

The Origin and Nature of Sin

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Sin Began in Heaven

Ezekiel 28 contains a proclamation against the king of Tyre. However, it is clear that this human king was a type of a supernatural but created being (v. 13) because God suddenly is speaking about *the anointed cherub who covers* (v. 14). A cherub seems to be an order of angels who were often, but not exclusively, associated with God's throne (Exodus 25:17-22; Psalms 99:1; Ezekiel 10:1-2). Reference to *the cherub who covers* (v. 14) is to one of two angels surrounding God's throne as represented by the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant in Exodus 25. Indeed, this angel must have been very special to be one of the covering cherubs. He was also adorned in all kinds of jewels (v. 13) and apparently could sing multiple parts at once since timbrels and pipes (v. 13) were part of his anatomy. Verse 15 tells us that he had been created perfect, but the sin of pride in his own beauty corrupted him and caused him to sin (v. 17). See our paper entitled "Angels" for a more detailed discussion of angels. See our paper entitled "Angels" for a more detailed discussion of angels.

In Isaiah 14:12-16, a being in heaven called Lucifer was said to be cast out of heaven because he desired worship for himself. Lucifer is a name that means *son of the morning, morning star, light bearer, or day star*. In II Peter 1:19, Jesus is called *the morning star*, and in Revelation 22:16 Jesus calls Himself *the Bright and Morning Star*. This close association of Lucifer's name to one of Jesus' titles indicates that Lucifer was a very close angel to Jesus in heaven until his pride erupted. Clearly, then, Lucifer is the same cherub described in Ezekiel 28.

According to Revelation 12:9, the symbol of a red dragon is used to represent a being called *the Devil and Satan, who...cast to the earth, and his angels with him*. In fact, he was cast out of heaven to earth because he began a war in heaven that he lost (vv. 7-8). Of all the places in the universe for sin and war to begin! His *violence within* (Ezekiel 28:16) spilled out into war in heaven, making it clear that this Satan or the Devil is the same being as Lucifer. The word *Satan* means *adversary*, and he certainly became the great adversary of God and mankind. The parallel of the clauses, *His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth* (v. 4) with *his angels were cast out with him* (v. 9), tells us that Satan persuaded one-third of heaven's angels to take his side in this rebellion against God.

A tail is used as a metaphor in Isaiah 9:14-15 to indicate false prophets' use of deceit to ensnare people. Apparently, Satan deceived a third of the angels in heaven and convinced them that he

was right. In this way, he was responsible for casting out those angels even though it was literally the good angels who did so (v. 7). Ezekiel 28:16 says that this angelic being was engaged in an *abundance of trading*. The word for *trading* there means *to move around in trading* in either products or in words. In reference to Satan it would mean *trading in words*, which means that he engaged in slander, obviously against God. He must have been accusing God of being unfair and unjust because God would not acknowledge his claim to be equal with Him. Therefore, we know that Satan engages in deceit and slander in order to persuade others to join in his rebellion.

Two questions naturally arise from these facts. First, why did God create the Devil? Second, when he first sinned, why did God not simply destroy him immediately? To the first question, God did not create the Devil, for Ezekiel 28:15 says that he had been created as a perfect being. Because *God is love* (I John 4:8, 16), all of His intelligent creatures must have been given free will. Without free will beings who serve God would simply do so because they were programmed to do so. But that kind of service is not love, which is obviously what a God of love desires. Therefore, God created a perfect and beautiful angel who exercised his free will to turn himself into the Devil.

Concerning the second question, if God had destroyed Satan immediately upon the appearance of his sin or at the first moment of his slander against Him, most of the other angels would naturally have been led to serve God out of fear rather than from love. Although God knows the end from the beginning because He is eternal (and thus outside of time and space), He could have just declined to create Lucifer in the first place. Even though no one else in the universe would have known, God must be consistent with His own character. From God's frame of reference, He would have in effect denied Lucifer's free will. A God of love would not do this.

Sin Came to Earth

After Satan lost the war in heaven, he was cast *to the earth* (Revelation 12:9). However, even there he was apparently restricted to one specific place on the earth. Revelation 12:9's reference to Satan as *that serpent of old* takes us back to Genesis 3, where a talking serpent deceived Eve, the first woman, to eat the fruit of the one forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve were prohibited from eating, called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:2-3, 6). They were not even to touch that tree, suggesting that they should keep their distance from it. Then the fact that Satan channeled a serpent residing in that tree suggests that God had limited him to that one spot on earth, which in turn suggests that the tree was forbidden in order to test their loyalty in the first place. Apparently, Satan's angels were prohibited from entering the Garden of Eden at all.

