

§ 8. Doctrine of Creation

Lecture 22

The Origin of Satan

We finished our lesson last time by raising the question of the origin of Satan. Satan, as we've seen, is presented as a tremendous adversary of the work and Kingdom of God with whom we have to contend. This raises the obvious question of the origin of this being. Since God is not evil and cannot create evil, then how could there be such a being as Satan? When God created in Genesis 1 it says that he looked at creation and he saw that it was all very good. So how do you explain the origin of someone like Satan and the demons?

One thing that is very clear that we need to insist upon is that Scripture does not teach some sort of dualism. It does not teach that there is God and anti-God who is equal and opposed to God; that there is light and there is darkness and that these are equally opposed to each other. This dualistic view is completely foreign to both Judaism and Christianity which think of God as the sole source of all reality outside himself. Anything that is not God – anything that exists other than God – is created by God. There isn't any reality apart from God that is uncreated. This is the burden of my book *God Over All* which defends God as the sole ultimate reality. So dualism is simply out of the question.

To give just one Scripture on this, consider Colossians 1:15-16. Speaking of Christ, it says:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, [then Paul begins to mention specifically these spiritual realms] visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

Paul will talk elsewhere about these principalities and powers in reference to the demonic realms that exist, as well as the angelic realms. He is quite clear in Colossians that these things do not exist independently of Christ. Rather, they are all created through him. So dualism is simply out of the question. If there is such a being as Satan, and beings like his demons, then these are part of the created order. They were made by God. That's the clear implication here.

But that leaves us then with this very difficult question. How could God create something which seems to be so intrinsically evil and opposed to God? Unfortunately, this is not a question that is explicitly addressed in the Bible. Even in the story of the Fall in Genesis 3 there's no attempt to explain where the serpent or evil came from. Man is simply confronted with the serpent in the garden. So the best that we can do is to try to piece

together various clues and intimations in Scripture and try to draw some tentative conclusions about this.

Some people have said that Isaiah 14:12-17 are a reference to the origin of Satan. We will read that together. Isaiah says,

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! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit. Those who see you will stare at you, and ponder over you: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home?'

Some have said that this language could not be used to describe any human person. This is rather a description of Satan when he was an angelic being who, through pride and vaulting ambition, opposed himself to God and so fell away. While I think that that view of the origin of Satan is probably close to the truth, I don't think that that is what Isaiah is talking about. As you can see from the beginning of chapter 14, this is a taunt that is directed against the king of Babylon. That's why in verses 16 and thereafter it says, "Is this the man who . . . shook kingdoms, . . . who . . . overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home?" It's clearly talking about an earthly king whom Isaiah identifies as the king of Babylon. It is using hyperbolic language to describe the vaunting ambition and pride whereby the king of Babylon sets himself against God. So, while I think that the view expressed about the origin of Satan might well be correct, I'm very skeptical that this is what this passage is about.

Similarly, Ezekiel 28 has been interpreted to describe Satan's fall. Ezekiel 28:12-19 says,

You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, carnelian, topaz, and jasper, chrysolite, beryl, and onyx, sapphire, carbuncle, and emerald; and wrought in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. With an anointed guardian cherub I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

Here again the suggestion is that this is a description of Satan prior to the Fall – how he was originally created good and then he fell away and became evil. But once again the context of the passage doesn't support this. It sounds like it only if you read it out of

context. If you look at verse 11, it says, “Moreover the word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord God.’” And then the passage follows. So this is a lamentation over the city of Tyre, an earthly city. Similarly, in verse 16 it goes on to say,

In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and the guardian cherub drove you out from the midst of the stones of fire.

So here it's condemning him for his unfair trade practices in the commerce that was conducted by the king of Tyre. This wouldn't obviously be applicable to Satan. It goes on to condemn the other things that this king did which were wrong. So once again, I think when read in context, this is not a passage about Satan or his origin.

What some critics have claimed is that originally these passages were myths about some sort of angelic fall which the biblical prophets borrowed and demythologized in order to apply them to human kings. They took these pagan myths (which were about angels or humans falling away) and then they demythologized them and applied them to the king of Tyre and the king of Babylon. The problem with such a hypothesis is that it is ultimately untestable. Since we know of no such pagan myths in the ancient Near East, this theory is no better than conjecture. It is what might be called *nephelococcygia* about these texts. Now, in case you do not know the word “nephelococcygia,” this is a word which I encountered for the first time this week in reading an Old Testament scholar. It is finding shapes in the clouds. Nephelococcygia is finding shapes in the clouds. I think that is a good description for those who would attempt to discover these pre-biblical pagan myths that are not attested anywhere and therefore cannot be confirmed. It is literary nephelococcygia. In any case, the passage as we now have it is clearly not about an angelic fall. It's about earthly kings.

