

ARTICLES

*Finding Hope in God Who Reigns
over Heaven and Earth*

Angels

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ARTICLE ONE

Nephilim

A handful of verses in Genesis 6 have sparked a good bit of controversy among scholars in both Judaism and Christianity. Genesis 6:1-4 (CSB) says,

When mankind began to multiply on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of mankind were beautiful, and they took any they chose as wives for themselves. And the LORD said, “My Spirit will not remain with mankind forever, because they are corrupt. Their days will be 120 years.” The Nephilim were on the earth both in those days and afterward, when the sons of God came to the daughters of mankind, who bore children to them. They were the powerful men of old, the famous men.

This text brings several questions to the surface, the most prominent being: Who are the sons of God and the daughters of men? Most theologians agree on the identity of the women in the text which is a small miracle in itself! They are believed to be human women. The debate mainly revolves around the identity of the “sons of God.” While a small minority might categorize them as royalty (a line of kings), most scholars believe they are either angels or men.

We will take a brief look into each of these views to explore the arguments on both sides. But before we do, it’s important to remember godly men and women have disagreed about this text for centuries. I want to encourage you to think deeply and form your own view while holding it loosely—with humility.

I also want us to remember that extrabiblical books—like 1 Enoch or the Book of Giants—are informative sources, but they are not inspired Scripture. While these books do help us understand the worldview of those who lived centuries before us, that doesn’t mean the author’s interpretation was correct.

“SONS OF GOD” AS ANGELS

In this view, the “sons of God” (Genesis 6:2) were angels who went outside the bounds of God’s commands and procreated with human women, producing superhuman giants who were half angel and half human. They are referred to in the text as Nephilim, a title derived from the original Hebrew word *naphal*, which means “fallen.”¹

THOSE WHO HOLD THIS VIEW MIGHT CITE THE FOLLOWING EVIDENCE:

1. **The original language** – The Hebrew for “sons of God” is *bene Elohim*.² This term is most often used in Scripture to refer to heavenly beings, in such passages as Job 1:6 and Job 2:1. In Job 38:7, the sons of God (*bene Elohim*) shouted for joy when the earth’s foundation was laid, before humans were created! The related Hebrew term *bene elim* is also used in Psalm 29:1 and Psalm 82 to refer to supernatural creatures. However, Psalm 82:6 seems to use the term *bene Elohim* to refer to humans; so, while it’s most often used of angels, there is room for disagreement on its use in Genesis 6.
2. **The age of their position** – Understanding *bene Elohim* in Genesis 6 as fallen angels is the oldest historical position and most popular view in ancient Judaism and the early church. In addition, writings from the third century BC expound upon this view in extra-biblical resources like the Book of Enoch, the Book of Jubilees, the Book of Giants, and the writings of Josephus.³

The view of *bene Elohim* as human men didn’t surface until the fifth century AD when the church was defending the supremacy of Christ in light of angel worship.⁴

3. **New Testament connections** – Those who see the “sons of God” as angels would also cite New Testament references such as 1 Peter 3:18-22 as confirmation that the spirits in prison from Noah’s day are the same fallen angels in the Genesis 6 account. They might also make connections between the sons of God as fallen angels in 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6.
4. **Context of the verses** – Proponents of this view would see the account of the Nephilim as a prelude to the flood, explaining the need to wipe out corruption from the earth.
5. **Parallels with the fall of man** – Many who hold this view would make a connection between Genesis 3—the fall of man—and Genesis 6—the fall of angels. Here are some connections they acknowledge:
 - In Genesis 1:28 people were instructed to be fruitful and multiply while in Genesis 6:1 it tells us that people had increased on the earth.
 - In Genesis 2:24 marriage was spoken of just before the fall while in Genesis 6:2 we find conversations about marriage between the sons of God and daughters of men just before the flood.
 - There is also a similar construction in the Hebrew that we might miss in English. In Genesis 3, the people saw (*ra’ah* in Hebrew) the fruit was good (*towb* in Hebrew)

and they took (*laqach* in Hebrew) resulting in consequences—separation from God. In Genesis 6, the sons of God saw (*ra'ah* in Hebrew) the daughters of men were beautiful/good (*towb* in Hebrew) and they took (*laqach* in Hebrew) wives for themselves which resulted in consequences—a worldwide flood.

"SONS OF GOD" AS HUMAN MEN

A contingent of theologians, pastors, and Christ-followers view the “sons of God” in Genesis 6 as godly human men—the descendants of Seth who intermarried with ungodly human women—the daughters of Cain. They see the Nephilim as those born of these ungodly unions—fallen ones.

