

## 8 Satan's original sin: felling Adam

### 8.1 THE EARLY POST-BIBLICAL EXPLANATION: SATAN FELL BECAUSE OF ADAM, ADAM FELL BECAUSE OF SATAN

So far, by examining the Old and New Testaments and the "Inter-Testamental" writings, we have found no speculation as to where Satan came from or how he obtained his position as tester and accuser of Humankind. For the most part, we can mark this silence down to the fact that all Angels and Heavenly Ministers in the Bible come from nowhere. They just appear.

In the Book of Job, for instance, we are simply told that Sons of God presented themselves before Yahweh, and "the satan" was among them, presumably also a Son of God. What is their background – when and why were they created? And how did it happen that one of them functioned as an inspector and opponent of Human Beings? We are not told, and there seems to have been no curiosity about the matter.

In the Gospel of John, when Jesus says that DEVIL was a liar and murderer from the beginning, he was speaking about some sort of complicity in Cain's murder of his brother Abel. The connection of Satan with the disobedience of Eve and Adam had not yet been made, or at least had not yet surfaced, in any of the writings that have survived from the time.

Let us then turn to the earliest Church Fathers,<sup>1</sup> to see how they began to piece together a "scenario," a "life-story" of the

<sup>1</sup> The works of Justin Martyr are translated in ANF vol. 1; for Theophilus, Tatian, and Athenagoras, see vol. 2; for Tertullian, vol. 3; and for Cyprian, vol. 5. For data on the Church Fathers, see Berthold Altaner, *Patrology*, tr. Hilda C. Graef (New York: Herder, 1964). For their ideas on Satan, see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

Devil.<sup>2</sup> We will first deal with Justin Martyr, the most important and influential of the "Apologists" or Defenders of the Christian religion in the second century. He was born around AD 100 of Pagan parents in Neapolis (present-day Nablus) in Samaria, and trained in philosophy. He converted to Christianity around 130 and was martyred in 165 or thereabouts.

From what I can ascertain, Justin was the first person to postulate Satan's responsibility for inducing the fall of Adam and Eve, but he does so casually, without explaining his reasoning. He simply identifies Satan with the Serpent. He says that Satan-the-Serpent tempted Adam and Eve, not through some obligation to test Mankind, but for an unspecified sinful reason, and he was cursed for it (*Dialogue with Trypho*, chs. 45, 79). The fall that the Devil suffered at that time is recorded in Psalm 82. In that Psalm (as we saw in **chap. 5.2**), God threatens the [other] Gods, whom He identifies as Sons of the Most High [His own Sons, presumably], and says that, because they have neglected the widows and orphans and other Humans under their care, they will die like Men and fall like one of the Archons. So Justin concludes that Satan-the-Serpent actually did take such a fall after deceiving Adam and Eve (*Trypho*, ch. 124). No matter that this would mean that God uttered this threat well before there were any widows and orphans to mistreat.

There is more. Justin believes that Satan will fall again, after being defeated by Christ, and that this ultimate fall was predicted by Isaiah 27.1. This is the verse about the twisting Serpent-Dragon who will be slain by God's sword, which we studied above (**chap. 6.2**).

<sup>2</sup> Usage note: I shall now begin to speak of "the Devil," rather than "Devil." We cannot tell precisely when writers shifted from thinking of *ho Diabolos* in Greek and *Diabolus* in Latin as "proper titles" rather than "proper names" (like "Satan"). In Latin we don't even have a definite article to guide us. But we do know that eventually this change, from name to "supertitle," did occur, and I shall make a clean break and assume that everyone did it right away.

Another usage note: I shall continue to capitalize all pronouns referring to God, but from now on I shall also capitalize pronouns referring to Jesus.

But the catastrophe that awaited him did not become clear to him until he heard the discourses of Christ and His Apostles (cf. *Trypho*, chs. 91, 112).

A later writer – John, Patriarch of Antioch – reports Justin as saying that the fall of the King of Babylon as Lucifer in Isaiah 14 was also an allegory of Satan's future fall. Justin said (according to John), "Isaiah, fashioning a tragedy [*ektragodon*], revealed the whole dramatic working-out [*dramatourgia*] prepared for the Devil under the mask [*prosopon*] of the Assyrian" (PG 6:1592–93).

According to Justin's *Second Apology*, the other wicked Angels who will share in Satan's fate are the Angels who sinned with women before the Flood, who, far from being locked away from doing further mischief, are none other than the troublesome Principalities and Powers of the Deutero-Pauline Epistles and – believe it or not – they are also the Gods of the Pagans. AND! They are also the grubby little parasitic possessing Demons of the Gospels (2 *Apol.*, chs. 5–6)!