So, again, the suggestion of an angelic fall may be theologically correct, but I think it's eisegesis to read it into these passages. That is to say, the interpretation is not being read out of the text; it's being read into the text. It takes these passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel and in effect says that when read out of context they give us a really nice theory of Satan's origin if we interpret them as describing the devil's fall. But there's nothing in the context to suggest that this is, in fact, what the passages are about.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I kind of like these passages referring to Satan because these are parodies of Babylon and Tyre. I see these as inserts of this parody of what happened with Satan, because you also see in Daniel where you had watchers and you have over certain areas of the world and conflicts with Michael the Archangel and so forth. So these leaders are

playing out Satan's plans and devices. So it doesn't seem a stretch that God would parody . . .

Dr. Craig: Well, I guess my difficulty is that I just don't see anything in the context that would suggest that these are parodies of Satan's fall being applied to human beings. Why not instead just take it to be hyperbolic language that is applied to these kings rather than think that this is something that is about Satan when there's nothing in the context to suggest that?

Student: Well, you could except there's statements that can't apply to human beings.

Dr. Craig: Not literally, no. That's clear.

Student: I think part of what drives this tradition is that John Milton read these verses and that's how he got the idea for *Paradise Lost*. The fall of Satan is very vivid in *Paradise Lost*.

Dr. Craig: I've been reading Old Testament commentaries on the book of Genesis lately, and some of the commentators have mentioned that our views of Satan and the Fall of man are shaped more by John Milton's *Paradise Lost* than by the actual biblical narratives. It is a tremendous work that Milton wrote, and one of the greatest pieces of English literature, and it has had a profound effect that we may not even be conscious of. Thank you for making that point.

END DISCUSSION

What other indications in Scripture are there about the origin of Satan from which we might make some intelligent inferences? Well, consider again the book of Job, chapter 1. Job 1:6 says: "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them." Then it goes on to tell the rest of the story. Here it seems to be talking about angelic beings who are presenting themselves before God, and Satan is there. This takes place in heaven because Satan responds to God's question about, *Where you have come from*, by saying, *I've come from going to and fro upon the Earth*. So this scene is not something that takes place on Earth. This is the heavenly throne room, so to speak, and here Satan appears to be included among the sons of God who are there. So he does seem to be some sort of an angelic being who has now set himself against God and in opposition to God.

With that in mind, go to the New Testament to Luke 10:17-18. This is the story of the disciples going out on their mission preaching the Gospel that Jesus has sent them on. When they return from their mission, in verse 17, it says: "The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!' And he said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.'" Is Jesus talking here about an angelic fall that he saw, perhaps in a pre-creation state; that he saw Satan fall from heaven? Or is he

merely talking here about the way in which the demons were cast out by the disciples, and Jesus is reflecting on the triumph of their mission by saying, *I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven in what you did*. Well, it's unclear. We don't know for sure the correct interpretation. But at least we do have in this passage the idea clearly expressed of a satanic fall from heaven which Jesus mentions.

Now turn to 2 Peter 2:4. Here we have something a little bit more specific. The author says, "For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment. . . ." What is indicated clearly here is that there are angels who have sinned. This could well be a reference to the sons of God mating with human women in Genesis 6:1-4. But minimally I think at least it shows us that there are angels who have sinned. It says that these sons of God have been incarcerated in the underworld in some sort of nether darkness. Here we have some indication of the idea of an angelic fall that could be relevant to the origin of demons.

Also, in Jude verse 6 this same event is mentioned. That passage says,

And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day.

Here again is an indication that there are angels who have sinned and fallen away and whom God has now imprisoned in the underworld until the judgment on the great day. These fallen angels seem to be incarcerated; they're not let out. But the speculation is that perhaps there are others who are free to roam upon the Earth, and that Satan and his minions are some of these. Satan also appears to be one of the company of angels. We saw that, for example, in the book of Jude in his contest with the archangel Michael. Jesus talks about Satan falling from heaven like lightning. So it could be that the origin of Satan and the demons lies in an angelic fall, and that some of them are still free (within limits) to work their wrath upon the Earth even though there are others who are kept in this underworld.

1 John 3:8 is also relevant. 1 John 3:8 says, "He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." Here again we have indication of sins that have been committed by Satan, by the devil, which would obviously result in a sort of fall. So we have evidence in Scripture, I think, of an angelic fall and specifically of sin on the part of Satan which would bring him into condemnation before God.

Another verse that might be relevant is 1 Timothy 3:6 which might tell us something about the sin of Satan. Paul is giving the qualifications here for someone who wants to be a bishop in the church, and he is warning against pride. He says that the candidate, "must

not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.” The question is how do you interpret that phrase “the condemnation of the devil.” Does it mean that the recent convert who gets puffed up with pride would then be condemned by the devil? That it is the devil who would condemn him? Or does it mean rather that he would fall into the same condemnation that the devil fell into, namely from being puffed up with pride and arrogance. Setting himself against God, he finds himself also condemned before God just like Satan. If we interpret the phrase in that latter way then this would suggest that the devil’s sin was indeed some sort of pride or arrogance whereby he raised his heel against his creator, against God, and so fell away.