THOSE WHO HOLD THIS VIEW MIGHT CITE THE FOLLOWING EVIDENCE:

1. **Old Testament support** – Those who see the “sons of God” as men would point to Genesis 4:25–5:32 and Genesis 4:1-24 as indicating two distinct lines of human descent from Adam—the godly line of Seth and the ungodly line of Cain. They might also present the argument that God’s people are sometimes called God’s sons in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 14:1; Jeremiah 3:19).
2. **Context of the passage** – Proponents of this view could place Genesis 6:1-4 as a summary of chapter 5 rather than a prelude to the flood. They might see it as a recap that the sons and daughters of Adam have greatly increased in number, married, and continued to have children. They would point out the emphasis in the passage on humans not angels. It is humans that the spirit of God will not contend with forever (Genesis 6:3). God sees the wickedness of the human race and evil of the human heart (Genesis 6:5).
3. **New Testament connections** – Jesus said in Matthew 22:30 that angels in heaven do not marry, nor are they given in marriage.
4. **Less controversial** – Early church fathers like Augustine and John Calvin championed this view and it was carried into the Middle Ages as less “disturbing” to comprehend.
5. **Lack of clear connection to giants** – The text of Genesis 6 does not clearly state that the Nephilim are actually the offspring of the *bene Elohim* so there is no need to provide an explanation for their superhuman size in this view.

OTHER QUESTIONS

What does it mean that their days would be 120 years?

- Some might say that the 120 years was the length of time until the flood would come since we know people after the flood often lived 500 years or more. They may cite 1 Peter 3:18-20 where it mentions that God was patient in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared.
- Another view would contend that after the flood, lifespans eventually became closer to the 120 years mentioned in Genesis 6. This didn't happen overnight, instead it was a gradual decrease. For example, Noah's son Shem died when he was 600, but his grandson only lived 438 years. Further generations continued on this downward cycle with Abraham living to 175 and Moses to 120.

If the Nephilim were wiped out by the flood, how were they still around in Numbers 13?

- Some contend that Noah had giant DNA so that through Ham giants descended through Nimrod (Ham's descendant).
- Others might say that fallen angels continued to procreate with human women after the flood creating more Nephilim. While the Nephilim are only mentioned by name in Genesis 6 and Numbers 13, we find references to giants in Deuteronomy 3:11 (King Og had a massive bed), 1 Samuel 17:4 (Goliath), and 2 Samuel 21:16-22 (a giant warrior and his sons).

We may not have conclusive answers to any of our questions regarding Genesis 6 or the Nephilim, but we can trust that God revealed as much of the information as He intended for us to have. We can seek unity with those on the other side of our views seeking to understand their positions with humility.

1. Strong's H5307: nāpal, Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h5307/csb/wlc/0-1/>.
2. Strong's H1121: bēn, Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1121/csb/wlc/0-1/>
Strong's H430: 'ēlōhīm, Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h430/csb/wlc/0-1/>.
3. K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26, vol. 1A, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 325–326.
J. A. McGuire-Moushon, "Angel, Critical Issues," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 139.
4. John H. Walton, *Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 291.

ARTICLE TWO

The Angel of the LORD

The identity of the angel of the LORD (first mentioned in Genesis 16) has been debated throughout the centuries, so if you are confused about this, you are in good company. If the scholars don't agree, we can sit in the tension with them. While a variety of opinions and views exist, the most prevalent views include designating the angel of the LORD as:

- **YAHWEH** – The angel of the LORD is viewed as God taking the form of an angel to communicate with His people. This is referred to as a theophany, a visible manifestation of God on earth.
- **THE PREINCARNATE CHRIST** – The angel of the LORD is identified as the Son of God coming to earth to engage with humanity prior to His incarnation, when He “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).
- **AN ANGEL** – The angel of the LORD is classified as an angel, a messenger from Yahweh who serves as God's representative. In this view, the angel is not elevated to divinity but is classified as a heavenly being, perhaps an angel of superior rank.

YAHWEH

Arguments for this view often focus on the angel's divine attributes, actions, and the language used to describe this angel in the Old Testament. Some examples in Scripture would be:

The angel of the LORD forgave sins – something only God can do. In Zechariah 3:1-9 we find the angel of the LORD saying, “Take off his filthy clothes.” And turning to Jeshua he said, “See, I have taken away your sins, and now I am giving you these fine new clothes” (Zechariah 3:4).

The angel of the LORD accepted worship – something other angels rejected, such as in Revelation 22:9 when John was told to worship God only. In Joshua 5:14, the commander of the Lord's army accepted worship from Joshua.

The angel of the LORD has God's name in him – In Exodus 23:20-33 the angel guarded God's people as they traveled into the promised land and was described as having *hashem*—God's name in him. God's name was an expression of His person.

The angel of the LORD spoke with the authority and intimacy of God – The angel of the LORD’s tone is more personal yet authoritative than other angels when they communicated with people throughout the Old Testament. The pronouns are often used interchangeably—the angel of the LORD spoke a message, and it is later referenced as God Himself speaking. We see this in such texts as Genesis 16:7-14; Exodus 3:2-4; Judges 2:1-4; 2 Samuel 24:16; and Zechariah 1:12.

