

Where Did We Get “Lucifer”?

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The name Lucifer commonly refers to Satan, but I looked for it in my Bible and I couldn't find it. What am I overlooking?

This is a case in which finding what you are searching for depends on which Bible translation you use. The name "Lucifer" shows up in the King James Version in Isaiah 14:12 ("Lucifer, son of the morning!"), but is not usually found in more recent translations. Your question gives us the opportunity to examine the role of ancient translations in the interpretation of a biblical text. My answer may seem a bit technical, but follow the discussion and you'll understand some of the complexities of the topic. Fortunately, we know how the name Lucifer was introduced in the Bible, and thus we can establish how accurate the translators of the King James Version were in employing it.

1. Origin of the Title "Lucifer": The term *Lucifer* is the English rendering of the Hebrew term *hēlēl* ("shining or brilliant one"). The meaning of the Hebrew noun was preserved in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible through the Greek term *heōsphoros* ("bright one," "morning star"). The English "Lucifer" comes from Latin; it renders the Greek *heōsphoros* into the Latin *lucifer*, which simply means "light bearer, morning star." The early Church Fathers employed the Latin *lucifer* as a proper name to refer to Satan. The translators of the King James Version decided to retain the Latin term in their translation, and it became "Lucifer," another name for Satan. The Hebrew term was not a proper name, but an epithet.

2. The Hebrew Meaning: The Hebrew expression used in Isaiah 14:12 could be translated, "shining one [*hēlēl*], son of dawn [*ben-shāchar*]." Traditionally *hēlēl*, used only here in the Old Testament, has been understood as designating something that is shining or brilliant, from the verb *hālal*, "to shine." It has been suggested that the Hebrew term refers to Venus, the "morning star," but there is no linguistic evidence to support that. The suggestion could be supported by the use of the term *heōsphoros* in Greek and *lucifer* in Latin, both of which are sometimes employed to designate Venus.

Another argument that could be used is based on the meaning of the phrase "son of dawn." In this case the term *son* expresses the idea of "belonging to," that is to say his brilliance belongs to or is the brilliance of the dawn. The Greek and Latin versions read "[the morning star] which rises early," instead of "son of the dawn," strengthening the idea that the "morning star" refers to Venus. The noun *shāchar* is used in the Old Testament to designate the first light or brightness of the morning, the dawn. The Hebrew could then be rendered, "the shining one [star], the brightness of the morning," and could be referring to Venus, as it appears in the morning sky. This interpretation is very likely, but it is still far from certain and relies too much on ancient translations.

It is probably better to understand the title "shining one, son of the dawn" as emphasizing the glory of this being, as well as his leading position. He is being compared to the beauty of the brightness of the dawn, to the first light of the morning that announces the beginning of a new day. This glorious and leading position is metaphorically employed to refer to this glorious, celestial leader. The name "Lucifer" came to express the idea of a celestial being, and to that extent it expresses the basic idea of the biblical text.

3. Theological Implications: The New Testament image of the bright morning star, suggested by the Greek, applies to Jesus. Originally "Lucifer" was not fully satisfied with his celestial position and aimed to ascend to heaven, to enthrone himself on the heavenly mount of the assembly (Isa. 14:13). This search for greatness resulted in his fall from heaven. In contrast, Jesus did not seek greatness. He voluntarily descended from His high position to serve others, and God "exalted him to the highest place and gave him a name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:9, NIV). Christ is the only one who can now truly claim the title "bright and morning star" (Rev. 22:16). We look forward to the moment when our morning star will appear to bring us salvation (cf. 2 Peter 1:19).