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SUMMARY
AN ANALYSIS OF SATAN IN THE BIBLE
AND RABBINIC LITERATURE
DANIEL TREISER

This thesis contains four chapters, as well as an introduction and conclusion. The contribution of this thesis is as a compilation of various references to Satan, either as a character or a technical term, and to categorize and explain them. The goal of this thesis was to create a composite portrait of the figure of Satan in early Jewish thought, and understand the important role he played in Rabbinic theology. The thesis is divided into four chapters by text: Tanakh, Tannaitic and early Palestinian Amoraic Literature, the Babylonian Talmud, and Midrashic Literature. Primary sources included these various texts, including compilations of midrashim and translations when necessary. Encyclopaedias were used for background information on midrashic technical terms, and other scholarly work was used for information relating to the Biblical material.

AN ANALYSIS OF SATAN IN THE BIBLE
AND RABBINIC LITERATURE

DANIEL TREISER

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

March 6, 2000
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before applying to Hebrew Union College, I had never read a Rabbinic text. I had heard the terms Talmud and Midrash, but had no idea what they meant, let alone how to read them. As I near the completion of my studies, I feel as if I have just begun to enter a wonderful new world, filled with fantastic stories, frustrating arguments, and incredible lessons. Several people have guided me on the first steps of this journey, and I owe them a great deal of thanks.

Dr. Stephen M. Passamanek introduced me to the Babylonian Talmud. His unique style of teaching and guidance provided me with invaluable skills in reading and deciphering the *Gemara*. I consider myself fortunate to have studied Midrash with two incredible professors. Dr. Lewis Barth literally makes Midrash come alive. His excitement and joy when reading Midrash made it a joy for me as well. Dr. Norman Cohen's insights into the text, and his ability to enable my comprehension of the texts at the same time made my love for Midrash grow even more. The idea for this thesis was born in his course. Dr. Eugene Borowitz introduced me to the concept of studying one term throughout a broad scope of texts. His vast knowledge of

Rabbinic texts was surpassed his concern and compassion for me as his student.

Dr. Michael Chernick has been, for me, an invaluable guide. His knowledge and skills in reading Rabbinic texts is awe-inspiring. As thesis advisor, Dr. Chernick brought meaning to seemingly empty texts. His encouragement of my own abilities, guidance in my understanding of the texts, and assistance in editing various drafts was crucial to my completion of this thesis.

I am greatly indebted to all these professors. I hope that I can continue to study and explore this incredible world you have introduced to me. And I pray that, as Rabbi, I may impart to my students the same wonder and knowledge you have given me.

I would like to thank Rabbi Bruce Block and Mrs. Sara Kaplan for their support throughout this year. Your encouragement and assistance was wonderful. Allowing me the time needed to work on this thesis is also greatly appreciated.

Thank you to all my friends and classmates at the College, especially my fellow "LA-transfers". Your confidence in my skill, and your continued encouragement strengthened me throughout this process. *Peshita!!*

I have never questioned my decision to become a Rabbi because I have always had the most important support a person can have: the encouragement of my parents. I know at times you have wondered where this desire came from, yet you always encouraged me to pursue my goal. I am so lucky to have your love and support. My program at the College has afforded me the opportunity to return to New York to complete my studies, but the best benefit was that it gave me more time to spend with you. I cannot thank you enough for all that you have given me. I love you both so much.

Words cannot begin to describe the love and thanks I have for my wife, Rachel. My life was made complete when we stood together under the *chupah*. Your patience, understanding, kindness, and love throughout these last few months is what allowed me to finish this project. You knew just when to be a welcome distraction, and when to "give me my space". I know that the rest of our lives together will be filled with even more love and mutual support for each other. Thank you, and I love you with all my heart.

INTRODUCTION

Satan is an easily identifiable character in American culture. Various media have given a common description of Satan: a red skinned, horned demon that rules over Hell. He is the Prince of Darkness. While this description may have its base in classical literature and medieval Christian eschatology, Satan has a very different origin.

Satan's origin can be traced back to the Hebrew Tanakh. Though he does not actually appear in the Tanakh, several divine characters are identified as "a satan". In the Rabbinic Literature of the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods, Satan gains his own identity and responsibilities. Descriptions of a Divine Prosecutor, who simultaneously serves as the Evil Inclination and the Angel of Death, are prevalent in both the halakhic and aggadic texts. Many times, he serves as both the Divine Challenger and Defender of God's will. This thesis will explore these various texts, which inform the description of Satan, and attempt to present the early Jewish view of this divine being.

CHAPTER 1
"SATAN" IN THE TANAKH

שטן (S.t.n.) functioning as a verb

Before exploring the "character" of Satan in the Bible, the uses of the root .ש.ט.ן in verb form need to be explained. The question exists as to whether this is the actual root of the word Satan. Several attempts have been made to explain the term *satan* as an etymological relative of third weak hollow verbs in other Semitic languages, especially Aramaic, Arabic, Syriac, and Akkadian.¹ Although these arguments are attractive because of the definitions they offer ("to stray", "to be unjust", "to seduce", etc.), it is preferable to examine the root in its own right, as a full, simple three-letter root.

.ש.ט.ן appears alone in a verb form four times in the Tanakh, where it is not specifically describing a character.² In Genesis 26:21, Isaac's herdsmen have been arguing with the herdsmen of Gerar over ownership of

¹ Day, Peggy L. An Adversary in Heaven; satan in the Hebrew Bible Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988 pp. 17-23 provides an explanation, and rejection, of the major arguments for origin in other Semitic languages.

² In several of the passages to be explored later, .ש.ט.ן also appears as a verb, but as the function of a character identified as a *satan*. See, for example, Zech. 3:1.

several wells. Because the shepherds involved themselves (התעשקו) with him, Isaac named the first well 'Eseq. Similarly, Isaac names the second well Sitnah (שטנה), because they argued or quarreled with him (ויריבו). In this case then, ש.ט.נ. refers to a quarrel or harassment. A similar definition appears in Ps. 38:21. The Psalmist laments that although he continues to try to do good deeds, those who repay evil continue to harass (ישטנוני) him.

One of the key roles Satan plays in both Biblical thought and later Rabbinic thought is an accuser. A connection between ש.ט.נ. and this definition of accuser is found in Ps. 109:4 and Ezra 4:6. In the section from Psalms, the Psalmist beseeches God for help or deliverance from the wicked around him. The wicked respond to the Psalmist's love with accusation (ישטנוני).³

The use of the root in Ezra is technical for a type of accusatory document. Upon returning from exile, Zerubbavel

³ Both the JPS translation (*JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999], 1552) and the Stone edition (*Tanach: The Stone Edition*. [Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1996]. 1535) translate the word in this instance as "accuse", even though it is in the exact same form as Ps. 38:21, which both translated as "harass". It is possible that both translations are being influenced by: 1- the context established by v.2, in which the evil are speaking slander against (accusing) the Psalmist) and

and Jeshua, the leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, started out to re-build the Temple in Jerusalem in accordance with Cyrus' edict. The enemies⁴ of the tribes asked to assist with the construction and were refused. When Ahasueros ascended to the throne, these enemies wrote a *Sitnah* (שטנה)⁵, an accusing letter against Judah and the people in Jerusalem. The text is not clear as to whether the text that follows (v. 9-16) is this same *sitnah*, or a second letter sent later. The purpose of the *sitnah* can be understood from context: it was a part of the enemies' plan to undermine the attempted construction. They bribed the ministers, made the people afraid, and slandered and accused the people of refusing to follow the Persian king with this form. This bureaucratic understanding is developed in later texts concerning *Satan*, where a *satan* serves as a courtroom prosecutor.

2- the use of the root in v. 6, which more definitively describes a courtroom setting with an accusing adversary.

⁴ The people living on the land. Because of their interest in assisting the tribes in the construction, it is possible that they are remnants of Israel left behind during the exile. The Stone translation, p. 1820 comments that they were foreign tribes "... installed in Samaria by Sennacherib... [who] adopted a distorted version of the Jewish religion".

⁵ There is no explanation of what exactly a *sitnah* is. It is reasonable to assume, then, that it was a technical term easily understood by the reader as a form for filing a complaint or accusation.

Humans Identified as a Satan

When a person or nation is identified in the Bible as a *satan*, the message is clear: they are serving in an adversarial role. All but one of the texts refer to adversaries of Israel or a particular Israelite. In several instances, the adversary takes on the additional role of accuser or prosecutor. The human *satans* of the Tanakh can be divided into two categories; military enemies, and non-military yet adversarial relationships.

Predictably, the military references to *satans* can be found in the earlier books of the Prophets, which chronicle the events of Israel's early monarchy. In 1 Sam. 29:4, the first human identified as a *satan* (actually a potential one), is none other than David. While fleeing from Saul, David and his men sought refuge with the Philistine commander Achish (1 Sam. 27). Achish planned to bring David with him into battle against Saul and Israel, yet the Philistine officers refused to let him go to war with them. They understood that his only benefit in the battle would be to stand against them, acting as a *satan*. Their fears later came true, as David defeats the Philistines in battle in 2 Sam. 5:17-25.

In a similar fashion, *satan* is used as a simple military term for enemy in 1 Kings. In newly installed

King Solomon's letter to King Hiram of Tyre, he explains that he has been fortunate God has not sent a *satan* against him in battle. Since he has not engaged in warfare, he is eligible to construct the Holy Temple (1 Kings 5:18). However, this favorable relationship between God and Solomon does not continue throughout his life. Solomon's many wives introduced their foreign religions to his palace, and caused him to engage in idolatrous practices. God raises up two leaders, Hadad the Edomite and Rezon as *satans* against Solomon (1 Kings 11:14,23,25). Both men had escaped death at the hands of David's armies and had raised up forces of their own to seek revenge against Israel. It is interesting to note, though, that they do not attack until God makes them *satans*. In this manner, they are perhaps serving in a more "divine" role as *satans*- serving as messengers sent by God to serve as adversary, similar to the *malakh* in Numbers 22.⁶

The non-military uses of *.l.l.v.w* all use the root to mean "accuser" or "prosecutor". In 2 Sam. 19:23, Shimei of

⁶ Rivkah Kluger *Satan in the Old Testament* (Evanston, Ill. 1967 p. 34-35) In Jeffrey B. Russell. *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) 190. Kluger notes that even in these passages (as well as 2 Sam. 19:23 and Ps. 109:6) where Satan is not specifically identified as a character, there is a hint to the

Gera, a Saulide who had earlier cursed David (2 Sam. 16:5-9), approaches David and asks his forgiveness. Abishai, a member of David's royal entourage, argues that Shimei should be executed for his crime. David asks why Abishai is acting as a *satan* to him, and why should any Israelite die just to prove that David is king? This reference actually implies both meanings of *satan* as an adversary and a prosecutor. In a technical legal sense, Abishai is acting as the accuser, pointing out the crime Shimei has committed and demanding justice.⁷ Abishai also serves as an adversarial *satan* to the will of David, who wants to pardon Shimei.

The other non-military references can be found in Psalms. In Ps. 71:13, the Psalmist cries out for his *satans* to perish. These *satans* are identified in v. 10 as "the ones who speak out against me", i.e. accusers. It is not clear from the context whether or not these accusers are slandering him as well.

The final references appear in Psalm 109, in verses 6 and 20. Verses 6-7 paint a vivid picture of a courtroom

personality of Satan, for "... all these adversaries are opposed to the right and proper order."

⁷ Day, 26. Day also shows that this is not an official office of *satan*, rather a function Abishai performs here. Abishai's actions were justified, for Shimei had committed a crime. *Satan* here, therefore, does not imply slander.

in which the wicked stands to be judged. The Psalmist asks that a *satan* stand at his right side, so that he may be brought to justice and punished. An association is made between the act of the wicked and the appointment of a *satan* to prosecute. This connection is explored later by the Rabbis in the *Tosefta*. Verse 20 returns to the use of *satan* found earlier in verse 4, where the wicked that stood against him were called *satans*. These wicked, who spoke evil against him, function as both adversaries and accusers.

