The goal of sex after the expulsion is to procreate.

All of these elements, desire, death and procreation, are understood by the Rabbis as being connected to knowledge. Desire is the opposite of knowledge. One make irrational decisions at the height of desire. Death is also placed in juxtaposition with knowledge. On the one hand, God does not want man to have knowledge. God prefers that man exist in blissful ignorance. Yet, on the other hand, God knows the power and the benefit of knowledge and He entices man to disobey Him so that in the end man will have the knowledge at the expense of death. And finally, procreation is connected with knowledge in so far as the first act of procreation appeared to be a conscious decision based on survival. Man knows that he will die, so he makes the rational choice to procreate so the human race may continue.

In the following chapters sin, desire, knowledge and vulnerability will be discussed

CHAPTER THREE  
THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF THE  
GOLDEN CALF INCIDENT

The Biblical account of the Golden Calf, like the story of the Garden of Eden, contains no mention of Satan, or for that matter, any angel. The midrashim on the topic, however, use the Angel of Death or Satan as the instigator for the sin of building the calf. It is, therefore, important to review the story so as to analyze later the reasons why the Rabbis used the character of Satan in their attempt to understand the story. The Golden Calf incident in Exodus 32:1-35 may be examined in three parts: the building of the calf, God and Moses' reaction to the idol, and finally the punishment of the people.

The first part of the story is a description of Aaron building the calf for the people. The people had felt deserted by Moses and are longing for a physical representation of a god or a leader. The former slaves need a leader who will protect them from their enemies, guide them through the desert, and maintain their physical well being. The people fear that without such a leader they will die. The people are willing to risk the punishment for idolatry, for at the time of the building of the calf, the punishment was not as real to them as their fear of abandonment.

According to the Interpreter's Bible, the concept of building a calf was a tradition dating no earlier than the eighth century.

There can be no doubt that the story received its present form very much

later than the Mosaic era and that  
it was developed and used for polemic  
purposes in the struggle of the Jerusalem  
Priests against the Bethel shrine.<sup>1</sup>

It is thought that the story developed using the strength of the figure Moses so to gain credibility for the reformers of the eighth and seventh centuries.<sup>2</sup> Idolatry was a serious sin, and in the midrash, the Rabbis will understand the act of idolatry as the cue for the appearance of the Angel of Death.

The second section of the story deals with Moses' interaction with God. Verse 7 of chapter 32 illustrates God's immediate response to the rebellion of the Israelites. "The Lord spoke to Moses, 'Hurry down, for your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely.'" God's use of the second person, your, and you, has not gone unnoticed by the commentators. God is clearly relinquishing all responsibility for the Israelites. "There is no ambiguity in Yahweh's judgement; Israel has corrupted herself."<sup>3</sup> God is disgusted by her actions, He feels they are a stiffnecked people not worthy of His laws. "Israel's election is surely at stake because God is now prepared to annihilate her completely."<sup>4</sup>

The next phrase, however, is the turning point in the story. God says in verse 10, "Now, let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them...." Commentators, such as Childs, state that God's request to be let alone, was

<sup>1</sup> Intepreter's Bible p.1064.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.1064.

<sup>3</sup> Childs, Brevard. The Book of Exodus, a Critical Theological Commentary. p. 553.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.553.

just that, a request. God is giving Moses the option not to leave Him alone. God wants to be talked out of destroying His people.<sup>5</sup> Moses does not let the opportunity pass by, he stands up to God, arguing in favor of granting the Israelites one more chance.

Moses' argument with God contains three segments. The first tactic is an appeal to God's ultimate love of His people Israel. Moses points out in verse 11 that it was God, and not Moses, who brought the people, God's people out of Egypt.

The second strategy is Moses' praise of the Divine name and reputation. Moses begins with the fact that God would not want the Egyptians to think that the Israelites were brought out of slavery merely to be killed by their own God in the desert. "Let not the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth.'" (Ex. 32:12) According to Cassuto, the word "haraha" evil is used twice in this verse, and once in verse 14, describing not the evil deed of the Israelites, but rather the possible evil that God would do. Moses uses this phrase as a way to deter God from changing His reputation from a loving God, to an evil one. There is also a play on the words "רַחֵם" to be left alone, and "תִּתְּנֵם" to repent. Moses uses the word "henachem" as a way to entice God to be left alone to repent for the evil thought of killing off the Israelites.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.555.

<sup>6</sup> Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, p.416.

The final phase of the argument is directed at remembering the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The goal in this section is to convince God that if He were to destroyed the Israelites all of the previous promises would be for naught.

The final section of the story involves the punishment of the Israelites.

Moses does not attempt to justify the people. He realizes that they have committed a great sin, and that strict justice requires them to be severely punished.<sup>7</sup>

Moses burns and grinds the golden calf and forces the people to drink of it. How could the calf be both burnt and ground to powder? There is a Ugaritic parallel, namely, Anat cleaves to Mot with a sword, burns him with fire, grinds his body with millstone and strews his flesh upon the field.<sup>8</sup> This reference to the Ugaritic text illustrates not only a precedent for Moses' behavior, but it also makes reference to Mot, an evil god, who is viewed as the forerunner of the מוֹת הַמָּוֶת.<sup>9</sup> This mention of Mot, will also parallel the Rabbis' use of the Angel of Death in the midrash on the golden calf.

The saga of the Golden Calf is seen as Israel's ultimate sin against God. As was seen in the Garden of Eden story, disobedience against the will of God is the catalyst for Divine disapproval and punishment. In their attempt to

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.14.

<sup>8</sup> Childs. p.558.

<sup>9</sup> The same root Mem-tav, meaning death, is used in both the Ugaritic name of the defeated god and the Hebrew Angel of Death.



explain the reasons for Israel's disobedience the Rabbis will use Satan as the instigator of the building of the calf. In addition the Rabbis will use the Angel of Death and his role as a means to justify Moses' punishments for idolatry

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**MIDRASH ON THE GOLDEN CALF**  
**IN RELATION TO THE ANGEL OF DEATH**

As stated before in the Bible section dealing with the Golden Calf, there is no mention of the Angel of Death (Satan) at all in the Biblical narrative. The Rabbis use Satan as an active part in the midrashim in order to understand the Biblical story. Satan is visible in discussions concerning the giving of the Torah to Israel, in the descriptions of Moses as a leader, and in the explanation of the Golden Calf incident.

It is believed that the study and acceptance of Torah lead to eternal life. According to various midrashim, the Angel of Death does not hold sway over the nation that possesses the Torah.<sup>1</sup>

God resolved to give everlasting life  
to the nation that would accept the  
Torah, hence Israel upon accepting the  
Torah gained supremacy over the Angel  
of Death.<sup>2</sup>

Through an understanding of the mitzvot, and an obedience to God, Israel would insure their everlasting presence in the world. Torah and mitzvot control our desires and inclinations. Torah enforces a moral, secure, rational code to the universe, that demands total alligence. Once Israel strayed from God and the mitzvot, Israel faced irrationality and a sense of vulnerability.

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<sup>1</sup>Exodus Rabbah p.476.

<sup>2</sup> Ginzberg. Legends of the Jews V:3, p.120.

There are also midrashim that state that Israel was given the Torah as protection against the Angel of Death. In Tanhuma it says that the Torah protected against other kingdoms, the Angel of Death, and from suffering trials.<sup>3</sup> The Angel of Death would have no dominion over them, until the sin of the Golden Calf, as it is said in Psalm 82:6, "Ye shall die like mortals."<sup>4</sup>

The Angel of Death knew that Israel would not remain tied to the Torah. Satan was opposed to Moses receiving the law because he (Satan) knew that the Israelites would violate it with the Golden Calf.<sup>5</sup> It is even said that God exiled the Angel of Death before giving Moses the Torah because God knew that the Angel would object.<sup>6</sup>

The story of the Golden Calf begins with the people being concerned about Moses returning. "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain...." (Ex. 32:1) The Rabbis explain the people's panic in regard to where Moses is, by inserting Satan into the text. Satan, according to Tanhuma, incites panic in the people while they are waiting for Moses to return. Satan creates the illusion that Moses has died by causing the illusion of his death bier to float above the people.<sup>7</sup> Satan knows that if he can disrupt the people, that they will feel vulnerable enough to do something drastic. The people panicked when they saw that Moses had died and they reverted back to their old ways and demanded that Aaron build a

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<sup>3</sup> Tanhuma Buber 2:112.

<sup>4</sup> Talmud B. Avodah Zarah 5a, p.20-21.

<sup>5</sup> Talmud B. Sanhedrin 26b, p155.

<sup>6</sup> Bamberger. Fallen Angels p.275.

<sup>7</sup> Tanhuma Buber 2:113.

them an idol for them. "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt-we do not know what has happened to him." (Ex. 32:1)

R. Jehudah said, Samael entered into it and he was lowering to mislead Israel, as it is said, "The ox knows his owner." (Isaiah 1:3)<sup>8</sup>

When faced with the death of Moses, and probably the fear of their own death, the people searched for a way to feel more secure and protected. Satan plays on that fear and entices them to sin against God.

The Rabbis have compared the building of the calf to the sin of Adam in the Garden. Just as Adam and Eve gave into temptation and disobedience, the Israelites gave into fear and the false desire for security.

