Devil

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Devil

Although many ancient religious traditions have concepts of the personification of evil, the idea of an anti-god is rooted in ancient Jewish and Christian concepts of the “adversary” (Heb. **satan**, Gk. **diabolos**). In the **HEBREW BIBLE** the term **satan** is used to refer generically to an opponent or to the accuser who is not at odds with God, but calls humans to account on God’s behalf. In the **NEW TESTAMENT**, the terms **satan** and **diabolos** appear to be used interchangeably, even by the same author (e.g., Matthew and Luke). In contrast to their more general use in the Hebrew Bible, these terms are used in the New Testament to refer to the personification of evil, who is opposed to God and God’s people. **Iblis** is the proper name given to the Devil in the ** Qur’an**, signifying in particular his rebellious aspect. The Qur’an is particularly concerned with his fall from grace, connecting it to the refusal of Iblis to prostrate himself before **ADAM** after his creation; for this Iblis was banished from heaven, doomed to **HELL**, and became the Devil, the supreme tempter and seducer of humanity, also known as **al-Shaytan** (Satan).

As a personified being, certain characteristics and roles are assigned to the Devil in the New Testament. Early in the Gospel accounts he tempts **Jesus** in the wilderness, is rebuked by Jesus as the agent behind Peter’s misunderstanding of the Jesus passion prediction, and at the end of Luke and John he enters **JUDAS ISCARIOT**, presumably precipitating his betrayal of Jesus. The Devil not only acts against Jesus, but also against his followers, who are repeatedly warned to avoid his snares, implying that the Devil is a crafty character who attempts to trick the unsuspecting righteous in an ongoing spiritual battle between good and evil. A human being can also be demarcated as a “child of the devil,” indicating his or her allegiances with evil forces. The shift between the ancient Jewish notion of the “adversary” and the later idea of the Devil as an opponent of God can be located after the **EXILE**, indicating that the personification of evil may have entered the “**APOCALYPTIC imagination**” as a result of the outside pressures of foreign rule.

Some ancient texts depict Satan as a fallen **ANGEL**, providing a narrative that is later used to explain how he shifted roles. Islamic exegetical literature or **TAFSIR** is especially focused on this issue. Though Islamic tradition generally holds that angels are wholly subject to the divine will and cannot sin, Iblis is often identified as a fallen angel. The commentators seek to resolve this contradiction by building upon the Qur’anic identification of Iblis as “one of the **jinn**,” a reference to nature spirits of a capricious and often diabolical nature venerated in pre-Islamic Arabia; they thus adumbrate stories of how Iblis was originally a **jinn** but found himself among the hosts of angels in Heaven through one circumstance or another in the time before the creation of Adam. Advocates of this viewpoint to Iblis’ own assertion that he is made of fire, which implies difference from angels, who are generally considered to have been made of light. A striking transformation of Iblis occurs in Sufi literature beginning in the ‘**ABBASID** Period, where Iblis becomes a tragic figure caught between the principle of absolute **MONOTHEISM** and the ineluctable divine will: commanded to bow to Adam or be punished, he maintains that only God is deserving of worship, even though this leads to his damnation.

**Suggested Reading**