Divine Beings serving as Satan

Four references are made in the Tanakh to divine, or celestial *satans*: Numbers 22:22-35, Zechariah 3:1-2, Job Chapters 1-2, and 1 Chronicles 21:1. Each reference informs the reader of different aspects of the character of a *satan*, and the character than comes to be identified as *Satan*.

In Numbers 22, Balaam, a non-Israelite priest, is summoned by Balak to curse Israel. God instructs Balaam to refuse the invitation. Balak sends more summons, promising wealth and honor for Balaam if he will curse Israel. Balaam knows that he should reject this offer as well, yet waits to hear God's instructions. In verse 20, God gives

Balaam an ambiguous response: "If these men have come to invite you, you may go with them. But whatever I command you, that you shall do."⁸ Balaam departs to answer the summons and incurs God's anger. A messenger (*malakh*) of God stationed himself on the road as a *satan*. Balaam's ass saw the *malakh* and swerved into the surrounding fields to avoid him, so Balaam beat her. The *malakh* moved further ahead and blocked the path again, causing the ass to swerve and crush Balaam's foot against a wall, for which Balaam beat her again. The *malakh* moved once again, and completely blocked the path so that the ass laid down, and received another beating. When God grants the ass the power of speech, she asks Balaam why, after so many years of being his mount, she is receiving this beating. Surely, he must know there is a reason for her actions! God then opened Balaam's eyes so that he saw the *malakh* standing as *satan*, whereupon he fell to the ground. The *malakh* tells Balaam that were it not for the ass, he would surely have killed him. Balaam is instructed to continue on his journey, and only to speak what God tells him to say.

The *malakh* that serves as a *satan* is a unique character. Unlike the other divine *satans*, which stand in opposition to God in some way, this *satan* stands as an

⁸ JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh, 336

adversary to Balaam. He represents the will of God. This is explained by the fact that this *satan* is simultaneously a *malakh Yhvh* and *satan*. A *malakh Yhvh* is frequently sent throughout the Tanakh to present the will of God to humans. In many cases, the *malakh Yhvh* and God function interchangeably. In Genesis 22:11-18, for example, the line between the *malakh* and God speaking seems blurred.

Another interesting aspect of this *satan* is his relative free will. Unlike the *satans* of 1 Kings 11 which are sent out by God, this *satan* goes out on his own, stationing himself on Balaam's path. Taking these two ideas together, it is possible to say that this *satan* is, in actuality, an embodiment of God Himself.

While this *satan* clearly fits into the role of adversary because of his physical action (i.e. standing in the path), it is also possible to understand how this *satan*, can be identified as prosecutor. Balaam in some way acts against the will of God⁹. The *satan* as prosecutor is explaining the "crime" Balaam has committed. The punishment for this crime was God's anger against him. It is only through the intervention of the *malakh/satan* that

⁹ Day, p. 65-66, describes how v.32 explains the ambiguity in v. 20, where it appears God gives Balaam permission to go on the journey. Balaam comes to understand that he was hasty in his departure.

Balaam is saved. In this instance, the *satan* merely points out the fault. In later Rabbinic texts, *Satan* will also become the deliverer of punishment.

According to the biblical text, the prophecy of Zechariah dates to the second year of the reign of Darius, approximately 520 BCE. Zechariah's prophecy contains several symbolic visions relating to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, the restoration of the priesthood to its office, and the coming of the Messiah. The vision described in Chapter 3 envisions Joshua son of Jehozadak¹⁰, the High Priest, standing before an angel of God with *Satan* standing on his right to prosecute him. The *satan* is rebuked by the angel and Joshua is dressed in clean clothes so that he may assume his position.

From a grammatical standpoint, it is important to note the identification of the divine creature as the *satan* (הַשָּׂטָן). The use of the definite article indicates that this is not a familiar name for the creature, but rather a title. He is serving in the role of a *satan*, whatever that role may be for this text.¹¹ As has been seen before, it is

¹⁰ according to Haggai 1:1

¹¹ The definite article is also used with every mention of *satan* in Job. This explanation applies there as well. It is possible, however that both texts envisage the same character, "The Satan".

possible to understand the *satan's* role as adversarial as well as that of a prosecutor.

A historical perspective of Joshua and his situation helps in defining *satan* as adversary. It is likely that there were several reasons for opposition by different parts of the community to Joshua's election as High Priest of the new Temple. Joshua is a direct descendant of the priestly family that oversaw the last days of the First Temple. The books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah describe this period as rife with idolatry. The priests permitted, and even participated in, this abomination.¹² Perhaps, then, certain elements considered Joshua "tainted" by his ancestry (which is alluded to by Zech. 3:3, his "filthy garments") and therefore unfit for the position. As has already been discussed, Ezra Chapter 4 details the opposition from the group of Israelites that had remained in the land to the returning exilic community's efforts to rebuild the Temple and re-establish the priesthood. It is possible that they too found Joshua tainted by other cults encountered in his exilic experience, also rendering him unfit. The *satan* as adversary could represent both of these "counter-Joshua" movements. It is impossible to know

¹² Jer. 8:2

for certain because the *satan* never vocalizes the complaint, and the *malakh's* response is ambiguous.

The scene's setting naturally lends to an interpretation of the *satan* as a prosecutor. The language is similar to Psalm 109:6, where the prosecuting *satan* stands on the right, ready to accuse.¹³ What is the charge the *satan* brings? A possible answer may be derived from the *malakh's* admonition of the *satan*: "The Lord rebuke you, O Accuser; may the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! For this is a brand plucked from the fire."¹⁴ As a brand pulled from the fire, Joshua had already suffered the punishment of exile, along with the entire community for turning away from God's ways. The *malakh* implies that this was enough, hinting that the *satan* was calling for continued or even increased punishment. Where God is calling for compassion, the *satan* is calling for justice according to the letter of the law. Indeed, by attempting to prevent the installation of Joshua, the *satan* stands in opposition to the plan for ultimate salvation detailed in Zechariah's remaining visions. This is the occurrence in the Bible where the *satan* represents a view counter to the

¹³ In Zech. 3:7, the *malakh* charges Zechariah תדין את ביתי. The unusual usage of the verb seems to hint at the courtroom setting of this scene as well.

¹⁴ JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh, 1386

will of God. Again, by playing the role of "the accuser", the *satan* simultaneously becomes identified as "the adversary", not just against Joshua, but God as well.

In her book *An Adversary in Heaven: satan in the Hebrew Bible*, Peggy Day suggests that this interpretation has a potentially dangerous origin as an anti-Jewish polemic. Building on the work of Joshua Trachtenberg, she explains the common theme in early anti-Semitism of identifying Jews with the devil. She explains:

Interpreting Zechariah's *satan* as the advocate of strict law over grace is but a more sophisticated and abstract expression of the old equation of the devil and the Jew. Zechariah's *satan* becomes the spokesperson of Jewish law as opposed to Christian grace. The superiority of Christianity is thus affirmed by giving it a textual basis, while Judaism, represented by the *satan*, is pronounced contrary to God's will. Grace supersedes law as the way to community salvation.¹⁵

The Zechariah text also may teach two other details concerning the power of the *satan*. The *satan* never gets a chance to make his case. Is it possible that once the *satan* starts, it is already too late? Must the charges the *satan* brings stand and his punishment meted out? This idea is supported in later

¹⁵ Day, 125. While I agree that this could be taken as an anti-Jewish polemic, I also think it is one of the

Rabbinic texts (and will be explored later¹⁶). If this is true, then the *satan* wields tremendous power, for he represents a truth that must be dealt with. In this instance, the "truth" of Joshua's (or the Jewish community's) violation of God's law is superseded by the other "truth" of God's mercy.

It is also possible to understand a limitation on the *satan's* power. It would appear that Joshua is in some way protected from the *satan*. Because Joshua is an essential key to God's plans for the community's salvation, he cannot be punished by the *satan's* accusations. While the *satan* does have power, it still must yield to the power and ultimate will of God. Perhaps this text teaches that all of God's "chosen" are in some way protected from the *satan's* prosecution.

The book of Job is one of the most difficult books in the Hebrew Bible to understand. The theological message of the book is not easy to grasp. The book appears to be made up of several different texts. Many different views are offered when attempting to date the book. A divine being,

legitimate understandings of the text, not necessarily supporting anti-Semitic views.

¹⁶ See, for example, p. 39 discussing Berachot 19a and 60a

identified once again as *ha Satan*, plays a central role in the book, as the instigator of its events.

After a brief introduction explaining the piety and financial success of Job, the book details a convening of the *benei Elohim* before God. The *satan* appeared with them. God asks where the *satan* has been, and he responds that he has been wandering the earth. God points out Job to the *satan*, praising his virtues. The *satan* insists that Job is pious only because God shows favor to him. If God were to turn his favor away from Job, the *Satan* argues, he would falter like everyone else. God grants the *satan* power to strike at all Job possesses, whereupon his flocks, servants, and children are killed. Despite this, Job remains faithful. At another convention of the *benei Elohim*, a similar dialogue occurs between God and the *satan*, where God gives him authority to afflict, but not kill Job. Job suffers but maintains his faith, and the remainder of the book ensues with the visits by Job's friends.

The *benei Elohim* gathering as a divine council is a relatively common motif in the Bible.¹⁷ What is unusual about this text is the specific identification of the *satan*. It is difficult to assess whether the *satan* is a

part of the *bnei Elohim*, or a separate divine entity.

Because God addresses him personally, it is possible that he is not a regular part of the divine council, and God is surprised to find him there, asking where he has been. At the same time, it is possible that he is a part of the group, and the singular discussion found in the text is there merely because it is the only one relevant to the narrative of Job. An interesting argument for including the *satan* in the council has been offered by N.H. Tur-Sinai.¹⁸ He suggests that the role of *satan* is related to the idea of the secret police of the king of Persia, who roamed the kingdom as "the eyes and ears" of the king. Indeed, the *satan* himself answers that he has been roaming (שׁוּט- one of the suggested verb root origins for the term *satan*, see above) the earth. This dialogue between God and the *satan* may simply be his report. Whether or not the *satan* is a part of the *benei Elohim*, it is clear that he is a divine creature.

This text also informs the reader concerning the power the *satan* wields. He seems to be independent from God. He is free to roam the earth, and God does not even know where he has been. He clearly has freedom of speech, as he is

¹⁷ See Jeffrey Russell, 184-85 for a discussion of the term.

allowed to challenge God directly, without fear of repercussion. The authority that God gives the *satan* to act in both 1:12 and 2:6 can be interpreted as both a sign of his strength and his limitations. God sets the parameters for what the *satan* is allowed to do to Job. It is possible that God is restricting the powers that the *satan* normally has at his disposal for the sake of the experiment. At the same time, the *satan* may actually be weak, and God is merely granting him this power over man for a limited time. Either way, these texts again show the *satan's* subservience to God's will.

Central to the narrative and the importance of the character of the *satan* is the challenge. It has been suggested that the *satan* is challenging Job and his level of piety, similar to the Akeidah trial of Abraham. Yet, the true challenge the *satan* offers is to God. God almost seems proud of the righteousness of Job. The *satan* challenges God's understanding of Job's faith, and indeed the entire system God has established for relations between God and humanity. The *satan* maintains that Job's piety, (as well as the faith of all humans) is motivated only by the promise of continued prosperity. While it may seem

¹⁸ As quoted in Marvin H Pope. The Anchor Bible: Job (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. 1965 10-11

that this is an indictment of humanity, it can also be understood as the *satan* coming to the defense of human nature. God has set up a system where it is impossible for a person to be prosperous without simultaneously living in fear of God. If the *satan's* challenge was successful, the relationship between God and humanity would change- perhaps for the better, since it would no longer rest purely upon a base of reward and punishment.