Wow! It's all coming together, isn't it? It's amazing to think that so many disparate traditions could be united into one "system" so soon in the Christian tradition. This achievement – if we can call it that – on the part of Justin can be chalked up in large part to his habit as a philosopher of finding patterns and seeing order in the Cosmos and its contents. Admittedly, he had to sacrifice some facts to accomplish it. But, no worries. What mattered most was that it all worked out in the end. Anyway, no one would notice! (Too true, I'm afraid.)

Other Greek Apologists, notably Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch later on in the second century, and Justin's student Tatian, shared Justin's belief that Satan first went astray in misleading Adam and Eve, and so did the slightly later North African Latin Christian Tertullian, as we shall soon see.

It actually made a lot of sense to see Satan as at least supervising the test of Adam and Eve, whether or not he was perceived as doing

anything wrong in so acting. It did, after all, fit in with his original job – that is, what could be readily perceived as his official function, on the basis of his appearances in Job and Zechariah.

Probably the only reason that the connection between Satan and the first Humans wasn't made earlier is that the original story already provided a villainous tester, namely the Serpent, who is identified in the text of Genesis as "the most subtle of all the animals that Yahweh-Elohim had created" (Gen. 3.1). If the Serpent is just a very clever and nasty animal, how can he also be a clever and nasty Angel? To Justin, no problem. He just overlooked the fact that Genesis says that he was a created animal.

Finally, let me point out that Justin seems to have believed that sinful Angels as well as sinful men can repent, but that God has foreknowledge that some of them will remain unchangeably wicked. Hence, the word of God predicts certain punishment for some Angels and men (*Trypho*, ch. 141). Justin undoubtedly considered Satan to be in the number of the unrepentant Angels.

Another early Christian champion who found Satan's "original sin" in his deception of Adam and Eve was Tertullian of Carthage (ca. 160–ca. 225), but he gives a fuller history for Satan.

According to Tertullian, the Devil was placed in "a mountain Paradise" (see Ezekiel 28.11–16), which he takes as an allegory of Heaven. Tertullian also takes the creation of the animals in Genesis to be an allegory of the creation of the Angels. The Devil was an Archangel, the most exalted and wisest of the Angels (perhaps Tertullian is thinking of the description of the Serpent as "the craftiest of all of the animals of the Earth that the Lord had made," Gen. 3.1). He was adorned with Angelic glory until he began to sin, and his sinning consisted of injuring Man, who was cast out (*ejectus*) from God's allegiance (*obsequium*). The Lord testified that Satan fell from the heights of Heaven, being cast out (*dejectus*) like Lightning, *Fulgur*, referring of course to the words of Jesus in Luke 10.18 (Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2.10).

Tertullian does not speculate on Satan's motivation. He interprets *diabolus* as *delator*, "informer," but he does not discuss any informing activity on his part. After telling of the fall that he suffered for injuring Man, Tertullian does say that his full punishment will be put off until he is more bitterly punished by him whom he had previously injured (namely Man).

Later in the same treatise against Marcion, Tertullian attributes to Satan the words given to the King of Babylon in Isaiah 14.13–14: "I will set my throne above the stars . . . I will go up above the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (Tert., *Marcion* 5.17). So Tertullian in effect identifies Satan with Lucifer! Yes, but only after Satan suffered his first fall from Heaven, and then set up headquarters closer to Earth, taking over the Air or Atmosphere (for his presence in the Air he is drawing on Ephesians 2.2; see chap. 5.2 above).

The boastful words that Isaiah attributes to the King of Babylon are spoken *before* his coming fall like *Lucifer*, the Morning Star. The same has to be true in Tertullian's scheme. Satan has already fallen like *Fulgur* in partial punishment for injuring Adam, and he will fall again, this time like *Lucifer*, after his defeat by Christ.

St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (d. 258), who was very familiar with the works of Tertullian, attributes the boasting words of the King of Babylon not to Satan in the past but to "the Spirit of [the?] Antichrist" in the future. He says that the Lord planted a rebuke of Antichrist in Scripture, when the Prophet says, "For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into Heaven, I will place my throne about the stars of God; I will sit on a lofty mountain, above the lofty mountains to the north; I will ascend above the clouds; I will be like the Most High" (Cyprian, *Epistle* 54.3).

