

SATAN: GOD'S SERVANT

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Satan is usually understood primarily as the archenemy of God, a supernatural being who opposes the will of God and seeks to lead people into sin. There are good grounds for this understanding in the Bible. However, there is another side to the biblical portrayal of Satan. While many texts emphasize the hostility between God and Satan, there is also abundant evidence that the biblical authors believed that Satan was subject to God's control and was used by God to accomplish his purposes.¹ They represent Satan, not only as God's adversary, but also as God's servant.² The subordination of Satan to God is most explicit in the prologue of the book of Job, but the Joban conception of Satan exercised significant influence on the rest of the biblical canon. We will look at how Satan is portrayed as a servant of God in Job, then explore how later biblical texts pick up and use the Joban ideas.

As is well known, the concept of Satan is not well developed in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew word from which we get "Satan," שָׂטָן (*śāṭān*), is a common noun that designates an adversary or opponent and is used both of an enemy in a military context and of a legal opponent in a judicial context. There are only three places in the Hebrew Bible where the term is used of a supernatural being who opposes God: the prologue of Job; Zech 3:1–2; and 1 Chr 21:1.

I. THE PROLOGUE OF JOB

Job contains what may be the earliest reference to a celestial Satan figure in the Hebrew Bible.³ The opening chapters of this book include two scenes

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¹ The notion of Satan as a servant of God is explored in T. C. G. Thornton, "Satan: God's Agent for Punishing," *ExpTim* 83 (1971–72) 151–52; James Kallas, *The Real Satan* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975) 22–26; and Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1993) 11–22.

² One need not be consciously devoted to someone to serve them. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar is portrayed as Yahweh's servant in Jer 25:9 and 43:10. The Persian king Cyrus is portrayed similarly in Isa 44:28 and 45:1, 13. Neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Cyrus intentionally served Yahweh, but the biblical authors represent them as instruments through which he accomplished his will nonetheless.

³ The story of Job is set in the pre-patriarchal period, but the dating of the composition of the book is very controversial. Suggestions range from the tenth to second centuries BC, with most favoring a date in the middle of this range. Many think the material in the prologue is older than the material in the body of the work.

in which heavenly beings, including the Satan, appear before Yahweh.⁴ In Job 1:6–12, the Satan disputes the blamelessness of Job and receives Yahweh's permission to test his integrity by attacking his possessions. In Job 2:1–6, the Satan repeats his charge and receives permission to launch a second attack on Job, this time an attack upon his person. In both narratives, there is a pronounced emphasis on the subordination of the Satan to Yahweh.

From the outset, the setting of the dialogue between Yahweh and the Satan demonstrates the subordination of the Satan to Yahweh. The setting is that of a heavenly council or divine assembly. Such gatherings of celestial beings are well known in the literature of the ancient Near East, and the Israelites used this imagery to describe their understanding of the heavenly realm.⁵ However, unlike their polytheistic neighbours, they pictured the members of Yahweh's court as subservient to him. In Job 1:6 and 2:1, the author says that the heavenly beings (literally, "sons of God") came to "present themselves before the Lord," using language that implies that the denizens of heaven are subject to Yahweh's will (cf. Zech 6:5).⁶ When the heavenly beings gather, the Satan also comes with them. There is some dispute over whether the author conceived of the Satan as a regular member of the divine council or as an intruder, but in any case, he is not represented as Yahweh's equal.⁷

A second indicator of the subordination of the Satan to Yahweh consists of the title and role accorded to him. Some scholars think that the prologue of Job represents the Satan as a prosecuting attorney who has the unenviable task of bringing charges against human beings but is nonetheless a loyal member of Yahweh's retinue.⁸ Certainly, the Satan does bring accusations against Job, but his role cannot be reduced to this single activity. He not only questions Job's integrity, he attacks Job's property, family, and health in an effort to get him to curse Yahweh. As G. I. Riley observes,

This is not the action of a mere heavenly prosecutor in the divine council, appointed by God to accuse the defendant of sin (cf. Zech 3:1–2); no prosecutor

⁴ The noun שָׂטָן appears with the definite article in the prologue of Job and in Zech 3:1–2, but is anarthrous in 1 Chr 21:1. It is usually assumed that the presence of the article indicates that the noun is a title, in which case, it might best be translated "the Satan" in Job and Zechariah. Note, however, that Peggy Day has argued that the article may be equivalent to "a certain one" in *An Adversary in Heaven: šāṭān in the Hebrew Bible* (HSM 43; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 39–43. Bruce Waltke and M. O'Connor, on the other hand, suggest that the combination of an article and noun can be equivalent to a proper name and cite שָׂטָן as an example of this in *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 249.

⁵ Cf. T. E. Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM 24; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980).

⁶ All biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV.

⁷ For the view that the Satan was a member of the council, see D. J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC 17; Dallas: Word, 1989) 19. For the view that the Satan was an intruder, see F. I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976) 82.

⁸ So, e.g., W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1967) 2.205; and Wink, *Unmasking* 13–14.

destroys the property of the defendant, then kills his children and destroys his health, in order to bring about hatred for the Judge.⁹

The Joban Satan is much more than a legal adversary, but he reports to Yahweh and does his bidding. His function is clearly a subordinate one. He does not even initiate the conversation concerning Job. It is Yahweh who calls attention to Job as “a blameless and upright man,” both in Job 1:8 and in Job 2:3.

