

# Spiritual Beings

VIDEO NOTES COLLECTION

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# Intro to Spiritual Beings

## EPISODE 1

Many modern readers of the Bible think of God and humans as the main characters of the biblical story and spiritual beings as interesting (or weird!) background characters. But this is not how the biblical authors thought about spiritual beings. For them, spiritual beings played a significant role in their conception of the world and of humanity's role within it. In this video series, and in these study notes, we're going to take a deeper dive into the Bible's portrayal of the spiritual realm and its inhabitants. Be prepared for some surprises!

### SECTION 1.1

## Understanding spiritual beings in the Bible requires us to reorient ourselves to how the biblical authors saw the world, and to do that, we need to reconsider the story of Genesis chapter 1.

- a. Genesis 1:1 is an introductory statement that (most likely) acts as a summary of all of God's activity in Genesis 1:2-2:3, in which he organizes the heavens and earth into one harmonious whole.
- b. Genesis 1:2 describes the "pre-created" state of the cosmos, in Hebrew *tohu va-vohu*. This dense and carefully worded phrase prepares us for the program of six days to follow:

*In the beginning, God created the skies and the land.*

GENESIS 1:1

*Now the land was wild and waste, and darkness was over the face of the deep abyss, and the Spirit of God was fluttering over the waters.*

GENESIS 1:2

tohu	va-vohu
<i>"lacking form and purpose, unordered, desolate"</i>	<i>"empty, uninhabited, wasteland"</i>
<i>"[God] found Israel in a land of wilderness, and in tohu a howling wasteland." DEUTERONOMY 32:10</i> <i>"[God] pours contempt upon princes, making them wander in a tohu with no path." PSALM 107:40</i>	<i>See Isaiah 34:10-11 and Jeremiah 4:23-26, that describe an empty (vohu) and desolate cities with no inhabitants.</i>
SOLUTION: <i>Days 1-3 bring order to chaos</i>	SOLUTION: <i>Days 4-6 fill the created order with inhabitants</i>

## Days 1-3 are designed in a sequence of ascending order, and Days 4-6 go back and fill these realms with inhabitants.

DAY 1	THE ORDER OF TIME: <i>Light and dark/day and night</i>	DAY 4	<i>The lights that rule the day and night on God's behalf</i>
DAY 2	THE ORDER OF SPACE: <i>The waters above (the sky dome) and the waters below (the seas)</i>	DAY 5	<i>The the birds the fly by the waters above and the fish that swim in the waters below</i>
DAY 3	THE ORDER OF DRY LAND: <i>Dry land emerges from the waters, and vegetation and fruit-trees emerge from the dry land.</i>	DAY 6	<i>The animals on the dry land and the human images of God that rule the sea, land, and sky creatures.</i>

The following chart shows the paired relationships between Day 1-3 and 4-6

Wild (tohu) = unordered		Waste (vohu) = uninhabited	
DAY 1	<p>"Let there be light" GENESIS 1:3</p> <p>God <b>separates between light and dark:</b> light and darkness "day" and "night"</p>	DAY 4	<p>"Let there be lights..." GENESIS 1:14</p> <p>God creates the lights to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>separate between the day and night</b></li> <li>be "signs and appointed feasts, days and years"</li> </ol> <p>The big light and the small light are appointed to rule the day and night GENESIS 1:16</p>
DAY 2	<p>Waters above separated from waters below.</p>	DAY 5	<p>Creatures in waters below Creatures in waters above</p>
DAY 3	<p>Waters separated from dry land.</p> <p><u>"Let the land bring forth (אֲרָבֶת) plants and vegetation and seed producing plants and trees producing fruit"</u> GENESIS 1:12</p>	DAY 6	<p>Creatures on the land</p> <p><u>"Let the land bring forth (אֲרָבֶת) living beasts by their kinds"</u> 1:25</p> <p>"Let us create the human (ha-adam) in our image and as our likeness..."</p> <p>"And God blessed them and said..."fill the land and subdue it, and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the beasts on the land" GENESIS 1:26-28</p>
		<p>"And so were completed the skies and the land (Days 1-3) and all their hosts (Days 4-6) GENESIS 2:1</p>	

## Observations on the literary design of Days 1-6

1. Days 1 and 3 show God passing his authority to “separate between dark and light” (Gen 1:3) and delegating it to the celestial lights, so that they now “separate between day and night” (Gen 1:14). God also tells the great and small lights to “rule the day and night” (Gen 1:16-18). Whatever these lights are, they are now God’s delegated authorities in the sky-realm.
2. Days 4 and 6 begin and end the three days of God’s “filling” creation with inhabitants. Notice that only these two days show God appointing created beings to “rule” on his behalf.

DAY 4	DAY 6
<p><i>And God made the two great lights, and great light for ruling the day, and the small light for ruling the night, and also the stars.</i></p> <p>GENESIS 1:16</p>	<p><i>And God blessed [humanity] and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land and subdue it and rule the fish of the sea and the birds of the skies and all the beasts that moves on the land.”</i></p> <p>GENESIS 1:28</p>

3. Notice that in the conclusion of Genesis 2:1, both the celestial and terrestrial rulers are called the “host of the heavens” and the “host of the land” as a matching pair.
4. In Genesis 1:14, the lights in the sky are called “signs” (‘otot), which is the standard biblical word for symbol. A sign is some kind of physical entity that represents and points to some greater, more important reality.
  - a. Exodus 3:10-12: Moses’ experience standing on a mountain in the wilderness is a sign that all the Israelites will stand in this place to meet God on the same mountain.
5. This is foundational for understanding spiritual beings in the Bible. The lights in the sky are portrayed here as heavenly rulers that govern with authority delegated from God.
  - a. Their status and role are parallel to the human earthly rulers that govern over the land. The fact that the celestial rulers are called the host of the heavens (Gen 2:1) should inform all of our understandings of this phrase in the rest of the Bible.
  - b. The stars are the primary biblical image for spiritual beings, as creatures that share in God’s exalted status and authority over time and calendar.

SECTION 1.3

## God is depicted as dwelling “above the heavens,” so that the transcendent realm above is the divine throne.

*The Lord is in his holy temple;  
the Lord is on **his heavenly throne**.  
He observes everyone on earth;  
his eyes examine them.*

PSALM 11:4

*This is what the Lord says:  
“**Heaven is my throne,**  
and the earth is my footstool.  
Where is the house you will build for me?  
Where will my resting place be?  
Has not my hand made all these things,  
and so they came into being?”  
declares the Lord.*

ISAIAH 66:1-2

SECTION 1.4

## “The host of heaven” which, according to Genesis 1, are set in the “sky dome” (Gen 1:14-18), are the inhabitants of the divine throne room above the heavens.

1. This helps us understand why the biblical authors consistently used the language of stars to describe the spiritual beings. They are creatures that inhabit the heavenly realm and have authority under God.
2. The host of heaven as God’s heavenly throne room staff-team

*The Lord has established his **throne in heaven**,  
and his kingdom rules over all.  
Praise the Lord, you his **angels**,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
who obey his word.  
Praise the Lord, all his **hosts of heaven**,  
you his servants who do his will.*

PSALM 103:19-21

*Praise the Lord **from the heavens**;  
praise him **in the heights above**.  
Praise him, all his **angels**;  
praise him, all **his heavenly hosts**.  
Praise him, **sun and moon**;  
praise him, all you **shining stars**.*

PSALM 148:1B-3

*Micaiah said, “Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all **the host of heavens** standing by Him on His right and on His left.*

1 KINGS 22:19

*And **an angel of the Lord** suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened... And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of **the host of the heavens** praising God*

LUKE 2:9, 13

## Observations on the phrase “host of heaven”

- a. The lists of heavenly creatures in Psalms 103 and 148 are in the literary form of Hebrew parallelism, so that paired lines describe the same things from different points of view. The heavenly hosts are the sun, moon and stars.
- b. Notice how in Luke 2, the angel is associated with the light of God’s glory, and these two are associated with the host of heavens, who are depicted as God’s heavenly choir (as they are in Job 38:6-7 and Isaiah 6:1-3).

### 3. The sons of God

- a. These are parallel lines in Hebrew, so that the stars and the sons of God are not separate entities, but the same creature described from two perspectives.

*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the land?  
Tell me if you have understanding.  
Who set its measurements, since you know.  
Or who stretched a measuring line over it?  
...when the **stars of the morning** sang together,  
and all the **sons of God** shouted aloud.*

JOB 38:4-5, 7

## SECTION 1.5

# In Genesis 2, Eden is depicted as a “cosmic mountain,” a place where God’s heavenly space and humanity’s earthly space overlap in unity.

1. Genesis 2:10-14 depicts Eden as the highest place on the dry land with a single river flowing out of it to water all the land.

HINT: RIVERS FLOW DOWNHILL

*Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four head-waters.*

GENESIS 2:10

2. All of the later recollections of Eden in the Bible compare with high-temple-mountains.

*Blow the trumpet in **Zion**, sound the alarm on **my holy mountain**...before them [the army] the land is like the **garden of Eden**; behind them, a desert wasteland.*

JOEL 2:1-3

*You were in **Eden**, the **garden of God**...you were on **the holy mountain of God**.*

EZEKIEL 28:13-14

3. The later depictions of the restored Jerusalem use the ancient Eden garden as the archetype of the new creation, always situated on a high mountain.

*In the last days, **the mountain of Yahweh's temple** will be established as the **highest of the mountains**; it will be **exalted** above the hills, and all nations will stream into it.*

ISAIAH 2:2

*In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a **very high mountain**, on whose south side were buildings that looked like a city.*

EZEKIEL 40:2

*And he carried me away in the Spirit to **a mountain great and high**, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God*

REVELATION 21:9

*Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*

REVELATION 22:1

4. This idea is foundational for understanding the biblical storyline. God's plan is for humans to live and rule the world alongside him **in the heaven and earth place**.

## SECTION 1.6

# Psalm 8 shows us how later biblical authors understood God's purposes in placing humanity in the high Eden temple: to rule as God's image over all creation, including over the other spiritual beings.

1. This poem is a meditation on the creation story of Genesis 1:1-2:3. Notice how it depicts humans as being "lower" than **elohim**:
  - a. Some translations render this word "God." This is certainly possible, but given that verses 3-4 just contrasted humans made of dust with the "skies, the work of your fingers...the moon and stars," it makes much more sense to see the word **elohim** as referring to the host of heaven, that is, the spiritual beings appointed to rule.
2. Notice here that humans are appointed to rule "over the works of your hands," which in verse 6-8 refers to the animals. But also notice that this same phrase in verse 3, "the works of your fingers," refers to the host of heaven. When we come to verse 6, "you make him to rule over **the works of your hands, you have put all things under his feet**," we are meant to understand "all things" to refer not only to the following list of animals, but also to the preceding list of the heavenly host.
3. In Psalm 8, God (remarkably!) appoints humans to rule over **all of heaven and earth**.

*O Lord, our Lord,  
How majestic is Your name in all the earth,  
Who has displayed Your **splendor** above the heavens!  
From the mouth of infants and nursing babes  
You have established **bstrength**  
Because of Your adversaries,  
To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.  
When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;  
What is human that You take thought of him,  
And the son of human that You care for him?  
Yet You have made him a little lower than **elohim***

(ELOHIM = "SPIRITUAL BEINGS"),

*And You crown him with **glory and majesty!**  
You make him **to rule** over the works of Your hands:  
You have put **all things under his feet**,  
All sheep and oxen,  
And also the beasts of the field,  
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,  
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.  
O Lord, our Lord,  
How **majestic** is Your name in all the earth!*

PSALMS 8

## Because the garden of Eden is a place where heaven and earth overlap, it is no surprise that we find humans in the presence of God and the heavenly beings, like the Cherubim (Gen 3:22-24).

1. This gives us a greater perspective on the snake introduced in Genesis 3:1. It is called a “beast of the field,” but it strikes the readers as possessed of powers greater than that of a normal animal. It can talk (not normal!), and it claims to have some kind of knowledge of God’ heavenly decisions (“for God knows that in the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like **elohim**, knowing good and evil” Gen 3:5).
2. These narrative hints that the snake is a spiritual being are confirmed by the choice of the Hebrew word for snake.
  - a. Hebrew **nakhash** is one of many available words for snake. The author could have used many other words (**seraph**, **peten**, **tsiphoni**), but instead chose this one. Likely, for the following symbolic associations:
  - b. **nakhash** rhymes with the Hebrew words for “to practice divination, sorcery” (**nikhesh**, see Deuteronomy 18:10), a ritual often associated with astrology, child sacrifice, and the worship of stars and heavenly bodies (see 2 Kings 17:16-17; 21:5-6).
  - c. **nakhash** also rhymes with the Hebrew word for “bronze” (**nekhoshet**) the main precious metal used for shiny reflections. Spiritual beings are often described as shining like **bronze**: the cherubim (Ezekiel 1:7) and angels (Ezekiel 40:3, Daniel 10:6).
3. As the biblical story develops, we will discover that this snake is connected to a rebel spiritual being whose downfall is discussed cryptically in later biblical texts (Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28).

*They forsook all the commandments of the Lord their God and made for themselves molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah and **worshiped all the host of heaven** and served Baal. Then they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and **practiced divination and enchantments (nakhash)**, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him.*

2 KINGS 17:16-17

### EPISODE 1 END

The story of humanity’s exile from the garden-temple is a descent from their intended home in a united heaven and earth. Genesis 3-11 depicts an increasingly corrupted world that results from the combined rebellion of human and spiritual beings. We will explore this in episodes three and six of our Spiritual Beings series, The Divine Council and The Satan and Demons.

# Elohim

## EPISODE 2

The Hebrew word that is translated as “God” in the Old Testament is **elohim** and **theos** in the Greek New Testament. These words have different nuances than our modern vocabulary for God/god, so unfortunately, we often misunderstand what the Bible is telling us about spiritual beings. These study notes are primarily a Hebrew and Greek word study about the biblical vocabulary for god/God.

### SECTION 2.1

## Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning **elohim** created the skies and the land.”

1. The Hebrew word **elohim** is the most common Hebrew term for god/deity, but it is not the only word! Rather, it is a lengthened, plural form of the ancient semitic word for deity, which is **el**. This semitic word is not a name, but a title that describes a type of being, namely, an inhabitant of the spiritual realm. The word occurs in multiple forms in biblical Hebrew.

a. “**el**” (אל occurs some 235x), “deity, divine being”

i. The noun likely derives from a proto-semitic verb **'uwl** (אול), meaning “to be strong.” (see Koehler-Baumgartner, Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament)

ii. Canaanite texts use the word **el** to refer to a distinct deity who resides on the sacred mountain north of Canaan and is the chief of the other gods and master of the pantheon. He also bears the title **malk**, or king. In the Ugaritic texts (northern Canaanite), **el** is depicted as an aged deity with a gray beard and called “father of humanity” ('ab 'adam).

iii. This short form can have a plural ending **elim**, meaning deities in the Hebrew Bible. “Sons of **elim**” refers to members of the gods/pantheon. See Psalm 29:1; 89:7 referring to the divine council.

vi. The word **el** referred to a chief deity in Canaanite religion, and it seems that the Israelites adopted this term to describe Yahweh, the **el** they came to know in the story of Abraham, the Exodus, and at Mount Sinai. This idea is attested in numerous phrases that preserve an old use of **'el** as a proper name. SEE TABLE

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*“El, elohe Israel” - “El, the god of Israel”*  
GENESIS 33:20

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*“Ha’el elohe abika” - “El, the god of your father”*  
GENESIS 46:3

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*El olam - El of eternity*  
GENESIS 21:33

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*‘El elyon - El most high*  
GENESIS 14:18-22

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*Yahweh eloheka ‘el qanna’ - “Yahweh your God is El of passion”*  
EXODUS 20:5

- b. An alternate short form: **eloah** (אלה used 57x in biblical Hebrew) = “deity, divine being”: This is a composite word, made up of two syllables: **el** + **ah**, which passed into Arabic as **Allah**.
  - i. **eloah** is a title for Yahweh, used most frequently in Job (41x), along with **El** (55x) and **Shadday** (“powerful one” 31x).
  - ii. **eloah** is synonymous with **elohim** and other divine titles in the Hebrew Bible. They all refer to Yahweh most often.

Notice the parallel between Psalm 18:32 “Who is **eloah** but Yahweh,” and 2 Samuel 22:32, “Who is **el** but Yahweh.”

- c. The long forms, **elohim** = **eloah** + the plural ending **-im**, used around 2,750x in the Hebrew Bible. This is by far the most common term for Yahweh in the Old Testament.
2. The form **elohim** is technically plural (the **-im** is the normal plural ending for nouns) and can be used (1) in the plural sense for “gods” and also (2) to refer to the one God of Israel.

- a. The word’s plural meaning refers to the deities worshiped by the nations around Israel. SEE TABLE 2A
- b. The plural noun **elohim** can also have a singular meaning, referring to a deity worshipped by Israel’s neighbors. SEE TABLE 2B
- c. The “plural of majesty” is a grammatical term used by Hebrew scholars to describe how a singular entity that is intense or large can be referred to with a plural noun. See Paul Jouon & T. Muraoka, A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew, section 136d.
  - i. “Wisdom (חכמות = lit. “wisdoms”) calls out (singular verb) in the streets” (Proverbs 1:20) and “Wisdom(s) builds her house” (Proverbs 9:1).
- d. This use of the plural **elohim** to refer to one particular deity is also found in other Canaanite and Mesopotamian texts, as in the Amarna letters, where Pharaoh is addressed by his Canaanite subjects as “my gods.” See the Dictionary of Demons and Deities in the Bible, entry “**elohim**” for references.

**Table 2A**

*The 1st commandment: “You shall have no other **elohim** before me”*  
EXODUS 20:3

*“the **elohim** of Egypt.”*  
EXODUS 12:12

**Table 2B**

*Can refer to the deity of another nation: “Chemosh the **elohim** of Moab”*  
1 KINGS 11: 33

***elohim** created (3rd masc. Singular verb), usually refers to Yahweh, the God of Israel.*  
GENESIS 1:1

3. **The Point:** The Hebrew word **elohim** can refer to spiritual beings in addition to the one **elohim** worshipped by Israel.

- a. The patron deities of other nations:

<i>“the <b>elohim</b> of Egypt”</i>	<i>“Foreign <b>elohim</b>” = gods of other nations (“Manasseh removed the foreign <b>elohim</b>”)</i>	<i>The Israelites sacrificed to <b>demons</b> that are not <b>eloah, elohim</b> that they had not previously known.</i>
EXODUS 12:12	2 CHRONICLES 33:15	DEUTERONOMY 32:17

- b. 1 Samuel 28:12-13: Saul has a spirit-medium conjure up the presence of the deceased Samuel. “And the woman saw Samuel, and she cried out...and said, ‘I see a elohim rising up from the ground.’”
- i. This refers to a human who exists apart from their body. This is not saying Samuel is “God” or a “god.” Rather, the word elohim apparently refers to the mode of existence: a member of the non-physical, spirit realm.
- c. The later biblical authors developed more specific vocabulary to talk about these beings to more clearly distinguish between them as elohim and the one elohim: Angel, demon, spirits, etc...