All angels may serve as God’s agents, but proponents of this view would see a distinction when it comes to the angel of the LORD. They would separate the angel of the LORD from other messengers because he appears to act and speak with divine authority that is distinct from other angel activity.

THE PREINCARNATE CHRIST

Those who hold this view would use all the previous evidence to separate the angel of the LORD from other angels, but they see the preincarnate Christ acting, rather than Yahweh Himself.

The angel of the LORD is identified as distinct from Yahweh yet the same as Him. For example, in Genesis 16, the angel of the LORD told Hagar that Yahweh had heard her cry of distress and informed her that she should name her son Ishmael. After she received the message from the angel of the LORD, we find this verse: “Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the LORD, who had spoken to her. She said, ‘You are the God who sees me.’ She also said, ‘Have I truly seen the One who sees me?’” (Genesis 16:13). Several other passages in the Old Testament reveal the angel of the LORD as distinct from Yahweh but also interchangeable with Him, including Genesis 22:11-18; Joshua 5:13-15; and Zechariah 3:1.

The New Testament characterizes Jesus as both distinct from and the same as the Father. Consider John 1:1 (CSB), “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Early church leaders such as Athanasius, Irenaeus, and Justin Martyr identified the angel of the LORD as the preincarnate Christ as well as Reformation leaders like Martin Luther, John Gill, and Jonathan Edwards.

One scholar proposed, “What if the Son of God is more actively and personally present in the Old Testament than people think?”¹ I love considering this question! And I encourage you to keep this gospel curiosity at the forefront of your mind as we spend the next few weeks in the Old Testament learning about angels and the angel of the LORD.

AN ANGEL

Many would argue that the angel of the LORD is just that—an angel. Angels acted as God's representatives, so any divine actions on their part would be expected in their role as agents. Their ideas against the angel of the LORD being identified as the preincarnate Christ or a theophany would include:

The New Testament never explicitly identifies Jesus as the angel of the LORD – Jesus is identified as the Shepherd (John 10), the Rock in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:4), the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7), the Son of David (Matthew 21:15-16), and so on. While some have tried to draw connections from New Testament passages to appearances of the angel of the LORD in the Old Testament, there are no explicit mentions identifying Jesus as the angel of the LORD.

Seeing Jesus as the angel of the LORD dilutes the uniqueness of the incarnation – Some have argued that Jesus put on flesh as a human and came to earth to save humans. They interpret the Hebrew grammar and cultural context in a way that supports their position that the angel of the LORD is simply a messenger of God like other angels.

Early church fathers like Augustine saw the angel of the LORD as possibly a theophany (appearance of God in the Old Testament) or a chief angel, but not the preincarnate Christ. Jewish scholars hold diverse opinions but most fall into line with Augustine's ideas of either a high-ranking angel or a theophany.

No matter which identity of the angel of the LORD you hold, what we don't want to miss is the angel of the LORD's actual activity, which reveals God's love, mercy, and warnings. We don't want to be guilty of the mistake of the Pharisees who strained out a gnat but swallowed a camel (Matthew 23:24). If we spend all our energy trying to identify something veiled in the Scriptures, we might miss the more important truths—the messages, miracles, and mission of the angel of the LORD.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD:

- told Hagar that God heard her distress (Genesis 16:11)
- stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son (Genesis 22:12-13)
- appeared to Moses in the burning bush so that God could reveal Himself as I AM (Exodus 3:2-14)
- blocked the way of Balaam's donkey to warn Balaam of his stubborn resistance against the LORD (Numbers 22:22-35)

- reminded the Israelites of their exodus from Egypt and their covenant with the Lord (Judges 2:1-4)
- called Gideon a mighty hero and reminded him that the Lord was with him (Judges 6:11-12)
- appeared to a barren woman (Manoah's wife) and promised her a son (Judges 13:3)
- told Manoah that his name was too wonderful to understand, but later Manoah understood it had been the angel of the LORD who spoke to his family (Judges 13:18-21)
- enacted God's judgment after David disobeyed the LORD, but then put his sword away before Jerusalem was destroyed because of the LORD's mercy (2 Samuel 24:16)
- told Elijah to eat and sleep (1 Kings 19:7)
- warned the king of Israel about the danger of consulting false gods through Elijah (2 Kings 1:3)
- told Elijah not to be afraid to confront the king of Israel (2 Kings 19)
- killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers who threatened God's people (2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36)
- is a guard who surrounds and defends all who fear him (Psalm 34:7)
- prayed to the LORD to show His people mercy after their 70 years in exile (Zechariah 1:12)
- exchanged the dirty clothes of the priest Jeshua for clean ones and forgave his sins after Satan had accused Jeshua before the LORD (Zechariah 3:1-10)

This is the angel of the LORD—encouraging, warning, enacting judgment, forgiving, and speaking God's truth! We can all get on the same page here as we embrace these messages and come to know God better in the process.