The definition of the term *satan* in this text seems to be different than has been found in the other biblical texts. While both Adversary and Prosecutor can be understood from the *satan's* challenge to God, the negative connotation of these terms is not as prevalent here as it is in other texts. The *satan* seems to challenge God out of love for Him. This challenge can almost be read as an adoring child attempting to make his parent understand what is really happening.¹⁹

One of the clearest definitions of the *satan's* functions appears in this text. In 2:3, after the *satan* destroyed all Job's property and children, God praises Job

¹⁹ I readily admit that this reading is influenced by my attempt to see the *satan* not as an evil character, but as a loving, subservient angel of God with a difficult job. It is more commonly accepted that his challenge is not done out of love.

for maintaining his piety, even though the *satan* incited²⁰ God against him. It is interesting that, though God accuses the *satan* of inciting Him to act, it was God who granted authority to the *satan* to attack Job.

A possibility that always exists in the Bible is that the *satan* is actually acting in accordance with God's plan. The *satan* did not notice Job until God pointed him out. It almost seems that God wanted the *satan* to challenge Him. Perhaps the real challenge in the introductory chapters of the book of Job is a challenge of the *satan*- would the *satan* challenge God.

In 1 Chronicles, the Chronicler attempts to strengthen the reputation and legitimacy of the Davidic line. Through genealogical lists and a retelling of the history found from 1 Samuel to 2 Kings, the Chronicler paves the way for the coming of the Messiah, David's descendant. 1 Chron. 21, retells the story found in 2 Sam. 24. In the original, God's anger is directed at Israel, so He instructs David to take a census of the people. After the census is taken, a plague of pestilence strikes Israel. The angel attacking Israel is stopped at the threshing floor of Araunah, where

²⁰ להסית - while not etymologically related to *satan*, the similarities in sound would inform a listener as to a part of the nature of this *satan*.

David builds an altar to God. In the Chronicles version, Satan, not God, incites David to take the census.²¹

Unlike the previous texts, the character in question is not identified with the definite article. This has led many scholars and interpreters to treat *satan* as a proper name. Through a detailed account of recent research on the dating of Chronicles, Peggy Day demonstrates that this conclusion is probably incorrect.²²

Satan in this text serves primarily as a tool of the Chronicler. The 2 Samuel text contains a paradox: Why would God cause David to take a census if census taking would incur God's anger? Replacing God with *satan* as the instigator negates the paradox.

As discussed earlier, the Chronicler is interested in more than removing paradoxes. His purpose for writing is to improve David's reputation. Several incidents which portray David in a negative way were eliminated from his account (i.e. the Batsheba incident, Nathan's reprimand,

²¹ Two other noticeable differences between the two stories: 1- Joab does not complete the census in Chronicles; he doesn't count Levi or Benjamin, and it is implied that this was the sin. 2- The angel is stopped, and the altar is built, at the home of Ornan.

²² Day 127-32. She concludes an approximate date for Chronicles in the late sixth century, nearly 300 years before the first clearly identifiable usage of *Satan* as a proper name. During this time, *satan* is only used in the texts already evaluated to identify an anonymous character.

etc.). In this story, the Chronicler seems to try to repair the relationship between God and David, and eliminates God's apparently unwarranted displeasure with David. By substituting *satan*, it appears as if God never commanded David to do something for which he would be punished.

It is difficult to define the role of *satan* in this text as has been done in the other biblical texts. As in Job, *Satan* incites David (להסית again) to take the census. The only hint we have as to *satan's* role as prosecutor or adversary comes later in the text, 21:7-15. David confesses to the sin, and punishment is meted out. This might point to *satan* acting as a prosecutor, as David receives a sentence of pestilence.

1 Chronicles represents a transition in thought on *satan* and evil. This is the first time a Jewish text mentions a *satan* leading a human to commit an act against God's will. It is this role, as the overseer of wrongdoing, that finds expansion in Rabbinic texts.

The Biblical material, though not dealing with the specific character *Satan*, provides the information that leads to his development. The use of the root .ש.ט.נ is primarily as an adversary or an accuser. The adversarial definition is used primarily in reference to military

relationships. It serves in several instances in the Psalms as a reference to accusation, even in a courtroom like environment. This sets the stage for *Satan's* later role as the Prosecutor.

The four references to divine beings teach different characteristics of the nature of *satan*. Balaam's *satan* was an angel (*malakh Yhvh*) representing God's will, and works to make sure God's plan is followed. The *satan* in Zechariah's vision takes on the role of prosecutor, as he is prepared to bring charges against Joshua's suitability to serve as High Priest. He also stands as an adversary, representing the forces that did not want to see him installed as High Priest. The *satan* in Job is a divine being with great powers and freedoms, yet still subservient to the ultimate will of God. He challenges God's perceptions of reality, and in doing so, defends humanity. This *satan* is responsible for wandering the earth and examining human beings. He is also perceived as a troublemaker, stirring God against His favorite Job. David's *satan* in 1 Chronicles introduces the idea of a *satan* as instigator to humanity, inciting David to do wrong. In addition, these *satan* texts play a very

important role in the future development of *Satan*: they are frequently used by the Rabbis as proof texts for their teachings concerning *Satan*.

CHAPTER 2
SATAN IN THE TANNAITIC AND
EARLY PALESTINIAN AMORAIC LITERATURE

The Tannaitic strata of Rabbinic literature contains the major teachings from the latter days of the Second Temple period through the 5th generation of tannaim, approximately 250 CE. Collection of the tannaim's teaching may have continued until sometime in the 8th century CE. The major texts of the tannaitic strata are the *Mishnah*, *Tosefta*, the *halakhic midrashim*, and the *Palestinian Talmud*. This chapter will explore the few uses of the term *Satan* in these texts.

Before examining the Rabbinic texts, a brief explanation of the development of *Satan* is necessary. In the non-canonical texts of the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Qumran texts, *Satan* begins to take on the role of the devil. The various demons that were a part of Jewish folklore begin to be seen as subservient to, and even a part of, *Satan*, the ruler of the demons. This understanding of *Satan*, while not considered sacred

literature by rabbis, surely had some influence on their thinking and use of *Satan*.²³

It is also important to note that the term *satan*, or even its root form, never appears in the *Mishnah*. While an explanation for this deficiency has not been offered before, it is possible to speculate as to the reason. The *Mishnah* is a strictly legal text. It contains little if any aggadic material, which might have provided a natural arena in which the rabbis might have used *Satan*. It is also possible that the political and religious environment of the Rabbis during the compilation of the *Mishnah* was not the most hospitable to the idea of a *satan*. Living under the rule of the Roman Empire with the simultaneous emergence of Christianity, the personage of a Divine Adversary subject to the Jewish God might have been perceived as a dangerous anti-Roman or anti-Christian polemic. Self-censure was surely necessary.

Satan as Military Adversary

The only use of the root form **.ל.ט.ש** is found in the *Tosefta*, *Sotah* 12:2. Its use is similar to that found in

²³ For a detailed treatment of the apocalyptic textual treatment of *Satan*, see Jeffrey Russell. *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* 174-220

1 Kings 5:18 as a military adversary. Commenting on 2 Chronicles 16:1, the Tosefta explains that the 36 years, in addition to the time of Asa's reign as king of Judah, was the length of a treaty between Israel and the kingdom of Aram. However, at the end of 36 years, Aram will stand as *satanim*, or military enemies to Israel, as occurs in 2 Chron. 16:3-5.

Development of Satan into a deity

Two texts show how Satan had progressed from being merely a servant of God in Rabbinic thinking into a deity in his own right. *Tosefta Shabbat* 17:3²⁴ quotes a teaching by R. Eleazar son of R. Yosi the Galilean concerning travel with others on your path. If a wicked person plans to travel on the same road, you should try to leave 3 days before or after him, for angels of Satan (מלאכי סטן) serve him on the way. This teaching is based on Psalm 109:6, where R. Eleazar believes it teaches that Satan is assigned to the wicked. This notion comes from a parallel teaching about a righteous traveler, who has angels of peace accompanying him, based on Psalm 91:11. The teaching about the righteous traveler is fine, because it is based on a

²⁴ This exact same teaching is also found in *Tos. Avodah Zarah* 1:18

relatively close reading of the verse from Psalm 91. The teaching about the wicked traveler, however, requires a more liberal interpretation of Psalm 109:6, which has already been discussed. R. Eleazar's teaching does show some interesting traits he attributes to Satan. Satan is now powerful enough that he has his own minions or messengers that he is able to send out on a journey: he no longer has to do it all himself. Even in his new role as a deity, Satan maintains his role as a prosecutor. R. Eleazar appears to be warning that Satan may make his claim against this wicked man on his journey, and it would be wise not to be there when punishment comes.

The second text that shows an increase in Satan's power as a divine entity is *Sifra* on *Parshat Shemini*, Chapter 1. In Leviticus 8:14-15, Aaron and his sons offer a sin offering to God as a part of their ordination process, presumably to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. Yet, in 9:2, Aaron is instructed to take another sin offering for himself. The *Sifra* explains this apparent repetition as a sacrifice not for God, but for Satan! Moses explains that Aaron must make full atonement before he attempts to enter the Tabernacle. If he doesn't appease Satan, Satan will be waiting to prosecute him when he comes out. This sacrifice appears to be necessary to confuse Satan. Aaron

still felt that he carried guilt for the Golden Calf. If he went in with that guilt, it would give Satan an opening to prosecute him later. By making the sacrifice to Satan, it keeps the prosecutor pre-occupied. This text indicates Satan's elevated status by showing the way to appease him: by a sacrifice, the same way other gods are satisfied.

It is possible that this text is also teaching about the power Satan has gained as the ruler of other demons. There is a parallel between Aaron's offer of a bull to Satan and the offering of a goat to Azazel in the Yom Kippur service by the High Priest in Leviticus 16. When God is appeased by a sacrifice on the altar, the demon-god must be appeased as well, with all the sins going out to him. Perhaps this offering represents Aaron sending his sin off to Satan, representing Azazel.²⁵

Connection of Satan to Yetzer ha Ra

Sifre to Deuteronomy 21:18, on verse 21:18²⁶, discusses issues relating to the rebellious son. According to the text, when a man succumbs to his evil inclination and illicitly brings a beautiful Gentile captive into his

²⁵ Azazel has been identified as a goat-demon, and therefore requires a goat as a sacrifice. Perhaps the calf Aaron offers here hints to the identity of Satan (or maybe his role in the Golden Calf)?

house, it is as if he has brought Satan in as well. Satan punishes the man by causing his son to be rebellious and wayward. The son, the Bible teaches, must be put to death, thus punishing the father as well. It is as if Satan is in concert with the Yetzer ha Ra, just waiting to punish someone who gives in to it.

Satan as Instigator

In Numbers 22, when Balak sends for Balaam to curse Israel, Balaam professes to be a pseudo-prophet of God, not wanting to curse Israel without first receiving God's permission. After blessing Israel instead of cursing them, Balaam conspires with Balak²⁷ to turn God against Israel by having the Israelite men fornicate with Moabite women, causing God to punish them. Yet, as God says in Deuteronomy 23:6, God did not listen to Balaam. The biblical text portrays Balaam as a weak, greedy man. How could he have attempted this plot? *Midrash Tannaim* to Deuteronomy 23:6 explains that it was Satan²⁸ acting through Balaam to make God curse Israel. This is a new level in the adversarial relationship between God and Satan. In

²⁶ This teaching is also found in *Midrash Tannaim* 21:22

²⁷ Numbers 25.

²⁸ identified here with the definite article, but I am not certain of the significance.

Job, while the *satan* challenged God, there was still an understanding of deference. In 1 Chronicles, he instigates David to act counter to God's will. Here, however, *Satan* is actually attempting to trick God.

Satan as Prosecutor

The familiar role of *Satan* as a prosecutor can be found in several tannaitic texts. These texts expand and limit *Satan's* prosecutorial power. In *Sifre to Numbers* 42, *Satan* stands ready to prosecute Israel for one of its greatest sins- idol worship. However, if there is peace among the people, even if they are engaged in idol worship, according to R. Eleazar ben R. Eleazar ha-Kappar (a.k.a. Ben Kapparah) *Satan* can't touch them. This represents a severe limitation of *Satan's* power- he cannot overcome peace.