## SECTION 2.2

### The Implications of this word study

1. Yahweh is an **elohim**, but not the only elohim (spiritual being). He is the most powerful and authoritative, and he alone is the creator of all things, including the other **elohim**.

“Yahweh is an elohim, but no other elohim is Yahweh. Elohim is a place-of-residence term. The word tells you what the proper domain is for that being. By nature, the God of Israel, the many elohim of God’s council, demons, angels, the departed human dead like Samuel, they are part of a spiritual domain, that’s related to, but distinct from the physical, embodied domain. An elohim is by definition and by nature a disembodied entity, so the word can refer to many different beings who inhabit that realm.”

CITED FROM A LOGOS MOBILE-ED CLASS, “THE JEWISH TRINITY: HOW THE OLD TESTAMENT REVEALS THE GODHEAD.”

2. When Paul says that there “is no such thing as an idol,” he is saying that the statue itself is not an **elohim** (or, in Greek, a **theos**). But he is not denying that there are in fact other spiritual beings that people worship, and to describe them he uses the term **theos**, gods.

*For Yahweh your **elohim**, he is the **elohim of elohim**, and the lord of lords, the great and mighty and awesome.*

DEUTERONOMY 10:17

*They [the Israelites] sacrificed to demons that are not **eloah** **elohim** that they had not previously known.*

DEUTERONOMY 32:17

*Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that **there is no such thing as an idol in the world**, and that **there is no God but one**. For even if **there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords**, yet **for us there is but one God**, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.*

1 CORINTHIANS 8:4-6

## SECTION 2.3

### The challenge of the terms monotheism and polytheism.

1. This biblical portrait of a populated spiritual universe is sometimes thought to contradict the concept of monotheism, the belief that there is only one God. This problem is caused by our English word G/god, which has two meanings.

- a. “**God**” with a capital “g” refers to the one, all-powerful creator deity referred to in the Abrahamic religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).
  - b. “**god**” with a lower case “g” refers to a deity of lesser status or power.
2. The real problem is that English speakers use one word (G/god) to refer to both of these spiritual beings. While the distinction between the Creator God and all other gods is maintained by the spelling convention of using capital or lowercase letters, it can still cause confusion.
  3. For the biblical authors, there is no tension in calling Yahweh the Creator an **elohim** while also using that word to describe the spiritual beings that were created by Yahweh. They are all elohim, that is, inhabitants of the spiritual realm.
  4. Some people mistake the biblical idea that there are many **elohim** with the concept of “Polytheism.” This is an easy mistake, but it’s incorrect. In academic religious studies, polytheism refers to religious worldviews that believe that the spiritual realm of many deities rival one another for status and power (think of the classic pantheon of Greek gods on Mount Olympus). This is not at all the same as biblical monotheism, which claims that only Yahweh is creator and ruler of all things, including the other elohim.

*You, Yahweh, are Most High (elyon) over all the land,  
You are exalted above all **elohim**.*

PSALM 97:9

SECTION 2.4

## What about “no other god” passages of the Bible?

1. There is a common phrase in the Hebrew Bible where God says “there is none besides me” or “no God but me.”

NIV	Literal Hebrew
<p><i>You were shown these things so that you might know that <b>the LORD is God; besides him there is no other.</b></i></p> <p>DEUTERONOMY 4:35</p>	<p><i>...know that Yahweh, he is the <b>elohim, there is not another except for him.</b></i></p>
<p><i>Know and take to heart today, that <b>the LORD is God</b> in heaven above and on earth below. <b>There is no other.</b></i></p> <p>DEUTERONOMY 4:39</p>	<p><i>...Yahweh is the <b>elohim</b> in heaven above and on earth below, <b>not another.</b></i></p>

### Observations on “no other gods” passages of the Bible

- a. In these passages, elohim has the Hebrew word “the” attached (ha-elohim), which means the claim being made is that Yahweh alone is **the** chief God, not that Yahweh is the only elohim that exists.

b. All of these “no other god” passages are found in contexts that explicitly assert the existence of other spiritual beings.

*“And not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all **the host of heaven**, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, **those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.**”*

DEUTERONOMY 4:19

c. The phrase “no other” or “there is no other” is not referring to existence, but to comparability within a category.

*The identical phrase is used in Isaiah 47, to describe the arrogance of the leaders of Babylon.*

*You [Babylon] say to yourself:*

**“I am, and there is no one besides me”**

ISAIAH 47:8

*The claim is not “no other ancient cities exist.” Rather, the claim is “no other ancient cities **compare with the status and power** of Babylon”*

d. “A close reading of these passages in Deuteronomy and Isaiah shows... that the denials are not claiming that other **אֱלֹהִים** (elohim) do not exist, but that Yahweh’s has unique and incomparable qualities in relation to other gods: Yahweh’s pre-existence, his role as creator of all things, including other elohim, his ability to save, and national deliverance. The focus is on Yahweh’s incomparable status and the impotence of the other gods. It would be empty praise to compare Yahweh to beings that did not exist. The biblical authors assume they do exist, but that they are “nothing” compared to Yahweh.”

MICHAEL HEISER, “THE DIVINE COUNCIL,” THE LEXHAM BIBLE DICTIONARY

## SECTION 2.5

### What about biblical texts that deny the reality of idol-gods?

1. There are many biblical texts that mock the ancient practice of worshiping gods that are represented by idols. In these texts, the authors claim that these statues are “nothing.”
2. For similar texts see Psalm 135:15-18; Jeremiah 10:1-6; Isaiah 44:9-20
3. These passages are sarcastically lampooning idol statues as such. They’re mocking the concept that an inanimate statue could be confused for a spiritual being that is very real. These texts are not an argument about the non-existence of other spiritual beings.

*Our **elohim** is in the heavens*

*He does whatever He pleases.*

*Their idols are silver and gold*

*The work of man’s hands.*

*They have mouths, but they cannot speak;*

*They have eyes, but they cannot see;*

*They have ears, but they cannot hear;*

*They have noses, but they cannot smell;*

*They have hands, but they cannot feel;*

*They have feet, but they cannot walk;*

*They cannot make a sound with their throat.*

*Those who make them will become like them,*

*Everyone who trusts in them.*

PSALM 115

4. The distinction between idol-gods and spiritual beings is made explicit in Paul's warnings to the Corinthians that they stop attending ritual meals at idol temples.

*Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there **an idol is nothing in the world**, and that there is no God but one.*

*For **even if there are gods** spoken of, whether in heaven or on earth, as **indeed there are many gods***

***and many lords**, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.*

1 CORINTHIANS 8:4-6

## Observations on 1 Corinthians 8:4-6

- a. Paul's claim here is that idol-statues are not spiritual beings (he uses the term **theos** the Greek word for "deity"). But he quickly qualifies what he means, by saying that, of course, there are many spiritual beings.
- b. Paul's concern is that in going to the local idol temples, the people will unwittingly end up under the influence of corrupt spiritual powers, as he says later in 1 Corinthians 10.

*Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to **demons, not to God**, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.*

1 CORINTHIANS 10:19-20

## Observations on 1 Corinthians 10:19-20

- a. Paul uses the Greek word DAIMONION to refer to evil spiritual beings. This word was a normal term to refer to lower-level deities and spiritual beings. Paul is very clear that to deny the reality of idol-gods is not the same as denying the existence of other gods, that is, other spiritual beings.

1. The words for deity in the Bible (Hebrew **elohim** / Greek **theos**) are category titles that can refer to any being that exists in the spiritual realm. This is why they can be used to refer to the one God of Israel (God) and also the deities worshiped by other nations (gods).
2. The biblical authors do, however, use this title in ways similar to how we use proper names. Just as siblings can use the title Mom to refer to their particular mom, the biblical authors will often use the word **elohim** to refer to Yahweh. They can do so because the biblical texts were written by, to, and for tight-knit religious communities that shared a common understanding of who these words referred to.
3. The biblical authors do believe that there is only one, chief **elohim/theos** who is revealed in the story of Israel's scriptures and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. That **elohim** is named Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible and called Father in the New Testament.
4. The biblical authors do not portray the other spiritual beings as rivals to the one, Creator God. Rather, they exist in a realm that is parallel to the earthly realm, where some are loyal and others have become rebels. We will explore the concept of spiritual rebels later in our Spiritual Beings series, in episodes four and six, The Divine Council and The Satan and Demons.

# The Divine Council

## EPISODE 3

When many people think of spiritual beings in the Bible, it's usually God and angels, Satan and demons, that come to mind. The biblical authors, however, have a much more nuanced conception of the spiritual realm, which is matched by a wide vocabulary for talking about spiritual beings. In the study notes for episode two of the Spiritual Beings series, we discovered that the biblical words *elohim* and *theos* can refer to spiritual beings that are not the one Creator God. So who are these other *elohim*, and what role do they play in the biblical story?

### SECTION 3.1

**The biblical authors believed that heaven and earth are parallel realities, each inhabited by creatures that have been delegated with God's blessing to rule and oversee that realm.**

1. In the heavens, the celestial lights are appointed to "rule" day and night, that is, the order of time. (Genesis 1:14-18)
2. On the land, humans are appointed as God's image to rule over land, sea, and air creatures. (Genesis 1:26-30)
3. These creatures are called "the host of heaven" and "the host of the land." (Genesis 2:1)

### SECTION 3.2

**This portrait of the ordered world is fundamental to understanding the biblical storyline, and it prepares us for an entire tier of creatures in the spiritual realm that we will meet at many points in the Bible.**

This crew goes by many titles, but in every appearance, their role in the heavenly realm is similar. They are God's "staff-team," his agents of delegated authority that mirror God's earthly staff-team, the humans. These spiritual beings are portrayed as honoring the one who created and rules them, and they also are invited by God to participate in making decisions and carrying them out.

1. Psalm 89:5-7 contains the most diverse collection of titles.

*The heavens will praise Your wonders, Yahweh;  
Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the **holy ones**.*

*For who in the skies is comparable to Yahweh?  
Who among the **sons of God** is like Yahweh,*

*A God greatly feared in the **council of the holy ones**,  
And awesome above all those who are around Him?*

*Yahweh God **of hosts**, who is like You, mighty Yahweh?  
Your faithfulness also surrounds You.*

PSALM 89:5-7

2. Sons of God

**Sons of God**, give to Yahweh,  
give to Yahweh honor and power.

Give to Yahweh the honor due his  
name,  
worship Yahweh in the splendor of  
holiness

PSALM 29:1-2

Now, one day when **the sons of God**  
came to present themselves before the  
Lord, and the satan also came among  
them. The Lord said to the satan, "From  
where do you come?" Then Satan an-  
swered the Lord and said, "From roaming  
about on the earth and walking around  
on it."

JOB 1:6-7

Where were you when I laid the founda-  
tions of the land?

Tell me if you have understanding.

Who set its measurements, since you  
know.

Or who stretched a measuring line  
over it?

...when the **stars of the morning** sang  
together,

and all the **sons of God** shouted aloud.

JOB 38:4-5, 7

3. The host of heaven

Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw  
the Lord sitting on His throne, and all **the host of heaven**  
**standing by Him on His right and on His left.**

The Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at

Ramoth-gilead?' And one said this while another said that. Then  
**a spirit** came forward and stood before the Lord and said, 'I will  
entice him.' The Lord said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go  
out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.'  
Then He said, 'You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and  
do so.'

1 KINGS 22:19-22

4. The council

"But who has stood in the **council of Yahweh**, that he  
should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His  
word and listened?"

"I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not  
speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood  
in My council, then they would have announced My  
words to My people, and would have turned them back  
from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds."

JEREMIAH 23:18, 23

God takes his stand in the **divine council**,  
In the midst of elohim he renders justice.

PSALM 82:1

"Were you the first man to be born,  
or were you brought forth before the hills?

Have you listened in **the divine council**?  
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?"

JOB 15:7-8

## Observations on the phrase “The council”

In both of these Jeremiah and Job passages, the focus is on humans who occasionally get glimpses into God’s heavenly throne room to overhear what God is discussing with his council. In the book of Job, these words are ironic because while Job of course does not have access to the divine council to know why he is suffering, the reader actually does because of Job chs. 1-2.

### SECTION 3.3

**When all of these texts are read together, a fairly clear picture emerges. God is consistently depicted on his heavenly throne, surrounded by his staff-team who participate in discussing and then carrying out God’s plans.**

1. The divine throne room is the place from which Yahweh governs the world with his heavenly council, the place where “Yahweh’s decrees directing the human community and the divine world are set forth and through whom they are communicated or enacted.” MICHAEL HEISER, “DIVINE COUNCIL,” IN DICTIONARY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: PROPHETS, P. 163
2. This concept helps us to make sense of one popular and puzzling passage in Isaiah 6.

*In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said,*

*“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts,  
The whole earth is the fullness of His glory.”*

*And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.... Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”*

ISAIAH 6:1-4, 8

3. Notice that Isaiah is having a vision of the divine throne room and sees Yahweh exalted, surrounded by spiritual beings. Then in verse 8, Yahweh speaks to represent both himself (“whom shall **I** send?”) and the divine council (“who will go for **us**?”)

## In all of these texts we have a positive portrayal of the divine council functioning in their ideal role, and notice that it's parallel to the human realm.

God's representatives honor their creator and King and carry out his purposes in heaven and earth. But the biblical story is driven by a plot conflict about a rebellion against God in both the heavenly and earthly realms. There are actually three significant waves to the rebellion explored in Genesis chs. 1-11. Here they are in summary form:

### The heavenly and earthly rebellions of Genesis 1-11

1. A rebel divine council member lures God's images into a rebellion (Genesis 2-4)
2. More divine council members rebel and try to restore eternal life to humans by impregnating women. (Genesis 6)
3. More divine council members rebel and lure the empire of Babylon into a rebellion, giving birth to the scattered nations who worship idol-gods. (Genesis 10-11)

#### NOTE

In episode three of the Spiritual Beings series, we are exploring the third rebellion because it's the least familiar to most Bible readers. We will explore the first and second rebellions in episode six, The Satan and Demons.

## The Third Rebellion of the Divine Council: Genesis 10-11

1. After Noah's sons and their wives get off the ark, we're told that they divide and go their own ways, each becoming a network of people groups that develop their own language.

*These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood. The sons of Japheth...*

*From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, **each with his own language**, by their clans, in their nations. The sons of Ham...*

*These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, **their languages**, their lands, and their nations. To Shem also, the father of all*

*the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born.*

*The sons of Shem...*

*To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, **for in his days the land was divided** (Hebrew: **palegu**) and his brother's name was Joktan.*

*These are the sons of Shem, by their clans, **their languages**, their lands, and their nations.*

GENESIS 10:1-31

## Observations on Genesis 10

- a. The three sons of Noah are listed along with their many descendants who make up the 70 nations in this list. But notice that each list ends with the phrase “each with their own language” (verses 5, 20, 31). This story assumes that the nations are already divided up with their own languages. However, this story has not been told yet, because it is found in the next chapter, Genesis 11!
  - b. The division of the descendants of Noah is connected to the obscure comment in 10:25 that in the days of Peleg “the land was divided.” Whatever it was that separated the nations into languages is called a “division” in this passage. The division happens in the days of Peleg (which means “division” in Hebrew). The reader is left to ponder this until one discovers the backstory in Genesis 11, which is about this very thing: the scattering and division of the nations.
  - c. This leads to the obvious conclusion that Genesis 10-11 are not arranged in chronological order, but instead have been placed in reverse order for a thematic reason: The author wants to present the rebellion at Babylon.
2. The earthly dimension to the rebellion at Babylon

*Now the whole land used the same language and the same words. It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.*

*They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.” And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.*

*They said, “Come, **let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into the heavens, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.**”*

*The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.*

*The Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. “Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”*

*So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore its name was called aBabel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.*

GENESIS 11:1-9

## Observations on Genesis 11

- a. After being exiled from Eden, humanity was forced to go to the east (Genesis 3:24), and so too Cain was exiled further east after murdering his brother (Genesis 4:16). So too here, after surviving the flood, humanity journeys east and does the opposite of what God told Noah after the flood: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land” (Genesis 9:1). Instead of spreading out and filling the land, Noah’s descendants do the opposite. They band together in an effort to avoid dispersing.

- b. The city and tower that they are building is not an average building project. The ancient Israelites knew exactly what Babylonian towers were all about. They are ziggurat temples, which are symbolic buildings designed to be a man-made cosmic mountains. Temples were the place where the divine and human realms overlapped. This is why they say, “let its top be in the heavens.” This story presents Babylon as a human attempt to reverse humanity’s exile from Eden. Babylon is an anti-Eden, where humans try to ascend to the skies and assert themselves over God’s wisdom and authority.
  - c. This is why God scatters them, resulting in the diverse languages and 70 scattered nations of Genesis 10. This story is clearly focused on the human actors in this story, but the drama of Babylon’s rebellion does not end there.
3. Moses recalls the scattering of Babylon as a spiritual rebellion alongside the human rebellion. Deuteronomy 4 and 32.

*“Don’t act corruptly and make an image for yourselves in the form of any figure... And don’t lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. But the Lord has taken you...to be a people for His own possession, as today.*

DEUTERONOMY 4:16-20

*Remember the days of old,  
 Consider the years of all generations.  
 Ask your father, and he will inform you,  
 Your elders, and they will tell you.  
 When the **Most High (Yahweh) allotted the nations,**  
 and set the divisions for the sons of humanity  
 He fixed the territories of peoples  
 According to the number of **sons of God (sons of elohim)**  
**For Yahweh’s portion is his people**  
 Jacob his own allotment*

DEUTERONOMY 32:8-9

## Observations on Deuteronomy 4 and 32

- a. In Deuteronomy 4, Moses warns the Israelites who are going into the land of Canaan that the nations around them worship animal-gods as well as the host of heaven. And notice his remark: God has “allotted” these spiritual beings to the nations, so that the nations worship and serve them, not the Creator God. In contrast to the nations, is Israel, whom Yahweh redeemed in the Exodus story. This raises the question: When did the nations get handed over to spiritual beings to worship them? Welcome to Deuteronomy 32!
- b. In Deuteronomy 32, Moses recalls an event from the distant past, when Yahweh “alloted” the nations. This is a clear reference to Genesis 10-11, the list of 70 nations, and the scattering of Babylon. Moses says that this is when Yahweh alloted the 70 nations “according to the number of the sons of God,” while he kept Israel for himself as his own special portion.

