

The Angels that Sinned

Slandering Celestial Beings

by Steven Cox

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INTRODUCTION

The subjects of this booklet are the “Angels that sinned” of 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. The subtitle “slandering celestial beings” is taken from the following verses in 2 Peter 2:10 and Jude 8, where false teachers who were troubling the early church are condemned. To slander means to falsely accuse. The “angels that sinned” and those teachers who accused “celestial beings” (in other words, they falsely accused angels) are closely related. This booklet examines that relationship.

However, before starting on this subject a word of caution to the reader:

Many Christians believe a tradition that the evil in this world is due to ‘rebel angels’, and that the ‘devil’ of the New Testament is also a ‘fallen angel’ - although the Bible never says so. Therefore the two mentions of “angels that sinned” in 2 Peter and Jude, which are unique in the whole Bible, have become popular as evidence for belief in a supernatural devil and demons.

It needs to be said that evil, the devil, and demons, are complicated subjects. They may in fact be among the last subjects which a student of the Bible comes to understand. This is because the New Testament (where almost all references to ‘the devil’ and ‘demons’ occur) expects that the reader already has an understanding of God and man, good and evil, life and death built on the foundation of the Old Testament. Too often readers of the New Testament take references to ‘devil’ and ‘demons’ on their own terms - according to what the words mean in their own local culture - and then read backwards into the Old Testament. In this way they mix their own ideas with the teachings of the Bible.

A better method is to first gain a thorough understanding of Old Testament teaching, and only then start to study secondary subjects such as the devil.

Even when the time comes to make a study of the devil and demons, this booklet, which only deals with two exceptional verses in 2 Peter and Jude, is not the place to start. It would be better to first read more general material about the subject of the devil.

The reader may well feel that he or she knows the subject of the devil very well, and has no need to re-examine the subject, but if you are not so sure then try answering the following questions:

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- (1) When did Satan fall from heaven? Christians are often very sure that Satan did fall but very unsure if asked to answer exactly when. The usual answer is that it was in the Garden of Eden, but thousands of years after Eden, Satan was still apparently serving as an obedient courtier in the heavenly court in Job 1. So *when* did Satan fall, if he fell at all.
- (2) 2 Samuel 24:1 records that God tempted David, but 1 Chronicles 21:1 says that it was Satan. How can these both be correct?
- (3) In Exodus 4:11 God tells Moses that he is the one who makes men mute, but in Luke 11:14 muteness appears to be caused by a demon. Did God lie to Moses?
- (4) In Isaiah 45:7 God says that “I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster, I the Lord do all these things”. This in opposition to dualistic Babylonian belief in two gods: one god of good, and one god of evil - the Babylonians’ Satan. So who was right - Isaiah, or the priests of Babylon?
- (5) In Psalm 78:49 God sent a band of “evil angels” against Egypt. In some modern Bible versions this has been changed to “destroying angels” but it is “evil angels” in the older Bibles such as the English King James, and original Hebrew. Do evil angels obey God?

If you are not sure of the answer to any of these questions then you are invited to first write to the address on the back cover for other booklets on The Devil and Demon Possession. When those booklets are read it is hoped that this little booklet will be a useful appendix.

PART 1

Popular beliefs in Peter and Jude’s day

The modern Christian idea of the devil largely developed out of an interpretation of Isaiah 14:12 which was taken as a description of the fall of Satan from heaven. In the English King James Bible the word is Lucifer, which means ‘Morning Star’ - a name for the planet Venus as it is visible at daybreak. In recent years many Christian churches have stopped using Isaiah 14:12 in this way, as others (including Christadelphians) have pointed out that Isaiah is describing “the King of Babylon” (14:4), “a man” (14:16), but the tradition is still strong and ‘Lucifer’ is still behind many peoples’ understanding of the devil.

However, at the time Peter and Jude wrote, ‘Lucifer’ was never used as a name for the devil. In fact Peter’s own “day star” (2 Peter 1:19, meaning Christ) was rendered ‘Lucifer’ in Latin Bibles, and as a result in the early church ‘Lucifer’ was considered as a title of Christ, sung to in early hymns, and taken as a personal name by several bishops.

