

BELIAL, BELIAR, DEVIL, SATAN

The NT concepts of Satan and his host are closely related to ideas that develop in the intertestamental period and are found in early Jewish literature. In their interpretation of OT passages, various books among the [Pseudepigrapha](#) and [Qumran](#) literature give different explanations to the presence of evil in the world. Some writings describe the struggle between good and evil as a cosmic-spiritual struggle and anticipate the ultimate annihilation of evil and the evil powers. In some texts, the evil powers have an [angelic](#) leader named Semihaza, Mastema, Belial or the Prince of Darkness.

[1. The Old Testament Background](#)

[2. The Wicked Kingdom and Its Angelic Leader](#)

[3. Conclusion](#)

1. The Old Testament Background

Some biblical passages are important for later interpreters who relate them to the evil forces in the world. [Genesis 6:1–5](#) describe how the “sons of God” mingled with the daughters of men. This passage is often interpreted as referring to a fall among the [angels](#). In some late texts we encounter an odd or accusing member of God’s heavenly court, subordinate to the sovereign [Yahweh](#): in [1 Kings 22](#) (a sixth-century text describing a ninth-century event) a spirit gets God’s permission to deceive the [prophets](#) of [Samaria](#). In [Job 1–2](#), one of “God’s sons,” *haṣṣatan* (“the accuser”), gets permission from the Lord to test Job and inflict trials upon him (cf. [Zech 3:1–2](#)). As a proper name, “Satan” occurs only in [1 Chronicles 21:1](#). Some isolated references to figures easily interpreted as [demons](#) (see *DJG*, [Demon, Devil, Satan](#)) do not play a significant role in intertestamental interpretation.

Biblical texts refer to Gentile peoples antagonistic to Yahweh, his anointed and his people ([Ps 2, 46, 110](#)). [Isaiah 14](#), [Ezekiel 28](#) and [Ezekiel 32](#) portray the evil king and the oppressive empire in mythological tones. Further, the prophetic [tradition](#) knows that God will judge the empires on earth. These ideas would be combined by the [apocalyptists](#): empires and their rulers symbolize cosmic evil forces who will be judged by God. The cosmic [judgment](#) and renewal is described by the so-called Isaianic apocalypse ([Is 24–27](#)). This textual unit uses mythological language when it proclaims that after the downfall of the oppressive city (Babylon?; [Is 24:7–13](#); [25:1–6](#); [26:5–6](#); [27:10–11](#)) God will swallow up [death](#) forever ([Is 25:8](#); cf. [Is 26:19–20](#)), punish Leviathan and slay the sea dragon ([Is 27:1](#)). Powers antagonistic to God (“the heavenly host above and the kings on the earth below”) will be punished and shut up ([Is 24:21–23](#)).

2. The Wicked Kingdom and Its Angelic Leader

Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

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2.1. In *Daniel and Early Pseudepigrapha*. The idea of heavenly forces antagonistic to God becomes commonplace in Israelite [tradition](#) of the second century B.C. This motif is found in a number of [pseudepigraphic](#) writings represented in the [Qumran](#) caves (some of these were known before the discovery of the [Dead](#) Sea Scrolls). These writings were probably written before the emergence of the *yahad*, the community reflected in the [Qumran](#) scrolls. They were known by the *yahad* and were influential in the framing of the [theology](#) of this community.

The earliest postbiblical source that elaborates on evil angelic forces is probably the Enochic Book of Watchers ([1 Enoch 6–16](#); [17–36](#)), which should be dated around 200 B.C. These chapters interpret [Genesis 6:1–5](#): the angelic watchers cohabit with earthly women and bring [magic](#), sin and violence to the earth. [Enoch](#) is shown the coming [judgment](#) on the [angels](#), who in vain ask him to intercede for them. Their leader is Semihazah, but he is not portrayed as a cosmic opponent to God or the elect. [1 Enoch 10:4](#) reflects a [variant tradition](#), in which Azazel is the leading angel. The watchers are bound until the final [judgment](#) ([1 Enoch 10:11–12](#)), while the offspring of the illegitimate union between [angels](#) and women become evil spirits who spread sin and destruction on earth ([1 Enoch 15:8–16:1](#)). The archangels participate on God's side in the spiritual struggle.

