

Week 27 – Tough Questions – “Does Isaiah describe the fall of Satan?”

Hey, Tim Perry here, pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church, and I want to welcome you to Week 27 of Tough Questions.

This week, we’re going to look at a prophecy that Isaiah utters against the King of Babylon. He’s predicting the downfall of Babylon. Now if you’ll remember, Babylon is going to become the oppressor nation of Israel when they go into exile. So this is actually a prophecy about a time when Babylon itself is going to be brought low and God’s people are going to be led out from the experience of exile to return to their nation.

Here’s what Isaiah Chapter 14 says: (you’ll read this on July 3rd).

³ On the day the LORD gives you relief from your suffering and turmoil and from the harsh labor forced on you, ⁴ you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has come to an end!

How his fury has ended!

*⁵ The LORD has broken the rod of the wicked,
the scepter of the rulers,*

*⁶ which in anger struck down peoples
with unceasing blows,
and in fury subdued nations
with relentless aggression.*

*⁷ All the lands are at rest and at peace;
they break into singing.*

*⁸ Even the junipers and the cedars of Lebanon
gloat over you and say,
“Now that you have been laid low,
no one comes to cut us down.”*

*⁹ The realm of the dead below is all astir
to meet you at your coming;
it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you—
all those who were leaders in the world;
it makes them rise from their thrones—
all those who were kings over the nations.*

*¹⁰ They will all respond,
they will say to you,
“You also have become weak, as we are;
you have become like us.”*

*¹¹ All your pomp has been brought down to the grave,
along with the noise of your harps;
maggots are spread out beneath you
and worms cover you.*

*¹² How you have fallen from heaven,
morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth,*

you who once laid low the nations!

Now before we read any more, that term “morning star” in the Latin Vulgate translation of your Bible is actually the word Lucifer and that’s why this week’s reading and this week’s question is going to revolve around Satan and Satan’s fall from heaven. Because the question we want to tackle this week, “Is Isaiah here prophesying about the King of Babylon or is Isaiah actually talking about Satan?”

So let’s read a little bit more and then let’s launch our question again.

¹² *How you have fallen from heaven,
morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations!*

¹³ *You said in your heart,
“I will ascend to the heavens;
I will raise my throne
above the stars of God;
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,
on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon.*

Up, up, up – whoever this is – wants to grasp at something so high, so far beyond him that a downfall is inevitable – and here it comes:

¹⁴ *I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.”*

Here’s somebody or something wanting to be just like God – as high as God –

¹⁵ *But you are brought down to the realm of the dead,
to the depths of the pit.*

So our question this week has to do with this text and how Christians and people interested in literature have interpreted these lines. Is this a description of the king of Babylon and his eventual defeat by the Median Persian Empire – or is it a description of Satan and Satan’s fall from grace – fall from heaven - his expulsion from heaven by God?

Well, let’s take a look at this chart and we’ll map out some of the options. Here’s a great title I would recommend if you’re curious about this question. I borrowed a few of B. J. Oropeza’s thoughts here as I was putting together this video. His book, *99 Answers to Questions about Angels, Demons & Spiritual Warfare* is real helpful. I’d highly recommend it.

Now let’s take a look at my chart. Well as we just read about in Isaiah Chapter 14, we hear of this character in here called the “Morning Star” or the “Day Star” and we’re beginning to wonder about his identity. Initially and most obviously, we are talking about the King of Babylon and this makes the most sense in the historical

context of the exile just about to take place. But as we read, we realize that this is a person incredibly infected with the sin of pride. Whoever is doing the talking here is going from the highest high that he could imagine – down to the lowest low absolutely possible. Who experienced such a drastic drop off from the highest heights to being clothed in worms at the lowest point of a grave? Well, many throughout Biblical interpretation history have thought, well, this has got to be talking about Satan, in addition to somehow talking about the nation of Babylon.

Now if we go a little further down the timeline – to roughly the time when Ezekiel ministers, which is sometime between the time 593 – 570 BC, we open to a character talked about in Ezekiel Chapter 28 and again, we're talking about somebody here who on the surface of things looks like the Prince of Tyre – that's what he's called. Tyre is one of those cities representative of a nation of people who were at enmity with God. But listen to a few things out of Ezekiel 28 that describe him:

The word of the LORD came to me:² "Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

*"In the pride of your heart
you say, 'I am a god;
I sit on the throne of a god
in the heart of the seas."
But you are a mere mortal and not a god,
though you think you are as wise as a god.*

So again, there's this pattern of prideful, boastful talking. Listen to this a little bit further down:

¹¹ The word of the LORD came to me:¹² "Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

*"You were the seal of perfection,
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
¹³ You were in Eden,
the garden of God;*

Now isn't it interesting that here we have a prophecy about somebody who has been in Eden. Now we don't know of any kings, Princes of Tyre or otherwise who were in the Garden of Eden. Who could that possibly be? Well, some have said that this is a character much like the King of Babylon through whom we can see some of the experience of Satan's fall. Key words used in here are "perfection, the highest creation, brought down and cast down" – so the same kind of language of falling and being brought low.