Truly I (God) had hoped that after all this (the giving of the Torah) you would sin no more, and like Myself and the angels would live eternally, without ever tasting death. You however conducted yourselves like Adam. Hence like Adam you shall die.<sup>9</sup>

Adam was given the opportunity to live in eternal bliss, but he trespassed God's commandment not to eat of the tree, and he was punished with death. God feels that the Israelites had the same opportunity for eternal life through the Torah, but they relinquished that right by building the Golden Calf. The Israelites had the opportunity to be like the ministering angels

<sup>8</sup> Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer. p.355.

<sup>9</sup> Ginzberg. V:3, p. 278.

living eternally, "not discharging any excretions like the children of men." As it is said in Psalm 82, "I said, you are angels all of your son's of the Most High."<sup>10</sup> But after the building of the calf, the Israelites revert to simple mortal human beings.

As through their words and their  
talk they angered Me, so shall the  
word kill them.<sup>11</sup>

There would have been no exile of the Israelites nor would there have been an Angel of Death, had the Golden Calf never been built.<sup>12</sup>

Once again the existence of sin and desire become the factors leading to death. As in the Garden of Eden, God has promised the people a type of eternal life. Yet, they cannot relinquish their need for immediate gratification. The people were undisciplined. They need to constantly be watched over and disciplined. They cannot be trusted to obey the rules, or to place their trust in their leaders. The threat of Death seems to be the only punishment that can persuade the people to rethink their reactions and desires.

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<sup>10</sup> Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer p.367.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid p. 279.

<sup>12</sup> Exodus Rabbah 32:1, p404.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF JOB**

The last Biblical story to be examined in terms of the origins of the Angel of Death is the Book of Job. In the Book of Job, the character ha Satan exhibits a personality and a purpose that has not been developed as fully in any other part of the Bible. It is in this saga that Satan not only challenges God's authority, but he takes on the characteristic of truly being God's adversary. He is seen as an evil agent with a will to defy God and to instill unfaithfulness into the faithful. After careful analysis of the behavior of "ha Satan", it is easy to see the correlation between this evil character and the character of the Angel of Death that develops from it. As we will see later, the Angel of Death develops the same sense of evil and will to defy as this earlier character.

The Book of Job opens with God sitting among the B'nai Ha Elohim. This phrase in and of itself tells the reader that there are other Elohim in the heavens.<sup>1</sup> They are beings that belong to the class of God.<sup>2</sup> The phrase "B'nai Ha Elohim" appears in very few additional places in the Bible ; Genesis 6:2-4, referring to those "angels" who cohabitated with human beings, and in Job 38:7 "And the divine beings shouted for joy." Little is known about

<sup>1</sup> The Targum on Gen 6: 2 where the phrase appears the first time, translates B'nai ha elohim as "sons of nobles." R.Simon Johai believed that it should be translated as "sons of judges."

<sup>2</sup> Driver. A Critical and Exergetical Commentary on the Book of Job, p. 10.



those particular beings and their specific functions. There are, however, parallels between the term "B'nai Ha Elohim" and "Tzavah Ha Shamiim" in terms of the scene that is illustrated in Job in comparison with other verses in the Bible. For example in 1 Kings 22:19, "I call upon you to hear the word of the Lord! I saw the Lord seated upon His throne, with all the host of heaven standing in attendance to the right and to the left of Him." God sends one of these hosts out to entice and be a "lying spirit" to the prophets. The hosts are a military advisory council for God. Another example is in Deuteronomy 4:19, "And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and the moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them." In this instance, it appears that the heavenly hosts have powers that some nations might be compelled to bow to. The precedent of angels or beings, described as "Tzavah Ha Shamim, as having a type of advisory status and/or power, leads us to believe that the phrase "B'nai Ha Elohim" may contain some of the same connotations. Therefore, Satan is among this council, ready to interact with God.

Yahweh, according to the writer, is not just one of the Elohim but the supreme ruler of the other beings. וְהָיָה ה' יוֹסֵף וְיִבְרָאֵל בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים  
 וְהָיָה ה' יוֹסֵף וְיִבְרָאֵל בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים. "One day the divine beings presented themselves before the Lord, and the Adversary (ha satan) came along with them." (Job 1:6) It appears that ha satan is counted as one of the "elohim" and he, like the others, has been called into God's presence, to do God's will.

The term "ha Satan" does not, at this stage hold all of the connotations of the later Jewish and Christian Satan or Devil.<sup>3</sup> That is, the ha Satan is not a personal name but rather it is a role specification. The term, satan, is understood in three different ways; as an accuser, as a wandering instigator, and as a symbol of destruction. In the first instance, Satan is seen as the accuser, the adversary, and the doubter in God's court. Satan is not necessarily evil but rather he is someone who plays "devil's advocate," he challenges the opinions of the other parties.<sup>4</sup> An example of this kind of challenging is in Numbers 22:22, "God was incensed at his (Balaam) going; so an angel of the Lord placed himself in his (Balaam's) way as an adversary. Satan's role here is to challenge Balaam's intentions.

The second understanding of Satan as an instigator arises from the character's desire to wander. There are those scholars that believe that the word satan is a play on  $\text{שָׂטָן}$ , that is this creature goes around stirring up trouble, looking for the failings of men.<sup>5</sup> "The Adversary answered the Lord, 'I have been roaming all over the earth.'" (Job 1:7)

And the third understanding of Satan is held by those who believe that the word satan is derived from root  $\text{שָׂטָן}$ , meaning hate or animosity. Other uses of this are found in Gen 27:41 where Esau is described as harboring a grudge, dislike, and hatred towards Jacob. And similarly, in

<sup>3</sup> Pope. The Anchor Bible. Job. p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Habel. The Book of Job. p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> Driver. p.12.

Gen 50: 15 where Joseph bears a grudge or dislike towards his bothers.<sup>6</sup> Whether it means adversary, vagabond, or hatred, the term satan implies something unpleasant and distrusting.

Satan maintains a certain amount of freedom in his travels, yet he must in the end answer to God. "The Lord said to the Adversary, 'Where have you been?'" (Job 1:7) God wants an accounting of his travels, and he wants to know if ha satan has noticed His servant Job in his visits. Satan quite boldly speaks out to God saying it is easy for Job to be righteous, but take something away from him and see how easily he will turn away from God. It is at this point that God sends Satan on a mission, "See, all that he (Job) has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on him." (1:12) Satan would not have gone had God not sent him. Therefore, it would appear that Satan is being sent to do God's "dirty work" in order to test Job.<sup>7</sup>

After the second meeting between God and Satan, the Adversary is allowed to affect Job's body, but he is instructed to also protect it so that Job does not die. "See that he is in your power; only spare his life." (2:7) This seems ironic in two ways, first one would think that Satan's role would not be to protect but to destroy, and second Job ends up blaming God for his torture, (10:13-14, 13:27, and 33:11). Satan is expected to play the role of God and protect Job, and God is playing the role of the adversary in allowing Job to be tempted.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Gordis. The Book of Job. p. 16 In addition, the term Mastema, same root, is found in the Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha as the name of the fallen angel.

<sup>7</sup> Habel. p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.95.

Satan is not God's co-equal, he is subservient to God. The role of the Adversary is a powerful one. He can cause distress and mistrust. He can tempt man with evil and lead him to blaspheme God. Satan can also cause disease, discomfort and, finally, death. The natural question is, why would God have a character such as this sit among His other hosts? Perhaps the earlier translation of B'nai Ha elohim as judges offers an enlightening image. (see footnote # 1) The role of the Adversary is to judge from a negative perspective. He gives the account of the darker side of the world. He is the spokesperson for that which fights against life, i.e. death, evil, mistrust, doubt. Perhaps God needs this character in the Divine presence so that the balance of life will be sustained. Perhaps the character develops into a more haunting, evil, and destructive character, the Angel of Death, because human beings, like God, need the same structural understanding of life. Human beings often feel tempted, disarmed, challenged, and accosted by the evil in the world. The creation of an Angel of Death puts a name on the projection of that evil in the minds of the tortured.

CHAPTER SIX  
JOB MOTIFS

This chapter is called Job Motifs because it is comprised of both the midrashim on Job and midrashim on other stories that follow similar patterns. In these midrashim, there appears to be a similar interplay between God and Satan. The focus will be on those instances where God and Satan work out their power-struggle. God and Satan both use their victims' faith to prove who is more powerful. These midrashim use these patterns to address issues of faith, good and evil, and death. The chapter begins with the midrashim on Job, followed by the midrashim that fall into the same genre.

### Job

In the Book of Job, Satan and God are playing a game of sorts. God is trying to convince Satan, the Adversary, that Job is completely faithful. Satan challenges God. As the Rabbis say,

Satan comes down to earth and seduces,  
then ascends to heaven and awakens  
wrath; permission is granted to him and  
he takes away a soul.<sup>1</sup>

The game begins. Satan attempts to shake the foundations of Job's faith so as to win the bet with God. There are a number of midrashim that developed out of this game. These Midrashim use the God vs. Satan game as

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<sup>1</sup> Talmud B. Baba Bathra 16a, p. 78.

a way to explain other trials of faith in the Biblical text. In addition, the midrashim that developed out of the Job story, there are similar themes that revolve around the Akedah, and the sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau.

