DECONSTRUCTING LUCIFER

REEXAMINING the ANCIENT ORIGINS of the FALLEN ANGEL of LIGHT

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Chapter 4: Deconstructing Lucifer

As a child growing up in a Pentecostal, evangelical church, I was taught many “foundations of the faith,” most of which I hold onto fast until this day. In addition, I was taught what are considered non-core interpretations of scripture which at the time there was no reason to doubt. In fact, I had no idea that there was any other way to interpret certain passages, especially passages involving prophecies of the future.

One of the passages of scriptures about which I had a firm understanding was Isaiah 14:12-15 based on the King James Version of the Bible, the translation with which I grew up. “This was that Old Testament passage about Satan before he fell,” I thought, every time I read it or heard it read to me:

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. *(Isa 14:12-15 KJV)*

I could tell you nothing about the verses surrounding that passage, or very much else about Isaiah as prophetic book of the
Bible. But one thing I knew for sure is that Lucifer was Satan before he fell and was brought down to hell, and that before he fell, he made the famous five “I will” statements. As far as I knew, there was no other possible interpretation of that passage. I would venture to guess that I am not alone in that position. If one were to poll Christians, or even non-Christians, about who Lucifer is, I would venture a guess that 90% of them would answer “Satan” to that question.

Just reading those verses in a vacuum, it is easy to see why that was a valid interpretation of that passage. Why? For one, the King James Version structures the passage such that an entity with the proper name of Lucifer was being addressed by the prophet. And everyone knows who Lucifer is, right? In addition, there is no way a human being could make the “I will” boasts. Only a supernatural being with access to heaven could make those boasts. Finally, Lucifer was brought down to hell from the heavens, and Jesus revealed in Luke chapter ten that he saw Satan fall from heaven. It is a pretty airtight argument, an open and shut case, based on the King James Version’s translation of the passage.

Not only does this interpretation seem valid based on the English King James Version, but the early church fathers using the Greek and Latin translations, as we discovered earlier, agreed with this interpretation. Fathers as early as Justin Martyr believed that Isaiah chapter 14 was a passage written about the fall of Satan. Thus we have interpreters of three different languages, English, Latin, and Greek, confirming the ‘Lucifer is Satan’ belief. But what about the original language in which the passage was written: Hebrew?
“The Labyrinth to Lucifer”

To understand whether this ‘Lucifer is Satan’ interpretation is correct, a thorough understanding of the original Hebrew rendering of Isaiah 14:12 is necessary. “Deconstructing Lucifer” will be a process of subjecting the text to critical analysis in order to determine whether it can be understood in a different way than what has been traditionally understood. In the process, the translations which served to blaze the trail down the path that I will call “The Labyrinth to Lucifer” will be thoroughly examined.

This labyrinth is the interpretive, translational muddled maze that leads to an understanding of how the original Hebrew rendering of Isaiah 14:12 eventually led to an interpretation that Lucifer was a name for an angel before he fell and became Satan. The maze begins with the original language in which the passage was written, Hebrew, and continues with the main languages into which it has been translated, which include Greek, Latin, and English.

Below, the verse is presented in the Hebrew Masoretic text with the word traditionally translated as “Lucifer” in brackets:

אָוֹ֫ךְ בֵּפַלְקָהּ מִנְשֵׁמֵי, (הָוֶ֫לֶל) בֹּ-שֶׁהְרָו, בָּבֹ֫שַׁתָּ לִאָ֫כְרִים, הוֹלֶ֫לֶשׁ עַל-אָ֫ו֔וּב.

The English transliteration of the verse in Hebrew is presented below, leaving the word that is traditionally translated as “Lucifer” untranslated:
Eik nafalta mishamayim לֶלֹאָה ben-schachar nigda’ta
la’aretz cholesh al-goyim

The English translation of the verse is presented below, leaving the word that is traditionally translated as “Lucifer” untranslated:

How art thou fallen from heaven, לֶלֹאָה, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! (KJV)

The Hebrew word that we must investigate, then, is לֶלֹאָה. As was discussed previously, there is little Jewish commentary on Satan in the Old Testament. There is even less on whether the passage in Isaiah chapter 14 was an esoteric reference to Satan, and that is because the Jews had no reason to believe there was a reference to Satan to be found. The Jewish understanding of Isaiah chapter 14 was that it was a poetic taunt of the king of Babylon, a prophecy of his imminent downfall.

In order to investigate לֶלֹאָה, and continue down “The Labyrinth to Lucifer,” the next stop is the ancient Greek translation. In the third century B.C., King Ptolemy of Egypt commissioned Jewish scholars proficient in both ancient Hebrew and Greek to translate the books of Moses into Greek. Over the next two centuries, the entire Old Testament would be translated into Greek. In modern times, this translation has become known as The Septuagint after the number of Jewish scholars involved in the translation project.

How did these Jewish scholars translate לֶלֹאָה into Greek? Below, Isaiah 14:12 is presented in Greek, from the Masoretic text, as
rendered in the Septuagint and with the Hebrew word ליל, traditionally translated as “Lucifer” underlined:

πῶς ἐξέπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὁ ἑωσφόρος ὁ πρωὶ ἀνατέλλων; συνετρίβη εἰς τὴν γῆν ὁ ἄποστέλλων πρὸς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.

The English transliteration of the verse in Greek is presented below, with the word that is traditionally translated as “Lucifer” underlined:

pos exepesen ek tou ouranou ho heosphoros ho proi anatello sunetribe eis ten gen ho apostellon pros panta ta ethne

The English translation of the verse is presented below, leaving the word that is traditionally translated as “Lucifer” untranslated:

Look how you have fallen from the sky, O heosphoros, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the ground, O conqueror of the nations!

This is an extremely important transition in the meaning of this verse. The translators of the Septuagint chose to translate the Hebrew word ליל as heosphoros, which expresses their understanding that the Hebrew word ליל had the meaning of a shining stellar body. Thus, the English transliteration of ליל is heilel, and the best translation of this word into English is “shining one.”
The root word for *heilel* is the subject of controversy. If Isaiah meant to convey a proud and boastful individual, then the root of *heilel* is likely *hâlal*, for which the most common translation in the King James Version is “to be praised,” and “to boast.” However, another meaning of *hâlal* is “to shine,” and evidently it is this meaning that the translators of the Septuagint chose in translating יְלֵן as *heosphoros*. With *hâlal* as the Hebrew root, the phrase could be translated into English in either of these fashions:

Look how you have fallen from the sky! Boast [*heilel*],
son of the dawn!

Look how you have fallen from the sky, o shining one
[*heilel*], son of the dawn!

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The Labyrinth to Lucifer

Hebrew: לָעַל
Transliteration 1: yalal – “to howl”
Transliteration 2: halal – “to shine”

Greek (LXX): ἱεροφόρος
Transliteration: hierophoros – “morning star”

Greek (Aquila): όλοχοςον
Transliteration: olouchon – “howl”

Latin (St. Jerome): lucifer
Transliteration: lucifer – “morning star”
Meaning: Satan

Aramaic (Peshitta): :numel
Transliteration: ‘hal – “howl”

German (Luther): Morgenstern
Meaning: “morning star” – Venus

English (Coverdale): Lucifer
Meaning: “morning star” – Venus

English (Wycliffe): Lucifer
Meaning: “morning star” – Venus

English (Matthew’s): Lucifer
Meaning: “morning star” – Venus

English (Geneva): Lucifer
Meaning: “morning star” – Venus

English (King James): Lucifer
Meaning: “daystar” – Satan

English (Douay/Rheims): Lucifer
Meaning: “daystar” – Satan