“SO SATAN HATH HIS MYSTERIES TO BRING US TO ETERNAL RUINE:”
SATAN AS PROVACATEUR IN PURITAN MINISTERS’ WRITINGS, 1662–1704

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ABSTRACT

Satan was a prominent figure in American Puritan theology in the late seventeenth century, and the witchcraft trials provide a unique opportunity to analyze how religious leaders thought about Satan. As I will show, Puritan ministers and lawmakers transformed the Devil into a character with increased power and agency during the period of the Salem Witch Trials. This transformation is revealed in the writings of these six Puritan ministers during the era of the witchcraft trials, when concerns about Satan’s activity reached fever pitch. The amorphous, undefined characterization of the Devil in the Bible allowed these ministers to perceive Satan in a variety of roles, including that of independent agent or provocateur.

Much of the secondary material on the witch trials regards actual explanations about why they occurred and why they were so severe and numerous in Salem. This project diverges from existing scholarship in that I am not looking to explain about why the Salem witch trials they occurred or why they were so severe and numerous. My work moves in a different direction, examining how Puritan ministers thought about Satan as a critical element of the events. Focusing on their beliefs about Satan, his agency, and his potential power will give a new perspective on the events of the Salem Witch Trials, as well as on Puritan society in the late seventeenth century.
This is dedicated to my mother, Veronica Hughes, who has constantly supported me in everything that I have done, even when I made it difficult.
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Megan Cross and Lisa Lamson tapped me a year ago to be a member of their thesis group. This may be the most significant event of my scholarly career. When I came into the group, I was struggling with devising a thesis topic. Six months later, I was still struggling with devising a thesis topic. Their support and belief in me never wavered. They have seen me completely lose confidence in my work, yet never lost confidence in me.

My mother, Veronica Hughes, has provided constant support as I worked through the process of writing this thesis. The fact that she is also a professional editor did not hurt, either.

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INTRODUCTION

While a great deal of scholarship about the Salem Witch Trials has been written, the character of Satan has been almost completely overlooked. Authors are quick to include the words “Satan” or “The Devil” in the titles of their books and articles, but analysis of the role that Puritan ministers believed Satan played in the trials has not been, in my view, sufficiently researched. This project was inspired by the quote from the title, which in context is preceded by the phrase, “As God hath his Mysteries to bring us to Eternal Salvation.” This struck me as odd, even potentially dualistic. I decided that a closer look at conceptions of Satan held by Puritan ministers during the late seventeenth century might prove interesting.

I argue that the Puritan ministers whose works I analyzed, writing during the period of the Salem Witch Trials, afforded Satan a great deal of power and agency, as evidenced by language in their sermons and essays. Some of the independence and ability that Satan was purported to have cannot be proven through Scripture, and could be considered dualistic. These ministers depict Satan as a being with an enormous amount of power and agency, and while they are quick to add that he can act only under God’s direct control, close analysis of their writing reveals flaws in this theory.

Puritans sought to distance themselves not just from the Catholic orthodoxy, but also from Protestant theology. They believed that, in order to fully comply with God’s will, they needed to mentally (and eventually physically) distance themselves from Catholics and Protestants. They relied solely on the Bible for proof of God’s wishes and desires, jettisoning any other theological ideas.
Puritans who traveled to the New World considered themselves “God’s select people,” as evidenced by John Winthrop’s famous “City on a Hill” sermon. The Massachusetts Puritans saw themselves as setting an example to be followed by devout Christians everywhere. They considered themselves as held to a higher standard by God.

This higher standard had a corollary, however. They believed that not only God, but Satan as well, saw them as God’s chosen people, and as such, Satan was extremely angry with them. This placed them on the front lines of the cosmic war between God and Satan, as elite soldiers. This pressure from both God and Satan, to say nothing of the multiple hardships of establishing a new colony in an untamed, godless land, was overwhelming. I argue that this led Puritan ministers in Massachusetts to greatly exaggerate the power and independence of Satan to levels that could not be proven with regard to evidence in the Bible.

In order to begin this project, I needed to establish appropriate context. I needed to know about the Biblical representations of the Devil, Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy concerning diabolic power and limitations, Puritan beliefs about Satan, and the various philosophies regarding witchcraft. I organized these into the first three chapters, with analysis of the primary sources in the fourth chapter.

The first chapter is concerned with Biblical representations of Satan. I looked at passages in the Bible that clearly referred to Satan, primarily the story of Job and the story of Jesus’ temptation in the desert. I also studied secondary material regarding possible origins of the Christian Devil, including his potential evolution from dualistic Mediterranean religions such as Zoroastrianism.
Chapter Two provides context for understanding the concept of the Devil in Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy. Catholics relied on relics, rituals, and divine intercession to resist Satan’s plots. Protestants, with their emphasis on a personal relationship with God, divested themselves of these concepts, arguing that only piety and vigilance could allow one to resist the Devil. This led to the Protestant version of the Devil gaining power and ubiquity. The Catholic Devil was easy to foil, provided one had access to the appropriate methods or objects. Satan was a more powerful figure in Protestant theology.

Chapter Three focuses on Puritan beliefs about Satan and the methods effective in countering his schemes. The concept of “Puritan exceptionalism” and the notion that Puritans saw themselves on the front lines of the cosmic war are also addressed in this chapter. Chapter Four consists of the analysis of the primary sources, and the conclusions drawn from this analysis. These primary sources are Increase Mather’s essay “Remarkable Providences” (1662), Cotton Mather’s essay “Memorable Providences” (1689), Deodat Lawson’s sermon “Christ’s Fidelity the only Shield Against Satan’s Malignity” (1692), John Hale’s essay “A Modest Inquiry” (1702), John Higginson’s introduction to Hale’s essay (1697), and Lawson’s sermon “Witchcraft in Salem” (1704).

When analyzing the primary sources, I looked for language or statements that might impart Satan with power or agency that was not in line with orthodoxy. Close textual reading of the sources revealed evidence that these ministers were granting Satan a level of independence that did not agree with the concept that Satan can act only with God’s direct permission.
Much of the secondary material on the witch trials regards actual explanations about why they occurred and why they were so severe and numerous in Salem. Scholars have written extensively about these issues, offering such explanations as personal grudges, attempts by ministers to increase the population of congregations in order to augment their individual power (or finances), an overall sense of anxiety caused by poor harvests or Indian incursions, or class conflicts. My work moves in a different direction, examining how Puritan ministers explained Satan as a critical element of the events. Focusing on their beliefs about Satan, his agency, and his potential power gives a new perspective on the events of the Salem Witch Trials, as well as on Puritan society in the late seventeenth century. Satan is such a central feature of Puritan doctrine that he should not be dismissed in the discussion of causes of the hysteria in Salem. This is an important variable, as beliefs about Satan must have had an effect on people’s behavior, both accused and accusers. Some Puritans saw their community as equivalent to a latter-day Job, specifically tested by God as his chosen people, and as such could expect a very severe test of their piety. This test would come in the form of a furious Satan, eager to punish their community. Fear of Satan was a powerful motivating factor in Puritan Massachusetts, and this variable needs to be included in further research about the Salem Witch Trials.

The secondary literature that I used to establish context in the first three chapters covered a wide variety of topics. These include material about the origins of the character of Satan, histories of the Bible and its authors, and Catholic, Protestant, and Puritan orthodoxies. I also referred to books and articles about witchcraft beliefs in
England, continental Europe, and the New World, as well as material about the Salem Witch Trials and books about mysticism and magic in the medieval world.

Sidebar: Historians on Dualism

An odd phenomenon arises in the secondary material. Historians seem to be hesitant to call reformers dualistic. Brian Levack, while describing Luther as affording Satan a great deal of power over the physical world, notes that this “borders on dualistic heresy.”¹ Levack may have been too generous to Luther by including the qualifying words “borders on.” It is difficult to understand why an omnipotent deity would cede complete control of the physical realm to his biggest adversary. Levack also comments that, “Some Protestant reformers, most notably Luther, seemed to exaggerate the extent of diabolic activity in the world, almost to the point of flirting with Manichaeism or dualist heresy.”² Again, Levack stops just short of accusing these reformers of heresy, using terms such as “seemed,” “almost,” and “flirting.” He also comments on dualism directly: “At times orthodox Christians came very close to subscribing to such ideas (that Christ might not defeat Satan, or that they could not withstand his control)… they came dangerously close to assigning powers to him that the official doctrine of the Church condemned.”³

“How close?” “Dangerously close?” How close must one approach before the line between orthodoxy and heresy is crossed? It is unclear why Levack is so hesitant to make more concrete statements, particularly because he uses positive language about

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² Ibid., 111.
³ Ibid., 31.
dualism on the same page as the last quote, noting that the Devil did not have “anything that came close to unlimited power over the physical world.”

Richard Godbeer, writing about Cotton Mather, claims that Mather made remarks that “verge on the Manichaean in their evocation of the Devil as an independent force, rather than as the subordinate instrument of God’s just wrath.”

“Verge” on the Manichaean? This would seem to be the very definition of dualism.

Keith Thomas notes, “The personification of Good rested upon the same basis as the personification of evil, and the two concepts were inextricably interlocked. But there was an almost Manichaean quality to this emphasis on the Devil’s reality.” Again, the word “almost” seems like a weak justification here – how is this not dualistic?

Robin Briggs also claims that the belief that earthly matters were under the control of the Devil would “sustain a semi-Manichaean popular cosmology.” “Semi-Manichaean”? It is unclear why these writers are squeamish about directly accusing reformers or other religious writers of supporting dualistic beliefs. Perhaps they are hesitant to depict these writers as heretical, despite apparent evidence to the contrary.

As a historian, I am interested in challenging the master narrative, or exploring aspects of history that are overlooked for some reason. As I mentioned above, writers are quick to mention Satan or the Devil in the titles of their works, but very few directly address his character. Additionally, it seems that the popular consensus history regarding the Puritans in America portrays them simply as religious fanatics, and therefore it is easy

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to discount them. Much of the literature that addresses the Salem Witch Trials, as I said, is concerned with providing alternative explanations for why they occurred. Most historians seem unwilling to explain the witch trials as something as pedestrian as a reaction to common fear, preferring instead to generate complex situations involving personal concerns or external factors. I choose to take these people at their word and believe that they were not simply unbalanced or delusional. They deserve better than that.
CHAPTER ONE: “MORE SUBTILL THAN ANY BEAST OF THE FIELD WHICH THE LORD GOD HAD MADE:” TRADITIONAL AND BIBLICAL DEPICTIONS OF THE DEVIL

This chapter establishes context for understanding the creation and evolution of the Christian Devil. The Devil is not defined in the Bible, and his powers, independence, and agenda are unspecified. Ancient Mediterranean dualistic religions influenced the creation of Satan, as well as his capabilities and agency. The character of Satan evolved as the Bible was being written, as a means to explain the existence of evil in the world without affecting God’s all-benevolent status. Due to all of these factors, no clear definition of Satan’s abilities can be deduced from Scripture.

Satan in the Old and New Testaments

The passage from Genesis in the title of this chapter refers to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, who tempted Eve and caused the expulsion of Adam and Eve. While there is no evidence in the Bible that this serpent is a representation of Satan, it is easy to make a connection between the two, and it is a common belief that the two are connected. T. J. Wray and Gregory Mobley argue that “in Jewish and Christian literature of the Intertestamental Period the serpent did come to be identified with Satan.”

This is but one example of the amorphous, evolutionary nature of the Devil, as he is depicted in the Bible. There is no clear definition of Satan in the Bible, and his

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7 Genesis, 3:1.
8 The “Intertestamental Period” refers to the time between the writing of the final books of the Old Testament and the final writings of the New Testament, roughly 200 B.C.E to 100 C.E.
10 For this project, I am concentrating on biblical representations of Satan as an empowered individual. Passages from the Bible that refer to unclean spirits, demons, or plural devils will not be addressed, as they are beyond the scope of this paper.
powers, limitations, and agenda are never specified. Elaine Pagels notes that while “angels appear frequently in the Hebrew Bible, Satan and demons are virtually absent.”

There are also linguistic problems with translations that further confuse the issue. The term satan is used as a generic concept. As Wray and Mobley note:

The word satan has been variously translated to mean adversary, obstacle, opponent, stumbling block, accuser, or slanderer. In the Hebrew Bible, the name usually appears with an article – the satan – which describes a function, rather than being a proper name.

Thus, every use of the term satan is inherently problematic, as it is difficult to ascertain exactly what the reference is. In addition, Satan was not always considered to be an independent, evil entity. As Pagels argues:

In biblical sources the Hebrew term the satan describes an adversarial role. It is not the name of a particular character. Although Hebrew storytellers as early as the sixth century B.C.E. occasionally introduced a supernatural character whom they called the satan, what they meant was any one of the angels sent by God for the specific purpose of blocking or obstructing human activity.

