

Jewish Texts on Satan

In the Torah, Satan as a character does not appear. The closest thing we have to it is the use of various derivatives of the verb לשטן as in this passage from the story of Balaam, in Numbers 22:

כא וַיִּקָּם בַּלְעָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־אֲתוֹנוֹ וַיִּלְךָ עִם־שָׂרֵי מוֹאָב׃ כב וַיַּחֲרֹ־אָף אֱלֹהִים כִּי־הוֹלֵךְ הוּא וַיִּתְּנִיצַב מִלְּאָךְ׃ יְהוָה בַּדֶּרֶךְ לְשָׂטָן לוֹ וְהוּא רֹכֵב עַל־אֲתוֹנוֹ וּשְׁנֵי נֶעְרָיו עִמּוֹ׃ כג וַתֵּרָא הָאֲתוֹן אֶת־מִלְּאָךְ׃ יְהוָה נָצַב בַּדֶּרֶךְ וַחֲרָבוֹ שְׁלֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ וַתִּט הָאֲתוֹן מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ וַתִּלְךָ בְּשָׂדֵה וַיִּךְ בַּלְעָם אֶת־הָאֲתוֹן לְהַטֹּתָהּ הַדֶּרֶךְ׃

21. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.
22. And God's anger was kindled because he went; and the angel of the Eternal One stood in the way **as an adversary** against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him.
23. And the ass saw the angel of the Eternal One standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field; and Balaam struck the ass, to turn it to the way.

Enemies, especially in war, were spoken of similarly as adversaries in the early histories. In the Psalms, the word is used to indicate a kind of prosecuting attorney before God's judgement.

ד תַּחַת־אֲהַבְתִּי יִשְׁטָנוּנִי וְאֲנִי תַפְלָה׃ ה וַיִּשְׁימוּ עָלַי רָעָה תַחַת טוֹבָה וְשִׂנְאָה תַחַת אֲהַבְתִּי׃ ו הַפְקִד עָלָיו רָשָׁע וְשָׂטָן יַעֲמֵד עַל־יְמִינִי׃ ז בְּהַשְׁפִּטוּ יֵצֵא רָשָׁע וַתַּפְלְתוּ תַהֲיֶה לַחֲטָאָה׃

4. In return for my love they are my accusers; but I give myself to prayer.
5. And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love.
6. Appoint a wicked man over him; and let Satan stand at his right hand.
7. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned; and let his prayer become sin.

In the relatively late book of Chronicles (roughly 3rd Century BCE), Satan appears briefly as a character'. Especially in the case of the Chronicler, this is likely to be an influence from Zoroastrianism, as in the source documents from the early histories (see II Sam. xxiv. 1) Satan does not appear. God incites David to take the census.

א וַיַּעֲמֵד שָׂטָן עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסָּת אֶת־דָּוִד לְמִנּוֹת אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ ב וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־יֹאבֵב וְאֶל־שָׂרֵי הָעָם לְכוּ סַפְרוּ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע וְעַד־דָּן וְהָבִיאוּ אֵלַי וְאִדְעָה אֶת־מִסְפָּרָם׃

1. And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to make a census of Israel.
2. And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, count Israel from Beersheba to Dan; and bring their number to me, that I may know it.

The most interesting text from the Hebrew Bible in which Satan appears is the book of Job. In this passage from that book's first chapter, it is very clear in both the Hebrew and the English that Satan has indeed become a character; he is portrayed as a being having a conversation with God.

6. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Eternal One, and Satan came also among them.
7. And the Eternal One said to Satan, Where are you coming from? Then Satan answered the Eternal One and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.
8. And the Eternal One said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God, and turns away from evil?
9. Then Satan answered the Eternal One, and said, Does Job fear God for nothing?
10. Have not you made a hedge around him, and around his house, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions are increased in the land.
11. But put forth your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.
12. And the Eternal One said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power; only upon himself put not forth your hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Eternal One.

The dating of this book is uncertain, but it is likely to be between the 7th and 4th centuries BCE. It is thus earlier than the Chronicles passage. However, it belongs to the genre of the wisdom literature, not the histories. It is an enquiry into the nature and reasons for suffering, and takes a poetic form.

From the Jewish Encyclopedia - from 1910, but an excellent source document for scholarly views on Jewish subjects

...[I]n the prologue to the Book of Job...Satan appears, together with other celestial beings or "sons of God," before the Deity, replying to the inquiry of God as to whence he had come, with the words: "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (Job i. 7). Both question and answer, as well as the dialogue which follows, characterize Satan as that member of the divine council who watches over human activity, but with the evil purpose of searching out men's sins and appearing as their accuser. He is, therefore, the celestial prosecutor, who sees only iniquity; for he persists in his evil opinion of Job even after the man of Uz has passed successfully through his first trial by surrendering to the will of God, whereupon Satan demands another test through physical suffering (ib. ii. 3-5).

Yet it is also evident from the prologue that Satan has no power of independent action, but requires the permission of God, which he may not transgress. He can not be regarded, therefore, as an opponent of the Deity; and the doctrine of monotheism is disturbed by his existence no more than by the presence of other beings before the face of God.