

Talk of the Devil: Unpacking the Language of New Testament Satanology

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Abstract

This article builds from the count of NT Satan references produced in 'Diabolical Data': A Critical Inventory of New Testament Satanology' (JSNT 39.1). Linguistic-statistical tools unveil the literary distribution of Satan language across NT writings, showing Satan to be 'topical' in 14/27 NT books and following a fairly even distribution, correlated to word count. Satan is a consistent feature within NT discourse, characterized by very rich language but also a consolidation of that language through the use of synonyms. The coherence of the NT portrait of Satan stands out from the inconstant and loosely connected Satan language of Second Temple Judaism, suggesting a new departure in early Christianity. The implications of this 'Satanology' are considered for wider projects in NT studies, for the history of religions and hermeneutics. The problem this study sets for future interpreters is that of exploring and explaining the distinctive nature of NT Satanology both in its context and for today's readers.

Keywords

Devil, Satan, statistics, hermeneutics, history of religions, topicality

1. Introduction

The first article in this two-part study counted all references to Satan in the NT, creating a comprehensive list and sorting it according to type and probability. This yielded 149 *potential* references (i.e. having some scholarly support) of which 137, in our judgment, *do* refer to Satan. Alternatively, using the statistical

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notion of expectation to deal with uncertainty, we gave a probability-weighted estimate of 129.2 references. The aim of the first article was to create a condensed and comprehensive summation as a reference point and tool for scholarship.¹ This article discusses the implications of those results.

To begin, certain simple outcomes immediately emerge from the first study. The 137 references identified far exceed what one obtains by simply summing singular occurrences of *σατανᾶς* and *διάβολος* (70). Moreover, these references are spread over the majority of NT documents and exhibit significant literary variety. Perhaps most striking is the sheer richness of language, from proper nouns ('Satan'), to abstract epithets ('accuser') and visual metaphors ('serpent'). The extent and power of this language will be investigated below.

The structure of this article is as follows. Firstly, we use linguistic-statistical tools to identify patterns in literary distribution, focusing especially on the notion of 'topicality'. We conclude that Satan is a consistent feature of NT language *as a whole*.² Secondly, we identify the coherence of this language and argue for a *distinctive* NT 'Satanology' that stands out from the diversity of Second Temple Judaism. Thirdly, we consider the implications of those arguments for historical and hermeneutical approaches to Satan in the NT. To clarify, it is not our intention here to produce an exhaustive account, but rather to sharpen current analytical approaches and sketch out a proposal for a holistic understanding of Satan as a common theme in emergent Christianity.

2. Linguistic-Statistical Analysis

2.1 Topicality

The term 'topicality' is used technically in linguistics and information science. In the former, topicality is 'the general organizing principle of discourse structure', inasmuch as 'the topic associated with a discourse unit is provided by the explicit or implicit question it answers' (van Kuppevelt 1995: 109). In the latter, 'topic' signifies simply 'document contents' (Borlund and Ingwersen 1997: 235), and 'topicality' (synonymous with 'topical relevance') is the relatedness between the

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1. Various studies of Satan in the NT/Bible are in print (e.g., Kelly 1968; Russell 1977, 1981; Böcher 1972; Pagels 1996; Bell 2007; Fröhlich and Koskenniemi 2013), but what is lacking is a comprehensive count of the literary distribution, condensing all possible references to a single, succinct point. This is further to be distinguished from a survey of research, e.g., Brown 2011a.
 2. We thus take up Brown's (2011a: 214) call for further studies of Satan in biblical texts, which move beyond single verses or pericopae and rather 'consider all of the references within given writings and/or authors, or even from a canonical viewpoint'. We disagree with Lochman's (1990: 137) assessment that it would be a mistake to 'catalogue' the devil as an independent theme.

topic of a query (e.g., keyword search in a library catalogue) and the topic of the assessed documents (Cosijn and Ingwersen 2000: 539).

Applying these notions to our subject, how great is the topical relevance of Satan (under any designation) in the NT documents? To what extent is NT discourse organized around Satan? We aim to answer these questions quantitatively using word frequency and distribution. The previous article provided a basic measure of topicality through a reference count (137).³ This is inadequate, however: it is important to assess and compare topicality at the level of authors and books. We will use 'frequency' here for the number of occurrences of a word within a particular document.

It seems a 'simple fact' (Baayen 2001: 2) that the frequency of a particular word/phrase in a text will increase proportional to the size of the text. Accordingly, we might expect the frequency of Satan references in a NT book to be approximately proportional to its length. Generally, it is: the Spearman correlation between Satan frequency and book length (measured by word count in the NA27 Greek text⁴) is 0.75.⁵ However, the matter is not so simple. Linguists classify words and phrases into two broad categories in terms of roles played in texts. Content words or phrases 'name corresponding notions and concepts', whereas function words (prepositions, conjunctions, etc.) 'interconnect them, making text formation possible' (Katz 1996: 17). Obviously, NT designations for Satan are content words/phrases. We will treat all of these designations together since, despite varying connotations, they are referentially equivalent.

The distinction between function and content words/phrases is important to analysis of textual phenomena, because it affects the probability distributions which model their occurrence. The frequency of function words tends to be approximately proportional to document length and can thus be modelled as a Poisson process.⁶ However, Katz has shown that this is generally *not* the case with content words/phrases. Instead, the frequency of a specific content word in a document is 'a function of how much this document is about the concept expressed or named by that word' (Katz 1996: 18).

Katz offered a simple but ingenious system (which he validated experimentally) for classifying the topicality of content phrases: a phrase is classified as 'unrelated' if it does not occur within a document, 'non-topical' if it occurs once,

3. To contextualize, this is about equal to the number of references to the concept of resurrection and occurrences of forms of *εὐαγγέλιον/εὐαγγελίζω* (each about 125).

4. A method for deriving these word counts in Logos Bible Software is described on the web at <http://overviewbible.com/bible-word-counts-logos-word-lists/>

5. *p*-value: 6.2×10^{-6} . This is a correlation coefficient whereby 1 represents perfect association between two variables and 0 represents no relationship.

6. A Poisson process is a sequence of random variables following the Poisson probability distribution, which gives probabilities for frequency of random events in space or time, assuming a fixed average rate commonly denoted λ .

and ‘topical’ if it occurs multiple times. This schema has limitations: a word occurring once may really be topical,⁷ and a non-topical word may occur multiple times by accident. Still, Katz’s system is useful for objectively rating the topicality of Satan within individual NT books.

2.2 Topicality Analysis

The basic data set of Satan language is represented in Figure 1.

