

Unmasking the Devil: *Their Development Through the Bible*

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INTRODUCTION

Who is Satan, really? For many, images of a horned, red-skinned figure come to mind—thanks to movies and cartoons. But the Bible’s portrayal of Satan is far more complex and fascinating. In fact, the idea of Satan has changed over time, influenced by Jewish, Christian, and even Greek ideas. In this article, we’ll explore how Satan’s role evolved from a courtroom adversary in the Old Testament to the malevolent enemy of God we often think of today.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT SATAN?

The Bible doesn’t start with the modern concept of Satan as the devil. Instead, in the Hebrew Bible (what Christians call the Old Testament), we meet a figure called *ha-satan* (meaning “the accuser”). This being isn’t the ruler of hell but a member of God’s divine council. Think of *ha-satan* as a prosecutor—his job is to challenge humans and test their faithfulness.

For example:

- In **Job 1–2**, *ha-satan* questions Job’s integrity and gets permission from God to test him.
 - In **Zechariah 3**, *ha-satan* accuses Joshua the high priest, but God rebukes him.
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FROM ADVERSARY TO ENEMY

Over time, Jewish thought began to expand on the idea of spiritual beings and their roles. Texts like *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* (not part of the Bible but influential in Jewish thought) describe rebellious angels who corrupt humanity. These stories introduced the idea of spiritual beings acting in opposition to God, paving the way for the more unified figure of Satan.

By the time of the New Testament, Satan's role had shifted:

- He becomes the tempter of Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11).
- He is described as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31) and “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4).
- Revelation 12 paints Satan as the dragon leading a cosmic rebellion against God.

This transformation reflects a growing understanding of spiritual warfare—a battle between good and evil.

WHY DID THESE CHANGES HAPPEN?

The shift in how people saw Satan didn't happen in a vacuum. Several factors contributed:

1. Jewish and Greek Influences:

As Jews encountered Greek philosophy, ideas about the soul, the afterlife, and spiritual beings became more detailed. Greek thinkers like Plato shaped how people thought about good and evil, influencing Jewish and early Christian theology.

2. The Need for a Clear Enemy:

As Christianity spread to non-Jewish audiences, simplifying complex ideas helped

explain spiritual truths. Combining various adversarial figures into one “Satan” made the spiritual battle easier to understand.

3. **The New Testament’s Focus:**

Jesus’ ministry emphasized His victory over sin, death, and evil. Satan became the ultimate symbol of rebellion against God and the target of Jesus’ mission.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SATAN

Many of our modern ideas about Satan come more from art and literature than the Bible:

- **The Red Devil:** This image owes more to Dante’s *Inferno* and medieval artwork than Scripture.
- **Ruler of Hell:** The Bible actually describes hell as a place of punishment for Satan, not his kingdom (Revelation 20:10).
- **God’s Equal Opponent:** Satan is powerful but not omnipotent. The Bible portrays him as a created being, ultimately subject to God’s authority.

The Septuagint (LXX) translators’ decision to use the Greek term ὄφις (**ophis**) to describe the serpent in Genesis 3 carries significant theological implications. In Greek, ὄφις generally denotes a “serpent” with connotations of craftiness and subtlety rather than inherent malice. This aligns with the Hebrew term **nāḥāš**, which not only refers to a serpent but also carries layered meanings, such as “shining one” or “diviner,” reflecting divine or supernatural attributes.

Interestingly, the translators did not choose **ἐχιδνα (echidna)**, a term used elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Matthew 3:7) to describe venomous vipers, often

associated with treachery and malice. By selecting ὄφις, the LXX frames the serpent in Genesis as a being characterized primarily by cunning rather than overt evil, setting the stage for later theological developments. This deliberate choice suggests the serpent's identity was understood as more than a mere animal.

