

Abstract

The literary character of Satan is commonly perceived to gradually evolve from the first divine agents in the Hebrew Bible, representing the darker sides of the divine governing of affairs (Job 1–2; Zech 3; 1 Chr 21:1; Num 22:22, 32 and so forth), to the full-blown enemy of God of the post-biblical era. However, texts referring to Satan (and related characters) in between these two poles are not uniform and diverge considerably, spanning from the rehabilitating and disciplinary Satan of Paul (1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 12:7; 1 Tim 1:20) to the Johannine liar and murderer from the very beginning (Joh 8:44; 1 Joh 3:8–10). By employing narrative critical analysis, this study explores where the Satan of Revelation is positioned along this axis.

The central objective of this thesis is to determine the narrative function of Satan in Revelation. In doing so, I will explore whether viewing Satan in Revelation as a disciplining and testing agent of God makes more sense from the text itself by creating less narrative dissonance than the customary cosmic conflict paradigm.

In the Book of Revelation, we encounter a Satan/devil possibly adhering to either side of the dichotomy. On the one hand, Satan is part of the coming hour of trial, the hour of testing and sifting the population of the earth (Rev 2:10; 3:10). As such, he is *given* (by proxy) to blaspheme God and his heavenly abode; to exercise authority for 42 months, and to wage war against and conquer the saints (13:5–8). Moreover, the authority and powers he is given are primarily used as a means of deceiving and coercing humans into idolatry (13:15), thus constituting the very thing from which humankind is to abstain at any cost.

On the other hand, he is cast out of his heavenly abode, removed from his office as a prosecutor (12:7–12), and is in the end cast into the lake of fire to suffer eternally (20:10).

These two strands of the characterization of Satan seem to be woven together in a text such as 20:3,7–10, where Satan is bound and incarcerated, only later to be released by divine necessity.

The paradigm most commonly used to interpret the function of Satan in Revelation has been the ancient combat myth/cosmic conflict. Read from this perspective, Revelation is a narrative about the conflict between God and Satan, and its hermeneutical starting point is Rev 12. This paradigm can explain the expulsion of Satan from heaven and his eternal torment in the lake of fire. However, it cannot make sufficient sense of God endorsing and enabling his archenemy, his unexpected release after incarceration, or the general cosmological implications of the throne vision (Rev 4–5) that casts the almighty God upon the throne in charge of all that is revealed – benevolent as well as malignant.

This study explores another way of perceiving the character of Satan in Revelation that makes better sense of his divine endorsement, enablement, incarceration, and finally the liquidation of his office. The hermeneutical starting point of this reading is twofold: firstly, the messages to the seven congregations – the hermeneutical microcosm of the rest of the book. Secondly, the throne vision that provides the reader with the proper lens through which everything revealed is to be perceived. Seen from this perspective, the plot of Revelation is not about an eschatological battle between God and Satan, but rather the eschatological ordeal unleashed upon humankind in order to test and sift the believers from the unbelievers; to separate the

repentant from the unrepentant; to sift the ones marked with the number of the beast from those written in the book of life. From this perspective, Revelation is a narrative about the eschatological sifting of humankind culminating in the judgment scene of Rev 20 as well as the envisioned inauguration of salvation in Rev 21–22. In such a plot, humankind is put at the center of attention, to which Satan functions as necessary evil – the test against which the fidelity and allegiance of man are to be measured. Those giving in to his snares of deception are worthy of judgment (20:11–15), but those faithful to the point of death conquer their adversary and will receive the heavenly fruits of their labors (2:10; 12:10–11).

Revelation is a book written relatively late compared to other New Testament writings. However, it is a book with considerable affinity to the writings of the Hebrew Bible. It is a hypothesis of this reading that this affinity rubs off on its characterization of Satan. He emerges as a disciplinary adversary to humankind (cf. 1 Kgs 11:14, 23; Isa 9:11–13; Ezek 38–39) and functions as tester and accuser of the saints (Job 1–2; 1 Chr 21:1; Zech 3:1–2; Jub. 10:7–9).

This thesis argues that this new way of perceiving Satan in Revelation is a more probable one, narratively speaking, as it creates less narrative dissonance than the combat-myth paradigm. It is also a more probable reading in light of the intertextual references within the narrative connected to the character of Satan. Moreover, it finds precedents in the numerous texts attesting a similar monistic cosmology to that of Revelation while incorporating a similar semi-dualistic character to that of the Satan (the Mastema of the Book of Jubilees and the Pauline Satan perhaps bearing the closest resemblance).