The biblical book of Daniel may be discussed here, since [Daniel 7–12](#) was written 167 to 164 B.C. and thus belongs to this same period. The four beasts of [Daniel 7](#) symbolize earthly kings and kingdoms. However, these kingdoms are portrayed in a way that point to cosmic significance; behind them one can sense superhuman spiritual powers. According to [Daniel 7–12](#), the struggle between the [Seleucids](#) and faithful Jews reflects a cosmic spiritual battle in which angelic forces are involved. The Jews are supported by an unnamed angelic leader ([Dan 10:4–11:2](#)) and their guardian angel, “the great prince” Michael ([Dan 10:13](#), [20](#); [12:1](#)). These two are engaged in battle against the evil forces, including the angelic Prince of Persia and Prince of Greece, probably referring to the national gods of the Gentiles. Ultimately the people of God and their angelic supporters will triumph ([Dan 7:13–27](#); [12:1–3](#)).

To the early Maccabean period belongs the Enochic Animal Apocalypse ([1 Enoch 85–90](#)) and probably also the Apocalypse of Weeks ([1 Enoch 91:11–17](#); [93:1–10](#)). Cosmic history and the history of Israel are described in symbolic terms: the [angels](#) fall down from [heaven](#) and interfere with humanity, and they are bound by the archangels ([1 Enoch 86–88](#)). During the history of Israel, God gives the people into the power of evil shepherds ([1 Enoch 89–90](#)). These shepherds symbolize Gentile kingdoms and the angelic powers behind them, who inflict evil upon Israel and will be annihilated together with the watchers at the [judgment](#) (see [Angels of the Nations](#)). Both apocalypses expect the ultimate [judgment](#) upon evil in the world and the fallen [angels](#) ([1 Enoch 90:18–27](#); [91:12–15](#)).

In the middle of the second century B.C. 4QPseudo-Moses ([4Q386–390](#)) portrays the history of Israel in similar terms. Israel is subject to the “[angels](#) of *mastemot* [destruction],” demonic [angels](#) symbolizing the rule of the [Diadochian](#) kings and the ungodly high priests Jason, Menelaus and Alcimus (174–160 B.C.): “I will remove that man (i.e., [Alexander the Great](#)) [and] abandon the land into the hands of the [angels](#) of destruction [and they will cause the people(?) to [worship](#) other god[s] ...] like abominations [... and there will rise] three [priests] that will rul[e in the land ... and they will defile the h[oly of holie]s” Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

([4Q388 frag. 1 ii 6–9](#)). A Gentile kingdom (that of Alexander the Great or Antiochus IV Epiphanes) is probably designated “that [evil k]ingdom” (*mamleket hariš-ah hahi-*, [4Q387 3 ii 9](#)).

The book of *Jubilees* was probably written in the early Maccabean period (see [Jubilees](#)) and perhaps belongs to circles antecedent of the *yaḥad*. *Jubilees*, which pretends to be angelic [revelation](#) to Moses on Mt. Sinai, is dependent on the Book of Watchers: the fallen [angels](#) are bound before the deluge, but their offspring, the evil spirits, lead the children of Noah to sin. Also the spirits are bound, but their leader Mastema (Destruction) gets God’s permission for one tenth of the spirits to stay on earth under his command, so that he can execute his dominion over humankind, corrupt people and lead them astray ([Jub. 5](#); [10](#)). Prince Mastema is a figure close to Satan of the NT. He is the leader of the demonic hosts; he rules the spirits of men and women and opposes God’s plans for his people.

These ideas recur in the writings of the *yaḥad* and [Testament of Reuben 2–4](#) (it is presupposed here that the apocalyptic and dualistic passages in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* were formed in Jewish circles between the mid-second and mid-first century B.C.). *Jubilees* contains other terms relevant to our subject. Moses prays that the “spirit of belial” should not rule over Israel ([Jub. 1:20](#)). In this text “spirit of belial” probably means “spirit of nought,” so “belial” is not a personal name. According to the eschatological poem in [Jubilees 23](#), Israel shall enjoy a time of blessing without any “satan” (antagonist) or “destroyer” ([Jub. 23:29](#); also in the [Qumran](#) scrolls “satan” is not used as a proper name, cf. [11QPs Plea 15–16](#), “Let not a satan rule over me, nor an unclean spirit. Neither let pain nor evil inclination have control over my bones”; [4Q213a \[Levi^b\] 1–2 17](#), “let not any satan have power over me”). Perhaps [Mark 8:33](#) and the parallels should be translated “Get behind me, satan!” (i.e., in this you are an antagonist to the [will of God](#)).