Wray and Mobley provide an example: In the 1611 version of the King James Bible, 1 Kings 11:23, the verse is “And God stirred him up another adversary,” where adversary originally was written as satan. The term satan was also used to describe military and political opponents, legal accusers, and other troublemakers.

The absence of a cohesive definition of the Devil allows for a great deal of speculation, even outright invention, concerning the nature of diabolic forces. This uncertainty is evident in the assorted depictions of the Devil in ancient writings. Scholars

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12 Wray and Mobley, 1. Emphasis in direct quotes will be as in the original unless otherwise noted.
13 Pagels, 39.
14 Wray and Mobley, 53-54.
have commented on the origin of a personalized evil force in Judeo-Christian writing.

Keith Thomas argues:

Above all the immanent Devil was an essential complement to the notion of an immanent God. The early Hebrews had no need to personify the principle of evil; they could attribute it to the influence of other rival deities. It was only the triumph of monotheism which made it necessary to explain why there should be evil in the world if God was good. The Devil thus helped to sustain the notion of an all-perfect divinity.15

Wray and Mobley offer specific examples of deities from rival religions that helped shape the concept of personalized evil in Judaism: “The religions of Mesopotamia, Canaan, Egypt, Persia, and Greece – Israel’s closest neighbors – influenced the development of the idea of Satan in Jewish religion and added elements to his character.”16 The authors name the epic of Gilgamesh as the one of the earliest influences on the concept of Satan. They identify four elements of the tale that contributed to the idea of a diabolic adversary. The first element is the idea of a supernatural opponent of the hero, in this instance, the monster Humbaba; the second, the fact that the border between the terrestrial world and the netherworld is permeable. The third element concerns the character of Enki, a “trickster god,” a being capable of derailing divine plans; and the final element is the concept of a “cosmic battle between good and evil.”17 In addition to the Mesopotamian religion, the beliefs of the Canaan civilization contributed similar elements, namely, a god of the underworld (Mot) who

15 Thomas, 477.
16 Wray and Mobley, 75.
17 Ibid., 77-78.
must be conquered by the “good god” (Baal).\textsuperscript{18} Zoroastrianism, the primary religion of the time in Persia, would bring a very firm duality to creators of “new” religions, as evil does not emanate from the Zoroastrian “good” god Ahura Mazda, but comes from a separate, malignant entity, Ahriman. Ahriman is completely separate from Ahura Mazda, and was not created by him.\textsuperscript{19} The authors also note that attributes of an independent evil entity come from other Mediterranean religious beliefs as well, specifically the Greek god Hades and the Egyptian god Set.\textsuperscript{20}

The evolution of the concept of an independent, evil entity occurred over a long span of time and incorporated elements from neighboring religions. However, the Hebrew Bible does not provide an all-encompassing definition of the Devil’s capabilities; in fact, Satan does not appear very often in the Old Testament.

The first writing involving the Devil (unless he is in fact the serpent from Genesis) in the Old Testament is the story of Job.\textsuperscript{21} In this, God and Satan debate about Job’s faith, with Satan claiming that Job is loyal to God only because he has a good life, and that Job would abandon God if beset with hardships. God allows Satan to first destroy Job’s property and family, and later to affect his health. In the end, Job remains faithful to God despite his suffering. Analysis of this tale reveals some interesting aspects of the character of Satan.

The first mention of the Devil is as follows: “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to

\textsuperscript{18} Wray and Mobley, 80.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{20} Wray and Mobley provide a chart on pages 92-93 describing similarities among all of the “evil” or “nether” gods in the ancient Mediterranean world.
\textsuperscript{21} Many scholars argue that Job was written before Genesis.
present himself before the Lord. (Job 1:6)”22 Is Satan one of the “sons of God”? Why else would he need to “present himself”? It is unclear, but Satan is not adversarial in nature at this point. “And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. (Job 1:7)” There are interesting nuances here. Why does God ask where Satan has been? Would an omniscient being need to ask this of a subordinate? The fact that Satan has been on the earth is also intriguing. Did the meeting with God take place in Heaven, or in a spiritual, non-material place? In many dualistic religions (in particular later Christian heresies), the evil entity is typically relegated to control over the physical world, while the good deity controls the spiritual, non-material world.23 Could this be evidence that Satan was seen as more relevant to the material world?

God accepts Satan’s challenge regarding Job’s faithfulness. “And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord. (Job 1:12)” God clearly places limits upon the challenge. But does he actually grant Satan the power to affect Job? The phrase “all that he hath is in your power” is ambiguous. Does it refer to God bestowing power to Satan, or is it an admission that Satan already has this power? The fact that God places a limit on what Satan is allowed to do is interesting – if God is giving Satan a degree of power, why not simply limit the amount of power granted? In Chapter Two of the Book of Job, after a repetition of verses six and seven from Chapter One, the wager is

22 I understand that these texts have been translated a number of times, and that the initial terminology might have differed in meaning from more recent translations. However, I am using the same texts that the Puritan ministers used, so the initial meaning is somewhat irrelevant.
23 This tendency is perhaps most evident in Manichaeism from ancient Persia and the Cathar movement, from medieval Europe.
augmented, with God allowing Satan to directly affect Job, and again limits the challenge, asking only that Satan not kill Job. This time, God says, “Behold, he is in thine hand,” but again, is this God granting the power or simply admitting that Satan already possesses it?

In addition, Satan’s behavior during this episode does not align with his accepted roles. True, he is used as a punishment by God, but not as righteous retribution to avenge a wrong, or even to correct the behavior of a person in danger of placing his soul in peril. Job, a good man, suffers merely because God wants to prove a point to Satan. Of course, God gives Job a new family and restores his health in the end, and even doubles his wealth, but the reason for the punishment seems capricious. And if Satan tricked or tempted anybody in this story, it was God himself!

If the main appearance of Satan in the Old Testament is this problematic, how could later writers base their accounts given this framework? The intertestamental literature shows how the concept of the Devil evolved. Wray and Mobley argue that: “in the intertestamental period… Satan acquires articulation and definition; the Devil comes of age and begins to act independently, apart from the divine court. Satan now has his own agenda and his own band of cosmic lackeys.” Wray and Mobley claim that intertestamental Jewish writers constructed a new theory to explain their misfortunes: “If the descendants of Abraham and Sarah were partners to a covenant with the Architect of the Universe, then why had their cultural and political properties been condemned by a parade of Near Eastern tyrants?” The Jewish writers’ theory was that there was “a

24 Wray and Mobley, 96.
cosmic conspiracy at work, led by a supernatural criminal mastermind (Satan) who controlled a vast, nefarious network of demonic forces dedicated to frustrating the divine purpose at every turn.25 Thus, Satan was granted a high level of power and freedom to act, as well as an army of demons, in order to explain the downfalls of the “chosen people.” The only other explanation would be to place blame for the problems that they faced on God, which raises problematic questions with regards to God, as this seems to be an apparent breaking of his covenant.

Perhaps the best-known material from the intertestamental period comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, and typically attributed to the Essenes, a Jewish sect. Wray and Mobley claim:

The Qumran literature (the Dead Sea Scrolls) makes it clear that the Essenes understood Satan to be an evil leader who commanded a legion of followers in heaven and on earth. They believed Satan was engaged in a cosmic battle with God, and they saw themselves as personally engaged in this battle alongside God.

Wray and Mobley also claim that this belief was likely influenced by Persian dualism, the struggle between good and evil as personified by Ahura Mazda and Ahriman.26 Of course, the Puritans in the seventeenth century obviously would not have known about literature that was not discovered until the twentieth century. However, the belief that Satan was in combat with God was not specific to the Essenes.

Wray and Mobley identify three major factors that influenced Satan’s evolution among Jews between roughly 500 B.C.E. and 100 C.E. First is the rise of monotheism: “Pure monotheism is theologically and existentially unstable. Although it is not

25 Ibid., 97-98.
26 Ibid., 105.
impossible, it is extremely difficult to believe in the ultimate beneficence of a God who also bears responsibility for everything, including misfortune… the idea of a cosmic force opposed to God, a shadowy anti-god who perversely, inversely reflected every virtue of the Creator, began to emerge.”

The second factor is the influence of foreign cultures, especially dualism from Zoroastrian Persia, as a result of the Babylonian captivity and the diaspora. This influence “eased, but did not solve, the tension between divine power and divine goodness. If there was a Devil, then God was not the author of evil; evil had its own independent source.” The third factor is the “increased amount of reflection on the origins of evil,” caused by assorted misfortunes, including the sack of Jerusalem and the Babylon Captivity.

By the time that the New Testament was being written, Satan had evolved through a series of roles: possible tempter of the first humans; one of the “sons of God,” albeit one with a kind of level of equality with God; and finally, God’s direct rival. Wray and Mobley argue that “even though Satan’s character is more clearly defined in the New Testament than it had been in the Hebrew Bible, his essential function in the Bible remains unchanged: He is still the troublemaker, the stumbling block, the Adversary.” Pagels argues that Satan has a central role in the gospels, because the story would not make sense without his participation: “How, after all, could anyone claim that a man betrayed by one of his own followers, and brutally executed on charges of treason against Rome, not only was but still is God’s appointed Messiah, unless his capture and death

27 Wray and Mobley, 166.
28 Ibid., 167-168.
29 Ibid., 113.
were, as the gospels insist, not a final defeat but only a preliminary skirmish in a vast cosmic conflict now enveloping the universe? The final battle has not yet been fought, much less won, but it is imminent.\textsuperscript{30}

The most notable appearance of Satan in the New Testament is his temptation of Jesus. Bruce Metzger notes that “the essence of the devil’s temptation was to entice Jesus into doing what would have prevented his full participation in the human predicament.”\textsuperscript{31} Had Jesus performed any miracles in this instance, for his own benefit, he would have given up the ability to be truly human.

The temptation of Jesus is only briefly alluded to in Mark, and the accounts in Matthew and Luke are very similar.\textsuperscript{32} The gospel of John does not mention the event at all. Satan attempts to cajole Jesus into performing miracles that would save Jesus from discomfort, then death, and finally offers him all the kingdoms of the earth. Satan first tempts Jesus to create bread from stones to ease his hunger, then to throw himself down from a temple tower, that angels might save him from death, as he was the Son of God. In the final temptation, Satan offers Jesus “All the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them (Luke 4:5),” if Jesus will worship him. Peculiar to Luke’s gospel is the following phrase: “And the devil said to him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will give it. (Luke 4:6).” This is clear evidence that Satan is firmly in control of the physical world, and is

\textsuperscript{30} Pagels, 12.
\textsuperscript{32} Biblical scholars generally agree that Matthew and Luke were based on a combination of Mark’s gospel and an as yet undiscovered source, known as the “Q” source. This accounts for the similarities in Matthew and Luke.
another link to Persian dualism. Jesus refuses all the temptations, and Satan takes his
leave. There is an interesting difference in the two gospels with regards to this departure.
Matthew: “Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him
(Matthew 4:11).” Luke: “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed
from him for a season (Luke 4:13, emphasis added).” “For a season” can also be
translated as “until an opportune time.”33 The implication in Luke is that Satan would
revisit Jesus at some point in the future. What is significant is that, in Luke’s account of
Judas’ betrayal of Jesus, Satan enters Judas before the betrayal. This does not occur in
Mark or Matthew (it does in John, but John is considered to be based on different
material than the three “Synoptic” gospels). Is this the return of Satan that Luke alluded
to?

The four gospels are also problematic due to the political and social situations that
existed during their creation. They were composed at various times in the first century of
the Common Era, during which tension between Jews and their Roman overlords was at a
high level. The authors of the Gospels would have had this struggle in mind, and would
have had to word their writings carefully in order to not offend more powerful groups. In
addition, each author had specific agendas in mind while writing their gospels, all of
which affected their depictions of Satan.

Pagels argues that the earliest gospel, Mark, was written during the war between
the Jews and the Romans, and that “the author of Mark’s gospel was well aware of the
war and took sides in the conflicts it aroused, both among Jewish groups and between

33 Pagels, 90.
Jews and Romans.”34 She also claims that Matthew was primarily at odds with the Pharisees, and was attempting to discredit the Jewish priesthood in order to “refute damaging rumors about Jesus,”35 in particular the legitimacy of his birth and bloodline. Luke, the only Gentile gospel author, drew on many of the same sources as Matthew, but is more accommodating, inviting “Greeks, Asians, Africans, Syrians, and Egyptians to identify themselves, as confidently as any Essene, as members of the ‘true Israel’.”36 John’s gospel, as usual, does not correspond directly with the other three gospels, but Metzger claims that John “was guided by theological rather than simple historical interests.”37

Given these disparate circumstances and interests, it is not difficult to understand the lack of agreement in the gospels. What is interesting is how they portray Satan as the actor behind the arrest and execution of Jesus. According to Pagels, “Mark virtually invents a new Pilate… a well-meaning weakling solicitous of justice… but intimidated by the priests and the crowd, and he executes a man he suspects might be innocent.” She argues that Mark was attempting to reassure the Romans that the early Christians posed no threat to their rule, and also to convert non-Jews to the new faith.38 Luke’s account is very similar to Mark’s, which may reflect his desire to gain converts, as noted above.