We observe that 74% of NT books (20/27) refer to Satan.⁸ While authorship issues lie beyond our scope, we divide the NT into 11 authorial groups: Matthew, Mark, Luke–Acts, Johannine (John, 1–2–3 John), Pauline (Romans, Galatians, 1–2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon), deutero-Pauline (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, Pastoral Epistles), Hebrews, James, Petrine,⁹ Jude and Revelation.¹⁰ Satan is mentioned in *all 11* of these corpora.

Using Katz’s classification system, Satan is ‘unrelated’ in seven books (Galatians, Philippians, Titus, Philemon, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John), ‘non-topical’ in six (Romans, Colossians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter, Jude) and ‘topical’ in fourteen (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, 1–2 Corinthians, Ephesians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Hebrews,¹¹ 1 John, Revelation). Moreover, Satan is probably ‘topical’ within all major known and hypothetical Synoptic sources: Mark,¹² Q,¹³ M¹⁴ and L.¹⁵

7. Even a lone reference to Satan may be rich in traditional content, and presuppose considerable understanding on the part of the reader (e.g., Jas 4.7; 1 Pet. 5.8; Jude 9). Hence, *contra* Allison 2013: 626, that James mentions Satan only once does not indicate this writer’s ‘scant interest’ in Satan.
8. This assumes we are correct that Col. 1.13 implicitly refers to Satan. If not, 70% of NT books (19/27) refer to Satan.
9. Most scholars today doubt the authenticity of 2 Peter and/or 1 Peter, and many ascribe them to different authors. While not minimizing the differences, we justify treating them as a single authorial category on the grounds that ‘2 Peter appears to refer to 1 Peter and to claim that both letters were written to the same readers and with the same purpose (2 Pet. 3.1–2)’ (Hultin 2014: 41). The author of 2 Peter may be reasonably assumed to have read and understood 1 Peter. Significantly, both writings make use of the Enochic Watchers tradition with its mythology of evil (1 Pet. 3.18–22; 2 Pet. 2.4).
10. By ‘authorial category’ we mean a writing or set of writings emanating from a common milieu or tradition (though the deutero-Pauline category is judged to be large and recognizable enough to stand apart from Paul). Defenders of different views (e.g., deutero-Paulines authentic, Petrines unrelated, Revelation attributed to John the Evangelist) may adapt our analysis accordingly.
11. Assuming we correctly identify ‘the destroyer’ in Heb. 11.28 as Satan.
12. Mk 1.13; 3.22–27; 4.4–15; 8.33.
13. Q 4.1–13; 11.14–22. Kloppenborg (2000: 100) classifies both passages as ‘highly probable’ Q texts, except for 11.21–22 which are ‘probable’.
14. Mt. 5.37; 6.13b; 13.25–39; 25.41.
15. Lk. 10.18–19; 13.16; 22.31–32.

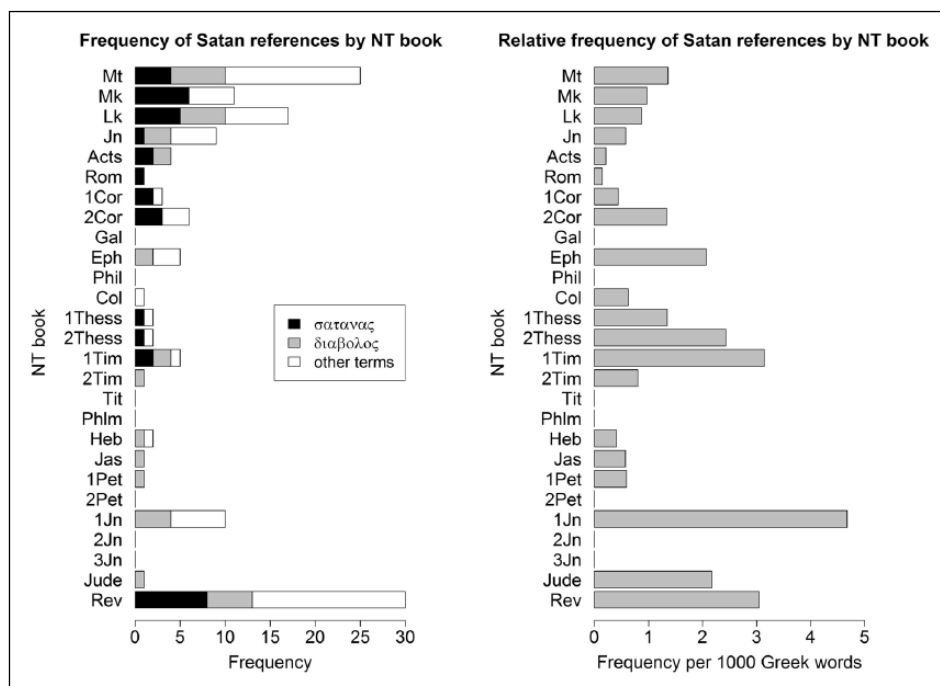


Figure 1. Literary distribution of NT Satan references

What can be said of the seven books ‘unrelated’ to Satan? We should avoid arguing from silence for a marginalization of Satan in the writer’s worldview. In all cases except 2 Peter, such an argument is undercut by other documents from the same authorial category in which Satan is topical. As for 2 Peter, the earlier Petrine letter has a non-topical reference to Satan, while 2 Peter itself presupposes mythological evil (2 Pet. 2.4).¹⁶

Texts in which Satan is absent or non-topical include nine of the ten shortest NT books. Moreover, all such texts have fewer than 2,000 words except for Romans (7,111) and Galatians (2,230). Probably the strongest conclusion we can draw from Satan’s absence in seven books is that this concept was not so central that mentioning it was *obligatory* (contrast Christ, who is ‘topical’ in every NT book except 3 John). However, that Satan is topical in about half the NT books and is mentioned in over 70%, covering the full breadth of NT tradition, suggests broad topicality in early Christian discourse overall.

16. While the writer appears to have removed a reference to Satan found in his source (Jude 9), this more likely reflects reluctance to cite apocryphal traditions or ignorance of this tradition than reluctance to mention Satan (Bauckham 2004/2015: 279; Green 2008: 272).

2.3 Burstiness and Word Count Correlation

Further complicating matters is the notion of within-document burstiness: multiple occurrences of a topical content phrase often occur in rapid succession, i.e. in bursts (Katz 1996: 18).¹⁷ This means that occurrences are not distributed at a constant mean rate throughout the document, and hence the total frequency does not directly depend on document size. Katz argues that the causality works in the *opposite* direction: an author tends to utilize 'a larger document form when there is more to say about a particular content word' (Katz 1996: 19-20). Burstiness certainly occurs with NT Satan references.¹⁸ This tendency thus reveals a conundrum in the NT data. We saw that Satan frequencies in the NT correlate strongly to document length. However, it is unlikely that any NT book (except, possibly, Revelation) was lengthened because the author had more to say about Satan. How then can this correlation be explained?