Some pre-*yaḥad* writings preserved in the [Qumran](#) caves mention cosmic evil forces. Similar to the Book of Watchers and *Jubilees*, [1Q/ 4QMysteries](#) (see [Book of Mysteries](#)) reflects a dualistic [worldview](#) and refers to cosmic antagonists of God. This work mentions “the mysteries of wickedness” ([1Q27 1 i 2, 7](#)), “the wisdom of evil cunning and the de[vices of nought(?)]” ([4Q299 frag. 3a ii 5](#)) and “migh[ty mysteries of light and the ways of dark]ness” ([4Q299 frag. 5 2](#); cf. the first-century B.C. [1QapGen 1:2](#) “the wrath of the [mystery](#) of evil”; see [Genesis Apocryphon](#)). It looks forward to the time “when the begotten of unrighteousness are delivered up, and wickedness is removed from before [righteousness](#), as darkness is removed from before light. Then, just as smoke wholly ceases and is no more, so shall wickedness cease forever, and [righteousness](#) shall be revealed as the sun (throughout) the full measure of the world. And all the adherents of the mysteries of wickedness are to be no more” ([1Q27 frag. 1 i 5–7](#)).

An eschatological passage in [4QInstruction](#) describes the end-time [judgment](#) on the powers antagonistic to God: “In [heaven](#) he will judge the work of iniquity ... [the] kingd[om of iniquity(?)] will tremble, the water and the depths will fear.... And all iniquity shall be consumed” ([4Q416 frag. 1 10–13/4Q418 frag. 212 1](#)). If it is correctly reconstructed, this passage refers to the “kingdom of iniquity,” which trembles at God’s [judgment](#), as did the watchers in [1 Enoch 13](#). The presectarian 4QVisions of Amram (see [Visions of Amram](#)) refers to two angelic princes in strife over the dominion of men, who are divided into the sons of light and the sons of darkness ([4Q548 1](#)). The ruler of darkness is called King of

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Wickedness (Melchiresha, [4Q544 frag. 2 3](#), this name also occurs in [4Q280 \[4QBerakot^f\] 1 2](#) “Cursed be you Melchiresha ... may God set you trembling at the hand of the avengers!”). M. Philonenko has suggested that the name Melchiresha represents an interpretation of “Bera King of Sodom” and “Birsha King of Gomorrah” in [Genesis 14:2](#) (*Tg. Ps.-J.* and *Gen. Rab.* read Bera as “son of evil,” Birsha as “son of wickedness”).

Early interpreters thus saw evil powers behind Abram’s adversaries and found in the same chapter [Melchizedek](#)—King of Righteousness—as their positive antitype. [4Q544](#) probably referred to Melchizedek as leader of the angelic host (in [11QMelch](#), written in the *yaḥad*, Melchizedek is the angelic leader who will overcome Belial and his spirits). [Testament of Dan 6](#) testifies to the same apocalyptic [tradition](#): “the kingdom of the enemy” belongs to Satan and his spirits and is the cause of “Israel’s period of lawlessness,” but finally “the enemy’s kingdom will be brought to an end” (here the name *Satan* probably represents Christian editing of an earlier Jewish text). The faithful are supported by the “angel of peace,” who intercedes for them, so that they might not submit to Beliar, the spirit of deceit ([T. Levi 5](#); [T. Benj. 6](#)). The later *Birkat haminim*, the curse on the infidels in the daily prayers, is based on an earlier [prayer](#) that asked God to subdue the kingdom of evil.

2.2. In the Writings of the Yaḥad. The *yaḥad* was founded in the second half of the second century and was probably an elite group within a wider [Essene](#) movement. The library of [Qumran](#) was related to the *yaḥad*, although only a few dozen of its books were authored within the community. The *yaḥad* drew [inspiration](#) from a number of dualistic-[apocalyptic](#) works, including the books of [1 Enoch](#) and [Jubilees](#) (the latter was considered an authoritative book by the community), when they described the cosmic realities that encountered their “community of latter-days [saints](#).” From their predecessors and literary heritage they learned about the cosmic struggle between light and darkness and the spiritual forces that oppose the sons of light.