PT Berachot Chapter 1, page 2d *halakha* 1, deals with the potential danger of combining required rituals. It might seem that by combining rituals, the person is doing them wrong, and *Satan* is standing by, waiting to prosecute the transgressor. However, R. Yosi b. R. Bun teaches that certain rituals may be done at the same time, and *Satan* is powerless to prosecute. One may combine the washing of hands with reciting the blessing before eating bread and

Satan will not bother him during the meal. Similarly, one may combine his recitation of the prayer for Redemption with the recitation of the *Amidah* and Satan cannot prosecute him throughout that day. This text also hints at Satan's penchant for prosecuting according to the strictest sense of the law. There may have been fear that Satan is waiting to prosecute because it seems that combining rituals is not the proper way to fulfill the obligations according to a strict reading of the commandments. This text teaches, however, that the obligation is indeed fulfilled.

In addition to introducing further limitations on Satan's power, this text very clearly defines his role as prosecutor. R. Yosi b. R. Bun borrows the Greek term for prosecutor, *kategor*, (קטגור or in this case מקטרג)²⁹ to explain his actions. By using a term from a foreign language, the allusion to Satan serving as prosecutor is now made clear.

Two separate texts provide another situation when Satan stands ready to prosecute. In *Midrash Tannaim* to Deuteronomy 23:10, R. Yosi b. R. Hanina teaches why the Torah says you must guard against evil when going out from the camp to war: Satan stands ready to prosecute in times

of danger. This text implies that death in dangerous situations does not come simply because of the danger presented. It is the punishment for not being able to face Satan's charges. Whenever you go out, there are prosecutors waiting to charge (i.e. kill) you. The challenge this text forces is: Can you lead a meritorious life so that, should you find yourself accused, you will survive the ordeal? Do your good deeds and way of life outweigh your sins? Theologically, this is a very difficult concept. This eliminates the possibility of succumbing to some danger, or even an accident, while on a dangerous journey. If someone dies, they must not have lived a worthy life, their sin was greater than their goodness, and therefore gave Satan an opportunity to prosecute against them.

A parallel to this teaching can be found in the *PT Shabbat* Chapter 2, p. 5b *halakha* 6. In addition to several rabbis offering different Scriptural bases for Satan prosecuting in a time of danger, they include examples of dangerous situations when Satan might attack. R. Levi offers three situations that should be avoided: making a trip on one's own, sleeping by oneself in a closed house,

²⁹ קטרגי - to denounce, bring charges; to incite anger against", as found in Marcus Jastrow. *Dictionary of the*

and travelling on the Great (Mediterranean) Sea. If someone must engage in any of these dangerous situations then, based upon Deut. 23:9, he must be careful to guard against evil, lest he give Satan an easy opportunity to prosecute him.

This PT text indicates why Satan would be waiting to prosecute: failure to strictly uphold the mitzvot. The entire discussion stems from a discussion of women who die in childbirth for failing to observe the mitzvot of family purity, separating the challah, and lighting the Shabbat candles. True, this is a dangerous situation for women. Because these were the mitzvot women had to be most concerned with following, it made sense to the Rabbis that their death was punishment for failing to observe them.³⁰

Finally, a new and interesting use of the term *satan* appears in *PT Yebamot*, Chapter 1, p. 3a *halakha* 6. As the rabbis attempt to resolve the legal issues surrounding the marriage status of daughters' co-wives, they discover that a certain R. ben Harkinas is teaching in accordance with the Shammai school that permits this marriage. They approach R. Dosa b. Harkinas to challenge him on this teaching, for they think he is responsible. He replies that

Talmud (Jerusalem: Horeb Press), p. 1353

³⁰ The offensiveness of this statement today is obvious.

they seek his brother Yonatan b. Harkinas. He warns them as they leave to be careful, for he is a first-born of Satan (בכור שטן). The only way to possibly understand this strange colloquialism is from R. Dosa's continued warning and the actions of Yonatan b. Harkinas. R. Dosa continues by warning the rabbis that his brother has 300 answers to this issue of the daughter's co-wife. Yonatan rather arrogantly responds to his brothers warning of their approach, "how could you call these men sages of Israel?" Clearly he feels he knows more than any of them. When they come to him, they argue until the rabbis fall asleep, but they do not accept his teaching. Finally, he offers Scriptural quotes to describe each of them. The question never arises again.

It appears that the term here implies someone who is cunning. Yonatan b. Harkinas maintains his own beliefs, even though he is challenging the majority. He turns the Rabbinic system of proof texts against the great Sages of Israel, attempting to show them their faults. In a way, he "prosecutes" the rabbis. Perhaps he also provides further clarification regarding the definition of Satan with his arrogance as well.

These tannaitic and early Palestinian amoraic texts teach a great deal about the continually developing

character of *Satan*. *Satan* becomes the proper name of a divine being with various responsibilities. He developed into a deity in his own right, with angels or messengers under his command and requiring sacrifices to appease him. A connection is made between *Satan* and the *Yetzer ha Ra*, waiting to find someone who succumbs to his inclination so that he may attack. *Satan* continues to act as an instigator, forcing Balaam to again act against God's will. The primary job for *Satan* as prosecutor (קטגור) continues to be developed. *Satan* is prepared to prosecute a person for not strictly adhering to God's law. He is also understood to be ready at all times with charges of a person's sins, ready to prosecute them should a dangerous situation arise. Only by living a meritorious life and avoiding dangerous circumstances can one prevent *Satan's* prosecution, and the inevitable punishment of death. All these roles are expanded in the parallel and later texts of the Babylonian Talmud and aggadic Midrashim.

CHAPTER 3

SATAN IN THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD

The Babylonian Talmud represents the great teaching of the Amoraic period. Scholars continue to debate an accurate date for the final version of the Talmud. It incorporates teachings from the tannaitic period, specifically in the form of *mishnayot* and *braitot*, and continues quoting tradition from the Palestinian and Babylonian Rabbinic communities through the Saboraic period, perhaps into the early Geonic period in the 8th century.³¹ The term *satan* continued to evolve in the Babylonian Talmud to represent the divine character responsible for challenge, prosecution, and in some cases, evil and death. *Satan* plays more of a role in aggadic passages in the Babylonian Talmud, though many could be considered halakhic as well. Parallels can be seen between several of the passages in the Talmud and the Midrash, which will be explored later.

³¹ See H.L. Strack and Gunter Stemberger. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 201-207 for a more detailed discussion of redaction theories.

Satan as Prosecutor

Once again, Satan continues to fill his role as a prosecutor of humanity, especially concerned with making sure punishments that should be meted out are in the name of justice. In *Megillah* 11b, Satan's power to prosecute extends even to non-Israelites. Ahashueros, after calculating that the prophesied time for Israel's return from exile had passed, orders a feast. During the feast, he drinks from the sacred vessels of the Holy Temple. As punishment for his iniquity, Satan dances among the crowd and kills Vashti. This text represents an increase in the speed of Satan's work- the transgression, charge, and punishment happen very quickly.

This text may also present another role of Satan, as the tool of God. When reading this text, it is striking to see Ahashueros transgress and Vashti punished. As the story of Esther unfolds, it becomes clear that it was necessary for Vashti to be eliminated so that Esther could assume the role of queen. This may have been God's way of enabling this plan.

Another development of Satan is his action in this text- he dances among them before killing Vashti. Perhaps this shows a metamorphosis into some type of malevolent

spirit, dancing around the room before deciding to strike. In other texts that will be examined in a moment, a dancing Satan seems to represent his presence in dangerous situations.

Another textual teaching relating to Satan as prosecutor is found in *Berachot* 19a and 60a. In both, the rabbis disagree with a prayer formula that sees the person almost asking for death. In 19a, the prayer includes the line "I have sinned and You have not exacted from me one thousandth" of the punishment. In 60a, the objectionable phrase is, "May no ruin or iniquity happen to me, but if it does, may my death be atonement for all my sins." R. Yosi, Abaye, and Resh Lakish all teach that one should never say this, for "Man should not open his mouth to Satan." These prayer formulas represent a confession of guilt to the prosecutor of a crime worthy of death. It is essentially a demand for punishment. While admitting to sin and seeking forgiveness is essential to the atonement process, demand for punishment is not.

These texts seem to re-inforce an idea found in earlier texts about the prosecutor. Once Satan brings charges against someone, it may already be too late. They also represent a new dimension of the Prosecutor: Satan, either directly or indirectly, also serves as executioner

or punisher. Satan seems to understand only the measure of strict justice: if someone has transgressed, he must be punished, so Satan brings the punishment.

Satan implied to be the Angel of Death

Related to this idea, two texts associate death with Satan. *Berachot* 51a, contains a teaching of R. Yehoshua b. Levi. He re-tells what the Angel of Death taught him not to do if he wants to avoid harm: taking your shirt in the morning from your butler, having your hands washed by someone who has not washed his hands, and standing in front of women returning from a funeral. Concerning this last lesson, the Angel of Death explains that he dances with his sword drawn before them, and he has the permission to strike at anyone. If someone cannot avoid the women, he is supposed to turn away and repeat Zech. 3:2, "God said to the Satan, 'May God rebuke you, O satan!'"³²

Once again, Satan is dancing. It doesn't seem to be joyful dancing. It may just be an expression here denoting his presence and activity. This text also finds connection to the idea explored in the tannaitic texts dealing with dangerous situations. The death of one person was

considered dangerous for everyone around him as well. Someone has died, so *Satan* must be nearby and can strike again. Hence, he is represented with his sword drawn.

In *Eruvin* 26a, during a discussion concerning Isaiah's actions in 2 Kings 20:4, Rabbah bar bar Chanah quotes a teaching from R. Yochanan, who determined that he established a yeshiva near Hezekiah's door when he became ill. From this, they teach that a yeshiva should be established near the door of any ill scholar. This idea is rejected though, because it might bring *Satan* against him.

It doesn't appear that there is a prosecution-type challenge being suggested here. Rashi's commentary on this text explains that *Satan* is acting as the Angel of Death. Because students will argue in a yeshiva, it creates a hostile environment, the perfect setting for *Satan*/ Angel of Death to come in and take the scholar.

It is important to briefly mention here another text, *Bava Batra* 16a. In this extensive Rabbinic commentary on the book of Job, Resh Lakish teaches that *Satan* is also the Angel of Death. This text will be examined later.

³² While this Talmudic text does not specifically identify the Angel of Death as *Satan*, this quotation as a talisman against him implies they are the same.

Satan as the Evil Inclination (Yetzer ha Ra)

On *Berachot* 33a, while discussing whether one can stop his prayers because of the approach of a dangerous animal, R. Meir is quoted as saying that one should run and climb a roof to avoid a bull, even one that is eating. Shmuel clarifies this teaching that it only deals with a black bull during the month of Nisan. Why? *Satan* dances between the bull's horns. Similarly, in *Pesachim* 112b, R. Judah ha Nasi instructs his sons not to stand in front of a bull as it comes out of a swamp because *Satan* dances between its horns.

Perhaps the best way to understand this text is through Rashi's commentary on the *Berachot* text. He explains that during Nisan, when the spring comes and new grass grows, the bull is seized by a craziness to eat after the long dry winter. This craziness he identifies as the *Yetzer ha Ra*. Unlike the function of the evil inclination in humans, which leads them to sin, it works here to make the bull uncontrollable. And unlike previous texts that merely place *Satan* at a dangerous location, these texts offer the possibility that *Satan* causes the situation. There is no association with justice, prosecution, or punishment here. *Satan* is just simple malevolence.