Wray and Mobley argue that “John does not depict Satan appearing as a free-standing supernatural being, rather, Satan appears in the guise of those people who

34 Ibid., 6.
35 Ibid., 76-77.
36 Pagels, 89.
37 Metzger, 112.
38 Pagels, 10-11.
oppose Jesus.”39 The most obvious of these opponents is Judas Iscariot. John and Luke are the only two gospel authors to claim the direct influence of Satan on Judas. This appears to exonerate Judas from any blame (as it also, in turn, exonerates both the Romans and the Jewish priesthood, placing all of the blame for the death of Jesus in Satan’s hands). Remember that Luke also implies that Satan would return to oppose Jesus following the temptation sequence. Pagels argues that “the New Testament gospels almost never identify Satan with the Romans, but they constantly associate him with Jesus’ Jewish enemies, primarily Judas Iscariot and the chief priests and scribes.”40 Whether this was due to a desire to assure the Romans that early Christians meant no threat or an attempt to discredit the Jewish priesthood is impossible to ascertain; in all likelihood, it was a combination of these factors. What is certain is that the character of Satan is used for a variety of reasons by the authors of the four gospels.

Satan in the Bible is an evolving, amorphous entity whose scope of power is never fully delineated. His various guises, tactics, and intents show that this was not a pre-existing conception of an evil deity, but a concept that assorted writers could use as they saw fit. Wray and Mobley argue that “although the Devil may have a few tricks up his sleeve, the authors of the New Testament make it clear that Satan is no match for the obedient Son of God. Round after round hero and villain spar in a struggle for universal supremacy, but at the end of the struggle, God scores a knockout, throwing Satan into a ‘lake of fire and sulphur’ (Revelation 20:10).”41 This New Testament Satan also

39 Wray and Mobley, 126.
40 Pagels, 13.
41 Wray and Mobley, 114.
appeared in a variety of aspects, and “every Satan we have seen to this point – whether it be those cancerous cells in the body of Christ that Paul demonizes, the Satan who appears in embodied form to do solo combat with Jesus in the desert or the evil spirit who enters persons like Judas – will appear in Revelation.”

Pagels notes that “Satan fascinates us because he expresses qualities that go beyond what we ordinarily recognize as human: “initially just a fallen angel, now he stands in open rebellion against God.”

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42 Ibid., 137.
43 Ibid., xvii.
CHAPTER TWO: “AND THE LORD SAID UNTO SATAN, FROM WHENCE COMEST THOU?”: EARLY MODERN EUROPEAN VIEWS ON THE DEVIL

This chapter will focus on Christian beliefs about Satan, in particular, the extent of his earthly powers and methods to resist his schemes. Satan is frequently associated with power over the material world, as evidenced in the Biblical passages concerning Job and Christ’s temptation in the desert. Ancient dualistic religions that inspired Christianity separated good and evil as being linked to the spiritual and material realms, respectively. Christian sects such as Catharism carried these beliefs into the Middle Ages and beyond. Christian orthodoxy held that God only allowed Satan to act for the cause of some greater good. Protestant reformers in particular saw the world as the setting for a vast cosmic war between God and Satan. Protestant orthodoxy placed the responsibility for resistance to Satan on the individual, as opposed to Catholic belief, which allowed for intercessionary measures, such as rituals, sacred objects, or the interference of saints or the Virgin Mary.

**Christian Demonology**

In order to understand the revised views of the Puritan ministers in Massachusetts concerning the Devil, it is necessary to establish a larger context of Christian demonology. These ministers were unsatisfied with Protestant doctrine, which in turn was a reaction to Catholic doctrine. This chapter will focus on two aspects of belief in the Devil: first, the extent of his powers on earth, and second, methods used to withstand his machinations. Understanding these beliefs in a broad sense will provide context for
analyzing the Massachusetts Puritans’ writings about the period of the Salem Witch Trials.

**The Devil as “Lord of the World”**

Satan is frequently depicted as having power over the physical plane, and subsequently having dominance over the material world, in contrast with God’s dominion over the heavens and the spiritual world. The quote in the title of this chapter is from the book of Job – God asking Satan where he had been. Satan answers that he had been “going to and fro in the world, and walking up and down in it.” As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, this seems to imply that Satan has a level of control over the physical realm, if not outright authority in it – God needs to ask Satan about his whereabouts. Satan’s temptation of Jesus also implies that Satan has power over material issues, as his temptations all involve physical matters (relieving hunger, avoiding injury, and finally offering Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth).

Many other ancient religions posited that the “good god” ruled over spiritual matters and that the “evil god” ruled the material world. Judaism, and later Christianity, though, had to jettison the equality of the good and evil gods in order to justify their monotheistic views. However, it seems obvious that there would be some inertia behind the concept of dualism. Julio Cara Baroja argues that this dualism was evident from the beginning: “Officially, the triumph of Christianity left little room for any conception other than that inherited from Hebrew monotheism, according to which there are only
two spheres of action in human life: the Good, pursued by those who submit to the law of God, and the Evil, inhabited by followers of the devil and demons.44

This is evidenced broadly in the Bible with the notion that God and Satan were constantly at war for the souls of humanity – the major difference being the concept that God would ultimately and decisively win the conflict. More specific attributes of this struggle, namely the idea that Satan had power over the material world, remained firmly in the beliefs of Jews and Christians.

Manichaeism was an earlier form of this belief, and Catharism existed into the early modern era.45 Thomas Madden explains that Catharism was a long-standing heresy, with roots that stretched back to the first century AD. The Cathars saw the universe as the setting for the battle between a good god and an evil god, that “the spiritual world is the work of goodness, while the material world is inherently evil.”46 Brian Levack agrees, noting that the Cathars “exaggerated the powers of the Devil and especially his control over the material world.”47 Cathar doctrine held that the purpose of Christianity was to teach how to free one’s soul from the material trappings of the body, because matter was inherently evil. While decried as heretical, it is apparent that the claim that the Devil was the ruler of all material things has support from the Scriptures. Levack

45 Many authors use these terms interchangeably or in an overlapping fashion. This paper will only make a distinction between them if a significant difference is present.
47 This explanation seems to assume that orthodox Christianity is factual, in that the Cathars “exaggerated” the powers of Satan. While this is not technically a theological paper, this distinction is significant due to Levack’s unusual treatment of reformers and dualism (see below). Perhaps Levack does not distance himself enough from the material he analyzes.
argues that the increased power given to the Devil by the Cathars was the reason that orthodox interpreters considered them to be devil-worshipers, and therefore heretics.\textsuperscript{48}

Levack also argues that Christian orthodoxy held that the Devil did not have “anything that came close to unlimited power over the physical world,” and argues that “whatever the Devil did was by the explicit permission of that immanent God, who retained many powers for His\textsuperscript{49} exclusive use.” Any claim that the devil was equal to God, or even controlled the material world, was dualist heresy.\textsuperscript{50}

However, it appears that this is not an all-encompassing, universal belief. Robin Briggs notes: “Although orthodox Christianity had always opposed dualism and made the Devil subservient to God, there was a constant danger that harping on the fact that life on earth was dominated by the Devil would sustain a semi-Manichaean popular cosmology.”\textsuperscript{51} Marion Gibson relates the story of a woman accused of witchcraft in seventeenth-century England who, when asked how many gods she acknowledged, answered “two, God the Father and the divell.” In an endnote, Gibson argues:

This ranking of the devil alongside God corresponds with the heresy of Manichaeism, justifying the [interviewer’s] opinion that the woman answered questions “most blasphemously.” The emphasis on the Devil in English Catholic and Protestant teaching could easily lead an innocently conformist parishioner to the conclusion that the devil rivaled God in his omnipotence.\textsuperscript{52}

A corollary to this belief in a powerful Satan is the concept that God allowed evil to exist only in order to create a greater good or to punish transgressions. This avoids the

\textsuperscript{48} Levack, 37-8.
\textsuperscript{49} Capitalization of “his,” referring to God, is in the original. Other authors do not use this convention except in direct quotes.
\textsuperscript{50} Levack, 31.
\textsuperscript{51} Briggs, 103.
thorny theological problem of God’s infinite goodness, as well as the heresy of dualism, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

Stuart Clark, writing about the concept that God permits evil only for the cause of a greater good, argues that Protestant pastors continually stressed this concept in sermons and writings, and that this distinguished them from Catholic priests. He argues that this stress was due to the desire to avoid any form of dualism, and that the arguments “were also more readily supportable from the Bible than the scholastic demonology favored by many of the great Catholic experts.”

Briggs and Gibson both address the impact of a powerful Satan on the common populace, and the associated dualistic tendencies could be explained due to the uneducated nature of much of the medieval population. However, this tendency was not limited to simple parishioners. Noted Protestant reformers wrestled with the concept as well. Nathan Johnstone argues that:

[Protestant reformers’] sense of struggling personally against an enveloping diabolism focused their attention very firmly on Satan’s earthly rather than cosmic agency. It is striking how little the reformers were interested in the question of theodicy (the defense of God’s omnipotence and goodness).

Martin Luther himself was not immune to this tendency to grant ultimate power over the earth to Satan, as Thomas argues, “Protestantism was a response to a deep conviction of human sin, a sense of powerlessness in the face of evil. For Luther, the whole world of visible reality and the flesh belonged to the Devil, the lord of this


Darren Oldridge agrees, arguing that the belief that Satan was “the Father of Lies” was connected to his power over the material world. Luther saw the Devil as the “prince and the god” of the world: “the bread which we eat, the drink which we drink, the garments which we wear, yea, the air, and whatever we live by in the flesh is under his dominion.”

Levack offers more proof of Luther’s belief that the Devil was supreme in the earthly realm, noting that Luther claimed to have had actual physical bouts with the Devil, and wrote that “We are all subject to the devil, both in body and goods… and we be strangers in this world, whereof he is the prince and god.” The Devil, according to Luther, “liveth, yea and reigneth throughout the whole world.”

The reasons behind this disconnect are difficult to explain. On one hand, Christian orthodoxy holds firmly that God is in complete control of Satan. To argue differently is to commit a serious heresy. However, noted theologians grant power over the material world to Satan, and two of the most significant appearances of the Devil in Scripture (Job and Christ’s temptation) seem to lend credence to this belief. Briggs comments on this problem, claiming that the story of Job was a central text with regards to reformers’ beliefs about their view of the world, that “earthly misfortune was a test of faith, and those who endured it patiently would be rewarded by God.” However, she also notes the inherent problems with this concept: “[Reformers’] deep hostility to any form

55 Thomas, 470.
57 Levack, 97.
of dualism made them insist that the Devil could only act with divine permission, despite the severe problems this created over responsibility for evil.”58

Thomas agrees that reformers ceded control of the physical world to Satan: “The Protestant position was that steadfast faith in God was an infallible protection against the Devil’s onslaught on men’s souls, but did not provide a similar immunity for their bodies and goods.”59

Of course, if Luther saw himself at the center of a cosmic war, it is possible that the theodicy question would seem superfluous, or at least not the most pressing of concerns. Faith that God was both omnipotent and good might have served him well enough – no need to get involved in thorny logic problems during combat.

Luther was not alone in envisioning himself as a foot soldier in a much larger struggle. Nachman Ben-Yehuda, commenting on the widespread acceptance of Dominicans’ theories about the Devil, calls their theories a “dualistic assumption,” and that they saw the “world as a battlefield in which a struggle between the godly sons of light and the satanic sons of darkness was being played out.”60 Jean Calvin also saw the earth as a battlefield in which Satan had an advantage; he was “preoccupied with diabolical power in the world and no less committed to counteracting it.”61 For him, the power of Satan was so strong and pervasive that the true Christian saint had to engage in an “unceasing struggle against him.” Calvin was unfailingly confident that God would prevail over Satan, and that Satan acted only with the permission of God, but feared that

58 Briggs, 125.
59 Thomas, 495.
61 Levack, 97.
“the number of the Devil’s earthly followers was so great that the saint could not afford to relax his efforts.”62 In short, Calvin knew that good would prevail, but that did not guarantee that all of God’s followers would be unharmed in the struggle.