So it seems that Cyprian is thinking that there will be only one Antichrist – unlike the multiple anti-Christ of Prester John, who invented the term (see chap. 6.3 above). Antichrist will make a big fellow of himself, but he is in for a fall. Cyprian adds that God told Antichrist long ago, in the very next verse of Isaiah's prophecy,

that things would turn out much differently from his boasting expectations: "Rather, you shall descend into Hell, to the foundations of the Earth, and those who see you will marvel at you" (Isa. 14.15). In this application of Isaiah's prophecy, the immediate-past-tense fall of *Lucifer* the Morning Star ("How has Lucifer fallen," LXX Isa. 14.12) is not mentioned, just as it was not mentioned in Tertullian's application.

What then did Cyprian think of Satan? Let us see what he says about him in his little homily on "zeal," that is, envy:

At the very beginning of the World, the Devil himself perished, and he caused others to perish. He had been maintained in Angelic majesty, an intimate and beloved of God. But once he beheld Man, created in the image of God, he erupted into jealousy and malevolent envy. Before casting another down by jealousy, he himself was cast down by jealousy; he was captured before making others captive, and he perished before he caused perdition: he took away from Man the grace of immortality which he had first lost himself. (Cyprian, *Jealousy*, ch. 4)

It is interesting to see here that, according to Cyprian, not only Man but also the Devil himself loses immortality. That is, he suffers the death of the life that he had hitherto known. But, of course, he continues to live on in his punished state – as will all Men after they die.

Cyprian goes on to cite his inspiration for this interpretation of the fall of the Devil and the fall of Man, namely Wisdom 2.24: "Through the envy of the Devil did Death enter the orb of the Earth, and therefore they imitate him who are of his condition." He then proceeds to tell of the jealous Cain and his murder of his brother Abel (*Jealousy*, ch. 5).

Now we have it. Instead of Cain being the envious adversary (*diabolos*) who introduced Death into the World, which was how Pope Clement I interpreted the passage from Wisdom (see **chap. 3.4** above), it is definitely the Devil. Actually, Tertullian had spoken of envy, *invidia*, in connection with the Devil, but in a different sense. He says

that the Devil mendaciously told Adam and Eve that God was jealous of His position and so denied them the gift of Divinity (*Marcion* 10.1). Cyprian, instead, attributes jealousy or envy to the Devil.

However, Cyprian was not the first to make the Devil envious. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in France, a contemporary of Tertullian's – he died in the year 200 – had already come to this conclusion in his treatise *Against All Heresies*.

Irenaeus's understanding of the Devil's biography was shaped by his interpretation of this statement in Ephesians: "You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this World, following the Prince of the power of the Air, [who is] the Spirit [*pneuma*] that is now at work in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2.1–2). Irenaeus parsed the grammar of this passage from Ephesians differently from the way I give it. He read it instead as, "the Prince of the power of the spirit [*pneuma*] of the Air." In other words, he assumed that the Devil was one of the Angels originally placed in charge of the Atmosphere (Irenaeus, *Heresies* 5.24.4).

There is a similar conception of Angels in the work of the slightly earlier Apologist, Athenagoras of Athens, except that Athenagoras says that the Angels, who were put in charge of exercising God's Providence, were originally positioned in the First Firmament. Most of them stayed there, but some of them, of their own free will, succumbed to the impure love of Human virgins, and so fell from Heaven into the Air and the Earth and are no longer able to rise to the Heavens (Athenagoras, *Plea for Christians*, chs. 24–25).

It is clear what Athenagoras has done: he interpreted the "caves of darkness" into which the lustful Angels of the *Book of Enoch* (and 2 Peter and Jude in the New Testament) were imprisoned to refer to the smoggy air of the Earth! It is an interpretation that will "have legs" and go far, as we shall see when treating of St. Augustine (**chap. 9.2**). However, Athenagoras singles out one of these be-smogged Angels for special treatment, namely the Devil. He was assigned to

be the Prince of Matter, to govern material forms, but "he became negligent and wicked in the management of the things entrusted to him" (ch. 24).

Athenagoras does not specify just how the Devil went wrong, but Irenaeus does: he became envious of Man, and was thereby rendered an "apostate," that is, "fallen away," from the Divine Law, "for envy is a thing foreign to God." He thereupon became all the more envious of Man, envying him his life (apparently referring to his continued life even after he was expelled from Eden), and he subjected him to his own apostate power (*Heresies* 5.24.4).

