

Historical Semantics of the Concept of Satan in the Sacred Texts of the Torah, Gospel, and Quran

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Abstract

Historical semantics is a method of lexical semantics in sacred texts that examines the components of a word in a historical context, revealing its developments, ups and downs over time. The concept of Satan has undergone transformations throughout history and has an ancient connection with sacred texts. The use of the term "Satan" in pre-monotheism was associated with concepts like evil, jinn, and malevolent spirits, intertwined with the functions of wickedness and impurity. In the Abrahamic religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, Satan is recognized as a fallen divine being. The lexical application of this concept in sacred texts shows various attributes such as intelligence, an inquisitive nature, benevolence, and a dual nature, indicative of the interactions of the believers of these texts with diverse civilizations and the manner of its metamorphosis. Among these, the Quran, with its systematic narrative within a specific discourse, provides a unique interpretation of Satan. This research employs a descriptive-analytical method to read the concept of Satan in the narratives of the Torah, Gospel, and Quran through a historical lens (diachronic), exploring the transformations of the concept.

Keywords: Quran, Holy Book, Satan, Concept, Historical Semantics.

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Introduction

The concept of Satan is deeply intertwined with humanity's ancient beliefs regarding evil and malevolence. Although early humans did not necessarily recognize all forms of wickedness as "Satan," they attributed malice, misfortunes, and evil deeds to malevolent spirits, jinn, and similar entities; these were believed to perform the same wicked functions attributed to Satan today, influencing all aspects of human existence and shaping mental images of desirable and undesirable events. In this regard, the human perception of Satan, which has persisted throughout history, is also reflected in sacred texts. The process of the formation of sacred texts like the Old and New Testaments over time, amidst the fluctuations and interactions with various peoples and nations, has rendered the narratives of Satan's conception in these sacred texts diverse and dissimilar. Meanwhile, the Quran's account of Satan is coherent and relates to the framework of pure monotheistic discourse and its formation.

To understand the concept of Satan in sacred texts, it is essential to revisit the narrations found within these texts and the impact of environmental factors and contextual conditions. In this light, to grasp the meaning of Satan, its emergence, persistence, and transformation of the conception and its meaning in Mesopotamian cultures and neighboring civilizational cultures will be re-examined using historical semantics. The meaning of Satan in the Quran will be recognized in connection with the discourse system and the contexts of the revelation of its verses; therefore, this research seeks to find answers to the following questions.

- How is the concept of Satan and its developments reinterpreted in the Holy Scripture and the Quran?

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- What does the concept of Satan signify within the discourse system of the Quran?

- What counterparts does the idea of Satan have in Mesopotamian beliefs?

The background of research on Satan in the Quran and the Bible has been widely recognized. Numerous articles have been written from various perspectives, among which only a limited number have focused on semantic analysis. These include "A Comparative Study of the Image of Satan in Divine Religions" (Yaqoubiyan, 2015 AD/1394 SH), which examines the representation of Satan in the texts of the Holy Scriptures and the Quran from a comparative perspective; "A New Semantics of the Term Satan" (Asgari, 2010 AD/1389 SH), which applies historical semantics to the Quran; and "Difference or Similarity between Satan and Iblis" (Momtahn et al., 2012 AD/1391 SH), which explores the semantic foundations to examine the consistency or inconsistency of this concept in verses and narrations.

The method of this research involves examining the concept of the term Satan with a historical perspective using historical semantics in the Holy Scriptures and the Quran. In this approach, efforts are made to reinterpret the emergence of the concept of Satan in the sacred texts (the Old and New Testaments and the Quran) and the transformation of its meaning in the historical context.

1. Concept of Historical Semantics

Historical semantics¹ (diachronic) is the study of the fundamental meanings and their evolved interpretations over the course of the history

1. The term of semantics, which in Arabic is called "Ilm al-Dilālah" or "Ilm al-Ma'nā" and sometimes "Semantics" (Ahmad Mokhtar, 1998: 11) and its predecessor is human imagination (ibid, 2016 AD/1386 SH: 25).

of a word, which has changed in correlation with historical and temporal sequences (Sadeghi & Nosrati, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 7). This method began in 19th-century Germany² and gained popularity through the French Linguistic Society, eventually attracting the attention of linguists (Palmer, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 29; Ahmad Mukhtar, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 189; Safavi, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 29-31). Words do not remain confined to their original meanings but undergo semantic expansion and contraction over time (Saidi Roshani, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 237). The terms semantic contraction and expansion refer to the narrowing meaning³, widening meaning⁴, or convey meaning⁵ (Qadoor, 1999: In this approach, the term Satan is re-examined within Jewish, Christian, and Islamic cultures, reflecting the temporal transformation and development of this term along with its expansive or restrictive meanings and the recreation of meaning. The outcome of the diachronic study may lead to an understanding of meaning change or a lack of semantic transformation within the semantic field. If there is a semantic transformation, then diachronic semantics is realized.