Third, the Satan explicitly acknowledges that he does not have the ability to act independently of the will of Yahweh. In Job 1:10, he states that Yahweh has put a fence around Job and his possessions, implying that he is unable to breach the protective wall that Yahweh has placed around Job. Then he invites Yahweh to stretch out his hand and touch what Job has (cf. Job 2:5). In effect, he concedes that he is not able to act independently against Job; ultimately, it is Yahweh who will determine what will happen to Job.

Fourth, the narrative emphasizes that the Satan is able to do only what Yahweh permits him to do. After the Satan urges Yahweh to strike Job in their first encounter, Yahweh replies, “Very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him!” (Job 1:12) There is a similar response in their second encounter, but there, Yahweh tells the Satan that he must spare Job's life (Job 2:6). In both instances, it is clear that the power that the Satan exercises is delegated to him by Yahweh and that he is bound to respect the limitations that Yahweh imposes on him.¹⁰

Finally, there is a curious ambivalence in the text concerning who afflicts Job. The disasters that befall him are attributed to both Yahweh and the Satan. Job 1:11 and 2:5 refer to Yahweh stretching out his hand against Job, and Job himself believes that his misfortunes proceed from Yahweh. In Job 2:5, he refers to receiving both good and bad at the hand of God, and in Job 19:21, he says, “the hand of God has touched me” (cf. Job 42:11).¹¹ On the other hand, Satan is portrayed as the one who afflicts Job. After the first meeting of the heavenly council, the narrator tells of a series of disasters that befall Job, without specifying that a supernatural being is responsible for them, but Satan's involvement is a natural inference from the fact that Yahweh grants the Satan power over Job in Job 1:12. The involvement of the Satan is explicit in the second round of the attack on Job. Job 2:7 says, “So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the soul of his foot to the crown of his head.”

Although both Yahweh and the Satan are represented as being responsible for Job's tribulations, it is apparent that they do not stand in the same

⁹ G. I. Riley, “Devil,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (2d ed.; ed. K. van de Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 247.

¹⁰ In his fanciful retelling of the story of Job, the author of the *Testament of Job* refers to the fact that Satan had to ask God for permission to afflict Job and could only do what God allowed him to do (*T. Job* 8:1–3; 20:2–3).

¹¹ Misfortune is also traced back to Yahweh in Deut 32:39; Ruth 1:21; 1 Sam 2:6–7; Isa 45:7; and Amos 3:6.

relation to them. To begin with, Yahweh is ultimately in control of what happens to Job, and the authority of the Satan is clearly derivative and secondary. Satan does not and cannot act independently of Yahweh. Presumably the author's belief in a single supreme ruler of the universe led him to the conviction that, in the final analysis, everything must be traced back to Yahweh.¹²

More specifically, Yahweh uses the Satan as an instrument for accomplishing his purposes, though those purposes are never made known to Job. The ambivalence in Job 1:11–12 and 2:5–6 concerning whose hand it is that strikes Job shows that the Satan acts as an agent of Yahweh. The Satan urges Yahweh to stretch forth his hand against Job, and Yahweh delegates the affliction to him. Seeing Yahweh behind the harmful actions of otherworldly forces is not foreign to the biblical world of thought. The notion that Yahweh uses evil spirits to accomplish his purposes is also expressed in the case of the lying spirit in 1 Kgs 22:19–23 and 2 Chr 18:18–22, where we also have a vision of the heavenly council and a dialogue between Yahweh and a celestial being. The accounts in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles explicitly indicate that God uses the lying spirit to bring judgment upon King Ahab.¹³

A final difference between the ways Yahweh and Satan participate in Job's suffering has to do with their motives. Yahweh clearly affirms his confidence in the integrity of Job (Job 1:8; 2:3) and presumably wants Job to pass the tests he undergoes. It is hard to imagine that the author believed that Yahweh desired that Job curse him to his face! The Satan, on the other hand, contends that Yahweh's confidence is misplaced and clearly expects (wants?) Job to fail the tests to which he subjects him.¹⁴ The fact that Yahweh places limits on the ways the Satan can afflict Job suggests that without them, the Satan might go to any lengths to get Job to curse God. The viciousness of the attacks on Job might also be seen as evidence of the Satan's malicious intent. Moreover, Job's steadfastness in the first trial prompts Yahweh to rebuke the Satan, saying, "He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him for no reason." The statement that the Satan incited Yahweh against Job without just cause calls his motives into question. He not only brought accusations against Job; he slandered him. He brought baseless charges against Job with a view to causing him harm.

¹² So, e.g., Brooks Schramm, "God and Satan in Job," *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin* 78 (1998) 36.

¹³ See also the way the evil spirit that troubles Saul is said to come from Yahweh in 1 Sam 16:14, 15, 16, 23; 18:10; 19:9. Cf. Robin Routledge, "'An Evil Spirit from the Lord': Demonic Influence or Divine Instrument?" *EvQ* 70 (1998) 3–22.

¹⁴ That God can use agents whose motives are malicious to accomplish his beneficent purposes is illustrated in Gen 50:20. Reflecting on the treachery of his brothers, Joseph says to them, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today."

II. ZECHARIAH 3:1–2

Like the prologue of Job, Zech 3:1–2 describes a vision of the heavenly realm in which the Satan appears. The account is very brief, but the prophet sees a post-exilic high priest named Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord with the Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. However, before the Satan can bring his accusations, Yahweh says, “The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?”

The way the Satan is portrayed here is very similar to the way he is portrayed in Job. The noun שָׂטָן is articular and probably should be understood as a title here as well as there. Second, Zech 3:1 explicitly states that the specific role of the Satan is to bring accusations against Joshua.¹⁵ The Joban Satan is more than an accuser, but bringing charges against Job is certainly one of his roles. Third, although this is not universally accepted, the setting of Zechariah’s vision appears to be that of a meeting of the heavenly council.¹⁶ Zechariah presents the Satan as a functionary whose position is clearly subordinate to Yahweh’s.