Another text involving Satan and the *Yetzer ha Ra* is *Kiddushin* 81a. Satan appears to both R. Meir and R. Akiva in the form of an attractive woman in order to tempt them. Both men, though pious, find themselves acting foolishly to be with her. In this text, Satan is not acting as the *Yetzer ha Ra*, but tempting the rabbis to give in to it. It becomes a tool for Satan to lure them to do wrong. Again, Satan has evolved into a creature more interested in causing trouble than prosecuting the unjust. This Satan is more identifiable with the Western tradition of him as a devil.³³

Satan as a Tool of God

While Satan has continued to evolve into an independent divine being increasingly responsible for evil, he also continues to serve as a tool for making God's plan come to fruition. In *Sanhedrin* 95a, Satan plays a relatively minor role as God's implement for bringing David to justice. When David fled from Saul, he sought refuge with the *Kohanim* in Nov. In return, Saul massacred them all. Because David had led Saul to destroy God's priests, God holds David partially accountable for the massacre and

³³ As noted above, *Bava Batra* 16a also identifies Satan as the *Yetzer HaRa* as well. This text will be examined later.

requires him to be punished. In *Sanhedrin*, David chooses to be turned over to his enemies. While David was hunting one day, *Satan* took the form of a deer and appeared before David. David fired at *Satan*, but missed. He chased after *Satan*, until he reached the land of the Philistines, where he was captured and bound.

Although *Satan* is acting in this minor role, it is understandable that he is the divine creature chosen by God to deliver David to the Philistines. *Satan* is simultaneously leading David to justice and punishment, his main job as Divine Prosecutor.

However, God won't let *Satan* leave David alone. In *Sanhedrin* 107a, David complains to God that he should be tested like the Patriarchs. God warns him that it will be a test of physical temptation. That night, as David was walking on the roof of the palace, *Satan* appeared in the form of a bird. David shot an arrow at *Satan*, but missed. The arrow struck the wicker that was hiding Batsheva as she bathed, and revealed her to David. This of course, led to David's relations with her, and his failure of the test.

This text does not portray *Satan* as prosecutor or adversary. It harkens back to the role of the *satan* in the Balaam story, where he is an instrument of God. Knowing that *Satan* plays this part begs the question of whether it

is an underlying part of all Satan's actions. Perhaps everything Satan does is because it fits God's plan. It would seem that this is obvious in some cases. In others, though, it seems that Satan acts to cause what he thinks God wants to happen- strict observance of the mitzvot.

It is possible to see another aspect of the relationship between Satan and the Yetzer ha Ra in this text that did not fit the previous models. Before, Satan either represented it or used it as a tool. Here, knowing its power, Satan leads David to a situation where his inclination will take over his actions.

Satan the Destroyer and Cause of Trouble

Satan gains a new title in *Berachot* 16b. The Talmud lists the additional prayers various Rabbis recite after completing the *Amidah*. Judah ha Nasi adds a prayer that he be saved from, "an evil man and an evil incident, from the evil inclination, from an evil companion, from an evil neighbor, and from Satan the Destroyer (שטן המשחית)." It is clear by inclusion in the list that Satan is somehow connected to evil. The others are all evil humans. Perhaps Satan represents "divine evil" for Judah. The connection is made to Satan's nature as prosecutor by the

phrases that follow it in the prayer³⁴. What it is that Satan can destroy, though, remains unclear.

A brief mention in *Gittin* 52a points to Satan's penchant for causing trouble. Tales are told concerning how R. Meir became involved in situations that didn't relate to him. In one, Satan caused two men to fight every Erev Shabbat. R. Meir visited them and stopped them for three consecutive weeks, so that Satan was removed from them. There is no mention of why Satan bothers these two, or what benefit is derived for anyone from R. Meir's intervention. This text may simply show Satan as a cause of strife.

Satan as the Voice of Logic- God's Challenger

As was seen in the book of Job, one of the essential roles of Satan is to challenge God. In the next two texts as well as Job, Satan applies logic to the dictates of God and finds fault.

In *Yoma* 67b, the Rabbis discuss the ritual of the scapegoat. A *baraita* is brought to the discussion that expounds on Leviticus 18:4, "You will do my judgements and keep my statutes." The first part of the verse is

³⁴ "A harsh judgement, and a harsh legal adversary, whether a Jew or not".

understood to refer to those mitzvot that, even if they had not been written, it would be expected that they should be observed because of their obvious necessity, i.e. idolatry, adultery, and murder. The second part of the verse is said to instruct the Israelites to keep those mitzvot that wouldn't seem necessary were they not written, i.e. eating pork, wearing *shatnez*, the release of the levirite wife, the cleansing of a *metzora*, and the sending of a goat to Azazel. These mitzvot are being answered or contested by Satan. They make no sense from a logical point of view. Why then, *Satan* would maintain, must they be observed? The *baraita* bases its answer on the end of the verse, "I am Adonai your God", that they are simply commanded by God and we don't have the authority to question them.

Could it be that *Satan* is correct? There is no explanation understandable by human reason for these mitzvot. *Satan* perhaps represents a crisis for the rabbis. They must accept this system on faith, without finding an answer. It is ironic that the rabbis must reject logic, a tool they strive to use in their debates, in order to justify these non-rational mitzvot. From this perspective, it is easy to understand why Rashi and other Rabbinic commentators associate *Satan* here with the *Yetzer ha Ra*.

Logic, the tool of Satan, is instigating them to stray from the performance of mitzvot.

The possibility exists that in this text, Satan represents something more. In the early days of Christianity, the argument for the rejection of the "old" Jewish way of life in favor of the new Christian system was to show how so many of Judaism's rules failed to stand up to a logical criticism. *Kashrut* and circumcision simply had no purpose, so why cling to a system that maintains their necessity? Perhaps this manifestation of Satan contains within it a polemic against Christianity's "logical faith".

In a series of *aggadot* related by R. Yehoshua b. Levi, (*Shabbat* 89a), he tells the tale of Satan noticing that the Torah isn't in heaven. God tells Satan He gave it to the earth. Satan seeks it on the earth, in the depths, the sea, and with death and destruction, but cannot find it. God then sends Satan to "the son of Amram", and Moses denies receiving it.

Satan's distress at the missing Torah shows his challenge. He disagreed with God's plan to let humanity have it, so he goes off to find it. While Satan's logic isn't obvious in his actions, it can be inferred. He approaches the different expanses- earth, the sea, the

depths, etc. It never occurs to Satan that humans could possess the Torah- it is logically inconceivable. The Torah, being God's words and laws, God's most treasured item, is too large and great for humans to have and understand. Even Moses' "lie" supports this thought. Moses himself can't conceive of being so great as to be able to possess the Torah that is so precious to God. It's only with the diminution of the self and allowing God to be with humanity that we can share it. Again, it appears that Satan is correct, yet doesn't understand God's grace.

There is a minor contradiction between this text and other texts concerning Satan. In the previous aggadah in the text, the Angel of Death, along with all the other angels gives Moses a gift as he receives the Torah. If Satan is a member of the Heavenly Tribunal, indeed is the Angel of Death³⁵, how could he not know where Torah is? Maharashah explains that Satan did know about the giving of Torah, but is acting as the *Yetzer ha Ra* and attempting to entice the Jews to go back on the agreement³⁶. Another possibility is that the Rabbis didn't consider Satan a regular resident of Heaven, but rather as someone who

³⁵ See *Bava Batra* 16a

³⁶ *The Babylonian Talmud: Schottenstein edition*. edited by R. Michael Weiner (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1996), notes on 89a2.

spends his time wandering the Earth, as in the beginning of Job. He may have returned to find Torah missing. This may be alluded to by the responses of the Earth and depths to Satan, based on quotations from Job.³⁷

Limitations of Satan's Power

While helping to define Satan, several texts teach both natural limitations on Satan's power, and methods people can use to prevent Satan from paying attention to them. One limitation is the ability to confuse him. In *Rosh Hashanah* 16a-b, R. Yitzhak teaches that a *tekiah* and *teru'ah* are sounded on Rosh Hashanah while the congregation sits the first time and stands the second time around in order to confuse Satan. Rashi provides an explanation for how two shofar blasts confuse Satan: Satan is overwhelmed by Israel's commitment to hold the mitzvah dear and sound the shofar twice- the commandment only requires a single sounding. This may also serve as a general teaching for how to keep Satan at bay, i.e. through the observance of

³⁷ This does not, however explain the discrepancy with regards to the identity of Satan as the Angel of Death. It probably results from the final redaction of the talmudic text: these two texts are probably from independent sources.

mitzvot beyond the obligation.³⁸ This text also shows the importance of failing to confuse *Satan*: a year that begins without confusing him will end with the sounding of the shofar in despair, for *Satan* will stand against the community.

Another limitation placed on *Satan* during the High Holy Day period is his inability to function on Yom Kippur. According to a *gematria* calculation by Rami bar Chama on Yoma 20a, "*ha Satan*" (השטן) has the numerical equivalent of 364. Therefore, *Satan* has authority to act on 364 days of the year. The one day he can't is the holiest of them all, Yom Kippur. Perhaps this text can be read in a more positive light for *Satan*- it is his day off. On all other days of the year, it is his job to prosecute people for their wrongdoings. On Yom Kippur, everyone has already been judged. There is no need for a prosecutor.

Another method for keeping *Satan* away is through a spoken formula. In *Kiddushin* 29b-30a, R. Chisda proclaims that if he had married at age 14, he would have been able to say to *Satan*, "An arrow in your eyes!" Presumably, if he had married earlier (as it is he married at 16), he

³⁸ At the same time, presumably, one would have to guard against following one mitzvah so endearingly that one neglects other mitzvot, thus also bringing *Satan* against them.

would have avoided distraction by *Satan*, understood here as the *Yetzer ha Ra*. R. Chisda believes he could have dedicated more of his energies to study. In this text, the phrase seems to serve as a dismissal of *Satan* as well as a protective formula. In *Kiddushin* 81a-b the same phrase is spoken by Plimo every day to keep *Satan* away. It doesn't work very well, though. *Satan* appears to him and causes Plimo great suffering. *Satan* seems bothered by the phrase, but not stopped altogether, hence the maliciousness of his attack. When Plimo asks what could be used to stop him, *Satan* suggests rather than cursing him to entreat God to rebuke him.

Kiddushin 81a also teaches that *Satan* may be kept at bay through devout Torah study. *Satan* tempts R. Meir and R. Akiva to put their own lives in danger by appearing in the guise of a beautiful woman in need of help. *Satan* stops short of striking them down only because it was proclaimed in Heaven to be cautious of them because of their Torah study. This might mean that they would have the knowledge to stand and argue against *Satan* and win. At the same time, it is important to note that while Torah study may be used against *Satan*, it is not a perfect prevention. They are still attacked. Study only protects them from punishment (i.e. death). This also is not an

effective preventive measure for everyone: If the study of rabbis as pious as Meir and Akiva barely stops *Satan*, how can the study of a "common" person?

In *Shabbat* 32a, Shmuel actually finds comfort in one of *Satan's* limitations. He would never cross a river in a ferryboat unless an idolater was in the boat with him. He considered it protection for him, because he believed *Satan* can only pronounce judgement against one nation at a time. Therefore, since it was obvious that the idolater was committing a sin and worthy of punishment, he would be safe. Of course, Shmuel recognizes that he has done something wrong as well, and this river crossing represents one of the dangerous situations where he would expect to face *Satan*.

Miscellaneous Texts

As could be expected, the Rabbis spend a significant amount of time attempting to explain the book of Job. In *Bava Batra* 15b-16a, several aspects of *Satan* that stem from Job are considered³⁹. The Rabbis understand *Satan's* mission of wandering the Earth as a prosecution of all humanity.

³⁹ It must be mentioned that the definite article attached to *Satan* in Job does not effect their commentary. They understand the Job character as *Satan*, not a divine being serving AS a *satán*.

He is looking for someone as faithful as Abraham, but cannot find anyone. His charge is that they truly are no longer righteous, and the world is full of sinners. This explains God's showing Job to Satan: it is an answer to his charge. Even more so, God's praise of Job is greater than that of Abraham.

R. Yitzhak sees Satan in Job as a purely evil character who suffers when he is not able to act according to his evil ways. He teaches that the restriction God places on him in Job 2:6⁴⁰ was even greater torture for Satan than Satan's torture was of Job. He couldn't act against Job with his fullest strength, in his many roles.