So if we come down the timeline a little bit further from the day of Ezekiel to the time of Christ, in AD 90 – John, one of Jesus’ original disciples was writing, and not only did he record the Gospel of John, but he also wrote the Book of Revelation. In Revelation Chapter 12, there’s a depiction of Satan. He’s depicted as a dragon.

³ Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. ⁴ Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. ⁵ She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

So here’s an interesting depiction of Satan as a dragon who is actually expelled from heaven, thrown down. And along with him are people who are angelic beings who are his followers. Then notice he’s not cast straight to hell, he’s cast down to earth – to the earthly regions where he wages war against the son born to the woman. And that son born to the woman, of course, is Jesus. And that shows Satan’s hatred of everything that Jesus tried to do in his earthly ministry.

Well, if we go a little bit further, we get to this character named Origen. Origen is one of the church fathers. He writes a couple of things that become famous track tapes among Christians in the early stages of the church. He writes a piece call the *Principiis* and he also writes another volume called the *Hexapla*. In the *Principiis* and the *Hexapla*, he is the first of all of the original early church fathers to identify the Morning Star or the Day Star with Lucifer. Up until this time, no one had made that connection, but Origen in his way of studying scripture and interpreting things, he makes an equation between Lucifer and Satan and the person who’s talked about back here in Isaiah’s prophecy. So we have Origen to thank for that development. But if you notice on the timeline of theological development – no one up until his day even thought of the connection between that. No one was interpreting scripture that way, and so while it may look convincing that this character called the Day Star in Isaiah is a Satan like character with a lot of pride who was thrown down – though it looks tempting to interpret that as Lucifer, there’s no real warrant in the passages themselves that would make us interpret it that way.

The same thing with Ezekiel’s prophecy. This is a prophecy about the Prince of Tyre. It’s not a depiction of Satan’s fall from grace. John, writing in Revelation, is the first place where we have accurate, literate depiction – using symbolic language, but a depiction of Satan himself. We know its Satan being talked about – not the Prince of Tyre – not the King of Babylon. So we do know that the dragon and all of his followers are actually a depiction or description of Satan and how he fell. Origen begins getting us thinking in ways that we think nowadays about these passages. But just because there’s some overlap in the ideas doesn’t mean that’s necessarily how we should interpret Isaiah 14 or Ezekiel 28.

Melton, later on, he's the poet that comes along, and in 1667, he writes *Paradise Lost*. That becomes a very famous piece of literature where he depicts this rebellion in heaven of Satan and many of his followers where in a three-day war in heaven Satan is expelled – banished. He's actually banished to hell. Then somehow he worms his way out of hell when he finds out that the rest of creation is being planned. So he shows up in the Garden of Eden having escaped from hell in order to tempt Adam and Eve into the fall of humanity.

So Isaiah's prophecy does raise very interesting questions for us but unfortunately they're questions that the text itself doesn't give us a really clear answer on. That doesn't mean that we can't build a case for Satan and how he might have fallen from heaven – it doesn't mean that Satan didn't fall from heaven because of his pride. That's completely plausible. It also doesn't mean that somehow scripture isn't giving us enough to go on and God is being cryptic with us. One thing we know for sure – that is that Satan was a created being. He was created good like everything else that God made, but somehow he fell from a relationship with God in which he could use his will in order to serve God. He was some kind of willful creature before he encountered or experienced sin in his own motivation. Maybe that sin was pride – maybe that sin was envy over the human family and humanity being made in God's image in a way that angels were not made in God's image. But whatever the reason, we do know he was instrumental in the fall of humanity into sin. That sin wasn't an original concept just with humanity, but that sin had come on the scene somewhere in the experience of Satan and angels with God before the creation of mankind.

So, I don't know what you think of all that. If that just raises more questions for you, I'd love to know what your questions are. Hit on the "comment" link and let's chat.

This has been Tim Perry, pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church. We'll see you next week.