1. Matt Foreman, Douglas Van Dorn, *The Angel of the Lord* (Waters of Creation Publishing, 2020), xii.

ARTICLE THREE

The Satan

Growing up in the church, I heard “Satan” used as a proper name interchangeably with words like devil, serpent, or Lucifer in reference to God’s enemy. In studying angels, I noticed a discussion among scholars regarding whether Satan is a title or proper name. In both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, Satan appears almost every time with an article in front of the name. If it were translated word for word, it would read, “the Satan.” However, translators opted to leave the article out, likely for flow and understandability.

In this article, we will first look at the terms used for the enemy, then we will review the key points surrounding whether Satan is a title or personal name, and lastly, we’ll tackle the impact for our lives today.

TERMS

- **Satan:** the most popular name for the enemy in culture today. In Hebrew, the word is *śātān*, defined as “adversary, one who withstands.”¹ In the Old Testament, Satan is used as a noun 27 times and as a verb 6 times in a more general than specific way. In Greek, the word *satanas* is used 36 times and defined as “adversary (one who opposes another in purpose or act).”²
- **Devil:** used only in the New Testament and refers to the enemy but also to people. The Greek word *diabolos* means, “prone to slander, slanderous, accusing falsely.”³ It is used in reference to the enemy—it was the *diabolos* who tempted Jesus in the desert (Matthew 4:1) and Paul warned believers to put on God’s armor to fight against his schemes (Ephesians 6:11). In Paul’s letter to Timothy, he advised him that women should not be *diabolos*, which is translated slanderers, malicious gossips, or malicious talkers depending on the translation (1 Timothy 3:11).
- **Lucifer:** not a Greek or Hebrew term. When Jerome translated the Scriptures into Latin, he used the term *Lucifero* to translate the Hebrew term *Heylel* which means, “shining one, morning star” in Isaiah 14:12.⁴ The King James translators used an English transliteration of the Latin term referring to the one fallen from heaven as Lucifer.
- **Serpent:** the word used for the creature in the garden who tempted Eve. Historically, he was believed to be Satan, and John wrote of the connection in

Revelation 12:9, connecting many of the enemy's names in one short verse, "This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was thrown down to the earth with all his angels."

- **Dragon:** only John used this term, which we find in the book of Revelation. He said, "I saw a large red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, with seven crowns on his heads" (Revelation 12:3b). This dragon is identified as Satan in Revelation 12:9.

OTHER TERMS USED OF SATAN IN SCRIPTURE INCLUDE:

- Beelzebub (*beelzeboul*) – Matthew 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15-19
- the tempter (*peirazo*) – 1 Thessalonians 3:5
- the accuser (*kategoros*) – Revelation 12:10
- the evil one (*poneros*) – Matthew 6:13; 13:19
- the father of lies (*ho patēr autou*) – John 8:44
- prince of the power of the air (*kata ton archonta tēs exousias tou aeris*) – Ephesians 2:2

TITLE OR NAME?

Before outlining the debate regarding whether Satan is a proper name or title for the enemy, we want to acknowledge that either view can be held without greatly impacting our theology of the evil one. He is God's enemy who accuses, tempts, deceives, and persecutes God's people with the purpose of stealing, killing, and destroying.

Those who believe Satan is a title rather than a proper name might bring up these ideas for support:

- **The article before the name** – In almost all the references in Hebrew (*satan*) and Greek (*satanas*), an article appears before it. It would literally be translated as "the Satan." The one exception of the use of the article is 1 Chronicles 21:1 where Satan incited David to take a census.
- **The generic use of satan in Scripture** – In Numbers 22:22, the angel of the LORD is referred to as "the satan" (sometimes translated "adversary") against Balaam. Unlike in English, where *Satan* always refers to God's enemy, in Hebrew *satan* can have the generic meaning of "adversary" not always indicating the devil.

- **The importance of names** – Names had great meaning in biblical times. Some scholars might suggest that a proper name gives the enemy too much dignity, so the Bible's writers assigned him titles and descriptions but not a name.

Those who believe Satan is a proper name rather than a title might bring up these ideas:

- **Old Testament context** – While passages like Job and Zechariah seem to suggest a title or office for Satan, many other passages point to a distinct being whose actions seem to go beyond just an adversary to include being a tempter, deceiver, accuser, or persecutor. In 1 Chronicles 21:1, the word *Satan* is used as a proper name with no article in front of it when Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. Many scholars agree that Satan is a specific name, not a title, in this verse.
- **New Testament context** – In the New Testament, many of the mentions of Satan seem to point to him as a distinct being rather than just a title. Here are a few examples:
 - Satan tempted Jesus (Matthew 4:10).
 - He will soon be crushed under the feet of the God of peace (Romans 16:20).
 - We are to be familiar with Satan's schemes so that he won't take advantage of us (2 Corinthians 2:11).
 - Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).
 - Satan hindered Paul from coming to the church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:18).
 - Paul said that some would turn aside to follow Satan (1 Timothy 5:15).
 - John identified Satan as the serpent, the devil, and the dragon in Revelation (Revelation 12:9).
- **Early translators didn't include the article** – This suggests that they may have understood Satan as a proper name rather than a title.

