

## Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12

Isaiah 14:12 in the Authorized, King James Version reads:  
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!

In the New International Version, and many other modern versions, “Lucifer” is removed:

How you have fallen from heaven,  
    **O morning star**, son of the dawn!  
You have been cast down to the earth,  
    you who once laid low the nations!

In such modern versions, “Lucifer” is no longer a name for the now fallen angel known as Satan or the devil. (Highly regrettably, “morning star” in versions such as the New International is a name for both Lucifer, Isaiah 14:12, and Christ, Revelation 22:16, which can cause serious confusion, although it is not linguistically an impossible translation<sup>1</sup> of both passages.<sup>2</sup>) The name *Lucifer* has been entirely removed from Scripture.

The Authorized, King James Version is correct in Isaiah 14:12, and *Lucifer* is a name possessed by the angel that fell and became Satan. It is true, of course, that the Hebrew noun translated Lucifer (הֵילֵל, *hēlēl*) means “shining one.”<sup>3</sup> This, however, by no means proves that the personal angelic being Lucifer is not in view (as, after all, the Latin *Lucifer* has a related meaning).<sup>4</sup> Practically all names in the Bible mean something—*Satan*, for example, means “accuser,” but this hardly means that *Satan* is not a name of a personal being, any more than the fact that *Jesus* means “Jehovah saves” proves that the Lord Jesus Christ is not a personal being with a personal name. Furthermore, Hebrew lexicists employ and recognize the legitimacy of “Lucifer” in Isaiah 14:12.<sup>5</sup> The Latin Vulgate properly rendered “How art thou fallen from heaven, O

<sup>1</sup> Compare the marginal note in the KJV on *O Lucifer* in Isaiah 14:12: “O day star.”

<sup>2</sup> Obviously, Isaiah 14:12 and Revelation 22:16 were not even in the same language, so they could not employ the same word. Furthermore, the LXX of Isaiah 14:12 contains a different word for Lucifer (ἑωσφόρος) than the word found in Revelation 22:16 concerning Christ (ὄρθρινός). Finally, even if exactly the same word had been employed, it would no more have equated the two than the fact that both Satan and Christ are compared to a lion (1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 5:5) or that Satan and Christ are compared to strong men (Luke 11:21-22, where, one notes, Christ is “stronger than he”).

<sup>3</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 237; David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press; Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2011), 542.

<sup>4</sup> Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *Harpers' Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), 1080.

<sup>5</sup> E. g., Jan Bergman, Helmer Ringgren, and H. Haag, “לְיָ,” ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, trans. John T. Willis, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B.

Lucifer, son of the morning!” (אֵד נִפְלְתָ מִשָּׁמַיִם הַיּוֹם בֶּן-שָׁחַר) ,<sup>6</sup> *’ēk nāpaltā miššāmayim hēlēl ben-šāḥar*) as “Quomodo cecidisti de cælo, *Lucifer*, qui mane oriebaris?”<sup>6</sup> Consequently, great classical Jewish commentators such as ibn Ezra recognized the reference as one to “Lucifer.”<sup>7</sup> Finally, the “historical view, since the time of the church fathers, applies the passage to Satan.”<sup>8</sup> That is, “Tertullian, Gregory the Great, and others”—such as Origin, Augustine, John Cassian,<sup>9</sup> and Jerome<sup>10</sup>—“have referred this verse to the fall of Satan, described in Luke 10:18.”<sup>11</sup> It is consequently also not surprising that English Bible versions that antedated the Authorized, King James Version also referred to *Lucifer*: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, sonne of the morning?”<sup>12</sup> “Howe art thou fallen from heauen O Lucifer, thou faire mornynge chylde?”<sup>13</sup>

Chafer explains the doctrinal significance of the reference to *Lucifer* in Isaiah 14:

It is requisite, as well, if the two great passages—Ezekiel 28:11–19 and Isaiah 14:12–17, which contribute most to the making known of Satan’s early history—are to be interpreted according to truth, to distinguish the different viewpoints of these human authors. Ezekiel in his prophetic vision stood on the threshold of angelic history and saw in *prospect* on to the end of Satan’s career, whereas Isaiah in his prophetic vision stood at the end of this history and saw in *retrospect* what he records. The truth that Isaiah thus looked backwards from the end time accounts for the opening sentence of his prophecy, which assumes that this mighty angel will have then fallen from heaven. Much that is found in this prediction is yet unfulfilled in its complete measure. The colossal undertakings of this angel as Isaiah saw them are not yet concluded.