2. The Fundamental Meaning of the Word "Satan"

To understand the historical/diachronic meaning of the word Satan, it is essential first to recognize its fundamental meaning. The foundational semantics of the word Satan has a distinct linguistic history in the context of different cultures. Accordingly, this study delves into the derivation

2. Before this, the main approach in linguistics was historical or chronological linguistics, and often the history of the change and evolution of words and their meaning was assumed.

3. It means more limited compared to the old meaning of the word.

4. It means expanding the range of the new meaning compared to the old meaning of the word.

5. If the new meaning differs from the old meaning and transfers meaning from one domain to another, convey of meaning has taken place.

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and disparate formulations of the concept of Satan within the Arabic lexicon and beyond, subsequently reinterpreting the core meaning of Satan.

- A) The word Satan is derived from "*Shaṭana*" which means a long rope with a sturdy texture used to draw water from a well. *al-Mushāṭinu* refers to someone who pulls the bucket from a well with two ropes. "Drunkenness resulting from a long nap is like a bucket tied by two strings hanging in the air" and the poem "A hungry prisoner whose head and legs seem to be stuck between two ropes" Point to the tangible meaning of rope (Ibn Manẓūr, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 13, 237). It seems that, like other words, the concept of Satan gradually evolved due to metaphorical applications in its central meaning. Thus, the application of Satan in concrete matters transformed through the intermediary function of Satan related to temptation and various deceptions that ensnare humans, leading to the abstraction of its meaning interpreted as being distanced from God in the form "*Fī'āl*." Another concrete meaning of this word among Arabs is "Rebellion." An unruly horse is referred to as "Satan" by Arabs; its abstract meaning is rebellion against God (Abbasi et al., 2020 AD/1399 SH: 93-94).
- B) In another structure, it originates from "*Shāṭa-Yashītu*" which means to burn or be destroyed.⁶ It is understood to be invalidated, in accordance with the form (*Fa' lān*). It appears that this sensory meaning has taken on a transcendent connotation through its

6. In this structure, Satan seems to be a mixture of fire from the point of view of existence and creation, and the meaning of the verse "And the creation of the world is from fire" (al-Raḥmān/15) has a semantic compatibility (Rāghib, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 24; Ṭabrisī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 6, 516; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 12, 151).

semantic application of intense wrath (Abasi et al., 2020 AD/1399 SH: 93-94).

- C) Linguistically, it is also suggested that it may derive from *Shawṭ*. It is the singular form of *Ashwāṭ* meaning one round of running to completion; in this semantic framework, the usage of the word Satan in the Quran can refer to someone who has reached the finish line once, and God has granted him "A second chance."⁷ The core meanings of Satan in these formulations include rope, rebellion, intensity of heat, and reaching an endpoint, which can be generalized and transformed into a transcendent meaning (Abbasi et al., 2020 AD/1399 SH: 93-94).

3. Diachronic Semantics of the Word "Satan"

Diachronic semantics, associated with chronological sequences, undergoes meaning transformations (Sadeghi, Nasrati, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 7). In this approach, the word "Satan" is reexamined within Jewish and Islamic cultures, revealing how the temporal evolution of this word has been shaped by a broad or narrow semantic range and the recreation of meaning. Initially, the approach examines the Hebrew culture's understanding of the concept of Satan, followed by the transformations of this concept in the narratives of the Old and New Testaments and the Holy Quran.

The application of "Satan" in Semitic (Arab) culture was commonly used as a proper name (Jeffery, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 282). Names such as *al-Shayṭān ibn 'Ūf ibn al-Nakha'* (Ibn Ḥazm, 1983: 416), *Mu'āwīya ibn al-Shayṭān ibn Mu'āwīya* (Ibn Ḥazm, 1983: 208), *'Āhān ibn al-Shayṭān*

7. [Allāh] said, "So indeed, you are of those reprieved; until the Day of the time well-known (al-Ḥijr).

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(Ibn Durayd, 1991: 401), and *Sharāḥīl* ibn *al-Shayṭān* ibn *al-Ḥārith* (Ibn Durayd, 1991: 406) illustrate the usage of this word in pre-Islamic Arabia and the awareness of its implications. Additionally, "*al-Shayṭān*" referred to a snake with hair (or bristles) in Arab culture (Ibn Manzūr, 1994 AD/1414 AH: 13, 238), and a dangerous snake was known as "*Shayṭān*" or "*Shayṭān al-Ḥamāṭa*." (Ibn Nāqīya, 1954 AD/1374 AH: 70) Such applications can also be found in Arabic poetry, which reflects the lived experiences of Arabs.