When Peter and Jude wrote, belief in fallen angels did not centre around Isaiah 14:12 but on this verse:

“The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and they married any of them they chose” (Genesis 6:2)

The context of Genesis 4 and 5 suggests that ‘sons of God’ here means the same as it means in the New Testament - human believers. The famous 5th Century Catholic theologian Augustine wrote at length about Genesis 6:2 in his book *City of God* and concluded that the ‘sons of God’ were the sons of Seth who “began to call on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:26), but were enticed away from worship of the Lord by the godless ‘daughters of men’ - meaning that they intermarried with the descendants of Cain - until only Noah and his family remained faithful. This is also the interpretation followed by the Jewish Rabbis writing on Genesis 6:2.

However, in the days of Peter and Jude many myths had grown up among Jews as a result of influence by Babylonian and Greek traditions.

Jewish Myths

We might think of ‘myths’ as being something found more among Greeks and Romans, but Paul warned Titus to “pay no attention to Jewish myths” (Titus 1:14). Many of these Jewish myths are fantastic fiction about Old Testament figures, such as Seth, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Solomon and Ezra.

Examples of Jewish myths are found in the Apocrypha of Roman Catholic Bibles (Tobit, Bel and the Dragon), and in other surviving Pseudepigrapha - meaning ‘false writings’. Jewish myths about angels and demons are also found inscribed on papyrus and pottery fragments dug up by archaeologists, and in the Dead Sea Scrolls which were discovered

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in Israel in 1948. They had lain hidden since around AD70 - exactly the time at which Peter and Jude were writing.

Enoch and the angels that sinned

Frequent among these Jewish myths is the myth of fallen angels. The most complete version of the myth is found in the so-called *Book of Enoch*, which is an imaginative expansion on the Sons of God and Daughters of Men in Genesis 6.

The key event, the fall of the rebel angels, is described as follows:

“And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied, that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: ‘Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children.’ And Shemihazah, who was their leader, said unto them: ‘I fear you will not agree to do this deed, and I alone shall have to pay the penalty of a great sin.’ And they all answered him and said: ‘Let us all swear an oath, and all bind ourselves by mutual imprecations not to abandon this plan but to do this thing.’ Then they all swore together and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And they were in all two hundred who descended on the earth in the days of Jared.” (Enoch 6:1-6)

The story continues with the fallen angels fathering a race of giants. But the angels are accused by the archangel Michael, and bound in Tartarus to await judgment for 70 generations. The angels ask Enoch to mediate with God on their behalf, but Enoch’s requests are refused. The giants also cause havoc on the earth, Michael appeals to God again, and they are drowned in the flood. In the *Book of the Giants* these children of the angels, led by their leaders Ohiyah and Mahawi, also ask Enoch to mediate for them. God decrees that the spirits of the giants shall survive to torment mankind and they become a new class of beings, the demons (one of the most powerful of whom was the same Asmodeus mentioned in the *Book of Tobit*). The giants’ human mothers also survive and become Sirens.

In the 1st Century the Book of Enoch was a best-seller. The book was so popular that it would have been known to all the Jewish Christians addressed by Peter and Jude - even if they, like many educated Jews, did not accept it as fact. We know, for example, that it was rejected by the 1st Century Pharisee known as Pseudo-Philo (Book of Antiquities 3:1), by Rabbi Simeon Ben Yohai (Genesis Rabbah 26:5), and by Trypho, the Jew who debated with Justin Martyr (Dialogue 1:79:1). Not to mention by the Lord Jesus himself (Mark 12:25).

Nevertheless despite Paul’s warning (Titus 1:14) some of the converts from Judaism to Christianity brought with them these Jewish myths - including the Book of Enoch and the legend of the fallen angels - and the documents of the early church indicate that these myths were later taken up by the Gnostics.

PART 2

Peter, Jude, and Enoch

Jude 18 is the only quote of one letter by another in the New Testament; of 2 Peter 3:3. The proof that Jude quotes Peter and not the other way round is shown by comparing the following:

*“But there were false prophets also among the (Jewish) people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They **shall secretly bring in** destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them.”* (2 Peter 2:1-2)

*“I felt I had to write to you ... for certain men ... **have secretly slipped in** among you ...denying Jesus Christ our only sovereign and Lord.”* (Jude 3-4)

Peter and Jude are obviously addressing the same problem but with one difference; when Peter wrote the false teachers were coming, but when Jude wrote they had arrived. Jude is a continuation of 2 Peter.