Satan, as stated in the section on Job, plays the adversarial role in the story. The midrash attempts to more fully develop the interplay between God and Job. God asks, "Have you noticed my servant Job? There is no one like him on earth, a blameless, and upright man who fears God and shuns evil." (Job 1:8) Satan's response according to the midrash is, that he has searched the entire world and has found none so righteous as Abraham (not Job.)<sup>2</sup> Satan is determined to instigate trouble. He tells God that Job is righteous merely because God has given him all that he desires, but were God to take away all that he treasures Job would curse God. "But lay Your hand upon all that he has and he will surely blaspheme You (God) to Your face." (Job 1:11) God responds to the challenge, but He maintains His ultimate authority when He tells Satan "Behold he is in your hand but spare his life." (Job 2:6)

Satan's torment was worse than Job's;  
he was like a servant who is told by his  
master, 'break the cask but do not let  
any of the wine spill.'<sup>3</sup>

Satan successfully instigated a challenge, but he is forced to play by God's rules. The midrash suggests that Satan's initial desire was to kill Job, and the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 16a.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 16a.

restriction to spare his life seemed almost a punishment for such a character as Satan.

Satan, as the story continues, takes away all of Job's possessions. Job's wife is not as strong as Job and she tells him "Blaspheme God and die!" (Job 2:9) The Rabbis find it curious that Job's wife would give in to unfaithfulness so quickly. The midrash explains that Satan stood behind Job's wife and forced her into arguing with her husband. Job knows that Satan is the cause of her groans and tears, and he forgives her for her weakness. Job then challenges Satan to step forward and meet him face to face. Satan steps out from behind Job's wife, admits he lost this round and flees.<sup>4</sup>

Satan tries a similar tactic with Job's "friends" as he did with Job's wife. Satan knows that Job's friendships will either strengthen Job's faith through their support, or weaken his faith through their pettiness.

As long as the friendship between Job  
and his companions was unimpaired,  
Satan had no power over the former;  
but when jealousy and strife set in among  
them, he (Satan) could accomplish his  
task.<sup>5</sup>

Alas, that too did not work, for Job maintains his faith throughout his interactions with his friends.

Although Satan has been portrayed as the evil adversary, Job manages to maintain his loyalty towards God. Job must attempt to hold fast to his

<sup>4</sup> Ginzberg. Legend of the Jews. V. 2, p.235.

<sup>5</sup> Ginzberg. V.5, p.387.



allegence towards God and avoid Satan's skill of instilling doubt and destruction into his faith. The ultimate battle has nothing to do with Job, but everything to do with God's supremacy over evil and doubt. As the Rabbis understand it, God and Satan continue their bantering in other arenas as well, e.g. in the Akedah story, and in the contest between Jacob and Esau.

### The Akedah Story

In the Akedah story, Satan [or Samael] is determined to destroy Abraham's faith so that Satan may win the battle with God. The midrash begins with a comment on verse 8 from chapter 21 of Genesis, "....and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned." At that point Satan says to God, that with all of the preparations, and all of the food at that great feast, Abraham did not offer up one sacrifice to God. God responds, "Yet were I to say to him, 'Sacrifice thy son before me,' he would do so without hesitation."<sup>6</sup> Abraham does not know that part of the incentive to have Isaac offered up was God's reaction to Satan.

The battle between God and Satan continues as Abraham leads Isaac to the altar. The next appearance in this series is illustrated in Bereshit Rabbah 56:4,

Samael went to the patriarch Abraham  
and unbraided him saying; What means  
this, old man! Have you lost your wits?  
thou goes to slay a son granted to thee  
at the age of a hundred!....Tomorrow God  
will say to you, 'Thou art a murderer, and

<sup>6</sup> Talmud B. Sanhedrin 89b.

art guilty."

When Samael sees that he is not accomplishing anything with Abraham, he tries, to no avail, the same tactics on Isaac. Both God and faith have won the first round, and Abraham and Isaac continue to walk on together.<sup>7</sup>

Satan is determined to win on some level. In Tanchuma Nidpas,<sup>8</sup> it is related that Abraham already struck Isaac once with the knife. Satan recognizes this act as a possible victory for God, and as Abraham raises his hand again to stab Isaac, Satan grabs Abraham's arm in an attempt to save Isaac. Satan's interaction seems ironic at first, why would Satan, alias the Angel of Death, try to prevent the death of Isaac. It is more important for Satan to defeat God even if it means defending against death. Satan's goal is to counter God, to be the adversary in God's world. Death is but just one way to disrupt God's universe. In the case of the Akedah, Satan utilizes the tool of dissuasion and doubt to lure Abraham away from God.

The midrash continues with Satan going to visit Sarah. Satan has disguised himself as Isaac, and he tells Sarah what Abraham has done to him. Sarah is so shocked and upset that she dies.<sup>9</sup> Although this death was a minor victory for Satan, he had won only a segment of the battle. He has shaken Sarah's faith and killed her, but he has not managed to destroy Abraham's faith.

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<sup>7</sup> The same motif of Satan attempting to dissuade Abraham and Isaac can be found in Tanhumah [Buber] 1:114.

<sup>8</sup> Tanchuma Nidpas; Vayera; p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.30.

A similar midrash is found in Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer dealing with Satan and Sarah. Anger raged in Satan's heart, and in his desperation, he went to see Sarah. When he told Sarah of Abraham's deed she cried three times, which corresponds to the three sustained notes of the Shofar. And she made three "howling sounds" which correspond to the disconnected notes of the Shofar.<sup>10</sup> Satan, having lost the battle with God, desired to incite trouble between Abraham and Sarah, thus leading to Sarah's death.<sup>11</sup>

### **Jacob and Esau**

Another instance of the Satan vs. God challenge is in the midrashim concerning the story of Jacob and Esau. In one midrash it states that Samael is causing Jacob's lamb to escape from his hands. Samael is trying to prevent Jacob from receiving the blessing from his father Isaac. Samael is invested in Jacob's defeat because the midrash states that Samael is Esau's angel.<sup>12</sup> Esau is the hunter and in this midrash, Samael is described as having long flowing hair, and having a body that resembles a ram<sup>13</sup> (this animal thus has an inherent relationship with the hunter). Samael does not want Jacob to catch his game, because Samael knows the eventual outcome of the story. He, therefore, wants to sabotage all of Jacob's efforts so that Jacob never has

<sup>10</sup> Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer. Eng. P. 233 Ch. 32.

<sup>11</sup> The parasha directly after the Akedah is Chai Sarah, which begins, "Sarah's life time-the span of Sarah's life came to 127 years. Sarah died in Kiriath-arba. (Gen. 23:1-2).

<sup>12</sup> Ginzberg. V: 5, p.311.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.311.

the opportunity to encounter God. The midrash describes Samael moving Jacob's lamb, his father's dinner, every time Jacob tries to kill it. Samael is trying to delay Jacob's catch.<sup>14</sup> Samael efforts are thwarted, and Jacob moves on to encounter God.

The next time the midrash brings in this battle between God and Satan is in the wrestling match at the ford Jabbok. There is a midrash that states that the angel or "ish" that Jacob is wrestling with, in Genesis 32: 25, is Easu's angel Samael. "Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." According to this midrash, Samael is attempting to kill Jacob so that he, in fact, could not serve God.<sup>15</sup> ...וְאֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ

... (יְהוָה) God's proxy in this battle is Jacob, and Satan's stand-in is this "ish". Jacob wins the match by pinning down the Angel and demanding a blessing from him. Not only does Satan lose to God, but he must also bless God's servant, Jacob.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the midrashim on these three stories address the issues of faith, good and evil, and death. Job, Abraham and Jacob are traditionally seen as being righteous, God-fearing individuals. Each of them must struggle with their faith when they are confronted by situations that appear to be contradictory to their faith. When evil (Satan) enters their worlds they are forced to substantiate their actions and their faith.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.312.

<sup>15</sup> Tanhuma Nipas Vaishlach, p. 43.

Satan's issue with God is that the individual will not maintain his faith once he is faced with evil. Through the midrashim, the Rabbis are addressing the question of how can there be evil in a world governed by a good God. Satan is portrayed as an entity separate from God. It is Satan and not God that is the cause of evil, confusion, and deception in the world.

The Rabbis need an explanation for evil, and so they created the myth of Satan.<sup>16</sup> The Rabbis are searching for a way to explain this evil and Satan seems to provide a solution. Satan kills Job's children. He tries to mislead Abraham and Sarah, and he causes strife between Jacob and Esau. Evil and Satan have a reality all of their own.<sup>17</sup>

The myth of Satan carries with it dual characteristics. Each of his actions contain a more positive message. He is a dark character that tortures Job. Yet his presence presents God in the context of light and protection. Satan is an evil character that scares Sarah into believing that her son is dead. Yet his actions give God an opportunity to draw out good and faith from Abraham. Satan causes struggle and confusion between Jacob and Esau. So God then has the opportunity to establish order, and a hierarchy of unity.<sup>18</sup>

The Rabbis have characterized the reality of evil in the world. These midrashim put that evil, personified as the Angel of Death, in the context of a

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<sup>16</sup> Bamberger, Fallen Angels p.54.

<sup>17</sup> Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p.238.

<sup>18</sup> Russell, The Devil. Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity, p.52.

game, a challenge, so the individual will not feel overwhelmed by helplessness in the face of adversity.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ANGEL OF DEATH

The development of the Angel of Death has been examined in the previous chapters. The Bible eluded to the existence of this character. The development of the character of the Angel of Death has been traced to the stories of the Garden of Eden, the Golden Calf, and the Book of Job. The midrashim on these stories embellished the character. By the end of the chapter on Job motifs the Angel portrayed as a member of God's court and an adversary of human beings.

There are many other midrashim that continue develop the character of the Angel of Death. These midrashim show the Angel prosecuting men for their sins, enticing men into unfaithfulness, and killing men during times of vulnerability. It is necessary to study the developed characteristics of the Angel of Death, as portrayed in the midrash, before any conclusions can be drawn as to why the character was created in the first place. In order to examine the Angel as a whole, one must look at the origin of his name, his appearance, his role, and his motivation in his job.

