

# The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

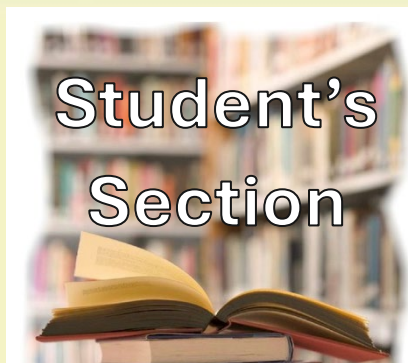
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## The Alleged Fall of Satan in Ezekiel 28

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\*Note: NASB used as Text

One of the more controversial topics in the study of the book of Ezekiel is the twenty-eighth chapter and its proper interpretation. The controversy concerns language used in Ezekiel's denouncement of the king of Tyre that sounds like it could be details that are true of Satan as well. This language, though highly poetic, sounds like it could be a description of Satan, his pride, and the nature of his sin against God. With this view in mind, this article will discuss those passages which are particularly interesting as they relate to this topic, rather than try to write an

exposition of the chapter as a whole.

"Again the word of the LORD came to me saying, 12 'Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, "Thus says the Lord GOD, You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The ruby, the topaz and the diamond; The beryl, the onyx and the jasper; The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, Was in you. On the day that you were created They were prepared. 14 You were the anointed cherub who covers, And I placed you *there*. You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire. 15 You were blameless in your ways From the day you were created Until unrighteousness was found in you. 16 By the abundance of your trade You were internally filled with violence, And you sinned; Therefore I have cast you as profane From the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst

of the stones of fire. 17 Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I put you before kings, That they may see you.'" **Ezekiel 28:11-17**

Upon examination of this language, the student of God's word finds that he is confronted with seemingly only two possible conclusions.

1. Ezekiel is using highly figurative, highly poetic language to describe the fall of the king of Tyre.
2. He is describing the fall of Satan and saying that the king of Tyre, in his great pride, was like the Devil in his own fall.

Verses 11-17 provide the most intriguing points which face the interpreter of this passage. In general, opinion is greatly divided as to the actual interpretation of the chapter. The response most often to be found among those who reject this passage as speaking of Satan is the fact that Ezekiel directly refers only to the

king of Tyre and not to Satan in this chapter.

While this point is conceded, there is nevertheless some language that one must strain to the very limits of figurative communication in order to apply it to the king of Tyre.

One such example comes from **Ezekiel 28:12** where God says through the prophet, "...You had the **seal of perfection**, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty."

In this verse, the phrase that is crucial is the first part of the section just quoted. Of prime importance is the reading of the actual Hebrew, which literally means "the sealing of a plan". The Hebrew, then, suggests that the being referred to here was the completion or consummation of a plan; or, to put it another way, the final piece of the puzzle. It is easy to dismiss this passage as being merely symbolic language that the prophet is applying to the king of Tyre, but it cannot be denied that this is using figurative language to a level of hyperbole not often found in Scripture.

In what way was the king of Tyre the completion of a plan? The context would seem to require it as being God's plan (**cf. Ezekiel 28:14a**). While it is certainly true that God used even pagan kings as part of His plan, the king of Tyre is never referred to as being God's servant in the same way that Nebuchadnezzar or Cyrus are in Scripture.

However, if this passage were viewed as relating the fall of Satan, whom the king of Tyre

resembled in his own fall, then this passage is not difficult to understand. Considering that Satan himself was in Eden and that he is the ruler of this world (**John 12:31**), it is clear from Scripture that Satan is indeed powerful, and it is not difficult to see how Satan could have completed God's plan in some way. To simply dismiss this phrase as poetic imagery is to ignore the strong statement being thus made about a pagan king.

In the next verse, another phrase of interest is found. There, we read that,

"You were in Eden, the garden of God...And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you. On the day that you were created, they were prepared." **Ezekiel 28:13**

Thus the prophet Ezekiel places the king of Tyre directly in the garden paradise where the Creation of man began, in the midst of the perfect paradise that God had created for Adam and Eve. While it is certainly possible to interpret, as some do, the term *Eden* as being simply metaphorical for some pagan counterpart, that leaves the interpreter of this text with the conclusion that God inspired Ezekiel to take this term, associated with sinless perfection and paradise, and lower it to the level of a pagan king's garden, temple, palace, etc.

The phraseology also suggests that the king of Tyre was in the *presence* of God, since God Himself was in Eden (**cf. Genesis 3:8**). Again, the interpreter of

God's word must consider the statements that Ezekiel is making before he dismisses everything as poetic or figurative language. In what way was the king of Tyre in God's presence?

However, if one were to view this passage as actually speaking of Satan, then this phrase presents no difficulty at all, since we know that Satan was indeed in the Garden and would eventually be dismissed. Then, the passage would be taking Satan's presence in the Garden (and his attitude therein) and applying it to the king of Tyre's fall from the splendor in which he lived.

Additionally, the latter portion of this verse creates complications for the interpreter of this passage, for it recalls language regarding God's instructions concerning the tabernacle (**see Ex. 25:10-16; 26:15-25**). Again, this suggests preparation for use in some function within the plan of God on the part of the king of Tyre that Bible students are not privy to and must assume either took place or again attribute to symbolic imagery on the part of God's prophet.

