Do Modern Versions Substitute Jesus For Satan? (Part 1)

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In many circles where the belief is held that the KJV is the Preserved Word of God for the English-speaking people, it is common to find an argument thrown around about how all (or most) modern versions apart from the KJV actually support Satan, Satanism, or the New Age Movement.

Lucifer vs. Morning Star

Reading the KJV Next To Other Translations

While such an argument can take many different forms, one of the common ones is to point to the KJV rendering of Isaiah 14:12, and compare it to the same passage in several modern versions. The KJV Reads 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!"
(Is. 14:12, KJV)

While the ESV, and most other translations today, read something like this;

"How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!"
(Is 14:12 ESV)

The purportedly significant difference comes in verse 12, where the KJV has "O Lucifer, son of the morning" and most other translations have something like, "O Day Star, son of Dawn" (ESV) or "O shining star, son of the morning" (NLT) or "morning star, son of the dawn" (NIV), or "O Day Starshining one" (NET) or something like that. One can see a number of different translations, old and new, and how they handle the phrase side-by-side;

- ESV - "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!"
- RSV - "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!"
- NIV - "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!"
- NET - "Look how you have fallen from the sky, O shining one, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the ground, O conqueror of the nations!"
- D-R - "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning? how art thou fallen to the earth, that didst wound the nations?"
- NRSV - "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!"
- NLT - "How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world."
- HCSB - "Shining morning star, how you have fallen from the heavens! You destroyer of nations, you have been cut down to the ground."
- CSB - "Shining morning star, how you have fallen from the heavens! You destroyer of nations, you have been cut down to the ground."
- The Message - "What a comedown this, O Babylon! Daystar! Son of Dawn! Flat on your face in the underworld mud, you, famous for flattening nations!"
- Wycliffe - "A! Lucifer, that risidist eerli, hou feldist thou doun fro heuene; thou that woundist folkis, feldist doun togidere in to erthe."
- Geneva - "How art thou fallen from heavẽ, ô Lucifer, sonne of the morning? & cut downe to the grounde, which didest cast lottes upon the nations?"
- YLT - "How hast thou fallen from the heavens, O shining one, son of the dawn! Thou hast been cut down to earth, O weakener of nations."
- KJV - "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!"
- Wycliffe - "Hou felle thou, Lucyfer, fro heuene, the whiche erli sprunge; thou felle in to the erthe, that woundedest the folkes of kynde."
- NKJV - "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!"

After the comparison is made between the KJV and some other translation that has a different reading (most often, the NIV), this text is then connected with Rev. 22:16 and II Pet. 1:19. In those passages, Jesus is referred to as "the Morning Star" or "Day Star" or something like it in most versions.

I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.
I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.
(Rev. 22:16, KJV)

19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy;
whereunto ye do well that ye take heed,
as unto a light that shineth in a dark place,
until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

(2 Pe 1:19, KJV)

Then, it is claimed that Isaiah 14 is about the fall of Satan, and that in the KJV Satan is condemned, and is NOT called "the morning star," which is a title for Jesus. But since modern translations read, "morning star," in Isaiah 14:12, they have, it is claimed, replaced Jesus with Satan. Usually, this is claimed to be part of a New Age Conspiracy in which Satan will be worshipped as God. And almost all modern translations are alleged to be a part of the conspiracy. They are, we are told, slowly and subtly trying to replace Jesus with Satan, so that when one gets to Rev. 22:16, in the NIV for example, it is not Jesus that is being worshipped by NIV readers, but Satan himself. This is not some straw man of my own creation. I heard this preached and taught regularly in the circles I grew up in. Worse than that, I used to parrot such claims, ignorantly having no idea what I was talking about, and with sinful arrogance speaking condemnation on others without basis. I have confessed this as sin, and repented of it with sincere weeping. I urge all who today use such arguments and make such claims to likewise repent of the sin of slander. The goal of such claims, of course, was to end with a, "Therefore, you should only use the KJV, not any other modern translation, since the KJV is the perfect word of God, and most others are part of a satanic conspiracy to replace Jesus with Satan." Or something to similar effect. It seems like a pretty simple, straightforward case. Why would anyone want to use a Bible that is part of a satanic conspiracy? Clearly, we should all use the KJV instead.

So what is actually going on here? Is the NIV part of a grand satanic conspiracy? Is the KJV the only right translation here, or at least, one of the only ones that are correct here? Are modern translations committing blasphemy here? Are modern translators part of a grand plot to get you to worship Satan?