### **The Name**

In order to investigate the characteristics of the Angel of Death, it is important to first establish the origins of his name. The Angel of Death, Satan, and Samael are all synonymous terms. However, there is some discrepancy as to whether Samael/Satan is a "fallen Angel." On the one



hand, there are those Rabbis who say that Samael was originally called Satan-El. In Pesikta Rabbati 21:10, it is pointed out that, the name of God, "El", is joined to the name of angels. Since the angels are God's courtiers, God's name is engraved on their hearts.<sup>1</sup> Satan-El was once the great prince in heaven,<sup>2</sup> but when he led a rebellion against God, he lost his divine element, (the "El"), and he was ousted from heaven.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this rebellious Angel is called Satan.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the Rabbis felt that the Angel of Death is simply God's adversary in the Divine court. (See Chapter on Job) His function is to argue with God, to challenge God's judgment, and to test the righteousness of men. He is not, according to the this opinion, a fallen angel. However, he is an angel capable of evil, of instigating trouble, and of taking a life. The fallen angel tradition was originally formulated in the second book of Enoch, whereas the adversary tradition is developed in the midrashim and Talmud.

### **Appearance**

Based on the adversary tradition, Satan, like other angels, is found in heaven. But his appearance is different than the others.

There was an angel in the seventh

<sup>1</sup> Van Rad. Genesis, p.21.

<sup>2</sup> Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer p.92.

<sup>3</sup> Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, "Death," p.803.

<sup>4</sup> According to the midrash, it is suggested that Satan-El was jealous of Adam's power and he objected to Adam's creation (specific mention of the midrash is found in the section dealing with the midrashim on Adam and Eve).

heaven different in appearance from all the others, and of frightful mien. His height was so great it would have taken five hundred years to cover a distance equal to it. And from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. He was studded with glaring eyes at the sight of which the beholder fell prostrate in awe. His name is Samael.<sup>5</sup>

Samael has the ability to change his appearance at will. He can choose to be grotesque or pleasant looking, frightening or unthreatening.

Sitting under a tree, Abraham perceived a flashing of light and a smell of sweet odor and he saw Death coming toward him in great glory and beauty. And Death said, "Don't think this beauty is mine or that I come this way to every man. Nay, but if any one is righteous like thee, I thus take a crown and come to him, but if he is a sinner, I come in great corruption, and out of their sins I make a crown for my head, and I shake them with great fear...." Death revealed corruption, showing two heads, the one had the face of a serpent, the other head like a sword.<sup>6</sup>

Satan appears differently for the righteous than he does for the sinner. In terms of the Angel of Death's appearance, the message of the Rabbis is, one who is sinful and who succumbs easily to temptation will face an ugly death. Because of his actions, the sinner is forced to confront an evil character who is a mirror- image of the life of the sinful individual. The

<sup>5</sup> Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, V:2 p.308.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. V:1 p. 307.

righteous individual has the opposite experience. One who is faithful to God, and obeys God's commandments, such as Abraham, will encounter Death in a more peaceful guise. Death will come, not as a frightening experience, but rather as a peaceful one. (This will be more fully explored subsequently in the section on the Patriarchs.)

### **Angel of Death's Role**

What is the role of the Angel of Death? What is his power over man? And how does he perform his act of killing? All of these questions arise when the personal and functional role of the Angel of Death is addressed. According to the Rabbis, the Angel of Death is, for the most part, an accuser of man and an adversary of God. The Angel of Death maintains most of his control over man through man's evil inclination. Everyone sins, so everyone is vulnerable to the trials of the Angel. There are only a few who have managed to escape the Angel's powers, and that is only because God has interceded on their behalf. Furthermore, through an examination of the Angel of Death's characteristics, the underlying motive for the creation of such a being can be determined.

As stated earlier, the Angel of Death is God's evil adversary. The Satan of the Talmud is "... an agent of God, unpleasant, a spy, a stoolpigeon, a provocateur, a prosecutor, and a hangman."<sup>7</sup> That is not to say that Satan was a rebel against God.<sup>8</sup> Rather, he is part of the Divine court and he is

<sup>7</sup> Talmud B. Berakot 46a, p.279.

<sup>8</sup> Bamberger, Fallen Angels, p.94.

available to God to do His bidding. For example he can be a prosecutor as it is said in the midrash that, as Satan accuses, Michael (the guardian Angel) points out Israel's virtues.<sup>9</sup> He can be a conduit of evil in the world, that is, man's evil inclination. As the Rabbis said,

The Angel of Death appears many times in our sources always as a servant of God-never as a rebel-God created the evil inclinations for a useful purpose.<sup>10</sup>

God has granted the Angel of Death a certain amount of power in the universe. The Angel of Death, and the evil that he represents, is "woven into the existence of God."<sup>11</sup> In other words, God and the Angel of Death are intricately involved with each other. God makes Divine judgments based on the opinion of His adversary, Satan.

According to R. Lakish, "Satan, the evil inclination and the Angel of Death are one and the same."<sup>12</sup> It is through the personification of sin, i.e. Satan, that one is led to death.<sup>13</sup> Man has the ability to choose between good and evil, life and death. If he chooses disobedience, he is choosing the way leading to death.<sup>14</sup> Man's evil impulse, and the Tempter, alias Satan, are one in the same. It is that evil inclination that is man's nemesis which causes

<sup>9</sup> Exodus Rabbah 18:5, p.222.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.95.

<sup>11</sup> Scholem. Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. p.238.

<sup>12</sup> Bamberger. p. 95.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.96.

<sup>14</sup> Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. p.803.

man to sin, and that slays man in the end.<sup>15</sup> The only way to be saved from the evil inclination is through God's intervention.

If God would only swallow up the evil inclination, everyone would come under His wings.<sup>16</sup>

Just as God instructs the Angel of Death to kill, so can God restrict the activities of the Angel. If one ties oneself to the Torah, and to the Mitzvot, God will be able to restrain the Angel of Death. (See chapter on Warding off the Angel of Death). However, if one does follow the evil inclination the individual will not only be faced with Death, but also with the judgment of God.

And know that all is according to the reckoning, and let not thy evil inclination assure thee that the grave is a place of refuge for you.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of the power of the Angel of Death, God still has ultimate authority in human life. The Angel of Death is a threat created to scare human beings into fearing God, and living more righteously.

### **The Patriarchs**

Even the most righteous have to die, but the manner of their death is different than the death of other people. God said to the Angel of Death that he has jurisdiction over the entire world except for certain people who God

<sup>15</sup> Exodus Rabbah 30:17, p.366, and Tanhuma Va Yishlach. p.43.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p.366.

<sup>17</sup> Talmud B. Avot Ch. 4:22, p.56.

chose for Himself.<sup>18</sup> The individuals who were taken up to heaven without tasting death, "דל גמול גמול מיתה".<sup>19</sup> were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.<sup>20</sup> They died by a kiss from God. "דל פ' יי". For example, as seen in Numbers 33:38, "Aaron the priest ascended Mount Hor at the command of the Lord, and died there." According to Yalkut Shimoni, "ללא שלל מלאך המות באהרון אללא בנשקה" ...Aaron did not die from the Angel of Death's sword, but rather from a kiss from God.<sup>21</sup> The midrash goes on to say that Moses and Eliezar had taken Aaron up the mountain to die; while they were there Satan caused the people to panic. The people began to believe that Moses had killed Aaron. It was not until God floated Aaron's bier above the crowd that the people were finally pacified.<sup>22</sup>

Moses' death is described in Deuteronomy 34:5, "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there, in the land of Moab, at the command of the Lord." The kiss of death is also indicated in the midrash, *Petirat Moshe*. In this midrash, Samael is determined to seize Moses' soul. God tries to warn Samael that Moses is too strong for him. God tells Samael that Moses' hands are stronger than the normal individual's hands because Moses received the Torah. Moses' feet are swifter than other feet because Moses' feet touched the clouds. Samael is not persuaded. He goes forth girding himself with

<sup>18</sup> Numbers Rabbah p.691.

<sup>19</sup> Ginzberg. V:5, p.96.

<sup>20</sup> Talmud B. Baba Bathra 17a, p.86.

<sup>21</sup> Yalkut Shimoni 33-35, p.588.

<sup>22</sup> Yalkut Shimoni 32-33, p.557.

cruelty, and wrapping himself in wrath. The first time Samael encounters Moses, Samael is scared away by the fire coming from Moses' mouth and the radiance from Moses' face. Samael returns a second time, and Moses forces Samael to do his bidding by means of his (Moses') staff that has the ineffable name carved on it.<sup>23</sup> Moses is far too righteous to be taken by Samael. Therefore it is God, in the end, who takes Moses' soul.

A similar battle between the Angel of Death and Elijah occurs. Although God arranged, at the time of creation, Elijah's entrance into heaven, the Angel of Death refuses to let Elijah in without having him die first. God argues with the Angel of Death, telling him that Elijah has enough power to banish the Angel of Death. But Death insists on trying, and a battle ensues between the Angel of Death and Elijah. Not only was Elijah victorious, but had it not been for God's intervention, Elijah would have completely annihilated his opponent. Elijah goes on living for all eternity in heaven.<sup>24</sup>

The Angel has many forms and many instruments of destruction. Yet his most compelling instrument is the evil inclination. The Rabbis believed that the evil in the individual brought about death for the individual. Perhaps they weren't always referring to a physical death. Sin could lead to spiritual death. Sin could force man to turn away from Torah, from the community, and from God. Evil could, like the drop of gall from Satan's sword, choke off the life forces of the individual, forces that promoted strong friendships, family responsibility (perhaps even procreation) and meaningful

<sup>23</sup> Ginzberg, V:3, p.467 and in Tanchuma Buber VI p.160.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. V:4, p.200-201.

relationships. The threat of the Angel of Death compells the individual to turn towards righteousness. The punishment of evil appears more dreadful than the hardship of the commandments. The Rabbis believed that loyalty, control, and fear were far more profitable than wanton behavior, disobedience, and lethargy.