By our count, the five narrative books (gospels and Acts) contain nearly half (66) of the NT references to Satan. Revelation singlehandedly accounts for over one fifth (30), and the other 41 are distributed among the 21 NT epistles. It might therefore be argued that the narrative books and apocalypse refer to Satan more frequently because of their *genre*, not because these books are longer. The length of a book is related to genre, so the relationship between document length and Satan frequency would be coincidental rather than causal. This explanation has merit, but does not tell the whole story. Satan actually appears *more* often in the epistles than the narrative books in terms of relative frequency (every 1,096 words vs every 1,261). Besides, Satan frequency correlates with document length even *within* the epistles.¹⁹

To reconcile our conundrum with Katz's theory, we must realize that his data set consisted of technical literature covering numerous academic disciplines, whereas the NT is a relatively homogeneous corpus written by a few representatives of a nascent religious movement. We have, therefore, some basis for hypothesizing that Satan is uniformly topical throughout the NT. While allowing for nuances and preferences of individual writers, Satan occurs regularly but 'randomly' throughout. Writers do not mention Satan systematically out of some

17. One statistic proposed by Katz for measuring burstiness is 'topical burstiness', the average number of references to a content word/phrase in documents in which it is topical. In the NT the topical burstiness value for Satan terms is 9.4.

18. A burst is defined in this instance as two or more references to Satan within a single context, where the subsequent references seem to be closely related to the first. Obvious bursts of Satan references occur in Mt. 4.1-11; 12.24-29; 13.4-19; 13.25-39; Mk 3.22-27; Lk. 4.1-13; 10.18-19; 11.15-21; Jn 8.44; Eph. 2.2; 1 Tim. 3.6-7; 5.14-15; 1 Jn 2.13-14; 3.8-12; 5.18-19; Rev. 2.9-10; 2.13; 12.3-13.4; 20.2-10. We also classify the following as bursts: Jn 13.2-27; 2 Cor. 11.3-14; Eph. 6.11-16.

19. Spearman correlation coefficient = 0.56; *p*-value = 0.008.

premeditated desire to emphasize this concept, but make recourse to this aspect of their worldview as their sources and rhetorical purposes dictate.

Indeed, references to Satan in the NT actually behave almost like a Poisson process: they are events occurring ‘randomly’ but with a fixed average rate. It is only the ‘burstiness’ phenomenon which causes the data to deviate from the Poisson distribution. If we eliminate burstiness by considering a burst of references to Satan within a passage as just one reference, a Poisson regression model relating Satan frequency to word count fits the data well.²⁰

This model suggests that, once ‘burstiness’ is eliminated, references to Satan in the NT are approximately Poisson-distributed with average rate proportional to word count. This result supports the hypothesis that Satan was uniformly present in early Christian discourse.

2.4 Designations and Synonyms

Beyond basic topicality and distribution, the linguistic relevance and development of Satan is also evident in the variety of synonyms and functions. In the previous article we found that there are 23 different designations for Satan in the NT.²¹ Apart from God and Christ, there is probably no NT figure with so many titles and aliases.

Every NT authorial category which contains more than 5,000 Greek words uses at least five different designations for Satan.²² This language is rich and varied but ironically reflects a kind of consolidation toward a consistent theme:

20. A Poisson regression model predicts a dependent variable which is assumed to follow the Poisson distribution (in this case Satan frequency, with a burst counted as one occurrence) to one or more independent variables (in this case, word count). The model enables inferences on the relationship between word count and Satan frequency as well as calculation of the expected number of Satan references for a book of a specified length. In this case the estimated model equation is $\log(\hat{\lambda}) = -4.9924 + 0.71201 \log x$ (where $\hat{\lambda}$ is expected Satan reference count and x is word count). The coefficient of the $\log x$ term is statistically significant (p -value = 1.25×10^{-10}), suggesting that number of Satan references is related to book length.
21. For a list of designations besides δ σατανᾶς and δ διάβολος, see previous article, Table 1, together with exegetical results in Table 2.
22. Mark: δ σατανᾶς, βεελζεβούλ, δ ἄρχων τῶν δαιμονίων, δ ἰσχυρός, τά πετεινά τοῦ οὐρανοῦ; Matthew: δ σατανᾶς, δ διάβολος, δ πειράζων, βεελζεβούλ, δ ἄρχων τῶν δαιμονίων, δ ἰσχυρός, τά πετεινά, δ πονηρός, δ ἐχθρός; Luke–Acts: δ σατανᾶς, δ διάβολος, βεελζεβούλ [δ ἄρχων τῶν δαιμονίων], δ ἰσχυρός, τά πετεινά τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, δ ἐχθρός, ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ σκότους; Johannine: δ σατανᾶς, δ διάβολος, δ πονηρός, δ πατήρ [ψεύδων], δ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου [τούτου], δ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ; Pauline: δ σατανᾶς, δ πειράζων, δ ὀλοθρευτής, δ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, βελιάρ, δ ὄφεις; deutero-Pauline: δ σατανᾶς, δ διάβολος, δ πονηρός, δ αἰὼν τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, δ ἄρχων τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ σκότους, δ ἀντικείμενος; Revelation: δ σατανᾶς, δ διάβολος, δ δράκων [μέγας πυρρός], δ ὄφεις [δ ἀρχαῖος], δ κατήγῳρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν; Other: δ διάβολος, δ ἀντίδικος, δ ὀλοθρεύων.

