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As an aspiring theologian, I wrote my first research paper on Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28—passages that Adventists traditionally have assumed refer to Satan and the origin of evil in heaven. Following the lead of higher-critical commentaries, I came to the unsettling conclusion that the passages in context refer to neither. Consequently, I felt that Adventists should no longer cite these assumed biblical supports for their understanding of how the Great Controversy began.

However, further study revealed that, until the rise of historical criti-

**Satan's
Celestial
Slander**

cism at the time of the Enlightenment, Christians in general interpreted Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 as Adventists do. And recently, I've found compelling exegetical evidence that Isaiah and Ezekiel were indeed referring to Satan in these passages.

While a student at our seminary,

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Jose Bertoluci wrote a dissertation that deals a devastating blow to the critical view that the two prophets describe only earthly, historical enemies of Israel. Titled “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,”¹ Bertoluci’s paper shows that each passage moves from the local, historical realm of earthly kings to the heavenly, supernatural realm in which Lucifer played his seditious role. I’ve uncovered further evidence supporting this conceptual shift in Ezekiel 28—from earthly “prince” (*nagid*, the king of Tyre, vss. 1-10) to cosmic “king” (*melek*, the supernatural ruler of Tyre, Satan himself, vss. 11-19). I’ve discovered also that this judgment upon the fallen cherub comes at the climactic center of the whole book.² Thus biblical evidence strongly supports the traditional exegesis: evil had its origin in Lucifer, the covering cherub.

Until a few months ago, however, one familiar Adventist concept of

the rise of the Great Controversy seemed without anything more than inferential biblical support. I refer to the allegations that before his fall Satan went among the angels slandering the character and government of God. In the books *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *The Great Controversy*, some 16 pages sound this theme, drawn from such information about Satan as his being called “a murderer from the beginning, . . . a liar” (John 8:44, RSV) and “the accuser of our brethren” (Rev. 12:10, RSV). But is there a more explicit biblical basis for the charge of “celestial slander”?

I believe there is. By serendipity I was examining a recent claim that much of the description of Satan in Ezekiel 28 is only symbolic because, it was argued, he is described as engaged in “an abundance of. . . trading” (vs. 16, NKJV), and obviously Lucifer was not literally a heavenly merchant. In the etymology of the Hebrew word for “trading,” I came to a startling and excit-



ing discovery. The verb *rakal*, from which this noun derives, literally means to “go about, from one to another (for trade or gossip).”³ The noun derivative *rakil*—found six times in the Old Testament, one being in Ezekiel 22:9—means “slanderer or talebearer.” The other noun derivative, *rkullah*—which is the word for “trading” in Ezekiel 28:16—appears only in this book, and all four occurrences deal with Tyre (26:12; 28:5, 16, 18).

Most modern versions translate *rkullah* as “traffic,” “trade” or “merchandise”—logical, if applied only to historical Tyre, a merchant city and the only context for the word. However, in reference to portrayals of the covering cherub in 28:16, 18, the notion of *trade* does not seem to fit so well. Noted critical exegete Walther Eichrod comments: “The description of the trespass is a little unexpected, since trade is here suddenly represented as the source of iniquity.”⁴

An answer that accommodates both “trade” and “slander” can be found, I believe, in a literary device known a “paranomasia”—a play on word meaning. Since the noun *rkullah* is derived from the verb that means to “go about, from one to another, either for trade or gossip/slander”—it appears likely that Ezekiel chose this rare Hebrew word (instead of the more common term for trade, *sahar*) because of its

potential double meaning. The historical Tyre clearly “went about, from one to another” for trade among the nations. Likewise the ultimate ruler of Tyre, Satan (vss. 11-19), in the heavenly “mountain of God” also went about, from one to another—not, however for trade, but rather for gossip or slander among the angels. Both the earthly and supernatural rulers were engaged in “trafficking,” one in merchandise and the other in slander against God.⁵

The immediate context of Ezekiel 28:16 portrays the fall of the Covering Cherub from perfection (vs. 15) to pride (vs. 17). In this setting, verses 16 and 18 track his ensuing steps to perdition. We can best translate verse 16: “By the abundance of your slander [*rkullah*] you [Satan] became filled with violence within, and you sinned. Therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God. . . .” With deft brush strokes, Ezekiel paints the picture of Lucifer’s going about slandering God, an early step toward the open and ultimately violent rebellion described so well by John the Revelator as “war in heaven” (Rev. 12:7, NIV). Ezekiel 28:18 reveals that after his expulsion from heaven, the fallen cherub continues his “iniquity of slander [*rkullah*]” against God. The verse also records the divine sentence against Satan: fiery destruction because of his “multitude of iniquities.”

Satan's seditious celestial slander against God early in the Great Controversy is not an extra-biblical Adventist addition to the story; rather, it is striking biblical truth! □

REFERENCES

¹Jose M. Bertoluci, "The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil," Th.D. dissertation, Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1985 (available from University Microfilms, University of Michigan, P.O. Box 1346, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346).

²Richard M. Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament," *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, Adventist Theological

Society Occasional Papers, vol. 1, Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson, eds. (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), pp. 118, 119.

³Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 940.

⁴Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), p. 394.

⁵Revelation 18 seems to capture this double nuance of Ezekiel's usage. In a passage clearly alluding to Ezekiel 28, the angel speaks of the "merchandise" of various material things in vss. 12, 13, but the list concludes by shifting to the spiritual realm: "merchandise of . . . souls of men" (KJV).

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