CHAPTER EIGHT  
VULNERABILITY

In the last chapter the characteristics of the Angel of Death were explored. The Angel of Death is the external source of evil, as well as, the evil inclination that is inherent in man. The Angel of Death is an ugly creature who is on a mission to destroy. The previous chapters which outline the midrashim on the Biblical stories, indicate that the Angel of Death is the cause of evil in the world. He entices Adam and Eve to sin. He is the instigator of the building of the Golden Calf. And he is the challenger of God and of Job. This chapter addresses specific times in man's life when he is particularly vulnerable to the attack of the Angel of Death.

The Rabbis advise us to repent every day of our lives because we do not know when we will die. Nonetheless, there are, according to the midrashim, times when one is more vulnerable to the Angel of Death than other times. There are four particularly vulnerable situations. The first is at times of assumed contentment. The second situation occurs at times of illness. The third occurs at moments when one is dependent on friends. And the fourth is at life cycle events (for example, marriage). It is at such occasions that Satan arises to torment, to disrupt, and to destroy life.

### **Contentment**

Contentment implies both a physical and emotional stability, as well as a sense of satisfaction. Satan, according to the Rabbis, finds his own

satisfaction when paying surprise visits to his victims. For example, in Bereshit Rabbah, it states, "Whenever you find dwelling *"נול"* mentioned Satan becomes active."<sup>1</sup> That is, at times where there is eating and drinking, sitting and relaxing, the "arch robber cuts his capers."<sup>2</sup> As man indulges himself in his hunger for physical nourishment, Satan strikes, and disrupts the sense of satisfaction. "R. Helbo said, 'Wherever you find tranquility, Satan accuses.'"<sup>3</sup> Another example of this is illustrated in the following midrash:

Never say upon entering a bath house; May it be thy will O Lord do deliver me from this.... Let no ambiguity befall me and if I do fall into any perversity or iniquity may my death be an atonement for all my iniquities. A man should not say this-for it opens his mouth for Satan.<sup>4</sup>

The Rabbis feel that such an admission of hope for bodily satisfaction will incite Satan to strike. Even the righteous are susceptible to such attacks and they must proceed cautiously.

R. Aha said: When the righteous wish to dwell in tranquility in this world, Satan comes and accuses them: They are not content with what is in store for them in the here after, but they

<sup>1</sup> Bereshit Rabbah p.306-307.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.307.

<sup>3</sup> Bamberger, Bernard. Fallen Angels. p.97.

<sup>4</sup> Bereshit Rabbah 60a, p376.

wish to dwell at ease even in this world.<sup>5</sup>

Men, regardless of the ease and comfort promised them in the world to come, wish for comfort in this world, yet they must always be conscious of the fact that their comfort is alluring to the Angel of Death.

The final, and ultimate example of Satan attacking man at a time of physical pleasure and comfort is seen in the case of masturbation. According to Yalkut Shimoni, וְהַיְתִיךָ דָּם וְשֶׁקַּח נַפְשְׁךָ וְהָרַחֵק אֶתְּךָ מִן הַחַיִּים "וְהַיְתִיךָ דָּם וְשֶׁקַּח נַפְשְׁךָ וְהָרַחֵק אֶתְּךָ מִן הַחַיִּים"

"... וְהַיְתִיךָ דָּם וְשֶׁקַּח נַפְשְׁךָ וְהָרַחֵק אֶתְּךָ מִן הַחַיִּים ...If you masturbate Satan will possess you, kill you, and take your soul.<sup>6</sup> The midrashim on masturbation is a particularly poignant one, in regard to bodily satisfaction. Masturbation implies not only of bodily release, but of an act of sexuality. The midrash found here parallels that found in the section on Adam and Eve. As seen in the midrashim on Adam and Eve, Satan is jealous, and desirous of physical contact and of sex. Satan is aware that when human beings give into their physical desires they become vulnerable. Satan, fueled by his own feelings of desire, strikes at individuals who are involved in physical gratification.

### Illness

Another obvious time to witness the will of the Angel of Death is during an illness, epidemic, or plague. This is a time when the Angel has an extensive amount of control. He has been given jurisdiction over the ill, and he is the one to determine when and how a life will be terminated. Even the

<sup>5</sup> Bereshit Rabbah p.770.

<sup>6</sup> Yalkut Shemoni Tetzah p.646.

Rabbis feared the power of the Angel. There was some discrepancy, among the Rabbis, as to what the practice should be if a scholar fell ill. On the one hand, it was advised that a college to be set up at the scholar's door. On the other hand, though, it was argued, that Satan might be challenged, or provoked by such a gesture.<sup>7</sup>

The most frightening situation was an epidemic. The midrash states, that at times of peace and health, the Angel of Death slinks along the sides of the street in hiding. But at a time of an epidemic, the Angel of Death, walks haughtily down the center of the street.<sup>8</sup> Not only was death a frightening prospect, but the fear and pain of the illness must have been terrifying as well. One even warned not go into the synogogue at the time of an epidemic, because it was believed that the Angel of Death stored his tools there.<sup>9</sup>

At times of illness, how did the Angel of Death take a life? According to the Talmud, the scenario of death was,

The Angel of Death, he is full of eyes.  
When a sick person is about to depart,  
he (Death) stands above his head-pillow with  
his sword drawn out in his hand and a  
drop of gall hanging on it. As the sick  
person beholds it, he trembles and opens  
his mouth in fright; he then drops it into  
his mouth. It is from this that he dies.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Talmud B. Erubin 26a, p.179.

<sup>8</sup> Talmud B. Baba Kamma 60b, p.350.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.350.

<sup>10</sup> Talmud B. Abodah Zarah, 20b, p.105.

This is explained in the Talmud as meaning that the Angel of Death has such regard for the honour of the human being that he kills him this way. If it were not for the Angel's respect, he would, "cut the throat of men as widely as that of an animal is cut."<sup>11</sup>

There is, however, a story in the Talmud about R. Levi who manages to trick the Angel of Death at the time of his death. R. Levi pleads to the Angel to show him his place in paradise before he actually dies. The Angel agrees to take him. But before the Rabbi will go, he demands that the Angel relinquish his sword to the Rabbi, lest the Rabbi be afraid of the Angel of Death along the journey. The Angel of Death again agrees, and gives the sword to Rabbi Levi. They come to the wall surrounding paradise, and the Angel of Death lifts Rabbi Levi up so that he may see over the wall. While elevated, Levi jumps over the wall. The Angel of Death, in desperation, grabs R. Levi's coattails. The Angel then demands that R. Levi give him back his knife so that he can at least continue his work in the world. Rabbi Levi and the Angel are still arguing, when the voice of God interrupts them, and demands that R. Levi return the Angel of Death's sword.<sup>12</sup> Alas, R. Levi manages to escape, yet the Angel also manages to maintain his position in the world.

### **Friendships**

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.106.

<sup>12</sup> Talmud B. Ketubath, 77b p.487.

Individuals are also particularly vulnerable to the Angel of Death when they find themselves completely dependent on their friendships. As seen in the section on the midrash of the Job story, Satan attempted to shake Job's faith by turning his (Job's) friends against him. Satan assumed that if Job was depending on his friends for support, Satan could sabotage the "networking" system, and instill distrust and jealousy among the friends. Satan attempted to use the friends against Job.

The issue of the failing support of friends is also discussed in Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer. Unlike the first example, where Satan plays on the jealousys in a friendship, here Satan makes friendship powerless. No matter how strongly one human being can feel for another, Satan's strength is more powerful.

A man has three friends in his lifetime,  
and they are: his sons and his household,  
his money, and his good deeds. At the hour  
of a man's departure from the world he  
gathers his sons and his household, and he  
says to them: I beg of you to come and save  
me from the judgment of this evil death. They  
answer him, saying to him: Hast thou not  
heard that there is no one who can prevail  
over the day of death? and is it not written,  
"None of them can by any means redeem his  
brother." (Psalm 49:7)<sup>13</sup>

Even when friends would like to aid each other, Satan judges the individual not by the strength of the friends, but rather by the weakness of the accused. In this case, the friends were willing to help the dying man.

<sup>13</sup> Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer. Ch. 34 p.256.

Another example is found in two Talmudic stories dealing with Raba. In the first case, Raba is sitting at his brother's death bed. The brother begs Raba to intervene on his behalf (Raba was considered close to God because of his studies). Raba, however, is powerless. He explains that the Angel of Death takes no heed of him. He tries to comfort his brother by telling him, that in a dream Raba heard that the pain of death only feels like a prick of a cupping instrument.<sup>14</sup> The second story is very similar, but this time Raba reports that death is only as painful as taking a hair from milk.<sup>15</sup> While Raba attempts to shelter, and comfort his friends, he in fact knows that he has no bargaining power with the Angel of Death. Raba has done all that he can do. As it is said, "While Satan is accusing man, his friends point out his good deeds."<sup>16</sup>

### **Weddings**

The final example of vulnerability comes at life cycle events, specifically at the time of a wedding. A wedding is the epitome of the other conditions previously discussed. The bride and groom are involved in a celebration with friends. There is much gaiety, eating and drinking, a sense that the world is perfect and whole. In addition, there is the unspoken knowledge of a sexual union about to be consummated. Not only will the couple be involved in physical self gratification, but the goal of their union will eventually be for procreation.