This distinction is crucial for understanding the serpent's evolving portrayal in Scripture. The LXX's subtle framing contributed to the eventual theological consolidation of the serpent with Satan, as seen in Revelation 12:9, where he is called "that ancient serpent." This decision underscores how early translators shaped the trajectory of biblical interpretation, allowing the serpent to transcend the confines of the garden narrative and become emblematic of cosmic rebellion.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

Understanding how Satan's role developed helps us see the Bible's bigger picture: God's ultimate victory over evil. Satan isn't a random villain; he represents everything opposed to God's love and truth. And while he is a powerful adversary, the Bible assures us that he is defeated through Jesus.

CONCLUSION

The story of Satan is more than just a tale of an evil being. It's a reminder of the cosmic struggle between good and evil—and the hope Christians have in Christ's victory. So, the next time you hear about the devil, remember: his power is limited, his defeat is certain, and God's love always prevails.

This article simplifies complex theological ideas for a general audience while retaining historical and biblical depth. Let me know if you'd like any adjustments!



Image 2 Description: This depiction synthesizes biblical and historical references to celestial beings, particularly those with serpentine features. The serpentine lower body reflects ancient Near Eastern depictions of divine or hybrid beings,¹ often associated with Yahweh’s court, as argued by Michael S. Heiser in his analysis of spiritual hierarchies and rebellion narratives. Heiser identifies figures such as Lucifer (Helel ben Shahar, “*Son of the Morning*,” Isaiah 14:12) as a “*serpentine divine being*,” tying this motif to the broader theological narrative of divine hierarchy and rebellion. Similarly, the imagery of the *nāḥāš* (serpent) in Genesis 3 and the *šārāp* (seraphim) in Isaiah 6 reinforces the complex roles of serpentine beings in the biblical imagination.² These beings were not exclusively adversarial but also served as throne guardians, emphasizing their multifaceted significance in ancient Israelite and Second Temple thought.

The majestic demeanor of the being draws from Revelation 10:1, which describes a “*mighty angel*” with a luminous appearance, while the six wings specifically reference Isaiah 6:2, where seraphim are described as having six wings: “*with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.*” This combination of elements reflects the awe and reverence associated with such beings in biblical theology. Notably, this depiction features a serpentine lower body, functioning as the being’s feet. While some might expect human-like feet in a heavenly vision, it raises the question: what does “*feet*” represent in such a celestial context?

¹ For serpentine imagery in ancient Near Eastern artifacts and their association with divine beings, see Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 150–52. For the biblical reference to seraphim, see Isaiah 6:2. The description of the mighty angel in Revelation is found in Revelation 10:1.

² Michael S. Heiser, “*Jesus, the Morning Star*,” accessed November 2024.

APPENDIX B: TRIPLE ENTENDRE AND THE SERPENT

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

Genesis 3:1 ESV

3:1	Now the serpent was	more crafty	than any	other	beast	of the field
	וְהַיָּה נָחָשׁ חָיִית	אֲרֻמִּים מִכֹּל	הַחַיָּוִי שָׂדֵה	•	חַיָּוִי	הַשָּׂדֵה
	w ha nāḥāš	hāyâ	‘ārûm mi kōl		ḥayyat	ha śāde
	וְהַיָּה נָחָשׁ	הַיָּה אֲרֻמִּים	מִן כֹּל		חַיָּוִי	הַשָּׂדֵה
	w ha nāḥāš	1 hyh	‘ārûm min kōl		ḥayyâ 1	ha śāde

Image 3 Description: The image emphasizes the unique phrasing in Genesis 3:1, which describes the serpent as “*more crafty than any beast of the field.*” Notably, the Hebrew text does not classify the serpent as one of the “*beasts of the field,*” implying a distinct nature. Modern translations may add interpretive elements like “*other,*” which are not present in the original text. This visual and accompanying note challenge readers to consider deeper implications regarding the identity and role of the serpent in the garden narrative.³

³ Logos 10 Bible Software, Genesis 3:1 Interlinear Analysis (*English Standard Version*), accessed November 20, 2024.