The Possible Referents of the text

The larger taunting poem seems to stretch from Isaiah 14:3-33 (or 14:3-21, depending on where one breaks it). The portion we have zoomed in on is verse 12-14. But the poem must be kept in its full context. Isaiah specifically explains that he speak this lament (or taunting rejoicing) over the King of Babylon. In verses 3-4, the introduction that stands as a heading over the entire poem, he explains,

"And it shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, 4 that thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say..."

Thus, there is no real doubt that the King of Babylon is being spoken of (or against) here. And almost all interpreters would agree at this point, for Isaiah is explicit at this point. But it has been very common from the beginnings of Patristic exegesis and on to see a kind of double referent here. That is, to see Isaiah as speaking about the King of Babylon, but also as speaking, in a metaphorical and figurative way, of the fall of Satan as well. So what does the phrase he uses mean?

The word, הֵילֵל *Helel*
("O Lucifer" in the KJV, "Oh day star" in the ESV)

A glance at the standard Hebrew lexicons reveals an extremely uniform understanding of the word translated, "Lucifer" in the KJV;

- HALOT defines our word simply as, "the morning-star or crescent moon."
- DCH defines it as, "shining one, in ref. to king of Babylon," noting that it is used appositionally, "shining one, son of dawn Is 14:12."
- The older BDB explains it as an appellation, "shining one, epith. of king of Babylon"
- TWOT explains that, "This proper name is a hapax legomenon describing the King of Babylon (Isa 14:12)."
- NIDOTTE explains it as, "**light-bearing object in the sky**, Shining One, i.e., Morning star or Day

> star, the planet Venus, prominent in the morning, referring to the majesty and high status of a king (Isa 14:12+), note: kjv, nkjv translates as "Lucifer," but it is begging the question to say this must then refer to Satan. Note: possibly this is a reference to a "crescent moon" based on analogous language studies."

Origen of Alexandria was one of the first Christian interpreters (though not the very first) to see the text as referring to a reality beyond the Babylonian King. He wrote, "How can we possibly suppose that what is said in many places by Scripture, especially in Isaiah, about Nebuchadnezzar is said about a human being? For no human being is said to have "fallen from heaven" or to have been "Lucifer" or the one who "arose every morning." (On First Principles 4.3.9. As quoted in McKinion, S. A. Isaiah 1-39 p. 121.) He elsewhere noted, "It is most clearly proved by these words that he who formerly was Lucifer and who "arose in the morning" has fallen from heaven. For if, as some suppose, he was a being of darkness, why is he said to have formerly been Lucifer or lightbearer? Or how could he "rise in the morning" who had in him no light at all?... So he was light once ... when "his glory was turned into dust." (On First Principles 1.5. As quoted in McKinion, S. A. (Ed.). (2004). Isaiah 1-39 (p. 121)) This understanding of the text in Isaiah as ultimately referring beyond a human ruler to Satan and his fall became the standard Christian interpretation of the text until the Reformers. For example, we see it in the great Augustine, who wore, "For example, what is said in Isaiah, "How he is fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning!" and the other statements of the context which, under the figure of the king of Babylon, are made about the same person, are of course to be understood of the devil..." (Augustine of Hippo. On Christian Doctrine.)

Jerome in the 4th century particular is noteworthy. He is the one who essentially coined the word, "Lucifer," according to his understanding of the phrase as being a proper name referring to Satan, when he was translating the Hebrew text into Latin, in an attempt to correct the Old Latin translations. Jerome explained,

> For greater ease of understanding we translated this phrase as follows: "How you have fallen from heaven, Lucifer, who arose in the morning." But if we were to render a literal translation from the Hebrew, it would read, "How you have fallen from heaven, howling son of the dawn." Lucifer is also signified with other words. And he who was formerly so glorious that he was compared to a bearer of lightning is now told that he must weep and mourn. Just as Lucifer scatters the darkness, it says, glowing and shining with a golden hue, so also your stepping forth to the peoples and the public seemed like a shining star. But you who spoke with arrogance, who wounded the nations, fell to the earth. I have obtained so great a power that heaven should stand still for me, and the stars above deserve to be thrown under my feet. Nevertheless, the Jews wanted to be understood as the heaven and stars of God, inasmuch as it continues, "I will sit in the mount of the covenant," that is, in the temple where the laws of God are hidden, "and on the sides of the north," that is, in Jerusalem. (Commentary on Isaiah 5.14.12–14. As quoted in McKinion, S. A. (Ed.). (2004). Isaiah 1-39.)