The various roles of Satan are explained by Resh Lakish through a series of proof texts. First, based solely on the text of Job (though we have seen several other texts as well), Satan is the Prosecutor in the Divine Court. By equating the presence of the word "only" (רק) in Job 2:3 and Genesis 6:5 (the people's hearts were only filled with evil), he teaches that Satan is the Yetzer ha Ra. Lastly, because Satan is warned not to take Job's

⁴⁰ "Behold he is in your hand, but preserve his soul."

soul, it is clear that this is within his power. He must therefore be the Angel of Death.⁴¹

An attempt is made in this text to save *Satan's* character. R. Levi taught that *Satan's* intentions were honorable. Like Peninah, whose chiding motivated Chanah to pray for a child, *Satan* was actually trying to preserve the memory of Abraham. God's praise of Job was so great that it appeared He forgot Abraham. By attempting to show Job's failings, *Satan* tried to re-establish the merit of Abraham in God's eyes, and in turn, preserve our own relationship with God, which is based on the merit of our ancestors. There is a hint that this was indeed *Satan's* true intention. When R. Acha bar Yaakov repeated this teaching in Papunia, *Satan* came down and kissed his feet.

Sanhedrin 89b deals with a popular topic in Rabbinic literature: the role *Satan* played in the Akeidah. While *Satan's* role is expanded in much greater detail in the midrashic literature, this text relates two important lessons about *Satan*.

R. Yochanan (quoting R. Yosi b. Zimra) is credited with the teaching blaming the entire trial of the Akeidah on *Satan*, based upon the verse "And it happened after these

⁴¹ Resh Lakish's teaching is a repetition of a *baraita* quoted earlier in the *sugya*, with the Scriptural support.

things". The "things" was an appeal of Satan to God. Though at first the motives might seem evil, Satan's challenge keeps in character with both Satan as Prosecutor and Protector of God's will. Abraham didn't make a sacrifice upon the birth of Isaac, which was the proper thing for him to do. By pointing this out, he prosecutes Abraham's wrongdoing, while at the same time protecting God, demanding the sacrifice God deserved.

Once the trial has been established, Satan sets out to stop Abraham from his task. First, Satan tries a rational approach: Is it logical that someone as pious as you should suffer this tragedy? Furthermore, if it has been Abraham's life goal to teach the way of God and ensuring its continuity on Earth, isn't sacrificing his son a contradiction? It would both send the wrong message to the nations of the world that child sacrifice is acceptable as well as destroy Isaac, the future messenger. Abraham responds to this challenge from reason with an answer of faith. Following the ideal path (i.e. listening directly to God's word) will lead to the best results. Satan then challenges the notion of blind faith: Doesn't your faith lead you to foolishness? Abraham responds that faith, even when it seems to be taking you to destruction, is always the safest path. Finally, Satan resorts to telling Abraham

the truth; he will find a ram to sacrifice in place of his son. Even the truth cannot turn Abraham from his path, punishing a repeated liar by not listening to his truth.

Satan's attempts to stop Abraham can be understood in two very different ways, both of which seem to fit definitions of Satan. First, he is playing the role of Instigator to its fullest. He repeatedly tries to stop Abraham, determined to try again and again as Abraham rebuffs him. Yet at the same time, even though we've already seen that Satan is acting as God's tool, he can be seen as challenging God's plan. Satan knows it is not proper for humans to sacrifice their children. He is almost pleading with Abraham to listen to him and go against this evil thing God is asking him to do. In this way, Satan may actually once again be defending humanity.

Satan's three-fold role as instigator, prosecutor, and punisher was greatly increased and better defined in the Babylonian Talmud. As Prosecutor (*Kategor*), he waits for opportunities to present themselves for him to prosecute a person. A person may inadvertently welcome prosecution by "requesting" punishment. He will even prosecute Gentiles that defile God's sacred objects. The role of Instigator is combined in the Talmud with the *Yetzer ha Ra*. He either acts as the evil inclination, causing animals to behave

wildly, or uses it to tempt people, especially Rabbis, to sin. In one instance, he is simply a cause of strife between two students. Satan is also identified with the punisher, specifically the Angel of Death.

Satan also fills two apparently contradictory roles in the Talmud, as both an instrument of God and challenger of God. As God's tool, he helps make God's will come to be on earth. At the same time, he stands to challenges God's will in several instances. As challenger, he frequently resorts to logic to challenge God's ways: the lack of reason for following certain mitzvot, giving the Torah to humanity that is unable to grasp its wonders, and arguing against the method of Abraham's test in the Akeidah.

While Satan's roles are increased, limitations on his powers are also found in the Talmud. Satan is easily confused, especially by dedicated observance of mitzvot. He has no power on Yom Kippur, and he can only prosecute one nation at a time. A person dedicated to Torah study is protected from Satan as well.

CHAPTER 4

SATAN IN THE MIDRASHIC LITERATURE

Midrashic literature is a natural place to find Satan. As the Rabbis incorporate legends and create stories to explain laws, Biblical texts, and historic events, *Satan* proves to be a worthy tool for representing evil, challenge, death, and destruction. It also provides the ideal texts for creating a better understanding of the character of *Satan*.

Much of the material found in various midrashic texts are repetitive. This is due primarily to the nature of the material- collections of stories and teachings that were, to some extent, already well known. This, of course, makes dating the material very difficult. Many midrashic texts were compiled contemporary with the two Talmuds. Three sources were used for the texts found in this study: *Midrash Rabbah* (specifically *Genesis and Exodus Rabbah*), *Midrash Tanhuma*, and *Otzar Midrashim*. *Genesis Rabbah* probably dates to the first half of the fifth century,

contemporary with the Palestinian Talmud⁴². Exodus Rabbah is difficult to give an accurate date.⁴³ *Midrash Tanhuma* is thought to have existed in some form around the year 400.⁴⁴ *Otzar Midrashim* is a collection of minor midrashim compiled and edited by Judah Eisenstein in 1915. While Eisenstein attempts to provide original date information for each of the midrashim, due to the nature of Midrash as compilations of earlier works, it is difficult to gain a clear picture here as well.⁴⁵

Satan as Prosecutor

Once again, Satan is portrayed as a prosecutor, ready to charge those who do wrong. In *Pereq R. Yishaiyahu* (OM p. 202-203), Edom has conquered Israel. Israelites come together, prepared to go to war against Edom to reclaim the land. After laying siege for 40 days, at the time of the recitation of the *Shema*, they shout it in a loud voice, causing the walls to fall and their enemies to die. Israel

⁴² H. L. Strack and Gunter Stemberger 278

⁴³ *ibid.* 309

⁴⁴ *ibid.* 305 The authors note that there is some connection between The Rabbah texts and *Tanhuma*, especially because of the similarity of so many texts, as well as the similar *petichta* form of later Exodus Rabbah and *Tanhuma*.

⁴⁵ The midrashim are also not easily cited. The method used here will be to use the Midrash's title and the page on which the citation appears in *Otzar Midrashim*, for example: *Ma'asey Avraham Avinu* (OM p. 3).

plunders the city, taking all the gold and silver as booty. They take the sacred vessels of the Temple from Edom (or, in another version Rome), so that they may offer sacrifices. The Arab king comes forward and challenges them that their sacrifices won't be accepted. When Israel makes its sacrifice, it isn't accepted. Only the sacrifice of the Kedaraites is accepted. The text explains that Satan was prosecuting against them before God, preventing their sacrifice from being accepted.

The text isn't clear as to what the people did that brought prosecution. Perhaps, while engaged in war, they did not follow the proper rules for taking booty (Deut. 20). It is also possible that *Satan* acting as God's tool. Because the sacrifice wasn't accepted, Israel fled to different countries. This allowed one of the signs of the Messiah, the ingathering of the exiles, to come true.

Satan also acts as prosecutor against Israel in *Midrash Megilat Ester* (Chapter 1, OM p.51-52). After observing Israel's practices, Haman advises Ahashueros to proclaim a feast throughout his land and invite everyone to come. Haman suggests that "these people" (Israel) who have a different God and follow their own laws, will give in to their impulses and eat and drink, which will anger their God. Mordechai cautions the people not to go, or they will

give Satan an opportunity to prosecute them. In spite of the warning, they attend the feast. Immediately, Satan turns to God and prosecutes them. When this story is repeated in Chapter 4 (*OM* p. 55), Satan's prosecution is elucidated. Satan asks God how long will He continue to cling to this people that keep provoking Him. God wonders who will care for Torah, and Satan tells him to look around the heavens and know it will be cared for there. God agrees, and instructs Satan to bring a scroll on which God writes "Extermination". Only through the intervention of the Torah (dressed as a widow), Elijah, Moses, and Mordechai is Satan's charge overturned and the scroll destroyed.

While Satan successfully prosecutes Israel, it is once again possible to understand a different motive. Yes, the people gave in to their urges and sinned, but Satan's charge to God sounds as if he is instead defending God, and trying to protect God's image. God continues to coddle this people that constantly reject the laws He gave them. God seems to agree with Satan and issues the decree Only the supreme righteousness of Elijah, Moses, Mordechai, and even the Torah itself convince God to spare Israel.

As in the Talmud, several small citations show ways to prevent Satan's prosecution. *Exodus Rabbah* 31:2 teaches

that Torah will stand as defense against Satan for those who study it and practices its rules. *Tanhuma Bechukotai* 1 states that those who uphold God's statutes cannot be touched by Satan, while those who don't are vulnerable. Since Satan's argument is usually that God's laws weren't followed, this seems obvious. *Exodus Rabbah* 43:1 teaches that Moses was superior to Satan. When Satan stood before God prosecuting Israel for the Golden Calf, Moses rushed in, pushed Satan aside, and interceded on Israel's behalf.

According to *Midrash Vayosha*, (OM p. 155) Satan's dominion is limited. Satan, along with grief, oppression, the Evil Inclination and the Angel of Death, only have permission to rule over people in this world. In the World to Come, they will have no authority.

Satan as the Yetzer ha Ra- Tempting People to Sin

In *Tanhuma Ki Tissa* 19, Satan plays a key role in inciting the people to commit the sin of the Golden Calf. When Moses had not returned from Mount Sinai on the 40th day, the people became afraid. Aaron and Hur promised that he would return. Satan causes trouble for Israel by showing them the image of Moses laying on a funeral bier on the mountaintop. The people believed Satan's image over Aaron and Hur's guarantees. When Hur chastised them for

believing *Satan*, they killed him. Aaron feared for his own life, and gave in to the peoples demand to construct the Golden Calf.

In this instance, *Satan's* actions are clearly malevolent. It simply provides him with another opportunity to prosecute Israel (see above). Only through Moses' intervention is *Satan's* third common role as the Angel of Death avoided.

Satan tries to play the Tempter again in *Mashalim shel Shlomo ha Melekh* (OM p. 531). King Solomon prepares a test to prove his theory that there is only one man in a thousand that can be found with a holy spirit, while even fewer women may be found. A man with a beautiful wife is called before the king. Solomon promises to make him minister in his palace, give him immense wealth and a new, more beautiful wife if he will kill his own wife first. Though the man agrees to do it, when he returns home he finds he cannot. As he wavers, *Satan* appears and tries to coerce the man into stabbing his wife. He rebukes *Satan*, pushes *Satan* aside, and sheaths his sword. Even though *Satan* uses his coercive powers as *Yetzer ha Ra*, the holy spirit within the man proves more powerful.

Satan encounters R. Matia ben Heresh, a student of R. Meir, in *Midrash Aseret HaDibrot* (OM p. 457). R. Matia ben

Heresh spent all his days studying Torah. He never looked at another man's wife for fear of giving in to his urges. His piety was so great his face shone like the sun. Satan did not think anyone was so pious that he could not be tempted. God gave Satan permission to test him. He appeared to Matia in the form of a woman so beautiful that no one like her had appeared on earth before. Every time Matia turned away, Satan would move around so Matia could not avoid seeing him. Matia felt he could stand the temptation no longer, and had his students bring him nails and fire. Matia used them to put out his eyes, to prevent him from giving in to his evil inclination. Satan saw this, became visibly shaken, and fell on his face. Satan then ran to God and relayed what happened. God sent Raphael twice to heal Matia, but he refused both times. God sent Raphael back to him a third time with a message, that the Yetzer ha Ra will never have hold of him again. With this guarantee, Matia let himself be healed.