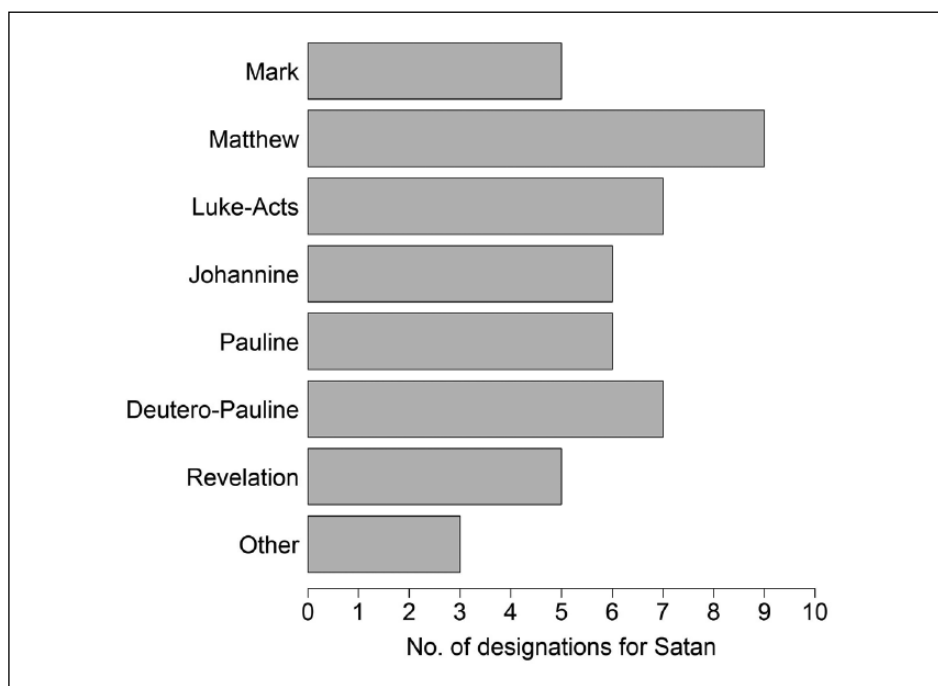


Figure 2. Designations for Satan by NT authorial category

there is a discernible willingness among NT writers to make the terms equivalent. Beelzeboul *is* Satan (Mk 3.22-29). The dragon *is* the serpent, the devil, Satan (Rev. 20.2). In some respects, this linguistic feature sets the NT apart – a point to which we shall return.

3. Romans: An Outlier

The linguistic-statistical analysis suggested Satan's broad topicality across the NT, a significant (though not indispensable) feature of early Christian discourse, distributed 'randomly' throughout the texts, and characterized by rich, developed language. Nevertheless, there is one anomalous book which does not fit this picture well, namely Romans.²³ Our model predicts Romans (7,111 words) to contain 3.8 distinct references to Satan, but there is just one. The expectation of Satan

23. Hebrews could be a lesser outlier if we are wrong about Heb. 11.28 referring to Satan, since there would then be just one Satan reference vs a predicted 2.9. Possibly, the decisiveness of Christ's defeat of the devil on the cross (Heb. 2.14) leads the writer to deemphasize Satan's ongoing significance.

references only increases when we consider the discussion of sin and death, and the emphasis on condemnation: part of Satan's domain elsewhere. Some (e.g., Dunn 1998: 109) argue that Romans represents a 'pinnacle' for Paul's thought and thus includes a humanistic appraisal of values and behaviour, diminishing Satan's role. However, such arguments cause more problems than they solve. For instance, why would Paul emphasize Satan in the Corinthian correspondence and then change his mind? Additionally, the tradition-rich reference to Satan in Rom. 16.20 undermines the notion of this material being consciously eliminated. It may be that the unfamiliar audience for this letter in part explains the limitation of Satan by Paul, who might have avoided emphasizing a concept he had not taught personally. Nevertheless, one can only speculate concerning what motives – if any – Paul had in referring to Satan only once in this lengthy letter.²⁴ It could be merely accidental: our Poisson model estimates a 12% probability of a book this size containing one or no references to Satan. Overall, while this 'outlier' is challenging, contextual understanding of the letter and the recognition that Satan still features in it, together with some allowance for random variation, suggest that Romans can be incorporated into our proposals.

4. A Developing Coherence

Thus far, we have shown the general linguistic topicality of Satan across the NT and considered an apparent exception. Now, we seek to conceptualize this language holistically. Looking at the data, it becomes apparent that the NT reflects the consolidation of strands and themes in emerging Christianity. The earliest texts display consistency and definition on the topic of Satan, implying some standardization in teaching, belief and practice – hence, *NT Satanology*. By 'Satanology' we do not mean a systematic doctrine or self-conscious intellectual production. Rather, we mean a coherent perspective, an amalgamation of threads of tradition that are distinctive in their presence across NT texts and in the context of diffuse teaching within Second Temple Judaism.

4.1 NT Coherence concerning Satan's Functions

It would be difficult to find another body of Jewish texts from the Second Temple period that could check so many boxes, at least without being very selective. Satan is an inconstant and less developed figure in Jewish texts, and there are major corpora from which Satan is absent (e.g., Philo, Josephus and arguably the OT Deutero-Canon/Apocrypha).²⁵ Satan barely features in early rabbinic

24. For suggestions, see Brown 2011b: 116-25 and Löfstedt 2010: 126-28.

25. Sir. 21.27 may refer to Satan but is regarded by some as a polemic against such a concept (Kelly 2006: 75). Wis. 2.24 may refer to Satan (Dunn 1998: 86 n. 26; Dochhorn 2007: 150-51), but some recent studies have suggested otherwise (Kelly 2006: 78; Zurawski 2012).

Table 1. Coherence of NT Functions of Satan

Feature	Matthew	Mark	Luke– Acts	Johannine writings	Pauline epistles	Deutero- Paulines	Other epistles	Revelation
Seduces, deceives, devious	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tempts, tests	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Oppresses, persecutes, destroys			X	X	X		X	X
Rules: the age, evil spirits/ men	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cosmic dualism vs God/Christ	X		X	X	X		X	X
Eschatological defeat	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Accuses humans			X				X	X

literature. Even in collections of texts in which a leading figure of evil features significantly (e.g., the DSS), references are intermittent and inconsistent. The inter-relatedness of terms can be questioned, as there is *not* the overt consolidation of Satan language that one finds in the NT.²⁶ In that sense, NT coherence witnesses to a new departure in its own right, the roots of what would become a distinctly Christian concept.

4.2 NT Coherence and Later Developments

NT coherence helps explain the consistent patristic interest in Satan. The Apostolic Fathers, for example, mention Satan often. Applying Katz's nomenclature, Satan is topical in *Barnabas*, *Hermas*, three Ignatian letters, Polycarp and *Martyrdom of Polycarp*,²⁷ non-topical in three more Ignatian letters as well

26. So Stuckenbruck 2013: 61 on 'chief demonic beings' in the DSS: 'It is not clear how much the different texts allow us to infer that any of the different writers identified a figure designated by one name with a figure identified with another'. Similarly, in rabbinic literature, it is unclear whether the two main Satan-like figures (Satan, Sama'el) are the same or independent characters (see Reeg 2013: 81-82).