In a poem, a man reproaches his wife:

"When she swears, she swears like the *Shayṭān al-Ḥamāṭ*, I know." (Farrā', 1980: 2, 387)

The angry woman swears that when she takes an oath, she resembles the crowned snakes that inhabit the *Ḥamāṭ* tree. In this poetic statement, the word "*Shayṭān*" is used in a specific sense to reproach a man by his wife. A simile of "*Shayṭān*" in poetry is exemplified by:

"When *Muthannā Ḥaḍramī* twists like the *Shayṭān* through the desert where the plant *Khirwa* 'grows.'" (Ibn Qutayba, 2002 AD/1423 AH: 224; Ibn Nāqīya, 1954 AD/1374 AH: 70; 'Asgari, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 210)

It shows the lived experiences and familiarity of Arabs with the concept of "*Shayṭān*." This perception of the meaning of "*Shayṭān*" within pre-Islamic Arab life might be influenced by interactions with neighboring cultures, such as those in Mesopotamia. Although in Mesopotamian belief systems, the "Snake" had positive roles, assisting and being favorable to human life, facilitating the fertility of the earth, and the annual molting of snakes symbolized immortality (Gha'emi Manesh, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 54), they also served to ward off evil forces from humans and even transcended to the realm of gods (Mozaffari and Zarei, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 91). The anthropomorphic representations of

Mesopotamian deities in snake form (Thorkild, 1968: 104) indicate the stability and influence of its function within this system.

This ancient archetype of the snake⁸—reflected in the names of Arab tribes such as *Banū Ḥiyya*, *Baū Af'ī*, and *Banū Khash*—may signify its totemic⁹ status among the Semites. This perspective strengthens the notion that the usage of the word "*Shayṭān*" as a proper name for individuals and tribes could have had a totemic root (Jeffery, 1952: 282).

The exploration of the evolving meaning of "Satan" in the diachronic sequence of millennia makes the understanding of this concept unstable. With an intertextual approach, its semantic transformation in negative and unpleasant matters is accessible. In these unstable transformations, the meaning of "Satan" and its function shifted from pleasantness to unpleasantness, and broadly to negative matters (Gha'emi Manesh, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 54).

The narrative of the Torah regarding the seduction of Adam and Eve by the serpent—whether in the mouth of the serpent or in the form of a serpent—(Genesis 3: 1-14) aligns with meanings of enmity¹⁰ and

8. Considering the resemblance of snake to string, this word was also interpreted as string, for example, *Farāhīdī* writes: "al-Shaṭān is a long string that has a strong texture and is used to draw water (from a well)." (*Farāhīdī*, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 6, 236); *Azharī*, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 11, 213) *al-Mushāṭīn*: One who pulls water from the well with two strings. An example of this can be found in the poems of Dhul Rama:

Drunkenness resulting from a long nap is like a bucket tied by two strings hanging in the air.

A hungry prisoner whose head and legs seem to be stuck between two ropes (*Azharī*, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 11, 213-214). This meaning is significant for the devil in that the devil binds people with various tricks and obsessions.

9. Totemism is a set of beliefs that believe in a kind of spiritual connection and kinship between a group of people and another physical being (animal, plant or object) called a totem (Gould and Kolb, 2004 AD/1384 SH: 273-274). The ancient indigenous people believed in the power of the totem to protect the clan.

10. Some believe that Satan is derived from the Hebrew or Syriac word "Hashtatin" which means "Enemy" (*Khazaeli*, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 78).

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slander¹¹, illustrating a transformation in the meaning of this ancient archetype. This new application of meaning also manifests in the New Testament, where the words "Dragon," "Serpent," "Devil," and "Satan" are considered synonymous, all having angelic lineage (Revelation 12: 9; Revelation 20: 2).

The account of "Satan" in the Quran within its novel and specific discourse indicates a change in meaning and its reproduction. In the Quranic narratives, the names "Satan" and "Iblis" are considered synonymous. (al-Baqarah/34-36; al-A'rāf/11-20) The use of "Satan" in the sense of evil spirits aligns with its employment in ancient Arabic poetry and is interconnected with the ancient archetypes of snakes, giants, and jinn (Jeffery, 1952: 283).

Secondary meanings, such as driving humans away from truth and God, include the meaning of "Straying from good" (Ibn Durayd, 1988: 2, 867; Ṭurayḥī, 1955 AD/1375 AH: 6, 271; Farāhīdī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 6, 237) and "Rebellious," (Ṭabrisī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 1, 36) indicate this semantic transformation. The reason for this change lies in God's command to rebel, as stated in the words of *Umayyah ibn Abī al-Ṣalt* about Prophet Solomon, who said, "Any rebellious one (Satan) who disobeyed was constrained." The term "Rebellious" here refers to "Satan." (Azharī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 11, 214) Ultimately, "Satan" became a term for "Any vile and malevolent individual, whether from jinn, humans, or animals." (Rāghib, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 454; Ibn Manzūr, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 13, 238; Ṭabrisī, 1952 AD/1372 AH: 1, 36)

4. The meaning of "Satan" in the Bible

11. Hawks considers the devil to be the translation of the Greek word "Diapolis" meaning "Chinese speech" (Hawks, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 545).