IMPACT

Whether Satan is a proper name or a title, he is an enemy of God to be taken seriously. God has already given us victory over the penalty of sin, but we are still fighting the power of sin while we are on earth.

Satan is still in the business of accusing, deceiving, tempting and persecuting people. We don't have to be scared, but we must be prepared.

Thankfully, we don't have to fear him or his work in the world, because the battle against the enemy is already won:

"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."

ROMANS 16:20

"In this way, he [Christ] disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross."

COLOSSIANS 2:15

"But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world."

1 JOHN 4:4

We fight the enemy *from* victory not *for* victory. However, we do want to be ready. Scripture reminds us to be aware of Satan's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11), to suit up with God's armor to resist him (Ephesians 6:13), and to pray for the Father to not "let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13).

We don't want to overfocus on the enemy, but we do want to know as much as the Lord has revealed about him. We can take a hard look at our own lives and ask ourselves, "Where is the darkness creeping in?" Our enemy is subtle, so his influence can slowly infiltrate our lives through addictions, unhealthy habits, pride, or counterfeit comforts we seek instead of the Lord. We fight against evil by humbling ourselves before the Lord, admitting our weakness, and calling on the Lord to help us by His Spirit. We want to be prepared without being scared because our God reigns over heaven and earth!

1. Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius, "Satan," *The New American Standard Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon*, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/satan-2.html>.
2. Thayer and Smith, "Greek Lexicon entry for Satan," *The NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon*, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/satanas.html>.
3. Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889), 135.
4. Strong's H1966: Hēlēl, Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1966/kjv/wlc/0-1/>.

ARTICLE FOUR

Cosmic Geography

Cosmic geography refers to the idea that geographic regions on earth are governed by cosmic forces. Another way to say this would be that divine beings, such as angels or demons, can exercise dominion over certain regional territories. Those who affirm the concept of cosmic geography point to several areas of Scripture for support. We will briefly review some of these passages while remembering that these are hints, echoes, and not the main focus of the Scriptures.

The worldview of the people who the Holy Spirit moved to author these sacred texts is one of the key factors for a cosmic geography. The Old Testament, especially its earliest books, was written in an ancient Mesopotamian context. The Israelite cosmology at that time included an understanding of three realms: the heavenly realm (where God rules from the highest heaven); the earthly realm (where man lives); and the realm of the dead (the underworld, sometimes referred to as Sheol).

Ancient Israelites understood sacred spaces like the garden of Eden, the tabernacle, and the temple as places where God communed with man. They also acknowledged desecrated areas where evil practices occurred (2 Kings 23:10). They made distinctions between clean and unclean when it came to their tools, homes, and bodies. Keep in mind their cultural mindset as we contemplate the following passages in the Bible and any possible connections to cosmic geography.

BORDERS DIVIDED ACCORDING TO THE ANGELS

Deuteronomy 32:8

In Genesis 11:1-9, God dispersed the people on earth by confusing their languages after they tried to build a tower. In Deuteronomy 32, Moses referenced the division of people adding the detail that they were divided according to “the number of the people of Israel” (CSB) or “the sons of God” (Hebrew, *bene Elohim*). One scholar said it this way, “The incident at Babel and God’s decision to disinherit the nations drew up the battle lines for a cosmic turf war for the planet.”¹

DEMONIC FORCES CONNECTED TO FALSE GODS

Deuteronomy 32:15-17

Another idea related to cosmic geography has to do with understanding the false gods of the other nations connected with demons. Fallen angels (demons) would be territorial spirits who governed nations like Assyria, Babylon, or Egypt. In this view, Israel's enemies worshiped gods like Baal, Ashtoreth, Dagon, Chemosh, or Rimmon who were not just fake gods but real spiritual entities. The same chapter that revealed the borders organized according to the heavenly court also hints at this idea of demonic forces connected to regional gods (Deuteronomy 32:15-17).

One author said, "From the fateful decision at Babel onward, the story of the Old Testament is about Israel versus the disinherited nations, and Yahweh versus the corrupt, rebel elohim of those nations. The division of the nations and their allotment under other elohim is behind the scenes in all sorts of places in biblical history."²

CONNECTION BETWEEN THE LAND AND GOD

1 Samuel 26:17-19; 2 Kings 5

Ancient people also saw a connection between the land and the spiritual rulers of the land. Israel is holy ground because it is Yahweh's inheritance. When David was on the run from King Saul, he had been driven from the land of Israel. He encountered Saul while on the run, and his words reveal his understanding of feeling cut off from the Lord by being cut off from the land (1 Samuel 26:17-19). When you read the dialogue between Saul and David in 1 Samuel 26, you notice that David connected his banishment from the land as being cut off from sharing in the inheritance of the Lord. Outside of the land, he could not worship at the temple, properly offer sacrifices, participate in holy festivals, or worship Yahweh communally.