The word *created* is also interesting and would seem to suggest the original beginning of the being under discussion here. Could this merely be a reference, as some have suggested, to the day of this pagan king's crowning? While this is not impossible, one wonders why all of this sacred Old Covenant religious language of service and use to God would be applied to the day of the king of Tyre's ascending the throne over a pagan nation. Further interest on

this point actually comes from **Hebrews 9:23**. There, the writer clearly indicates that the things of the earthly tabernacle were merely copies of heavenly ones.

Could Ezekiel be hinting at the existence of these heavenly things here in **Ezekiel 28:13** and in the verse to follow (to be discussed shortly)? If that be so, then one can easily see how this verse refers to Satan, who would have been present among these things and would have been in the service of God. Then, we would have an application (admittedly symbolic) of literal events that were true of Satan.

This seems to be more consistent with the passage and does not necessitate the hyperbolic extremity to which we would be forced to take the language. It certainly cannot be denied that people today often take what is true of one person's attitude or life and apply it to the behavior of someone else although the events were not *literally* true about the second person.

For the interpreter who does not see Satan in this passage, **Ezekiel 28:14** presents multiple problems: "You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you *there*. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire."

Here, there are three points that should be noted.

**First**, in Scripture and particularly in Ezekiel, cherubim are associated with God's glorious presence (cf. **Eze. 1 and 10**). Also, this language brings to mind

the ark of the covenant over which cherubim were placed (see **Ex. 25:17-22**). In what way, then, was the king of Tyre the cherub who covers, i.e. covering the presence of God? The suggestion that the king of Tyre was the covering cherub of his own paradise does not keep in mind this word's continual association with God's presence, i.e. the fact that cherubim are always seen to be in the actual presence of the holy God of Israel and not a Gentile king's palace or the temple of his god.

**Second**, the phrase "the holy mountain of God" cannot be, as some have theorized, synonymous with the earlier phrase "the garden of God"; for there that phrase is equivalent to Eden, and such an identification here does not seem appropriate. The term *holy mountain* in Scripture is often used of Jerusalem and prophetically of the Church, although it does have at least one usage where it seems to refer to Heaven (cf. **Isa. 14:13**). Contextually speaking, then, the phrase as used here in Ezekiel seems to be best identified with the usage in Isaiah and is thus referring to Heaven. Therefore, we must assume that Ezekiel is depicting the king of Tyre as symbolically residing in Heaven, the very dwelling place of God.

This is not impossible, however, this being a reference to Satan instead is certainly plausible, for there can be no question that Satan had (at least at one time) direct access to God's presence (**Job 1:6; 2:1**). If the ancient identification of Satan as a fallen angel is correct (cf. **II Cor. 11:14**),

then the Devil did at one time reside in Heaven.

**Third**, the phrase "stones of fire" is of importance. The most common interpretation is that this term concerns the manifestation of God's power (cf. **Ex. 19:16; Ps. 18:8,12**). This identification certainly seems plausible, but again, it places this proud king of Tyre in the very midst of the awesome presence of God. However, to identify this passage as referring to Satan who *did* reside in the amazing presence of God whom the king of Tyre did resemble in his pride lessens the extreme position required by the interpretation of this verse as offered by those who do not see Satan as part of this chapter.

As Ezekiel continues his denunciatory proclamation, there is yet more terminology that sparks controversy for the minds of the interpreters of the Bible.

Continuing in this passage we read, "You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you." **Ezekiel 28:15**

At first glance, there is nothing wrong with interpreting this passage as referring solely to the king of Tyre. *Blameless* here could simply mean nothing more than uprightness of conduct as king. However, this interpretation does bring to light the following question: Would God see the ways of a pagan king with his pagan worship as blameless and without fault? To apply this passage only to the king of Tyre requires the interpreter of this verse to conclude that the

unrighteousness referred to here is the pride of this Gentile king and the violence with which he obtained his wealth, an interpretation postulated by some biblical scholars. This interpretation is somewhat difficult as it overlooks the pagan worship of this king.

While it is true that God may not have held this king to the same standards as He would have held His own people (**cf. Acts 17:30**), it still forces us to conclude that God expected less of this king regarding his form of worship while holding him to higher standards regarding his pride and how he obtained his wealth. Additionally, verse sixteen reiterates the terminology of verse fourteen, stating that he (the king or Satan) has been removed from God's presence. This again creates the issue discussed above when one considers the implications of such a figurative interpretation of verse fourteen.

The twenty-eighth chapter of Ezekiel is one that provides the student of the Bible with an interesting controversy. There is no doubt that its primary function was to denounce the king of Tyre, but the deeper question rests in just how this denunciation was written, whether this is only speaking symbolically of the king of Tyre or truthfully of Satan to whom the king of Tyre is being compared to in this passage.

Those who choose to see this chapter as symbolic see no problem with the seemingly extreme statements being made regarding a pagan king while those who see Satan as being

described here believe that the lack of a direct reference to the Devil is compensated for by the terminology that better fits a heavenly being as opposed to a Gentile king.

Regardless of the true interpretation, the clear teaching of this passage is that pride can lead to a great fall and that all individuals should humble themselves before God and His sovereign will. All should be aware that whatever gifts we have are from God, and that any attitude other than gratefulness regarding our blessings is fraudulent and likely to lead to a humbling of our position and our perceived greatness.

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