Undoubtedly, if Adam and Eve had passed that test, God would have required Satan to leave the earth, leaving Adam and Eve free to eat of its fruit (since God does not create evil, there could not

have been anything intrinsically wrong with its fruit). Unfortunately, after Eve ate from that forbidden tree, she enticed Adam, who also ate from it (Genesis 3:6). Thus, they both failed the test of loyalty. This is what theologians speak of as the fall of man.

Some might ask why our first parents were required to face a test of loyalty in the first place. First, although Adam and Eve were created with physical, mental, and moral perfection, no beings with free will are born with a character. Character is formed from our thoughts, words, actions, and habits and describes what a being is in terms of how he relates to others, including God, other intelligent beings, and even to animals. Second, the formation of character requires choices so that one can develop good habits and thus a good character. It does not require any actual experience with evil thoughts, words, or actions, but does require choices. So while our first parents were perfect in nature, they had to develop a perfect character to demonstrate they were going to permanently side with God.

Original Sin and Its Effects

Although sin is sin, the Scriptures do make a distinction between Adam's sin and Eve's sin in Eden. I Timothy 2:14 states that *Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression*. Indeed, according to Genesis 3:1, Satan first planted doubt about whether God had really denied them the fruit of that one tree. Second, he told her that God had lied to them about dying if they ate of the fruit and implied that He was depriving them of great wisdom or insight and that they would be like God Himself if they ate it (Genesis 3:4-5). Therefore, according to the apostle Paul, Adam's sin was worse in that he sinned with his eyes wide open. This is the reason that theologians refer to Adam's sin as "original sin" even though his sin was not chronologically first.

The significance of Adam's original sin is that *judgment [which] came from one offense [and] resulted in condemnation* (Romans 5:16; cf. v. 18). In verse 19 Paul plainly declares, *For as by one man's [Adam's] disobedience many were made sinners*. Verse 14 makes clear that he is referring to Adam. The words *judgment* and *condemnation* are courtroom terms. What Paul is saying is that Adam's willful sin brought a *judgment* and *condemnation* upon all mankind who came after him.

Of course, none of us were yet even living when Adam committed the original sin. How is it therefore just to be judged and condemned for something that we did not personally do? Hebrews 7:9-10 says that Levi paid tithes through Abraham even though Levi, as Abraham's great-grandson, had not even been born when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-20). This is sometimes referred to as an example of *corporate personality*, when someone in another person's lineage is credited for having done what his ancestor did. Since Ephesians 2:12, 19 use the citizenship metaphor, we can illustrate this Biblical concept. A childless Russian couple

emigrates to the United States and eventually become American citizens. Then they have a child, who is automatically an American citizen because of the earlier actions of his parents even though he is a full-blooded Russian. In other words, that child is credited with having changed his citizenship through his parents even though he had not yet been born. Likewise, Ephesians 2 implies that we are all born into Satan's kingdom—because of the decision Adam made—even though we had not yet been born. So it is not a matter of fairness or justice, but simply one of legal reality. In this way, *all sinned* in Adam (Romans 5:1). Some object to this last statement, insisting that all have sinned only like Adam in following his example. While we have all certainly followed Adam's example, the very nature of Paul's argument in Romans 5 makes it unmistakable that we all are credited with Adam's sin; thus we *all sinned in Adam* even though we had not yet been born.

All human beings are condemned by Adam's original sin to two just sentences. First, we all are born with a sinful nature. We naturally go astray (Isaiah 53:6) because our *heart is deceitful above all things* (Jeremiah 17:9). Therefore, *the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God...nor can he know them* (I Corinthians 2:14). *For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh* (Galatians 5:17). In other words, our very spiritual nature that we are born with is naturally inclined to go our own way, so much so that we cannot even understand spiritual things. This is what theologians call the sinful nature or sin nature. Since we have it due to Adam's sin, it can be said that we have been condemned to possess a sinful nature. Even though our conversion brings us the Holy Spirit, and we then become a spiritual person (I Corinthians 2:15), both natures remain inside us so that a Christian is like a walking civil war until glorification at the Second Coming removes our sinful nature; only then will we become perfect (Philippians 3:12-14, 20-21). This concept of a sinful nature, or sinful flesh, is also spoken of in Romans 8:3, Ephesians 2:2-3, and Galatians 5:16-17 as sinful desires that emanate from our sinful flesh. Thus, Scriptures teach that we all have a sinful nature.