It seems the Israelites were not the only people to hold this connection between the land and God, either. In 2 Kings 5, a Gentile army commander from Aram named Naaman contracted leprosy. A servant girl in his house from Israel mentioned that the prophet in Israel could heal him. When he arrived, Elisha sent a message for him to wash seven times in the Jordan river. At first Naaman was insulted but eventually heeded the instructions and was healed. His response, which you can read in 2 Kings 5:15-19, reveals his theology, which seems to include cosmic geography. One scholar made this comment, "Naaman views the land of Israel as holy ground – it is Yahweh's territory. Naaman takes as much dirt as his mules can carry so he can worship Yahweh on Yahweh's own territory, even though Naaman lives in the domain of the god Rimmon."³

YAHWEH AS GREATER THAN ALL LESSER GODS

1 Samuel 5:1-7

When the Philistines captured the ark of God (the place where the presence of God resided) and brought it to their own temple, their false god fell over. Here is the account:

“After the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they took it from the battleground at Ebenezer to the town of Ashdod. They carried the Ark of God into the temple of Dagon and placed it beside an idol of Dagon. But when the citizens of Ashdod went to see it the next morning, Dagon had fallen with his face to the ground in front of the Ark of the LORD! . . . When the people realized what was happening, they cried out, ‘We can’t keep the Ark of the God of Israel here any longer! He is against us! We will all be destroyed along with Dagon, our god’” (1 Samuel 5:1-7).

This incident reminded God’s people that no lesser god—whether a fallen angel or simply a manmade idol—would be left standing against Yahweh. Yahweh is greater than all lesser gods. He is the King of the cosmos and everyone (and everywhere) in it.

THE SPIRIT PRINCE OF PERSIA

Daniel 10:12-13

In Daniel 10, an angel came in answer to Daniel’s prayer. He relayed that he had been delayed for twenty-one days because he was fighting the spirit prince of Persia. The angel seemed to indicate this was a cosmic evil force blocking his way from bringing a message from the Lord (Daniel 10:12-13). The main idea of this text is that God heard Daniel’s prayer and sent an angel to encourage and communicate with him. However, the Lord chose to give us a glimpse into the unseen realm where angels and demons fight, and we see an archangel coming to the assistance of another angel.

By naming Persia as a geographic location, it beckons us to consider whether other spiritual forces are associated with other regions. A prince is only a prince if he has something to rule over. “Biblical scholars are in unanimous agreement that the ‘princes’ referred to in Daniel 10 are divine beings, not humans.”⁴ This may lead you to wonder, Is there a spirit prince of Babylon, Egypt, or the United States?

AN ARCHANGEL GUARDING THE NATION

Daniel 12

In Daniel 12, we find a verse about the end times that suggests that Michael had authority over Babylon, “At that time Michael, the archangel who stands guard over your nation, will arise. Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since

nations first came into existence. But at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued” (Daniel 12:1). While the spirit prince of Persia seemed to be assigned to a specific region, it seems that Michael the archangel stood guard for the Lord over the nation where Daniel served, which at the time was Babylon.

PAUL’S USE OF TERMS

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul used the following Greek terms to describe the evil forces working against believers:

- Principalities (*arche*)
- Powers/authorities (*exousia*)
- Powers (*dynamis*)
- Dominions/lords (*kyrios*)
- Thrones (*thronos*)

In the Greco-Roman culture of the New Testament, the culture into which Paul was writing, these terms were used in other Greek texts to describe evil powers over specific regions.⁵ While we cannot know exactly how these spiritual forces operate, these passages suggest that they are organized with ranks and possibly assigned to specific places. The good news is that these are the same words used of those Jesus has conquered and disarmed!

“I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come.”

EPHESIANS 1:19-21

“In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.”

COLOSSIANS 2:15

Whether our spiritual enemies are organized or geographic, we have nothing to fear because greater is He that is in us than He that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

RECLAIMING THE NATIONS INTO THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

In the Old Testament, God worked through the people of Israel but always included a plan for the nations. He worked through Gentile women like Rahab and Ruth, and He called all nations to repentance sending Jonah to Nineveh to preach His message. Even the Lord's messages of judgment against the nations in books like Isaiah reveal His desire for them to turn back to Him and His inclusion of foreigners who commit their lives to Him (Isaiah 56:1-8).

