

6. Playing God (1Q 2021—Isaiah)

Biblical Material: Isaiah 13, Isaiah 14, Isaiah 24–27, Isa. 25:9.

Quotes

- Many a humble agnostic, worshipping an unknown God, is nearer to the Kingdom of God than is a theologian confident in his theology.... Many an “atheist” is rejecting false conceptions of God which he assumes to be Christian beliefs about Him. Many an agnostic has a reverence for the unknown God which puts to shame the pride of a superficial dogmatist. *Frederic Greeves*
- Irreconcilable to our grand Foe/ Who now triumphs and in th’ excess of joy/ Sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heav’n. *John Milton, Paradise Lost*
- Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God? *Epicurus*

Questions

How was Lucifer ‘playing God’? In what ways do we follow his example? How can we avoid falling in to such self-serving traps? What *are* the issues at the heart of the great controversy as revealed in this passage in Isaiah? How did Lucifer think to make himself like the Most High? In so doing, what misunderstandings did he reveal about the nature of God?

Bible summary

Isaiah 13 details God’s judgments on the Babylonians. Isaiah 14 begins by mocking of the king of Babylon, but morphs into a description of the fall of Lucifer. Isaiah 24–27 is a mixture of prophecies speaking of both God’s blessings and his punishments, conditional on the response of the different people. “At that time his people will say, ‘Look! This is our God; we have trusted in him and he has saved us! This is the Lord we have been looking for. Now we can be happy and celebrate the salvation he brings!’” Isa. 25:9 FBV.

Comment

This section of Isaiah (13:1) identifies Babylon as the enemy of Judah, and continues the great controversy theme with Lucifer under the symbol of the king of Babylon. With prophetic insight Isaiah also mentions the Medes as attacking Babylon (13:17). There is much again that speaks of wrath and anger, of violence and bloodshed. Why is this?

For all its pride, Babylon will be destroyed and become a desert place. For Judah (remaining after the loss of Israel to the Assyrians), this is a cause for rejoicing. Much of this message seems very nationalistic. Yet God puts his message of redemption into the historical and cultural context. However behind all this the whole of the universe-wide conflict is still playing out... In chapters 24-27 is a apocalyptic vision of disaster and destruction; yet the message is that God is still in control and will ultimately redeem those who choose him. (chapter 27 end).

But the most significant aspects are the insights into the origins of evil and the heart of the controversy that still rages. The king of Babylon is the image, yet there is much here that cannot refer to any human being. While the “taunt” has human aspects, the use of the words “morning star” (14:12) refers to the “light-bringer” Lucifer.

The question is of course, what light? Lucifer claimed to have a better way, more light, than God. His desire to be like the Most High revealed that in fact he had a very warped concept of the true nature and character of God. He obviously desired the power and ability, but not the true character of God. His desire was to “ascend,” when God in his humility is the one who comes down to all his creation. In Isaiah 14:13, 14 the word “I” occurs five times, illustrating the self-centered perspective that Lucifer had. That is why Ellen White writes that “Sin originated in self-seeking.” In looking to selfish benefit, in placing self first, in making decisions from a self-referenced perspective, Lucifer denied the fundamental principle of God’s selfless love.

Lucifer refused to admit any error; he continued in his rebellion against the only one who could save him from himself; and eventually placed himself beyond even God’s ability to help and to save. Lucifer is brought down by his own self-centered actions that lead to self-destruction.

In a recent compilation of ideas about God, most gave the problem of suffering and evil as the main reason they rejected God. He is either not there, or if he is, then he acts as a terribly cruel tyrant and consequently is not worth knowing anyway.

But there is another, far more comprehensive and valid answer. One that does justice to reason, and which puts God in a good light. The only way of understanding why.

Consider. You are God (hard, but try!) Rebellion has broken put in your Universe. The Number One of your created beings has decided to set himself up in opposition to you. You could easily dispose of this trouble-maker by blowing him away--literally!

Now if you are a tyrant, who rules by force and cruelty, such a violent act poses no problems. But if you are as God says he is—a God of love who wants trusting love from his children—then you must think again. For even if the Rebel deserves such a fate, how will your other created beings see your killing him? Difficult.

Especially when the Rebel has clearly stated that you are a vindictive and arbitrary dictator! How can you deal with such charges of being unloving, merciless and dictatorial and show yourself to be a truly loving Father? How can you make sure your created children worship you from love and not fear? Only by fully demonstrating your true character, and allowing the Rebel to demonstrate what he is really like—and what his way leads to. Lucifer, the Light-Bringer, chose to rebel against God, to set himself up above God (see Ezekiel 28:12-17 and Isaiah 14:12-15.). He accused God of everything evil—that he was harsh and legalistic, an unloving selfish Being who ruled the Universe through fear. That is, the Devil accused God of being just like the Devil!

To answer these charges God permitted the Devil to work out his evil program, so that everyone may know where such rebellion leads. So that all may see God as he truly is, God came to this world. Jesus revealed God, and showed us the way back to him. (see John 17:3; 14:9).

Ellen White comments

Sin originated in self-seeking. Lucifer, the covering cherub, desired to be first in heaven. He sought to gain control of heavenly beings, to draw them away from their Creator, and to win their homage to himself. Therefore he misrepresented God, attributing to Him the desire for self-exaltation. With his own evil characteristics he sought to invest the loving Creator. Thus he deceived angels. Thus he deceived men. {DA 21-22}

Little by little Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation (Ezekiel 28:17 and Isaiah 14:13, 14 quoted). Though all his glory was from God, this mighty angel came to regard it as pertaining to himself. Not content with his position, though honored above the heavenly host, he ventured to covet homage due alone to the Creator. {PP 35}