

THE ORIGIN OF SATAN: How Christians Demonized Jews, Pagans, and Heretics

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Overview

Originally from Jewish apocalyptic sources, the description of the cosmic struggle between good and evil far predates the stories of Jesus of Nazareth. This conception of evil personified brought about a split between several groups, with the “sons of light” and the “sons of darkness” fighting against each other. The conflict between Jesus and the mysterious being named Satan actually represents the conflict between Jesus and those who denied his teachings or pushed for his crucifixion. Additional conflicts existed between the Romans who converted to Christianity, the Pagans, and the dissident Christians. This book denies the literal personification of an incarnated Satan being, and argues instead for a Satan that was a manifestation of the struggles of the early Christians.

“The figure of Satan as it emerged over the centuries in Jewish tradition, is not a hostile power assailing Israel from without, but the source and representation of conflict within the community.”

Chapter I. The Gospel Of Mark And The Jewish War

In 66 C.E., rebellion broke out between the Palestinian Jews and Rome. Jews found themselves divided, some willing to fight and others refusing. Those who chose to fight believed that God was on their side in ridding the land of the heretical Romans. During this war, the Romans stormed a great temple, the Holy of Holies, taking treasures and setting it ablaze. They sacrificed to their own gods while robbing, raping, and massacring the Jewish people living there. The warring time period of 66-70 C.E. held catastrophic events for the Jewish world. The first Christian gospels were written during

the last year of the war, tradition attributing this gospel to Mark (although it is presumed anonymous).

Followers of Jesus refused to fight in the war. After Jesus’ crucifixion, they saw the events afterwards to be signs of the end of days. When Jesus said, “*Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!*” (Mark 1:15), they believed him literally, believing he had predicted the impending destruction of the Temple. Others believed the destruction of the temple was punishment for rejecting Jesus while he lived, some 35 years prior to the war. Followers of Jesus had quarrels with the Jewish council of elders (the *Sanhedrin*), who had labeled Jesus insane or possessed by a demon.

Although it was ultimately the Roman governor Pontius Pilate who sentenced Jesus to death, blame is placed on Satan. Mark writes of Jesus’ baptism, in which God came to him and anointed him to challenge evil. He writes about how Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days and was tempted by Satan. After failing to tempt Jesus, Satan supposedly retreated until an opportune time arose. Satan was perceived again in Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. Jesus’ crucifixion was described as the culmination of the struggle between good and evil – between God and Satan.

Early Christians did not view the Romans during the war as acting on Satan’s behalf; to them, the truly evil ones were Judas and the small-minded *Sanhedrin*. The real conflict was the struggle to convince people of Jesus’ true status as the prophesized Messiah. It is both implied and explicitly stated that the crowds against Jesus were fueled by Satan. Mark sees the Roman conflict as just something that happened in the background, whereas the Jewish leaders who suppressed Jesus’ teachings were Satan’s true emissaries. Still, Mark’s account is by no means intended to be anti-Semitic and an attack on all Jews, just the *Sanhedrin* leadership.

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