

BERESHIT RABBATI

HUMILIATION OF SATAN LEGEND¹

“And all the years of Adam—those which he lived—were 930 years” (Gen 5:5). Three people cheated the Angel of Death out of gaining power over their souls, and they were Adam the protoplast, Jacob our ancestor, and Moses our teacher.

(How did) Adam the protoplast (do so)? The day when he was endowed with his knowledge, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded the ministering angels: ‘Enter and bow down to him!’² The ministering angels entered to perform the will of the Holy One, blessed be He. (However,) Satan, who was the mightiest of all the angels in heaven, said to the Holy One, blessed be He, ‘Master of the universe! You created us from the Divine Glory, and now You say to us, “Bow yourselves down!” before one whom You created from the dirt of the earth??!’³ The Holy One, blessed be He, answered him: ‘This one who originates (from) the dirt of the earth possesses some wisdom and intelligence which is not in you!’⁴ Satan responded, ‘Try me!’, and so He put him to the test.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: ‘Behold, I have created cattle, creeping things, wild beasts, and birds on the earth. Descend so that you might arrange them in front of yourself and in front of him (Adam). If you can give names to all of them, I will command Adam to bow down to you, and I will install you beneath the presence of My Glory indefinitely. However, if Adam can give them the names

¹ Ḥanokh Albeck, ed., *Midrash Berešit Rabbati* (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1940), 24.21-25.18.

² According to Latin *Vita Adae et Evae* 14:1-2, it is the archangel Michael who commands the angels and Satan to “worship the image of the Lord God, just as the Lord God has commanded.” The Armenian version (*ibid.*) represents Michael as summoning the angels, to whom then God says: “Come, bow down to god whom I made.” Translations cited from *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve: Second Revised Edition* (SBLEJL 17; ed. Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 16E.

³ Latin *Vita Adae et Evae* 14:3: “I will not worship him who is lower and later than me. I am prior to that creature. Before he was made, I had already been made. He ought to worship me.” Translation from Anderson-Stone, *Synopsis*, 17E. Note also Q 38:76: “I (Iblīs) am superior to him (Adam). You created me from fire, whereas You created him from clay.”

⁴ Compare Q 2:31-33.

which correspond to their names which are with Me,⁵ you must bow down to Adam, and Adam will be in My garden to serve and to protect.⁶ The Holy One, blessed be He, descended to the Garden of Eden, as Scripture affirms: ‘My Beloved has descended to his garden’ (Cant 6:2), and Satan also descended.

When Adam noticed that Satan (*sic*)⁷ had descended, he stood up and told his wife: ‘Come, let us bow down before the Holy One, blessed be He, Who created us!’, as it is written, ‘Come and let us worship and bow down before His footstool, and let us praise the Lord our Maker!’ (Ps 95:6). At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, asked Satan, ‘Will you begin giving names to the cattle, or will Adam?’ Satan answered him, ‘I will go first!’ The Holy One, blessed be He, brought a bull and a cow and stood them before Satan. He said to him, ‘What are the names of these?’ He did not know. He removed them from before him and brought a camel, and asked him, ‘What is its name?’ He did not know. He removed that one and brought a donkey, but he did not know (its name).⁸

Now the Holy One, blessed be He, had endowed Adam with mental organization via wisdom, and a voice with which to speak and respond, as it is written: ‘Adam possessed mental plans’ (Prov 16:1). He brought the cattle before him, and the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: ‘What shall the name of this one be called?’ Since He began (his question) with the letter *beth*, he answered Him, ‘*baqar*’ (cattle). He then stood the camel before him and asked, ‘And this one too, what is its name?’ Since He began (his question) with the letter *gimel*, he said ‘*gamal*’ (camel). He stood the donkey before him, and asked, ‘This animal, what is its name?’ Since He began (his question) with the letter *heth*, he said, *hamor* ‘donkey.’

⁵ I.e., a thing’s ‘name’ as a perfect expression of its ‘essence’ or ‘nature.’

⁶ Note that nothing is said about Satan losing his heavenly position. Contrast Latin *Vita Adae et Evae* 15:3-16:1: “I (Satan) said: ‘If he (God) grows angry with me, I will place my seat above the stars of heaven and I will be like the Most High.’ Then the Lord God grew angry with me and sent me forth with my angels from our glory. On account of you (Adam) we were expelled from our dwelling into this world and cast out upon the earth.” Translation from Anderson-Stone, *Synopsis*, 17E. Note too the early application of Isa 14:13-14 to Satan by the author of *Vita Adae et Evae*. See also *2 Enoch* 29:4-5 (long): “And one [Satanail] from out [of] the order of angels, having turned away with the order that was under him, conceived an impossible thought, to place his throne higher than the clouds above the earth, that he might become equal in rank to my power. And I threw him out from the height with his angels, and he was flying in the air continuously above the bottomless.” Translation cited from *APOT* 2:447.

⁷ Perhaps, as Albeck suggests, we should read instead ‘the Holy One, blessed be He.’

⁸ Compare *Gen. Rab.* 17.4 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 155-56); *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 4.3 (ed. Mandelbaum, 1:60-61); *Pesiq. Rab.* §14; *Num. Rab.* 19.3, where the ministering angels (מלאכי השרת) collectively are incapable of providing names for the animals.

When Satan realized that the Holy One, blessed be He, had endowed Adam with wisdom,⁹ he let out a great cry and ascended back to heaven. The Eternal One said to him, ‘Why did you cry out?’ He responded, ‘And why shouldn’t I cry out! You created me from Your Own Presence and created Adam from the dirt of the earth, yet you have granted to him wisdom and intelligence!’ The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: ‘Satan, O Destroyer, why are you surprised? ...’¹⁰

⁹ Or: ‘when Satan realized that the Holy One, blessed be He, had given Adam insight ...,’ perhaps a better rendering in this context of God’s hint-giving.

¹⁰ A new and unrelated legend now follows, and eventually the story about how Adam attempts to cheat the Angel of Death. The denouement of the ‘fall of Satan’ episode is lacking in *Bereshit Rabbati*.