A developed philosophical [dualism](#) is found in the Two-Spirit Treatise ([1QS 3:13–4:26](#); see [Rule of the Community](#)), which was included in the copy of the community’s manual found in Cave 1 (the treatise is not represented among the Cave 4 fragments; its [theology](#) was not necessarily shared by everyone in the community). God has created two opposing spirits, the spirit of [truth](#) (the Prince of Light) and the spirit of deceit (the Angel of Darkness). As he allotted each man his portion, he ordained for him to walk with one of these spirits until the [judgment](#), when he will make an end to all evil. There is eternal enmity between these spirits and those who follow them, between the sons of light and the sons of deceit. According to the last part of the [discourse](#) (perhaps a later explanation), every man has been allotted a portion of both spirits (the balance between them will vary from one man to another), who fight their battle in the human heart ([T. Jud. 20](#) and [T. Asher 1–6](#) present similar doctrines).

Other texts of the *yaḥad* also reflect a cosmic [dualism](#) that is experienced existentially by the sons of light. According to the [War Scroll](#), there is an ongoing struggle between the heavenly powers, led by Michael, Prince of Light, and Belial, Prince of Darkness. The community considers itself in fellowship with the [angels](#) and partakes with them in the battle and the [eschatological](#) war, which has its scene both in [heaven](#) and on earth. Unfaithful Israel is identified as sons of darkness and the army of Belial. However, Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

Belial is subordinate to God, “who made Belial to corrupt, an angel of hatred” ([1QM 13:11](#)). God has ordained a day “to annihilate the sons of darkness, (when there will be) rejoicing for al[l the sons of light]” ([1QM 13:16](#)).

According to the [Damascus Document](#), the watchers of [heaven](#) fell as they did not follow the precepts of God ([CD 2:18](#)). This Qumranic work attributes the rising of Moses and Aaron to the Prince of Light and their adversaries to Belial: “For in ancient times, during the first deliverance of Israel, there arose Moses and Aaron, by the hand of the Prince of Lights; and Belial, with his cunning, raised up Jannes and his brothers” ([CD 5:18–19](#)). In the present time Israel at large is subject to the dominion of Belial ([CD 4:12–19](#)). The first part of the [Rule of the Community](#), prescribes a [covenant](#) ceremony to be conducted by the community “for all the days of Belial’s dominion” ([1QS 1:18; 2:19](#))—the present age is “Belial’s dominion” on earth (cf. [Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11](#), “the prince of the world”). The [liturgy](#) has the sons of light pronounce curses against the sons of darkness, “the men of Belial’s lot” ([1QS 2:4–5](#)).

In the writings of the *yahad* Belial is a proper name, derived from the word *b^eliya-al* (“nought”) in the Bible, and later usage such as “the spirit of belial.” The sons of light have their angelic partner in Michael (or, in the case of [11QMelch](#): Melchizedek), who will implement the [judgment](#) on Belial and the fallen [angels](#).

2.3. Other Texts. A highly developed [doctrine](#) of Satan is found in the [Testament of Job](#), written in Greek, perhaps in Egypt around the turn of the era. Humans are objects of Satan’s attacks and deceiving schemes. He is designated Satan, the devil, the evil one, the antagonist. But also here, Satan derives his limited [authority](#) from God. An elaborate account of the fall of Satan occurs in *Life of Adam and Eve* (see [Adam and Eve](#)), perhaps written around the end of the first century A.D. An influential verse is [Wisdom 2:24](#): “through the devil’s envy [death](#) entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it.”

3. Conclusion

The NT relates to widespread Jewish ideas on the evil one and the presence of evil in the world when it describes the Jesus event, the role of the end-time community and the conditions that meet both humanity in general and the disciple in particular. A particular NT emphasis is the central role of Jesus in the cosmic-spiritual struggle ([Rev 12:7–9](#) perhaps preserves an earlier [tradition](#), in which Michael fights and overcomes Satan).

See also [ANGELS OF THE NATIONS](#); [APOCALYPTICISM](#); [DEMONOLOGY](#); [MELCHIZEDEK, TRADITIONS OF](#); [WAR SCROLL \(1QM\) AND RELATED TEXTS](#).

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Page 5. Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#), 3:29 PM April 22, 2015.

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