The idea of the Satan as an accuser exercised a significant influence on later understandings of Satan. It is particularly prominent in the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*. The dating of this document is notoriously difficult, but O. S. Wintermute thinks a date prior to AD 70 is likely.¹⁷ In *Apoc. Zeph.* 3:8–9 we read, “Also the angels of the accuser who is upon the earth, they also write down all of the sins of men upon their manuscript. They also sit at the gate of heaven. They tell the accuser and he writes them upon his manuscript so that he might accuse them when they come out of this world (and) down there.”¹⁸ A similar conception appears in the NT, where Rev 12:10 describes the devil as “the accuser of our comrades . . . who accuses them day and night before our God.”

The account in Zechariah goes on to state that the angel orders that Joshua’s filthy clothes be removed and replaced, symbolizing that his guilt has been taken away. Apparently Yahweh’s intention was to show mercy to Joshua and restore the priesthood, and the Satan was there to argue for his guilt and punishment.¹⁹ Some kind of opposition between what Yahweh

¹⁵ The position of the Satan to the right of Joshua recalls the position of the accuser in Ps 109:6, “Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand on his right.”

¹⁶ For the view that the setting of Zech 3:1–2 is a meeting of the heavenly council, see N. L. A. Tidwell, “WĀ’ŌMAR (Zech 3:5) and the Genre of Zechariah’s Fourth Vision (1 Kgs 22; Isa 6, 40; Job 1, 2; Zech 1, 3, 6),” *JBL* 94 (1975) 352–53; and Marvin E. Tate, “Satan in the Old Testament,” *RevExp* 89 (1992) 463–64.

¹⁷ *OTP* 1.500–501.

¹⁸ The English translation is taken from *OTP*. Cf. *Apoc. Zeph.* 6:17; 7:1–9; 9:1. See also *1 Enoch* 40:7 and *3 Enoch* 26:12.

¹⁹ There are differences of opinion concerning what the replacement of Joshua’s filthy clothes represents. Many think that Joshua represents the post-exilic community. So, e.g., R. Mason, *The*

intended and what the Satan intended is presupposed, but it is the will of Yahweh that emerges triumphant.²⁰ Indeed, the Satan appears to be silenced before he even has an opportunity to voice his charges against Joshua. Yahweh and the Satan may differ on how Joshua should be treated, but it is clearly Yahweh's decision that prevails. The Satan is subject to Yahweh's control.

III. 1 CHRONICLES 21:1

The final occurrence of the word שָׂטָן with reference to a supernatural being in the Hebrew Bible is in 1 Chr 21:1. Here we read, "Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to count the people of Israel." Note that in this instance the noun appears without the article. It is usually assumed that the absence of the article indicates that the noun had by this point become equivalent to a proper name;²¹ however, this has recently been called into question. Some argue that in this text, the word is a common noun and refers to an unnamed adversary, probably a human adversary.²² In favor of understanding the term as a proper name is the fact that the Chronicler echoes language from the earlier texts that refer to the Satan. The phrase translated "stood up against" (עָמַד עָלַי) is also found in Zech 3:1, where it is used of the Satan standing at Joshua's right side, and the verb translated "incited" (סָוֵר) is the verb Yahweh uses when he accuses the Satan of inciting him against Job. These linguistic links suggest that the Chronicler had the earlier references to the Satan in mind when he redacted the statement he took from 2 Sam 24:1 about what prompted David to take the census that led to the devastating plague in Israel.²³

The most interesting feature of the Chronicler's redaction of 2 Sam 24:1 is, of course, that whereas the earlier text speaks of Yahweh inciting David to take the census, the Chronicler attributes this action to Satan. A variety of explanations for this have been proposed. It may be due in part to a growing reluctance to attribute evil directly to God,²⁴ though it must be acknowl-

Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 50. However, it is likely that the restoration of the priesthood is in view. So, e.g., J. C. VanderKam, "Joshua the High Priest and the Interpretation of Zechariah 3," *CBQ* 53 (1991) 553–70.

²⁰ A similar triumph of mercy over punishment appears in *Apoc. Zeph.* 7:9; 9:1.

²¹ For the view that the noun functions as a proper name in 1 Chr 21:1, see *GKC* 402; and *HALOT* 3.1317.

²² So Day, *An Adversary* 128–32, 142–44; Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 374–75; and G. N. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 10–29* (AB 12A; New York: Doubleday, 2004) 744. In the tenth century, Sa'adia ben Joseph argued that the adversaries in the prologue of Job and Zech 3:1–2 were also human beings; see William Yarchin, *History of Biblical Interpretation: A Reader* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004) 163–67.

²³ Cf. H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 143. For additional criticism of the view that 1 Chr 21:1 refers to a human adversary, see Paul Evans, "Divine Intermediaries in 1 Chronicles 21: An Overlooked Aspect of the Chronicler's Theology," *Bib* 85 (2004) 546–49.

²⁴ Cf. Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles* (WBC 14; Waco: Word: 1986) 217; and Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 121.

edged that the Chronicler does not consistently distance Yahweh from evil.²⁵ It is also possible that it reflects the Chronicler's interest in divine intermediaries.²⁶ Whatever the Chronicler's reasons for replacing the reference to Yahweh with a reference to Satan, by doing so, he introduces the same ambivalence between divine and satanic causation that we saw in the prologue of Job. If he was consciously modifying what he found in 2 Sam 24:1 in the light of the prologue of Job, he probably believed that Satan was acting within the will of God when he enticed David and that he even was being used by God.²⁷ If so, what is most striking is that he presents Satan as an instrument God uses to entice someone to sin, for 1 Chr 21:3, 7, 8, and 17 clearly indicate that David's action is sinful.

