

LUCIFER, WHO OR WHAT?

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Lucifer's only mention in the Bible is at Isaiah 14:12. The marginal notes of many Bibles direct attention to Luke 10:18 where we read Jesus' words: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." I do not approve of such a connection and will seek to show why in the following paragraphs.

The translation of the phrase *helel ben shachar* in Isaiah 14:12 is not easy. The *ben shachar* is not the problem.¹ It means "son of dawn" or the like. The morning star is the son of the morning. The Hebrew idiom *ben*—"son" means anything closely related to or dependent on or described by the following word in the absolute state.² But is *helel* a name? Is it a common noun? Is it a verb? The word *helel* appears in Zechariah 11:2 in parallel with a verb whose radical letters are *yll*. Both thus mean "howl" or "yell" and are apparently onomatopoeic. In Ezekiel 21:12 (v. 17 in Hebrew) we have a similar situation. There *helel* is parallel to *z'q* which means "cry." Jeremiah 47:2 has a related form (*hiph'il*) and there the word is rendered "wail." The Syriac version, among others, so understood the word in question. "How are you fallen from heaven! Howl in the morning: . . ."³

More translators and commentators chose to render the word as a noun however. The Greek has *heosphoros* and the Latin *lucifer*. Both mean "light carrier." The translators of the Septuagint and the Vulgate along with the leading Rabbins and most of the early Christian writers understood the word as a derivative of *hll*, "to shine." Hence it means "bright one" or "shining one." This, of course, fits best with the rest of the phrase *ben shachar*, "son of dawn."

Tertullian, commenting on Isaiah 14:12, said, "This must mean the devil. . ."⁴ Origen, too, readily identified "Lucifer" with Satan.⁵ John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has contributed to the dissemination of this erroneous notion:

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1. Although Winckler (*Geschichte Israel*, ii, 24) suggests *shahar* for *shachar*; hence "son of the moon." The word appears in Jud. 8:21, 26, and Isa. 3:18.

2. Cf. Isa. 5:1, "a very fruitful hill" is literally "a horn of the son of oil."

3. George M. Lamsa, *The Holy Bible from Ancient Eastern Manuscripts* (Philadelphia: Holman, 1957).

4. *Against Marcion*, Bk. V, ch. xviii (in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951], Vol. III, p. 466).

5. *De Principiis*, Bk. I, ch. v (in *Ibid.* Vol. IV, p. 259).

... City and proud seat
 Of Lucifer, so by allusion called
 Of that bright star to Satan paragoned:
 ...⁶

From these has arisen the popular perversion of the beautiful name Lucifer to signify the Devil.⁷

The argument for understanding *helel* as a noun derived from the verb meaning "to shine" is strong. At least three semitic languages in addition to Hebrew have a form of this word and all mean "shine" or "light." There is the Akkadian *ellu*, the Ugaritic *hll*, and the Arabic *halla*. "New moon" in Arabic is *hilal*.⁸ The feminine form of the Akkadian is *ellitu* and is a name for the goddess Ishtar. She is also called *mushtilil*, "the shining one."⁹ She is Ashtar in Phoenician and Ugaritic.¹⁰ The Arabs call Venus *zahra*, "The bright shining one."¹¹ Also consider the German *Helle*, "brightness."

There is an additional observation regarding the morning star and the goddess.¹² Isaiah 14:12 has "son" of the morning, not a feminine as we would expect. Furthermore the Greek translation is a masculine word.¹³ As we now know, the morning and the evening stars are the same even though the ancient Semites viewed them as twins. Albright judges from the Akkadian evidence that this god was originally androgynous, being male in the morning and female in the evening.¹⁴ In the Ugaritic literature the names of the children seduced by the god El are *shchr* and *shlm*.¹⁵ These thus represent sunrise and sunset. We have *sachar* in Arabic, *seru* in Akkadian, and *sachra* in Aramaic for the morning and *shalam shamshi* in Akkadian for the evening.¹⁶ The German word "Morgenröte" may best describe *shachar*, it being that brief moment before the break of dawn.¹⁷

6. (Chicago: Homewood Publishing Co.), p. 364f.

7. Cf. Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963 [originally published in 1865]), p. 295.

8. *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti*, ed. Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner (Leiden: Brill, 1951).

9. H. Skinner, Isaiah I-XXXIX in *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* ed. A. F. Kirkpatrick (Cambridge: University Press, 1954), p. 122.

10. P. Grelot, "Sur la Vocalisation de *hyll* (Is. XI^g 12)" in *Vetus Testamentum*, 6 (1956), pp. 303f.

11. Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), Vol. I, p. 440n.

12. Gunkel was the first to equate *helel* with the morning star. See his *Schöpfung und Chaos im Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2nd ed. 1921), pp. 255f.

13. Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah I* in *Commentaries on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), pp. 311f.

14. *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1953), pp. 83f.

15. There is also a *ben 'bd shchr* in a name list in 308 1,19 according to Gordon's catalog.

16. Cf. Young, *Ibid.* and Theodor H. Gaster, "A Canaanite Ritual Drama: The Spring Festival at Ugarit," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, LXVI (1946), pp. 69ff.