<sup>14</sup> Talmud B. Moed Katan 28a, p.183 Add note on cupping instrument.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p.183.

<sup>16</sup> Exodus Rabbah p.379.



The midrashim bring forth some very disturbing stories of how the Angel of Death interferes with the joyous occasion of a wedding. For example, there is a story told of R. Simeon who, at the time of his son's bris, wished to store away a portion of his son's cake for his son's wedding. On his way home, Simeon encounters the Angel of Death. The Angel tells him that he (the Angel) was God's messenger. The Angel of Death believes that Simeon is naive in planning for his son's wedding so many years in advance. The Angel warns him that no one knows the day one will die. The Angel then tells Simeon that his son will die in thirty days.<sup>17</sup> The midrash points out the frailty of human joy. One minute there is happiness and life, and in the next moment, there is despair and death. The Angel of Death has the power to change joyous time, into mournful time.

There are examples in which the Angel of Death is dissuaded from performing his evil deed at a wedding. Once there was a woman who was married three times. Each of her husband's died on the wedding day. She is preparing to marry the fourth man, when Elijah warns the groom that a poor man, with hair like nails, will come to meet him at the reception. This is the Angel of Death in disguise. Elijah advises the groom to sit the beggar next to himself, and to feed him immediately. After the meal, the Angel reveals himself to the bride. She boldly argues that newlyweds are exempt from their duties for an entire year. If her husband is deprived of life, then a lie is made out of the Torah. It is at this point that God intervenes and saves

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<sup>17</sup> Deuteronomy Rabbah 9:1, p. 156.

her husband.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the Angel's will was weakened by the wedding feast. Perhaps it was the supplications of the bride that lessened his intent to kill. Or finally, perhaps it was God's intervention and power that restrained the Angel. In any case, the Angel had been determined to kill the fourth time. He is attracted to situations where there is apparent happiness, food, and an atmosphere of sexuality.

The message of this chapter is, when one is feeling a sense of satisfaction in one's life, one can expect the Angel of Death to disrupt the peace. Just as in the story of Job, pleasure and tranquility cannot go unchallenged. With every moment of contentment comes news of a disturbance. With a feeling of health, comes the dread of illness. With the satisfaction of close friends comes moments of loneliness and despair. And with every joyous wedding comes the breaking of the glass.

The Angel of Death absorbs the Rabbis' projections of fear of evil in the world. The Angel is the Rabbis' answer as to why the evil, destruction, and death in the world do not cease. The Angel of Death forces the individual not to take life for granted. One must always be conscious of never falling into idle behavior. Perhaps the Rabbis' focus was not to show the horrors of death, but rather to illustrate the best in life. If one approaches life seriously and appreciates its tenuousness then one will be prepared to confront the Angel of Death.

In the following chapter, the midrash will discuss how even the most aware and righteous individuals are subject to Satan's power.

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<sup>18</sup> Ginzberg, V: 4 p227.

CHAPTER NINE  
ENTICEMENT TO SIN

Satan is the adversary in God's court. As discussed in the chapter on Satan's characteristics, Satan's role is to accuse and to prosecute those people who have followed their evil inclinations. Satan is also provoked when he perceives that human beings have taken the good in their life for granted. In the chapter on Job, it is shown that Satan wanted to show God that Job would lose his faith in God when his life is made difficult. The same theme is also addressed in the chapter on vulnerability. When human beings take their physical comfort and satisfaction for granted, the Angel of Death tortures them and disrupts their lives. On the one hand, it seems that Satan is merely doing his job as it has been designated by God. On the other hand though, it appears that Satan receives some kind of personal satisfaction in tempting, luring, and destroying human beings. The portrayal of the Angel of Death as a conniving, manipulative instigator will be illustrated in this chapter.

Satan's goal is to retrieve the souls of men. He determined to fulfill his role regardless of the means and tactics that he must employ to do so. According to the Rabbis, there were 903 forms of death. The most severe way to die was from asthma or the croup. These methods were compared to a thorn being torn out of a ball of wool. The least brutal method was the "kiss of death," (as seen in the chapter on Characteristics) this method was reserved for the righteous. The ease of this type of death was compared to

hair being removed from milk.<sup>1</sup> These methods would be employed when Satan was in control. The challenge for the Angel of Death is for the Angel to first lure the individual into sin, illness, physical satisfaction, wanton behavior, etc, and then he chooses his method of destruction.

### **Satan as a Woman**

One way that the Angel of Death entices his victims to sin is when he appears to them in the form of a woman. This method is illustrated in three examples. In the first instance, R. Amram is motivated by the evil inclination. He is determined to reach a group of woman who are being held captive in an upper chamber. His desire is so strong that he moves a ladder, which "ten men could not have raised," in order to be with the women. Upon witnessing Amram's behavior, the other Rabbis yell out to him and their screams brought Amram bring him to his senses. Had it not been for the Rabbis watchful eyes, the Tempter, the Angel of Death, would have succeeded in luring Amram into sin, and then into death.<sup>2</sup> As it is said, "Satan comes down to earth, and seduces, then ascends to heaven and awakens wrath; permission is granted to him and he takes away a soul."<sup>3</sup>

A second example of Satan tempting man through the image of a woman is seen R. Meir's situation.

R. Meir use to scoff at transgressors.  
One day Satan appeared in him in the

<sup>1</sup> Encyclopedia Judaica. "Death" V:5 p1420.

<sup>2</sup> Talmud B. Kiddushin 81a, p.417.

<sup>3</sup> Talmud B. Baba Bathra 16a, p.78.

guise of a woman on the opposite bank of the river. As there was no ferry, he (R. Meir) seized a rope and proceeded across. When he had reached half way along the rope, Satan let him go (saved R. Meir) saying, "Had they not proclaimed in Heaven, 'Take heed of R. Meir and his learning, I would have valued your life at two ma'ahs (a small coin)'"<sup>4</sup>

In this case, God is willing to intervene because R. Meir was such a learned man. Had it not been for Meir's scholarship, he would have followed his desire and the Angel of Death would have killed him.

The third example is very similar to the second. In this instance, R. Akiba, like R. Meir, thought that he was above transgression. One day Satan attempts to lead R. Akiba into sin. Satan appears to Akiba in the guise of a woman sitting on top of a palm tree. Akiba proceeds to climb up the tree. Satan would have let him continue, but Satan heard the voice of God warning him, once again, of Akiba's learning. Had Akiba reached the so-called woman he would have been killed.<sup>5</sup>

The message of these three stories is that no one is above sin. Satan has a way of discovering each persons vulnerable attributes and exploiting the attributes so that individuals will sin. The threat of Death is used as a way of deterring man from sin.

### **Distraction**

<sup>4</sup> Talmud B. Kiddushin 81a, p.417.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 81a, p.417.

Another way that Satan manipulates in order to kill is by distraction. Satan knows that he has no power over an individual who studies. (See chapter on Warding Off the Angel of Death) In three examples in the Talmud.

the Rabbis make a point of the power of study. R. Hisda, in Makkot, 10a, King David, in Shabbat 30b, and Rabbah Nahmani, in Baba Mezi'a 86a, are all examples of individuals who attempt to ward off the Angel of Death through study. The Angel, however, is determined to have their souls. Death perches himself on a branch outside the Rabbis study. When the limb breaks the Rabbis stop studying and the Angel of Death seizes their souls.

Satan also performs his deed of destruction by luring his victims into various traps. The Rabbis depict this type of behavior in the story about Solomon's two Cushite servants. According to the Talmud, Solomon observes the Angel of Death looking sad. Solomon asks the Angel why he is unhappy. Death tells Solomon that God has commanded Death to take the souls of two Cushite men. Upon hearing the Angel's plans, Solomon warns the Cushite men to flee to the district of Luz. When the Cushite men arrive at Luz's gates they are killed. The Angel returns to Solomon smiling. Solomon had unintentionally aided the Angel of Death by sending the servants to the exact place where the Angel was told to kill them.<sup>6</sup>

In the above story, one witnesses the Angel's enjoyment in killing. The Angel exhibits satisfaction in tricking and killing his victims. Perhaps the Angel is portrayed this way because the Rabbis felt that death was unpredictable, and capricious. This is a portrayal of a totally evil being, who

<sup>6</sup> Talmud B. Sukkah 53a, p253.

kills according to his own will and who leaves human beings defenseless. One could dismiss caution because death really over powered any precautions. And finally one could relinquish responsibility for the consequences of impassioned, irrational actions, because it one could blame the Angel of Death for luring the individual into such a behavior pattern. As the Rabbis said, "...For when a man is on the way to commit a sin, Satan dances encouragingly before him until he completes the transgression. After Satan destroys him."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Numbers Rabbah p.797.



CHAPTER TEN  
WARDING OFF THE ANGEL OF DEATH

There are times when man is particularly vulnerable to the Angel of Death, yet man is not completely helpless in his confrontation with death. Although man can never match the Angel's power there are three ways to defend against him. The methods that are recommended are: righteousness, repentance, and prudence.