In the Garden of Eden, mankind's sin resulted in the loss of perfection, separation from God, and certain curses (Genesis 3:7-24). Therefore, the sinful nature also constitutes a loss of perfection and separation from God.

Some believers have attempted to divorce our sinful nature from sin itself, so that we only sin if we yield to our sinful nature. However, we reject that view as unbiblical for several reasons. First, the Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17) calls coveting itself a sin, and to covet means to intensely desire something that one should not have or to desire something innocent to the point that you are at least willing in your heart to commit another sin in order to possess it. Furthermore, Jesus declared that *whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart* (Matthew 5:28; cf. vv. 21-22). Therefore, sinful tendencies are desires to sin, and as such, make a person as guilty as if he had outwardly committed the sin. Therefore, sinful desires or the sinful nature makes a person a sinner in God's eyes. As to what God holds us accountable

for is another issue. Since we will always possess a sinful nature with its sinful desires until the Second Coming of Jesus, certainly God does not condemn a believer unless he actually commits an outward sin or consciously and deliberately thinks sinful thoughts. But accountability and what actually constitutes sin are two different things. By the way, it is quite evident that different people are born to different tendencies to commit specific sins. What tempts one person to sin may not be a temptation to someone else at all.

We can be certain that we are actually born, even conceived, with a sinful nature. It is not something we acquire by our own deliberate choice. First, even a parent knows when a baby is crying for a specific need, such as food or a changed diaper, and when it is throwing a temper tantrum. Therefore, even our experience reveals that the sinful nature is something we are born with. While babies are innocent of conscious, deliberate sin, they are not actually innocent in nature. Second, King David wrote, *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me* (Psalms 51:5). Since there is no evidence that David was an illegitimate child, he is saying that he was conceived with a sinful nature. Therefore, even before we consciously commit acts of sin, sin is what we are (by nature).

Our sinful nature even has a detrimental effect on the good things that we think, speak, or do. The apostle Paul declares that *all have sinned and come short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). The verb tense in the second part of this sentence is in the present continuous tense, which means that a more literal translation would be, *all have sinned and continue to come short of the glory of God*. This means that anything that falls short of God's perfection is sin, and by that standard, everything a person thinks, speaks, or does is sin. This is because our sinful nature contaminates the otherwise good things that we think, speak, or do so that they do not meet God's standard of perfection. Without a divine plan of salvation, all that we do would be considered as sin. This is the reason that Isaiah 64:6 declares that even *all our righteousnesses [righteous actions] are like filthy rags*. Of course, once again, because God has a plan of salvation, the believer is not condemned by the fact that his good works are contaminated with sin and thus are sinful.

The second just sentence that all of us are sentenced to as a result of Adam's original sin is death. Romans 5:12 says that *through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin* (cf. Genesis 3:19; I Corinthians 15:21-22). And Romans 6:23 states that *the wages of sin is death*. In addition to the condemnation of having a sinful nature, we are also condemned to die. One can argue that since sin separates us from God the Life-Giver, we will eventually automatically die. While true, sinful mankind has been condemned to die as a result of God's judgment against sin. That is the reason that death is the wages of sin; wages are something that people earn. Thus, the death common to all is the result of God's actual penalty for sin and not merely the result of being separated from the Life-Giver.

Unfortunately, the original sin of Adam brought suffering and death to the plant and animal kingdoms and even brought instability to the inanimate elements of nature. This is seen by our own human observations and by the fact that the introduction of sin into the world is said to have resulted in negative effects on the earth itself (Genesis 3:14, 17-18). Romans 8:20-22 describes creation itself as being *subjected to futility* (v. 20) and to being in *bondage of corruption* (v. 21), and thus *groans and labors with birth pangs* (v. 22). The explanation for the fact that plants, animals, and the earth itself were negatively impacted by sin is that when Adam sinned he effectively transferred his human earthly kingdom to the kingdom of Satan. This is the reason that the Scriptures describe Satan as *the ruler of this world* (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The fact that Jesus Himself acknowledged this proves that it was the result of Adam's sin, for God certainly did not hand the earth over to Satan because He wanted to do so.

An Overview of What Sin Is

We can summarize the nature of sin in the following seven ways:

- *Sin is Separation from God*

In Genesis 3:22-24 God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, resulting in their separation from God. Isaiah 59:2 also tells us that sin separates us from God. At the same time, Romans 3:23's verb *sinned* comes from a Greek word meaning *to miss the mark* of God's perfect righteousness. This missing of the mark constitutes a continual separation from God's righteousness and thus from God Himself. Therefore, sin not only separates us from God but is also itself separation from God.