Image 4 Description: The image breaks down the etymological complexities of the Hebrew term *naḥaš* (נחש), exploring its various meanings and associations as a noun, verb, and adjective. The noun *naḥaš* commonly refers to a serpent but also carries associations with divination (*nḥš piel*, “prognosticate”) and bronze (*neḥōšet*), creating a rich interplay of meanings. The adjective “shining one” links to the serpentine figure’s appearance and symbolic role.⁴

The etymological analysis provided by Heinz-Josef Fabry delves into:

- **Noun Usage:** Referring to a serpent, particularly in Ugaritic and Hebrew contexts.
- **Verb Usage:** Indicating divination or magic, derived from associations with whispering or foretelling.
- **Adjective Usage:** Highlighting qualities like brightness or metallic sheen, associated with bronze.

The analysis emphasizes that *naḥaš* is more than a simple term for “serpent”; it conveys theological and symbolic significance, connecting the serpent to themes of deception, prognostication, and even divine or supernatural attributes. This multifaceted term invites deeper reflection on the serpent’s role in Genesis and its broader implications in ancient Near Eastern thought.

This image visually organizes these linguistic connections, illustrating the rich semantic field of *naḥaš* and its implications in understanding biblical narratives.⁵

⁴ YouTube, “Serpent Imagery in the Bible,” uploaded by Ben S., accessed November 2024. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BO13BSSjsYU>.

⁵ Heinz-Josef Fabry, “נחש and נחשת,” *TDOT*, 9:., 356–357.

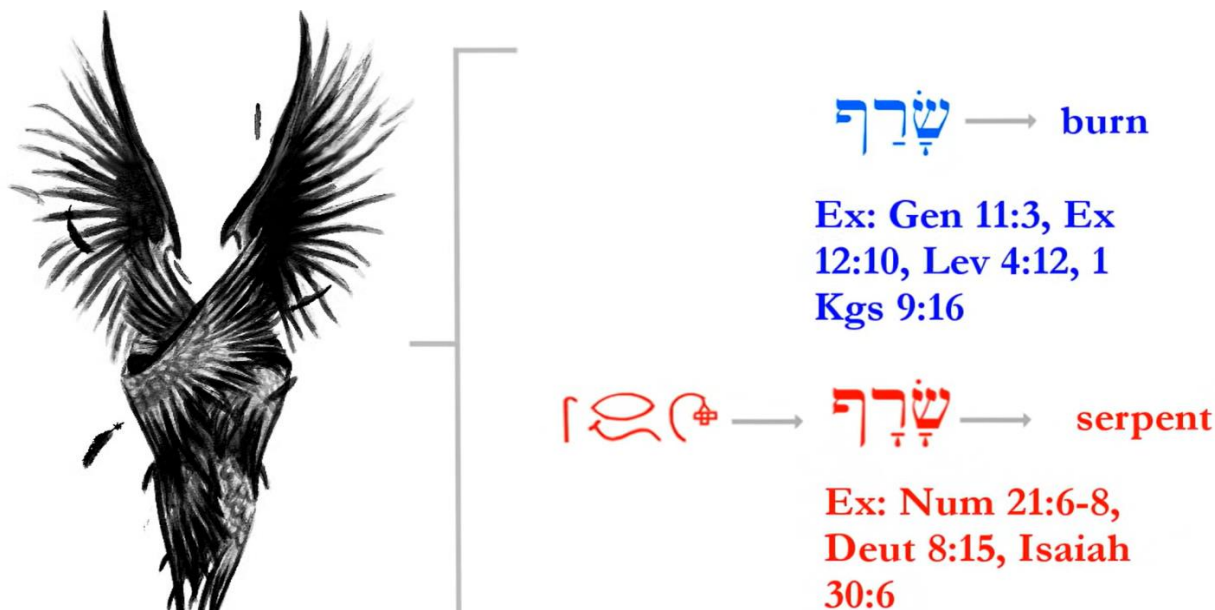


Image 5 Description: The slide highlights the connection between the Egyptian *uraeus* serpent and the biblical seraphim motif. According to Tryggve Mettinger, there is an emerging scholarly consensus that the *uraeus* serpent—symbolizing sovereignty, royalty, and divine authority in ancient Egypt—is the original source of the seraphim imagery. The text quotes *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, Page 743, as the source for this assertion.⁶