17. Cf. Ludwig Köhler, "Die Morgenröte im Alten Testament," in *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 4 (1926), pp. 56ff.

Because of the connection of the words in Isaiah with those which describe non-Israelite mythology many have been quick to make the association. Eissfeldt, for instance, says that this and Ezekiel 28:1-19 stand out exceptionally as real myths, that is, they have not been transformed or converted to Hebrew theological thought pattern.¹⁸ Such a connection is unnecessary. First, we have no evidence of a story from the ancient Near East dealing with the rebellion of a younger god against a chief god. Secondly, Isaiah could very well have made reference to the glory of the dawn and used the morning star to illustrate his point purely in and of itself.

We have discussed the meaning of the words *helel ben shachar* and find it best to render it "bright one, son of the morning" or the like. "Lucifer" is perfectly good too (especially for Latin speaking people) except that it has been misunderstood so widely that we best avoid it.

But the question remains—why can this not be the Devil? Let us consider the context. Chapters 13 and 14 of Isaiah deal with Babylon. Chapter 13:1 reads: "The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw." Chapter 13 deals with the nation as a whole. Verse 19 epitomizes the chapter:

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms,
the splendor and pride of the Chaldeans,
will be like Sodom and Gomorrah
when God overthrew them.

Chapter 14 opens with comforting words in prose to the house of Jacob (vv. 1-3). Then God instructed them to sing this taunt song against the king of Babylon (v. 4). Verses 7 through 20 are a mocking lament. First the lands rejoice especially the trees because the hewer no longer comes to cut them down—that is, the king is dead. Sheol is the scene of verses 9-20. The ghosts of those already there express surprise at the newcomer. "You too!" they say (v. 10). Verse 12 is a quotation of the fellow shades in Sheol.

How are you fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!

They continue, reminding the king of his boasts of equality and even

18. *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 36. Cf. also Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec Allenson, 1960), p. 68; Gottfried Quell, "Jesaja 14, 1-23," in *Erlanger Forschungen Reihe A, Band 10* (Erlangen: Rost, 1959 [Festschrift Friedrich Baumgärtel]), pp. 150-53; Julian Morgenstern in *Hebrew Union College Annual 14* (1939), pp. 109ff; and Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. A. W. Heathcote & P. J. Allcock (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1958), p. 327f.

superiority to God, but conclude noting that his death was more ignominious than most having been “cast out, away from your supulchre, . . .” In short this dirge tells of the downfall of a Babylonian tyrant. His reign of terror is over and he is to be feared no more.

Does this describe Satan also? Has the accuser fallen from a position of power? Has the adversary ceased from ruling this world with “unceasing blows and unrelenting persecution” (v. 6)? To the contrary, Satan is very much in power. He is the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) and the prince of the power of the air (Eph.2:2). In no sense is he fallen from a position of kingship in this world. The king of Babylon is gone and heard from no more. Not so Satan. His “fall” marked the beginning of his wicked reign. The king of Babylon’s fall marked the end of his wicked reign. Lucifer cannot be Satan. Isaiah is not speaking of Satan in chapter 14.¹⁹

Before concluding, it would be of interest to examine biblical expressions akin to that in Isaiah 14:12. Stars and in particular the morning star (which is really a planet) are sometimes used of the Messiah as well as of Satan. Numbers 24:17b reads:

A star shall come forth out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; . . .

We read in 2 Peter 1:19, “And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” To the angel of the church in Thyatira John was commanded to write (Rev. 2:28): “I will give him the morning star.” Revelation 22:16 is most conclusive. “I, Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star.”

We do not deny the connection of Satan with light. Nor do we deny that he had some kind of a fall.²⁰ Note Luke 10:18 again: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” In addition we find 2 Cor. 11:14: “And no wonder, for Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” In neither of these is the light something evil. In the latter especially it is something good. In the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (50:6) we read that Simon the son of Onias was “as the morning star in the midst of a cloud and as the moon at the full” when he came out of the sanctuary. Lastly there was the false messiah Bar Kochba. His name means “son of a star.”

To summarize and conclude let us simply note these salient factors. Lucifer is a perfectly good translation of *hll* in Isaiah 14:12. The meaning

19. Nor is Ezekiel in Ezek. 28 when the fall of the king of Tyre is in view.

20. Cf. also John 8:44, “. . . the devil. . . a murderer from the beginning. . .”

“light bearer” or “day star” is suitable. But the chapter deals solely with the downfall of the king of Babylon and this verse in particular. That Satan inspired the wicked king even as he rules all degenerate men is undeniable but that is quite different from saying Lucifer is Satan. The morning star is something beautiful to behold and has a most noble task in the heavens, that of announcing the new day. The king boasted that he was as great as God and Isaiah likened him to that star which is beautiful for a moment but quickly eclipsed by the glory of the sun itself. That Satan made such a boast is not known.²¹ We have no more justification for such an identification here than we do in Ezekiel 28 where the king of Tyre is in view. Lucifer is only the proud but now fallen king of Babylon.

21. Cf. Rev. 12:8-9.