- c. Deuteronomy 32 invites us to link these two stories together and view the rebellion and scattering at Babylon as a joint human and spiritual rebellion. Humans wanted to build their own pseudo-Eden mountain where they'd have access to eternal life, and now we learn that there were some sons of God involved as well, who, according to Deuteronomy 4, are now being worshiped by the nations.
- d. This portrait of the scattered nations serving other gods and rebel spiritual beings is introduced here in Deuteronomy 4 and 32, and it formed the basis for a whole network of passages in the prophets and Psalms that develop all of these ideas further.

SECTION 3.6

## When the prophets after Moses look back to Babylon, they also see more to Genesis 11 than just human rebellion. They compare this rebellion of human empires to a more ancient spiritual rebellion linked with rebel spiritual beings.

- 1. Isaiah 13-14: These chapters contain oracles against Babylon that transcend the horizon of Isaiah's own day, when Babylon greatly reduced in size and influence. That's because Isaiah is looking at the bigger "Babylon" of biblical imagery, which is an image for any and all violent nations that don't acknowledge Yahweh.
- 2. When Isaiah addresses the "king" of this Babylon, he uses cosmic poetry to describe his arrogance and presumption.

*Your pomp and the music of your harps  
Have been brought down to Sheol;*

*Maggots are spread out as your bed beneath you  
And worms are your covering.*

*How you have fallen from the heavens,  
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!*

*You have been cut down to the earth,  
You who have weakened the nations!*

*But you said in your heart,  
"I will ascend to heaven;*

*I will **raise my throne above the stars of God,**  
And I will sit on the mount of assembly*

*In the far reaches of the north,  
**I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;**  
I will make myself like the Most High."*

*Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol,  
To the recesses of the pit.*

ISAIAH 14:11-15

### Observations on Isaiah 13-14

- a. Behind the earthly empire of Babylon, Isaiah discerns a darker and more mysterious spiritual rebel that animates the earthly kingdom. This spiritual rebel wanted to ascend to God's status and authority instead of living under it.

- b. Notice that this poetic description of a creature attempting to ascend to the heavens and usurp God's authority ("sit on the mount of assembly") maps precisely onto the story of the tower of Babylon that was made to "have its head in the heavens" (Genesis 11:4). This poem is portraying the spiritual dimension of the human-focused story in Genesis 11. It's about one of the "sons of God" who rebels, tries to usurp God's authority, and is cast down. While this sounds a lot like Genesis 3, notice that this story is clearly recalling Genesis 11.

3. Psalm 82: God's response to the rebellion of the sons of God

### Observations on Psalm 82

- a. Psalms 82 is addressing the spiritual rebels whose story is told in Genesis 3, 6, and 11. For the moment, let's simply notice that the scene depicts God confronting rebel *elohim* who are responsible for injustice towards the poor and vulnerable. This is a classic prophetic accusation that the worship of idol gods leads to injustice because these gods don't demand justice or holiness from their worshippers (see Amos 1-6).
- b. This poem depicts Yahweh as confronting the rebels spiritual beings and assigning them to destruction and death: "You will die like humans." (This is like a hyperlink to Genesis 6:3, where God assigns the sons of God to a mortal fate). "And you will fall like one of the princes." (This is a hyperlink to Genesis 3:14-15, the humiliation and exile of the snake to dust and death).
- c. Notice how verse 8 provides a climactic resolution to Genesis 11. The scattering of Babylon is when God handed over the nations to worship other *elohim*. In Psalm 82, we learn that these *elohim* led the nations into injustice and death, and so now the solution is for God to do for all nations what he did for Israel: to rescue them from slavery to human and earthly rebels and "possess all the nations."

**God takes His stand in the divine council;**  
*In the midst of **elohim** he renders judgment*

*"How long will you judge unjustly  
 And show partiality to the wicked?"*

*Vindicate the weak and fatherless;  
 Do justice to the afflicted and destitute.*

*Rescue the weak and needy;  
 Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked."*

*They do not know nor do they understand;  
 They walk about in darkness;*

*All the foundations of the earth are shaken.  
 I said, "You are **elohim**,*

*And all of you are **sons of the Most High.**  
 "Nevertheless you will die like humans*

*And fall like one of the princes."  
 Arise, O God, judge the earth!*

*For it is You who possesses all the nations.*

PSALM 82

NOTE

Jesus refers to Psalm 82 in John 10:34-36 in a way that has led some people to think that the *elohim* in Psalm 82 are human leaders of Israel. But Jesus uses Psalm 82 to make the opposite point. He has just claimed that he and his heavenly Father are one (John 10:30), which angers the Jewish leaders who want to kill him for blasphemy. Jesus responds by saying that in their own scriptures in Psalm 82, God refers to members of the divine council as sons of God and as *elohim*, that is, spiritual beings. Jesus then says, "if he called them 'gods' (Greek. *theos*), what about the one whom

the Father set apart and sent into the world? Do you say, 'he blasphemes' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?'" (John 10:34-36). Jesus' point is that he shares in the very identity and status of the one God above the divine council. This idea isn't blasphemous for readers of the Bible. The very existence of the divine council as sons of *elohim* make it reasonable that there would be one particular Son of God who is set apart from them and who rules as God's ultimate Son. So then, Jesus' use of Psalm 82 affirms that this poem is about the divine council who rebelled.

## The prophetic hope is the downfall of human and spiritual rebels.

1. There are numerous texts in the Old Testament prophets that view the conflict among empires in the human realm as a mirror of conflict among their heavenly counterparts. Daniel 10 is a great example.

After Daniel has prayed for God's mercy upon the remnant of Israel, Daniel is visited by an angelic messenger in a dream/vision.

*I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult.*

*He said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding*

*this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. "But **the prince of the kingdom of Persia** was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, **Michael, one of the chief princes**, came to help me, for I had been left there with **the kings of Persia**.*

*Then he said, "Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against **the prince of Persia**; so I am going forth, and behold, **the prince of Greece** is about to come. "However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except **Michael your prince***

DANIEL 10:5-6, 11-13, 20-21

### Observations on Daniel 10

- a. The message given to Daniel reveals the biblical heaven and earth worldview, where the empires of our world are each given over to the authority of a spiritual rebel who can be called the "prince" of that nation. When God is at work to redeem and rescue his people from among these nations, the earthly conflict is a mirror of a heavenly one as well.
- b. The empire of Babylon lay in ruins by this point in Daniel, so that the empires of Persia and Greece are ruling in the present and near future.
- c. In the larger scope of the entire book of Daniel, chapter 7 depicted these empires and their heavenly representatives as mutant beasts that will be toppled when God's Kingdom is established forever.

*So it will happen in that day,*

*That the Lord will punish **the host of heaven on high,**  
And **the kings of the earth on earth.***

*They will be gathered together  
Like prisoners in the dungeon,*

*And will be confined in prison;  
And after many days they will be punished.*

*Then the **moon** will be abashed and the **sun** ashamed,  
For the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,  
And His glory will be before His elders.*

ISAIAH 24:21-23

## Observations on Isaiah 24

This poem is a depiction of the culmination of history, the great Day of Yahweh in Isaiah. Notice that God's justice will confront both earthly and heavenly rebels and that the spiritual powers are called the host of heaven. Notice also that in 24:23, we see the sun and moon being ashamed in comparison to the light and glory of Yahweh that will pervade the new creation.

### SECTION 3.8

## The conclusion to the Hebrew Scriptures depiction of rebels from among the divine council.

1. When all of the above texts are coordinated, we can see a picture of spiritual evil that resembles what we find in the New Testament as well. The biblical authors are aware of powers of evil that work on the corporate levels of human societies and nations, an idolatry that distorts humans and ruins social institutions when they don't acknowledge the one true God.
2. Notice how frequent the images of power, the skies, and royal rule are used: princes and kingdoms (Daniel 10), the host of the heavens (Deuteronomy 4, Isaiah 14, 24), the rulers of the sky (Genesis 1). Human kingdoms are portrayed as enslaved to the worship of these powers in and through their idolatrous worship of the forces of nature and the stars.
3. When God's Kingdom comes in power, these powers will need to be confronted and dethroned. This is precisely the mission Jesus saw himself fulfilling.

### SECTION 3.9

## Jesus' testing in the wilderness

1. After Jesus was baptized, he went immediately into the wilderness and was tested by the ultimate spiritual rebel, who has authority over the kingdoms of the world.

*Again, the slanderer took Him to a **very high mountain** and showed Him **all the kingdoms of the world** and their glory; and he said to Him, "**All these things I will give You**, if You fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"*

*Then the slanderer \*left Him; and behold, angels came and began to serve Him.*

MATTHEW 4:8-11

2. After Jesus' initial resistance against the spiritual power at work behind the corruption of human kingdoms, Jesus launches his announcement of God's Kingdom. And it all led up to his conflict with these same human and spiritual powers in Jerusalem.

### Observation

Notice that when Jesus views the Jerusalem temple establishment coming to arrest him, he sees a spiritual dimension of evil at work in and through these human authorities. He calls it "the power of darkness." This is the same view we encountered in Deuteronomy 32, Isaiah 13-14, 24, and Daniel 10. Corrupt human kingdoms have been hijacked as expressions of cosmic spiritual evil.

*Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him,*

*"Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber? While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour belongs to you, and to the power of darkness."*

LUKE 22:52-53

## SECTION 3.10

# Jesus' death as orchestrated by human and spiritual powers

1. The later apostles viewed Jesus' crucifixion as primarily the result of spiritual evil powers that had enslaved humans through idolatry of power.

*We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the **rulers of this age**, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of **the rulers of this age** understood it, **for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory***

1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-8

### Observation

In this passage, Paul has fused the spiritual and human power structures together in their guilt and accountability for the death of Jesus. It is precisely human institutions that worshiped the idols of religious tradition and national security (the temple establishment and the Roman governor) that crucified Jesus. But the ultimate fault lay with the "rulers of the age" to whom the human rulers give their allegiance.

2. The apostles describe Jesus' death as a victory over these powers.

*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

COLOSSIANS 2:15

### Observation

The crucifixion of Jesus was actually his victory over the human and spiritual power structures who killed him. Jesus didn't exert his power based on the idolatrous values systems that enslave our earthly power structures. Rather, he allowed the rebellious powers to kill him, so that he could expose their ultimate weakness and powerlessness in comparison to the life-creating power of the Creator.

## Jesus' resurrection as victory over the powers

1. God's love and power to generate life out of death is real power, which was demonstrated when Jesus was raised from the dead.

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...*

MATTHEW 28:18-19

- a. Notice the connection between the risen Jesus' authority over heaven and earth together. This is precisely the rule that humanity was destined for according to Genesis 1 and Psalm 8. Now that Jesus has been exalted to that place of divine rule, his authority over the spiritual and human powers is shown by going to all nations.
- b. Remember in Genesis 11 (and Deuteronomy 32), God handed the nations over to rebellious spiritual powers. Here in Matthew 28, Jesus is announcing that he is the one who will repossess the nations to become part of God's Kingdom. The resurrection and exaltation of Jesus is the ultimate reversal of Genesis 11.

*That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand **in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.***

EPHESIANS 1:20-23

## The powers and authorities in Paul's writing.

1. In the mind of the apostle Paul, the ultimate opposition that followers of Jesus face is the spiritual "powers and authorities."
  - a. When Paul imagines the real enemy facing Jesus' people, he speaks of the same rebels of the divine council portrayed in the Hebrew scriptures. The idolatrous powers that animate the kingdoms of this world are the real culprit, not the humans who are enslaved to their ideologies and values.
  - b. This is why the type of resistance Paul advocates for is a subversion of normal warfare. He commends the nonviolent resistance that imitates the character traits of the messianic King from Isaiah. The divine armor listed here is all adapted from various texts in Isaiah that describe the rule of the Messiah (Isaiah 11:5; 59:16-17).

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the schemes of the slanderer. For **our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.** Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

EPHESIANS 6:10-17

## The defeat of the powers when God's Kingdom comes

1. Paul describes the transition of our world into a new creation with language that describes the defeat of the cosmic powers that have enslaved our world to violence and death.

*For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. **Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.** For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet."*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:22-27

Paul envisions the day when the new creation comes under the direct rule of its creator and the new humanity he has appointed to reign over it, namely Christ and his people. This means that the rebels of the divine council, the powers and authorities, must be dethroned and removed to open the way for a new future in a recreated heaven and earth.

# Angels and Cherubim

## EPISODE 4

Angels are one of the most well known characters in the story of the Bible, and perhaps the most misunderstood. Alongside them are the fascinating creatures called cherubim. They both play important roles in the Bible's depiction of the spiritual realm, but this biblical portrait is quite different than what most modern people imagine when they think of angels and cherubim.

In essence, biblical angels are the spiritual counterpart to the human biblical prophets. Both function as messengers of God and his divine council. Both human and spiritual messengers sometimes bring the power and life of God's heavenly realm here to earth in the form of signs and wonders (think of Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings 17-2 Kings 7). So, to really understand angels in the Bible, we need to sort out the vocabulary and relationships between the spiritual and human figures referred to by the word "angel."

### SECTION 4.1

## Angels

1. The Old Testament Hebrew word *mal'ak* means "messenger," and it can refer to anyone (human or spiritual being) sent with a message.

*So Saul sent **messengers** to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David who is with the flock."*

1 SAMUEL 16:19

*Now Jephthah sent **messengers** to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, "What is between you and me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?"*

JUDGES 11:12

HEBREW  
*mal'ak* - מַלְאָךְ

GREEK  
*angelos* - ἄγγελος

- a. However, when **mal'ak** refers to a spiritual being sent by God with a message, our translations choose a different word: angel.

*Now the two **angels** came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground."*

GENESIS 19:1

- b. In this passage from Genesis, **mal'ak** refers to spiritual and then human messengers, but our English translations use different words.

*Now as Jacob went on his way, the **angels** (Heb. **mal'ak**) of God met him. Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim. Then Jacob sent **messengers** (Heb. **mal'ak**) before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.*

GENESIS 32:1-3

- c. The New Testament Greek word **angelos** functions in a similar way. It can refer to human messengers

*And Jesus sent **messengers** on ahead of him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for him.*

LUKE 9:52

- d. And it can also refer to spiritual messengers sent by God.

*And Jesus was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by the satan; and he was with the wild beasts, and the **angels** were ministering to him.*

MARK 1:13

- 2. This practice of using different translation words (“messenger” vs. “angel”) is helpful from one perspective, as it clearly distinguishes between human and spiritual messengers. But it also hides the important common connection between God, his divine council, and the role of messengers sent by God.

- a. In the Old Testament, God’s heavenly realm is depicted as a throne room, and he is surrounded by a staff-team called “the divine council” (in Psalm 82:1; see our Divine Council”study notes). But there are more spiritual beings than just the council. Numerous times we hear of a larger group who are called by many titles:
- b. Just as a human king and queen have a large staff-team that consists of council advisors, attendants, and messengers, the biblical authors envision God’s Kingdom in a similar way. There are council members to whom God has delegated authority, and there are distinct beings who serve a different purpose.

*The heavens will praise Your wonders, O Lord; Your faithfulness also in **the assembly of the holy ones.***

PSALM 89:5

*“O Yahweh, **God of the hosts.**”*

PSALM 89:8

*Bless the Lord, O you his **angels,** you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!*

*Bless the Lord, all his **hosts,** his **ministers,** who do his will!*

PSALM 103:20-21

- c. However, it’s important to notice that God and the divine council often send **messengers/angels** that are human. This is the role of Israel’s prophets: to bring to Israel’s leaders messages from God and his council.

Thus says **Yahweh of hosts**,  
*"Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you.  
 They are leading you into futility;  
 They speak a vision of their own imagination,  
 Not from the mouth of Yahweh.  
 "They keep saying to those who despise Me,  
 'Yahweh has said, "You will have peace" ;  
 And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart,  
 They say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.'*

**"But who has stood in the council of Yahweh,**  
*That he should see and hear His word?  
 Who has given heed to His word and listened? ...*  
*"I did not send these prophets,  
 But they ran.  
 I did not speak to them,  
 But they prophesied.  
 "But if they had stood in My council,  
 then they would have announced  
 My words to My people.*

JEREMIAH 23:16-18, 21-22

## Observations on Jeremiah 23:16-18, 21-22

- i. Jeremiah is confronting Israel's leaders for listening to prophets that are not sent by Yahweh, and so do not confront the greed, idolatry, and injustice of Israel's kings and priests.
- ii. Notice Jeremiah's assumption in 23:21-22: true prophets are those who have had a vision of the divine council and who have been sent by God to speak his word as a messenger.
- d. This passage in Jeremiah helps us understand why Israel's prophets are sometimes called **mal'ak**, or **messengers**.

*The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His **messengers**, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they continually mocked the **messengers of God**, despised His words and scoffed at His **prophets**, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy.*

2 CHRONICLES 36:15-16

3. Parallel to these human prophetic messengers that are sent by God and the divine council, there are also spiritual beings who are sent. They perform similar roles to Israel's prophets:

- a. They give messages on God's behalf

*And an **angel from the Lord** appeared to Zechariah, standing to the right of the altar of incense. Zacharias was troubled when he saw the **angel**, and fear gripped him. But the **angel** said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard..."*

LUKE 1:11-13

- b. They perform wonders or acts of deliverance for God's people

*This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.*

**The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, And rescues them.**

PSALM 34:6-7

*On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. And behold, **an angel of the Lord** suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands.*

ACTS 12:6-7

- c. They give comfort or provision

*He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an **angel** touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat." Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again.*

1 KINGS 19:5-6

*And Jesus was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the **angels were ministering to Him.***

MARK 1:13

#### 4. The appearance of angels

- a. No angels in the Bible are ever depicted with wings. We know that's surprising to hear since "angel wings" are a fixed image in the modern mind. But this is not found anywhere in the Bible. The cherubim do have wings, but as we will see below, these creatures are very different from angels, and they are never called by this word. Cherubim don't give messages or perform missions for God; they remain in the heavenly realm, unlike angels who can cross the boundary between heaven and earth.

- b. Angels in the Bible appear as humans. There are numerous stories where angels appear but are merely called men because they look like people.

*Now **Yahweh appeared to him** by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, **three men were standing opposite him**; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth...*

*... Then **the men turned away** from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before **Yahweh.***

GENESIS 18:1-2, 22

### Observations on Genesis 18:1-2, 22

- i. In this text, Yahweh appears with two angels who then go to Sodom while he talks with Abraham. But notice, the men are not called angels.
- c. Angels appear as superhuman when people encounter them in dreams and visions. When angels appear in the day-to-day world of people, they are often unrecognizable. But when they appear in visions and dreams, they dazzle and frighten people.

*On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, while I was by the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris, I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult. Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision...Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you."*

DANIEL 10:4-7, 10-11

- d. Two unique angels are named in the Bible, and they have some kind of exalted role or status:
- i. Gabriel and Michael are called “princes” in Daniel 8-10 and 12:1. Michael is named again in the New Testament in Jude v. 9 and Revelation 12:7. Gabriel appears in Luke 1:19, 26.
  - ii. It’s likely that Paul the apostle refers to one of these when he speaks of “the archangel” in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 (see also Jude v. 9). The word in Greek means “chief-angel” and assumes some kind of tiered-authority structure in the heavenly realm that is not spelled out in any detail in the Bible.
- e. The apostles encouraged humble awareness of angels, but they discouraged unhealthy speculation about them.
- i. This is mostly likely referring to the story of Lot in Genesis 19, who wasn’t at first aware of the identity of the angels who visited him. Only once they used their power did he understand who they were.