While this test is similar to the one Satan made against Rabbis Meir and Akiva in the Talmud, he is caught by surprise because he fails! They succumbed to their evil inclinations and went to the woman. This rabbi, however, would rather blind himself than give in. Perhaps this teaches a lesson about the strength of Satan as the Yetzer

ha Ra: he is so strong that temptation can only be resisted by drastic measures. While Torah study and piety may save a person from punishment for giving in to it (as was the case with Meir and Akiva), only a self-sacrifice can prevent the *Yetzer ha Ra* from influencing one's actions.

Satan acts as *Yetzer ha Ra* for all humanity and for all time by creating wine in *Tanhuma Noach* 13. Satan finds Noah planting a vineyard and offers his assistance. Satan brings a lamb, lion, monkey, and pig. He slaughters them all on the vineyard, and then waters it with their blood. The text explains this strange act as a lesson on overindulgence: When one drinks one cup of wine, he acts like a lamb, humble and meek. The second cup makes a man brave like a lion, bragging that none is greater than him. The third cup, he wallows in waters and mud like a pig. When he becomes truly drunk, he hops around like a monkey, shouting obscenities and unaware of what he is doing. This text serves as a warning to avoid excess. Anyone who drinks too much allows the *Yetzer ha Ra* to cause him to act like these animals. This also makes Satan's job easier. These victims of overindulgence are easier for Satan to prosecute, for they are bound to sin in their inebriated state.

Satan as a Tool of God

While Satan has developed into a separate entity from God in the midrashic literature, he is still occasionally used to make sure God's will comes to be. In *Tanhuma Toledot* 11, Satan bothers Esau so that Jacob can do what he must. Jacob knows that he has to steal the blessing from Isaac that rightfully belongs to his brother. Jacob waits until Esau is out hunting to go in and receive the blessing. According to the text, Jacob knew that God sent Satan out to confound Esau. While hunting, Esau would tie up the animals he caught. Satan came up behind him and untied the animals, so that Esau had to chase them again. This gave Jacob the time he needed to deceive his father.

Interestingly, Satan here serves a similar purpose as the satan in the Balaam story in Numbers 22. He is sent out by God to stand in the way of Esau finishing his hunting tasks. While there is a bit of malevolence in his actions, Satan is simply acting as an adversary. The irony of the choice of Satan to confound Esau is that when angels are assigned to nations in other midrashic texts, Satan (or Armilus) is called the angel of Edom, Esau's descendants.

In another section of *Midrash Vayosha* (OM p. 150), Satan isn't sent by God, yet he delivers a message that God's laws must be obeyed. *Vayosha* expands the biblical

story of Moses and his relationship with Jethro. According to this text, Jethro, an Egyptian minister, threw Moses into a cistern when he asked to marry his daughter, because he recognized that Moses was the one prophesied to destroy Egypt. Tzipora secretly brought him food in the cistern for seven years. After seeing that Moses had "miraculously" survived in the cistern for seven years, Jethro allows Tzipora to marry Moses on the condition that half of Moses' children would be raised as Ishamelites.

When Moses' second son Eliezer was born, Moses and his family fled because Jethro would not allow the boy to be circumcised. On the way, Satan came to Moses in the form of a snake that swallowed him up to his groin, but stopped at the point of circumcision. Tzipora saw this and understood it as a sign, so she circumcised her son. She sprinkled the blood on the snake, and a voice from heaven commanded Satan to vomit Moses back up.

Satan serves as a tool of God by showing the necessity for Moses' children to be raised in the covenant and circumcised. It doesn't seem that Satan is trying to punish Moses, rather, he is communicating God's will in a unique manner. There is a striking similarity between this text and the biblical text of 1 Chronicles that helps show why Satan was the ideal messenger here. As was seen

earlier, the *satan* takes the place of God in the story from 2 Samuel. It seemed in 2 Samuel that God was inciting David to do wrong. The Chronicles text exonerates God (and David) and places blame for the sin on the *satan*. In Exodus 4:24, it is God who attacks Moses on the road and is stopped by the drop of blood. This odd representation of God is taken care of by this midrash. Just as the *satan* replaced God in Chronicles, so too does *Satan* replace God in this text.

Satan and Abraham

A popular theme throughout midrashic literature is the relationship between *Satan* and Abraham. Abraham, the first man to "know God", was the progenitor of God's Chosen People. *Satan* constantly tries to test Abraham, prove his worthiness, and stands as an adversary to Abraham's success. *Ma'asey Avraham Avinu* (OM p. 3-9) is a collection of midrashic material that deals specifically with the early years of Abraham's life, especially his dealings with Nimrod. While the material was gathered from various texts and different time periods, they were first printed

together as one text in 1519.⁴⁶ Satan appears in this text primarily to stop Abraham.

When Abraham was born, it was prophesied to Nimrod that the child of Terah would one day raise up and defeat him. Abraham's mother hid the baby in a cave. When she went to find him 20 days later⁴⁷, he was able to walk and speak like a full-grown man! Abraham sends a message with his mother to Nimrod that there is one true God in the world. Nimrod became afraid and didn't know what to do. Satan came to him in the form of a man dressed like a black sheep, and advised that Nimrod take all his weapons of war, arm his men, and send them out to capture Abraham. Abraham cried out to be saved, so God sent Gabriel to put a cloud between Abraham and the soldiers. This frightened them and they ran back to Nimrod.

Later in the text, after Abraham was imprisoned by Nimrod for a year, Nimrod brings him out in order to throw Abraham into a pillar of fire. Every time someone tries to throw him into the fire, though, a finger of fire comes out and burns the soldier holding him instead. Again, Satan comes and counsels Nimrod to bring a machine (a catapult?)

⁴⁶ Eisenstein, p. 2. Though we know from the biblical text that his name was changed to Abraham when he was older, the midrashic text refers to him, even as a young boy, as Abraham. Following the text, I will use Abraham as well.

to throw Abraham into the fire from a great distance. When he was bound and put in the machine, Satan came to Abraham and told him that the only way he could be saved was to accept Nimrod as God and bow down to him. Abraham refused to listen to Satan, quoting Zechariah 3:2 "May the Lord rebuke you, O Satan". God saves Abraham by extinguishing the fire without water, and causes the firewood to sprout shoots and fruit, and become a garden.

Satan's role in this text is purely an evil adversary, to both God and Abraham. Satan offers Nimrod new ways to accomplish his goals of capturing and killing Abraham. Nimrod actually works as a tool for Satan to stand against God- he uses Nimrod to attack his enemy Abraham.

Why does Satan first appear to Nimrod dressed like a black sheep? It seems that this is a method for Satan to gain entrance to and acceptance of the king. In walks this strangely dressed man, perhaps coming in from the wilderness, offering counsel and a solution to Nimrod's problem. Nimrod was interested to hear what the stranger had to say. His counsel seemed wise, so he became an advisor to the king. Note that when he comes to Nimrod the second time, he is merely in the image of a man, and is

⁴⁷ He was nursed and fed in the cave by the angel Gabriel.

able to walk right to the king. The black sheep may also indicate Satan's evil nature to Nimrod.

If Satan knew beforehand that his advice would not work, it is possible that he was acting as an instrument of God. He leads Nimrod to try foolish methods in order to prevent Nimrod's accidental success, as well as confounding Abraham's (and God's) enemy. Satan may have guided the entire encounter to its conclusion as a lesson for Nimrod's ministers as to who is the one true God.

Satan's discussion with Abraham can also be viewed from two different perspectives. He may indeed be trying to lead Abraham away from God and foil God's plans for a Chosen People. At the same time, Satan may be the instrument God uses to test Abraham: if Abraham refuses to follow Satan's suggestion, even as he is about to die, then Abraham truly is righteous and whole-hearted in his belief, and worthy of being saved.

Midrash Vayosha (OM p. 146-156), deals primarily with the Exodus from Egypt and the miracle at the Sea of Reeds. This midrash begins with a re-telling of the Binding of Isaac. In this version of the story, Satan plays a very prominent role.⁴⁸ Satan appears in the story four times:

⁴⁸ This story is found in several other midrashim, as well as in the *BT Sanhedrin* 89b. The version in *Tanhuma* (Vayera

appearing to Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, and as a roadblock for Abraham's travelling party.

Satan's first appearance to Abraham is in the form of an old man. Abraham lies to Satan, telling him that they are on their way to pray and may need the wood and knife to prepare their food. Satan then tries to trick Abraham, saying he was there when "The Seducer" (המשטין - an interesting play on his own role) told Abraham to sacrifice his son. Abraham calls his bluff, certain it was God who called to him. The conversation that follows is identical to the text in *BT Sanhedrin* 89b. Satan tries a rational attempt to stop him, an appeal to not act according to blind faith, and finally the truth that there will be a ram to take Isaac's place. None of Satan's attempts succeed, and Abraham continues on his way to Moriah.

As was seen in the *BT Sanhedrin* text, Satan is again filling multiple roles. He is challenging both God and Abraham, trying to stop Abraham from fulfilling God's command. Satan is also defending human nature, understanding that this is not right for people to do, and trying to convince Abraham to follow what he knows is right, not simply what God wants from him.

22-23) is similar to this text in most respects. Where differences occur they will be examined.

Of course, Satan may once again be acting as God's instrument. The entire Akeidah is a test of Abraham. Satan's challenge may simply represent another level of the challenge: not only must Abraham force himself to sacrifice his son, he must also answer Satan's reasonable arguments against following the command. In his thesis on *Midrash Vayosha*, Rabbi Michael White offers another understanding of Satan in this role. By appearing to Abraham as an old man, he suggests, Satan is acting as Abraham's alter ego. Satan's challenges represent Abraham's own internal conflict. By overcoming the challenge, Abraham overcomes his own doubts, and his resolve to see the test through is strengthened.⁴⁹

Satan's second intervention is with Isaac. He appears to Isaac as a young man, similar in age and appearance to Isaac. Isaac lies to Satan as well, saying they are going to study Torah. Satan tells Isaac where he is really going, and laments for him that his father is going to sacrifice him. Isaac's faith, however, appears as sure as his father's: he knows that his soul is in God's hands, and whatever God wants to do with him will be.

⁴⁹ Michael White. "A Literary and Source-Critical Analysis of *Midrash Vayosha*." (Rabbinic thesis, Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion, New York. 1989) 70-71

In the *Tanhuma* version (*Vayera* 22), *Satan* offers another argument to Isaac: all that his mother had arranged for him will be turned over to his half-brother Ishmael. This argument appeals to Isaac's possessive nature. When he hears it, he tells Abraham about the discussion. Abraham tells Isaac to be strong and ignore *Satan*.

Satan understands that perhaps the best way to stop the test is to appeal to Isaac, the one who has the most to lose. *Satan's* argument is simple- to continue on is suicide. Yet, once again, Isaac's faith is stronger than *Satan's* temptation, and he is defeated.⁵⁰

Satan appears to Sarah next and informs her of what her husband really plans to do to her son. When she hears the plan, she grows faint. She recovers quickly, strengthens herself, and says "Whatever God told him to do, let him do it in peace and life". *Satan's* interaction with Sarah is not directly related to God's test of Abraham. *Satan* may simply be acting maliciously, trying to upset Sarah. He may also be testing Sarah's faith as well. Though there is nothing she can do to stop the sacrifice, does she break down and mourn or maintain her faith in God

⁵⁰ Rabbi White's idea of *Satan* representing Abraham's alter-ego applies in this instance as well. *Satan* allows Isaac to argue with his own fears, and strengthen his resolve to continue.

(and devotion to her husband)? If this was a challenge, then Sarah passed as well.

After all these attempts to intervene, *Satan* becomes a physical obstacle on the journey. He stations himself ahead of the party as a river. Abraham tries to cross the river first and finds it is shallow. When Isaac follows behind and they reach the middle of the river, the water reaches their necks. Abraham cries out to God, "If we drown, who will proclaim Your glory to the world?" God immediately rebukes *Satan* and dries up the water. This doesn't seem to represent a challenge on *Satan's* part as much as it is him simply trying to stop the sacrifice by whatever means necessary.

