

Satan



How should we picture the wily serpent of the Garden of Eden? He's often regarded as the Devil in snake's clothes. Yet, much to many people's surprise, there is no Devil in Eden or, for that matter, anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. As Mary Joan Winn Leith explains in ["From Seraph to Satan,"](#) the serpent of Eden is just called *nahash*, or serpent, in the Hebrew Bible; he's never referred to as the Devil or Satan.

How did the name Lucifer come to be equated with Satan? Ronald Youngblood clarifies in ["Fallen Star"](#) that the Hebrew term *helel* from Isaiah 14:12–15 was mistranslated by early church fathers as Lucifer. It really means "morning star" and is simply a metaphor for the Babylonian king described in the preceding and subsequent verses. Modern English translations almost all translate the text of Isaiah in this way and not as Lucifer.

The name Beelzebul appears three times in the Bible—in the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Does it refer to Satan or the mighty Canaanite weather god Baal, or is it a mocking title for a Philistine deity? Bradley Stein traces the evolution of the name to answer the question in ["Who the Devil is Beelzebul?"](#)

Why do demons—so prominent in the greater Near Eastern world, in the New Testament and in the post-Biblical world of Judaism and Christianity—play such a minor role in the Hebrew Bible? As William H.C. Propp shows in ["Exorcising Demons,"](#) the Israelites made little room for other powers in the cosmos besides Yahweh: When people fell ill or suffered calamities, it was generally because of sin, not demons. And when harmful spirits do appear, they often do so as manifestations of God or as agents of his will.

Millions of Christians have recited the Apostles' Creed as a statement of their faith. The creed's brief account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is borrowed directly from the Gospels—except for one line: "He descended into Hell"—in Latin, *Descendit ad inferna*. Just when did Jesus descend into Hell and what did he do there? How did his descent become an integral part of early church belief and art? Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons answer these questions in ["The Harrowing of Hell."](#)

From Seraph to Satan

Shape-shifting in the Garden of Eden

By [Mary Joan Winn Leith](#)

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He's often regarded as the Devil in snake's clothes. Yet, much to many people's surprise, there is no Devil in Eden or, for that matter, anywhere in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. In the Hebrew Bible, the serpent of Eden is just called *nahash*, or serpent; he's never referred to as the Devil or Satan.

The figure called Satan in the Book of Job is not a character bearing this name but a heavenly official with the title *Satan*, meaning "Prosecutor." (The Hebrew term derives from the verb "to accuse.") According to the Book of Job, the Prosecutor roams "to and fro on the earth" and takes his place among the other "sons of God" (*bene elohim*); his job is to report on earthly doings to the heavenly court ([Job 1:6–7](#)). In fact, the first biblical figure to bear the title *satan* is none other than King David ([1 Samuel 29:4](#): "he may become an adversary [*satan*] to us in battle").¹

A fully realized dualist concept of Satan as we know him—a Prince of Darkness, the embodiment of cosmic Evil perpetually at war with the Good of God, first appears in the second- or first-century B.C.E. writings of the Dead Sea Scroll community, which generally refers to him as *Belial*.

Fallen Star

The evolution of Lucifer

By [Ronald F. Youngblood](#)

I first heard the word "lucifer" when I was a small child. My grandfather was warning me about the dangers of those long wooden matches tipped with antimony sulfide and potassium chlorate. He called them "lucifers." Needless to say, at that time I had no idea that "lucifer" was a word of Latin derivation meaning "light-bearer."

In my early teens, when I began reading the Bible with some degree of seriousness, I learned that "Lucifer," capitalized this time, referred to something—or someone—far more sinister than a matchstick. I read his name in [Isaiah 14:12–15](#):



How you have fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the dawn!

You have been cast down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations!

You said in your heart,
“I will ascend to heaven;

I will raise my throne above the stars of God;

I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,
on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.

I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.”

But you are brought down to Sheol,
to the depths of the pit.¹

Who the Devil is Beelzebul?

By [Bradley L. Stein](#)



Three passages in the Synoptic Gospels identify the enigmatic figure of Beelzebul as the ruler of demons ([Matthew 12:24](#); [Mark 3:22](#); [Luke 11:15](#)). In each of these passages, Jesus’ enemies attribute his ability to heal to the powers of “Beelzebul, the prince of demons.”^a No more information is given. Other verses where Beelzebul appears ([Matthew 10:25, 27](#); [Luke 11:18, 19](#)) are even less helpful, mentioning only his name. That’s it. There are no references to Beelzebul in early Jewish literature—or in any other early literature, for that matter.¹

Exorcising Demons

By [William H.C. Propp](#)

Pazuzu...Lamashtu...Khatyu...Sheseru...Sasam...Lilith...Asmodeus...Beelzebub.
... Names to conjure with. Literally. Years ago, when I was a student at Harvard, my teacher Frank Moore Cross raised a puzzling question: Why do

demons—so prominent in the greater Near Eastern world, in the New Testament and in the postbiblical world of Judaism and Christianity—play such a minor role in the Hebrew Bible? I never forgot his offhand comment.



Throughout the ancient Near East, demons were thought to be the agents of bad fortune, including disease. Only professional sorcerers and exorcists knew how to repel them.¹ Similarly, in the New Testament, one way that Jesus and his disciples establish their credibility is by expelling demons, thereby curing dumbness, deafness, blindness, lameness, and epilepsy.²

The Harrowing of Hell

By [Heidi J. Hornik](#)[Mikeal C. Parsons](#)



[He] was crucified, died and was buried.

He descended into Hell.

On the third day, he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into Heaven,

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Millions of Christians have recited these lines from the Apostles' Creed as a statement of their faith.¹ Dated as early as the second century C.E., the creed is part of the baptismal liturgy of Roman Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran churches. The creed's brief account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is borrowed directly from the Gospels—except for one line: “He descended into Hell”—in Latin, *Descendit ad inferna*.

Countless Byzantine and late medieval paintings depict this mysterious descent.² In Italian artist Benvenuto di Giovanni's version (above), from about 1490, Jesus stands at the entrance to a cave-like Hell. He has broken down the door, killing a red demon in the process. Jesus extends his arm toward an aged man with long white hair and beard: It is Adam, the first (and thus the oldest) man. Several other righteous spirits rush to greet Jesus: They include Eve (beside Adam) and John the Baptist (far right), wearing his animal skins.

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