27. *Barn.* 2.1, 10; 4.10, 13; 15.5; 18.1, 2; 20.1; 21.3; *Hermas*, *Man.* 4.3.4; 4.3.6; 5.1.3; 6.2.1-10; 7.2-3; 9.9-11; 11.3; 11.17; 12.2.2; 12.4.6-7; 12.5.1-4; 12.6.1-4; *Hermas*, *Sim.* 1.3-6; 8.3.6; 9.31.2; Ignatius, *Eph.* 10.3; 17.1; 19.1; Ignatius, *Tral.* 4.2; 8.1; Ignatius, *Rom.* 5.3; 7.1; Polycarp, *Phil.* 7.1; *Mart. Pol.* 3.1; 17.1.

as *1 Clement* and *2 Clement*,²⁸ and unrelated in one Ignatian letter (*Letter to Polycarp*). Topicality in the *Didache*, Papias and *Diognetus*²⁹ is debatable.³⁰ *Ascension of Isaiah* reflects a strong Christian interest in Satan during the same period.³¹ This trajectory suggests that NT language sets the tone for what was to become mainstream Christian tradition.

Accepting this characterization of ‘NT Satanology’ also helps us to make sense of a widely recognized phenomenon in later literature: the important role played by Satan in mediaeval Christian culture (in stark contrast to mediaeval Judaism).³² Later generations of Christians did not invent the idea of Satan; they found it in their sources. We are thus able to see these developments as forming an important episode in the history of ideas. When the language is broken down, what Kovacs (1995: 234) writes of John rings true for the whole NT: “‘the devil’ is not a mere figure of speech, or a “faded mythological conception.” Satan is an effective power who is active on the stage of human history’. Acknowledging further that the NT Satan is not a lone wolf, but leads a pack of demons and angels, as well as wicked humans, we see that he sits in a web of language and ideas about cosmic evil. This language proved to be highly influential.

5. Implications for History of Religions

Recent years have seen something of a flurry in history of religions studies on the topic of Satan.³³ These have generally been characterized by analytical approaches which pay attention to the specific themes and nuances of individual texts. While such research has crucial value, we propose here a synthesis of the whole NT.³⁴ If the arguments above are accepted – that Satan is broadly topical and coherent across NT literature – what are the implications for our understanding of the ‘history of Satan’?

28. Ignatius: *Mag.* 1.2; *Phld.* 6.2; *Smyrn.* 9.1. *1 Clem.* 51.1; *2 Clem.* 18.2.

29. *Did.* 8.2; 16.4; Papias fragments 13, 23 (Holmes 2007); *Diogn.* 12.3–8.

30. We leave exegesis of Satan references in the Apostolic Fathers for another occasion. The standard work is still Gokey 1961.

31. Going by Knibb’s (1983/2011) translation, Satan is mentioned about 30 times throughout using various terms: Satan, Beliar, prince/ruler/king/god of this/that world, adversary, Sammael, Matanbukus, and angel of iniquity. Note Bauckham’s (1993/2000: 121) assertion: ‘There are few indications that *Ascension of Isaiah* is dependent on any New Testament writings’.

32. See, with references to a selection of other works, Russell 1981: 29.

33. See, e.g., the various essays gathered in Fröhlich and Koskeniemi 2013, and the new historical studies on Satan and evil in Dochorn, Rudnig-Zelt and Wold 2016.

34. This is offered to an extent in the broad and brief overviews of Jewish and Christian Satan concepts provided by Schreiber 2007 and Theißen 2011. We depart from those studies in arguing for a distinctive coherence in emergent Christian Satan language.

Arguably, that question is insufficiently precise and is matched by some generalized treatments of a complex topic. For example, there is a body of work (not confined to biblical studies) that seeks to write the biography of Satan, from ancient ideas about evil, to mediaeval folklore and beyond.³⁵ Such works are helpful for understanding the lasting impacts on historical cultures. However, they implicitly offer a linear, homogenized sense of progression (from Persia, to Judaism, to Christianity).³⁶

There are a number of problems with that model for understanding Satan. Firstly, there is genuine uncertainty over the origins and causes of the idea in Judaism. There was undoubted development of Satan concepts during the Second Temple period, from their minimal presence in later OT books. However, that this development was a product of Persian dualism has recently been challenged.³⁷ Thus, the progression of Jewish views is disputed. Secondly, it is dubious to say that there was a 'Jewish Satanology'. As explained above, the patterns found across a majority of NT texts do not reflect a standard Jewish doctrine.³⁸ In that sense, the example of Satan may lend some weight to the pluralist ('Judaisms') view of the Second Temple period as an age of religious diversity.³⁹

The real historical problem is therefore not where Satan came from, but how the peculiar emphases of the NT emerged from a marketplace of concepts. We might ask whether the relatively consistent 'Satanology' identified in this study set Christianity apart as an incipient movement. Perhaps, ideas that seemed distinctive in the context of Judaism became crystallized in what became normative Christianity.⁴⁰ We cannot attempt any detailed response to that problem here. However, we shall briefly set out some of the sub-problems that might contribute to a historical understanding of NT Satanology.

35. E.g., Carus 1900; Forsyth 1987; Stanford 1996; Kelly 2006; Almond 2014.

36. This linearity is also assumed in some standard NT works, e.g., Boring and Craddock 2009: 127.

37. Hultgren (2007: 320), for instance, argues for the complexity of the origins of Qumran dualism, describing as 'inadequate' the older view that its development was unilinear or that it derived from a single source such as Zoroastrianism. See the different arguments from Davies (2010) and Heger (2010).

38. *Contra* Noack: 'Das N.T. übernimmt im grossen und ganzen die jüdische Dämonologie' (1948: 49). For the diversity of Satan in the Second Temple period, see Williams 2009: 87-92. Perhaps the Sadducees had no concept of Satan at all (Acts 23.8). Satan is absent from large swathes of Second Temple literature (see above). This contrasts with some, but not all (e.g., 4 *Ezra*), apocalyptic works.

39. As argued for, perhaps most exhaustively, by Anderson. In historiography, the era is 'victim of strongly confessional overgeneralizations' (2002: 1).

40. At a relatively early stage, Christian Satanology became a kind of identity marker in relation to outsiders. Note the comments of Celsus (second century), that the Christians made an error in 'creating an adversary to God' (*Or. Cels.* 6.42).

Firstly, to what extent did the historical Jesus initiate early Christian Satanology? Obviously, this question is subject to the extensively debated problems of reconstructing the historical Jesus in general. Nevertheless, that Satan is topical in all four gospels (including all major known or hypothesized Synoptic sources), Paul's letters, and so forth, leads one to consider how far back the chain goes. A link to Jesus himself arguably has considerable explanatory power in accounting for a coherent Christian Satanology. So, it might be that some sayings concerning Satan could be judged as 'authentic'.⁴¹ Furthermore, it is at least possible that the wilderness temptation narratives in Mark and Q originate from some experience reported by Jesus to his disciples.⁴² Or, if we are unsure of ascertaining the 'historical' words and deeds of Jesus, we might consider whether Satan features in the earliest discernible 'collective memory' of his teaching.⁴³ One avenue of current scholarship that implicitly engages with this question is the attempt to set Jesus in the religious-historical context of miracle workers and exorcists.⁴⁴ His work against Satan in this field might explain why his followers preserved such language in the oral tradition and, eventually, the earliest texts.