In the New Testament, we continually see God's intention to reclaim the nations and restore all people to Himself (Acts 17:26-27; Galatians 3:26-29). We don't have to be in Israel to experience God's inheritance. The people of God are now the temple of God inhabited by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:19-22).

ARGUMENTS AGAINST COSMIC GEOGRAPHY

The key arguments against a conversation regarding cosmic geography are the scant amount of information given in the Scriptures to build on and the growing understanding of literary and historical interpretation. One author said, "The statements of the Bible cannot be lifted out of their context and used as propositions in a study of non-human creatures in the cosmic realm."⁶

This same scholar pointed out that while the Bible references animals, it isn't primarily meant to teach us about animals; they are ancillary characters to help us understand a greater principle. This is the same with cosmic geography. We should exercise caution so that it does not become our focus, which would lead us to miss the greater truths the Lord is revealing.

SUMMARY

No matter where we land on the idea of cosmic geography, we always want to keep our focus on the Lord. As we think critically, speak, pray, and interact with others about God's Word, we must keep our gaze on the God of Angel Armies rather than the technicalities of cosmic battles. We can leave those details in His very capable hands knowing He reigns over both heaven and earth.

1. Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm* (Lexham Press, 2015), 122.

2. Ibid., 115.

3. Ibid., 118.

4. Ibid., 119.

5. Ibid., 121.

6. John H. Walton, Jonathan Harvey Walton, *Demons and Spirits in Biblical Theology* (Cascade Books, 2019).

ARTICLE FIVE

Three Cautions Regarding Mental Health and Spiritual Warfare

As the science around mental illness continues to grow and expand, it's no surprise that we see interactions and overlap with the conversation around spiritual warfare. I know this is a complex topic, so I asked my sister, licensed counselor Michelle Nietert, to explore some cautions and guardrails surrounding this sensitive subject. Here are three cautions she gives regarding the intersection of mental health and spiritual warfare.

1. AVOID OVER-SPIRITUALIZING MENTAL ILLNESS.

We live in a world that is both seen and unseen (2 Corinthians 4:18), and spiritual battles do affect our thoughts and therefore our feelings and behaviors. When sin came into the world, all aspects of humanity's being were broken. As a consequence of this fall, human beings experience many kinds of mental health problems. The Bible addresses solutions to some of our mental health struggles. For example, we are called to renew our mind daily (Romans 12:2). But when our bodies and brains aren't functioning properly, the mind may not be able to do the work of renewal we ask of it.

Our bodies are complex, and they are impacted by how we move, what we eat, how we think, how we behave, who we interact with, and the spiritual practices we partake in. Oversimplifying causes and solutions to complex problems (for ourselves and for others) can lead to frustration and shame-intensifying emotional responses and symptoms. At our counseling center, every treatment plan includes bio (physical like sleep, movement, and nutrition); psycho (mental, emotional, and psychological); relational (because we heal in community); and spiritual interventions. Using a singular approach to complex diagnoses often frustrates already discouraged individuals and can delay the healing process.

2. CHOOSE YOUR WORDS WISELY.

Describing mental health struggles as exclusively spiritual problems or attacks can cause undue fear, guilt, and shame for individuals already struggling with not feeling loved or feeling hopeless for not being able to change. We never want to send an unspoken message or create a false belief that suffering is caused by a lack of faith or an unknown sin. Instead, we want to encourage those we care for and those we're in community with that they are God's individual creations with their own unique paths led by the Holy Spirit. Each person's journey to health and healing looks very different and usually involves a combination of experiences and helpers along the way.

There can be times when we might sense darkness when praying with someone. We must be cautious with what we say, as we never want to demonize the person or their past experiences, which would further reinforce possible shame and negate the truth that believers are all new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) who can be oppressed but not possessed. When discussing spiritual battles, we want to focus our attention on God who is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4), and on the truth that believers have the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us (Romans 8:9). We are promised that when we resist the devil, he will flee (James 4:7).

In Christian counseling offices, resisting the devil often looks like confession, repentance, and letting go of past hurts through forgiveness. These processes involve active participation by the person seeking healing or deliverance. Someone praying for deliverance alone disempowers believers from being involved in learning to seek God for healing themselves and learning to trust the guidance of Scripture and the Holy Spirit to lead them toward lasting change.

3. BALANCE FAITH WITH PROFESSIONAL CARE.

If I had a child with a serious medical condition or injury, I would definitely pray for and over them and ask numerous kingdom warriors to join me, but I would also explore additional routes of healing including medical, nutritional, therapeutic, psychological, and educational interventions. When addressing mental health struggles or mental illness, it's important that spiritual caregivers stay in their lane. Working outside of one's area of training and expertise is never wise. For example, encouraging people to "trust God and not man" or giving direction to avoid medical or professional treatment could make you or those you have influence over vulnerable to accusations of liability if the person goes untreated and a catastrophe occurs. Prayer, Scripture, and professional counseling combined with traditional medication or alternative supplementation are all tools God can use to heal patterns of addiction, hopeless thinking, and overwhelmed bodies.