### **Righteousness**

Scholarship and righteousness go hand in hand, according to the Rabbis. Scholarship involves studying Torah, and the study of Torah leads to righteous acts. Although one does righteous acts, one is not assured of complete protection against the Angel of Death. Nevertheless, the Rabbis believed that through study, righteousness and charity, one may be able to hold the attack of the Angel in abeyance

Ten strong things have been created in the world. The rock is hard, but iron cleaves to it. Iron is hard but fire softens it. Fire is hard, but water quenches it. Water is strong, but the clouds bear it. Clouds are strong, but the wind scatters them. Wind is strong, but the body bears it. The body is strong by fright crushes it. Fright is strong but wine banishes it. Wine is strong, but sleep works it off. Death is stronger than all, and charity saves from death. As it is said,

"Righteousness delivers from death." (Prov. 10:2)<sup>1</sup>

That is not to say that righteousness will insure that an individual will live forever, yet there is a sense that a righteous person will have a place in the world to come. This idea can also be seen in the following midrash:

"Therefore do the maidens (alamot) love thee" (Song of Songs 1:3) Alamot may be read al mot-"the hidden love thee...." And what is more, even the Angel of Death loves him (the scholar), for the words may be read to mean, "the ones appointed over death-al mot loves thee."<sup>2</sup>

The Talmud asserts that an "ignorant man cannot be pious."<sup>3</sup> The learned know that Torah is the secret to warding off the Angel of Death.

### Repentance

An element of piety is repentance and prayer. The Rabbis believed that, "prayer defended against the Angel of Death."<sup>4</sup> Prayer gives us an opportunity to reflect on our lives. It provides a type of check-list for our personal needs and desires. Prayer demands concentration as well as study. The combination of prayer out of devotion to God and the element of study helped created a barrier against the Angel of Death.

Repentance is a major theme throughout the midrashim on the Angel of Death. Repentance is also an intricate aspect of prayer. Repentance

<sup>1</sup> Talmud B. Baba Batra. 10a, p.47.

<sup>2</sup> Talmud B. Avodah Zarah 35b, p.171.

<sup>3</sup> Talmud B. Chagigah 5b.

<sup>4</sup> Talmud B. Shabbat 30b, p.134.

becomes necessary when one trespasses God's laws and one fails to be obedient to God's will. This disobedience is evident in the Garden of Eden story, and in the Golden Calf story. There is a midrash that states, that after Moses punished the people for the sin of the Golden Calf God said the following:

If it were possible I would even dismiss  
the Angel of Death, but death against  
humanity has already been decreed by me,  
hence, it (death) must remain. Go return  
to your tents- so that they might enter upon  
conjugal relations.<sup>5</sup>

God wants to make sure that the people are distracted when He calls Moses up to the mountain a second time. Had the people not sinned, according to the midrash, death would never have entered the world. The only way to restore our agreement with God is to commit ourselves to repentance and to Torah. Further evidence of the power of repentance is in the following midrash about King David.

I (God) have sworn to the forefathers  
that I would multiply their seed....And  
you (David) come to annul my word.  
(David said,) It is I who have sinned;  
forgive me. Repentance was accepted and  
God said to the Angel who destroyed many  
among the people, "Stay thine hand."  
What did the Angel do? He took his sword  
and cleaned it with David's garment (his  
talit).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, V:3, p.107.

<sup>6</sup> Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer p.338.

Even the Angel of Death is sympathetic to repentance. As hard as it was for David to admit that he was wrong, (and as a result caused the death of many people), he knew that his act of repentance could temper God's decree, and halt the activities of the Angel of Death. According to Midrash Rabbah, "Two good things are near to you and far from you as well as far from you and near to you: repentance and death."<sup>7</sup>

### **Prudence and Caution**

In addition to repentance, there are some measures one can take to ward off the Angel of Death. Prudence implies a wisdom and an awareness of consequences connected with certain actions. Some cautious actions are even prescribed by the Angel himself. The first example of a specific, successful incident of restraint of the Angel of Death, occurs after the rebellion of Korah.

God cause a plague of death- Moses told Aaron to take incense out to stop the Angel of Death. This was the Angel of Death's gift to Moses (i.e. the secret power of the incense) when he received the Torah. Moses use the remedy to show the people the injustice of them concerning the incense, and to show them that it was sin that brought death, and not the incense.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ecclesiastes Rabbah 8:16, p.225.

<sup>8</sup> Ginzberg. V:3, p.304-306 The people believed that the incense is what killed Aaron's sons in Leviticus 10:2. This midrash points out that it was the sin of disobedience that brought the death of Aaron's sons, and not the use of the fire pan.

Moses knew that the fire pan and the act of atonement on the part of the people would free them of the Angel of Death.<sup>9</sup>

Just as Moses was given the secret of the incense by the Angel of Death, R. Joshua b. Levi also claimed that he was given guidance by the Angel of Death.

Do not take your shirt from your attendant  
when dressing in the morning. Do not let  
water be poured on your hands by one  
who has not washed his own hands. Do not  
stand in front of women when they are  
returning from the presence of a dead person.  
because I go leaping in front of them with my  
sword in hand, and I have permission to harm.  
Do not enter alone into a synagogue in which  
children are not being taught, because I hide there  
my weapons.<sup>10</sup>

The Rabbis were very concerned about cleanliness. They had the sense and the knowledge that uncleanness spread disease and death. They also believed that uncleanness accumulated at night, so one needed to be particularly careful of how one washed oneself in the morning. The Angel of Death was always watching to see if one was careless in taking care of such matters.<sup>11</sup>

Once again there were basic elements in life to keep the Angel of Death from striking. One needed to study and to absorb the eternal nature of the Torah. One needed to know of the power of repentance and to utilize

<sup>9</sup> Numbers Rabbah p.151.

<sup>10</sup> Talmud B. Berokot 51a.

<sup>11</sup> Levenson. "Some Aspects of the Rabbinic Attitude Toward Death." p.42.

that power through prayer. And finally, one needed to constantly be aware of his physical stature, condition, and well being-- never taking for granted his health.

Study leads to precision, precision leads  
to zeal, zeal leads to cleanliness, cleanliness  
leads to restraint, restraint leads to purity,  
purity leads to holiness, holiness leads to  
meekness, meekness leads to fear of sin,  
fear of sin leads to saintliness, saintliness  
leads to the possession of the holy spirit,  
the holy spirit leads to life eternal.<sup>12</sup>

Righteousness, repentance and prudence are aspects of a healthy balanced life. These healthy qualities help to balance the individual and give the individual a broader view of his reality. Righteousness demands that we step outside of ourselves and involve ourselves in the lives of the needy. Repentance is a vehicle in which we may forgive ourselves, and believe we are forgiven, for moments of weakness and sin. And prudence or caution forces us to put controls on our lives so we do not act capriciously without forethought.

These qualities are elements of self preservation. The fact that the human being can use the resource of righteousness or repentance is evidence that he has an invested interest in living a life of quality. When the individual is able to face all aspects of life with a positive outlook, then death feels like a distant reality. It is that healthy wholeness that truly wards off the Angel of Death.

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<sup>12</sup> Talmud B. Abodah Zarah 20b, p.106.

CHAPTER ELEVEN  
THE CITY OF LUZ AND  
THE DAY OF ATONEMENT



In the previous chapter methods for warding off the Angel of Death were discussed. These methods were righteousness, repentance and prudence. Each of these methods provide an emotional and intellectual barrier against the Angel of Death. However, these precautions did not fully satisfy the Rabbis. Therefore, the Rabbis also include the power of the city of Luz and the Day of Atonement as obstacles for the Angel of Death.

There are only two possibilities for completely immobilizing the Angel of Death; the City of Luz, and the Day of Atonement. In these two instances, one being a physical place and the other a spiritual dimension, the Angel is deemed powerless. The Angel's impotence, in the city of Luz, has to do with the locality and nature of the city and not with the strength of the people in it. On the Day of Atonement, when we might seem to appear the most vulnerable, we are insulated from the Angel through the process of faith, repentance and t'shuvah.

### Luz

God has told the Angel of Death that the whole world is under his rule. The Angel has free reign over the earth, into people's homes, into their lives, and into their minds. As we have seen there are very few individuals who have successfully combatted the Angel of Death. Everyone and everywhere

seem vulnerable to his power, except for the city of Luz where even the Angel of Death is powerless.

The city of Luz is first mentioned in Genesis 28:13 in Jacob's dream. God says, "The ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the West and to the East, to the North and to the South." Jacob, upon waking names this place Bethel, but the city had previously been called Luz. (Genesis 28:19). The city is again mentioned by Jacob when he encounters Joseph. Jacob mentions that God had come to him at Luz and bestowed the above blessing on him and his children. (Gen. 48:3) The city of Luz appears to have a special, everlasting quality to it. It marks God's promise for the immortality of the Jewish people. It serves as a reminder to the people of Israel that the land, and God are everlasting and irrefutable.

Luz is again referred to in the beginning of the Book of Judges. The Israelites want to take over the city of Bethel (formerly called Luz), but they are unable to penetrate the city's walls. The Israelite patrols spot a man leaving the city, and ask him how to enter into it. The man points the way and he is spared. (Judges 1:22-26) The Midrash then addresses the question as to why the city was so difficult to penetrate, and why it exists "even today." (Judges 1:26). The Rabbis answer this by making a connection between the city called Luz and the nut called Luz. The nut is a type of Almond. Just as an almond is difficult to crack, so was the city difficult to enter. The midrash, Bereshit Rabbah, explains that the man from the city,

who shows the Israelites how to enter the city, points the way through a tunnel cut out of an Almond tree.<sup>1</sup>

The city of Luz seems to have a natural eternal barrier, forever, against outside forces, even the Angel of Death. But surely the people of Luz do die? When the older members of the community of Luz become "weary of life", they leave the city and they die outside the city's gates.<sup>2</sup> It is only after they have venture out of the city that they die.