The notion that God is behind temptation may be theologically troubling, but it is not without precedent. Although Satan appears primarily as an afflicter in the prologue of Job, his actions there are designed to induce Job to curse Yahweh and thus constitute temptations, yet Yahweh explicitly endorses them. Job specifically uses the concept of permission to describe the relation between Yahweh's will and the will of the Satan. The Chronicler, on the other hand, does not tell us how he understood this interrelationship in the case of David's census. However, given his familiarity with Job, he may have thought along similar lines. This possibility finds support in the fact that the Chronicler speaks of Yahweh giving permission to the lying spirit to deceive the prophets of Ahab in 2 Chr 18:21.²⁸ According to this text, the spirit steps forward offering to be a lying spirit in the mouths of the prophets, then Yahweh instructs him to do what he has proposed.

The Chronicler's reference to Satan is so brief that dogmatism would be unwarranted, but there is reason to think that he believed that Satan was acting as a servant of God when he enticed David to conduct the census.

When we move to the NT, we encounter a more fully developed concept of Satan, in which his opposition to God and evil character are more pronounced, and his role as head of a kingdom of evil is well established.

²⁵ See the story of the lying spirit in 2 Chr 18:18–22.

²⁶ Cf. Evans, "Divine Intermediaries" 545–8.

²⁷ This understanding is explicit in the Targum of Chronicles, which says, "The Lord raised up Satan against Israel, and he incited David to number Israel." See J. S. McIvor, *The Targum of Chronicles* (The Aramaic Bible 19; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994) 114.

²⁸ There are striking parallels between the accounts of David's census and of the lying spirit. In both cases, the individuals who are enticed to do wrong are kings. In both, enticement to evil is attributed to Yahweh and to a member of his retinue who appears to have responsibility for actions that are detrimental to human beings. Finally, both incidents involve the execution of divine judgment upon human sin. In the case of the lying spirit, the result of the activity of the lying spirit is that Ahab is killed in fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah recorded in 1 Kgs 21:20–22, and according to 2 Sam 24:1, it was because "the anger of the Lord was kindled against David" that he was incited to conduct the census. To be sure, the Chronicler plays down the motif of divine judgment in his version of both incidents, but it was clearly present in his sources.

There are also significant parallels between the narrative of the lying spirit and the prologue of Job. In both cases, (1) the setting is that of the heavenly council; (2) there is a conversation between Yahweh and a member of the council, in which the latter proposes to entice a human being to sin and to harm him; and (3) Yahweh gives his subordinate permission to carry out his proposal.

Nevertheless, the fundamental concept of Satan as a servant of God that is articulated in the prologue of Job is not abandoned. On the contrary, it comes to expression in a number of texts.

IV. THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS²⁹

Each of the Synoptic Gospels indicates that the public ministry of Jesus began with his baptism in the Jordan and temptation in the Judean wilderness. At the very outset of his ministry, Jesus faced a confrontation with an adversary variously identified as "Satan" (Mark and Matthew), "the devil" (Matthew and Luke), and "the tempter" (Matthew). For our purposes here, what is noteworthy is that all of the evangelists indicate that it was God's will that Jesus face this temptation. Each of them mentions that the Spirit, who had just come upon Jesus at his baptism, led Jesus into the wilderness. Mark even says that the Spirit "drove" (ἐκβάλλει) him into the wilderness, using a verb that he commonly uses for casting out demons (cf. Mark 1:34, 39; 3:15, 22, 23; 6:13; 7:26; 9:18, 28, 38). Matthew specifically states that he was led there "to be tempted" (Matt 4:1), using an infinitive of purpose. Matthew leaves no room for doubt; it was God's intention that Jesus should come under satanic attack. Satan was not acting apart from divine knowledge or control. To the contrary, his actions had a place in God's plan for the one he had just acknowledged as his Son.³⁰

The connection between the baptism and temptation of Jesus has an interesting parallel in Job. In the prologue of Job, Yahweh acknowledged Job as "blameless and upright" and as one who "fears God and turns away from evil" (Job 1:8; 2:3) before allowing the Satan to attack him. In the Gospels, God identifies Jesus as his Son, as one he loves, and as one with whom he is well pleased (Mark 1:11; Matt 3:17; Luke 3:22) before exposing him to the devil's assault in the wilderness.

It is indisputable that the evangelists believed that Satan was an evil figure. He is expressly identified as "the evil one" in Matt 13:19 and 38; he is portrayed as "the ruler of the demons" in Mark 3:22; Matt 12:24; and Luke 11:15; and his destiny is eternal fire according to Matt 25:41. In the temptation narrative, his opposition to God and God's will is most clearly seen when he tempts Jesus to worship him (Matt 3:9; Luke 4:7) in direct violation of the first commandment. Satan's purposes are clearly inimical to the purposes of God. Nevertheless, his temptation of Jesus takes place

²⁹ R. T. France suggests that *πειράζω* in Mark 1:13 refers to testing rather than temptation in *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 85. Though Jesus' experience can be regarded as one of testing, the fact that Satan is identified as the agent responsible for the action expressed by the verb in Mark 1:13 indicates that one cannot eliminate the notion of temptation from the verb.