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained **angels** without knowing it.*

HEBREWS 13:2

- ii. Paul is here describing some kind of religious cult that has influenced some members of the church in Colossae. The people involved are practicing some kind of connection to angels that involves either venerating them in honor and worship or joining them in the worship of God. Either way, Paul discourages this practice, and in the broader context (Colossians 2:6-23), points them to the risen Jesus as the one to whom all of our honor and attention should be given.

*Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and **worship of angels**, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind.*

COLOSSIANS 2:18

- iii. Hebrews chapters 1-2 are focused on showing people that angels play an important role in God’s purposes, but followers of Jesus should not elevate their importance or cultivate an unhealthy fascination with them. Rather, angels should be regarded as fellow servants of God who appear at surprising moments to serve followers of Jesus in moments of need. In that sense, they should be treated as fellow members of God’s family to be welcomed and honored.

*Are **angels** not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?*

HEBREWS 1:14

## The Cherubim

These are multi-form animal creatures who are portrayed in the Bible as guardians of God's throne room. No one in the Bible ever meets cherubim in day-to-day life, and they are not the same as angels who can cross between the spiritual and human realms. Cherubim are only ever seen by prophets who have dreams or visions of the heavenly throne room of God.

1. Cherubim are first mentioned in the Bible as guardians of God's space in Eden where heaven and earth overlap.

*He drove out the human, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed **the cherubim** and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.*

GENESIS 3:24

### Observations on Genesis 3:24

- i. Notice that the biblical author simply assumes the readers know what the cherubim are and what they do. This is characteristic of biblical meditation literature, which assumes that you are constantly re-reading the Scriptures and will bring later texts to mind to help you understand earlier texts.
  - ii. One simple take-away from Genesis 3:24, however, is the role of the cherubim. They stand at the boundary of heaven and earth, and they guard sacred space. This is exactly the symbolic role they play in Israel's tabernacle and temple later in the biblical narrative.
2. Symbolic cherubim were placed all over Israel's tabernacle and temple, which were miniature representations of the garden of Eden, the place where God's space meets with human space.
    - a. Cherubim were embroidered into the curtains of the tabernacle (Exodus 26:1) and on the veil that marked off the holy of holies (Exodus 26:31).
    - b. Two cherubim were sculpted of gold and placed on top of the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:17-22). This was the focus-spot of God's presence.
    - c. Two large cherubim were made for the holy of holies in Israel's temple that overshadowed the ark of the covenant (1 Kings 6:23-28).
    - d. Cherubim were engraved all over the inner wall of the temple (1 Kings 6:29).

**There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel.**

EXODUS 25:22

3. These carved cherubim on the ark of the covenant and surrounding the priests in the temple were physical representations of their heavenly counterparts, the cherubim who surround God’s heavenly throne. This symbolism is made clear in the phrase, “[God] sits above the cherubim.”

*So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of Yahweh of hosts, **who is enthroned on the cherubim.***

1 SAMUEL 4:4 & 2 SAMUEL 6:2

*Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. **You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,***

PSALM 80:1

*The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; **he sits enthroned between the cherubim,***

PSALM 99:1

4. The cherubim are described as multi-form animal figures. **Their appearance is different every time they show up in the Bible.** This should lead us to conclude that the visual descriptions are symbolic and are meant to point our imaginations towards the **meaning and significance** of their appearance.

- a. The only common feature to all descriptions of the cherubim is that they have wings.

*Two wings*  
EXODUS 25:20 & 1 KINGS 6:27

*Four wings*  
EZEKIEL 41:18

- b. Their faces appear differently as well.

*One face (likely human)*  
EXODUS 25 & 1 KINGS 6:27

*Two faces*  
EZEKIEL 41:18

*Four faces (lion, human, ox, and eagle)*  
EZEKIEL 10:14

- c. In Isaiah’s vision, he sees into the heavenly throne room and describes creatures with six wings, and he calls them “seraphim.”

- i. Seraph/Seraphim (Heb. שרפים): This is one of the main Hebrew words for snake, particularly venomous ones (see Numbers 21:6, Deuteronomy 8:15, and Isaiah 14:29).

- d. In Ezekiel’s visions, they are called cherubim (Ezek 10:14) and “the living creatures” (Ezek 1:5, 13-15).

- e. In the Revelation, John the visionary has taken the visions of both Isaiah and Ezekiel and merged the living creatures, cherubim, and seraphim into one hybrid creature.

*...and around the throne, **four living creatures** full of eyes in front and behind. The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them **having six wings**, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say,*

**“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.”**

*And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever...*

REVELATION 4:6-9

## 5. The role of the Cherubim

a. As can be seen from the above passages, the cherubim play the role of throne room guardians, the choir praising the King, and the supporters or carriers of the divine throne.

b. Their multi-form animal character is a clue to their symbolic meaning along with the song they sing in Isaiah 6:3.

*"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts,  
The fullness of all earth is his glory!"*

i. The seraphim and cherubim are symbolic representations of the creatures of the land, who offer their praise to the Creator. The sheer diversity of the animal kingdom is a sign of God's creativity and power. Just as the host of heaven declares the glory of God (see Psalm 19), here we see that these creatures channel all of the bird-song, barks, and bear-growls into a chorus of honor and praise to the creator.

ISAIAH 6:3

EPISODE 4 END

**There are many mysteries left unexplained in the Bible about angels and cherubim, but what is revealed is awe inspiring and beautiful. They remind us that the universe is a larger and more mysterious place than we can imagine. And ultimately, they invite us to channel our grateful praise alongside them as we honor the creator and King of all things.**

# The Angel of the Lord

## EPISODE 5

Among all of the spiritual beings in the Hebrew scriptures, one of the most puzzling is the “angel of the LORD,” or more literally, “the messenger of Yahweh.” If you haven’t checked out our study notes on Angels and Cherubim, we recommend looking over those before reading on this topic.

### SECTION 5.1

**In the Bible, Yahweh is portrayed as the transcendent creator who is other and above all, but also present and accessible within every part of his creation.**

1. There are some occasions where the biblical authors describe Yahweh’s presence as a direct appearance in rather bold language:

*Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, **Yahweh appeared** to Abram and spoke to him...*

GENESIS 17:1

*And **Yahweh appeared** again at Shiloh, because **Yahweh revealed** Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.*

1 SAMUEL 3:21-21

2. On other occasions, Yahweh will send a third party messenger, who can be either human (that is, a prophet) or a spiritual being (what we call an “angel”).

*The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy.*

2 CHRONICLES 36:15-16

*Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom.*

GENESIS 19:1

## There are many occasions where a figure called the messenger/angel of Yahweh appears.

And the stories that describe this being are packed with puzzling features that are not there by accident. All of these stories are coordinated and focused on a core paradox that can be summarized in this way:

**The angel of Yahweh is both Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh at the same time.**

*Messenger/angel of Yahweh in Hebrew*  
מלאך יהוה

- Here's the key list of appearances of the Angel of Yahweh and the main characters in each story.

GENESIS 16:7-13 <i>Hagar the Egyptian</i>	JUDGES 6:11-24 <i>Gideon</i>
GENESIS 22:11-18 <i>Abraham and Isaac</i>	JUDGES 13:1-23 <i>Samson's parents</i>
EXODUS 3:1-9 <i>Moses</i>	1 KINGS 19:1-8 <i>Elijah</i>
NUMBERS 22:22-35 <i>Balaam</i>	ZECHARIAH 1:7-17 <i>Zechariah</i>
JUDGES 2:1-5 <i>The Israelites</i>	1 CHRONICLES 21:14-27 <i>David</i>

- If you read these stories carefully, you will notice a pattern. The narrator switches back and forth between various divine titles in a way that blurs the identity of the speaker.

*Now the **angel of Yahweh** found [Hagar] by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. **And he said**, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai...." Then **the angel of Yahweh** said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself to her authority." And **the angel of Yahweh** said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to*

*count." And **the angel of Yahweh said** to her, "'Behold, you are with child, And you will bear a son; And you shall call his name Ishmael, Because **Yahweh** has given heed to your affliction...." Then **she called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her**, "You are **God** who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing him?"*

GENESIS 16:7-13

- The narrator calls the figure the angel of Yahweh as though he's distinct from Yahweh. The angel can refer to Yahweh as a distinct being ("Yahweh has given heed.."), but also as if he is Yahweh ("I will greatly multiply.."). The narrator at the end tells us that it was Yahweh who spoke to Hagar, and in Hagar's speech she calls this being God (Hebrew: **'elohim**).

3. If you examine only one of these stories, you might be tempted to think that this story is either confused or a patchwork of different sources that were not harmonized (both conclusions have been offered by scholars in the past).
4. However, this same pattern appears in most stories when the angel of Yahweh shows up.

*The **angel of the Lord** appeared to Moses in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." When **Yahweh** saw that he turned aside to look, **God** called to him from the midst of the bush*

*and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." And he said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "**I am the God** of your father, the God of Abraham, **the God** of Isaac, and **the God** of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at **God**.*

EXODUS 3:2-4

- a. The narrator calls this figure the angel of Yahweh as though he is distinct from Yahweh, but then he's called Yahweh and then immediately called God. This figure speaks as though he is "Yahweh God," and that is who Moses understands him to be.

*Then **the angel of Yahweh came and sat** under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezerite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. **The angel of Yahweh appeared to him** and said to him, "**Yahweh** is with you, O valiant warrior."*

*Then Gideon said to him, "O my lord, if **Yahweh** is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now **Yahweh** has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."*

***Yahweh looked at him** and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not sent you?"*

*He said to Him, "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house."*

*But **Yahweh** said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man."*

*So Gideon said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who speak with me. "Please do not depart from here, until I come back to You, and bring out my offering and lay it before You." And He said, "I will remain until you return."*

*Then Gideon went in and prepared a young goat and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour; he put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, and brought them out to him under the oak and presented them.*

***The angel of God** said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so.*

*Then **the angel of Yahweh** put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. **Then the angel of the Lord vanished** from his sight.*

*When Gideon saw that he was **the angel of the Lord**, he said, "Alas, **O Yahweh God!** For now **I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face.**"*

***Yahweh** said to him, "Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die."*

*Then Gideon built an altar there to **Yahweh** and named it "**Yahweh is Peace.**"*

JUDGES 6:11-24

- i. This story is extremely sophisticated, as the narrator expects that the reader has been tracking in all of the previous stories of the angel of Yahweh's appearances. Here the blurring of identities is heightened to the extreme.
- ii. The angel of Yahweh, Yahweh, and God are all interchanged in this story. This is especially noticeable in the final scene where the angel of Yahweh departs (6:21), but then in 6:23, Yahweh is apparently still standing there talking to Gideon!

The most reasonable conclusion to draw from all of these stories is that this blurring of identities between Yahweh and the angel of Yahweh is an intentional strategy aimed at making a profound theological claim about the identity of Yahweh: The God of Israel is a complex unity who is both transcendent and above all, yet simultaneously present and accessible within creation through a mediating person who is both Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh.

*This was the entire point of our Bible Project video on "God."*

*Check out that video [here](#) as well as on our [podcast](#) episode about the angel of Yahweh.*

### SECTION 5.3

## The identity of the angel of Yahweh in other scriptural texts

1. The stories we explored above are making this sophisticated claim about the God of the Bible **through narrative exposition**. This is typical for the Hebrew scriptures. The biblical authors make their heavy-duty theological claims by means of narrative strategies, forcing readers to draw conclusions and explore the implications.
2. A perfect example is found throughout the book of Exodus. Here we find a clear set of hyperlinked stories that connect the angel of Yahweh in the burning bush with the pillar of cloud and fire that guarded the Israelites in the wilderness and with the glory of Yahweh that fills the tabernacle. Read the following texts in sequence, paying attention to all of the **titles** and **images** (cloud, fire, pillar, etc.) that are connected to the angel of Yahweh and to Yahweh himself.

*The **angel of Yahweh** appeared to [Moses] in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.*

EXODUS 3:2

*Then [the Israelites] set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness. **Yahweh** was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.*

EXODUS 13:20-21

*Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Come near before **Yahweh**, for He has heard your grumbings.' " It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of Yahweh appeared in the cloud.*

EXODUS 16:9-10

**The angel of God**, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. And it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.

EXODUS 14:19-20

The glory of **Yahweh** rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day

He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of **Yahweh** was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

EXODUS 24:16-18

Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because **Yahweh** descended upon it in fire; and its **smoke** ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. **Yahweh** came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and **Yahweh** called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

EXODUS 19:18-20

"Behold, I am going to send **an angel** before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. "Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him.

EXODUS 23:20-21

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of **Yahweh** filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it,

and the glory of **Yahweh** filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of **Yahweh** was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel.

EXODUS 40:34-38

3. Notice how the collage of images associated with the divine presence develops and grows throughout the story of Exodus and how both are progressively associated with the angel of Yahweh and with Yahweh.
  - a. Angel of Yahweh: fire (Exodus 3), cloud (Exodus 13), guide for Israel (Exodus 23)
  - b. Yahweh: pillar of cloud, fire and glory (Exodus 14 and 16), fire (Exodus 19), glory of Yahweh as cloud (Exodus 24), glory of Yahweh over the tabernacle that guides Israel (Exodus 40)
4. This network of images is crucially important because it fits the same pattern of ideas we saw in the angel of Yahweh stories above. There is a deliberate narrative strategy to portray Yahweh as a complex unity, so that the angel of Yahweh is both Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh at the same time.

## The divine glory in the tabernacle and temple

1. Notice how the stories in Exodus listed above associate the angel of Yahweh with the glory fire-cloud of Yahweh that guided Israel in the wilderness, appeared on top of Mount Sinai, and then finally took up residence over the tabernacle.
2. We must connect these stories from Exodus with the later experiences of the biblical prophets who have visions and encounters with this same glorious presence. We explore some of these in our notes on the divine council, but here are a few examples:

*Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and **they saw the God of Israel**; and under His feet there appeared to be **a pavement of blue-sapphire**, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and **they saw God**, and they ate and drank.*

EXODUS 24:9-11

*In the year of King Uzziah's death **I saw Yahweh** sitting on a **throne**, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. **Seraphim stood above Him**, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with **smoke**.*

ISAIAH 6:1-4

*Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. **I saw the Lord sitting on His throne**, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left.*

1 KINGS 22:19

*Now **above the pavement that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like blue-sapphire in appearance**; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with **the appearance of a human**. Then I noticed from the appearance of **His loins** and upward something like **glowing metal that looked like fire** all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like **fire**; and a **radiance** around Him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of **the glory of Yahweh**.*

EZEKIEL 1:26-28

3. All of these throne visions of Yahweh surrounded by his heavenly hosts are coordinated and working off of the same basic set of ideas: Yahweh is king of all creation and rules from his heavenly temple, with the stars (hosts of heaven) as symbolic servants that reflect his glory.
4. When it comes to the figure sitting on the throne, these visions are clear that it is Yahweh the God of Israel who is above all and truly other, the Creator and sustainer of all reality.
5. However, remember all of the hyperlinks between the stories of the glory fire-cloud of Yahweh in Exodus and the angel of Yahweh. The whole point of those connections was to make clear that the human-looking angel of Yahweh is the glorious being that Moses and the prophets encountered in their visions of the heavenly temple. **The angel of Yahweh is both Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh, and it is this visible Yahweh sitting on a throne that the prophets are experiencing.**

So there you have it. If your mind is blown, so is mine! The glorious enthroned Yahweh is the angel of Yahweh, who is both Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh at the same time. This is the robust portrait of God that pervades the entire Hebrew Bible, and it provides the crucial key for understanding how the New Testament makes its claims about the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

## SECTION 5.5

# The New Testament's portrayal of Jesus

1. These texts about the angel of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible are the key scriptural foundation for the New Testament's claims about Jesus as the human incarnation of the God of Israel.

2. Consider the opening of the Gospel of John:

a. There are many things going on in this amazing text, but the relevant point for our discussion is the portrayal of the pre-human Jesus. He is described as a being who is both God and distinct from God at the same time. **John is drawing upon the scriptural categories provided him by the character of the angel of Yahweh in the Hebrew Scriptures.**

*In the beginning was **the Word**, and the Word was **with God**, and the Word **was God**. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being **through Him**, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*

JOHN 1:1-3

3. This also helps us make sense of an important text later in the Gospel of John.

a. In this passage, John emphasizes that many leaders of Jerusalem rejected Jesus and did not believe in him, even though they saw his signs and wonders, specifically the raising of Lazarus from the dead in John chapter 11. But then John says that this rejection was not a surprise. It's actually what he expected based on the depiction of rebellious Israel found in the book of Isaiah, where Yahweh said that Israel was blind and deaf.

*So Jesus said to them, "For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. "While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light."*

*These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them. But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet **they were not believing in him.***

*This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Isaiah 53:1)*

*For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, "He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them." (Isaiah 6:10) **These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.***

JOHN 12:35-41

b. Notice what text John is quoting from. Isaiah chapter 6 is when Isaiah saw Yahweh elevated on his heavenly throne. When John (in 12:41) says that Isaiah saw "his glory," he is speaking about **Jesus as Yahweh**. His claim is bold and direct: Isaiah encountered the pre-incarnate Jesus as Yahweh.

## Why isn't Jesus called the angel of Yahweh in the New Testament?

The above examples make it clear that the apostles believed that Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible is the same being who they met in the person of Jesus. And if the Hebrew Bible portrays the angel of Yahweh as Yahweh, why didn't the apostles ever use the phrase "angel of Yahweh."

### RESPONSE 1

The apostles do use the imagery and conceptual categories of the angel of Yahweh to describe Jesus.

- a. Yahweh's (and the angel of Yahweh's) enthroned glory in the temple from Isaiah 6 is quoted in John 14 and applied to Jesus.
- b. Yahweh's enthroned, human-like appearance seen by Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24) is used to portray Jesus' transformation into a glowing royal king on a mountain (Mark 9:1-3).

### RESPONSE 2

The apostles quote from texts in the Hebrew scriptures that are about the angel of Yahweh and apply them to Jesus.

- a. Notice that Jude calls Jesus "Lord" and then describes him as the Lord who delivered the Israelites out of Egypt. Recall that the Exodus story says that the God who rescued the Israelites was both Yahweh (Exodus 14) and the angel of Yahweh (Exodus 13).

*For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny **Jesus Christ our only master and Lord**. Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that **the Lord** at one time delivered his people out of Egypt...*

JUDE, VV. 4-5

### RESPONSE 3

While the apostles used the biblical categories provided by the angel of Yahweh, they did not use the phrase "angel of the Lord," and for a fairly obvious reason.