- *Sin is Transgression of God's Law*

I John 3:4 plainly defines sin as *the transgression of the law* (KJV). The literal Greek reads, *Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness*. This means that to commit sin is to do something that is contrary to God's law. It is lawlessness precisely because it is that which is in violation of the law. Obviously, then, violations of specific divine laws is sin (Matthew 5:21-28; I John 3:15).

- *Sin is Rebellion Against God*

When Adam and Eve sinned they rebelled against God because they rejected His authority (Genesis 3:5-6). Lucifer rebelled against God when He desired to take some of the worship owed to God and receive it for himself (Isaiah 14:14). Finally, when I John 3:4 defined sin as *lawlessness* (literal Greek), the apostle was declaring that sin is a life of living outside of God's law, which is an attitude of rebellion.

- *Sin is a Lack of Love*

In the context of the Ten Commandments (Romans 13:8-9), Paul says that *love is the fulfillment of the law* (v. 10). That means that anything that is done without love is sin, even if it is the right thing to do.

- *Sin is a Lack of Faith*

In Romans 14:23 the apostle Paul declares that *whatever is not from faith is sin*. This means that even when an action is not sinful in itself, if one takes such action apart from faith it is deemed sin. Therefore, he who doubts whether he should do something and does it anyway, it is considered sin for him, but not necessarily for anyone else.

- *Sin is Whatever Creates a Stumbling Block for Someone Else*

According to Romans 14:13, 20-21, any action that creates a stumbling block for someone else is *evil* (v. 20) and thus sin. A stumbling block is any action that causes someone else to stumble back into sin. Therefore, the Christian should take care not to use his or her freedom to do that which is lawful *if* it is likely to cause a fellow believer to slip back into a sinful habit. In other words, Christian freedom should consider the impact on others rather than merely doing whatever is otherwise lawful to do.

- *Sin is What We Do Not Do*

To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin (James 4:17). If a person does not do what he or she knows should be done, then God holds that person responsible for it as a sinful act. Thus, sin is also what a person does *not* do (a sin of omission) as well as what he does do (a sin of commission).

The Great Controversy Theme

All sin and wickedness can be explained in terms of what is sometimes called the great controversy. This is the controversy that began in heaven when Lucifer attempted to gain the worship of angels. His envy of God led him to slander Him and to eventually engage in open rebellion against Him, resulting in a war in heaven. When he lost that war and was expelled from heaven, Satan then proceeded to war against God's creation on earth. In other words, Satan hates mankind because he first hated God Himself. Therefore, he attempts to deceive and otherwise tempt mankind to sin in order to get back at God. In this way, humans are caught in this continuing great controversy between Satan and God.

The good news is that Satan's days as the ruler of this world are numbered. According to Revelation 12:10, Satan was cast out of heaven a second time: *Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.* The possibility of salvation for humans was assured at the cross, when Jesus died as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. This event was followed by the enthronement of Jesus on His throne; in this sense His kingdom had begun. This cannot be referring to the future literal kingdom of Christ on the earth because the kingdom spoken of here had already come (*have come*) in the apostle John's day. Christ's *power* is referring to His *authority* because that is the meaning of the Greek word translated as *power* in that verse. The result of the arrival of Christ's kingdom and authority at His ascension is given as the reason that *the accuser of our brethren is cast down.* Elsewhere in Scripture Satan is portrayed as the accuser of God's people (Job 1:8-12; Zechariah 3:1). In fact, this concept is reflected in the very name *Satan*, which means *adversary*.

Obviously, Satan had been cast down to the earth before the cross because he was the *old serpent* who tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of human history. Thus, Revelation 12:10 refers to a second casting down. This second casting out of Satan is referenced by Jesus Himself in John 12:31-33, where He speaks of his casting out in the immediate context of His death. But in what sense was Satan cast out at the cross? When Satan successfully caused Adam and Eve to sin, as representatives of this planet they effectively handed the earth over to Satan as his kingdom. As a result, Satan was called *the ruler of this world* (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Apparently this gave him limited access to heaven (Job 1:6-7; 2:1-2). But when Christ's authority and kingdom came as a direct result of the cross, He replaced Satan as the true ruler of this world. Therefore, Satan apparently has no more access to heaven at all. In this way, the cross represented a second casting out of Satan to the earth.

The good news concerning this second casting of Satan out of heaven is that his days are numbered. He will soon lose actual possession of the earth when Jesus returns in glory to defeat him and place His people under His own literal kingdom. The bad news is that because his days are numbered, Satan has *great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time* (Revelation 12:12).