³⁰ For the view that the temptations Jesus faced had to do with how he would fulfill his role as Messiah, see J. A. Kirk, "The Messianic Role of Jesus and the Temptation Narrative: A Contemporary Perspective," *EvQ* 44 (1972) 11–29, 91–102; and D. B. Garlington, "Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful," *BSac* 151 (1994) 284–308.

as a direct consequence of the action of the Spirit. Though he opposes God, he is under God's sovereign control, and his activities somehow contribute to the accomplishment of the divine plan of salvation. Of course, he does not voluntarily and gladly do the will of God. No doubt his hope is that Jesus will succumb to his enticements. However, the evangelists indicate as clearly as the author of Job that he is subject to the will of God and is used by God to accomplish his purposes.

God and Satan are both involved in the temptation of Jesus; however, their motives are very different. Satan wanted to entice Jesus into disobedience and to deflect him from his God-given task. God's desire, on the other hand, was that his Son remain faithful and resist the devil's blandishments. One might say that the accounts of the temptation illustrate that a single experience can be regarded as both satanic temptation and divine testing.

Certainly, God repeatedly subjects his people to testing in Scripture. For example, the account of the Akedah begins with the statement, "After these things God tested Abraham" (Gen 22:1; cf. Exod 20:20; Deut 8:2; 13:3).³¹ His tests may have a variety of functions. They may have a probative function and be used to exhibit the character of those tested. They may have an educative function and be designed to bring those tested to greater maturity. Or they may be punitive and express divine judgment on sin. There is more than one reason why God tests those who follow him, but the common thread in all of them is that such tests have a place in God's plan for those who are tested. In this case, it was part of the divine plan that Jesus should be tempted in the wilderness. Clearly, however, it was not God's desire that Jesus fail the test.³²

We see the subordination of Satan to God, not only in the fact that it is God's will that Jesus be tempted, but also in the statement Satan himself makes when he tempts Jesus to worship him. In Luke's account, he shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and says, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please." (Luke 4:6) There is room for debate about whether Luke thought that Satan's claim to have authority over all the kingdoms of the world was valid,³³ but at the very least, Satan acknowledges that whatever authority he possesses has been given to him.³⁴ His authority is a delegated authority, and God is obviously the one from whom he received it. As in Job, Satan exercises only as much power as God gives him.

³¹ For a survey of the motif of divine testing in the Bible, see S. R. Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 20–32.

³² For a survey of Jesus' experiences of testing, see J. B. Gibson, *The Temptations of Jesus in Early Christianity* (JSNTSup 112; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

³³ For the view that Satan's claim is valid, see S. R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 41. For the view that Satan's claim is false, see I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 172. Irenaeus supports the latter view in *Haer.* 5.22.2; 5.24.3.

³⁴ Cf. Rev 13:7, where it is said concerning the beast from the sea, that "it was allowed to make war on the saints" and "was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation" (emphasis added).

V. THE LORD'S PRAYER

It is not only in the account of the temptation of Jesus that we find the notion that God and Satan both have a role to play in temptation to sin. This is also found in the final petition of Matthew's version of the Lord's prayer. There we read, "And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one" (Matt 6:13). The word that is translated "time of trial" in the NRSV is *πειρασμός* and can convey the idea of testing or the idea of temptation. There is debate concerning which idea was intended here, but if we interpret the petition against the background of the temptation of Jesus, as we almost certainly should, we cannot exclude the idea of enticement to sin.³⁵ There is also debate about whether the adjective *πονηρός* refers to evil in the abstract or to the evil one, that is, the devil. Again, the narrative of the temptation of Jesus favors a reference to Satan, and this is consistent with Matthew's use of the adjective in Matt 13:19 and 38, where he identifies both the birds in the parable of the sower and the enemy who sows the weeds in the parable of the weeds and the wheat with "the evil one."³⁶

That Jesus would teach his followers to pray for deliverance from the evil one is hardly surprising,³⁷ but the prayer that God would not bring believers into trial or temptation is more problematic. This implies that God might deliberately lead people into situations where they could be tempted, which would seem to be incompatible with the goodness of God and, more specifically, with the statement in Jas 1:13, "God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one." Some have appealed to the underlying Aramaic to resolve this problem, proposing that the verb had a causative or permissive force, so that the petition could be rendered "Do not permit or cause us to enter temptation."³⁸ This would allow for a distinction between Satan as the immediate agent of temptation and God as the one who gives him permission to entice human beings. In view of the way Job portrays the relationship between God and Satan, it is possible that Matthew (and Jesus) thought in terms of this sort of distinction; however, it is not explicit in the text. One can speculate about the *ipsissima verba Jesu*, but the fact remains that the Greek does not express the idea of permission.

What is clear from the text is that in some sense God is involved in the trials or temptations that believers experience. This is consistent with what

³⁵ For the view that Matthew had eschatological testing in mind, see R. E. Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," *TS* 22 (1961) 204–8; and J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (SBT 2/6; London: SCM, 1967) 104–6. For the view that enticement to sin is in view, see S. E. Porter, "Mt 6:13 and Luke 11:4: 'Lead Us Not into Temptation,'" *ExpTim* 101 (1990) 359–60. The cognate verb *πειράζω* is used in Matt 4:1 and 3.

³⁶ For a fuller presentation of the view that the adjective should be understood to be masculine, see Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer* (London: Collins, 1965) 213–17.

³⁷ Jesus himself prayed that his followers would be protected from the evil one according to John 17:15.