Perhaps the Angel's powerlessness comes from Luz's other meaning. The Rabbis believe that there is an almond shaped bone in the back of human beings which is impossible to destroy. Even after death, the vertebra will not decay. (Sukkah 53a) It is believed that this bone will be the substance from which the human body will be created at the time of the resurrection.

From which part of the body will the Holy One blessed be He, in the Time to Come, cause man to sprout forth? He answered: From the nut of the spinal column....He therefore brought one before him; he put it in water, but it was not dissolved; he let it pass through millstones, but it was not ground; he put it in fire, but it was not burnt; he put it on an anvil and began beating it with a hammer, but the anvil was flattened out, and the hammer was split, but all

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<sup>1</sup> Bereshit Rabbah.

<sup>2</sup> Ginzberg. Legends of the Jews. Vol: 4, p. 30.

this had no effect.<sup>3</sup>

This bone, and hence, this city, are protected against the Angel of Death.

It is the combination of these elements, Jacob's blessing, the secret to entering into the city, and the indestructable bone, that prevent the Angel from holding sway over the inhabitants of the city. Jacob's blessing is God's promise for the immortality of the people Israel. The city becomes the fortress that protects life. And the bone is the substance in which life is carried on.

The Rabbis have created a city and a part of the body which defy time, and death. Realizing that man was not even safe in the garden of Eden, they needed to develop a place that would protect them from evil and from death. It is the only place where man decides "who shall live and who shall die." It is interesting to note that men, as stated above, do get tired of living. The city of Luz does not erase death, but merely the threat of death. Death is placed in the hands of the people who may continue to live without fear.

The Rabbis were also searching for a final victory over the Angel of Death in so far as, they named a bone that not only will continue to exist but it will give birth to new bodies in the new world. The Rabbis were not blind to the reality of the body, i.e. its decline, deterioration, and disintegration. They were looking for a way to combat the body's frail state. The midrash on the bone called Luz does just that. It gives individuals a sense of perpetuation and continuation after the body has died. In many ways we are controlled by our bodies. They determine our strength and our needs.

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<sup>3</sup> Leviticus Rabbah 18:1, p. 224.

The bone Luz, an intellectual creation, puts us back in control and in touch with our bodies. It is through such a creation that the Rabbis combatted their fear of returning back to nothingness.

### Day of Atonement

The only day in the year on which the Angel has no power is the Day of Atonement. Perhaps it is because the Day of Atonement is a symbolic death for the people of Israel. Israel stands shrouded in white, fasting, pale, and penitent, and humbled before God, the Judge. Only God can decree who shall live and who shall die and it is God who weighs our petitions for forgiveness.

One might think that the Angel of Death would truly have his day in court prosecuting all of Israel for her sins. Satan, the adversary and prosecutor, presents his case within the Divine court. It is at this time that God will hear from both the guardian angels as well as from the prosecuting angel. In court, Satan must prove that Israel has gone astray from God's laws. He recounts Israel's sins and disputes Israel's allegiance to God. Satan, however, does not have a chance against God's sense of mercy. There is a midrash that states, that on Rosh Hashanah Satan brings his complaints to God. Satan can only call the sun as a witness because the moon is not seen. God holds off on His decree and Satan returns ten days later on Yom Kippur. Satan is too late, Israel has been forgiven.<sup>4</sup> In another midrash, Israel's sins seem so numerous that God is worried that Satan will in fact win his case

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<sup>4</sup> Ginzberg. V: 5, p. 38.

against her. As Satan searches for even more sins, God actually steps in and tips the balance in Israel's favor.<sup>5</sup>

The day of Yom Kippur was created when Moses went up Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah from God a second time. On that day Israel was particularly careful not to repeat the sins of the past, namely the Golden Calf.

All Israel spent it amid prayer and  
fasting so that the evil spirit would  
not lead them astray.<sup>6</sup>

This is the moment when Israel finally receives the Torah. It is also at this moment that the Angel of Death loses his power over the children of Israel. (see Angel of Death and Golden Calf/Torah section) With all other people, on all other days the Angel of Death may accuse and destroy, but not on the Day of Atonement.

Satan has no permission to act as accuser  
on the Day of Atonement. HaSaTaN in  
numerical value 364, that means of 364  
days he has permission to act as accuser but  
on the Day of Atonement he has no permission.<sup>7</sup>

Why does the Day of Atonement have that kind of control over the Angel of Death/Satan? The reasons are three-fold. First, on a day such as Yom Kippur, it is not necessary to project an evil personality on another being when we are faced with the evil in our selves. Yom Kippur is that day when we are finally able to deal with the mirrored images of ourselves. We

<sup>5</sup> Piskta Rabbati 45, 185b-186a.

<sup>6</sup> Ginzberg. V:3, p139.

<sup>7</sup> Talmud B. Yoma 20a, p87.

can see our evil wills reflected in past moments. In remembering the year gone by, we can see the times where we have acted defiantly and hurt others. We can experience our evil inclination as exhibited in the past. It is a time to reflect on selfish decisions, and actions. It is a time to recall lustful and hurtful acts as well. And we have a sense that the fasting that we are performing will cleanse us of the past. The fasting, perhaps becomes a vehicle for self punishment. In fasting, we are finally taking control and responsibility for our bodies.

The second reason that the Angel of Death has no control is perhaps due to the symbolism that cloaks the day. The Angel is evil and cunning; and Yom Kippur is innocent and pure. The Angel is destructive; Yom Kippur is strict yet ready to allow for personal growth. And finally the Angel of Death is dark and hurtful, whereas Yom Kippur is filled with God's light and God's mercy.

And finally the third reason, is perhaps the Angel has no work to be done on that day. A balance has been struck in our own minds in terms of our destiny. On Yom Kippur we are conscious of our past interactions; and we are also prepared mentally to accept judgment. We are willing to beat our chests, deprive our bodies of food, and to endlessly berate ourselves in a public setting. Our sense of good and bad in our own lives comes to rest, for a moment, on our personal scales. We need not fear destruction because we become in control of our future as we make our new year's resolutions. In addition, we do not need to succumb to our evil inclination because we have a vision of our higher selves. If the creation of the Angel was to

instigate our evaluation of our future, our coming to terms with our evil impulse, and putting us in touch with our mortal sides, we do not need the Angel on this day, because Yom Kippur does all that for Him.



## CONCLUSION

Appoint a wicked man over him:  
May an accuser stand at his right  
side. May he be tried and convicted,  
May he be judged and found guilty.  
(Psalm 109:6)

This is the essence and the role of the Angel of Death. He is God's adversary and man's worst fear. As man contemplates performing an evil deed, Satan dances encouragingly in front of him. After the sinful deed, Satan returns to heaven to prosecute the soul he helped to corrupt. The individual is then punished for his actions. The Angel of Death is a malicious creature whose purpose is to corrupt and destroy lives.

The Angel of Death, however, does not exist as an independent being. He is a member of the Divine court and therefore he is one of God's servants. The Angel of Death's character is intricately tied to the God's character. The Rabbis understand that for every one of the Angel's negative attributes God possesses a corresponding positive attribute. The Angel of Death is malicious; God is kind. The Angel of Death causes strife between human beings; God promotes peace between nations. The Angel of Death brings on confusion and mistrust; God implants order and faith. The Angel of Death instigates evil acts and immoral behavior; God demands obedience to the mitzvot and higher moral actions. The Angel of Death encourages wanton sexual behavior, and irrational actions; God encourages procreation and

knowledge. The Angel of Death serves to destroy and kill; God's function is to build and create. God needs a servant such as the Angel of Death. The Angel helps to promote the positive qualities and attributes of God.

The Rabbis need a character such as the Angel of Death because they need to promote not only the positive qualities of God, but the rewards of faith, mitzvot, and obedience as well. The authors of the midrashim contained in this thesis were faced with a struggle. The Rabbis were living in a world surround by non-Jews, foreign laws, and unsympathetic rulers. The Rabbis feared that their community would divest themselves from the Torah and mitzvot. They worried that the people would follow the foreigners' ways and challenge Rabbinic authority, and neglect the tradition. The creation of the Angel of Death perhaps was a way for the Rabbis to maintain their authority and control over the people. The goal of the Angel of Death, is threaten the Jews to a return to study, repentance and good deeds.

The myth of the Angel of Death was created to frighten the people into righteousness. Physical death was not understood as being as loathsome as the torture of dying. People feared the sight of the Angel and his power far more than the realization of death. The Rabbis promoted such a fear of the character. The Angel of Death became associated with all that was evil and destructive in the world. Every human being experiences some element of external or internal evil. The Angel of Death's power is maintained through the fear of evil.

The Rabbis suggested various ways to combat evil and death. By using the Garden of Eden story they proved that obedience would spare the people of the fear of abandonment. Procreation would counter the fear of death. The Golden Calf incident showed the people the healing power of repentance. The Rabbis used the story of Job to illustrate the authority of God and the saving power of undying faith. The Rabbis built into their creation of the Angel of Death methods for living righteously.

The Angel of Death/Satan/Samael, is a projection of our worst fears. One will only be frightened by him if one has not lived a life filled with righteousness, study and charity. All people sin; yet all people have the power of repentance available to them. Death is not a curse. Living with regret and the fear of death is a curse. For those who live in sin, performing evil deeds, dying is torture, and death is no reward. For those who attempt to live righteously, death is a kiss from God.

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