Additional Notes:

- The Hebrew term *seraph* (שרף) is often associated with “fiery” or “burning” creatures, but in several biblical contexts, it refers directly to snakes or serpents (e.g., Numbers 21:6-8). This dual association links the seraphim to both divine and serpentine imagery.
- In the ancient Near East (ANE), serpents often symbolized divine authority and power, as seen in the *uraeus* cobra used in Egyptian iconography to represent sovereignty and deity.
- The resemblance between a *seraph* and a serpent emphasizes the possibility that the biblical seraphim draw on both angelic and serpentine symbolism, merging theological and cultural motifs.
- The *uraeus* cobra, standing upright, mirrors the biblical description of the seraphim as upright, fiery beings surrounding God’s throne (e.g., Isaiah 6), adding depth to the seraphim’s divine association.⁷

This slide and its accompanying description provide valuable context for understanding how ANE symbolism, particularly from Egyptian traditions, influenced biblical imagery and theological concepts.

⁶ YouTube, “*Serpent Imagery in the Bible*,” uploaded by Ben S., accessed November 2024. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BO13BSSjsYU>.

⁷ Tryggve Mettinger, “*Seraphim*,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons*, 743.



Image 6 Description: The seals shown above date back to the eighth century BC during the reign of King Ahaz. Seal 273 portrays YHWH symbolically as a sun disk wearing a crown, a typical representation in Israelite-Judean art. Surrounding YHWH are the seraphim, depicted as throne guardians rather than hostile figures. These artistic elements align with Isaiah 6:1–7, where seraphim are described as guardians of God’s throne, reinforcing a theological tradition of divine imagery.⁸

“[This seal] portrays Yhwh symbolically as a sun disk wearing a crown (a typical representation in Israelite-Judean art). Yhwh is thus portrayed as king, and surrounding him are the seraphs. The text on [this seal] states that it belonged to a courtier of King Ahaz named Ashna. In light of the similarity between the seal and Isaiah 6, it is worth noting that Jerusalem in the eighth-century was a very small town, that both Isaiah and Ashna lived during the reign of King Ahaz, and that Isaiah enjoyed very close connections to the royal court in which Ashna served (see Isa 7-9). Consequently, it is inconceivable that Isaiah and Ashna did not know each other.”- Benjamin Sommer⁹

It is worth noting that serpentine beings, such as the seraphim, were not viewed as adversarial but rather as protectors in Jewish tradition. This understanding contrasts with later depictions of serpents in more negative contexts, such as interpretations of the Genesis narrative.

⁸ YouTube, “Serpent Imagery in the Bible,” uploaded by Ben S., accessed November 2024. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BO13BSSjsYU>.

⁹ Benjamin Sommer, “Seraph,” *Bible Odyssey*, November 2024, <https://bibleodyssey.com/articles/seraphs/>. Images sourced via Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst: Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sach 4* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977).



— Reptile looking figurines are 7000-year old possibly made in the Ubaid period

Image 7 Description: This figurine reflects the ancient Near Eastern and Mesopotamian association of serpents with divinity, wisdom, and immortality. Snakes' ability to shed their skin symbolized rejuvenation and renewal, which was interpreted as a connection to immortality. This theme is also present in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (XI:303–309), where a serpent consumes the plant of life, thereby symbolically attaining immortality. The figurine's design and cultural origins may connect to broader Mesopotamian beliefs about divine intermediaries and their serpentine symbolism, further enriching the narrative context of immortality and transformation.¹⁰

This figurine, discovered in Iraq and dated to approximately 7000 years ago, provides physical evidence of the cultural significance of serpentine forms, as discussed in sources such as the *How and Whys* exploration of reptile figurines from Mesopotamia.¹¹

¹⁰ *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet XI:303–309

¹¹ "7000-Year-Old Reptile Figurines Found in Iraq." *How and Whys*. Accessed November 20, 2024. <https://howandwhys.com/7000-year-old-reptile-figurines-found-in-iraq/>