The pre-fall Satan is referred to in Hebrew as "Lucifer" (לְיָהִי לְקָדֵשׁ), meaning "Bright and morning star," which appears only once in the both testaments: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!" (Isaiah 14:12) After the fall, he was called "Satan." The Hebrew word שָׂטָן (sâtan)¹² is a generic term meaning "Accuser" or "Enemy." (Kelly, 2006: 1–13; Campo, 2009: 603) The word "Devil,"¹³ which is used for "Iblis" or "Satan," is the Greek translation "Diabolos," meaning "Slanderer," and is also referred to as "Abaddon"¹⁴ and "Apollyon,"¹⁵ meaning the "Destroyer." (Hawks, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 545)

Some suggest that the word "Diable" in French and "Devil" in English are derived from this term (Hojjati, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 72), or that its root is Syriac (Khazaeli, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 78). According to Dehkhoda, the word "Satan" resembles the Greek "Titan"¹⁶ (Dehkhoda, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 10, 14706). In the Hebrew Bible, Satan appears as a supernatural being and is also used to refer to the ordinary enemies of humans (Kelly, 2006: 1–13, 28-29; Campo, 2009: 603). The term "Ha-

12. Western researchers believe that this word is the spelling of the Greek word "diaplos". In the Saba'ini translation of the Old Testament, Diaplos represents the Hebrew word for the devil in the book of Zechariah the Prophet, chapter 3 (Askari, 2009 AD/1389 SH: 215).

13. The English word devil is derived from the Old English *dēofol*, which in turn is derived from the Latin *diabolus*.

14. Hawieh is naked in his presence, and he does not cover Abaddon (Job, 26:6); Abaddon and Mut say that we have heard its reputation with our own ears (Job, 28:22); because this would be a fire that will burn until eternity, and it will uproot all my crops (Job, 31: 12). Hawieh and Abaddon are in the presence of God, so how many times are the hearts of the sons of Adam (Proverbs, 15: 11); Hawieh and Abaddon will not be satisfied, nor will human eyes be satisfied (Proverbs, 27:20).

15. Their king is the angel of the bottomless well, who is called "Ebdon" in Hebrew and "Apollyon" in Greek, and it means "Destroyer." (Revelation, 9:11)

16. The titans (Akh) the sons of Uranus and Gaia, in Greek mythology. Who rebelled against the gods and then decided to build a ladder by collapsing mountains to climb to the sky, but Jupiter, the god of gods, burned them (Dehkhoda, sub-word).

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Satan" usually directly refers to the heavenly accuser (Iblis) (Job 1 and 2; Zechariah 3), but "Satan" can signify any enemy or accuser (Kelly, 2006: 1–13, 28-29).

"Baalzebub" (Matthew 10:25; Matthew 12:24; Matthew 12:27; Luke 11:15; Luke 11:18; Luke 11:19)¹⁷ means "Lord of the flies." "Belial" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Ephesians 2:2; Matthew 9:34; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15)¹⁸ is another designation for Satan in the Bible, referring to meanings such as "Prince of this world," "Prince of the devils," "God of this world," "Iblis," "Murderer," "Father of liars," "Evil one," "Dragon," "Serpent of old," "Enemy," and "Roaring lion."

5. The Formation and Evolution of the Concept of Satan in Early Human Beliefs

Ancient human religions generally share beliefs in good and evil, seeking to attract favorable outcomes and repel unfavorable ones while avoiding

17. It is enough for the student to be like his master and the slave to be like his master. So if the owner of the house was called Beelzebub, how much more his household. I cast out demons through Beelzebub, with whose help do your sons cast them out? For this reason, they will judge you (Matthew 12:27). And the scribes who came from Jerusalem said that he has Beelzebub, and with the help of the chief of demons, he casts out demons (Mark 3:22); but some of them said that he casts out the demons with the help of Beelzebub, the leader of the demons (Luke 11:15); so, if the devil is divided against himself, how will his reign last? because you say that I cast out demons with the help of Beelzebub (Luke 11:18). So if I cast out demons through Beelzebub, through whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason, they will be your judges (Luke 11:19).

18. Now is the judgment of this world, and now the ruler of this world will be cast out (John 12:31); After this, I will not say much to you, because the ruler of this world is coming and has nothing in me (John 14:30); and as for the judgement, as it has been judged on the ruler of this world (John 16:11); in which before, you behaved according to the course of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, that is, the spirit that currently works in the children of sin (Ephesians 2:2); but the Pharisees said, he casts out the demons through the ruler of the demons (Matthew 9:34); and the scribes who came from Jerusalem said that he has Beelzebub and he casts out demons with the help of the ruler of the demons (Mark 3:22); but some of them said that he casts out the demons with the help of Beelzebub, the leader of the demons (Luke 11:15).

unpleasantness. Those phenomena that caused human suffering¹⁹ were labeled as "Evil." In this context, early humans sanctified natural celestial symbols, such as the sun, moon, and stars, as well as earthly natural manifestations like animals, trees, and plants, and later the spirits of the deceased. This gradually led to the emergence of multiple gods. For example, in Hinduism, there are numerous deities, with the most significant being Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva, who can be sources of either good or evil. The issue of evil²⁰ has been a universal phenomenon, and based on the ancient human understanding of this concept, unfortunate events, such as illness and natural disasters, were believed to be linked to hidden phenomena like evil gods, malevolent spirits, and demons (Khodabakhshi, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 43). Some also considered demons and spirits as the cause of diseases (Sami, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 290).