³⁸ E.g. M. P. Knowles, "Once More 'Lead Us Not *Eis Peirasmon*,'" *ExpTim* 115 (2004) 191.

is described in the prologue of Job and in the account of the temptation of Jesus and with the general biblical teaching concerning divine sovereignty. However, God no more desires the failure of the followers of Jesus than he desired the failure of Jesus himself. It is his will that believers experience temptation, and he uses Satan as an instrument through which temptation comes, but his intentions are radically different from those of the one who is called "the tempter." When James says that God "tempts no one," he is not claiming that God has no connection with temptation or that it falls outside the realm of his control.³⁹ More likely, he wants his readers to know that no one can evade responsibility for moral failure on the grounds that God willed that they should do evil. Note that James immediately goes on to say, "But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it." James clearly intends this as an alternative to the idea of being tempted by God.⁴⁰

The way God and the evil one appear together in Matt 6:13 shows that Satan does not operate independently of God's purposes, even in the realm of temptation. God controls the activities of the tempter and determines whether believers will be exposed to his attempts to lead them astray. The apostle Paul expresses his agreement that the temptations believers encounter fall under divine control, when he says in 1 Cor 10:13, "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."⁴¹

VI. THE SIFTING OF THE DISCIPLES

Perhaps the clearest echo of Job's portrayal of Satan in the NT is the saying of Jesus recorded in Luke 22:31–32. Here Luke prefaces his account of Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial with the statement, "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." The imagery of sifting that Jesus uses here goes back to Amos 9:9, where God says that he will "shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve." However,

³⁹ Cf. L. T. Johnson, *The Letter of James* (AB 37A; New York: Doubleday, 1995) 203–4.

⁴⁰ Cf. Sir 15:11–15,

"Do not say, 'It was the Lord's doing that I fell away';
for he does not do what he hates.

Do not say, 'It was he who led me astray';
for he has no need of the sinful.

The Lord hates all abominations;
such things are not loved by those who fear him.

It was he who created humankind in the beginning,
and he left them in the power of their own free choice.

If you choose, you can keep the commandments,
and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice."

⁴¹ Although the NRSV uses the language of testing, temptation to sin is in view. Cf. A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 747.

the notion of Satan asking to test the faithful calls to mind the conversations between Yahweh and the Satan in the prologue of Job.⁴²

The use of the term “Satan” and the concept of Satan testing the fidelity of God’s servants suggest that an allusion to Job was intended. The verb that is translated “has demanded” in the NRSV also points in this direction. Louw and Nida suggest that this verb (ἐξαιτέω) means “to ask for something and to receive what one has asked for”⁴³ and propose the translation “Satan asked and received permission to sift you like wheat” for Luke 22:31.⁴⁴ This verb clearly connotes an action that involves asking for something and would be an appropriate way of referring to the action of the Satan when he proposed that Yahweh test Job’s integrity.

There can be little doubt that the saying in Luke 22:31 indicates that Satan asked for divine permission to test the faith of the disciples of Jesus (the second person personal pronoun in this verse is plural) in a manner analogous to the testing of Job. Here as there, Satan is subject to the control of the deity and must gain his approval before attacking God’s faithful. He cannot and does not act independently of the will of God. His intent in sifting the disciples is undoubtedly malicious, and Peter’s denial and the abandonment of Jesus by all of the disciples indicate that he enjoys some success; however, he is unmistakably subject to God’s will.

VII. THE PASSION

All of the canonical Gospels give detailed accounts of the passion. Although Satan does not appear as a major figure in any of them, Luke and John make reference to his role in instigating the events that lead up to the death of Jesus. Since they also portray the death of Jesus as a divine necessity, Satan is furthering the purposes of God by the part he plays in bringing about the crucifixion, whether he knows it or not.⁴⁵

Luke mentions that Satan prompted Judas’s act of betrayal in Luke 22:3–4, where he says, “Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them.”

⁴² For the view that there is an allusion to Job here, see Marshall, *Luke* 820; and D. L. Bock, *Luke* (2 vols; BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994–96) 2.1742.

⁴³ L & N 1.407.

⁴⁴ L & N 1.407–8.

⁴⁵ The idea that the death of Jesus was ordained by God and predicted in the OT is a commonplace in the NT. Though the writers of the NT believed that it had to happen, and had to happen in the way that it did, they also believed that those who brought about the death of Jesus were guilty of sin. This antinomy appears very clearly in Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost, when he says, “Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law” (Acts 2:22–23; cf. Luke 22:22). If the human instigators of the crucifixion could be held accountable for an action that was “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God,” surely the supernatural instigator could as well.

Similarly, John 13:2 speaks of Satan putting "it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him,"⁴⁶ and John 13:27 says "Satan entered into him" before he left the upper room to betray Jesus.⁴⁷

In the Farewell Discourses in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus says, "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me" (John 14:30). "The ruler of this world" is a title of Satan in John. When Jesus speaks of his coming, he undoubtedly has in mind the fact that Judas and a band of soldiers are on their way to arrest him (cf. John 18:3). From John's perspective, however, Judas and those with him are emissaries of Satan. They are coming to put into motion the events that will culminate in the crucifixion, but they and the evil force that animates them are carrying out God's plan, and even the devil himself does not have ultimate power over Jesus.⁴⁸

There is also an allusion to Satan's role in the crucifixion in Luke 22:53. Luke records that when he was arrested, Jesus said to those who had come for him, "When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!" For Luke, darkness is the realm of Satan. In one of his accounts of Paul's encounter with the risen Lord on the Damascus Road, he says that Jesus said to Paul, "I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:17–18).⁴⁹ It is fitting that Luke records that the death of Jesus was accompanied by darkness (Luke 23:44–45; cf. Matt 27:45; Mark 15:33).