Jude also quotes from the Book of Enoch:

“See the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone and convict the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done” (Book of Enoch 1:9)

“Enoch the Seventh from Adam prophesied ... ‘See the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone and convict the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done’.” (Jude 14-15)

‘The Seventh from Adam’

Some will react strongly to the suggestion that Jude quoted from a Jewish myth and point out that he identifies Enoch as “Enoch the Seventh from Adam”.

Normally this would be a fair objection. The Bible does not generally quote from such profane sources, and certainly never treats such books as authoritative. However in this case the phrase “the seventh from Adam” does not come from Genesis but from Book of Enoch 60:8. So we are not dealing with one quote of Enoch here, but two. In fact there are as many as 30 references to Book of Enoch in 2 Peter and Jude.

It cannot be argued that the similarity of Enoch 1:9 that Peter was facing a major challenge to the inspiration of the scriptures and the authority of apostles. This is confirmed as we enter the next chapter:

2 Peter 2:1-3 “Stories they have made up”

Where should we look for an explanation of Peter and Jude’s mentions of “angels that sinned”? Rule No.1 of good Bible study is ‘always read the context’. And yet most Christian readers of the ‘angels that sinned’ passages read only the angels-flood-Sodom sequence in 2 Peter 2:4-8 (or the Sinai-angels-Sodom sequence in Jude 5-7) without noticing what precedes or follows. What precedes is clear:

“In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up” (2 Peter 2:3)

This alerts us that what follows is related to these stories which are being spread by false teachers ‘among the church’ just as they had once been spread by false teachers “among the people” of Israel. (This is confirmed in Jude’s parallel example of apostasy at Sinai (Jude 4-5).

2 Peter 2:4 “If...”

Peter refers here to Enoch 10:4 where the archangel Raphael chains the angels that sinned in Tartarus. But note that Peter is using a hypothetical “if”: “if the angels sinned... then...”. It does not mean that Peter is presenting Enoch 10:4 as historical fact, only that he is presenting a logical argument. His conclusion (the “then...” part) comes in 2:9.

2 Peter 2:5-8 Old Testament examples

Some will say that because Peter follows his reference to the chaining of the angels (Enoch 10:4) with the Old Testament examples of Noah (Genesis 7-9), and Sodom (Genesis 19) that Peter is granting Enoch the same authority as Genesis. But why should this be the case? Wouldn’t it be more natural to think that Peter simply does not consider that an example taken from the uninspired Book of Enoch is sufficient to prove his point?

We could also ask why, if Peter considered that the story of the fallen angels was true, he did not quote Genesis 6:2 rather than Enoch 10:4? Although people who believe in fallen angels often assert that the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6 are angels it is striking that Peter and Jude will quote from Genesis on Noah and Sodom but never, **without exception**, quote Genesis as the source of the ‘angels that sinned’ story. Because, of course, Genesis knows no such story.

Likewise in the parallel Jude 7 “punishment of eternal fire” Jude does not refer to the Genesis sons of God, (who were destroyed with water not fire), but instead the fallen stars who are chained “in a great fire that was burning and flaming” (1 Enoch 21:7). This is another sign that the 200 angels are mythical.

2 Peter 2:9 - Nothing to fear from angels

Peter now comes to his conclusion: if God has already reserved the angels “to the day of judgment” (as in Enoch 10:4) then there is nothing to fear from “angels that sinned”.

“if God did not spare angels when they sinned...if this is so then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment (2 Peter 2:4...9)”

Peter’s argument was picked up by the Canadian Christadelphian author Ron Abel:

“Why bother to chain these angels if, as one Jehovah’s Witnesses publication contends, ‘they can still exercise dangerous power over men and women’?” (Wrested Scriptures, p.180)

This was the best answer to the fallen angels myth in Peter’s time, and it is still the best answer today. If the part of Book of Enoch about the angels marrying is true, then why not the part about the angels having been chained in Tartarus? If they are chained in Tartarus, then (as Peter argues in 2:9) logically these angels aren’t a threat to anyone are they?

Of course people may claim that there ‘must have been’ other falls, and other angels who ‘got away’. But apart from the lack of any evidence for this (and the inconsistency that God would chain 200 angels and then let another band of rebel angels escape!) such a claim contradicts Peter’s fundamental point which is that, even if Enoch were true, that book itself shows that “God knows how to deliver the godly from temptation” (2:9).

This is one of the most clear arguments against the existence of fallen angels in the whole Bible.