Tanhuma Vayera 23 contains two additional elements to this story missing from *Vayosha*. In *Tanhuma*, *Satan* appears to Sarah after Isaac has been spared. He appears to her in the image of Isaac and tells her what happened on the mountain. Before he finishes the story of Divine intervention and salvation, Sarah dies. The only possible explanation for this addition, other than *Satan* simply acting maliciously, is that perhaps Abraham failed the

test. Satan may be serving Abraham's punishment by taking his wife.⁵¹

Another minor addition to the *Tanhuma* text highlights Satan's desire to save Isaac and stop Abraham from making a mistake and actually sacrificing his son. As Abraham raises the knife, Satan knocks it out of his hand. This text lends support to the idea that Satan wasn't trying to be malicious in stopping the sacrifice but defending humanity. Satan sees a crime about to be committed in the name of God and must stop it. Perhaps he was acting according to God's plan and was afraid that no angel was going to stop Abraham, so he did it himself. It may also be that he is simply making one last attempt to stop God's plan and physically intervene.

Satan and Armilus

Armilus is a midrashic character that appears in several legends relating to the war between the foreign nations and Israel under the leadership of the Messiah son of Joseph. Armilus is identified as the antagonist of this messianic figure (who will not be the one to lead Israel's redemption- that is the Messiah son of David). The legend

⁵¹ It also explains a biblical text problem. After the Akeidah, Sarah dies with no explanation.

of Armilus is found in *Sefer Zerubbavel* (OM p. 158-161), *Otot ha Mashiach* (OM p. 390-392), *Midrash Aseret Malakhim* (OM p. 461-466) and *Tefilat R. Shimon b. Yochai* (OM p. 551-555). In each of these texts, a connection is made between Armilus and Satan.

God created an alabaster stone figure of a beautiful woman and placed it in Rome. In *Otot ha Mashiach* and *Tefilat R. Shimon b. Yochai* the wicked Belialites come to Rome and fornicate with the stone. The figure gives birth to "The Satan Armilus whom the nations call the anti-Christ." According to *Aseret Malachim* and *Sefer Zerubbavel*, Satan lays with the statue and gives birth to Armilus. He is described as a gigantic creature, 12 cubits tall and 2 cubits wide. Armilus goes to different nations and convinces them to accept him as their God. Armilus, together with ten kings, goes to Jerusalem and makes war against Nehemiah ben Hushiel, the Messiah son of Joseph. In *Tefilat R. Shimon b. Yochai*, Nehemiah ben Hushiel rebukes him, saying, "You are no God, only Satan". During the war, Nehemiah is killed, and Armilus banishes Israel to the wilderness. All the nations of the world expel the Jews from their lands as well. Before the Messiah ben David comes, God will wage war against Armilus with an army

led by Nehemiah and Elijah. All Judah's enemies will be destroyed, and the time of the Messiah will come.⁵²

While Armilus probably is not the character *Satan* found in the other midrashic texts, it is important to include him in this discussion because of his identification as the *satan*. It is interesting to note the identification of Armilus in two of the texts as the offspring of *Satan*. The term *satan* in these texts represents the ultimate adversary, the last evil deity that will be destroyed before the coming of the Messiah. He leads the foreign nations and brings death and destruction to Israel. Only the army of God is capable of destroying him.

Satan and Various Angels

Several texts make associations between *Satan* and other angels. Much of this material finds its origin in the apocalyptic literature, and was expanded and commented upon in the midrashic literature.

In *Seder Ruchot* (OM p. 287), Metatron, the Prince of Countenance,⁵³ relates to R. Ishmael a description of the

⁵² Jacob Klatzkin, "Armilus" in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 3:476-477

⁵³ Metatron was one of the Princes of Countenance found in the Book of Enoch. He is described as one of the great

winds and their angels in the heavens. Each wind comes from a single angel's wings, who is responsible for that wind. Metatron states that Satan stands between the winds of destruction and the storm wind or whirlwind.

This identification with the destructive winds obviously points to the destructive nature of Satan. Yet, I believe it also hints to a close relationship between Satan and God. The whirlwind is sometimes taken over by God. In Job, God speaks to Job directly from the whirlwind. If this wind is so closely associated with God, and Satan stands near it, then perhaps Satan is closer to God than one might expect.

Later in *Seder Ruchot* (OM p. 289), Metatron describes another set of angels. These four angels represent the winds from the four corners of the earth. Their wings span the entire heavenly expanse. Each has four faces, which shine brighter than the sun, and even divine beings can't look upon their faces. These angels are called "burners" (שדפים) because they burn up Satan's tablets. Satan is envisioned sitting every day with Samael (the angel of Rome) and Damuel (the angel of Persia) listing the transgressions of Israel on a series of tablets, like a

angels, sometimes even called the lesser Lord. See Gershom Scholem, "Metatron", in *Encyclopedia Judaica* 11:1443-1446.

meeting of prosecutors preparing their arguments. *Satan* hands the tablets to these angels to deliver them to God for persecution. Since they know God cherishes Israel, they don't bother to bring the tablets to God, and instead dump them in the fire opposite the Throne of Glory. This text presents a strikingly different vision of *Satan* as prosecutor. In all the other texts, *Satan* is very active, chasing after wrongdoers, leading funeral processions, waiting in dangerous situations, etc. When he finds someone, he makes a strong and fast accusation. This text, though, seems to envision a rather lazy *Satan*. He sits and observes from the heavens, and rather than run to the Heavenly Court, he simply sends his charges with these angels. Perhaps this shows a level of kindness on *Satan's* part. If these angels are known for not delivering his charges, why does he continue to send them with them? Maybe *Satan* is showing compassion, doing his job by writing down the charges, but not actually making the arguments that will lead to Israel's punishment.

Exodus Rabbah 18:5 represents another common motif in the midrash: the association of *Satan* with Samael. In many texts, Samael is called the "head of the satans". The apocalyptic literature assign both him and *Satan* leadership of the netherworld and the fallen angels. In *Exodus Rabbah*

18:5 and several other texts, the two are used interchangeably. This text envisions Samael and Michael, the protecting angel of Israel as eternal adversaries in the Heavenly Court. Suddenly, the text switches, saying Satan accuses Israel while Michael points out their virtues. Michael silences Satan when he tries to further his argument. It was suggested in other texts that once Satan begins his prosecution, there is no way to avoid punishment. This text shows the strength of Michael, whose is able to overcome Satan's arguments, even if they have already been presented.

The midrashic material presents a much larger view of Satan. Once again he is seen as the Prosecutor, charging the people for not following God's ways. As prosecutor, it is possible to see Satan's dedication to God, and his interest in seeing that these "lawbreakers" don't discredit God's glory. Satan's power as prosecutor is limited in the midrashic material as well, for he is only allowed to reign in this world, and is kept at bay by Israel studying Torah and following God's laws.

Satan also continues to work as the *Yetzer ha Ra*, causing Israel to sin with the Golden Calf. The evil inclination meets resistance in these midrashim, however, from the holy spirit in a man, and the supreme piety of R.

Matia ben Heresh. Satan also continues to work as an instrument of God, both directly by delivering a message or stopping Esau, and indirectly when, by working as the challenger, causes God's will to ultimately happen.

Satan plays an important part in the life of Abraham. As Satan tries to be malicious and cause trouble, he strengthens Abraham's piety and helps ensure God's plans for him to come to fruition.

We gain further understanding of Satan from his relation to other divine creatures. He is closely associated with Armilus, the Supreme Adversary whose defeat will signal the coming of the Messiah. He works with, and is sometimes assumed to be Samael, another "demon" who stands in eternal struggle with Israel's protecting angel Michael. Finally, Satan has varied relationships with other angels, sometimes standing alongside them (especially the destructive angels), and sometimes being confounded by them, as they protect Israel from Satan's prosecution.

CONCLUSION

The role *Satan* plays in the theology of the Rabbinic literature is an important cautionary one. *Satan* is the eternal Adversary. He stands against people as well as God. Frequently, *Satan* represents failure to adhere to the moral, ethical, *mitzvot*-guided life required by God. It was well understood and accepted that keeping the laws and living life according God wanted led to reward, and failure to do so brought on punishment. *Satan* is the implement by which the punishment happens.

As Prosecutor, *Satan* was believed to keep a close eye on an individual's actions. If a person entered a situation where their life was in danger, the Rabbis imagined *Satan* standing with a list of that person's sins, ready to prove this life was not worth saving. Keeping *mitzvot*, studying Torah, and refusing evil were the best defense a person could prepare. Had the goodness in their lives outweighed their sins? God as Judge would have to decide that person's fate.

The implications of this way of thinking are, in some ways, disturbing. Clearly, the Rabbis were trying to promote a moral life filled with *mitzvot* and avoidance of

dangerous situations. But does this really mean that someone who dies in an accident, or while in a dangerous situation, was an evil person with no good in his or her life? Even the Rabbis must not have wanted to believe this was so. It is hard to imagine that this was a part of the lesson the Rabbis were teaching.

It is understandable that the Rabbis would make the connection between *Satan* as Prosecutor and *Satan* as the Angel of Death. Death of the sinning individual was the goal of *Satan's* persecution. If he indeed succeeded, it was logical to think that *Satan* was also the tool through which the punishment was meted. This only added strength to the suggestion that one wants to avoid *Satan* as much as possible.

Satan acting as the Evil Inclination seems to serve a different purpose. He is not so much a Punisher of sin as he is a cause of sin. The *Yetzer ha Ra* can be overcome in the same manner *Satan's* arguments are defeated: Torah study and keeping *mitzvot*. While the Evil Inclination may seem to be nothing more than an excuse, (i.e. the only reason someone commits a sin is he was overcome by the *Yetzer ha Ra*), it really appears to be more of a reminder of the difficulty of living the life God wants lived. It is the easy way, the non-thinking way of life to be guided purely

by urges. True moral living requires thought in one's actions and dedication to beliefs. That is how one overcomes the Evil Inclination.

The association of prosecution, punishment, and evil with *Satan*, along with his role as God's Adversary, allowed for the possible understanding of *Satan* as a deity in his own right, the evil god counter to the benevolent and merciful God. This dualism is even encouraged in some ways by the substitution of *Satan* for God in a biblical story where God acts in an "evil" manner.⁵⁴ However, this idea is countered by the various texts that portray *Satan* as an instrument of God. He is still subject to God's will, and is frequently sent out as a messenger for God. Though *Satan* may challenge God, he is never able to overcome.

Satan also does not seem to be the evil creature he is always assumed to be. In several instances *Satan's* actions indicate that he has a good understanding of human nature, and tries to defend humanity when God's will goes against that nature. *Satan* also shows love and respect for God when he prosecutes Israel (and occasionally other nations) for failing to show proper respect for God's rules. His argument is that God deserves the most dedicated love and

⁵⁴ See the discussion of 1 Chronicles 21 and *Midrash Vayosha* (OM p. 150)

worship from His people. If they do not show that reverence, then they truly deserve punishment. God actually agrees with *Satan*⁵⁵, yet His mercy leads God to give Israel another chance.

What is *Satan's* role for Reform Jews today? The theological system of reward and punishment and the obligatory nature of *mitzvot* are not a part of Modern Reform thought, so the roles of *Satan* as prosecutor and punisher have little use. As modern Jews have increasingly grasped the idea of free will, the idea that a divine *Satan* causes people to do evil seems preposterous. In addition, American Reform Jews living in a Christian society have been influenced to only think of *Satan* as the Devil, the ruler of Hell, the place of eternal punishment for sinners.

Perhaps the best way Reform Jews can view *Satan* is as a barrier between themselves and God. By failing to live the best Jewish life they can, the punishment of *Satan* is to keep them apart from God. In the past, the Rabbis taught that *Satan* was overcome by living what they considered a good Jewish life. Reform Jews can overcome their *Satans* the same way, by living their lives according to the precepts of Reform Judaism and following its ethical ways.

⁵⁵ For example, see *Midrash Megilat Ester* (OM p. 55)

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