**Dealing with the Devil: Catholic and Protestant Methodology**

A second aspect of belief about the Devil concerns methods for resisting his plots and temptations. Again, Catholic and Protestant beliefs differ. Protestants place responsibility for this resistance on the individual, as opposed to Catholic doctrine, which relies on external methods, such as rituals, sacred objects, and the intercession of heavenly figures – saints or the Virgin Mary.

One of the major causes for the Reformation was a belief that the clergy and its associated doctrine had fundamentally corrupted Catholicism. Logically, it follows that Satan, as the most prominent corrupting figure in Christianity, would have facilitated this downward slide. Protestant reformers thus saw Satan as a more powerful figure than that depicted in the Catholic Church, and possessing a greater amount of authority and agency: “reformers became increasingly convinced that a fundamental contrariety existed between their faith and the Catholic Church.”63

The reformers did not stop there. In addition to the concept of a powerful Devil, constantly a threat to Christians, reformers concluded that “Catholicism’s doctrines and ceremonies were inherently diabolic, the result of over a thousand years of the Devil’s

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62 Ibid., 97.
63 Johnstone, 180.
subversion… that the faith they had once accepted was irredeemably corrupted by the Devil.”

However, Johnstone notes that these reformers did not stray too far from accepted beliefs about Satan: “[Luther and Calvin] did not introduce a new and original conception of the Devil; their beliefs in who the Devil was and what powers he possessed were essentially the same as those of late medieval Catholic demonologists.” Of course, they believed that the Catholics were unwittingly doing the work of the Devil.

Two of the major Protestant reformers, Jean Calvin and Martin Luther, addressed the issue of the Devil in their writings and sermons. These were widely disseminated, as Brian Levack notes: “Protestants, owing mainly to their reliance on the Bible as the source of religious truth, placed great emphasis on successful preaching.” This tendency would have spread Protestant beliefs about Satan rapidly and effectively.

As long as people were appropriately pious and vigilant, the Devil would find it difficult to carry out his plots. Johnstone notes: [Calvin explained that] “the tendency of all that Scripture teaches us concerning devils is to put us on our guard against their wiles and machinations… the object of these descriptions is to make us more cautious and vigilant, and more prepared for the contest.” This places the responsibility of defense against Satan’s plots on the individual, as opposed to the Catholic hierarchy of intervening saints, relics, and rituals.

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64 Ibid., 180.
65 Ibid., 96.
66 Levack, 98.
67 Johnstone, 180.
Of course, this “contest” could be referring both to personal struggles against Satan and the larger cosmic conflict between God and Satan. Levack argues that “Luther was confident that the Kingdom of Christ would ultimately prevail over the forces of darkness, but that the struggle would be difficult and continuous, and the individual was always vulnerable to deception and harm.” This notion of a difficult, continuous struggle runs counter to the Catholic idea that the fight against Satan would be relatively easy. Protestant reformers promised no easy overall victory, and no individual could afford to let their guard down, lest the Devil seize the opportunity to lead them astray.

Darren Oldridge argues that Satan’s major tactic was to confuse Christians with illusions and “false opinions” about Christ, to “tempt people into heresy by infecting their minds with superstitious thoughts,” and that these “false opinions” could be overcome only through personal faith in Christ.

Johnstone agrees with this distinction between Catholicism and reform theology:

[Catholics] dealt largely with externals, promising an easy victory over the Devil through the mediation of the Virgin, the saints, and the quasi-magical paraphernalia of the sacraments. Instead, the reformed liturgy highlighted the ever-present threat posed by Satan that was to be understood as an integral part of being a Christian.

Deborah Willis agrees, commenting on superstition and village-level beliefs in magic:

“Reformation doctrine did away with the syncretistic multiplicity of this realm, along with the intercessory spirits of saints and the Virgin Mary associated with Catholic Christianity.”

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68 Levack, 97.
69 Oldridge, 234.
70 Johnstone, 182.
This distinction led to differing conceptions of the importance of the Devil in Catholic and Protestant theology. Robin Briggs argues that Satan’s role was magnified by both traditions due to the “intense, demanding religious sensibility of the early modern period,” namely, the omniscience of God and the absolute belief that evil was inspired by Satan, as the Protestants stressed. Since Catholics needed to “stand out against the Protestant determination to weaken the links between the physical and the divine, they positively welcomed opportunities to show that the Devil was a physically active presence in the world, one who could be combated with ritual and sacred objects.”

Just as Protestant reformers believed that it was possible for Christians to interact directly with God without intermediaries, they argued that defense against diabolic plots was also a personal matter. Protestants also considered Satan to be more powerful and dangerous than Catholics did, as Johnstone argues “the reformers were concerned to undermine reliance on ceremony and intercession, they did not fail to substitute their own understanding of how the Devil might be fought off… they offered no outright victory over Satan. Instead they had the more limited, but very real, objective of making temptation manageable.”

Protestants broke from Catholic doctrine in a variety of ways; for one, they established a new philosophy about resistance to Satan’s machinations. Instead of the reliance on external methods that Catholics favored, Protestants placed the responsibility for defense against the Devil on the individual. Personal vigilance was the only way to

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72 Briggs, 385.
73 Johnstone, 192.
defend oneself from Satan’s plots and schemes. In addition, Protestants saw the Devil as more powerful than did the Catholics, and promised no easy victory over him.

**Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: England versus The Continent**

While this paper is not strictly about witchcraft, the primary documents to be analyzed revolve around the witch trials in Salem. As such, a basic overview of witchcraft beliefs during the Early Modern Period is necessary to provide context.

Theories of witchcraft were sharply different between England and Continental Europe. Notions of powers that witches possessed and activities that they engaged in were not consistent between these two regions. The Puritans appear to have synthesized their own conception of witchcraft from elements of both schools of thought.

The most prominent text about witchcraft, the *Malleus Malificarum*, first published in 1486, was written in Germany, and before 1700 was reissued sixteen times in German and eleven times in French. However, it was “slow to impinge upon England,” and there was no English translation until modern times.\(^\text{74}\) Without a comprehensive text about witchcraft, English theologians did not create a systematic opinion about witches, and therefore concepts of witchcraft differed from Continental views.

Nachman Ben-Yehuda argues that prior to the fourteenth century, European\(^\text{75}\) witchcraft was not considered to be systematic, instead having individual, specific goals such as love potions or location spells. It was considered a methodological phenomenon; if spells were correctly cast, the desired results would ensue. Upon the publication of the

\(^{74}\) Thomas, 440.

\(^{75}\) The term “European” should be understood to refer to Continental Europe, as opposed to England.
Malleus Malificarum, however, “witchcraft was transformed into a completely evil entity which created problems rather than solving them.”\textsuperscript{76} The idea that witchcraft was used to manipulate situations, as opposed to a diabolic practice, would remain in force in England, as will be noted later. Witches also lost whatever power they had previously held: “The definition of a witch as powerless, first set forth by the Catholic authors of the Malleus Malificarum, became the hallmark of Protestant beliefs about witches.”\textsuperscript{77} Ben-Yehuda agrees that a witch’s “ability to force the deities to comply with her wishes was replaced by a total subordination to the Devil. In short, the witch became Satan’s puppet.”\textsuperscript{78} Deborah Willis adds gender to the argument, noting that witches were previously maternal figures, but that in Calvinist doctrine, the witch is “subordinated to a diabolic male ‘master,’ becoming the servant or ‘drudge’ of a devil now represented not as a child but as an adult male endowed with frightening powers, a rival of God and the godly fathers who rule in his name.”\textsuperscript{79}

With witches then cast as subordinates, a main feature of Continental witchcraft emerged – the “Witches’ Sabbat,” which was a “huge orgy between devils and witches… denying salvation, kissing the devil’s posterior, spitting on the Bible, having promiscuous sexual orgies, feasting on roasted or boiled unbaptized babies.”\textsuperscript{80} However, this concept never fully crossed the English Channel, as Johnstone notes, “In early modern England,

\textsuperscript{76} Ben-Yehuda, 3.
\textsuperscript{78} Ben-Yehuda, 3.
\textsuperscript{79} Willis, 15.
\textsuperscript{80} Ben-Yehuda, 11.
the narrative of the witches’ Sabbat never gained ascendancy."81 Thomas agrees, adding other features of Continental witchcraft that were less commonly believed in England, such as the existence of succubi and incubi, and the ability of witches to fly. He also mentions a feature of witchcraft that existed in England but not on the continent:

An associated belief was the peculiarly English notion that the witch was likely to possess a familiar imp or devil, who would take the shape of an animal…given by the Devil himself, or purchased or inherited from another witch.82

Witchcraft in England was also different in terms of its source. On the Continent, witchcraft was consistently considered diabolic in nature, and all witches received their power from evil supernatural entities. Thomas argues:

The narrow theological definition of witchcraft, as the power arising from a contract with the Devil, thus never triumphed completely in England, even during the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when continental notions were widely dissimilated.83

Richard Godbeer considers the legal aspect:

English law defined witchcraft as a hostile act rather than as heresy. The witchcraft statutes of 1542 and 1563 made no reference whatsoever to diabolic compact… toward the end of the sixteenth century, the courts did become better informed about continental demonology and showed an increasing interest in devil-related evidence.84

However, this “increasing interest” did not translate into widespread acceptance, as Thomas argues: “The evidence which has survived suggests that not until the seventeenth century did the diabolic compact figure very prominently in the witch-trials,

81 Johnstone, 173.
82 Thomas, 444-446.
83 Ibid., 448.
84 Godbeer, 157.
and even then was far from being an indispensible feature."85 Bryan LeBeau also addresses the English view on witchcraft:

Because greater emphasis was placed on the power of witches to engage in maleficium86 than on their worshipping the Devil, it was almost entirely a civil matter, and not a religious one; and, in most cases, those convicted were jailed or banished, and even in the extreme, hanged not burned.87

Thomas adds: “Witchcraft prosecution in England did not need the stimulus of religious zeal. Essentially it was made possible by the law of the land… the formal prosecution of witches in this period needed no impetus from above.”88

Clearly there was a sharp delineation between England and the Continent with regards to witchcraft beliefs. European witchcraft involved a compact with the Devil, flight, witches’ Sabbats, complete with orgiastic feasts and corruptions of Christian rituals, and was prosecuted and punished by the Church. None of these aspects appeared in English witchcraft belief; the English adhered to the earlier notions of witchcraft being used for personal gain, and it was largely a civil matter. The only concept that English witchcraft theory added was the animal familiar that witches were said to possess.

So what did the Puritans believe? This will be more fully explained in the next chapter but, in brief, they incorporated all of the preceding concepts into their witchcraft doctrine.

85 Thomas, 444.
86 Maleficium is the use of magic to harm other people or their property.
88 Thomas, 501.
CHAPTER THREE: PURITAN BELIEFS ABOUT GOD’S PLAN, SATAN’S POWER, AND THE IMMINENT COSMIC WAR

This chapter will address Puritan beliefs about the Devil, in particular beliefs held by Puritans who lived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Puritans saw themselves as God’s selected people, and as such were on the front lines of the cosmic war between God and Satan. This concept was intensified in the New World, populated by what the Puritan colonists saw as heathens, and therefore worshipers of Satan, intentionally or otherwise. As God’s selected people, they believed that they were under two pressures: one, that God would hold them to the very highest standard, and two, that Satan would be so infuriated by their attempt to “civilize” his followers that he would target them with his most destructive schemes. Puritan orthodoxy held that Satan, while only operating under God’s control, possessed massive powers of destruction.

Summary

At this point, a summary of the arguments from the first two chapters of this thesis will be helpful. First, Satan is not clearly defined in the Bible, either in character or in terms of the extents and limits of his power and independence. This leaves the scope of his abilities open to interpretation by seventeenth-century Massachusetts Puritans. The concept of Satan evolved from dualistic Mediterranean religions that predated the writing of the books of the Old Testament. Foremost among these was Zoroastrianism, the Persian faith at the time the books of the Old Testament were written. The concept of an independent entity responsible for all of the evil in the world is not exclusive to Zoroastrianism, and it in fact was likely inspired by earlier religions. However, the stark dualism of Zoroastrianism, with the “good god” seen as representing
light and the spiritual world, and the “evil god” representing darkness and the material world, appears to have influenced the authors of the Old Testament. While Satan is never portrayed as God’s equal, his adversarial role was unmistakable, and he seemed at times to operate outside of God’s control. In addition, translation issues may have further confused the situation, with satan (a generic term for an obstacle, accuser, or human opponent) becoming Satan (the specific entity) at times.