- a. They wanted to avoid any idea that Jesus was merely an angel. Angels are remarkable beings, but they are creatures, that is, created beings whose existence is sustained by their creator.
- b. It's clear that the apostles want to make a more exalted claim about Jesus. He isn't merely a high-ranking angelic being who came among us; rather, he is the one and only Yahweh become a human being.

c. Remember Exodus 23:20-21: Yahweh sent “my messenger” because “my name is in him.” The angel of Yahweh is not an angel, but the very personal presence of the creator God in human appearance. The author of Hebrews is claiming that Jesus is that divine person, who is both God and distinct from God, and who has become human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by the Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. **The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.** After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became **as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.***

HEBREWS 1:1-4

EPISODE 5 END

**The angel of Yahweh is God appearing as a human, while Jesus is God become human. There are many mysteries that remain, but the above summary is a helpful way to put all of the pieces together. If you are interested in taking a deeper dive into all of these topics, check out these excellent books to the right.**

FURTHER READING

[Angels: What the Bible Really Says about God’s Heavenly Host](#)

MICHAEL HEISER

[The Hum of Angels: Listening for the Messengers of God around Us](#)

MICHAEL HEISER

# The Satan and Demons

## EPISODE 6

One of the most striking things about the stories of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels is his awareness of an ultimate enemy, and it was not human! When Jesus retreated to the wilderness after his baptism, he has a showdown with a spiritual adversary called by various titles in the different Gospel accounts.

### SECTION 6.1

**Neither the words “devil” or “satan” are proper names. Rather, they are titles, which is why they both have the Greek word “the” in front of them.**

1. “The satan” is an English transliteration of a Greek transliteration of a Hebrew word (complex, I know!): *ha-satan*. This biblical Hebrew word refers to an adversary, or “one who stands against.” It can refer to humans who oppose one another (1 Kings 5:4; 11:14, 23), to the angel of the Lord (Numbers 22:22), or to a spiritual being in God’s throne room (Job 1:6 and 2:1). This is not a name but a categorical title describing a person’s function in a story. They are the one opposed, who stand against another.
2. “The devil” is an English translation of a Greek word, *diabolos*. It describes a person who slanders or speaks to defame another person. This Greek word is used to refer to humans who talk maliciously (1 Timothy 3:11), gossip (2 Timothy 3:3), or slander the reputation of others (Titus 2:3). It is also used to refer to the function of a spiritual being in God’s heavenly throne room, namely the one who accuses God’s people and slanders their reputation.
3. In fact, in the Old Greek translation of the book of Job, the Greek word *diabolos* was used to translate the Hebrew word *ha-satan*, “the adversary.”
4. These two titles were interchangeable in Jewish literature by the time of Jesus, and this explains the differences between the Gospel accounts.

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by **the devil**.*

MATTHEW 4:1

*At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tested by **the satan**.*

MARK 1:12-13

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tested by **the devil**.*

LUKE 4:1-2

**Throughout Jesus' mission of announcing the arrival of God's kingdom, he made perfectly clear that his adversary was not a human, but rather the spiritual powers of evil who are represented by one particular being referred to by many titles.**

<p><i>"the devil" or "the satan"</i> MATTHEW 4:1-2 MARK 1:12-13</p>	<p><i>"Beelzebul" which means "Lord of the house"</i> MATTHEW 12:24</p>
<p><i>"Ruler of demons"</i> LUKE 11:15</p>	<p><i>"The power of darkness"</i> LUKE 22:53</p>

1. It's clear that Jesus assumes a whole storyline about the powers of spiritual evil that he never taught in any depth, including the origins and purpose of evil spiritual beings, why they have the power they do, and what kind of threat they pose. All this and more is assumed knowledge in the New Testament, aside from the occasional side comments (for example, Matthew 25:41). Jesus and the apostles presume their hearers have a shared understanding about spiritual beings.
2. The storyline about spiritual evil that Jesus and the apostles assume you have in your head is provided in the Hebrew Scriptures (a.k.a. the Old Testament). To understand how Jesus conceived of his mission and why he went to Jerusalem to die on behalf of his people—all of this assumes the robust story of God's mission to overcome the powers of darkness in his good world. So let's focus on the main themes about spiritual evil that we find in the first three-quarters of your Bible!

## Spiritual Evil in the Hebrew Scriptures

The portrayal of spiritual evil in the Hebrew Scriptures is fascinating and complex. The biblical authors never express the mysterious nature of evil by describing it directly. Rather, they give readers a mosaic of stories and images, showing how evil manifests itself in and through human behavior. Like evil itself, the powers of spiritual evil are elusive and hard to nail down, yet their presence is always felt in the biblical drama, as it is in our day-to-day lives if we have eyes to see it. As with most important biblical themes, Genesis 1-11 offers us the crucial starting points for our reflections on spiritual evil in the biblical story.

1. The snake in the garden of Eden: Genesis 1-3
  - a. On day 6 of Genesis 1, God populates the dry land with creatures: first the animals, and after that, humanity.

- i. Notice that the animals are called “the living creatures” (Heb. *khayyot*, חַיִּוֹת), and then specified by rough categories: domesticated animals, “creepers” (the wild ones that run and hide), and the wild beasts.
- ii. Notice also that humans are the last to be created in Genesis 1, yet they are the ones elevated to rule over all creation, the sea and sky **and land creatures**. This establishes a major design pattern in the biblical story: God’s elevation of the late-comer to a role of honor above the early-comers.
- iii. In the book of Genesis, the theme of the late-comer’s elevation often focuses on the jealousy and anger of the early-comer. Think of Cain and Abel, or Jacob and Esau (“the older will serve the younger,” Genesis 25:23), or of Joseph’s older brothers who hate him because of his dreams of ruling over them (Genesis 37:1-11). Or think later in the Bible, of David’s jealous older brothers who were not chosen to be king (1 Samuel 16-17). And so on.
- iv. When readers come to Genesis 3 after considering this pattern throughout the Hebrew Bible, you’re prompted to notice the beasts of day 6, who are created first and yet summoned to come under the rule of humans who came second. Will any of them be like Cain or Esau or Joseph’s brothers and resent being ruled by a creature who has only come to the dry land **after them**?

*And God said, “Let the land bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the land after their kind”; and it was so.*

*God made the beasts of the land after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good.*

*And God said, “Let Us make human in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”*

GENESIS 1:24-26

2. The garden of Eden is a high mountain-garden temple where heaven and its creatures overlap with the earth and its creatures.
  - a. The garden in Eden is the source of a single river that leaves the garden and divides into four rivers that water the main regions of the biblical world (see Genesis 2:8-14). This has a fairly obvious implication: The garden of Eden is portrayed as the highest place on the dry land.
  - b. Eden is described as the host-land of the ultimate temple garden. It’s a land of gold, fruit trees, precious gems, and abundance (Genesis 2:9-14). These are precisely the images and materials used in the construction of the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31) and the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6-7).
  - c. The heaven and earth Eden-temple is the same place Israel’s prophets saw in their visions (Isaiah 6, 1 Kings 22, Ezekiel 1), a place where God’s heavenly presence overlaps with earth. We’re told that there are cherubim in this garden (Genesis 3:22-24), just as they populate God’s throne room (see Ezekiel 10:1-15).
  - d. All of this leads the reader to expect that Adam and Eve live together in the garden with spiritual beings of the hybrid-animal variety! So when a talking snake appears in Genesis 3, we have a category for this kind of creature.
3. The identity of the talking snake of Genesis 3 is developed as you read throughout the Hebrew Bible.

- a. The snake of Genesis 3 is introduced with a dense and important statement.
- b. This comment invites us to consider that there is more to this snake than just an animal. For starters, it can talk!
- c. The phrase “more shrewd than any beast of the field” could mean (1) that the snake belongs to the beasts of the field and is more sly than the rest. Or (2) it could also mean that it isn’t technically a beast of the field. Rather, it’s a different kind of creature that is simply more shrewd than any kind of beast. On either interpretation, the comment means, “This is not your average snake!”
- d. The snake also appears to have knowledge of God’s decisions and purposes (“God knows that in the day you eat [the fruit] you will be like divine beings, knowing good and bad,” Genesis 3:5).

*Now the snake (Heb. nakhash, נָחַשׁ) was more shrewd than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’”*

GENESIS 3:1

- e. Notice that when God curses the snake in Genesis 3:14, he says something that has puzzled readers across the centuries.
  - i. If it was a normal snake, didn’t it already crawl in the dust on its belly? Why does God say the snake’s future state will be to go in the dust if it already crawls on the ground? This statement assumes that the snake that approached the humans wasn’t on the ground.

*“Because you have done this,  
Cursed are you more than all cattle,  
And more than every beast of the field;  
On your belly you will go,  
And dust you will eat  
All the days of your life;*

GENESIS 3:14

- ii. This puzzling image of a snake that doesn’t crawl on the ground finds its confirmation much later in the biblical story. When the prophet Isaiah has a vision of God’s heavenly throne room, he sees heavenly creatures surrounding God’s throne. In Ezekiel’s visions of the same space, these beings are called “cherubim” and “living creatures,” but Isaiah calls them “seraphim” (Heb. שֵׁרָפִים)
- f. This is the only place in the entire Bible where the heavenly throne room creatures are called in Hebrew seraphim. All modern English translations leave this word untranslated, which is strange, because it is a normal Hebrew word for (get ready for it!) **venemous snake!**

*In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory!”*

ISAIAH 6:1-3

- i. Hebrew: *seraph* = singular noun / *seraphim* = plural noun

*“Yahweh sent snakes (Heb. nakhash), venemous snakes (Heb. seraphim) among the people, and they bit the people.*

NUMBERS 21:6

*“Yahweh led you in the great and terrifying wilderness, of the snake, the venemous snake (Heb. seraph).*

DEUTERONOMY 8:15

- g. Later in the book of Isaiah, the prophet describes the ruler of Babylon as a “snake” (Heb. *nakhash*) and a “flying snake” (Heb. *saraph me’opheph*). This appears in the same section as Isaiah’s accusation against the “ruler of Babylon,” which refers both to the human king of Babylon and the spiritual power that lurks behind Babylon.
- h. Flying snakes were a common religious icon in the ancient Near East, and images of them have even been found in ancient Israelite art (see below: images from Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst*, 1977; and Robert Deutsch, “Six Hebrew Fiscal Bullae from the Time of Hezekiah”)

*“Do not rejoice, O Philistia, all of you,  
Because the rod that struck you is broken;  
For from the snake (Heb. nakhash)  
root a viper will come out,  
And its fruit will be a flying snake  
(Heb. saraph).*

ISAIAH 14:29



- i. Also important is the prophet Ezekiel, who looks out at Tyre (a powerful seaside kingdom of his day) and accuses its leader of acting like an ancient spiritual rebel. Ezekiel first accuses Tyre’s king of claiming to be a deity.
- j. Ezekiel then likens the king of Tyre to an ancient spiritual rebel who inhabited Eden.

*“Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says:*

*“You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.*

*You were in Eden, the garden of God;*

*every precious stone adorned you:*

*carnelian, chrysolite and emerald,*

*topaz, onyx and jasper,*

*lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl.*

*Your settings and mountings were made of gold;*

*on the day you were created they were prepared.*

*You were anointed as a covering cherub, for so I ordained you.*

*You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones.*

*You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.*

*Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned.*

*So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones.*

*Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor.*

EZEKIEL 28:12-17

- 4. Isaiah and Ezekiel provides us with the earliest interpretation of the Genesis 3 snake within the Bible itself. These authors understood the snake to be a spiritual being, one of the winged throne guardians, a “living creature” (a.k.a. cherubim) in the garden-temple. But as we learned from the “last will be first” design pattern in Genesis, it seems that we’re meant to infer that this snake resented coming under the authority of the human creatures whose origins were in the dirt. And so this glorious creature misused its honored place of God-given authority and rebelled by seducing the humans into misusing their authority in the same way. In this way, the snake represents a spiritual rebellion that **coincides with** the earthly rebellion of the humans. Genesis 3 portrays the fall of humanity and **the fall of the spiritual rebel.**

- a. For more discussion of Genesis 3 as the fall narrative of humanity and the snake, check out Seth Postell, *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh*, chapter 6.
5. After the garden of Eden, this spiritual rebel is almost never directly described. Rather, his presence is hinted at when biblical characters face a moment of decision or a great moral test.
- a. Cain is tempted to murder his brother by “sin,” which is depicted as a hungry animal.
  - b. This story is important because it sets the paradigm for how the snake operates outside of the garden of Eden. This evil becomes present in moments of sinful desire that test a human’s moral character, and it plays the same, animal-like role as the snake in the garden. It twists words and tells deceptive lies and half-truths that justify inappropriate behavior. When humans give into these lies, they embrace their own self-destruction.
  - c. Genesis 3 and 4 set the template for how spiritual evil works in and through human decisions. Evil is not something God created. Rather, it is the sad corruption of what was intended for good. Although evil is always a possibility in a world where God grants true dignity and moral responsibility to his creation, it is God’s creatures that choose to give into evil, resulting in self-ruin.

*“Isn’t it the case that if you do good, you will be accepted? But if you do not do good, at the door is sin, lurking, and its desire is for you.”*

GENESIS 4:7

SECTION 6.4

**In many Christian traditions, Genesis 3 is the primary “fall” narrative. However, Genesis 3 does not stand in isolation. This story is woven into a tight narrative pattern that unites all of Genesis 1-11, which offers multiple “fall” stories. The spiritual rebellion that began in Genesis 3 is intensified in chapter 4 in the story of Cain, and then again in Genesis 6.**

**The “sons of elohim” in Genesis 6:1-4. Genesis 6 presents modern readers with one of the strangest stories in the Bible.**

*Now, when humanity began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of humanity were good; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.*

*Then Yahweh said, “My Spirit shall not reside with humanity forever, because that one is also flesh; so his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”  
The Nephilim were in the land in those days, and also afterward, when the sons*

*of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.*

GENESIS 6:1-4

1. While modern readers struggle to understand what’s happening here, the biblical authors were drawing upon a shared understanding that provides the background for this story. Because most modern readers don’t share that ancient context, it’s difficult for us to track. Here are some guideposts:

2. Who are the sons of Elohim?

- a. “The sons of elohim” is the standard Hebrew phrase for spiritual beings who surround Yahweh’s heavenly throne in the Eden-mountain temple. The same phrase is used elsewhere for the same beings (Job 1:6; 2:1), who are the same as “the host of heaven” (as in 1 Kings 22:19). These are members of the divine council whom God invites to participate in his heavenly rule (see our notes on “The Divine Council”).
- b. Just as angels can take human appearance and interact with humans (see our notes on “Angels and Cherubim”), so too (apparently!) can the divine council. This story, then, represents a second heavenly rebellion alongside the snake-seraphim’s rebellion in Genesis 3.

3. Did they actually have sex with human women?

- a. The plain sense meaning of this story is fairly clear: Yes, these spiritual beings crossed the heaven-and-earth boundary and had sex with women. The fact that this is presented as another fall narrative is clear from the narrative design pattern used by the author, who presents this story on analogy with Genesis 3.

GENESIS 2-3: THE SNAKE AND THE WOMAN	GENESIS 6:1-4: THE SONS OF GOD AND HUMAN WOMEN
<p><i>Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife and they will become one <b>flesh</b> (בשר).</i> GENESIS 2:24-25</p>	<p><i>And it came about when humanity began to multiply on the face of the land...and <b>the sons of God saw</b> (ראו), the daughters of humanity (בנות האדם) <b>that</b> (כי) <b>they were good</b> (טוב), and <b>they took</b> (לקחו) for themselves wives from all which they chose.</i> GENESIS 6:1-2</p>
<p><i>“And <b>the woman saw</b> (ראה) <b>that</b> the tree was <b>good</b> (טוב) for eating and <b>that</b> (כי) it was enticing to the eyes and it was desirable for gaining wisdom <b>and she took</b> (לקחה) its fruit and she ate and she gave to her husband with her and he ate.</i> GENESIS 3:6</p>	<p><i>And Yahweh said, “My Spirit will not dwell with humanity forever, in as much as he also is <b>flesh</b> (בשר), and his days will be one hundred and twenty years.”</i> GENESIS 6:3</p>

- b. The act of the sons of God is portrayed as an inverted replay of the garden story, but intensified. Instead of the woman taking what is good in her own eyes because of the lies of a spiritual being, in Genesis 6 it is the spiritual beings who take women that are good in their eyes.
- c. The analogy, which is intended by the author, also prompts us to consider the motive of the sons of God in light of the woman’s motive. The woman desired to have wisdom and life in the garden on her own terms instead of honoring the Creator’s command. This illuminates the unstated motive of the sons of God. Taking these women was a move to restore the life of Eden to humanity against God’s command since they had been exiled from access to the tree of life.

d. Later in Genesis 19, we find a narrative designed to invert this story about spiritual beings having sex with women. In the story of Lot's hosting the two angels in Sodom, the men of Sodom come to Lot's house in order to gang rape the "men" (the angels). And Lot, in a horrifying act of betrayal, offers his two daughters to the crowd of men instead of the angels. The angels intervene and strike all the men with blindness. This story is patterned after Genesis 6:1-2. It shows just how corrupt humanity has become once again, presenting Lot as the opposite of Abraham and Noah.

GENESIS 6:1-4	GENESIS 19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The men of Sodom want to have sex with the angelic men who visit the city</i></li> <li>• <i>Lot offers his daughters</i></li> <li>• <i>Angels rescue Lot and his daughters</i></li> <li>• <i>The city is destroyed</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The sons of God visit human daughters</i></li> <li>• <i>The sons of God have sex with them</i></li> <li>• <i>God rescues Noah and his sons</i></li> <li>• <i>The land is purified by the flood</i></li> </ul>

e. The reference to one hundred and twenty years is most likely a narrative countdown to the beginning of the flood. (see Genesis 6:13)

4. What were the children of these distorted "heaven and earth" unions?

a. In addition to spiritual beings having sex with women, this is the next strangest part of the story.

*The **nephilim** were in the land in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God went into the daughters of humanity, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty warriors of ancient time, men of renown.*

GENESIS 6:4

b. This passage tells us that a group called the **nephilim** lived in the land in those days. This word appears only one other time in the Hebrew Bible, and it helps us understand what's happening here in Genesis 6.

*So [the spies] gave the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are **men of great size**. "There also **we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are from the Nephilim)**; and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."*

c. The Nephilim are giant warriors from ancient times. This is why the first translation of the Hebrew Bible into ancient Greek (produced around 300-100 B.C.) translated the Hebrew word **nephilim** with the Greek word: γίγαντες / *gigantes* / giant!

NUMBERS 13:32-33

- d. These giant warriors have a prominent role in the biblical stories about Israel’s entry into the land promised to Abraham. Many of the cities and kings that attacked the Israelites when they entered the land were among the offspring of these giant warriors whose origin stems back to the Nephilim.