The Sumerians also held a belief in polytheism; in their worldview, each natural manifestation of the universe had a corresponding deity that surpassed humans. Over time, belief in monotheism replaced the

19. One of the roots of the emergence of the concept of Satan is suffering, which mankind has been struggling with for a long time. In fact, the suffering is caused by evil forces, evil spirits, jinn, etc., that a person is connected with. The subject of suffering, which is one of the most important teachings of ancient Buddhism, and considers the universe, including man, to be suffering, that in order to get rid of suffering and reach Nirvana, there are eight methods, such as right cognition, right thought, and action (Rostami et al., 2013 AD/1392 SH: 53). The subject of suffering is also reflected in monotheistic religions, which believe that the path to excellence and perfection is accompanied by suffering (Acts of the Apostles, 14:22; I Thessalonians, 3:3-4) and also the subject of suffering is reflected in the Qur'anic verses: We created man in the suffering (al-Bald/4). O! Man! You will go to your Lord with effort and suffering and you will meet him!

*Nirvana means freedom from the series of causes of the world's creation and suffering, the desired perfection that is realized by the eight Buddhist ways, Nirvana means a position that is unchangeable.

20. John Hick divides evil into moral evil (in which the human factor is involved in its creation) and immoral evil (such as floods and earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, etc.) (Hick, J. 1999: 39). In another view, evil can be divided into social evil, moral evil, natural evil and religious evil (Anthony J. T. 2001: 12).

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Sumerians' polytheism. As Babylon rose to prominence in Mesopotamia, Marduk was recognized as the supreme god, and Bukhtunnasr accepted Marduk as the sole personal deity, resembling monotheism (Shala, 1967 AD/1346 SH: 233). Nevertheless, the other gods did not disappear entirely; rather, they were considered manifestations of the supreme god and sometimes took on forms such as angels, evil spirits, Satan, and demons (Chigh, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 19-20). Consequently, ancient Mesopotamians, who struggled with numerous adversities, attributed these evils and unpleasantness to the wrath of the gods or ascribed them to malevolent forces, evil spirits, and demons, making sacrifices to stay away from such evils (Ghadiyani, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 37) and performing specific rituals.

Similarly, ancient Iranians perceived evil spirits as their enemies and resorted to magic and sorcery to ward off their harm (Damavandi, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 96). The Egyptians believed that human sin led to the domination of Satan, and that the embodiment of Satan in a person's body caused illness; they endeavored to cure this through various forms of sorcery, charms, talismans, and incantations (Durant, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 157 and 304). In Pre-Islamic Arabia, the origins of diseases were also thought to be evil spirits, demons, and Satan, and they sought to exorcise these entities from afflicted individuals through incantations and prayers (Safa, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 30).

The culmination of the evolution and development of the concept of Satan can be summarized as follows: Early humanity has long grappled with the issue of evil, attributing its causation to hidden forces such as malevolent spirits, demons, and evil forces. This belief was reflected in the primitive religions of ancient Egypt, India, Mesopotamia, and elsewhere, where such entities were considered powerful and influential

in human fate. They were labeled as evil gods in opposition to benevolent deities. In Iranian cultural belief, the evil god transformed into the force of evil and darkness known as Angra Mainyu/Ahriman, contrasted with the force of good/Ahura Mazda, leading to the prevalence of dualism.

6. The Concept of Satan in Mesopotamia

The belief in Satan, like in many cultures, was prevalent among the Sumerians, Assyrians, and Babylonians. An ancient inscription describes the characteristics of demons as follows: They are the poisons of the deities, capable of penetrating walls, descending from rooftops, and like storms, they sweep through homes; no door or lock can deter them. They enter every house like a snake or wind from beneath the door; they sever the bonds between husbands and wives, snatch children from their mothers' arms. Each of these demons has a name and a specific role: "Labartu," the child-snatcher; "Labasu," the agent of trembling; "Ahnasu," the cause of darkness, blackness, and paleness (Moballeghi Abadani, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 2, 45).

The majority of Sumerians, in addition to worshiping the "Great gods" and agricultural deities, believed in Animism²¹ and even more primitive forms of belief. They thought that numerous good and bad spirits governed nature and sent illness and death, or assisted humans in their affairs. Therefore, they revered these spirits. The spirits of rivers—which were worshiped according to official religion and in common societies—along with household spirits—who guarded the family

21. "Anim" means "To stimulate" and "To excite" (Nas, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 32), which was first used by English anthropologist "Tyler" in expressing his theory about the origin of religion. It is the primary religion or the earliest religion of the world (Soleymani Ardestani, 2012 AD/1382 SH: 44). Animists consider nature to be understanding and human-like (Anthropomorphic) and they pray with it and sacrifice for it rather than nature (Tawfiqi, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 14).