Satan is depicted in the Bible as having great power over the physical world, as evidenced in both the story of Job and in the temptation of Jesus Christ in the desert. This is potentially an extension of the Zoroastrian doctrine that the “evil god” wields control over material affairs. The role of “tempter” is but one of Satan’s roles in the Bible; the most prominent role he plays is God’s opponent. God and Satan are depicted as being in a vast cosmic war, and while God is destined to win in the end, the struggle would not be without human casualties, in particular the death of Jesus’ human form. Satan is ostensibly under the control of God, although the level of his autonomy is not clearly delineated in Scripture.

The nebulous nature of Satan’s character in the Bible thus allowed for a great deal of interpretation, and anyone attempting to tease out the specific abilities and limitations of the Devil using only the Bible obviously needed to provide some personal interpretation to formulate answers. Theologians and ministers have historically been careful to avoid accusations of dualism in their writings, yet certain Christian sects (as well as members of the general public) retained dualistic tendencies, despite these beliefs having been deemed heretical by Church orthodoxy.
Protestants (and, by extension, Puritans) and Catholics held differing views concerning the abilities of Satan. This clearly stemmed from the situation where Protestants were reacting to perceived shortcomings of the Catholic Church, and in turn the Puritans reacting to shortcomings that they saw in Protestantism. Puritan beliefs about Satan were closely based on Protestant orthodoxy; however, they were more extreme in nature. Many Protestant writers believed Catholicism had been hopelessly co-opted by Satan, and was in fact doing the work of the Devil on earth. Protestant and Puritan reformers struggled with the issue of Satan’s earthly powers, needing to find a balance between the easy victory over Satan promised by the Catholics and creating a Devil so dominant that he manifested a level of power that could lead to charges of dualism. Protestants placed the responsibility for defense against Satan’s machinations on the individual – one could thwart the Devil’s plots only by personal vigilance and piety. This ran counter to the Catholic reliance on rituals, sacred objects, and divine intercession.

Witchcraft was, in medieval times, believed to be one of the more prominent symptoms of diabolic interference. Beliefs about the nature of witchcraft differed both between the Catholic and Protestant theologies, and also between England and Continental Europe. New England Puritan beliefs about witchcraft (and subsequently, Satan’s hand in the practice) adopted concepts from all of these philosophies.

**Puritan Theology**

Puritans in general readily accepted the fact that Satan directly interfered with everyday affairs. Although Satan was firmly under control of God, his potential powers
and threats were enormous. God allowed Satan to interfere with God’s followers only in order to either admonish backsliders or to reinforce appropriate behavior, as a corrective measure. Puritans saw themselves as God’s selected people (Puritans in New England even more so), and considered themselves to be on the front lines of the cosmic war between good and evil.

Puritans felt the need to separate themselves from not only Catholic doctrine, but also from the Protestant orthodoxy, which they believed was not removed to a satisfactory degree from Catholicism. They saw God as an omnipotent being who used Satan as punishment to correct inappropriate behavior, although God’s specific plan could not be determined (nor should it be questioned or investigated). However, Satan could act only under the direct permission and control of God. To Puritans, the only method that could be used to resist Satan was personal vigilance and piety, as opposed to Catholic reliance on intercession by external forces.

The Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony considered themselves God’s elect people, sent to establish the famed “City on the Hill,” as an example of appropriate piety for the whole world to see. Of course, given that the New World was populated by “heathen savages,” this city could be better described as a citadel in a hostile territory. These particular Puritans saw themselves between two pressures. First, as God’s selected people, God would hold them to the highest standards of behavior. Second, as emissaries sent to convert the godless natives, they would naturally be targets of Satan’s rage – after all, every convert to Christianity (or, conversely, every dead native) was a soul lost to
Satan. It should be apparent that they believed that the Devil would do anything in his power to thwart this enterprise, to “pull [Christ’s church] down.”

As I will show, the Massachusetts Puritans saw themselves as directly involved in the grand cosmic battle. Despite their strong belief that good would ultimately win this contest, they were not assured that the struggle would be easy, or that there would be no casualties. As Godbeer notes, “the triumph of good over evil was assured on a cosmic level, but not on an individual human level.”

The Puritans were unsatisfied with both Catholic and Protestant doctrines. This led to their establishment of a theology that separated them from not just Catholicism, but also to an extent from Protestant orthodoxy. For Puritans, Protestantism was theologically correct, but in reality was not appropriately or sufficiently practiced. In order to understand the Puritans’ beliefs about the Devil and witchcraft, it is necessary to understand the basic aspects of Puritanism. George McKenna argues that the Puritans were positive that they were God’s chosen people, living with “both hope in the Lord and fear of his wrath.” They feared God’s punishments for inappropriate behavior, but these punishments would also indicate that God does intervene in history to punish wrongdoers and backsliders.

Keith Thomas’ book Religion and the Decline of Magic is invaluable in terms of understanding medieval beliefs about all aspects of Christian demonology. He argues that, while separating themselves from mainstream Protestant theology, Puritans, like

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90 Godbeer, 91-92.
Protestants, saw the Catholic Church as a “false church,” and that they were “striking a blow against popery.”

Puritans also placed less faith in the power of the clergy than ordinary Protestants did; they “virtually denied the existence of any church magic at all… all supernatural effects necessarily sprang from either fraudulent illusion or the workings of the Devil.”

Puritanism retained aspects of Protestantism, one of which was the ability of people to directly interact with God, as opposed to going through the various agents available to Catholics. “The individual stood in a direct relationship to God and was solely dependent on his omnipotence.” No intermediaries or ceremonies were able to affect this relationship.

Thus, Protestants were essentially on their own – they were capable of directly interacting with God, but they were also bereft of the potential protection afforded by the intricate Catholic system of intermediaries and sacraments. Therefore, they were responsible for their own well-being, and only direct prayer to God could bring this end about. This aspect of Protestantism was not altered by Puritan doctrine in any major way: “The only discernable difference between Puritans and others in their attitude to petitionary prayer was that Puritans laid greater emphasis on the need for it to be accompanied by fasting and personal austerity.”

This sense of independence and personal responsibility was a cornerstone of Puritan thought. Puritans were expected to reflect on their lives in order to discern if they

92 Thomas, 484.
93 Ibid., 256.
94 Ibid., 76.
95 Ibid., 114.
were properly doing God’s will, and in fact to document significant occurrences by means of keeping diaries and autobiographies. Puritan laymen were expected to record the mercies that God had bestowed upon them, from childhood ailments survived to preservation from accidents or misfortune. “He would also be on the lookout for the notable judgments which had befallen others.”

This ongoing self-examination would guide Puritans in living their lives in accordance with God’s wishes, making it possible:

For the godly layman to turn inwards, entrusting his doubts and uncertainties to a spiritual diary, and resolving his problems by recourse to prayer; the psychological function of the Puritan diary was, as has often been pointed out, closely parallel to that of the Catholic confessional.

Of course, Puritans did not need an actual confessional manned by a priest in order to maintain their good standing with God. This reflects the Puritan belief that they were special, selected by God to live to a higher standard than other Protestants. Thomas notes:

Indeed the readiness of the Puritan diarists to detect the hand of God in daily events is for modern readers the most striking feature of their journals; and the sense of being God’s especial preoccupation has been rightly noted as an essential feature of Puritanism.

This last quote has particular relevance to the Puritan ministers in New England. They were definitely aware of God’s hand in everyday life, and they certainly considered themselves to be God’s elect.

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96 Thomas, 93.
97 Ibid., 158.
98 Ibid., 93.
In Puritan theology, God was an all-encompassing, omnipotent force, firmly in control of every aspect of existence, as Richard Weisman notes: “In Puritan cosmology, all events in nature were believed to result from the intervention of a ubiquitous divine presence… each instant of nature represented an act of divine will, and it lay within the power of God to alter or bring to a halt the course of natural events at his pleasure.”99

Thomas agrees that this concept of God’s infinite power was firmly entrenched in Puritan theology, that they were “also very sensitive to any apparent threat to the notion of God’s omnipotence, and intolerant of any attempt to penetrate his mysteries.” They believed that mankind lived in an “abject predicament, compared with the Almighty’s irresistible power.”100

In addition, Thomas notes that Puritan preachers “warned their flocks against making providence ‘a warrant of our actions,’ insisting that although God might sometimes make the meaning of his judgments clear they were normally unsearchable.”101

These are some of the primary tenets of Puritan doctrine. God is omnipotent, and everything is firmly under his control. God should be feared, as straying from correct behavior and thought will bring divine retribution in some form. God’s ways cannot be known, and seeking explanations for his activities is discouraged. In Chapter Four, I will compare the writings of Massachusetts ministers at the time of the Salem Witch Trials to these fundamental beliefs.

100 Thomas, 369.
101 Ibid., 106.
New England Puritans and Satan’s Power

Even if Satan’s role in God’s plan could not be fully understood, the limits of his power and independence could be the source of speculation. To the Puritan clergy, Satan’s powers of destruction were massive and wide-ranging. Weisman claims that Satan was “at least a party to if not the prime mover in all sins of commission and omission against God.” In addition, Satan could drive men to despair and suicide, and cause “violent pain and sickness.” Puritans also believed that Satan was “well acquainted with the secrets of nature” (another reference to Satan’s dominion over the material world), and that he could create illusions to confuse and mislead humans.

The Devil’s specific role in God’s master plan could not be fully identified, but it was clear that God used Satan to punish transgressions. To Puritans, the “Devil was simply one of the many second causes used by God,” and that afflictions should be countered by attempting to discern what had been done to offend God, and then to repent. Deborah Willis argues that “Satan, though a retaliatory ‘bad’ father and the proximate cause of misfortune, acted only as God’s ‘rod of correction…”’ The Devil, of course, was considered to be firmly under God’s control, and he could only “exercise his destructive power only so far as it ‘pleaseth God.”

Weisman argues that:

However formidable the worldly activities of Satan, the New England clergy nevertheless firmly adhered to the doctrine that his movements were effectively limited and contained by the infinite and unlimited power of God. Accordingly, Satan acted not

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102 Weisman, 25.
103 Thomas, 256.
105 Willis, 91.
as an independent being in his assaults on humanity but rather by the liberty granted to
him by God. 106

This passage demonstrates the ambiguity with regards to Satan’s agency. Note
how Weisman describes Puritan doctrine: Satan’s movements were “limited and
contained” by God, not commanded or prescribed, which seems to imply that Satan has a
larger agenda. Additionally, Satan “acted (emphasis added) not as an independent
being,” not that he was not independent, and that God “granted him liberty,” as opposed
to God merely using Satan as a sort of neutral tool. Puritan ministers spoke in the same
ambiguities; they believed that they were writing from the front lines of a perceived
cosmic struggle between good and evil.

Weisman does address Puritans’ need to reject ideas of Satan’s autonomy, but
argues that “it was important that the limits of this autonomy remain obscure and that the
believer… never underestimate the power of Satan both in himself and in the world.” 107
The apparent argument here is that Puritan ministers needed to walk the line between
leading their followers to believe that God was firmly in control of the Devil and the
belief that Satan was a real, omnipresent threat.

Weisman argues that Puritan ministers depicted Satan as a very real threat, noting
that “it was not unusual for Puritan ministers to expound at length on the vulnerability of
individuals when faced with such an adversary,” and that Satan “enjoyed considerable
advantage over his victims.” He notes that Increase Mather explained that “any angel,

106 Weisman, 25.
107 Ibid., 27.
whether of God or fallen from God, could ‘destroy all the men upon the face of the whole Earth, in a very little time.’”

**New England Puritans and the Cosmic Battle**

Vigilance and prayer were the only methods available to Puritans to resist Satan’s temptations. Puritan doctrine held that God allowed Satan to inflict suffering on people only in order to correct their mistakes. In addition, God would never “allow the faithful to be tested beyond endurance.” God allowed Satan to tempt believers in order that their faith might be strengthened by means of the test. Also, “God might use Satan as one of his many instruments to punish the disbeliever or to warn the believer to further exert himself... God’s purpose in permitting these worldly manifestations was in some manner to promote the spiritual welfare of humanity.”

Puritans in general considered themselves as God’s elect people, held to a higher standard – in fact, the only “true Christians.” This notion was exaggerated in New England, due to the fact that Puritans were attempting to create a new Puritan society in an unfamiliar, hostile, and godless land. This view of the world, a chosen people forging a new Christian community, taught them that they were “charged with bringing God’s message to a heathen land previously ruled by the devil.” Attempting to “[transform] the diabolical wilderness into a monument to Christ infuriated the Devil,” who naturally made it his primary concern to destroy this new venture. This created pressure from

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108 Ibid., 25.
109 Johnstone, 193.
110 Weisman, 26.
112 Godbeer, 90-91.
two fronts: a need to placate God by holding themselves to the highest standards, while at the same time defending their colony from the constant assaults by Satan and his earthly minions. It is not difficult to understand the New England Puritans’ belief that they were on the front lines of an important battle between good and evil.