Finally, we may observe that in John 8:44, Jesus says to some who refused to believe in him, "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." This text suggests that Satan is behind the human hostility to Jesus, and the description of Satan as a murderer foreshadows his involvement in the passion.

VIII. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Perhaps the most surprising references to Satan as a servant of God are found in the descriptions of church discipline in 1 Cor 5:5 and 1 Tim 1:20. Both of these texts refer to individuals who were to be or had been "handed

⁴⁶ The Greek here is difficult. C. K. Barrett proposes that the text refers to the devil making up his own mind rather than putting something into the mind of Judas in *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1967) 365. Against this, see A. J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 403 and 409.

⁴⁷ Cf. John 6:70, where Jesus refers to Judas as a "devil."

⁴⁸ There is, of course, a strong predestinarian emphasis in John's Gospel. Cf. D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

⁴⁹ On the symbolism of light and darkness in Luke, see S. R. Garrett, "Let the Light in You Be Darkness': Luke 11:33–36 and the Question of Commitment," *JBL* 110 (1991) 93–105.

over to Satan” because of their wrongdoing. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is dealing with a man guilty of incest with his stepmother. Paul was disappointed that the church had tolerated this situation and tells the Corinthians “to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.” First Timothy refers to two individuals who have been “turned over to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

Although there are significant differences between these passages, they have much in common, including the use of the phrase “hand over to Satan” (παράδιδωμι τῷ σατανᾷ).⁵⁰ Also, both texts suggest that the action of delivering the offender(s) to Satan may have a beneficial outcome. First Corinthians refers to the individual’s spirit being saved, and 1 Timothy speaks of learning not to blaspheme. Clearly the hope is that the discipline will be remedial in both cases. The action of being handed over to Satan is a form of punishment, but it is not retributive punishment. It is performed with the hope that those who are disciplined will ultimately benefit from the action, in which case, Satan’s work will end up serving the purposes of God.

The interpretation of 1 Cor 5:5 is especially controversial. This is not the place to attempt a thorough exegesis of the text. However, it must be observed that the common view that the act of handing the guilty party over to Satan was intended to condemn him to a premature death is highly problematic and should be rejected.⁵¹ It is most likely that the action of handing someone over to Satan was understood as a formal act of excommunication by which the offender was excluded from the church. Verse 2 makes it clear that the handing over to Satan involved expulsion from the community, when it refers to the individual being “removed from among you.”⁵² Presumably, it was believed that removal from the church would place the offender in the realm of Satan’s influence. Paul may have thought that this could result in physical suffering, but this probably is not what he meant by the reference to “the destruction of the flesh.”

A. C. Thiselton has argued convincingly against the view that the terms “Spirit” and “flesh” speak of a “body-soul” distinction.⁵³ The “flesh” that is to be destroyed is not the body of the offender, but his sinful orientation and tendencies.⁵⁴ This is not, of course, to say that Satan’s goal is to destroy the

⁵⁰ For the differences between the accounts, see G. Forkman, *The Limits of Religious Community* (ConBNT 5; Lund: Gleerup, 1972) 183.

⁵¹ For the view that death is envisaged, see S. D. MacArthur, “‘Spirit’ in Pauline Usage: 1 Corinthians 5:5,” in *Studia Biblica 1978*, III. *Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors* (JSNTSup 3; ed. E. A. Livingstone; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980) 249–56. For an excellent critique of the popular view, see J. T. South, “A Critique of the ‘Curse/Death’ Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5:1–8,” *NTS* 39 (1993) 539–61.

⁵² Cf. verses 7, 11, and 13.

⁵³ A. C. Thiselton, “The Meaning of ΣΑΡΞ in 1 Corinthians 5:5: A Fresh Approach in the Light of Logical and Semantic Factors,” *SJT* 26 (1973) 204–28.

⁵⁴ Probably the sinful tendencies of the individual are in view, but some have suggested that Paul might have been thinking of the sinful attitudes of the Christian community in Corinth. So, e.g., V. G. Shillington, “Atonement Texture in 1 Corinthians 5.5,” *JSNT* 71 (1998) 38; and D. E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 174.

offender's sinful orientation. Paul does not say what Satan's intentions are and is vague about what he believed Satan would do.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it is apparent that Paul hopes that expulsion from the community will force the offender to confront the gravity of his sin and turn from it. By doing so, he would cease to live "according to the flesh" (κατὰ σάρκα). What happens to the individual will be determined by how he responds to the discipline.⁵⁶

Since the action of handing the offender over to Satan is intended to result in the ultimate salvation of the individual, Satan is being used by God to accomplish his good purposes in the person's life. Though it may seem odd that the enemy who schemes against the people of God (2 Cor 2:11) is also represented as an instrument of God, this is consistent with the Joban portrayal of Satan, which probably influenced Paul at this point. In the LXX, Job 2:6 says that Yahweh handed Job over to the devil, using the verb that is used in 1 Cor 5:5, παραδίδωμι. The wording is different in Job 1:12, but this text also refers to God granting the Satan power over Job (the LXX speaks of Job being given into the hands of the devil).

The members of the Qumran community also believed that God uses Satan as an instrument through which he punishes recalcitrant believers. Speaking of divine judgment on covenant breakers, *Damascus Document* 8:1–3 says, "Thus will be the judgment of all those entering his covenant but who did not remain steadfast in them; they will have a visitation for destruction at the hand of Belial. This is the day when God will make a visitation."⁵⁷ The Qumran sectaries do not suggest that God uses Satan to accomplish his salvific purposes, but they do portray Satan as one through whom he punishes wrongdoers.