*Hear, Israel: You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. The people are **strong and tall—Anakites!** You know about them and have heard it said: “Who can stand up against the Anakites?”*

DEUTERONOMY 9:1-2

*The **Emites** used to live there—a people **strong and numerous, and as tall as the Anakites.** Like the **Anakites**, they too were thought of as the **Rephaim**, but the Moabites called them **Emites**.*

DEUTERONOMY 2:10-11

*We took all the towns on the plateau, and all Gilead, and all Bashan as far as Salekah and Edrei, towns of Og’s kingdom in Bashan. (**Og king of Bashan was the last of the Rephaim. His bed was decorated with iron and was more than nine cubits long and four cubits wide.** It is still in Rabbah of the Ammonites.)*

DEUTERONOMY 3:10-11

*At that time Joshua went and destroyed the **Anakites** from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns. **No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive.***

JOSHUA 11:21-22

*A champion named **Goliath, who was from Gath**, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span.*

1 SAMUEL 17:4

5. What do the Nephilim warrior giants have to do with spiritual evil?

- a. The ancient Sumerian king Gilgamesh was portrayed in Sumerian mythology as part human, part God, and really tall! (see this depiction of Gilgamesh from the late Assyrian period, eighth century B.C.) He is depicted with a lion and snake in his hands, a hunter-giant. Gilgamesh’s legacy is likely behind the portrait of Nimrod in Genesis 10:9-10, who built Babylon and **Erek**, which is the Hebrew spelling of Uruk, Gilgamesh’s city.
- b. Genesis 6:1-4 is the introduction to the story of the flood, which begins in Genesis 6:5. In other words, the flood of divine justice is God’s response not just to human wickedness in general, but specifically to the outbreak of violence and war due to the warrior giants. The flood is God’s attempt to purify the land from the innocent blood shed by the Nephilim and their violence. We are meant to see that many of the Nephilim perish in the flood. But in the Hebrew Bible, that doesn’t mean the end of their threat. As Genesis 6:4 notes, they are still around after the flood!



- c. Recall in the list of passages about the biblical giants listed above that these warriors went by many names: Emim, Anakim, and **Rephaim**. This last title is fascinating, because it is most often used in the Bible to refer to the **spirits of dead warrior kings**.

*Lord our God, other lords besides you  
have ruled over us,  
but your name alone do we honor.  
They are now dead, they live no more;  
**the rephaim** do not rise.  
You punished them and brought them  
to ruin;  
you wiped out all memory of them.*

ISAIAH 26:13-14

*The realm of the dead below is all astir  
to meet you at your coming;  
it rouses **the rephaim** to greet you— all  
those who were leaders in the world; it  
makes them rise from their thrones— all  
those who were kings over the nations.*

ISAIAH 14:9

*I am reckoned among those who go  
down to the pit;  
I have become like a man without  
strength,  
Forsaken among the dead,  
Like the slain who lie in the grave,  
Whom You remember no more,  
And they are cut off from Your hand...  
Will You perform wonders for the dead?  
Will **the rephaim** rise and praise You?*

PSALM 88:4-5, 10

- d. These **rephaim**, the surviving spirits in the realm of the dead, are associated with the Nephilim and the giant warrior kings whose origins all go back to the spiritual rebellion of the sons of God in Genesis 6.
- e. In the New Testament, we find that Jude and Peter associate the Rephaim with the offspring of the sons of God and human women.

*For if God did not spare **angels when they  
sinned**, but cast them into hell and committed  
them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;  
and did not spare the ancient world, but  
preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness,  
with seven others, when He brought a flood upon  
the world of the ungodly;*

2 PETER 2:4-5

*And **angels who did not keep their own domain, but  
abandoned their proper abode**, He has kept in eternal  
bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day—  
just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them,  
since they in the same way as these indulged in gross  
immorality and **went after strange flesh**, are exhibited as an  
example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.*

JUDE VV. 6-7

- f. Peter and Jude are here reflecting on Genesis 6:1-4 and merging its ideas with the depictions of the **Rephaim** as spirits of the dead. Notice how Jude v.7 has connected the two stories of the sons of God in Genesis 6 and the men of Sodom in Genesis 19.
- g. Why does all of this matter?! These giant warrior kings play a key role in the final human and spiritual rebellion narrative in Genesis 1-11: the founding of Babyon.
6. Consider the two stories about the foundation of the Babylonian empire in Genesis 10-11. These two stories provide multiple links back to Genesis 3 and 6.

The sons of **Ham** were **Cush** and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. The sons of **Cush** were Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. Now **Cush** became the father of **Nimrod**; he became a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty warrior, a hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty warrior hunter before the Lord." The beginning of his kingdom was **Babylon** and **Erech** and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

GENESIS 10:6-10

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. They said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into the heavens, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

GENESIS 11:1-4

- a. Nimrod is the grandson of Ham, Noah's son, and he is called a "mighty warrior" (Hebrew: *gibbor*), which is the same word used to describe the offspring of the sons of God and human women in Genesis 6:4! We are meant to see the rebel sons of God behind the founding of Babylon, as they were behind the story of Genesis 6.
  - b. Nimrod, who is associated with the giants of Genesis 6, builds the kingdom of Babylon and Erech (Hebrew אֶרֶךְ), which is the same as the ancient city of Uruk, where Gilgamesh the original giant king lived!
  - c. Genesis 11 gives us a complementary story of Babylon's origins. We're told the city and its temple tower was built in order to "have a top in the heavens." In other words, the temple-tower of Babylon is portrayed as a human-made attempt to recreate Eden, the original temple-mountain where heaven and earth overlapped.
7. The idea that the foundation of Babylon was a joint human-spiritual rebellion is also made clear by the portrayal of the "ruler of Babylon" in Isaiah 14, which looks back at Genesis 10-11.

*"You all will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say,*

*"How the oppressor has ceased,  
And how fury has ceased!*

*"The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked  
The scepter of rulers...*

*"How you have fallen from heaven,  
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!  
You have been cut down to the earth,  
You who have weakened the nations!*

*"But you said in your heart,*

*'I will ascend to the heavens;*

**I will raise my throne  
above the stars of God,**

*And I will sit on the mount of assembly  
In the recesses of the north.*

**'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High.'**

*"Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol,  
To the recesses of the pit.*

ISAIAH 14:4, 12-15

In this poem, Isaiah depicts the "king of Babylon" as a human rebel who is embodying the career of the spiritual rebel behind the origins of Babylon. The fact that Babylon was founded by Nimrod, a warrior-giant associated with the Nephilim, and then built up as an anti-Eden in Genesis 11, shows the author of Isaiah that Babylon is more than just a human enterprise. It is an icon of the human and spiritual rebellion.

## Conclusions about spiritual and human evil in Genesis 1-11 and the Hebrew Scriptures

1. As we walk away from Genesis 1-11, we've encountered multiple spiritual and human rebellions that are all intertwined.
  - a. Genesis 3-4: The original spiritual rebel is a former exalted throne guardian of God's heavenly temple who resents being subservient to exalted humans. So he lures them into the same temptation he succumbed to, seizing authority by his own wisdom and abusing it for selfish purposes. We then watch humans replay this rebellion, first with Adam and Eve, and then with Cain's murder of his brother.
  - b. Genesis 6 and 11: Even more members of the divine council rebel in an intensification of the Genesis 3 rebellion. This results in the spread of creatures who are part-spiritual being/part human, who spread violence through their empires, beginning with Babylon. As many of these beings die in the flood, their spirits live on in the underworld as terrifying monsters.
2. These narratives provide three categories of spiritual evil.
  - a. An arch-rebel, depicted by the imagery of the snake (Genesis 3) and "sin" (Genesis 4).
  - b. Lower-level spiritual rebels who deceive humans into exalting their empires to divine status.
  - c. Deceased spirits of the Nephilim who endure a shadowy existence in the underworld.
3. These categories of spiritual rebels are developed throughout the storyline of the Hebrew Bible.

- a. The arch rebel can be depicted as a sea dragon (Isaiah 27:1), or a dangerous desert creature (Psalm 94:13), or Molekh, a spirit-king of the grave (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5), or as an accusing lawyer in the divine court (Job 1-2). Note: This mosaic-style portrayal of the arch-rebel continues into the New Testament, and is well illustrated by his description in Revelation 12:9.

*And the great **dragon** was thrown down, the **snake** of old who is called **the devil and the satan, the deceiver** of the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*

REVELATION 12:9

- b. The rebel divine council members deceive the nations into worshipping them, resulting in injustice and violence (Psalm 82; Isaiah 24:21-23). These are the 'gods of the nations' mentioned throughout the Old Testament, for example, 'the gods of Egypt' whom God defeated in the Exodus (Exodus 12:12).

*'For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against **all the gods of Egypt** I will execute judgments—I am the Lord.*

EXODUS 12:12

*And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, **all the host of heaven**, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.*

DEUTERONOMY 4:19

- i. The word “demon” appears in the Old Testament two times to refer to this group of spiritual rebels. Notice they are identified with the gods worshipped by the nations.

*They made Him jealous with foreign gods;  
With abominations they provoked Him to anger.  
“They sacrificed to **demons** who were not God,  
To gods whom they have not known,  
New gods who came lately,*

DEUTERONOMY 32:16-17

*They even sacrificed their sons  
and their daughters to the **demons**,  
And shed innocent blood,  
The blood of their sons and their daughters,  
Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan;  
And the land was polluted with the blood.*

PSALM 106:37-38

- c. The spirits of the deceased warrior kings who seek to terrorize the land. (see Ezekiel 32:17-32)

## SECTION 6.5

# Spiritual Evil in the New Testament

### 1. The satan/slanderer

- a. We began these notes exploring Jesus’ encounter with a spiritual rebel in the Gospels, and we can now recognize in the figure of “the satan/slanderer” the same one depicted as a snake in Genesis 3, as a dragon in Isaiah 27:1, and as a ruler of death in Leviticus 18 and 20.
- b. Jesus’ testing in the wilderness (Matthew 4) is a replay of Adam and Eve’s test in the garden. And notice that the satan offers Jesus a version of Babylon!
- c. The satan is Jesus’ primary enemy in the Gospels. From the Hebrew Scriptures Jesus knows that all humanity has given its allegiance to various forms of Babylonian idolatry, exalting human-made empires, economies, and gods to divine status. This rebellion is both individual and corporate, human and spiritual, which is why he viewed his confrontation with the leaders of Jerusalem as a battle against the power of darkness.

*Again, the devil took Him to a **very high mountain** and showed Him **all the kingdoms of the world and their glory**. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.”*

*Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written,*

*‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”*

MATTHEW 4:8-10

*Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber? While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; **but this hour and the power of darkness are yours.**”*

LUKE 22:52-53

### 2. “The powers”

- a. In Paul’s letters, the rebel members of divine council are referred to as “powers and authorities” who attract the allegiance and idolatrous worship of societies on political, cultural, and religious levels.

*“the age of this world, **the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit** who is now working among the sons of disobedience”*

EPHESIANS 2:2

*“**the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm**”*

EPHESIANS 3:10

*“not flesh and blood, but **the rulers, authorities, the cosmic powers of this present darkness, the evil spiritual beings in the heavenly realm**”*

EPHESIANS 6:12

*"all things were created in him, **things in the heavens and things on earth**, the visible and **invisible**, whether **thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities**, all things were created through him and for him"*

COLOSSIANS 1:15-16

*"they take you away captive through philosophies and empty deception, in accordance with human traditions and **the elemental powers of the cosmos**, not in accordance with the Messiah."*

COLOSSIANS 2:8

*"after disarming **the rulers and authorities**, he exposed them to public shame, triumphing over them in the Messiah"*

COLOSSIANS 2:15

*"Jesus Messiah, who gave himself on behalf of our sins in order to rescue us from **the present evil age**."*

GALATIANS 1:3-4

*"we were enslaved under **the elemental powers of the cosmos**"*

GALATIANS 4:3

*"you were **enslaved to what by nature were not gods...the weak and impoverished elemental powers**"*

GALATIANS 4:8-9

*"this age...**the rulers of this age** who are passing away...**the rulers of this age**... who, if they did know [the wisdom of God] they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."*

1 CORINTHIANS 2:6-8

*"when [the Messiah] hands over the kingdom to God and Father, when he nullifies every **rule and authority and power**, for it is necessary that he rule until he has placed **all enemies** under his feet; the last enemy to be nullified is **death**."*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:24-26

*"neither **death** nor life, nor **angels nor rulers** nor the present nor the future nor **powers**...nor anything in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Messiah Jesus our Lord."*

ROMANS 8:38-39

*"Paul considers the celestial bodies (also called "the elements" in Galatians 4:1-8), to be personalized spiritual forces of some kind, supernatural beings that hold power over human beings... [he] has in mind the tribal deities that were thought to oversee the nations on behalf of God (as in Deut 32:8-9)... but this purpose deteriorated. These same regulating beings are what is meant in Ephesians as kosmokratoras (Eph 6:12) "cosmic rulers." But the metaphor in this word contains an ambiguity. On the one hand, they can be said to "hold" (krateo) the world (kosmos), administering justice and order on behalf of God; on the other hand, their holding might easily become a "grab" (krateo), in which they seek to detract attention from the true creator God and establish themselves as the ultimate in divine power and authority.... These are the "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:11-12)."*

BRUCE LONGENECKER, THE TRIUMPH OF ABRAHAM'S GOD:  
THE TRANSFORMATION OF IDENTITY IN GALATIANS, 49, 54-55

### 3. Demons and evil spirits

- a. When Jesus goes about announcing the good news of the kingdom of God, he regularly confronts spiritual beings that terrorize individual humans, physically and mentally. These maladies are attributed to spiritual evil beings.

*Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they*

*brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, those under **demon-oppression**, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.*

MATTHEW 4:23-24

- b. Notice how this list of ills combines demon-oppression in a list of what we would consider medical or mental illness. This is odd to us because we don't share the same view of the world as the biblical authors. In the biblical imagination, anything that degrades the human person—sickness, death, mental instability, bodily malfunction—are all attributed to spiritual forces of death and the grave.
- c. One of the most common titles for these evil spirits is “impure Spirits.” (Matthew 10:1; 12:43; Mark 3:11; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:25)

*Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an **impure spirit**; and he cried out, saying, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy **us**? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” And Jesus*

*rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him.*

MARK 1:23-26

- d. Notice that this “spirit” (singular noun) speaks as if it is a collection of multiple spiritual beings: “Have you come to destroy **us**?”
- e. This spiritual rebel is called “impure” because, in the biblical storyline, these spirits are associated with the **rephaim**, the inhabitants of the realm of the dead warrior kings of old. In biblical-Jewish thought, the bodies of the dead are ritually impure (see Leviticus 14-15), so if a spiritual being is the remnant of the dead warrior giants, they are, by definition, ritually impure.
- f. One of the “impure spirits” Jesus faces has a very clear connection to the **rephaim**.

*When He got out of the boat, immediately **a man from the tombs with an impure spirit** met Him, and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing*

*himself with stones. Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and shouting with a loud voice, he said, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” For He had been saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” And He was asking him, “What is your name?” And he \*said to Him, “**My name is Legion; for we are many.**”*

MARK 5:2-9

- g. This spiritual rebel is both singular and a plural group (“**we are many**”), terrorizes a man in a graveyard, and is named after a Roman battalion! We are clearly meant to see here that Jesus is facing a battalion of **rephaim** in a ritually impure location (the realm of the dead), yet Jesus is victorious over them.

#### 4. Jesus' power over spiritual evil

- a. In Luke's version of Jesus' testing in the wilderness, he includes a short comment after Jesus overcomes the spiritual rebel. This comment casts a shadow over the entire narrative of the Gospel of Luke. We are meant to see Jesus' rising conflict with the leaders of Jerusalem and his arrival there for Passover as a spiritual conflict.

*"When the slanderer had finished every test, he left Jesus until the time."*

LUKE 4:13

- b. When Jesus went about announcing the arrival of God's kingdom, demons and spiritual evil were subservient to him and to his disciples.

*They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the impure spirits, and they obey Him." Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.*

MARK 1:27-28

*Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over impure spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.*

MATTHEW 10:1

- c. It is only as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem that he intentionally yields himself to the powers of evil, in order to let them inspire his sham trial and execution. At every step, Jesus is fully aware that the Jewish soldiers, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and the Roman soldiers are captive to powers of cosmic evil that drive their behavior.

*"While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours."*

LUKE 22:53

*"Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.*

JOHN 12:31-33

## Conclusions regarding spiritual evil in the New Testament

1. The categories of spiritual evil in the New Testament map closely to the portrait we find in the Hebrew Bible.
2. The conflict between Yahweh and the spiritual rebellion in the Hebrew Bible is carried forward by Jesus in his announcement of the arrival of God's kingdom.

“Paul’s vision of the ultimate rescue of the entire created order...a vision which flowed directly from what he believed about the Messiah, impelled him to understand ‘evil’ as a whole which was more than the sum total of humans sins or deaths. Rather, ‘Sin’ and ‘Death’ were themselves suprahuman forces bent on corrupting and destroying the creator’s good world... Based on Paul’s language about the “powers” the promise is both personal (the heart infected by sin, corrupting the mind into idolatry and the person into dehumanizing behavior) and cosmic, since the worship of idols allows the demons who masquerade behind them to gain power that is not rightly theirs... Sin and Death have replaced, in Paul’s mind, the wicked, idolatrous pagans as seen from within his pre-Christian worldview. Sin and Death are the real enemies to be defeated, and indeed they have been defeated on the cross and will be defeated fully and finally in Jesus’ coming.”