The New England Puritans considered themselves a chosen people, but also knew that divine retribution (through Satan) was a very real possibility if they did not live up to God’s expectations. Due to this, they “scrutinized all the events of their time, from the Indian wars and the loss of their colonial charter to the witchcraft trials, as evidence that God had some serious issues with his people.”\footnote{McKenna, 41.} Coupled with this fear was hope, namely that if God would intercede to correct wayfarers in his flock, he would similarly intervene to save it in a crisis, provided that the flock was behaving appropriately.

Ministers were quick to depict their situation in martial terms. Parris saw the world as embroiled in a “grand spiritual battle between the damned and the elect,” between Christ’s church and enemies intent on “[pulling] it down.”\footnote{Latner, 98.} These enemies were both external (native Americans) and internal (backsliding colonists), and “as the crisis grew, [the minister] projected the divisions within his own church and community onto the broader New England landscape.”\footnote{Ibid., 106.} The battle lines were clearly delineated, a firm division between two camps. Numerous ministers wrote sermons on this topic, portraying Satan as a powerful and constant opponent of God and his followers. Deodat
Lawson claimed that “Satan is the Adversary and Enemy. He is the Original, the Fountain of Malice, the Instigator of all Contrariety, Malignity, and Enmity.”  

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116 Weisman, 25.
CHAPTER FOUR: “SUCH A DARK DISPENSATION:” THE WRITINGS OF MASSACHUSETTS PURITAN MINISTERS

Puritan ministers in Massachusetts during the period of the Salem Witch Trials relied on several themes concerning Satan and his role in the cosmic war. As they saw themselves as God’s selected people, Puritans believed that they were direct participants in the combat against Satan. Satan, as depicted in their sermons, was a powerful, independent being, capable of creating and implementing complex, long-range plans. While he could only act with the direct permission of God, Satan was nevertheless a fearsome figure in Puritan thought.

The Sermons

This chapter collects and analyzes selected writings of Massachusetts Puritan ministers between 1662 and 1704. These are Increase Mather’s essay “Remarkable Providences,” Cotton Mather’s essay “Memorable Providences,” Deodat Lawson’s sermon “Christ’s Fidelity the Only Shield Against Satan’s Malignity,” John Hale’s essay “A Modest Inquiry,” John Higginson’s introduction to Hale’s essay, and Lawson’s sermon “Witchcraft in Salem.”

I selected these sources to ensure that I was addressing a fairly wide timeline, but not so wide that they would not have any connection with each other. I also selected sources that comment on Satan. I chose the two essays by the Mathers as a baseline, as they were written before the witch trials began. I also wanted two generations represented; scholars make much of the weakening faith of subsequent generations of Massachusetts Puritans, and I wanted to make sure that this was represented. I chose Lawson’s sermon because it was written while the witch trials were going on, and also
because the entire sermon is about Satan, his powers and goals, and his cosmic war against God. The Hale essay (as well as Higginson’s introduction) was written ten years after the trials, and was an attempt to explain what had occurred. Lawson’s 1704 sermon was also written well after the trials, and I wanted to include two works by the same author to determine whether there was a change in an individual’s thinking.

While analyzing these sources, I was looking at several themes, asking several questions. First, what powers do the authors give to Satan? Do their statements grant Satan agency, independence, or an agenda? Exactly how powerful did they believe he was? Second, I looked for language or statements that indicated that these writers saw themselves as participants in the cosmic war between God and Satan. Third, I looked for evidence that these writers saw the Massachusetts Puritans as God’s “select people,” and perhaps held to a higher standard by God (or seen as a more irresistible target for Satan).

Asking these questions and exploring these themes allowed me to determine if these authors saw their community as unique in the world. If this was the case, it is possible that their conception of a new, more powerful Satan could be justified. After all, if Puritan Massachusetts were actually the “City on the Hill” mentioned by Winthrop, it naturally follows that its circumstances might be different from any other community. In that kind of unique situation, anything might be possible, including a Satan with greatly augmented power and independence.

There is an apparent shift in the philosophy regarding the Devil and witchcraft, beginning with Lawson’s sermon from 1692. The earlier Mather essays do not depict Satan or witchcraft as the terrible plagues that the post-1692 works portray. It seems
obvious that ministers would see Satan and witchcraft as much more serious during and after the Salem Witch Trials. However, this is not necessarily the cause of this shift. Lawson’s sermon was written in the early stages of the witch trials, well before the full scope of the crisis was understood.

Several themes recur, particularly in the sources from 1692 and later. Satan was portrayed as an extremely powerful entity with varying degrees of independence and agency. Satan was the implacable enemy of God and his followers and was capable of devising and implementing complex plans. Despite this, the ministers all claimed that Satan can act only under the direct control of God. However, they contradict themselves (and each other) frequently with regards to God’s complete control of Satan’s activities. The ways of both God and Satan were deemed to be mysterious and impossible to ascertain.

Puritan ministers believed that God and Satan were embroiled in a cosmic war, and the Massachusetts Puritans, due to their piety, were expected to act as frontline soldiers in this struggle. As “God’s elected people,” God held them to a higher standard and would punish them more harshly because of it. Satan also had more anger toward them, due to their close relationship with God, and therefore was eager to punish them as well. All of these beliefs pointed toward the fact that Massachusetts Puritans saw their situation as unique, and that their role in the cosmic war was extremely significant.

This belief in a unique situation allowed ministers to take liberties with orthodoxy. With no other community being held to the same high standards, there was no reference point for comparison. In their minds, it is entirely possible that Satan was more
powerful, or allowed to use more power by God, in the New World. After all, the entire continent was populated by heathen Indians. Coupled with the ambiguous depictions of Satan in the Bible, ministers had tremendous leeway in describing the powers and agency of the Devil. Essentially, they were free to depict Satan as possessing any level of agency and power, provided they made an effort to argue that God was still in control of him. Coupled with this is the notion that “God’s ways cannot be understood by man.” I am not implying that these ministers consciously augmented Satan’s power to benefit themselves in some way; I believe that the crisis in Salem became so severe that they had no recourse but to present Satan as immensely powerful and furiously angry with their community. This attitude would be present both during the trials and later as a way to explain or justify the magnitude of the event.

**Increase Mather, 1662**

Increase Mather’s “Remarkable Providences,” written in 1662, consists of anecdotes about witchcraft and possession. Mather relates the case of Ann Cole, who was tried and executed for witchcraft in 1662 in Hartford, Connecticut. During the trial, Cole confessed that:

> she and other persons named in this preternatural Discourse, had had familiarity with the Devil: Being asked whether she had made an express Covenant with him, she answered, she had not, only as she promised to go with him when he called, which accordingly she had sundry times before; and that the Devil told her at Christmass they would have a merry Meeting, and then the Covenant between them should be subscribed.\(^{117}\)

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This account of witchcraft was in keeping with traditional Puritan beliefs. Satan would tempt individuals, typically females, into contracting with him. Cole’s testimony continues:

She likewise declared, that the Devil first appeared to her in the form of a Deer or Fawn, skipping about her, wherewith she was not much affrighted, and that by degrees he became very familiar, and at last would talk with her. Moreover, she said that the Devil had frequently the carnal knowledge of her Body. And the Witches had Meetings at a place not far from her House; and that some appeared in one shape, and others in another, and one came flying amongst them in the shape of a Crow.118

Many of the components of Puritan witchcraft beliefs are here: witches meeting in groups, sex with the devil, flight. At this point, no mention is made of any plot by Satan to attack or destroy the larger community, or participation in the cosmic war. The event is depicted as a small-scale situation, an isolated incident. Satan is not portrayed as having a tremendous amount of power or agency, as he is apparently tempting witches only to obtain their souls, not as part of a larger campaign.

**Cotton Mather, 1689**

Cotton Mather’s “Memorable Providences,” an essay written before the Salem Witch Trials in 1689, is largely a collection of instances of witchcraft and possession. However, he addresses aspects of Satan in the introduction.

He argues that the “old heresy of the sensual Sadducees,” who did not believe in angels, good or evil, is still in existence, that some “men (abandoning both Faith and Reason) count it in their wisdom to credit nothing but what they see and feel.”119 He

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118 Ibid., 20.
claims that this philosophy “has gotten ground in this debauched Age,” and that it inevitably leads people into atheism. Due to this,

    God is therefore pleased … to suffer Devils sometimes to do such things in the world as shall stop the mouth of gainsayers, and extort a Confession from them.  

God uses “Devils” in this instance to correct those who have fallen seriously away from the appropriate path. Mather’s use of the plural “devils” occurs frequently in this essay, and makes it difficult to discern whether he is speaking about the singular Satan or his dark angelic minions. Despite the fact that these “devils” are fulfilling a role that is typical of Satan, it cannot be ascertained that Mather is referring to the singular Devil. For this paper, I will use only passages that are clearly referring to Satan.

    Mather admits that “we can disclose but a little of those Mysteries of Darkness” about Satan, and in fact, even this speculation is problematic due to the use of illusions created by the “Father of Lies.”  

Of course, Satan is not the only supernatural being with a mysterious nature:

    The Secrets also of God’s Providence, in permitting Satan and his Instruments to molest His children, not in their Estates only, but in their Persons and their Posterity too, are part of His Judgments that are unsearchable, and His Wayes that are past finding out; only this we have good Assurance for, that they are among All the things that work together for their good.  

    Mather argues that we should trust in God’s master plan and have faith that it is all being done for a good reason. God’s loosing of Satan has been done for a specific purpose and should not be questioned. This was in keeping with Puritan theology and doctrine. Further arguments about Satan’s role in God’s plan:

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120 Ibid., 95.
121 Ibid., 96.
122 Ibid., 96.
There is no out-ward Affliction, but what God may (and sometimes doth) permit Satan to trouble His people withal: That, The Malice of Satan and his Instruments, is very great against the Children of God: That, The clearest Gospel-Light shining in a place, will not keep some from entering hellish Contracts with infernal Spirits: That, Prayer is a powerful and effectual Remedy against the malicious practises of Devils and those in Covenant with them.123

Again, this was in keeping with Puritan orthodoxy. Following Puritan belief, Satan is powerful and filled with hatred for God’s elect (Puritans), and even devout persons might be tempted into contracting with the Devil if they are not vigilant, but prayer is an effective method of forestalling Satan’s wiles. More advice with regards to resisting the Devil:

Those who refuse the Temptation to use doubtful or Diabolical Courses, to get the Assaults of the Devil and his Agents removed, Choosing to Recommend all to God, and rather to endure Affliction, than to have it Removed to His Dishonour, and the wounding of their own Consciences, never had cause to repent of it in the end.124

Again, this is consistent with Puritan theology, where prayer and endurance are the keys to ending the assaults of the Devil, as using external methods runs counter to Puritan belief. The Devil may be powerful, but prayer and vigilance would allow a person to resist. Mather argues that both God and Satan had methods that cannot be known by man, and these “mysteries” are not meant to be understood.

Deodat Lawson, 1692

Deodat Lawson’s sermon “Christ’s Fidelity the Only Shield Against Satan’s Malignity” is significant, as it was composed and delivered during the witch trials. The sermon was conducted on March 24, 1692, roughly a month after the trials began. Lawson repeatedly assures his congregation that Satan is acting only under the direct

123 Cotton Mather, in Burr, 97.
124 Ibid., 97.
supervision and control of God and beseeches the Lord to rebuke Satan and end the
affliction shortly. The bulk of the sermon concerns Satan’s biblical history, the extent of
his power, and his agenda. Lawson’s Satan has a clear set of personal objectives, even if
he is firmly controlled by God.

Lawson does not attempt to explain the reason for God’s unleashing of Satan; the
sermon on the whole reassures his congregation as opposed to accusing it of misbehavior.
Additionally, he does not exhort them to fast or pray in order to hasten the end of the
affliction. The sermon is basically a request to God to intercede and stop Satan’s
campaign against them. Satan, as envisioned by Lawson, is extremely powerful, and
limited only in his actions by the will of God. In addition, Satan has a specific set of
plans that he would immediately implement if allowed to.

Lawson also depicts his congregation (and Massachusetts Puritans as a whole) as
perhaps exceptional. Noting that the release of Satan by God was an affliction added to
the “common Calamities” of that time (likely shortages, attacks by natives, etc.), he
claims that this can “hardly be said to be common to Men.” He also surmises that Satan
is not only tempting ordinary citizens into sin, but is also controlling or misleading the
people accusing others of witchcraft, using them as “Instruments of his Malice, against
their Friends and Neighbours.” This suggests that he believes that Satan not only had a
level of independence in terms of affecting people, but was carrying out a complex plot to
increase chaos and suffering.