Irenaeus cites Justin as saying that, after Satan had led Man astray through the instrumentality of the Serpent, he refrained from blaspheming God, because he did not know the disaster that would befall him in the future, since it was contained in parables and allegories (presumably like those of Isaiah). But after the coming of Christ he realized, from what Jesus and His Apostles said, that eternal fire was prepared for him (*Heresies* 5.26.2). The specific reference here is to Matthew 25.41, where Jesus speaks of the fire prepared for Devil and his Angels (chap. 4.2 above).

## 8.2 SATAN'S JEALOUSY IN THE LIFE OF ADAM AND EVE

Irenaeus does not speculate on precisely why the Devil resented Man in the first place, but, as we have just seen, Cyprian does. Cyprian says that the Devil objected to the fact that Man was created in God's image.

A hundred years or so later, in the fourth century, this theory was dramatized in a fanciful work known as the *Life of Adam and Eve*, which was an important source for Mohammed. It portrays the Devil as objecting to God's command that all of the Angels should worship the image of God in the newly created Adam.

Great damage has been done to our subject – the *Life of the Devil* – by scholars who have dated the *Life of Adam and Eve* to the first century AD. As Marinus de Jonge astutely observes, the reason for the popularity of this theory is that it enables scholars to explain

Paul's views on Adam as reactions to contemporary Jewish ideas.<sup>3</sup> That is, it's another example of retro-fitting, of antedating texts to support prejudices. (The word "prejudice" comes from the Latin *prae-judicium*, meaning "judgment beforehand," so it is perfect for us to use here.)

The *Life of Adam and Eve* is included by modern editors among the "Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament," but in most versions the work is not a pseudepigraph at all, because no well-known worthy purports to tell the story. The story simply gets told by an unannounced narrator, as is true of Genesis and the other historical books of the Old Testament. The same was originally true of the Greek version, it seems, but someone attached a preface claiming that the narrative was revealed by God to Moses. As a consequence, it is often called the *Apocalypse of Moses*.

According to the Latin *Life of Adam*, after Adam and Eve have been expelled from Eden through the Devil's skulduggery, the Devil explains that Adam was the one who caused his own fall from Heaven. After God had created Adam in His own image, Michael ordered all of the Angels to worship the image of God, Jehovah. Satan refused, saying, "I will not worship one inferior and subsequent to me. I am prior to him in creation. Before he was made, I was already made. He ought to worship me" (*Lat. Life*, ch. 14, *OTP* 2:262).

When the Angels who were subordinate to the Devil heard this, they too refused to worship Adam. Michael warns them that if they continue to refuse, the Lord God will be wrathful with them. The Devil replies defiantly, "If he be wrathful with me, 'I will set my throne above the stars of Heaven and will be like the Most High'" (*Lat. Life*, ch. 15). The quoted words are taken, of course, from

<sup>3</sup> Marinus de Jonge, "The Christian Origin of the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve*," *Literature on Adam and Eve*, ed. Gary Anderson, Michael Stone, and Johannes Tromp (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), pp. 347–63, at 348 n. 2. I recommend the other essays in this collection as well. For the texts of the various versions of the *Life of Adam and Eve*, see *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve*, ed. Gary S. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, 2nd revised edn. (Atlanta GA: Scholars Press, 1999). See also the translation in *OTP* 2.

Isaiah 14, the boastful words of the Morning Star, *Lucifer*. The Devil sums up the result:

The Lord God was angry with me and sent me with my Angels out from our glory. And because of you we were expelled into this World from our dwellings and have been cast onto the Earth. And immediately we were made to grieve, since we had been deprived of so great glory. And we were pained to see you in such bliss of delights. So with deceit I assailed your wife and made you to be expelled through her from the joys of your bliss, as I have been expelled from my glory.  
(*Lat. Life*, ch. 16)

The Greek and Armenian versions of the *Life of Adam and Eve* have an interesting explanation of how the Devil set about seducing Eve. He first seduced the Serpent! The Devil asks the Serpent why, even though he is the wisest of all the animals and was created before Adam, does he bow down to Adam, and eat inferior food? "Come," he says, "let us make him to be cast out of Paradise through his wife, just as we were cast out through him." The Serpent is willing enough, but fears God's wrath. The Devil reassures him: "Do not fear; only become my vessel, and I will speak words through your mouth by which you will be able to deceive him" (*Gk. Life*, ch. 16, *OTP* 2:277).

According to the Greek version, the Devil first addresses Eve in the form of an Angel, and then from within the Serpent. The Armenian and Georgian versions explain that Eve first witnesses the Devil singing praises to God as an Angel, and then listens to him under the cover of the Serpent (chs. 17–18).

