

Biblical Misconceptions: Lucifer

The name Lucifer is associated with Satan among Bible believers and it's a common concept in popular culture as well. But is the Devil's name actually Lucifer? This misconception is based on similarities that appear in the writing of the prophet Isaiah, statements Christ made to his disciples and a passage from the book of Revelation. Let's take a look at each of these and then compare what we find.

Isaiah writes, "***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!***" (Isa 14.12). Now let's take a look at a statement Christ made after seventy disciples returned from the limited commission. "***And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.***" (Luke 10.18). The idea of falling from heaven that appears in both references, seems to refer to the same thing. Isolated in this manner, scholars in the past have equated these statements to be an indication of the origin of Satan.

In the book of Revelation John describes a scene that sets the stage for this interpretation. "***And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.***" (Rev 12.7-9).

Similarities in these statements are believed to describe the origin of Satan as a fallen angel. According to Isaiah, Lucifer has fallen from heaven, Christ saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven and John states that Satan was cast out of heaven. The final conclusion is that Satan was an angel who rebelled against God, fought against angelic forces in the heavenly realm, was defeated and thrown down to Earth. At first glance that explanation seems reasonable. Until we examine the context of each of these passages.

Isaiah's prophecy in chapter fourteen begins with a statement of mercy on Jacob and Israel, representing God's children. The prophets wrote about the coming judgment against the Lord's unfaithful people and how it would be accomplished. One instrument of judgment will be the kingdom of Babylon, which takes place under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. Although the Babylonians would be allowed to implement God's punishment against his people, they would later be judged for their own evil. Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar are the subject of a judgment from God confirmed early in the chapter as Isaiah writes, "***...thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon...***" (Isa 14.4). The following verses detail God's actions against the Babylonians for their evil, just as he allows them to be the instrument of punishment against his own people. Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance is apparent in the book of Daniel and the Babylonians are characterized as a "***bitter and hasty nation***" (Hab 1.6). Judgment against Nebuchadnezzar in particular is detailed in the book of Daniel and prophecies such as Isaiah's include the entire nation.

In Isaiah's writing, Lucifer, is used in reference to Nebuchadnezzar who would be cast

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down in his arrogance by God's judgment. Lucifer in this passage refers to the planet Venus, a bright body visible in early morning and well known in ancient societies. Stars and other celestial bodies are used in prophetic language to refer to governments, kings, rulers and their power. From the context we can conclude that Nebuchadnezzar, not Satan, is the subject of the passage in Isaiah.

Christ told his disciples he "***beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven***" which is a reference to the effect of the message being preached and the coming fulfillment of God's plan to save mankind. The power of Satan lies in deceiving and tempting humans to sin and be separated from God throughout eternity. The writer of Hebrews speaks of the effect that Christ's sacrifice had on humanity and the power of Satan. "***Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil***" (Heb 2.14). When Christ came into the world his presence marked the fulfillment of God's promise to save humanity made to Adam and Eve (Gen 3.15). The Gospel neutralizes Satan's power taking away the fear of death and eternal judgment. In that sense, the loss of the Devil's power is characterized in this passage describing him as falling from Heaven. Satan's defeat was imminent and sure. Although there's a similarity in language between the prophecy of Isaiah and Christ's statement, they're discussing two different subjects.

John's statement in Revelation concerning Satan being cast out of Heaven following a war between the Devil's forces and God's, led by Michael the archangel, seems to parallel the statements of Isaiah and Christ. But it doesn't. The book of Revelation is written in signs and symbols, the opening of the book specifies the events foretold would shortly come to pass and were specifically addressed to the seven churches of Asia. The similarity in language and imagery points to a common point of origin, not subject.

The images in Revelation aren't literal representations of events. They figuratively describe things that will take place at a point in the future. Taking this into consideration we can conclude that the similarity in language points to God as the source but due to the immediate context of each passage, that's where the similarity ends.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the statements of Isaiah were dealing with a time period that ended with the conquest of Judah in 586 B.C. and the end of the Babylonian exile in 536 B.C. Christ referred to Satan's power being compromised by the teaching of the Gospel in the early first century so that isn't consistent with Isaiah's statements. John's writing in Revelation, is a symbolic prophecy referring to things that would shortly come to pass but hadn't happened yet. That's inconsistent with Christ's statement because he referred to Satan as being in a fallen state as he spoke to the disciples.

The conclusion that makes sense and harmonizes with the passages I've noted is that Lucifer isn't a reference to Satan, and Satan's fall was through judgments against him and the preaching of the Gospel that neutralized his power over humans to deceive. In light of the

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scriptural evidence, Lucifer, the morning star, represents the downfall of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians which was fulfilled centuries earlier.

This doesn't mean that Satan is powerless now. Peter states, "***Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.***" (1 Pet 5.8). Satan continues to work to deceive the world according to the apostle Paul (2 Cor 4.4). But his influence is defeated by the presence and power of the Gospel. Individually we can overcome this by understanding the will of God revealed in the scriptures. When we come to a knowledge of the truth and obey it, we're translated from the kingdom of darkness into the church, the body of Christ (Col 1.13). The written word has the power to dispel misconceptions like this and lead us home to Heaven.