Looking closely at the language that Lawson uses to describe the Devil allows for
analysis of the perceived scope of his powers and independent thought (though not
Lawson repeatedly speaks about Satan’s “malicious operations,” implying that the Devil has an overall strategy. Lawson claims that he is the “ADVERSARY and Enemy. He is the Original, the Fountain of malice, the Instigator of all Contrariety, Malignity and Enmity.” Satan as enemy is a major theme in Lawson’s sermon:

First, He is Gods Enemy. He sets himself against the Infinite and Eternal GOD, All Satan’s designs and Operations; do strike and level, at the very Being of God; he would dethrone and Un-God him, if it were possible. He fell from Gods favour at first, by rebellion, and hence by his Righteous Judgment, was doomed to continue, under the power of Irreconcilable enmity, against him forever.125

This allows Satan an immense amount of independence, in thought if not in action. If everything that Satan desires to do strikes at “the very Being of God,” and attempts to “dethrone and Un-God” him, it seems that God would be hesitant to allow Satan any freedom at all. This would make Satan an unwieldy corrective device at best, and it is unclear how a being with such objectives could be used to bring those who strayed back to the path of righteousness. This also seems to run counter to the doctrine that Satan can perform only actions that God approves or controls directly.

Lawson mentions that Satan “mightily opposes” the execution of the “Purposes, Designs, and Resolutions” of God. If Satan is a being of the highest intelligence, as evidenced by his ability to create and implement complex plans, it seems odd that he would not understand that God allowed him freedom to act only in order to correct the behavior of his flock, and thereby strengthen their resolve to resist him.

Lawson explains that Satan is also the enemy of mankind, striking at both their bodies and souls. With regards to the souls of humans:

First, He is the Enemy of the SOULS of Men. And indeed, this is that he drives at, in all his designs, and operations, to catch devour and destroy SOULS; hence when he draws wretched mortals, to Contract with him; he bargains with them, that after the time of his service to them, he will have their Souls, viz. To be Tormented with him for ever.126

Again, Satan is said to have “designs” – in this case, a desire to obtain the souls of humans. Satan has the power to effect “the innate Rebellion of the will, though he cannot force it unto sin.”127 He could also increase passions, and thus tempt or trick humans into contracting for their souls.

Lawson also notes that Satan is the enemy of human bodies, and that he can afflict humans with diseases:

Sometimes by Moving and Exasperating the Corrupt Particles of the Blood, and vitiated Humours of the Body, he doth (by God’s Permission) Smite the Bodies of Men, with Grievous, Pestilential and Loathsome Diseases; of this JOB was a special Instance.128

This is an oddly scientific explanation of how Satan operates; however, it did grant him specific and absolute power over physical elements (with God’s permission). In addition to inflicting physical ailments on individual humans, Satan:

may (by Divine Permission) spread the Contagious Atomes of Epidemical Diseases, in the Airy Region (the Territory assigned to him) who is Prince of the Power of the Air.129

Lawson claims that Satan is in this way responsible for Biblical plagues used to destroy the enemies of God’s people, in particular the plague in Egypt. However, Satan

126 Ibid., 27.
127 Ibid., 27.
128 Ibid., 30.
129 Ibid., 30.
is not specifically named in this reference (Psalms 78: 50); instead, God “sent evil angels among them.”

Lawson claims that Satan is also the enemy of human life, “the Prince of Death, that hath the Power of Death.” He says that Satan was responsible for the first Biblical murder, when Cain killed Abel, as well as killing Job’s family. Satan also instigates all human warfare:

the Devil hath begotten Pride, Pride hath Created Wars, and Wars promoted Slaughter, and Destrucions; so that it is the true Mark and Character of Satan’s Kingdom, that it is Established, Supported, and Propagated by Malice, Enmity, Wars, Blood, Slaughter, and Destruction of Mankind.

Satan appears to have a great deal of influence on human, earthly matters. Lawson does not mention that Satan operates only with divine permission in this section, which is striking, given his proclivity to frequently remind his audience of this limitation in the rest of the sermon.

The next section of the sermon concerns Satan’s master plan and objectives, that he “makes it his business to improve all Opportunities and Advantages, to Exercise his malice upon the Children of Men.” This implies that God, while ostensibly in complete control of Satan’s activities, affords him “opportunities and advantages” in his campaign to harass humanity. Lawson, perhaps unconsciously, has created a paradox. There is no rational divine purpose that can be served by God allowing Satan to advance any part of his diabolical plans. This section of the sermon continues by describing Satan’s abilities to affect humans:

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130 Ibid., 31.
131 Ibid., 33.
132 Ibid., 33.
And indeed his Angelical Activity is such, as doth render him capable to Operate far beyond Humane Power of Resistance, without any Instrument whatsoever, whensoever he hath obtained the Divine Permission.\textsuperscript{133}

This is an odd phrase. As previously shown, Puritan doctrine held that the only way to resist Satan’s machinations was by personal prayer and vigilance. According to this passage, Lawson claims that Satan, when given God’s permission, is able to affect humans no matter how devout and careful they might be, that no resistance is possible. This was a level of power that appears to run counter to Puritan orthodoxy.

This section closes with a summary:

So far as we can look into those Hellish Mysteries, and guess at the administration of that Kingdom of Darkness, we may learn that Witches make Witches, by persuading one the other to Subscribe to a Book, or Articles, and c. And the Devil, having them in his subjection, by their Consent, he will use their Bodies and Minds, Shapes, and Representations, to Affright and Afflict others, at his pleasure, for the propagation of his Infernal Kingdom, and accomplishing his Devised Mischiefs, to the Souls, Bodies and Lives of the Children of men; yea, and of the Children of GOD too, so far as permitted and is possible.\textsuperscript{134}

This is one of the only direct references to witchcraft in the entire sermon. However, the language Lawson uses is intriguing. The reference to “Hellish Mysteries” seems out of place in a sermon intended to codify and explain Satan’s powers and activities, especially in that these “mysteries” refer to ideas about witchcraft that would likely be very familiar to his congregation. Two references to Satan’s “kingdom,” and its “administration” and “propagation” also appear to afford Satan a measure of independence, at the least an arena in which he wields total power. The final sentence

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 37.
seems to separate the Puritans (the Children of GOD) from everyone else (the Children of Men). As they saw themselves as “God’s elect,” this distinction makes sense.

Following that thought, the next section of Lawson’s sermon focuses on Puritans in the New World as particular targets of Satan’s ire.

The Covenant People of God, and those that would Devote themselves Entirely to his Service, are the special Objects of SATAN’s Rage and Fury. He is the malicious Enemy of the Church of God, and of every Member thereof… That which makes him so malicious against the Children of GOD is his accursed contrariety to the Image of God that is on them, and the Principle of Holiness that is in them.135

Lawson appears to be implying that the Puritans are the “Covenant People of God,” possibly to the exclusion of other Protestant sects (and almost definitely to Catholics). Satan therefore would be most willing to harass and destroy any community comprised of these people. Lawson describes Job as an example of such a person, and indirectly (or directly) compares his congregation with Job.136 In addition, he notes that Satan would have reason to be especially harsh on the Puritans in New England, as objects of his specific “rage and fury.” This places the Puritans on the front lines of the cosmic war between God and Satan.

The remainder of the sermon assures the reader that Satan can act only with God’s permission, and that Satan is but a part of the divine plan. Lawson uses the life of Jesus as a case study, showing that every part Satan plays, from the temptation in the desert to his involvement in Judas’ betrayal of Christ, results in a victory for God:

Hitherto we may observe, how Satan’s plot and project, seemed to be agreeable, (though against his Will) to the Purpose, and Eternal Counsel of the Blessed GOD: But in the Ends and Issues proposed, Behold how vastly they differ! For Instance, Satan’s

135 Ibid., 38.
136 Hale will make this same comparison in “A Modest Inquiry.” See below.
Design herein was to cut off the hopes of the Sons of Men, as to Redemption and Salvation by the Man Christ Jesus.\textsuperscript{137}

Lawson says that Satan’s schemes to foil Jesus’ ministry, whether to tempt Jesus into abandoning his humanity by temptation or by actually conspiring to have him killed, led to the opposite result, actually strengthening Christ’s power and popularity. Thus, he says, Satan is firmly under the control of God, despite potential appearances to the contrary. However, this assurance tends to run counter to some of Lawson’s previous statements about Satan’s master plan, as noted above.

In his conclusion, Lawson comforts his audience with the reassurance that whatever turmoil they were currently experiencing would soon pass:

That Whensoever, God hath declared a Person or People, to be in Covenant with Him, as the Objects of his Special mercy and Favour, he will assuredly and shortly, Suppress the malice of Satan, however violently engaged against them.\textsuperscript{138,139}

The sermon ends with another plea to God to rebuke Satan and end the period of suffering. Again, there is no mention of individual Puritans’ responsibility to be on guard and defend themselves from Satan’s machinations, which would hold with Puritan orthodoxy.

Lawson’s Satan, while able to operate only with God’s permission, nonetheless possesses a personal agenda and complex plans to carry it out. Lawson also grants Satan an intellectual capacity apparently equal to God’s. Satan is God’s enemy, and the enemy of all mankind. In particular, Satan is angry at the Puritans due to their piety and covenant with God. If allowed, Satan could affect humans with no chance of resistance.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{139} Lawson did not know at that time that the witch trials would go on for more than another year.
from them. This sermon insinuates that the Massachusetts Puritans were in a unique position, on the front lines of the cosmic war between God and Satan, and, as God’s elite soldiers, they were in very real danger, faced with a furious and powerful foe.

**John Higginson, 1697**

John Higginson wrote the introduction to Hale’s “A Modest Inquiry” in 1697, some five years after the witch trials ended. Speaking about Satan’s role in witchcraft:

Omitting other Examples, I shall Instance only in the matter of Witchcraft, which on the Humane side, is one of the most hidden Works of Darkness, managed by the Rulers of the darkness of this World, to the doing of great spoil amongst the Children of men: And on the Divine side, it is one of the most awful and tremendous Judgments of God which can be inflicted on the Societies of men, especially when the Lord shall please for his own Holy Ends to Enlarge Satan’s Commission in more than an ordinary way.⁴⁰

Satan is here a powerful character, a “ruler of the darkness of this world,” a phrase which refers both to Satan’s worldly powers and his control of darkness, both references with biblical roots. In addition, these two elements could be directly traced to older, dualistic beliefs. Likewise, witchcraft is a “hidden work of darkness,” which refers both to the darkness motif, as well as the fact that Satan’s plots cannot be ascertained by mortals. Of course, this judgment came from God and served his “holy ends,” but it is unclear how “enlarging Satan’s commission” serves any “holy end.” God’s overall plan, like Satan’s, is not for men to understand. Higginson comments directly on the trials:

It is known to all men, that it pleased God some few years ago, to suffer Satan to raise much trouble amongst us in that respect, the beginning of which was very small, and looked on at first as an ordinary case which had fallen out before at several times in other places, and would be quickly over.⁴¹

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⁴¹ Ibid., 400.
Here Higginson notes that the Salem trials were considered ordinary at first, and would not be any different from other witch trials. Again, God allowed Satan to interfere with the Puritans as part of some larger, mysterious divine plan. Higginson notes that the trials spiraled out of control, that:

The number of the Accused increased unto many scores; amongst whom were many Persons of unquestionable credit, never under any grounds of suspicion of that or any other Scandalous Evil. This brought a general Consternation upon all sorts of People, doubting what would be the issue of such a dreadful Judgment of God upon the Country; but the Lord was pleased suddenly to put a stop to those proceedings, that there was no further trouble, as hath been related by others.\textsuperscript{142}

Higginson holds that God’s plan is still not to be known, but clearly people believed that something was amiss, due to the scope of the crisis, but thankfully, the Lord “put a stop to those proceedings” and the trouble ceased. The logic of this sequence is puzzling. First, God sends Satan to correct or punish the Puritans, because they had strayed from his wishes. Then the Puritans punish those who are responsible for aiding Satan’s plot, but the Puritans go too far and possibly convict some innocent people. At this point, God rewards the Puritans by restraining Satan. That seems arbitrary, but perhaps God’s divine plan is not meant to be understood, even by historians.