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hearth—and the spirits of the dead—who were offered sacrifices on designated occasions—were among the spirits that were revered. In fact, the general populace of Babylon highly valued magical practices that stemmed from the belief in the existence of both good and evil spirits. "The summoning of demons and evil spirits" and witchcraft were prevalent among common people, and they also gained acceptance in official religion. Alongside temples, there were schools for the readers of prayers and incantations that organized the popular beliefs in summoning demons and spirits. The prayers and rituals mixed with popular magic, conducted by these individuals, transformed into grand ceremonies accompanied by sacrifices, and ultimately this particular religious practice became part of the religious ceremonies of the Assyrians and the inhabitants of Mesopotamia (Kazhdan, 1974 AD/1353 SH: 155).

7. The Concept of Satan in Pre-Islamic Times

Historical reports suggest that the concept of Satan was not expressed through this specific term; rather, what opposed good was referred to with terms such as evil, malevolent spirits, and jinn. These concepts reflected the ideas and actions associated with Satan. The details are as follows:

7.1. Evil

Primitive humans before the advent of Abrahamic religions were not familiar with a concept or being known as Satan; they referred to hardships and painful matters simply as "Evil"²² and attributed them to

22. Evil is the opposite of good, and good is that which is passionate; and that is existence or the perfection of existence... But evil is an absence, which does not have a nature, rather it is the lack of a gem or the lack of perfection for a gem (Ibn Sina, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 1, 355).

"Evil Forces," "Malevolent spirits," or "Jinn." Primitive tribes attempted to ward off malevolent spirits through magic and sought to attract beneficial spirits (Nas, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 13). References in the Torah also indicate a belief among the Jews in the capabilities of jinn (cf. Leviticus 19:31; 20:6; 1 Samuel 28:9). Additionally, suffering from wicked spirits is reflected in the Gospels (cf. Matthew 10:1; Luke 6:18 and 8:2; Acts of the Apostles 5:16 and 8:7) (Rodríguez, 1998: 5-7) and humans are warned against resorting to the powers of jinn and unclean spirits (Leviticus 19:3 and 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:11), with magicians and jinn-holders deemed unclean (Leviticus 19:3).

Therefore, with the emergence of Abrahamic religions, the belief in monotheism spread among people, who began to regard the power of jinn and wicked spirits as insignificant compared to the power of the one God. However, due to their inability to repel harm and afflictions, some individuals strayed from the teachings of the prophets and believed that besides God, malevolent spirits and demons also held independent power over worldly affairs. This ultimately led to beliefs in dualism and dual worship, causing people to think that their interests could not be secured solely through the worship of the benevolent and merciful God and that it was also necessary to worship the spirits of evil to be safe from the tribulations caused by demons and wicked forces (Lantihi, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 325). The worship of angels (to attract good) and the veneration of jinn (to repel evil) by pre-Islamic Arabs is another indication of these beliefs (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 13, 325).

7.2. Dragon and Serpent

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In Mesopotamian culture and civilizations, the serpent and the dragon²³ are two symbols that sometimes replace each other and are occasionally representative of evil and wickedness. For example, in Iranian mythology, Ahriman (Angra Mainyu) is an ancient demon able to manifest as a lizard or serpent. In his battle against goodness, he seeks assistance from other demons (Curtis, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 121). Sometimes, this being operates in a dual capacity, embodying both good and evil.²⁴ For instance, in Mesopotamian myths, the dragon plays a role in creation, yet heroes often engage in dragon-slaying. In Babylonian myths, Marduk is depicted with a sword, having defeated a winged dragon, which symbolizes his victory over Tiamat (Jiran et al., 1996 AD/1375 SH: 71). Tiamat²⁵ is a monstrous dragon who is the mother of existence, defeated by Marduk, from whose dismembered body the

23. Dragon: Snake. Big snake, big snake (Dekhoda dictionary); Torpedoes. Torpedo: It is a legendary snake with a large size, which has strong wings and claws, and fire jumps out of its mouth (Definite Dictionary).

24. This dual function of the dragon can also be seen in Chinese mythology. In Chinese mythology, the dragon is associated with water and rain and is immortal. The dragon has various forms, including the heavenly dragon, which benefits humans through wind and rain. Earth dragon that represent the course of rivers and streams (Rastegar Fasai, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 17) is also a symbol of contemplation, authority, fertility, etc. (Nayebzadeh and Samaniyan, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 240). The dragon is a benevolent and sacred animal. (Rastegar Fasai, 2015 AD/1379 SH: 21) but the depiction of the dragon in the form of a rain-making cloud among the Aryans, due to the damage caused by lightning and storms, turned the dragon into a harmful and evil symbol, but among the Chinese due to the benefits of rain, the dragon found a divine position as a beneficial being (Kalantar et al., 2019 AD/1398 SH: 255-256). However, according to some researchers, the dragon in Chinese myths is also a symbol of famine, calamity and vandalism. It has a positive meaning and is a symbol of birth and has holiness, but some thinkers also consider it a negative function in addition to being positive and consider it a symbol of famine and calamity.