N.T. WRIGHT, PAUL AND FAITHFULNESS OF GOD, 756

EPISODE 6 END

**The climax of Jesus’ liberation war against the powers of spiritual evil is his arrest, execution, and resurrection. This is how Jesus overcomes the powers of evil, and that is the topic of our last video in the Spiritual Being series.**

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[The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible](#)

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GREG BOYD

# The New Humanity

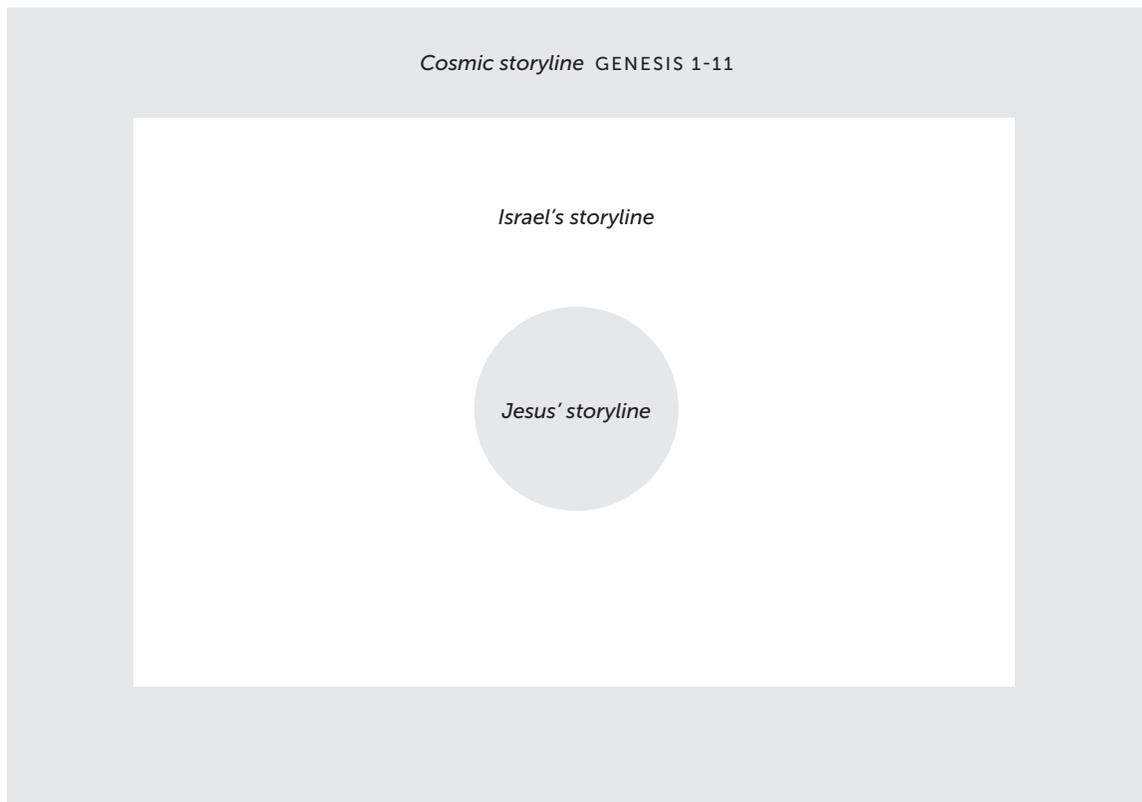
## EPISODE 7

Throughout this series we've been exploring how spiritual beings fit into the storyline of the Bible and the mission and identity of Jesus. In this final study, we will see how the story of Jesus fulfills the story of all humanity as presented in Genesis 1-3 in particular. In his death and resurrection, Jesus opens up the way for a "new humanity" that is both human and spiritual.

### SECTION 7.1

## How the Biblical Story Works

When we turn to the four Gospel accounts of Jesus in the New Testament, we see him presented as the one in whom the entire biblical story reaches its climactic goal. The story of God's covenant promises to Israel's ancestors (Abraham, Moses, and David) is taken up by Jesus as he announces the arrival of God's kingdom. But his mission to Israel fits within an even larger drama, namely the cosmic rebellion of human and spiritual beings that is narrated in Genesis 1-11. The narratives about Jesus assume the reader will understand his story within both of these larger plotlines.



# The Cosmic Storyline

## God's purpose in Genesis 1-2

1. God's purpose is to partner with humanity as his image-bearing representatives, so they can rule over creation on his behalf.

*Then God said, "Let us make human in our **image**, according to our **likeness**; and **let them rule** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

*God created human in his image, in the **image of God** He created him; **male and female** He created them.*

*God blessed them; and God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

GENESIS 1:26-28

2. God elevates the humans from the dirt to the realm of the divine throne by placing them in the royal mountain temple called "Eden" (Hebrew for "delight").

*Then Yahweh God formed human of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and human became a living being. Yahweh God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and **there He placed the human** whom He had formed. Out of the ground Yahweh God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food, and also the tree of life*

*in the middle of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.*

*Then Yahweh **God took the human and put him into the garden of Eden** to cultivate it and keep it.*

GENESIS 2:7-9, 15

3. The tree of life is introduced to the reader by noting its presence in the middle of the garden. This is a clue to its significance, and the author assumes that the reader will grasp the contextual clues that point to the temple-symbolism of the garden (see the study notes for Episode 1: "Introduction to Spiritual Beings").
4. The geography of Genesis 2 maps precisely onto the symbolic geography of the world in the Hebrew Bible.

THE DRY LAND	EDEN	THE GARDEN IN EDEN	THE TREE OF LIFE IN THE MIDDLE
THE PROMISED LAND	JERUSALEM AND THE TEMPLE MOUNT	THE HOLY PLACE	THE HOLY OF HOLIES

5. This helps us understand the meaning of the "tree of life in the middle of the garden." Humans are commissioned to rule and tend the garden on God's behalf and to "fill the land" (Gen. 1:26-28) with its spreading beauty. And to do so, God gives them access to the tree of life, that is, immortal life that transcends their 'dirty' origins as mortal creatures. When humans live

in the immediate presence of the Creator, their mortal origins are transcended and they are transformed into something more and greater.

“[The tree of life] represents life that is beyond the original life that God breathed into human. The first human by nature is susceptible to death.... Nevertheless, continued eating from the tree could renew life and prevent death. Apart from disobedience to God’s command, mortals had access to this tree... The tree of life allows humanity to transcend its mortality, the state in which it was created on the sixth day, so it can move to a higher dimension... to eternal life and immortality. As one partakes of this... fruit by faith, one participates in this eternal life. This highest potency of life was available in the garden and becomes once again available to us as we reenter the temple-garden through the second Adam... and look forward to the resurrection of our bodies.” BRUCE WALTKE, “OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY”, 257.

6. Genesis 1-2 depicts God as offering mortal humanity the chance to rise above their mortal origins in the dirt so they can become God’s eternal partners in ruling the world together. This is why the poet of Psalm 8 is so blown away by God’s generosity—because this grand calling is so incongruent with human’s humble origins. (see Psalm 8).
  - a. This poem is reflecting on the remarkable calling that God has placed upon humans in Genesis 1-2. It seems ridiculous when the frail and mortal nature of humanity is compared with the honor of the heavenly beings and their exalted status.
  - b. Note also that the glory and majesty that God gives to humans is precisely the majesty that characterizes God himself in the opening and closing lines of the poem.
7. Humans are given a two-part command that will guide their participation in God’s commission.
  - a. Notice that God’s first command is to enjoy the garden and eat from all of the trees. What a great command to receive! “All of the trees” includes the tree of life mentioned in verse 9. This leads to the conclusion that humanity’s access to all the trees of the garden, including the tree of life, is not conditional. They are given as a gift. But continued access to this gift comes with a warning.
  - b. The second part of the command regarding the tree of knowing good and bad is not a rule that must be followed in order to win access to the tree of life. It’s just the opposite. The gift of eternal life is freely given so that the humans can rule with God forever. God’s warning about the tree of knowing good and bad is just that, a warning. If they eat from that tree, it will signify a lack of trust in God’s generosity, as well as direct rebellion against their Creator’s command. Without God’s wisdom, humanity’s “knowing of good and bad” will be short-sighted,

O Yahweh, our Lord,  
How **majestic** is Your name in all the earth,  
  
You have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!  
From the mouth of infants and nursing babes  
You have established strength  
Because of Your adversaries,  
To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.  
When I consider Your heavens,  
the work of Your fingers,  
The moon and the stars,  
which You have ordained;  
What is human that You take thought of him,  
And the son of humanity that You care for him?  
  
You have made him a little lower than the spiritual beings,  
Yet You crown him with **glory and majesty!**  
You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;  
You have put all things under his feet,  
All sheep and oxen,  
And also the beasts of the field,  
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,  
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.  
  
O Yahweh, our Lord,  
How majestic is Your name in all the earth!

PSALM 8

*Yahweh God commanded the man, saying,  
“From any tree of the garden you may eat  
freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of  
good and bad you shall not eat, for in the day  
that you eat from it you will surely die.”*

GENESIS 2:16-17

prone to distortion, and easily corrupted. God does not want that kind of corruption to ruin Eden, where heaven and earth are one. So he warns them that such a rebellion will result in losing access to the tree of life—that is, it will lead to exile and death.

8. When human is deceived by a spiritual being, God informs the humans that their loss of access to eternal life will result in exile and death.

*Then to the human He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it';*

*Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.*

*Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;*

*And you will eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face You will eat bread,*

**Till you return to the ground,  
Because from it you were taken;  
For you are dust,  
And to dust you shall return."**

GENESIS 3:17-19

- a. Notice that humanity's return to the dust is a return to their mortal origins in the dirt. This is not a demotion of a "perfect" humanity. Rather, this consequence represents a loss of the destiny that God wanted for the humans. Eternal life was a calling that humanity forfeited.

9. God decides that eternal life would be terrible for a humanity that has chosen to **take** its own knowing of good and bad. And so, in an act of severe mercy, God exiles humans from the garden, so that the gift of eternal life remains out of their reach.

*Then Yahweh God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and bad; and now, **he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever**"—therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to work the ground from which he was taken. And He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.*

GENESIS 3:22-24

## Conclusions regarding the cosmic storyline of Genesis 1-3

1. God made humanity as his partners, to be his representatives who rule over creation on his behalf.
2. While humans are mortal dirt-creatures, God invites them into his own divine presence and gives them the opportunity to transcend their mortal origins. Eternal existence is not an inherent property of human nature in Genesis 1-2. Rather, mortal humans are given the gift of eternal life and are warned about the kind of behavior that will ruin the gift.
3. When the humans foolishly join the spiritual rebel in Genesis 3 and take their own knowledge of good and bad, they both rebel against God and also take a cheap substitute for the tree of life: they would rather have their own wisdom than God's gift.
4. In an act of severe mercy, God exiles the humans so that they do not live eternally in their corrupted state. They are sent away from the garden to the realm of the dirt, where they return to the dust from which they came.
5. The plot conflict introduced in Genesis 3 governs the entire narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures: God's mission is to restore humanity to their lost calling, to reinstall them as his image-bearing partners who can rule the world in the divine power of immortal life and love.
6. The solution is seen in God's purpose to raise up a "seed" from the woman (Genesis 3:15) who will both overcome spiritual evil at its source (to strike

the head of the snake) while also dealing with the horrific consequences of human and spiritual evil (to be struck by the snake). In other words, what we need is a new kind of human who will confront evil in God's good world and overcome it in a surprising and paradoxical way.

### SECTION 7.3

## The Israel Storyline

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, we are introduced to a whole lineup of heroes and heroines who, for brief moments, are presented as potential candidates for the promised seed of Genesis 3:15. Each narrative character steps onto the stage with great promise and hope, only to fail and leave their story as an image, a pointer to the anticipated "seed of the woman" who will fulfill the promise.

#### 1. Noah in Genesis 5-9.

- a. Noah is introduced as a character who will offer comfort to all humanity after the debacle of Genesis 3-4.
- b. And yet Noah replays the failure of Adam and Eve in another garden whose fruit leads to his nakedness and shame (see Genesis 9:20-24).

*And he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will give us comfort from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed."*

GENESIS 5:29

#### 2. Abraham in Genesis 12-25.

- a. Abraham is introduced as one who God will use to restore the blessing of Eden to all the nations.
- b. Yet Abraham twice betrays his wife by endangering her to save his own life (Genesis 12:10-20 and ch. 20). Then he and Sarah oppress an Egyptian slave and exile her and her son to die in the wilderness (Genesis 16 and 21).

*"And I will make you a great nation,  
And I will bless you,  
And make your name great;  
And so you shall be a blessing;  
And I will bless those who bless you,  
And the one who curses you I will curse.  
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

GENESIS 12:2-3

#### 3. Joseph in Genesis 37-50.

- a. Joseph is presented as the beloved son who is rejected and persecuted by his brothers but exalted by God from the pit to rule over the nations.
- b. Joseph's dreams in Genesis 37 hint back to humanity's lost calling to rule over heaven and earth as God's partners.
- c. Joseph is eventually elevated to become second-in-command over the nations, ruling at Pharaoh's right hand.

*Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have had still another dream; and behold, **the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.**"*

GENESIS 37:9

*Then Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find a man like this, **in whom is the spirit of God?**" So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so **discerning and wise** as you are. **You shall be over my house**, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; **only in the throne I will be greater than you.**" Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, **I have set you over all***

***the land of Egypt.**" Then Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck. He had him ride in his second chariot; and they proclaimed before him, "Bow the knee!" And **he set him over all the land of Egypt.***

GENESIS 41:38-43

d. Yet Joseph eventually dies in Egypt, hoping for the future Exodus from their exile and the return to the land of God's promise.

4. Moses in Exodus 2–Deuteronomy 34.

a. Moses is presented as a royal priest who confronts human and spiritual evil among the nations (represented by Egypt and its gods, see Exodus 12:12). He alone is invited to ascend to the high place of Sinai where heaven and earth meet, and he is transformed for a brief moment into a new mode of human existence.

*It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him.*

b. The high point of Moses' career as Israel's leader came when he offered his own life for Israel's sins so that God's covenant could be maintained with the people.

EXODUS 34:29

*On the next day Moses said to the people, "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to Yahweh, **perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.**" Then Moses returned to Yahweh, and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, **if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!**"*

c. Yet Moses consistently rebels against God's purpose, from the first moments of his commission (see Exodus 4:10-17) to the wilderness wandering when he dishonors God in the eyes of the people (Numbers 20:8-13).

EXODUS 32:30-32

5. David in 1 Samuel 16–1 Kings 2.

a. David is presented as the royal seed of Israel who is used by God to reunify the family of Abraham so that it can become God's instrument of blessing to the nations and overcome the forces of evil in the world.

*Once You spoke in vision to Your godly ones, And said, "I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.*

b. This poem is reflecting back on God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 and linking it to the cosmic storyline of Genesis 1-3. God called David to be that new human who would be exalted as God's human partner to rule the nations and subdue the chaos and evil among the nations. Like humanity in Genesis 1-2, David is the latecomer who was elevated as the firstborn (he was the eighth son of his father! See 1 Samuel 16).

*I have found **David My servant;** With My holy oil I have **anointed him,** With whom My hand will be established; My arm also will strengthen him. The enemy will not deceive him, Nor the son of wickedness afflict him. But I shall crush his adversaries before him, And strike those who hate him. My faithfulness and My loyal love will be with him, And in My name his horn will be exalted.*

c. In Psalm 89:29 we see humanity's lost calling reappear: Eternal life for the promised line of God's human partners, through whom the divine rule will be extended over all creation.

***I shall also set his hand on the sea And his right hand on the rivers.** He will cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.' **I also shall make him My firstborn, The highest of the kings of the earth.** My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever, And My covenant shall be confirmed to him. **So I will establish his seed forever And his throne as the days of heaven.**"*

d. For related statements of this hope connected to David and his line, see 2 Samuel 7, Psalms 2, 72, and especially 110.

PSALM 89:19-29

*Yahweh says to my Lord:*

**"Sit at My right hand**

*Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."*

*Yahweh will **stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion,** saying,*

**"Rule in the midst of Your enemies."**

*Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power;*

*In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,*

*Your youth are to You as the dew.*

*The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind,*

**"You are a priest forever**

**According to the order of Melchizedek."**

PSALM 110:1-2

- i. Here David is portrayed as speaking of another master whom Yahweh will elevate to sit beside the divine throne and rule over the nations from Jerusalem.
  - ii. Notice that this ruler is also a priest, which was not true of any of David's sons who ruled in Jerusalem. Rather, this poem anticipates that the future "seed of David" will be both a king and a priest, like Adam and Eve who ruled as the royal priests in Eden.
- e. Yet David replays the sin of Adam and Eve and Cain (Genesis 3-4) and the sons of God (Genesis 6).

DAVID IN 2 SAMUEL 11 AND 12	ADAM, EVE, AND CAIN IN GENESIS 2-4	THE SONS OF GOD IN GENESIS 6:1-2
<p>2 SAMUEL 11:2-4  <i>Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he <b>saw</b> (ראה) a <b>woman</b> (אשה) bathing; and the woman was very <b>good of appearance</b> (מראה טובת). So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" David sent messengers and <b>took</b> (לקח) her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house.</i></p> <p>2 SAMUEL 12:9  <i>Why have you despised the word of Yahweh by <b>doing evil in His eyes</b>? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have <b>murdered</b> (הרג) him with the sword of the sons of Ammon.</i></p>	<p>GENESIS 2:9  <i>And Yahweh caused to sprout from the ground every tree that was <b>desirable of sight</b> (מראה) and <b>good</b> (טוב) for eating...</i></p> <p>GENESIS 3:6  <i>When the <b>woman</b> (אשה) <b>saw</b> (ראה) that the tree was <b>good</b> (טוב) for food, and that it was a <b>delight to the eyes</b>, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she <b>took</b> (לקח) from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.</i></p> <p>GENESIS 4:6-8  <i>Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you <b>hot with anger</b>? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and <b>murdered</b> (הרג) him.</i></p>	<p>GENESIS 6:1-2  <i>Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, and the sons of God <b>saw</b> (ראה) that the daughters of men were <b>good</b> (טוב); and they <b>took</b> (לקח) <b>women</b> (אשה) for themselves, whomever they chose.</i></p> <p><i>And the land was <b>corrupted in the eyes of Yahweh</b>, and the land was filled with <b>violence</b>.</i></p>

- f. Through the repetition of key vocabulary, the sin of David is set in comparison with the rebellion stories in Genesis 3-6. Just as humanity forfeited its access to the tree of life and partnership with God in ruling the world, so now David loses his chance to embody God's rule over the nations. Just as the sons of God violated the boundary between heaven and earth, so also David forfeits his chance to become the promised seed that would rule over heaven and earth.

## Conclusions regarding Israel's story.

1. All of the narrative characters are presented as images of the anticipated “seed of the woman” promised in Genesis 3:15. In very different ways, they all replay the sins of their ancestors and forfeit the calling God has placed on Israel to mediate God's Eden-blessing to all the nations.
2. Israel's exile from the promised land, which happens in two waves (2 Kings 17 and 24-25), replays the exile of Adam and Eve from the garden (Genesis 3:22-24).
3. These portraits of humans at their best, in the figures of Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and David, stand in the Hebrew Scriptures as anticipatory images of the one who is to come. One book in the Hebrew Bible specifically picks up all these images and combines them into one complex mosaic, namely the “son of man” figure in Daniel chapter 7.