Yet again, extreme contrasts are employed by these two prophets in the titles they apply to this angel. When entering upon his description of the high and holy estate of this angel as first created, Ezekiel addresses him, speaking for Jehovah, by the earthly title, “king of Tyrus”; while Isaiah, essaying to set forth the degradation of this being, addresses him by his heavenly title, “Lucifer, son of the morning.” It would seem that these titles are thus purposely employed to the end that these two estates—that which is of the highest of all creative power, and that which is the lowest debasement of an angel—may be brought into startling juxtaposition. The title “Lucifer, son of the morning” is the glorious heavenly designation of this great angel before his moral fall.

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Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 152; Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 88-89, 326, 942; Payne, J. Barton. Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 875, 905.

<sup>6</sup> *Biblia Sacra Juxta Vulgatam Clementinam.*, Ed. electronica. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005), Is 14:12.

<sup>7</sup> Abraham Ibn Ezra, *The Commentary of IBN Ezra on Isaiah*, ed. M. Friedländer, vol. 1 (London: Trübner & Co., 1873), 70.

<sup>8</sup> Peter A. Steveson, *A Commentary on Isaiah* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2003) 121.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, Angela Russell Christman, and Michael J. Hollerich, eds., *Isaiah: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, trans. Robert Louis Wilken, Angela Russell Christman, and Michael J. Hollerich, *The Church’s Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 175–176.

<sup>10</sup> Steven A. McKinion, ed., *Isaiah 1-39*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 121.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–18*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 441.

<sup>12</sup> *Geneva Bible* (Geneva: Rovland Hall, 1560), Is 14:12.

<sup>13</sup> *Bishops’ Bible* (1568).

*Lucifer* means ‘bright’ or ‘shining one’—and is almost identical with *nāḥāsh*, the serpent, which means ‘the shining one.’ . . .

The prophecy by Isaiah is as follows: “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! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?” (14:12–17).

Thus the prophet announces the fall of this angel, the occasion of the fall, and something of his stupendous power. Of the latter, it is said that he it was who didst “weaken the nations,” “that made the earth to tremble,” “that did shake kingdoms,” “that made the world as a wilderness,” “destroyed the cities thereof,” and “opened not the house of his prisoners.” Much of this vast program is yet unaccomplished, and the authority and power which it connotes belongs to a later discussion. Again it is emphasized that Satan’s sin was intended to be a secret. This is the meaning of the words, “Thou hast said in thine heart.” Likewise, it is stated in this passage that Lucifer’s sin consisted in five awful *I will’s* against the will of God. Feeble indeed is the power of human imagination to picture the crisis in this universe at the moment when the first repudiation of God took place in heaven. These five “I will’s” of Satan are evidently various aspects of one sin. Writing of the acceptable characteristics of an officer of the church, the Apostle states that he must not be a novice “lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation [crime] of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6). Christ stated that Satan abode not in the truth, that he was dominated with an unholy desire, and that he was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). All these disclosures are, no doubt, but various ways of describing one sin—that of seeking to rise above the sphere in which he was created, and above the purpose and service assigned to him. This, it will be observed, is the essential character of human sin, as it is of the angels. Satan’s five “I will’s” are:

**1. “I WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN.”** In this, the first aspect of Satan’s sin, he apparently proposed to take up his *abode* in the third or highest heaven where God and the redeemed abide (2 Cor. 12:1–4). The abode of the angels is evidently on a lower plane; for, when returning to the highest heaven after His resurrection, Christ is said to have been seated “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion” (Eph. 1:20–21); but Satan, whose abode is that of the angels, even though his duties give him access to both earth and the higher spheres (cf. Job. 1:6; Ezek. 28:14), in unholy self-promotion determined that his abode should be higher than that sphere to which he had been appointed by his Creator. The redeeming grace of God will not be satisfied until some among men, who by original position are lower than the angels (Ps. 8:4–6; Heb. 2:6–8), are lifted to eternal citizenship in the highest sphere (John 14:3; 17:21–24; Col. 3:3–4; Heb. 2:10; 10:19–20); but Satan has no right either by position or redemption to claim that sphere as the place of his abode. His self-seeking intention as disclosed in this declaration is an outrage against the Creator’s plan and purpose.