Though Yahweh allows the Satan to afflict Job, he puts restrictions on his activities, insisting, in the second test, that he spare Job's life. Similarly, in 1 Cor 5:5, the offender is not handed over to Satan to be killed, but to have his flesh destroyed, so that ultimately he may be saved.⁵⁸ Under the influence of Job, Paul saw Satan as an unwitting servant of God, whose purposes may have been malicious, but who nonetheless could be used by God as an instrument for good.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ It is usually assumed that Paul expected Satan to attack the individual physically; however, Thielson suggests that Paul may have had Satan's role as accuser in mind ("Meaning of ΣΑΡΞ" 224–25).

⁵⁶ Cf. 2 Cor 2:5–11, where church discipline produces the desired result, and Paul urges that the repentant sinner be forgiven and welcomed back into the fellowship of the community.

⁵⁷ F. G. Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* (Leiden: Brill, 1994) 38. Cf. CD 2:5–7; 1 QS 3:20–26; 4:12.

⁵⁸ There is dispute concerning whether the phrase "for the destruction of the flesh" should be understood to express purpose or simply anticipated result. For the view that it expresses purpose, see Garland, *1 Corinthians* 169. For the view that it expresses result, see G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 209.

⁵⁹ For the view that Paul is indebted to Job, see South, "A Critique" 551; and Garland, *1 Corinthians* 176.

IX. PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH

The last reference to Satan as a servant of God that we will look at is found in 2 Cor 12:7, where Paul writes, "Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated." The identification of the thorn is a well-known *crux interpretum*, and there probably is not sufficient evidence to resolve it. Most think it was some form of physical or psychological illness, and this is a reasonable hypothesis.⁶⁰ Whatever the "thorn" consisted of, Paul saw it as "a messenger of Satan." In some sense, it was an instrument Satan used to afflict Paul. He specifically states that the thorn tormented him. The verb used here (κολαφίζω) can refer to striking someone with the hand, and in Matt 26:67 and Mark 14:65, it is used of the blows Jesus received from the soldiers who guarded him. Here it is used in a figurative sense to refer to painful attacks of some kind that Paul experienced. Whatever the nature of the affliction, it was distressful to Paul, and it is understandable that he would attribute it to Satan and pray for its removal.⁶¹

Although Paul sees his thorn as an attack from Satan designed to inflict pain, he also sees it as a gift of God with a salutary purpose. He detects the hand of God, as well as the hand of Satan, behind his affliction. The voice of the verb "was given" (ἐδόθη) is surely to be understood as a divine passive, with the implication that God is the one who gave the thorn.⁶² Moreover, Paul expressly states that God intended the thorn for his good.⁶³ He says that God gave it to keep him from being too elated (v. 7) and to teach him that his grace was sufficient for him (v. 9). Ironically, God uses one who, according to 1 Tim 3:6, was condemned for his pride to purge the apostle of pride!

Paul views his experience of the thorn through the lens of Job's experience.⁶⁴ Both Satan and God were involved in his suffering, as in the suffering of Job, but their purposes were very different. Satan sought to harm Paul, but God used the experience to promote Paul's growth in humility and dependence upon him. In the case of Job, the Satan tried to get Job to curse God, and it may well be that Paul believed that Satan wanted to deflect

⁶⁰ Cf. the excursus on the identity of the thorn in M. E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994–2000) 2.809–18.

⁶¹ There are striking parallels between Paul's experience with the thorn and the experience of Jesus in Gethsemane. For the similarities between them, see J. W. McCant, "Paul's Thorn of Rejected Apostleship," *NTS* 34 (1988) 571.

⁶² So, e.g., Thrall, *Second Corinthians* 2.806; and M. J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 855–56.

⁶³ On the educative value of suffering in the NT, see Rom 5:3–4; Jas 1:2–4; 1 Pet 1:6–7; and Heb 12:5–11.

⁶⁴ Susan Garrett contends that in the discussion of his thorn, Paul brings together two models of affliction: the Job model and the *παιδεία*/discipline model. See S. R. Garrett, "Paul's Thorn and Cultural Models of Affliction," in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks* (ed. L. M. White and O. L. Yarbrough; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 82–99. The similarity between Paul's experience and Job's experience is also noted by Lee A. Johnson in "Satan Talk in Corinth: The Rhetoric of Conflict," *BTB* 29 (1999) 152.

him from the path of obedience as well. However, rather than bringing about his downfall, his afflictions became a means of overcoming pride and experiencing God's sustaining grace. Satan intended to harm Paul, but he unintentionally became an instrument through which the apostle experienced personal growth.

X. CONCLUSION

The Bible portrays Satan as an implacable enemy of God, whose designs on humanity are malicious; however, it does not represent Satan as God's equal or as one who acts independently of divine control. In the prologue of Job, the oldest text that speaks of a celestial Satan figure, he is clearly pictured as one who is subordinate to God and who operates only within the parameters that God sets for him. Although there is incontrovertible evidence of change and development in the concept of Satan in the biblical literature, this basic notion that Satan is under divine control appears repeatedly. This motif may stand in a certain degree of tension with the conception of Satan as a hostile force, but it is a persistent theme in the biblical record. Satan is an enemy of God, but he is also a servant of God.

Satan may be portrayed as acting with the permission of God or as an unwitting instrument of God, but in either case, he fulfills the will of God in what he does. One must, therefore, be careful to avoid exaggerating the power of Satan and setting up a dichotomy between God and Satan that would suggest a particular action must be attributed to either one or the other. These alternatives are not mutually exclusive. Satan is God's adversary, but whatever he does falls under the overarching sovereignty of God.