### SECTION 7.4

## Daniel 7: The Israel Story and the Cosmic Story Come Together

1. Check out The Bible Project video on “The Son of Man” for a summary of these ideas, and our “Son of Man” podcast series for an in-depth exploration of this biblical theme.
2. In Daniel chs. 1-6, we are introduced to the line of David (Daniel 1:3, “the seed of the kingdom”) that is taken into exile in Babylon.
3. Throughout Daniel 1-6, the line of David is faced with a test of allegiance to Yahweh (the famous stories of the fiery furnace and the lion's den). Daniel and his companions are all threatened with death to give allegiance to the kings of Babylon and Persia, and they refuse. This leads to their “death” in Daniel chs. 3 and 6, but God intervenes to redeem them from death. After this vindication, Daniel and the friends are elevated to rule over the empire alongside the king (sounds like Joseph!).
4. These narratives in Daniel 1-6 are combined and replayed in a dream Daniel has in chapter 7, which takes the “royal seed” of Daniel and the friends and combines them with all the narrative images that we explored earlier. And the combined portrait is astounding!
5. Instead of a snake, we find a horde of mutant beasts crawling out of a dark, chaotic sea to wreak violence on the earth (Daniel 7:1-8). But all of a sudden, the Creator takes his heavenly throne and brings divine justice upon the beast and its evil (Daniel 7:9-12). Then comes the climax of the dream.

*“I kept looking in the night visions,  
And behold, with the clouds of heaven  
**One like a son of man** was coming,  
And he came up to the Ancient of Days  
And was presented before him.  
And **to him was given dominion,**  
Glory and a kingdom,*

*That all the peoples, nations and men of every language  
Might serve him.  
**His dominion is an everlasting dominion**  
Which will not pass away;  
And his kingdom is one  
Which will not be destroyed.*

DANIEL 7:13-14

- a. Here we see the original human calling restored to a figure who will rule alongside God as an eternal partner. The everlasting rule of the “**son of man**” will take place after the beastly evil of human empires has been done away with, so that only the rule of God and the **son of man** remains.
- b. Notice that in the stories of Daniel 3 and 6, the “seed of David” is brought through persecution and death (the furnace in ch. 3 and the lion’s den in ch. 6) and then elevated to rule beside the king. So here in Daniel 7, the **son of man** is brought up from the realm of the violent beasts to rule over all creation.
- c. This is a culminating image that summarizes the messianic hope of the Hebrew Scriptures. Notice that the heavenly beings play a key role in Daniel’s dream. They are surrounding the divine throne (Daniel 7:10), but the son of man is elevated to rule over them as well. We are back to our foundational images from Genesis 1-2, Psalm 8, and Psalm 110: Humanity was called by God to transcend their mortal origins and discover their elevated purpose to rule over heaven and earth, which is only possible if they accept God’s gift of eternal life.
- d. Daniel 7 is a poetic, dream-image of the fulfillment of God’s promise in Genesis 3:15, an eternal human who is exalted to rule as a divine-human partner over all creation.

#### SECTION 7.5

## Jesus’ Story in the Gospels

The four Gospel accounts in the New Testament all portray Jesus, in their different ways, as the one in whom all of these promises find fulfillment. This is why the stories emphasize Jesus’ conflict with spiritual evil from the very start.

### Jesus’ divine-human identity

1. After the litany of heroic failures from the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels present God’s surprising solution to the cosmic crisis and the failure of Israel. The Creator God who called Israel into being will himself become human in the person of the divine Son. Jesus will be the humanity that we could not be for ourselves, and he will be “Israel” in order to fulfill its calling to the nations.
2. Jesus’ Holy-Spirit conception is presented as the way that the Creator God enters into and becomes one with his human creations.

*The angel answered and said to [Mary], “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy One to be born shall be called the Son of God.”*

LUKE 1:35

## Jesus as the ultimate divine-human partner

1. Recall how the plot tension generated by Genesis 1-3 created the need for a human who can not only partner with God but also transcend death itself. The Gospels portray Jesus as the one in whom Yahweh the God of Israel is coming among his people to accomplish this very task.
2. Notice how Mark's Gospel begins with an extended quotation of Isaiah 40:1-3 (combined with wording from Malachi 3:1 and Exodus 23:20), which summons a prophetic herald to announce the arrival of Yahweh.
3. Mark clearly identifies John the Baptist as the heralding voice, who will prepare Israel for Yahweh's arrival.
4. Notice the narrative logic: If John is the herald for Yahweh, then Jesus' arrival is equated with the arrival of Yahweh.

*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Messiah, the Son of God.*  
*As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:*  
*"Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You,*  
*Who will prepare Your way;*  
*The voice of one crying in the wilderness,*  
*'Make ready the way of the Lord,*  
*Make His paths straight.' "*  
*John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness*  
*preaching a baptism of repentance for the*  
*forgiveness of sins.*

*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."*

MARK 1:1-4, 9-11

## Jesus' initial victory over the satan

1. Three of the four Gospel accounts locate the beginning of Jesus' kingdom announcement in his baptism and subsequent testing in the wilderness. Luke's account is an excellent example.

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness, for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'*

**And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You**

**worship before me, it shall all be Yours."** *Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.' "*

*And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,' and, 'On their hands they will bear You up, So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.' "* **And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' "** **When the devil had finished every test, he left Him until an opportune time.**

LUKE 4:1-13

2. Jesus' test is presented here as the climactic next step of both the cosmic storyline of Genesis 1-3 and also of the Israel storyline of Genesis 12 onward.

JESUS' STORY	ISRAEL'S STORY
<i>40 days in the wilderness</i>	<i>40 years in the wilderness</i>
<i>The wilderness is where Jesus obeys the will of the father and does not put him to the test.</i>	<i>The wilderness is where Israel tested God and disobeyed the will of Yahweh.</i>

*In Jesus' first and last tests, he responds to the satan by quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3 and 6:16, passages that recall Israel's failure in the wilderness.*

- a. The point: Jesus is reversing the failure of Israel in the wilderness and so proves himself as Israel's true royal-priestly representative who can fulfill the nations' calling before God.

JESUS' STORY	HUMANITY'S STORY
<i>The divine Son is tested in a wilderness.</i>	<i>Adam, the first "son of God" (see Genesis 5:1-3) is tested in a garden.</i>
<i>The satan's test that Jesus could take power over the nations happens "on high" (Luke 4:5).</i>	<i>Adam and Eve were tested by the snake in Eden, the high-garden-temple.</i>
<i>The satan's test is about how Jesus will become the ruler of the world.</i>	<i>Humanity's test is about how they will become co-rulers with God in Eden (Genesis 1:26-28).</i>

- 3. In each case, Jesus resists the temptation to grab political power on his own terms, and he deprives himself of food and honor, trusting that his Father will deliver him. In this way, he overcomes the testing of the satan, and submits himself to the road of hardship that lays ahead.

*Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and **proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.** The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various **diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.***

MATTHEW 4:23-24

*Then they brought him **a demonized man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.** All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. **But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.**"*

MATTHEW 12:22-29

## Jesus' mission to inaugurate God's heavenly kingdom

- 1. Jesus went about announcing the arrival of God's kingdom, and he brought God's reign to bear on the lives of Israelites and non-Israelites living around Galilee. Notice Matthew's description.
  - a. Notice how Matthew equates Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of God with two kinds of activity, teaching/announcing as well as healing. Notice also that these healings are for people who are sick along with those who suffer what modern western cultures would call "mental illness," a sickness of the brain.
  - b. In Jesus' view of the world, sickness, mental illness, even death itself, is a sign of our world's captivity to the powers of spiritual evil. His announcement of God's kingdom manifests itself in ministries of healing, generosity, hospitality, and welcome to the outsider.
- 2. Jesus' ministry of healing is portrayed as an act of liberation from humanity's captivity to spiritual evil.

*And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a **woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent over, and could not straighten up at all.** When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness." And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God.*

*"And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, **whom the satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?**"*

LUKE 13:10-13, 16

- a. Notice that in both of these stories, Jesus describes his ministry of healing in the language of confrontation with and liberation from spiritual powers of evil.
  - b. Jesus viewed his healings as a kind of offensive battle against the spiritual forces of death and evil.
3. Jesus invited his followers to view themselves as participants in the arrival of God's kingdom. This is why his famous Sermon the Mount (Matthew 5-7) has at its center the prayer Jesus invited his followers to say every day.
  4. Jesus presented God's kingdom as arriving, even invading earth, in and through his own mission. He invites his followers to pray that God's will and purpose be more and more manifest on earth. Within the context of the Sermon on the Mount, this means that God's kingdom displays itself **through the behavior of Jesus' followers as they imitate his own mission and way of life.**

*'Our Father who is in heaven,  
 May be Your name be recognized as holy.  
 'Your kingdom come.  
 Your will be done,  
 On earth as it is in heaven.  
 'Give us this day our daily bread.  
 'And forgive us our debts,  
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
 'And do not lead us into the test,  
 but deliver us from the evil one*

MATTHEW 6:9-13

## Jesus brings God's kingdom to Jerusalem

1. Jesus intentionally timed his kingdom of God movement to come to its climax in Jerusalem during Passover. Every moment in this part of Jesus story was pre-planned and strategically executed.
2. He made a public challenge to Israel's leaders who governed the Jerusalem temple. His announcement and symbolic destruction of the temple was a prophetic warning that their days as Israel's leaders were numbered (see the sequence of events in Mark 11).
3. Jesus provoked the temple leaders, knowing that they would arrest him as a troublemaker and rebel. This was his plan. His words and actions at his messianic Passover meal make clear that he meant to offer his own life on behalf of rebellious Israel (and therefore, for all humanity). See the sequence of events in Mark 14:22-31.
4. In the final hours before his arrest, Jesus went to a garden for one last test. In Gethsemane we watch Jesus wrestle with his calling once again, just as he did in the wilderness.
  - a. Notice that Jesus' prayer matches the Lord's Prayer that he taught his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. This helps us see that this prayer was not simply an item of instruction for Jesus. Rather, in the Lord's Prayer he shares with us the very words that sustained him in his effort to bring God's kingdom into the world at the cost of his own life and well-being.
  - b. Notice also that Jesus calls himself **the son of man**, that is, the figure from Daniel chapter 7 and Psalm 8. In this moment of vulnerability and weakness, Jesus is paradoxically at his most influential and royal: He is the truly human one exercising God's rule over the world—by giving up his life.

*Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."*

*Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and **the son of man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.** Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"*

MATTHEW 26:36-39, 45-46

5. In Luke's version of Jesus' arrest, Jesus identifies the Jerusalem authorities as agents of spiritual evil.
6. Jesus described his coming death and resurrection as his victory over the powers of darkness.

*And Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

*"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this*

*hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.*

*"Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.*

*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."*

JOHN 12:23-24, 27, 31-32

*Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber? While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours."*

LUKE 22:52-53

- a. Jesus is portraying his coming death as precisely the way that he will overcome the powers of evil who hold the power of death itself. Only through experiencing death on behalf of rebellious Israel and humanity can Jesus become the New Humanity.
7. Jesus' resurrection is portrayed as his vindication from death and the way that he receives divine authority over all of heaven and earth.
    - a. Jesus is here claiming to be the vindicated son of man, the figure from Daniel 7:12-14 and Psalm 8, who is installed as the divine-human ruler over all of heaven and earth.
    - b. The risen Jesus is the new humanity!

*And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

MATTHEW 28:18-20

## Jesus as the New Humanity in Paul the Apostle's Letters

1. Paul regularly refers to Jesus as "the image of God" from Genesis 1 and to followers of Jesus as the "new humanity" who are being transformed to become like the risen Jesus.

*For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.** *For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.*

COLOSSIANS 1:13-16

*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

COLOSSIANS 2:15

*Do not lie to one another, since you put aside the old humanity with its evil practices, and have put on the new humanity who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but the Messiah is all, and in all.*

COLOSSIANS 3:9-11

- a. Notice that in these passages, Jesus is the truly human image of God who has defeated the spiritual powers of darkness in his death and resurrection.
- b. In Colossians 1:13-15, Paul uses the language of “firstborn” and “kingdom of the Son” (recall Psalm 89 discussed above) and the “image of God” from Genesis 1. He also draws upon the imagery of Daniel 7 in Colossians 2:15, describing Jesus’ death as his victory over the powers of evil. Here, Paul is combining the ideas of Genesis 3:15 with the gospel announcement of Jesus’ resurrection.
- c. In Colossians 3, Paul then extends Jesus’ new humanity to include those who trust in Jesus and give their allegiance to him. They will find themselves being transformed into the new kind of humanity that Jesus pioneered on our behalf.

## The Resurrection of the New Humanity

1. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul offers his most developed thoughts on the nature of Jesus’ resurrection and how it provides a solution to the problems created in Genesis 1-3.
  - a. Paul presents Jesus as a new Adam—and remember, in Hebrew the word *adam* is the word for “humanity.” It was humanity’s rebellion, leading to death, that prevented humans from being God’s eternal partners who could rule over heaven and earth.
  - b. This is precisely the problem that the resurrection of Jesus solves. It opens up the way for a new humanity that does not die to be God’s covenant partners in ruling creation. Jesus is presently the only new human who exists in this resurrected, new creation state.
  - c. Notice that Paul quotes from Psalm 8:6 in the final line above, showing that he equates Jesus with the new humanity.
2. The climax of Paul’s argument in this chapter is an exploration of the new creation humanity, whose prototype is the risen Jesus.

*But the Messiah has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For **since death came through a human, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a human.** For as in Adam all die, so in Messiah all will be made alive. But each in turn: Messiah, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, **when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.** For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For **he “has put everything under his feet.”***

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-27

*But someone will say, “**How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?**” You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. **All flesh is not the same flesh,** but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.*

**So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a corruptible body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spirit-empowered body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spirit-empowered body.** So also it is written, “**The first man, Adam, became a living being.**” **The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.** However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. **The first human is from the earth, of dust; the second human is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.**

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-57

- a. This is an extremely dense paragraph, and our English vocabulary “physical” and “spiritual” are inadequate translations to help us understand the nature of what Paul is trying to say in Greek.
  - b. Paul’s larger point is that different creatures have different kinds of bodies, so that the heavenly bodies (which, remember, are considered spiritual beings in the biblical worldview) are a kind of “body” that is similar but also different from the “bodies” of earthly creatures. This helps Paul’s larger point, that the resurrection body of Jesus is still a body, but of a different kind.
    - i. In 15:43-44, Paul contrasts a “natural (ψυχικόν, *psuchikon*) body” with a “spiritual” (πνευματικόν, *pneumatikon*) body. The problem is that in English, the contrast pair “natural” and “spiritual” sounds like a contrast between “physical/material” and “non-material/spiritual.” This has led some readers to read this paragraph, which in 15:45 describes the risen Jesus as a “life-giving Spirit,” to conclude that Paul believes that the resurrection body is non-physical, that is, a disembodied reality. This is NOT what Paul is saying.
3. Paul used the words “natural” and “spiritual” earlier in this same letter, and these parallel examples are important to understand what Paul means by these same words in chapter 15.
    - a. Notice that we find the same contrast between “natural” and “spiritual” but we have lots of other additional terms that fill out the portrait of each.
      - i. “Natural” = “foolish” and “human” and “fleshly” = “jealousy and strife”
      - ii. “Spiritual” = “from God” and “wise” and “mature”
    - b. In other words, Paul’s main contrast in using the words “natural” and “spiritual” is not between “physical” and “non-physical.” In this context he’s addressing how there are some Corinthians who have turned the church into a popularity contest aimed at increasing the honor and status of celebrity leaders. This is what he calls “natural” and “fleshly,” because it leads to jealousy and strife.
    - c. For Paul, “spiritual” refers to a mode of humanity that is **empowered by God’s life-giving Spirit**, creating love, peace, and generosity in the world. These are acts that are very much physical, but they exist in a different kind of way than “mere human” behavior.
  4. When we apply these conclusions to the contrast between the Genesis 1 human as “natural” and “earthly” in contrast to the risen Jesus who is “heavenly” and a “life-giving Spirit,” Paul is not saying that the resurrected Jesus is not physical. Just the opposite! He is saying that the risen Jesus exists as a **new kind of humanity**, whose origins, values, and nature are not determined by the physical constraints of creation as we currently experience it. The risen Jesus is the first prototype of a Spirit-empowered humanity whose life can be given to others through the power and presence of God’s Spirit.

*Now we have received, not the **spirit of the world**, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by **human** wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.*

*But a **natural** (ψυχικός, *psuchikos*) human does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are **foolishness** to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.*

*For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

*And I, brothers and sisters, could not speak to you as to spiritual humans, but as to humans of the **flesh**, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still **fleshly**. For since there is **jealousy** and **strife** among you, are you not **fleshly**, and are you not walking like **mere humans**?*

1 CORINTHIANS 2:12-3:3

“When Genesis 2 speaks of the creator making Adam as a living “being” (Greek Septuagint, *psyche*), this was not a secondary form of humanity, but its primary form. What humans now need is not to get away from, or back behind, such an existence, but rather to go on to the promised state of the final Adam, in which this physical body will not be abandoned, but will be given new animation by the Creator’s own Spirit. Paul does not believe in a return to the primal state, but in the redemption from the sin and death which has corrupted the primal state, in order that a way forward be found into the new creation which, though always in the mind of the creator, has never yet existed. The ‘man from heaven’ is not a being who, unsullied by the world of creation, remains in a purely non-physical state; he is the risen lord who will come from the heavenly realm (1 Cor 15:47-49). He will enable other humans, not to escape from the physical world... but to go on to bear, in the new resurrected body, the ‘image of the human from heaven.’” N.T. WRIGHT, “THE RESURRECTION OF THE SON OF GOD”, 353.

*Now I say this, brothers and sisters, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Messiah.***

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-57

5. With the contrast between the “new” and “old” humanity in place, Paul concludes the entire line of thought with his hope of a transformation of our mortal bodies into a new creation existence—the immortal state that humanity forfeited in Genesis 3.
  - a. In Paul’s mind, the future resurrection of the new humanity is the grand fulfillment of the storyline of Genesis 1-2.

## The New Humanity and the New Creation

1. In the final book of the Bible, John the visionary depicts the new creation as a New Jerusalem-Eden-Temple, which recalls Genesis 1-2 but also carries it further into new territory.
  - a. This new creation is simultaneously a new heavens and earth (recalling Genesis 1:1), a new Jerusalem (recalling Isaiah 60 and 65), a new temple (recalling Exodus 25-31 and 35-40), and a new garden of Eden (recalling Genesis 2), all at the same time. John is combining images of the “new Eden” from all over the Hebrew Scriptures because he takes them as referring to one ultimate reality.
 

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, **new Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, **the tabernacle of God** is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,*

REVELATION 21:1-3
  - b. Notice the final line of the scene in 22:5, “and they will reign forever and ever.” This clearly recalls the original human vocation from Genesis 1:26-28, that humanity as the image of God reigns as God’s partners and children forever in creation.

*Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; **and they will reign forever and ever.***

REVELATION 22:1-5

**Once all of creation joins Jesus and the new humanity in the resurrection, God's ultimate purposes for creation will be fulfilled. This is all possible in and through the divine-human partner, who loved us and gave himself for us, so that his eternal life could become our own.**

FURTHER READING

[The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible](#)

MICHAEL HEISER

[The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination](#)

GARY A. ANDERSON

[The Last Adam: A Theology of the Obedient Life of Jesus in the Gospels](#)

BRANDON CROWE

[Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church](#)

N.T. WRIGHT