### 8.3 THE HISTORY OF IBLIS IN THE KORAN

Mohammed was so impressed by the account of the Devil's refusal to worship the image of God in Adam that he tells the same story fully ten times in the Koran.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For an English version of the Koran, see *The Holy Qur'an*, ed., tr., and with commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 4th US edition (Elmhurst NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an 2002).

The name of the Devil in the Koran is Iblis, which is a development of the Greek *Diabolos*. As in the *Life of Adam*, Iblis refuses Allah's order to the Angels to prostrate themselves before Adam. The reason he gives is similar to what the Devil says in the *Latin Life*, but it draws on Mohammed's special metaphysics. Iblis claims that he himself was formed of fire, an element superior to Adam's clay (sura 7.12).

As punishment, Iblis is banished from Heaven, but his request to have his final punishment postponed until the Day of Judgment is granted. He then states his determination to lead Humankind astray. In his guise as adversary and tempter of Adam and Eve and their descendants, he is called "the Satan," a term applied to others like him (sura 7.27); it is not specified who these others are, but we hear that he and his hosts will be thrown into Hell-fire at the end of time (26.95).

Iblis is clearly designated as one of the Angels, who were already existing when Allah created the Jinns, a lower order of Spirits, from fire, before He created Man from clay. But at one point, Iblis himself is said to be "from the Jinns" (18.50), and, as in other suras, he boasts that he was made from fire.

This contradiction (Iblis as Angel, Iblis as Jinn) gave rise to various explanations and elaborations, the most notable of which are those of Mohammed al-Tabari, a prolific author and commentator who died in AD 923.<sup>5</sup> Tabari says that the Jinns were the original inhabitants of the Earth. When they quarreled, Iblis, then named Azazil, and other Angels were sent to overcome them.

In another tradition reported by Tabari, however, Iblis was one of the original Jinns, who was brought to Heaven as a prisoner; he was then appointed judge over the Jinns, which role he fulfilled well for a thousand years, but negligently for another thousand years. He was rehabilitated again until he resisted the command to honor Adam. Yet another tradition that Tabari reports is that Iblis was one of

<sup>5</sup> On the commentary of Tabari, see the summary account by A. J. Wensinck in *Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913–1936*, s.v. "Iblis," revised by Louis Garnet in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 668–69.

the Archangels who ruled over the Jinns on Earth and in the lower Heavens before he became rebellious.

Still other theories developed about Iblis, especially in Persian Sufi circles – where he becomes “Eblis.”<sup>6</sup> One notion, traced to the mystic al-Hallaj (d. AD 922), is that it was God’s will that Eblis refuse the command to honor Adam. From this came the portrait of Eblis as “the lover of God who remained patient in the face of eternal rejection.” Most Sufi traditions maintain that Eblis will be eternally damned, but a few thinkers hold out a hope of rehabilitation.

According to the religion of the Yezidi Kurds, however, which can be regarded as a form of Sufism, the proud Angel Azaziel who refused to bow down before Adam has already been forgiven and restored to his original position. Anyone who recognizes him in his rehabilitated status, now termed the Peacock Angel, can expect his special protection.<sup>7</sup>

The Yezidis have no Satan, and, in fact, consider any use of the name to be an insult. Far from causing Adam’s fall, the Angel who attended him provided advice on the biological functions of his body. Evil actions are simply considered a fact of life, to be punished in the afterlife. They are not caused by any supernatural being.

It is ironic that the fearful Persian dualism has ended up, at least for the Yezidi Kurds, with a Non-Devil.

Well. Let’s get back to Christianity, and the new turn taken in the middle of the third century with Origen of Alexandria, which may well have been a reaction to contemporary Persian dualistic pressures.

The idea that Satan first went astray because of his jealousy of Adam will not play a prominent role in Christian tradition. True,

Satan will often be portrayed as jealous of Man, but only *after* he fell because of a sin of pride. However, the connection or identification with the Serpent of Eden and the tempter of Eve will become dominant and will constitute, for all practical purposes, an Article of Christian Faith.

<sup>6</sup> For medieval Sufi thought, see Hamid Algar, “Eblis in Persian Sufi Tradition,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. 7 (Costa Mesa: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1996), 656–61; Peter Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden: Brill, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> For the Yezidi view of the rehabilitation of “Iblis,” see John S. Guest, *Survival among the Kurds: A History of the Yezidis* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993) pp. 31, 236.