

THE ANGELS THAT SINNED

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Second Peter 2:4 speaks of how “*God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.*” Jude 6 refers to the same situation: “And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” Who are these angels that sinned, and what do we learn from their (bad) example?

The origin of the Devil?

There is a very widely held tradition that Satan was once a righteous and faithful angel of God who then led a rebellion in heaven, desiring to overthrow God, and was consequently expelled from heaven along with his followers, and they have been fighting against God ever since. A handful of Bible passages are frequently used to try to support this tradition, such as Isaiah 14:12-15, Ezekiel 28:11-19, Luke 10:18, and Revelation 12:7-9. However, *none* of these passages speak about the *origin* of Satan or teach about some alleged war that once occurred in heaven. Isaiah chapter 14 speaks specifically about the king of Babylon, while Ezekiel chapter 28 is specifically about the king of Tyre. Neither of those passages is about Satan. In Luke 10:18, Jesus said, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” Here, Jesus was speaking about the devastating impact the work of the seventy disciples he had sent out to preach had on the devil and his work. He was *not* speaking about the origin of Satan. Revelation 12:7-9 is not speaking about the origin of Satan either. According to the context, a war was fought in heaven *after* the world was made. We know this is not talking about where Satan originally came from, because: 1) Satan had been in heaven accusing *the brethren* day and night (Rev 12:10). There would have been no brethren to accuse before the creation. 2) Satan was “cast out into the earth.” The earth was already standing at the time of this war. Revelation 12:7-9 is describing the war that is being fought between good and evil *after* the creation. The Bible makes absolutely no mention of where Satan came from. There is no basis whatsoever for believing that either 2 Peter 2:4 or Jude 6 is speaking about the origin of Satan and his angels. We must conclude that God did not deem it important or necessary for us to know where Satan came from. It is pointless for us to speculate about it, and unwise for us to use our imagination.

What the angels did

The only clue in 2 Peter 2:4 about what these angels did is that they “sinned.” By definition, sin is transgression of God’s law (1 John 3:4). Therefore, these angels must have disobeyed something God commanded them. More information is found in Jude 6, where it says these angels “*kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation.*” The Greek word *arche* is translated “first estate” in this verse. The word *arche* means the beginner of something, or the chief time, place, or rank of something. These angels had a chief place, their

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(continued)

“own habitation,” where they had clearly been instructed to stay, but they left that place. *Where* exactly was that place? *Which* angels left that place? *Why* did they leave it, and where did they go instead? *When* did this happen? None of those questions are definitively answered in scripture.

Where the sinful angels are right now

The word for “hell” in 2 Peter 2:4 is the Greek word *Tartaros*. In Greek mythology, Tartarus was a place of torment in the underworld. However, we must only go by what is spoken in scripture to guide us in understanding what the actual place is, as everything we believe in the realm of religion must be based in God’s word (Rom 10:17). It so happens that 2 Peter 2:4 is the only place the word “Tartarus” is used in the Bible. Here, it describes the place where “the angels that sinned” are being held in chains of darkness awaiting the judgment. The place of torment where wicked *men* await the judgment is described in God’s word as a part of *Hades*, which is literally the “unseen” world. For example, the rich man in Luke 16:22-26 died and went to “hell” (the Greek word *Haidēs*), where he was tormented in flames (see also Luke 10:15 concerning the destiny of the wicked people of Capernaum). A great gulf separated his side from where Abraham and Lazarus were, a place of comfort referred to in scripture as *Paradise* (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4). No name is given to the torment side of Hades. It is possible that Tartarus is that same place. It is also possible that God has an entirely separate place where He is keeping these sinful angels “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). The Lord does not provide any further details, so believing that the angels who sinned are being held in a place called Tartarus until Judgment Day is as far as we can go with what we believe and/or say on that subject.

The lesson to be learned

A great principle is expressed in 2 Peter 2:9, that “the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.” Three specific examples are given in this passage to illustrate this vital point. God’s judgment of the ungodly via the Flood while He saved righteous Noah is one example (2 Pet 2:5). God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah while delivering righteous Lot is another example (2 Pet 2:6-8). What has happened (and will happen) to the sinful angels is the other example. In like manner, Jude 6 uses the same example of the angels who sinned as an example of the judgment that God is going to bring upon all the ungodly. We have been given all the details we need to know about these angles that sinned to remember the crucial lesson that God will punish *all* the ungodly on Judgment Day. If we serve Him faithfully in righteousness, we will be delivered on that great day!