

SATAN

CULTURAL INSIGHT

Although Satan is a prominent figure in the scriptures, he does not have that same prominence in much of the Old Testament. The name Satan comes from a Hebrew word that means “adversary,” and it appears fewer than thirty times in the Old Testament. However, Satan is more prominent in the Joseph Smith Translation, especially in Moses 1.

Many uses of the Hebrew *satan* do not explicitly refer to the being we know as the devil, and some clearly do not refer to that figure. Often the word describes an earthly adversary. For example, in describing the prosperity of his reign, Solomon told Hiram, king of Tyre, “But now the Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary [*satan*] nor evil occurrent” (1 Kings 5:4). *Satan* in this context refers to political adversaries of King Solomon.

Sometimes *satan* describes a heavenly figure sent by God to test individuals. For example, in the story of Balaam, we read, “And God’s anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary [*satan*] against him” (Numbers 22:22). In this passage, an angel sent from God is described as acting as an adversary, or *satan*, against the rogue prophet Balaam.

The appearance of *satan* in Job deserves special mention since this is one of the only places in the Old Testament where it is used as a name. Here a *satan* figure presents himself to God among the other “children of God,” a phrase that is often used in the Old Testament to refer to the heavenly host or the divine council. This *satan*’s purpose is to test Job to prove that he will follow the Lord no matter what. The fact that it is the Lord who eventually calls Job to account suggests that this *satan* works for the Lord and is not the devil as we find him in other scriptural books and accounts.

Related verses

Moses 1:12–21

Job 1:6–12

1 Chronicles 21:1–4 (compare 2 Samuel 24:1–4)

Zechariah 3:1–2

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