2 Peter 2:10-12 Slandering Celestial Beings

Peter’s main argument against Enoch is found in the sections immediately following the mentions of the “angels that sinned”. This often passes unnoticed by those seeking in 2 Peter and Jude support for their own belief in fallen angels:

- (A) 2 Peter 2:10 the false teachers slander
Jude 8 celestial beings.
- (B) 2 Peter 2:11 but angels, although much
Jude 9 greater (than the teachers), do
Not dare bring an accusation
against such (celestial) beings.
- (C) 2 Peter 2:12 so the false teachers
Jude 10 slander things they do not
understand (or beings they do not know).

2 Peter 2:10 Dominion and Glories

“This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant these men (false teachers) are not afraid to slander celestial beings.” (2 Peter 2:10)

“Authority” (literally ‘dominion’) is elsewhere in the New Testament always associated with heavenly ‘principalities and powers’ (Ephesians 1:21, Colossians 1:16)

“Celestial beings” literally is ‘glories’ plural and is used in this sense only by Peter and Jude in the New Testament. In 1 Peter 1:11 Peter speaks of the future glories of Christ, but in the Old Testament the term describes the glories surrounding God:

“Who is like you among the gods O Lord? Who is like you, glorified in holiness, marvellous in glories (plural), doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11)

It is also used in this sense in 1st Century Jewish literature:

“Moses said.. I am not able to bear the visible appearance of your form but I ask you that I may behold the glories (plural) that are around you”. (Philo, On the Special Laws 1:45)

“And the Lord blessed Levi; the Angel of the Presence blessed me; the powers of glories (plural) blessed Simeon, the heaven blessed Reuben; the earth blessed Issachar..” (Testament of Judah 25:2)

That ‘dominion’ and ‘glories’ mean more than just human government and dignities is confirmed by Peter’s next verse:

Humans slandering celestial beings

These verses, parallel in 2 Peter and Jude, are key to explanation of both letters. Both writers state (twice) that the false teachers were slandering celestial beings, namely angels. “Slander” implies two conclusions; (a) that they were accusing the glories of wrongdoing, (b) that their accusations were unfounded. Surprisingly the obvious impact of the verses, that the false teachers allegations were lies, that the angels did not sin, and that the whole story of angels that sinned is slander, is usually completely ignored.

“In the very same way these dreamers (the false teachers) pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings.” (Jude 8)

If the allegations (specifically of angels having sex with women) were “slandrous accusations” then it can hardly be used as proof that the accusations were true. If the ‘slander’ consisted of allegations that angels rebelled, descended to earth and fathered demons, then Peter and Jude’s evidence must be taken to mean that no such thing happened, and that it is not acceptable to believe or teach such things in the church.

2 Peter 2:11 Angels themselves do not slander

Peter and Jude then repeat the charge, that not only are the charges human slander against heavenly beings, but that real angels would never make such an accusation.

“Yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord.” (2 Peter 2:11)

In Jude 9 the same is said of Michael, yet according to Enoch Michael was the leader in bringing the accusation against the fallen angels to God:

“And then Michael, Uriel, Raphael, and Gabriel looked down from heaven and saw much blood being shed upon the earth, and all lawlessness being wrought upon the earth. And they said one to another: ‘The earth made without inhabitant cries the voice of their crying up to the gates of heaven. And now to you, the holy ones of heaven, the souls of men make their suit, saying, “Bring our cause before the Most High.”’ And they said to the Lord of the ages: ‘Lord of lords, God of gods, King of kings, and God of the ages, the throne of Thy glory stands unto all the generations of the ages, and Thy name holy and glorious and blessed unto all the ages! Thou hast made all things, and power over all things hast Thou: and all things are naked and open in Thy sight, and Thou seest all things, and nothing can hide itself from Thee. Thou seest what Azazel hath done, who hath taught all unrighteousness on earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were preserved in heaven, which men were striving to learn: And Shemihazah, to whom Thou hast given authority to bear rule over his associates. And they have gone to the daughters of men upon the earth, and have slept with the women, and have defiled themselves, and revealed to them all kinds of sins. And the women have born giants, and the whole earth has thereby been filled with blood and unrighteousness. (Enoch 9:1-10)

Thus according to Enoch it was Michael and three other archangels, who accused Shemihazah and Azazel, but according to Peter angels (specifically Michael, Uriel, Raphael and Gabriel) “do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord”, and Jude adds that Michael would not accuse the devil himself. In other words the story of Michael making an accusation against the angels in Enoch 9 is false - and if the story of the accusation is false then so is the story of the angels’ sin.