In Greek mythology, the dragon has both positive and negative functions (Jiran et al., 1996 AD/1375 SH: 59).

25. Tiamat is the personified face of the sea, manifested as a feminine element. "Lahmo" and "Lahamo" were the first creatures that were born. They are gods who have a relatively ambiguous personality; apparently they are a pair of snakes and dragons (Jiran et al., 1996 AD/1375 SH: 59).

elements of the universe are formed (Eliade, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 69-70). The serpent/dragon symbolizes all great mother goddesses connected with the vitality and birth of nature (Dubockour, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 55). In Mesopotamian myths, the dragon signifies fertility and birth. It should be noted that Tiamat also represents the dual principles of "Chaos and darkness." (Khalanatar et al., 2019 AD/1398 SH: 254) Tiamat, the first dragon-god of creation in Sumerian myths, appears as a great serpent. In the Babylonian creation myth "Enuma Elish,"²⁶ it is mentioned that children in the shape of serpents are born from Tiamat (Thorkild, 1968: 104). "Lahmu" and "Lahamu" were the first creations that were born, and they are gods with relatively ambiguous traits, apparently a couple of serpent dragons (Jiran et al., 1996 AD/1375 SH: 59). The enmity between man and the serpent (Dragon) is reflected in the Mesopotamian epic where the serpent steals the plant of immortality from Gilgamesh (Gilgamesh, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 104). Overall, the serpent/dragon in Mesopotamian myths symbolizes fertility and the creation of the world, but on the other hand, it has also posed a barrier to human immortality. It is quite possible that the story of Adam's fall in the religious beliefs of the Semites has roots in Mesopotamian mythological beliefs. In fact, "the dragon is equated with a demonic symbol, closely associated with the serpent... the dragon represents Lucifer's army against the army of God's angels." (Shahvalie, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 125 and 131)

In ancient times, the serpent was revered; in Mesopotamian myths, gods are often depicted with serpentine bodies (Thorkild, 1968: 104). The worship of serpent deities in Mesopotamia has a long-standing history. The depiction of two intertwined serpents, seemingly possessing a single body, represents one such serpent deity, "Nirah," in the city of

26. EnūmaElisha: The name of the creation epic in Babylonian mythology.

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"Der" at the border of Mesopotamia and Elam, which was worshipped as the minister of the deity "Ishtaran," lord of the city of Der (Skinner, 2001: 42-45; Black, Green, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 275). Among the serpent-like gods of Mesopotamia, "Ningiszida" (Image 1) is depicted as the ruler of the underworld in Sumerian mythology.



Picture 1: Source: The Louvre Museum

The result is that the serpent in the concepts of ancient peoples and Mesopotamians has been a symbol of fertility and growth, and the serpent's annual shedding of its skin represents renewal and immortality. However, the pursuit of fundamental changes over the millennia in the understanding of this symbol indicates the instability of symbols and the possibility of their meanings transforming; such that this concept has exchanged its role as a giver of life with a sinister position. In Hebrew culture, predatory animals and venomous snakes—believed to possess a demonic spirit—were revered (Moballeghi Abadani, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 2, 56). It is clear that in the Old Testament (Genesis 3: 1-14), it was the serpent that seduced Eve and then Adam, and in the New Testament, the serpent/dragon is sometimes the Devil and at times an accomplice of the Devil (2 Corinthians 11: 3; Revelation 12: 9; and 20: 2), being a cursed

being whom God expelled from Paradise and condemned to eat dust and crawl on his belly (Genesis 3: 14).

7.3. Jinn/Demon/Fairy

Among various nations of the world, the belief in jinn and fairies²⁷ has existed in the form of tales and myths, and they believed that spirits, jinn/fairies, and similar entities could sometimes take the form of animals and sometimes take human form (Nas, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 15). In the myths of Assyria and Babylon, angels or Utukku were divided into two groups: Good (Shedu/Lamassu) and evil (Edimmu). Edimmus afflicted humans with illness, compelled them to commit wicked and criminal acts, created discord among couples and families, and destroyed herds (Jiran et al., 1996 AD/1375 SH: 89). Pre-Islamic Arabs also believed that jinn were a type of harmful beings similar to demons, dwelling in the desert and instilling dread and fear in the hearts of the Arabs, serving as a source of evil.²⁸ The belief in jinn, angels, monsters, and *Sa' lāh* (a type of Jinn) is indicative of their Animism practices (Mashkour, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 275).

The demon has an ancient background and history, which the general populace perceives as akin to "Āl" or other imaginary and fantastical beings (Khushdel, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 371). It is of the genus of jinn and appears in various forms (Rastegar Fasaei, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 207-208). In the Avesta, the demon is referred to as Daeva, and in ancient India, it is called Deva²⁹ (Yahaqqi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 371), which in the Avesta

27. A demon is a creature with a soul, which is neither human nor animal, which sometimes harms humans and is known as "Jin" in Arabic. They are two groups, first, believer and good that named in Persian Fairy- and the second group, unbeliever and bad - which is referred to as "Demon" in Farsi (Mirzay Nazer, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 187).