Secondly, were the first Christians influenced by specific and identifiable Jewish traditions? Evidence for such influence may occur to some extent in suggestive parallels, such as in Jude 9⁴⁵ or 2 Cor. 6.15.⁴⁶ The issue is also addressed in part by attempts to define a relationship between Qumran and Johannine

41. E.g., one might consider the Beelzeboul controversy, note that it is in the triple synoptic tradition, assign it to Q (11.15, 19), and reason that it is linked to primitive oral tradition (Robinson, Hoffmann and Kloppenborg 2000: 222-33). This episode features in Crossan's reconstructed 'Gospel of Jesus' (1991: xix). Moreover, Lk. 10.18 'has usually been regarded as an authentic saying of the historical Jesus' (Gathercole 2003: 143).

42. So Allison 1999: 213. Borg notes that 'the *sequence* of initiation into the world of Spirit (the baptism) followed by a testing or ordeal in the wilderness is strikingly similar to what is reported of charismatic figures cross-culturally' (2005: 306).

43. Some see collective memory as an alternative reconstruction, after the 'demise' of authenticity criteria hailed in Keith and Le Donne (2012). A clear proponent of this approach is Allison. Note his comments specifically about Satan: 'The pertinent material is sufficiently abundant that removing it all should leave one thoroughly sceptical about the mnemonic competence of the tradition' (2010: 47). For a different perspective on memory and the sayings of Jesus, see Kloppenborg 2012.

44. E.g., Twelftree 1993; Witmer 2012.

45. The most detailed treatment of the source of Jude's allusion is Bauckham 2004/2015: 235-80. He holds that Jude depended on the ending of *Testament of Moses*, a work extant in one incomplete manuscript, which he distinguishes from the *Assumption of Moses* which Alexandrian fathers (Clement, *Adumbr.* Jude 9; Origen, *Princ.* 3.2.1) state to be Jude's source. Jude quotes *1 Enoch* in Jude 14-16, suggesting broader engagement with apocalyptic. Jude 9 depends indirectly on Zech. 3.1-2.

46. Beliar is the standard term for the devil in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Williams 2009: 92 n. 20, 149). Cf. *T. Job* 3.3. See our earlier article, section 4.2.

dualism.⁴⁷ However, it might be possible to go beyond isolated cases and look for wider trends. Tentatively, the semantic range and implicit concepts of NT Satanology suggest links to legendary and midrashic traditions of expanded scripture.⁴⁸ It is even possible that earliest Christianity possessed a primeval Satan myth which has not survived,⁴⁹ and an eschatological Satan myth preserved in *Asc. Isa.* 4.⁵⁰ However, the NT also reveals considerable Christian innovation concerning Satan's theological significance⁵¹ and perhaps also the conscious abandonment of certain existing Jewish ideas.⁵²

Thirdly, was there a ritual context for early Christian Satanology? One possible example is 'handing over to Satan' (1 Cor. 5.5; 1 Tim. 1.20). This is equivalent to expulsion from the community and understood as an *action*,⁵³ rather than a metaphor for a state of affairs. It closely parallels expulsion of apostates by the Qumran community.⁵⁴ Satan in this case arguably stands for the ritually impure space outside the community: 'the evil age'. Another example could be the use of the Lord's Prayer, understood as including an apotropaic petition for deliver-

47. A discussion explored in depth in Charlesworth 1972. Although his thesis about the link between Persian dualism and Qumran is now questioned (see above), the link between Qumran and Johannine dualism is still widely acknowledged (Lieu 1991: 83; Stuckenbruck 2011).

48. There are contested cases for this trend also, e.g., in the implicit 'Satan in Paradise' myth (i.e. = the serpent in Gen. 3.15) in Rom. 16.20 (cf. Ps. 91.13; *T. Sim.* 6.5-6; *T. Levi* 18.12) and 2 Cor. 11.3-14 (cf. *Apoc. Mos.* 17.1; 29.15; *LAE* 9.1). This also emerges in rabbinic Judaism (e.g., *PRE* 25A.i) and some Fathers (*Diogn.* 12.3-8?; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.30.7). See Williams 2009: 93-95. Another case of 'expanded Scripture' in NT Satanology could be the 'war in heaven' myth, derived from an interpretation of Isa. 14.12 as the fall of Satan (Lucifer), implicit in Rev. 12.7-12 (cf. Lk. 10.18). This can be compared with the unsuccessful angelic rebellion led by Satanael, who is also 'thrown down' in 2 *En.* 29.

49. Such material might possibly have been in the expanded Creation account which prefaced Papias's work, as recently argued by Bauckham (2014: 474). One or possibly two extant fragments of Papias's work describe an angelic apostasy, which later students of Papias (if not Papias himself) linked to Lk. 10.18 and Rev. 12.7-9. See Fragments 13 and 23 of Papias as discussed in Shanks (2013: 229-30, 248-49).

50. Knight (2015: 154-55) notes the dominant view that *Asc. Isa.* 6-11 was written in the late first century CE with chs. 1-5 added in the early second century.

51. Note especially the prevalence of texts linking Satan to the cross-event and Christ's soteriological work (Lk. 22.3, 53; Jn 12.31; 13.2, 27; 14.30; Heb. 2.14; 1 Jn 3.8; Rev. 12.10-11).

52. In rabbinic literature, 'Accuser' is Satan's most pervasive role, 'common to all classical rabbinic sources' (Reeg 2013: 73). Prosecution seems to be the role of שטן in Job 1-2 and Zech. 3 (Petersen 1984: 186-87; Fokkelman 2012: 37; but cf. Stokes 2014). By contrast, NT writers refer to this role rarely, and then usually to undermine it (Rev. 12.10; Lk. 22.31-32; Jude 9; possibly 1 Tim. 3.6).

53. I.e. when the Corinthians are *gathered* (1 Cor. 5.4) they are to *hand over* the offender (παραδοῦναι τὸν τοιοῦτον τῷ Σατανᾷ, 5.5), linking community assembly to the verb. By contrast, 1 Timothy implies that the action is performed by Paul, perhaps reflecting a later concern for apostolic authority.

54. Delivery 'to the hand of Belial'. See Yarbrow Collins 1980.

ance from the Evil One, Satan.⁵⁵ Such examples suggest, perhaps, that early Christian beliefs were shaped in part through concerns to separate and protect from evil spiritual influences.