**2. “I WILL EXALT MY THRONE ABOVE THE STARS OF GOD.”** By this statement it is revealed that Satan, though appointed to the guardianship of the throne of God, aspired to the possession of a throne of his own and to rule over the “stars of God.” The angelic beings, rather than the stellar system, are obviously in view (Job 38:7; Jude 1:13; Rev. 12:3–4; 22:16). Evidently very much of Satan’s unholy ambition to possess a throne has been permitted, for it is revealed that he is now a recognized, though judged, king with throne-authority both in the heavenly realm (Matt. 12:26; Eph. 2:2; Col. 2:13–15) and earthly sphere (Luke 4:5–6; 2 Cor. 4:4 and Rev. 2:13, where “seat” is an inadequate translation of *θρόνος*). The sinful character of Satan’s purpose to secure a throne is apparent.

**3. “I WILL SIT ALSO UPON THE MOUNT OF THE CONGREGATION, IN THE SIDES OF THE NORTH.”** As has been stated, “the mount” is a phrase which evidently refers to the seat of divine government in the earth (Isa. 2:1–4), and the reference to “the congregation” is as clearly of Israel. Thus this specific assumption seems to aim at a share at least (note the word *also*) in the earthly

Messianic rule. That rule is to be from Jerusalem, the city of the great King. The Messiah, we are told (Ps. 48:2), will reign from Mount Zion “on the sides of the north.” It is also disclosed that in the cross, which was set up on the north side of Jerusalem, Christ judged and spoiled principalities and powers (Col. 2:15). It is possible that when thus judged, Satan’s unholy designs upon the Messianic rule were thwarted forever.

**4. “I WILL ASCEND ABOVE THE HEIGHTS OF THE CLOUDS.”** The meaning of this assumption will probably be discovered in the use of the word *clouds*. Of upwards of one hundred and fifty references in the Bible to clouds, fully one hundred are related to the divine presence and glory. Jehovah appeared in the cloud (Ex. 16:10); the cloud was termed “the cloud of Jehovah” (Ex. 40:38); when Jehovah was present the cloud filled the house (1 Kings 8:10); “Jehovah rideth upon a swift cloud” (Ps. 104:3; Isa. 19:1); Christ is to come, as He went, upon the clouds of heaven (Matt. 24:30; Acts 1:9; Rev. 1:7); so the ransomed people appear (Israel, Isa. 60:8; and the Church, 1 Thess. 4:17). Satan’s “man of sin” will exalt himself “above all that is called God, or that is worshipped” (2 Thess. 2:4), and by this assumption Satan is evidently seeking to secure for himself some of the glory which belongs to God alone.

**5. “I WILL BE LIKE THE MOST HIGH.”** This, the fifth and last of Satan’s “I will’s” against the will of God, may be considered as a key to the understanding and tracing of his motives and methods. In spite of an almost universal impression that Satan’s ideal for himself is to be *unlike* God, he is here revealed as being actuated with the purpose to be *like* God. However, this ambition is not to be like Jehovah, the self-existent One, which no created being could ever be; but to be like the Most High, which title signifies the “possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:19, 22). Satan’s purpose, then, is to gain authority over heaven and earth. The essential evil character of sin here, as everywhere, is an unwillingness on the part of the creature to abide in the precise position in which he has been placed by the Creator. In pursuing this life-purpose as imitator of God and counterfeiter of God’s undertakings, Satan . . . recommended to Adam and Eve that they, too, “be as gods.” The original word here translated “gods” is *Elohim* and the plural form of *Elohim* evidently accounts for the plural “gods.” . . . In response to that suggestion, which only reflected Satan’s own supreme ambition to be like the Most High, Adam entered upon the same course of unholy repudiation of the divine purpose. So universal has this form of sin become that man thinks he has accomplished much when, if ever, he, through divine grace, reaches the place where his will is surrendered to God—the place, indeed, from which man should never have departed. In the strange, inexplicable permission of God, Satan’s ideal man, the man of sin, will yet declare himself to be God, sitting in the temple of God (2 Thess. 2:4); but this appears to be the climax of man’s unholy assumption and constitutes the sign of the end of the age (Matt. 24:15).

Satan’s sin may thus be summarized as a purpose to secure (1) the highest heavenly position; (2) regal rights both in heaven and on earth; (3) Messianic recognition; (4) glory which belongs to God alone; and (5) a likeness to the Most High, the “possessor of heaven and earth.”

There can be no adequate estimation of the immediate effect of Satan’s initial sin, first upon himself, and then upon that vast host of spirit beings who, in allegiance to Satan, “kept not their first estate”; or of the final effect of that sin upon the entire human race whose federal head adopted the same satanic repudiation of God.<sup>14</sup>

Isaiah 14:12 contains important doctrinal truth about *Lucifer* that is lost in modern Bible versions, as is that name for the devil.

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<sup>14</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 46–50.