28. Among the evil spirits among them, there is one "Giant" who lies in wait for people in the deserts to destroy them and eat their flesh and blood (Nas, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 479).

29. In Sanskrit, it means light.

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means "Evil God." In Zoroastrian prayers, one seeks to be free from "Daeva," thus the demon emerges as a "Non-praised god" and a "False deity" (Mirzaye Nazer, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 187-188). Among Indians and Europeans, besides Iranians, the term can also mean "God," but Iranians referred to a group of Aryan gods as "Demon," who were worshiped in India and Iran before the advent of Zoroaster. With Zoroaster's prophetic mission, Ahura Mazda was declared as the absolute good, and demons came to be known as misguiding and satanic beings. In the teachings of the Avesta, demons possess greater power than humans and dominate the realm of the world, correlating with natural phenomena such as wind and rain, thunder and lightning, floods, and earthquakes. Demons are superhuman creatures that negatively and destructively meddle in human lives, creating the conditions for the decay or destruction of Ahura Mazda's good creations (Hinzi, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 162).

8. The Narrative of Satan in the Quran

In the framework of the Quran, Iblis is a rebellious being who stood against God: "...We said to the angels, "Prostrate to Adam"; they all prostrated except Iblis..." (al-Baqarah/34; al-A'rāf/11; al-Isrā'/61; Tāhā/116; al-Kahf/50) He is a seducer (al-Ḥijr/39; Ṣād/82), an enemy of mankind (al-Kahf/50), cast out (al-A'rāf/13 and 18; Ṣād/77; al-Ḥijr/34), and a beautifier of human deeds (al-Ḥijr/39), who attacks humanity from all sides (al-A'rāf/17). After his rebellion against God, he was termed Satan, which in some instances refers specifically to Iblis (al-Baqarah/36; al-A'rāf/27; Yūsuf/5; al-Isrā'/53), and is generally a name for any evil seducing being, whether jinn or human, including the forces

of Iblis (al-An‘ām/112)³⁰. The realm of Satan's influence is legislative spheres; his only weapon is temptation (al-Nās/4-5) and invitation. "But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me..." (Ibrāhīm/22)

In the perception of the Quran, jinn are often associated with a demonic role, as humans have recognized throughout history, believing them to have supernatural powers. The Holy Quran amended the pre-Islamic Arab conception of jinn, where sometimes the term "Satan" refers specifically to the jinn. "And they followed what the devils recited during the reign of Solomon. And Solomon did not disbelieve, but the devils disbelieved..." (al-Baqarah/102) The scholar views them as a group of jinn (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 1, 235). Sometimes the term jinni specifically refers to Satan: Who whispers in the breasts of mankind; from among jinn and men (al-Nās/4-5).

Conclusion

- The term "Satan," meaning a strong long rope with a tangible application, gradually transformed in its metaphorical sense to denote a tempter. Additionally, in another interpretation, it means "To ignite or perish," and in an emotional context, it signifies "Intense anger." Beyond these interpretations, from a linguistic perspective, tracing the word "Satan" to "*Shuṭ*" meaning "To run a race and to finish" can be described. In this interpretation, the application of the term "Satan" in the Quran can refer to "A being that has once reached the finish line, to which God granted a second chance."

30. And thus We have made for every prophet an enemy - devils from mankind and jinn, inspiring to one another decorative speech in delusion. But if your Lord had willed, they would not have done it, so leave them and that which they invent.

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- The imagery of Satan in ancient human beliefs, followed by the ancient Mesopotamian culture, speaks of forces of evil and wicked powers. Over time, as people embraced monotheism, the Mesopotamian tribes intertwined the teachings of the prophets with their lived experiences, associating pleasant events with the merciful God, and attributing unpleasant events and disasters to the forces of evil and Satan. This belief gradually found its way into religious texts, and in the Quran, Satan is reflected as a wicked creation and the enemy of humanity, approached through a revelatory and monotheistic perspective.

- The concept of Satan in religious texts is interconnected with the historical development of these texts. Accordingly, the process of compiling the two testaments over many centuries utilized the Mesopotamian culture and the adjacent civilizations, such as Iran and Egypt, reflecting their distinctive discourse system in their perspectives on the concept of Satan.

- The narrative of the serpent in the Book of Genesis in the Torah described as cunning and deceiving Eve, signifies the replacement of Satan in this tale. Linguistic and mythological research indicates that in the non-homogeneous formulation of the Mesopotamian mythological world, the serpent existed as a supernatural entity with a dual character.

- The Quranic narrative of the concept of Satan reflects the confrontation between the pre-Islamic and Islamic approaches. In pre-Islamic concepts, Satan had a mythical essence under the umbrella of deity worship, whereas the Quranic perspective, with its focus on monotheism, presents a novel interpretation of Satan.

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