Finally, 1 Timothy 5:21 says, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without favor, doing nothing from partiality.” The phrase I want to draw your attention to here is the phrase “the elect angels.” There are certain angels who are elect to glorification just as we are. We are among the elect – the chosen ones on this planet among human beings. But there are also elect angels, which implies that there are other angels which are not elect. They would be fallen angels and would be under God's condemnation.

So, all in all, I think there are scriptural hints or indications that the traditional understanding of Satan and the demons is very plausible, namely that originally God created a realm of angelic beings who were created good (they're not created evil) but who, through an exercise of free will, rebelled against God and so fell away and are condemned. And the Earth now lies under the power and sway of these demonic angels. Great news, isn't it? These fallen angels (or some of them at least) become what we would call demons.

This raises a deeper question: how could angels who are in the presence of God fall away? And is it possible that more angels might fall away in the future? What prevents the elect angels from sinning? On this matter, we can only offer plausible speculations. It seems that God would have to create the angels originally at a sort of epistemic distance – at arm's length, so to speak – so as to allow them the freedom to rebel against God and to sin. Having made their choice, the wills of the elect angels are then sealed in that choice by being given a fuller vision of God's greatness and glory so irresistible that further sin is impossible. So there is no danger of a further angelic fall. Their free choice having been made, their will is now sealed.

But then what about the fallen angels? Could they now freely turn to God in repentance and be saved? The church father Origen actually believed such a thing. Origen believed in the doctrine called *apocatastasis*, or the restoration of all things. He believed that in the end even Satan himself will be saved and that everything will be restored to its

original good condition. But Origen's view was condemned as heretical by the church. In Matthew 25:41, Jesus refers to “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Notice the eternality of the punishment of the devil and the demons: “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Christ's atoning death was offered on behalf of mankind, not on behalf of angels. So in that very peculiar sense, the doctrine of the limited atonement is true – it is limited to the human race and does not include angels.

In fact, medieval theologians like St. Anselm believed that the number of elect human beings was chosen by God to precisely replace the number of the angels who had fallen away, so that the complete number of the elect will be saved – human beings will be substituted in the place of those angels that fell away. So there is no availability of atonement or salvation for the demonic beings.

Lest anyone think it unloving on God's part not to offer an atonement for the fallen angels, consider that God may know that Satan and the demons, having become evil, would never freely choose to repent and believe even if provision were made for them. So why make it?

START DISCUSSION

Student: Many theologians believe that in the context of Revelation 12:4, when it says, “His tail,” (talking about the dragon, which is Satan or the devil), “swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth,” is a reference that one-third of the angels in heaven fell. I was wondering if you put much stock in that.

Dr. Craig: Let's just turn to that passage – Revelation 12:4. I think that my reservation about that . . . to read the verse,

And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman . . . with child, . . . And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. . . .

And then he threatens the child. I just don't see any reason to think that this is talking about some pre-creation fall. This is in the context of an end-times vision of what's going to happen in the future. So I'm very reluctant to take this symbolic narrative of what's going to happen and project it into the past rather than into the future.

Student: I also had a question about Revelation 12 because in so many of the passages of Revelation 12 John goes back and forth between the past, and the present, and the future. He seems to shift. So along with the earlier question, what do you think about (especially with respect to time) verse 7 and verse 8 of that passage? Because it does sometimes . . . there's some people that you read feel that some things could happen in the past, and some can come to the forward meaning that the great woman in Israel is going to be

saved in the future. There's one particular passage that seems to go back and forth in 12:12 quite a bit. So could that also relate to Satan originally?

Dr. Craig: Well, here we have this struggle between Michael and the dragon casting him down to Earth and so forth. I guess the question should be . . . I have always taken this as what John says at the beginning of the book, that the book is about, where he says that he's going to show him what is going to happen and that therefore these are all describing future events. But if you projected into the past then, yes, you could interpret that as being an angelic fall.

Student: I just wondered if it could be a panoramic in some areas in order to explain later on in the book what will be in the future to understand . . . you have to understand where Satan got where he was because he's the power of the prince of the air.

Dr. Craig: I don't know. I guess I would have to be convinced that there's some good reason to take it that way because the way he presents it is that this is a vision that God has given him of everything that is going to take place, and it would include things like this warfare and defeat of Satan so that these are things that haven't happened yet. But if you could convince me, I'm perfectly open to the idea. I've just not taken it that way.

Student: The false prophet and the beast – are those demonic creatures or is that fallen man?

Dr. Craig: I don't know for sure. I have always taken these to be human beings who again are described in this kind of hyperbolic, apocalyptic, symbolic language rather than thinking that these are demonic creatures or angelic creatures. I've taken them to be human persons. But that's sure not a hill I'm going to die on. Revelation is just notoriously difficult to interpret. It's so symbolic and filled with imagery, I think any interpreter of that book needs to be very tentative in the interpretations that he proposes.¹

¹ ?Total Running Time: 34:50 (Copyright © 2018 William Lane Craig)