Oswalt explains how this interpretation prevailed till the Reformation era,

> Some of the church fathers, linking this passage to Luke 10:18 and Rev. 12:8, 9, took it to refer to the fall of Satan described in those places. However, the great expositors of the Reformation were unanimous in arguing that the context here does not support such an interpretation. This passage is discussing human pride, which, while monumental to be sure, is still human and not angelic. In fact, it is this very characteristic which makes this passage of special interest. Since the earliest discoveries of ancient Near Eastern religious literature this portion of the poem and other sections of the Bible have been compared to that literature. In this case, the vigor of this comparison was only increased by the discovery of the numerous verbal similarities with Canaanite myths uncovered at Ugarit. It is interesting that despite this vigorous investigation there is no single mythical story which can be said

> to be the prototype for Isa. 14:12–15. But it is of greater significance that among the numerous stories of a challenge to the high god, all the challenges are by another god. The remarkable thing about the Isaiah passage is that the challenge is by a human being. The prophet seems to be saying that ultimately the battle is not among the various manifestations of deity. Ultimately, the battle is between Creator and creatures, and the issue is whether we will accord him the right due him as Creator and bow to him in glad service or will continue to insist that we are as he is and continue to have our arrogance mocked by the worm.13
> - Oswalt, J. N. (1986). The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39 (pp. 320–321).

Luther is a representative example. He rejected the Patristic interpretation of the passage as referring to Satan, noting, "In confirmation of these sentiments, the fathers adduce the passage, Isaiah 14:12, 13. But with reference to Isaiah, he is evidently speaking of the king of Babylon, who wished to sit in the throne of God, that is, to rule over his holy people and his temple." (Luther, M. (1904). Luther on the Creation: A Critical and Devotional Commentary on Genesis.) The more modern consensus is that the passage refers only to the human King, and not to Satan. Most note that the poem appears to pick up language usually used to refer to Venus, who is commonly called "the son of the dawn," and uses it to metaphorically describe the ham king. For example, Smith explains,

> The "morning star" (lit. "shining one," hîlēl) probably refers to Venus, which is the "son of the dawn," the morning star that was sometimes used to represent a divinity in ancient Near Eastern religion. This analogy indicates how high this Babylonian king had raised himself up and how far he would fall. Similarly, religious and political leaders today who claim for themselves undue power and authority will need to resist the temptation to think that they control everything (setting themselves up as gods), lest God cause them to suffer the same humiliating fate.
> - Smith, G. V. (2007). Isaiah 1–39. (E. R. Clendenen, Ed.) (p. 315).

Oswalt notes of the relevant phrase in verse 12,

> *Day Star, Son of the Morning* reflects the likelihood that *hēlēl ben-šāḥar* refers to the planet Venus, which never reaches the zenith before the sun rises and apparently extinguishes it. *hēlēl* probably comes from the root meaning "bright" and thus logically applies to the brightest star. In Canaanite mythology the god Athtar, with whom the gods attempt to replace Baal at one point, may also be the morning star. In that story, however, Athtar does not seek the position and, upon finding himself unsuited for it, voluntarily leaves it. Recent attempts to derive the Isaiah account from the Greek myth of Phaeton, in which the central figure loses control of the chariot of the sun and is struck by a thunderbolt of Zeus in order to save the earth from the sun's fire, suffer from the evidence that the Greek myth is derived from the Near Eastern stories rather than being the precursor of them. Once again, the indications are that the prophet was not dependent upon any one story, but used a number of current motifs to fit his own point.
> - Oswalt, J. N. (1986). The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39 (pp. 321–322).

