

The satan in Job 1–2 is not a villain. He’s doing the job assigned to him by God. The book of Job does not identify the satan in this scene as the serpent of Genesis 3, the figure known in the New Testament as the devil. The Old Testament never uses the word *śāṭān* of the serpent figure from Genesis 3. In fact, the word *śāṭān* is not a proper personal noun in the Old Testament. Old Testament scholars are well aware of all this. Their conclusion that *śāṭān* is not a proper personal name in the Old Testament is driven by Hebrew grammar. Like English, Hebrew does not attach the definite article (the word “the”) to proper personal nouns. English speakers do not refer to themselves (or to another person) with phrases like “the Tom” or “the Sally.” I’m not “the Mike.” English doesn’t use the definite article with personal names. Neither does Hebrew. Most of the twenty-seven occurrences of *śāṭān* in the Hebrew Bible, however, do indeed have the definite article—including all the places English readers presume the devil is present (Job 1:6–9, 12; 2:1–4, 6–7; Zech 3:1–2). The satan described in these passages is not the devil. Rather, he’s an anonymous prosecutor, as it were, fulfilling a role in Yahweh’s council—bringing an accusatory report. The instances of *śāṭān* in the Old Testament that lack the definite article also don’t refer to the devil or the serpent figure. Those occurrences describe either humans or the Angel of Yahweh, who is occasionally sent by God to “oppose” someone or execute judgment (e.g., Num 22:22–23). The function of the office of the satan is why later Jewish writings began to adopt it as a proper name for the serpent figure from Genesis 3 who brought ruin to Eden. That figure opposed God’s choices for his human imagers. The dark figure of Genesis 3 was eventually thought of as the “mother of all adversaries,” and so the label satan got stuck to him. He deserves it. The point here is only that the Old Testament doesn’t use that term for the divine criminal of Eden.

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9. Given the connection made in the New Testament between the *nachash* (serpent) figure and the Hebrew word *śāṭān* (“adversary”) in Rev 12:9, the judicial role of the satan described in the Hebrew Bible (Job 1–2) becomes noteworthy. The role of the satan in Job involved roaming through the earth. In the context of the divine courtroom scene of Job 1–2, the ostensible purpose was to see, among humanity, who was (or wasn’t) obedient to God. This precipitates God’s words about Job. The satan issues a challenge to God’s assessment, and perhaps to the justness of God’s ordering of the world. Job becomes the focus of that challenge, as his integrity (and, by implication, God’s) is questioned. Presuming this accusatorial role, when the New Testament writers have Satan expelled from heaven in Luke 10:17–18, the theological message would be that, with the commencement of the kingdom of God, Satan’s role as “accuser of the brethren” is finished. God is no longer listening to challenges as to whom he deems righteous. That this phrase (“accuser of the brethren”) occurs uniquely in Rev 12:10, right after the only verse in the New Testament that connects the terms Satan, devil, and dragon (cf. the serpent) cannot be coincidental. The inauguration of the kingdom of God by the messiah means that Satan, the lord of the dead, has no “legal” authority in God’s court (council) by which to condemn any member of that kingdom. On Job 1–2 and the accuser, see Peggy Day, *An Adversary in Heaven: śāṭān in the Hebrew Bible*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 43 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 79–83. For a scholarly treatment of the divine courtroom, tracing its constituent ideas from the Hebrew Bible through the Second Temple period on into the New Testament, see Meira Z. Kensky, *Trying Man, Trying God*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 289, second series (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2010).

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