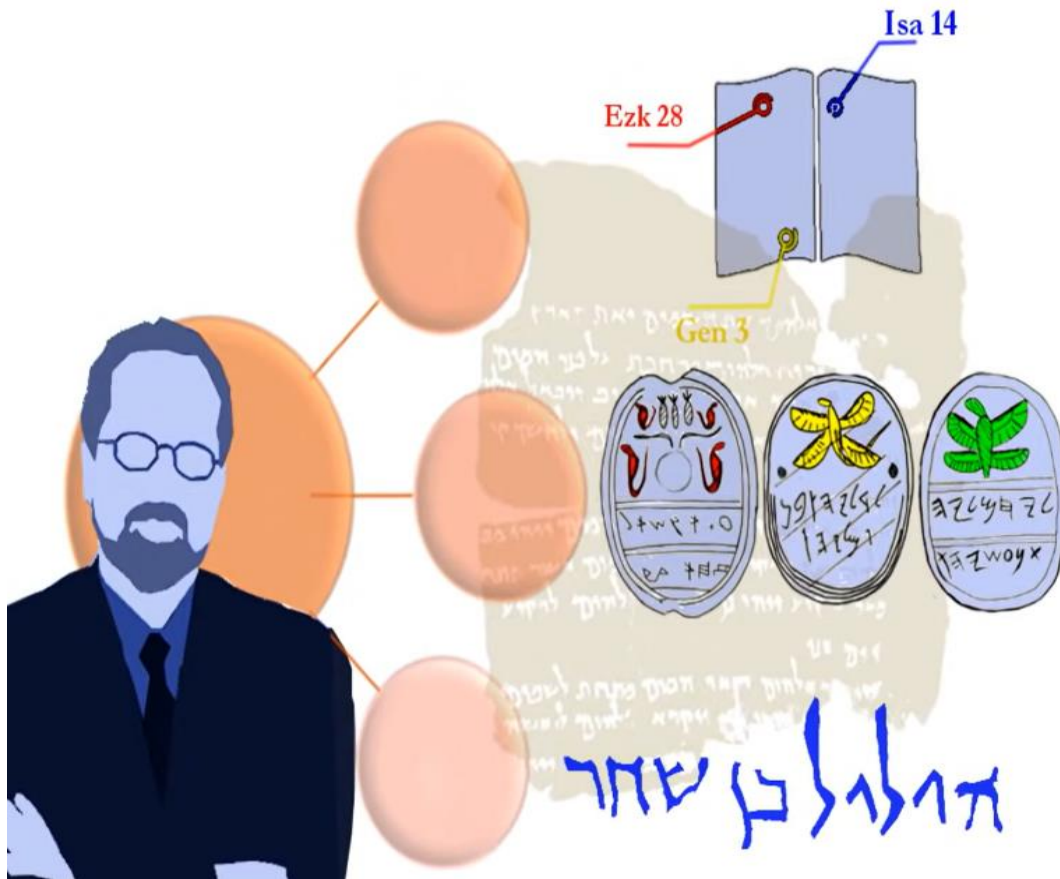


Image 8 Description: Heiser and other scholars highlight fascinating insights from the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly the fragmented text known as *The Visions of Amram*.¹² This Aramaic text, attributed to the father of Moses, recounts a vision in which Amram sees two Watchers contending over his soul. One of these entities identifies himself as the Angel Michael, while the other is referred to as the Prince of Darkness. The text describes the latter as “*terrifying in his appearance, like a serpent; his visage like a viper.*” This vivid imagery aligns with other ancient Near Eastern and Second Temple conceptions of serpentine beings, both divine and malevolent.¹³

¹² YouTube, “*Serpent Imagery in the Bible*,” uploaded by Ben S., accessed November 2024. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BO13BSSjsYU>.

¹³ Michael S. Heiser, “*Jesus, the Morning Star*,” *Dr. Michael Heiser’s Blog*, accessed November, 2024, <https://drmsb.com/jesus-morning-star/>.

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