Finally, what is the sociological context for Satanology and the community? This unites certain strands of the previous questions: the role of exorcism in Judaeon society, the dynamic of Christian groups emerging with Gentile and Jewish cultural identities and the function of ritual separation from an external threat of Satan. The wider question about the role of social psychology in explaining beliefs about evil and demonology is still relevant to our own times.⁵⁶ As for identifying a mentality in the earliest Christian communities, we might tentatively suggest that feelings of isolation and alienation could have sharpened some of the dualistic rhetoric we have found in our language study. There may also be some aspects of the early Christian Satan that functioned for ‘making sense’: of events, reality and relationships. This could be seen in a kind of everyday theodicy used by Paul on occasion,⁵⁷ or in the parable of the sower’s explanation for unbelief. The idea of Satan is thus socially defining, for what lies outside of or is opposed to the body of Christ.

To summarize, then, it is necessary to put early Christian Satanology into some historical context that is not understood in a simple, linear way. The wealth and distribution of NT language about Satan stands out among the varied approaches of Second Temple Judaism. How did the specific emphases of the NT emerge? We have made four tentative suggestions: (a) considering the impetus given by the career of Jesus himself, especially as an exorcist; (b) seeing the early Christians as engaged in wider Jewish traditions of expanded scripture; (c) identifying ritual practices for protection from evil; and (d) linking Satan to the social definition of inside/outside groups. By developing the sub-problems identified, it may be possible to produce a detailed and nuanced understanding of early Christian Satanology.

6. Implications for Hermeneutics

There are diverse contemporary reading strategies that seek to engage with the NT Satan from particular intellectual, cultural and political perspectives. We now consider how the results of this study might impact upon such hermeneutical trends.

55. It was argued in the previous article that the Lord’s Prayer liturgical tradition probably influenced Matthew’s designation of Satan as ‘the evil one’. Liturgy may have influenced other NT usage of this term as well (Jn 17.15; Eph. 6.11-18; 2 Thess. 3.3; 1 Jn 5.18).

56. See, for example, Beeman’s (2008) study of ‘demonization of the other’ between the US and Iran.

57. Why did Paul fail in Thessalonica? Because of Satan (1 Thess. 2.18). Why do false apostles oppose Paul? Because of Satan (2 Cor. 11.14). Why is there sexual sin? Because of Satan (1 Cor. 7.5). See Williams 2009: 314.

6.1 Demythologization

The traditional, 'mythical' Satan has become something of an embarrassment in post-Enlightenment Western Christianity. The unfashionable nature of this idea is evident in recent controversies in the Church of England.⁵⁸ Demythologization is designed to assist the modern reader – assumed to have a non-mythological worldview – in interpreting the Bible's mythical language. Satan is an obvious target for this approach, which aims to find the core 'message' hidden within the mythical mode of presentation. This has two possible angles: (a) a hermeneutic which the reader applies to the NT or (b) a hermeneutic which NT writers apply to religious traditions. Bultmann saw some evidence for (b)⁵⁹ but not in the case of Satan (1941/1989: 1). Here, he was chiefly concerned with (a), namely with interpreting this dualistic mythology existentially (1941/1989: 15).

However, other scholars view Satan through (b), asserting that the NT writers themselves reduce the mythology of apocalyptic Judaism and anticipate modern theology by trying to see beyond the supernatural.⁶⁰ Demythologization can be motivated by an ethical concern that attributing evil to Satan 'obscures' or 'suspends' moral thinking,⁶¹ or an apologetic concern to avoid a less-than-orthodox interest in the power of evil.⁶²

Whether 'looking beyond' Satan is seen as meritorious depends on one's worldview. However, the latter approach of imputing demythologization to the NT itself seems to conflict with the linguistic data. The NT writers do *not* minimise Satan language relative to their Jewish contemporaries; if anything, they intensify it! Bultmann's suggestion that demythologization is chiefly something the modern reader brings *to* a text seems more convincing.

6.2 African Readings

Contrasting with demythologization is the recent expansion of African hermeneutics in biblical scholarship, including a specific focus on supernatural powers.⁶³ A central argument seems to be emerging, that readers from an African perspective are equipped to appreciate the power of early Christian spirit beliefs, because there are analogues in the spirit beliefs of their own cultures. Unlike

58. E.g., the exorcism debate in the 1970s (see the 'Open Letter' cited in Bell 2007: 320 n. 2), and more recently the debate over the renunciation of the devil in the baptismal rite (Gledhill 2015).

59. Bultmann 1941/1989: 11. Specifically, he refers to the embodiment of NT eschatology in the historical person of Jesus as implicit demythologization (1941/1989: 32-33).

60. E.g., Kelly 1968; Phipps 2008.

61. E.g., Lochman 1990: 138; Wanamaker 1990: 122-23.

62. E.g., Boring 1989: 42, 165-66.

63. E.g., Gatumu 2008; Ezigbo 2010: 215-49; Moses 2012: 301-26; Michael 2013: 92-100.

Westerners, many Africans do not share a post-Enlightenment scientific worldview. Thus, the threat of evil spirits is taken seriously. Accordingly, the Bible is read with a kind of naive realism which avoids the anachronism of reading naturalistic presuppositions into the text, and arguably corresponds more closely to the authorial intent.

It should be emphasized that this is a powerful influence on life and ritual, not just a reading strategy. Some African interpreters are concerned to use their reading of the Bible to identify, challenge and influence the spirit beliefs passed on through African traditional religions.⁶⁴ A common theme, for example, is Christ's total supremacy and sufficiency for protection from evil spirits. In this sense, 'Satan' language in the NT is read as the counterpart to the numerous indigenous names for evil powers and becomes an important part of intercultural exchange.

In part, such readings fit with the broad topicality of Satan in the NT as revealed in this study. The coherence of Satanology also corresponds to some extent with the intent of some interpreters to unify African beliefs about evil. Nevertheless, caution is needed. Early Christian Satanology seems to have emerged from a wider Jewish tradition of prophecy, eschatology, scripture and mythologies of cosmic conflict. There is an experiential aspect to it, but it is also part of narrative, teaching and literary production. African traditional beliefs do not correspond exactly with NT cosmology and cannot be conflated with it.⁶⁵

6.3 *Liberation Readings*

Satan catches the interest of liberation theologians inasmuch as he can be construed as embodying social injustice. The most prolific interpreter of the NT Satan from a liberation perspective was Walter Wink (1984, 1986, 1992). He identifies the spiritual dimension to power with the driving force that animates visible institutions such as governments, cultures and economies (Wink 1984: 5). Thus, Satan links to the system of social domination: the authorities, Rome and economic exploitation. This liberation approach thus tends to emphasize the 'constructed reality' of evil figures,⁶⁶ rather than independent 'supernatural' power. Wink does not exactly demythologize; he sees social pressures as possessing their own form of existence.