\textbf{John Hale, 1702}

John Hale’s “A Modest Inquiry” was published in 1702, some ten years after the Salem trials. In the preface, Hale describes how he interprets the relationship between God and Satan:

The Holy Scriptures inform us that the Doctrine of Godliness is a great Mystery, containing the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven: Mysteries which require great search for the finding out: And as the Lord hath his Mysteries to bring us to Eternal

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 400.
Glory; so Satan hath his Mysteries to bring us to Eternal Ruine: Mysteries not easily understood, whereby the depths of Satan are managed in hidden wayes.143

Clearly, Hale believes that the ways of God cannot be discerned by mere mortals. However, the passage “And as the Lord hath his Mysteries to bring us to Eternal Glory; so Satan hath his Mysteries to bring us to Eternal Ruine” apparently places the mysteries of God and Satan on equal levels. To be sure, Hale makes it abundantly clear that Satan can operate only with the permission of God, that God is more powerful than Satan, but this statement suggests that both entities have specific, mysterious plans for humanity. This affords Satan a great deal of independent thought. Like Lawson, Hale has given Satan at least intellectual power equal to God, suggesting that Satan’s plans are as complex and far-reaching as God’s. While this is not technically dualism, it grants Satan a level of power that is not fully consistent with Christian orthodoxy or Biblical proof.

Hale on the witch trials:

And among Satan’s Mysteries of iniquity, this of Witchcraft is one of the most difficult to be searched out by the Sons of men; as appeareth by the great endeavors of Learned and Holy men to search it out, and the great differences that are found among them, in the rules laid down for the bringing to light these hidden works of darkness.144

As Hale believes it, the Puritans were afflicted by one of the most confounding of Satan’s “mysteries of iniquity,” in that there is no consensus (that he is aware of) about how to “[bring] to light these hidden works of darkness.” However, he does note that this was the worst episode of diabolical intrigue in New England’s history:

That there hath been such a dark dispensation by the Lord, letting loose upon us the Devil, Anno. 1691 and 1692, as we never experienced before: And thereupon apprehending and condemning persons for Witchcraft; and nextly acquitting others no

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143 Hale, in Burr, 402.
144 Hale, in Burr, 402.
less liable to such a charge; which evidently shew we were in the dark, and knew not what to do; but have gone too far on the one or the other side, if not on both.\textsuperscript{145}

This is an apology, an admission that the Puritans had erred, that they had not successfully discerned God’s desires. In addition, Hale is not sure whether they had convicted too many innocent people or acquitted too many guilty persons. Of course, if Satan possessed the level of power and independence that Hale saw fit to grant him, this too could be one part of a larger diabolic plan. At any rate, Hale states his current goal:

Desiring his Mercy in Jesus Christ to Pardon all the Errors of his People in the day of darkness; and to enable us to fight with Satan by Spiritual Weapons, putting on the whole Armour of God.\textsuperscript{146}

Again, the language is significant, as Hale sees the Puritans as soldiers in the cosmic war and asks both for forgiveness and the means to bring the battle to Satan. Despite Hale’s acknowledgment that they acted in error, he believes that

God’s Children shall be gainers by the assaults of Satan, which occasion’d this Discourse; which that they may, is the Prayer of, Thine in the Service of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{147}

Hale does not explain exactly why God allowed the Devil so much leeway in this instance, but he still asserts that it was part of his master plan and aided the Puritans in some way.

Hale admits that the Devil has great power, that if he had the liberty to reveal all that they\textsuperscript{148} know of the affairs of mankind, or to do all that is in their power to perform, they would bring dreadful confusions and desolations upon the World.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 402.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 405.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 405.
\textsuperscript{148} Hale tends to use “Devil” and “Devils” interchangeably. It is sometimes difficult to determine if he is referring to Satan or to his demonic minions.
\textsuperscript{149} Hale, in Burr, 406.
Again, the only reason that the Devil does not destroy or completely corrupt mankind is that God will not permit it. However, Hale insinuates that God is not always completely in control of Satan and his forces, as evidenced by the control system God uses to limit their actions:

The way God governs Devils is by Chains whereby they are kept Prisoners.¹⁵⁰ Men are governed by Laws, by convictions of Conscience. By Scripture Rules, Humane Laws, and also by Gods Spirit. But Devils have no such Laws, or tenderness of Conscience to bridle or restrain them. But the Lord hath his Chains, which are called Everlasting, and are always lasting; so that they are never wholly without a Chain. This Chain is sometimes greater and shorter, other times lesser and longer, as the Lord pleaseth, for his own Glory.¹⁵¹

This suggests that God is not in direct control of Satan and his demons, but can alter the limits of his activities only by adjusting the length of the restraining chains. If God were in direct control of Satan’s activities, he would simply give him specific orders to be carried out, but this is not the case. Note that the chains are not Hale’s invention, but have a Biblical basis, namely 2 Peter 2:2 and Jude 6. As a good Puritan, Hale looked only to Scripture for guidance and information. If the intellectual freedom of Satan is roughly equal to God’s, that notion is as old as the New Testament, and possibly inspired by assorted dualistic Mediterranean religions. Hale is apparently not uncomfortable with this concept, despite its potentially dualistic nature – after all, it is in Scripture.

Hale comments on Satan’s strategies as well:

The Devil is full of malice against man, and frames his designs against him, chiefly to destroy his Soul, as... Scriptures abundantly testify. Hence probably at sometimes he doth not all the hurt to man’s Body that he could, lest thereby he should awaken man to repentance and prayer; he seeks to keep men in a false peace.

¹⁵⁰ References to Biblical passages omitted for clarity.
¹⁵¹ Ibid., 406.
Hale grants Satan the ability to design malicious acts against man, as evidenced by Scripture. He goes further by surmising that Satan might not always use the full measure of the freedom that God affords him in a particular situation, to keep “men in a false peace,” short of resorting to repentance. This is a complex plan indeed, and apparently subverts God’s will – Satan himself deciding how severely to punish an individual. This is clear evidence of Hale’s belief about Satan’s agency and ability to countermand or alter God’s divine plan.

Hale also sees the Massachusetts Puritans as God’s select people, as evidenced by the following passage:

The Lord delivered into the hand of Satan the Estate, Children, and Body of Job, for the trial of Job’s faith and patience, and proof of his perfection and uprightness. So the Lord hath delivered into Satan’s hand men’s Children and Bodies, yea names and estates into Satan’s hand for the trial of their faith and patience, and further manifestation of the sincerity of their professions.152

Here Hale is equating the New England Puritans with Job, claiming that they are suffering the same type of affliction. Clearly he considers his congregation as equivalent in piety and faith to Job, who is considered by God his most loyal subject, even allowing Satan to test him to the breaking point. If God had sent Satan to test the Massachusetts Puritans in such a severe manner, surely he thought that they were capable of handling such a test and worthy of such close attention. The most pious individuals and societies merited the most challenging trials. Hale’s Satan is again an independent being with a complex agenda, and potentially the intellectual equal of God, if not able to match his

152 Hale, in Burr, 430.
power in other areas. Again, both God and Satan have mysterious plans that are not meant to be understood.

**Deodat Lawson, 1704**

Lawson revisits the Salem Witch Trials some ten years after his “Christ’s Fidelity” sermon of 1692 with “Witchcraft in Salem”:

It pleased God in the year of our Lord 1692 to visit the people of a place called Salem Village in New-England with a very sore and grievous affliction, in which they had reason to believe that the sovereign and holy God was pleased to permit Satan and his instruments to affright and afflict those poor mortals in such an astonishing and unusual manner.153

Lawson clearly indicates that this affliction was more severe than any other previously mandated by God. He describes the Black Mass, mock-baptism, and “devil-supper” held by the witches, commenting, “Thus horribly doth Satan endeavor to have his kingdom and administrations to resemble those of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Again, there is a sense of a long-term plan by Satan to create a perversion of Christianity. The terms “kingdom” and “administration” suggest that Lawson believes that Satan has the objective of establishing an earthly kingdom, which suggests a great deal of independence and agency, even if God would never allow it to occur. At the mock baptisms, participants were urged to “use their utmost endeavors to oppose the kingdom of Christ, and to set up and advance the kingdom of Satan.” Taken at face value, this implies that the “kingdom of Satan” was an achievable objective, or at least that Satan believed that it was. Additionally, defendants “confessed the design was laid by this

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witchcraft to root out the interest of Christ in New England and that they began at the village, in order to settling the kingdom of darkness and the powers thereof.” It seems unlikely that this was a part of God’s divine plan, especially if he was firmly in control of Satan’s activities. Satan is clearly depicted as having an agenda in opposition to God’s plan, which runs counter to the orthodoxy that Satan can act only under the direct control of God.

Lawson closes his sermon thus:

I have given my reader a brief and true account of those fearful and amazing operations and intrigues of the Prince of Darkness; and I must call them so, for let some persons be as incredulous as they please about the powerful and malicious influence of evil angels upon the minds and bodies of mankind, sure I am, none that observed those things above mentioned could refer them to any other head than the sovereign permission of the Holy God and the malicious operations of His and our implacable Enemy.¹⁵⁴

This last phrase is confusing – is God permitting Satan to perform these acts as part of his divine plan? Is the “powerful and malicious influence” of Satan too powerful for humans to resist?

**Themes Common to the Sermons**

These ministers return time after time to similar aspects of the Devil and his struggle with God. God and Satan both work in mysterious ways, and these ways cannot be understood by mortals. God and Satan are locked in a vast cosmic war, and the New England Puritans are frontline soldiers in this combat due to their exceptionalism and piety. Satan is a powerful, independent entity, potentially the intellectual equal of God, and has long-range, far-reaching plans for the destruction of Christ’s church, possibly even plans to unseat God. Only the power of God prevents Satan from carrying out these

¹⁵⁴ Lawson, “Witchcraft…”
schemes. These ministers have the leeway to depict Satan as such a powerful being because there is only scant evidence about Satan’s abilities in the Bible. As long as they mention that Satan is allowed to act only with God’s permission, ministers are basically free to assign any level of independence to the Devil, and God’s ways, after all, cannot be known.
CONCLUSION

I have demonstrated that the Massachusetts Puritan ministers in my study granted powers to Satan that are not in keeping with Christian orthodoxy. These powers included an enormous amount of control over the world, an intellectual capacity potentially equal to God’s, as well as the ability to compose and execute complex, far-reaching plans. These ministers, operating under the conception that they were God’s “elect,” saw themselves as elite troops on the front line of the cosmic war between God and Satan. This, along with the fact that they believed that they were to be an example of pious Christian living that the whole world was to follow, placed immense pressure upon them. These pressures came ostensibly both from God, who would hold them to a very high standard, and from Satan, who was infuriated because these people were favored by God and because they were attempting to establish a new Christian nation. These concerns, coupled with a lack of Scriptural proof about the powers and limitations of Satan, allowed these ministers tremendous leeway in describing the capabilities of the Devil.

This project is significant in that it addresses a central aspect of Puritan thinking that has not been sufficiently explored. Satan and his machinations are a critical factor in Puritan thought, specifically with regards to the witch trials. Yet historians have largely overlooked this aspect of Puritan belief, and also appear hesitant to accuse reformers and ministers of dualistic thoughts. It is unclear why this reticence exists, but it is apparent that beliefs about Satan cannot be removed from the conversation about Puritanism and the Salem Witch Trials. This project offers another lens through which to view history, and could be applied not just to the Salem Witch Trials but also to a wide variety of other
circumstances. Historians cannot appropriately study the Puritans without understanding the primary adversarial force that opposed them.

While I did not begin this project intending to write yet another paper offering a new explanation for the extreme nature of the Salem Witch Trials, I believe that I have identified an innovative way of analyzing the primary source material. Understanding that the Massachusetts Puritans believed that they were under attack by a furious, powerful opponent is critical to understanding their words and actions. The ministers believed that their community was unique, held to the highest standard by God, and as such, faced unique challenges. Attempts to explain or justify their behavior without addressing this factor overlook a critical variable.

This project could be expanded simply by adding more primary source material by Massachusetts Puritan writers, and there is a surplus of material that could be analyzed. The six sermons addressed in this thesis represent only a small portion of the available material written by Puritan ministers in Massachusetts. There is also a great amount of testimony from the Salem Witch Trials that has survived, and much of this concerns Satan and his machinations. This would allow for analysis of beliefs about the Devil and his powers and schemes held by the common people, lawyers, and magistrates. This analysis would add another level to the study of Satan and his perceived abilities during this period. It would also shed light on the effectiveness of the ministers’ sermons – did the general populace agree with what the ministers were preaching, or did they tend to hold different beliefs about Satan?
In addition, source material could be added from England and the European continent, making the project a more comprehensive study of conceptions of Satan in the medieval world. Was the idea of an extremely powerful Satan limited only to Massachusetts during this time period, or was it commonplace during periods of hysteria about witchcraft? Did Catholic priests afford Satan these same broad powers during witch crises in their communities? The *Malleus Maleficarum* would also provide an interesting example of beliefs about Satan, his powers, and his limitations.

This project has connections to the present day, as most of the historiography about the Salem Witch Trials does not directly engage theories about ideas regarding the power of the Devil. Addressing this issue would bring a fuller understanding of Puritan thought in early America. As Satan was such a central figure in Puritan ideology, it seems odd that his perceived influence is so frequently sidelined or overlooked.
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