(A sobering thought here is that if the teachings of Book of Enoch, and the false teachers, were considered as “blaspheming glories” then what does that mean for modern churches which have similar teaching on fallen angels?).

2 Peter 2:12-14 Consequences

Peter repeats again that the teachers ‘blaspheme’ or slander in matters (the matter of angels) about which they understand nothing. This is paralleled in Jude with the additional comment “these are the very things that destroy them”. This is a serious comment. We might not see a direct relationship between incorrect *ideas on angels and the kind of behaviour described by Peter and Jude*, but Jude does: these things, their

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talking about things they do not understand, “are the very things that destroy them” (Jude 10).

2 Peter 2:15-16 Rebukes from the Bible

Peter now takes the example of Balaam (from Numbers 22-24). Jude expands this to include Cain (Genesis 4) and Korah (Numbers 16) in Jude 11.

2 Peter 2:17 Rebukes taken from Enoch

It is at this point that Peter returns to Enoch with three references to the false teachers as “dry springs” (Hosea 13:15 but connected to Enoch 48:1,96:6), “waterless clouds” (Enoch 18:5,41:4-5,100:11-12) and “reserved for blackest darkness” (Enoch 21:3).

These rebukes are expanded in much greater detail by Jude 12-13 taking language used in Enoch about false shepherds of Israel: “trees without fruit” (Enoch 80:3), “plucked up” (Enoch 83:4), “raging waves” (Enoch 101:3-5?). And finally “wandering stars for whom blackest darkness has been reserved for ever” (Enoch 21:3). In this Jude uses language about ‘angels that sinned’ and applies it to the false teachers. This is a powerful way of repeating his charge that “these are the very things that destroy them” (Jude 10).

It might seem strange to us that Peter and Jude describe those who taught from the Book of Enoch in language drawn from the same false book, but this is blaspheming, the above three verses tend to be overlooked by those who have already decided that angels can marry, and can sin. This seems ridiculous but there are those who will read the above verses as follows:

“In the resurrection the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die, for they are like those angels which do not marry, (but unlike those angels which do marry).”

“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation, (excepting those angels who are not ministering spirits, and are sent to obstruct those who will inherit salvation)?”

That may seem humorous. It is not intended to be, not at all. This is a serious subject. Remember what Jude said about slandering celestial beings: “these are the very things that destroy them” (Jude 10).

How much better it would be to simply accept the overall teaching of the Bible, found in 288 references to angels, that angels really are all, meaning all without exception, ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation:

“The angel of the Lord encamps around those that fear him” (Psalm 34:7)

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NOTES

1. Jude 14

If Jude had wanted to say “prophesied concerning them” he would have written περι αυτων (preposition + genitive case), but instead Jude wrote αυτοι (dative case) “to them”. The error in the translation appears to have originated with Luther (presumably working from the Latin Bible which is ambiguous in this verse), and to have been perpetuated unquestioningly by the translators of every version since.

2. Jude 23

The quote of Zechariah 3:5 in Jude 23 makes it virtually certain that Jude 9 is connected to Zechariah. This is confirmed when we find that, in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) used by Jude’s readers, Satan in Zechariah 3:1 is rendered ‘diabolos’, devil.

We can draw a comparison as follows:

Jude	Septuagint	Zechariah	Ezra
Michael	Angel	Angel	Ezra
Devil	Devil	Satan	Rehum and Shimshai
Body of Moses	Jesus the Priest	Joshua the Priest	Priesthood
Dirty garments	Dirty garments	Dirty garments	Foreign wives
-	Dawn	Branch	Zerubbabel

QUESTIONS

Questions from Introduction p.4-5

1. When did Satan fall?
2. Who tempted David to number Israel?
3. What causes disabilities like muteness?
4. Explain Isaiah 45:7.
5. What are “evil angels” in Psalm 78:49?

Questions relating to this booklet:

6. Who were the “Sons of God” in Genesis 6:2?
7. Who were the “angels that sinned” of 2 Peter 2:4?
8. Who were the “wandering stars” of Jude 13?
9. Where does Peter mention “myths” or “fables”?
10. Apart from Jude 14, where else is Enoch described as “the Seventh from Adam”?