The older commentator Matthew Henry suggested;

> How hast thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer! son of the morning! v. 11, 12. The king of Babylon shone as brightly as the morning star, and fancied that wherever he came he brought day along with him; and has such an illustrious prince as this fallen, such a star become a clod of clay? Did ever any man fall from such a height of honour and power into such an abyss of shame and misery?" This has been commonly alluded to (and it is a mere allusion) to illustrate the fall of the angels, who were as morning stars (Job 38:7), but how have they fallen! How art thou cut down to the ground, and levelled with it, that didst weaken the nations! God will reckon with those that invade the rights and disturb the peace of mankind, for he is King of nations as well as of saints. Now this reception of the king of

> Babylon into the regions of the dead, which is here described, surely is something more than a flight of fancy, and is designed to teach these solid truths:—[1.] That there is an invisible world, a world of spirits, to which the souls of men remove at death and in which they exist and act in a state of separation from the body. [2.] That separate souls have acquaintance and converse with each other, though we have none with them: the parable of the rich man and Lazarus intimates this. [3.] That death and hell will be death and hell indeed to those that fall unsanctified from the height of this world's pomps and the fulness of its pleasures. Son, remember, Lu. 16:25.
> - Henry, M. (1994). Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume (p. 1106).

But some interpreters today suggest that we should see more than a human referent here. Webb for example suggests,

> The cosmic sweep of the poem led some early interpreters, and many since them, to see here a symbolic description of the fall of Satan. But if this reads too much into the text (and I think it does), it is equally misguided to reduce it to a description of the fall of a particular earthly monarch. The king of Babylon here, like Babylon itself in chapter 13, is a representative figure, the embodiment of that worldly arrogance that defies God and tramples on others in its lust for power. It is this which lies at the heart of every evil for which particular nations will be indicted in the following chapters. It also lies at the heart of all the horrendous acts of inhumanity which human beings and nations still commit against one another today. That is why the tone of this song should not cause us any embarrassment. This is no cheap gloating over the downfall of an enemy, but the satisfaction and delight which God's people rightly feel at his final victory over evil. The same note of celebration is heard at the very end of the Bible where, again, Babylon is a cipher for all that opposes God and his purposes.
> - Webb, B. (1996). The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings. (J. A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.) (p. 83).

Ultimately, it is not necessary for our purposes to determine whether Isaiah meant to refer only to the human King of Babylon, or also (or even, exclusively) to refer to the historic fall of Satan and the demons. I'm only pointing out that these are each *possible* options. They are each valid interpretations of the text. Isaiah explicitly explains that he refers to the King of Babylon (14:4), and the weight of Church history and Patristic interpreters have seen here also a description of Satan's fall. *Both* may be legitimate interpretations of the text. And, more to the point, either interpretation can be held using *either translation* of the word. Modern translations aren't "changing what the Bible says." They are just translating more literally. One can use the KJV, or the ESV, and use it to defend the interpretation that the text is only about the King of Babylon, or use it to defend the interpretation that the the text is only about Satan. These things are different. But they are also the same. The KJV and modern versions are not teaching anything different at this point. In a second post, we will look at the history of the word, "Lucifer," and how it came to be in the KJV in particular. But for now, it is enough to note that there is no real difference between the KJV and the ESV at this point. The ESV is not part of a plot to replace Jesus with Satan. They are just translating literally a Hebrew word that the KJV choose not to translate literally.

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Timothy Berg

I wrote, “Jerome in the 4th century particular is noteworthy. He is the one who essentially coined the word, "Lucifer," according to his understanding of the phrase as being a proper name referring to Satan, when he was translating the Hebrew text into Latin, in an attempt to correct the Old Latin translations.” But that is clearly a mistake. Not sure what I meant when I wrote it, but “Lucifer” as a Latin word referring to Venus clearly existed long before Jerome. And the word was even used as a title for Satan before Jerome, I am almost confident. Jerome may be given credit for having widely popularized the interpretation of the passage as referring to Satan, and of taking Lucifer as title for Satan. But he didn’t coin it. If someone has accesss the the 2 volume Oxford Latin Dictionary and wants to look it up and tell me when Lucifer first appears as a title for Satan, I would be grateful. I will correct the blog when I have a chance.

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David West Sr

"Jerome in the 4th century particular is noteworthy. He is the one who essentially coined the word, 'Lucifer,' " -- Jerome wrote about "Lucifer" before he wrote the Vulgate; but so did Origen, who also construed "Lucifer" as a proper name for the Satan, as well as the subject of Isa 14 as the Satan.

Philo of Alexandria speaks of "Lucifer" in the pagan sense in The Cherubim, part I, VII (21), “the periods of the seven planets have received their exact measure of time, moving on in an equal course, as the Sun, and Lucifer, and what is called Stilbon. For these three planets are of equal speed.”

Using "Lucifer" is Church tradition that was further cemented into the minds of many cultures wordwide by the 1611 KJV.

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