

IS SATAN “LUCIFER”?

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It is sad, but nevertheless true, that on occasion Bible students attribute to God’s Word facts and concepts that it neither teaches nor advocates. These ill-advised beliefs run the entire gamut—from harmless misinterpretations to potentially soul-threatening false doctrines.

Although there are numerous examples from both categories that could be listed, perhaps one of the most popular misconceptions among Bible believers is that Satan also is designated as “Lucifer” within the pages of the Bible. What is the origin of the name Lucifer, what is its meaning, and is it a synonym for “Satan”? Here are the facts.

The word “Lucifer” is used in the King James Version only once, in Isaiah 14:12: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!” The Hebrew word translated “Lucifer” is *helel* (or *heyel*), from the root, *hâlâl*, meaning “to shine” or “to bear light.” Keil and Delitzsch noted that “[i]t derives its name in other ancient languages also from its striking brilliancy, and is here called *ben-shachar* (son of the dawn)... (1982, 7:311). However, the KJV translators did not translate *helel* as Lucifer because of something inherent in the Hebrew term itself. Instead, they borrowed the name from Jerome’s translation of the Bible (A.D. 383-405) known as the *Latin Vulgate*. Jerome, likely believing that the term was describing the planet Venus, employed the Latin term “Lucifer” (“light-bearing”) to designate “the morning star” (Venus). Only later did the suggestion originate that Isaiah 14:12ff. was speaking of the devil. Eventually, the name Lucifer came to be synonymous with Satan. But is Satan “Lucifer”?

No, he is not. The context into which verse 12 fits begins in verse 4 where God told Isaiah to “take up this parable against the **king of Babylon**, and say, ‘How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!’” In his commentary on Isaiah, Albert Barnes explained that God’s wrath was kindled against the king because the ruler “intended not to acknowledge any superior either in heaven or earth, but designed that himself and his laws should be regarded as supreme” (1950, 1:272). The chest-pounding boast of the impudent potentate was:

I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation, in the uttermost parts of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High (vss. 13-14).

As a result of his egotistical self-deification, the pagan monarch eventually would experience both the collapse of his kingdom and the loss of his life—an ignominious end that is described in vivid and powerful terms. “Sheol from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming,” the prophet proclaimed to the once-powerful king. And when the ruler finally descends into his eternal grave, captives of that hidden realm will taunt him by saying, “Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?” (vs. 16). He is denominated as a “man” (vs. 16) who would die in disrepute and whose body would be buried, not in a king’s sarcophagus, but in pits reserved for the downtrodden masses (vss. 19-20). Worms would eat his body, and hedgehogs would trample his grave (vss. 11,23).

It was in this context that Isaiah referred to the king of Babylon as “the morning star” (“son of the morning”; “son of the dawn”) to depict the once-shining-but-now-dimmed, once-lofty-but-now-diminished, status of the (soon to be former) ruler. In his *Bible Commentary*, E.M. Zerr observed that such phrases were “...used figuratively in this verse to symbolize the dignity and splendor of the Babylonian monarch. His complete overthrow was likened to the falling of the morning star” (1954, 3:265). This kind of phraseology should not be surprising since “[i]n the O.T., the demise of corrupt national powers is frequently depicted under the imagery of falling heavenly luminaries (cf. Isa. 13:10; Ezekiel 32:7), hence, quite appropriately in this context the Babylonian monarch is described as a fallen star [cf. ASV]” (Jackson, 1987, 23:15).

Nowhere within the context of Isaiah 14, however, is Satan depicted as Lucifer. In fact, quite the opposite is true. In his commentary on Isaiah, Burton Coffman wrote: “We are glad that our version (ASV) leaves the word *Lucifer* out of this rendition, because...Satan does not enter into this passage as a subject at all” (1990, p. 141). The Babylonian ruler was to die and be buried—fates neither of which Satan is destined to endure. The king was called “a man” whose body was to be eaten by worms, but Satan, as a spirit, has no physical body. The monarch lived in and abided over a “golden city” (vs. 4), but Satan is the monarch of a kingdom of spiritual darkness (cf. Ephesians 6:12). And so on.

The context presented in Isaiah 4:4-16 not only does not portray Satan as Lucifer, but actually militates against it. Keil and Delitzsch firmly proclaimed that “Lucifer,” as a synonym, “is a perfectly appropriate one for the king of Babel, on account of the early date of the Babylonian culture, which reached back as far as the grey twilight of primeval times, and also because of its predominate astrological character” (1982, p. 312). They then correctly concluded that “Lucifer, as a name given to the devil, was derived from this passage...without any warrant whatever, as relating to the apostasy and punishment of the angelic leaders” (pp. 312-313).

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