Liberation hermeneutics can be seen at work on Satan, particularly in Revelation and Mark, where liberation from Satan arguably entails liberation

64. 'Christology should also engage constructively with Jesus' attitudes toward Satan and demons and the import of his attitudes and conversation with these spirit beings for interacting with and critiquing the African Christians' perceptions of such spirit beings' (Ezigbo 2010: 215).

65. See especially Michael 2013: 95 in this respect, who warns that, under traditional African beliefs, spirit beings are often capricious and found within a polytheistic framework.

66. Wink calls this 'real, yet unsubstantial' (1984: 4).

from systematic domination. In Revelation, the dualistic dimension to the plight of believers demonstrates the potential for reading in light of the dehumanizing, 'diabolical' aspect of social systems.⁶⁷ The lurid imagery of supernatural evil here is often viewed as having a social counterpart in the Roman state.⁶⁸ Similarly, Mark's gospel sharply contrasts Jesus with his opponents, the authorities and the Jerusalem elite, who tempt him just as Satan did.⁶⁹ Jesus in Mark can be understood as a protest figure, a challenger to established power and a prophet of reversal. He uses the language of supernatural evil to characterize political domination ('legion', 5.9).⁷⁰

What should we make of such readings? On one level, they make a good fit with the language of NT Satanology, weaving it into the message of the NT without dismissing or marginalizing it. Nevertheless, the explanatory power of liberation hermeneutics has limits. Certain ideas seem to be more mechanical (Lk. 22.3; 1 Thess. 2.18) or overtly mythological (2 Cor. 11.14; Jude 9). Satan seems to be the agent for *anything* malevolent, including, but not limited to, social domination.

6.4 Hermeneutical Prospects

Whatever approach is taken, making sense of NT Satanology will present challenges. Any hermeneutic will necessarily have strong points and blind spots, as the focus of the reader is drawn to certain emphases. Liberation readings have strength in underlining the social implication of Satan language. African readings have strength in explaining the real experiences of those who hold sincere beliefs in the spirit world. Demythologization has strength in critical reading and challenging the surface meaning of texts. Nevertheless, all approaches can marginalize or distort evidence which clashes with the agenda. In light of the linguistic analysis presented here, it seems that certain parameters can be given to future hermeneutical projects focused on Satan.

Firstly, any interpretation will have to reckon with the breadth of function and language ascribed to the NT Satan and resist reductionist explanations – for example, that Satan is *only* a social analogue, a symbol, a ritual problem. Secondly, interpreters must take seriously the narrative and tradition history of Satan material. It is not an accident of history or an alien feature of NT writings.

67. See Rowland and Corner 1989: 135. They also warn of the danger of demonizing one's opponents and losing sight of one's own vulnerability to evil influence (1989: 137).

68. So, e.g., Harrington 2008: 10-11; Labahn 2013: 161.

69. Mk 1.13; cf. 12.15. Rowland and Corner (1989: 103) note that the verb (πειράζω) is used in both cases.

70. Clearly, these demons are named after a unit of Roman soldiers. Myers (1988: 191) identifies the link to Josephus, *War* 4.9.1, which mentions an attack on Gerasa by the Romans. There is an implied link between political oppression, violence and demonic/Satanic power.

The material comes out of Jewish tradition and develops into something distinctly Christian. For good or for ill, Satan is part of Christianity's cultural and intellectual legacy to the world. Thirdly, interpretation must acknowledge that Satan features in early Christian cosmology and was thus part of how the world was thought to work. Whether we seek to focus on it, de-emphasize it or (as Bultmann suggested) go 'beyond' it, that way of constructing reality remains a legitimate and important area of study. Finally, interpreters of the NT should recognize how Satanology, like all beliefs, formed within a social context. It is therefore illuminated by sociological research on early Christian communities.

7. Conclusion – Progress and Prospects

This two-part study began with a count of NT references to Satan and proceeded to offer a linguistic-statistical analysis of this data. The results are simple and clear: Satan is broadly topical across the NT (featuring in all 11 authorial categories) and quite evenly distributed across works in proportion to word count. The absolute number of instances (137) is high enough to rival other important terms. The diversity of language is impressive both within and across strands of tradition. Satan appears frequently but haphazardly in the NT. His importance in early Christian discourse is undeniable, though by no means comparable to that of God or Christ. No NT book is *about* Satan, but Satan features in the supporting cast of the soteriological drama.

Analysing the language by type and function also yields a major conclusion for this study: that NT Satanology manifests a developing coherence in early Christian perspectives on the matter. Given the diversity of Jewish perspectives at the time, including significant literary corpora which ignore Satan altogether, the uniformity of NT discourse is striking. The cosmic remit implicitly given to Satan is also broader than the limited accusatory/seductive role that endures in rabbinic Judaism, for example. It is the making of this cross-textual – even canonical – claim which sets this current study apart and, perhaps, goes some way to explaining the strong interest that patristic writers took in this figure.

This result, in turn, enables us to sharpen our historical questions. We can move beyond the assumption that the NT thoughtlessly passes on a 'standard' Jewish doctrine. Given that Satan is an inconsistent theme across Second Temple texts, that assumption seems historically unjustified. Instead, the NT intensifies and consolidates material that was disparate in its Jewish context. The historical problem thus becomes one of identifying how the peculiar emphases of the NT emerged from Judaism, how coherence emerged from a diverse linguistic setting. Various avenues of research could help to answer those questions: historical Jesus studies, tradition history, ritual studies and social context analysis.

We then, finally, can comprehend how this might affect NT hermeneutics. Some current approaches display distinct strengths and weaknesses, trying to

communicate a valuable message from NT Satanology to today's reader. That message could be concerned with the human condition, political perspectives or the response to culture-specific experiences. Our study may now set parameters for future reading strategies, setting out the need to reckon with the scope, development, impact and context of Satan beliefs.

The aim of this study was to create a resource and starting-point for future Satan studies, creating a comprehensive list and count that could enable linguistic statistical analysis, and then showing what the analysis basically yields. Our hope is that the summation of references and data set will prove useful, even where our analysis is disputed. Our argument is that taking a view on the *whole* NT language of Satan is important because it allows us to see the distribution across what are the earliest Christian writings,⁷¹ so that we can talk about general trends in the emerging movement. While it still remains vitally important to see the nuances of Satan concepts in different NT writers, our hope is that this study shows that there is a meaningful development witnessed in these texts: the emergence of a 'Satanology' that proved to be a distinctive development in the history of ideas.

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71. Acknowledging that some non-canonical works (e.g., *Didache*, *Gospel of Thomas*) could be earlier than some NT works.

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