As I travel the country equipping local churches and ministry leaders, I encourage them to develop local and long-reaching lists of committed Christian providers that align with their biblical values. Receiving help from well-trained professionals who will join in the spiritual battle for healing is one of the best gifts we can give someone we care about. In doing so, we remind them they are not alone, and God is for them.

Licensed professional counselor of 25 years, Michelle Nietert is the best-selling coauthor of Strong and Secure, Managing Your Emojis, God, I Feel Sad, Loved and Cherished, and the award-winning book for adults Make Up Your Mind. She leads a team of counselors as the clinical director of Community Counseling Associates in the Dallas, Texas area. A popular speaker on topics regarding mental health, faith, and parenting, she is a frequent guest on national television and podcasts, and hosts the Raising Mentally Healthy Kids podcast. She and her husband, Drew, have been married twenty years with two school-aged children. Connect with Michelle at YourMentalHealthCoach.com and on Instagram @michellenietert.

Please note: This article is not intended to be legal counsel or to provide holistic counseling or pastoral care on the issue of mental health and illness. The article is intended to give a theological foundation for healing, bring understanding to the issue of spiritual warfare as it intersects with mental illness, and give practical wisdom in a general sense.

ARTICLE SIX

Guardian Angels

As we've been studying angels from Genesis to Revelation, we've discovered that the tension in a conversation regarding guardian angels isn't whether or not angels guard people. They do! One of our key teaching points in our video sessions has been that angels guard God's boundaries, something we see evident throughout Scripture. The debate regarding guardian angels typically surrounds the question of whether individuals are assigned a particular angel to protect and watch over them.

GUARDING GOD'S BOUNDARIES

Before we consider the question of individual guardian angels, I want us to take a brief look at some of the biblical examples of angelic guarding of God's people. This gives us the framework for what God's Word does say on this topic.

- The first appearance of cherubim in Scripture reveals the role of a guardian. After Adam and Eve ate forbidden fruit, they were banished from the garden of Eden. Genesis 3:24 says, "After sending them out, the LORD God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life."
- In Exodus, when God was preparing His people to enter the promised land, He assured them, "See, I am sending an angel before you to protect you on your journey and lead you safely to the place I have prepared for you" (Exodus 23:20). This protection would guard them against the enemies who occupied the land.
- While the text doesn't specifically mention guarding, in 2 Kings 6 we see Elisha ask the Lord to open his servant's eyes to see that more were on their side than the enemy armies. We get the sense that the hillside filled with horses and chariots of fire gave the servant a sense of protection knowing God's armies were on the scene (2 Kings 6:17-20).
- The psalmist spelled out the protective, guardian role of angels clearly, "For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go. They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone" (Psalm 91:11-12).

- In Daniel's prophecy, we read that the archangel Michael stood guard over the nation of Babylon, "At that time Michael, the archangel who stands guard over your nation, will arise. Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence. But at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued" (Daniel 12:1).
- The prophet Daniel also experienced angels guarding him from becoming a meal for a group of lions. When King Darius called to him, Daniel responded, "My God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty" (Daniel 6:22).
- We find more examples of angels in a guardian role in the New Testament. An angel warned Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt when Herod sought to kill God's anointed Messiah by killing infants (Matthew 2:13).
- An angel was involved in guarding the disciples as well. He opened prison doors so they could continue to preach the message of life. "They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, 'Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!'" (Acts 5:18-20).

This is not an exhaustive list, but it helps us see throughout genres of literature and centuries of time that God sent angels to guard His boundaries. God initiated their intervention, sending angels as His agents to carry out His instructions.

PERSONAL GUARDIANS?

We know that angels are involved in God's work as guardians, but we don't know exactly how it all works. Let's look at two passages that are sometimes cited as evidence for the presence of individual, personal guardian angels.

- In a conversation concerning who would be greatest in heaven, Jesus made a brief allusion to what some interpret as a theology of guardian angels. We know that James and John aspired to greatness with their desire to sit on Jesus's right and left in His kingdom (Matthew 20:20-23; Mark 10:35-40). However, Jesus spoke of a reverse economy where children rather than kings possessed great qualities. He said, "Beware that you don't look down on any of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father" (Matthew 18:10).
- In the book of Acts, Peter was miraculously released from prison by an angel. He went to join the believers and tell of his experience. "He knocked at the door in the

gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, 'Peter is standing at the door!' 'You're out of your mind!' they said. When she insisted, they decided, 'It must be his angel'" (Acts 12:13-15).

It's possible that the early church believed people had a specific angel assigned to them (and that the angel resembled the person they guarded) based on the Acts 12 account. However, much has been built on little when it comes to a scriptural basis for personal guardian angels. We can conclude that angels serve as guardians; we just don't know how their assignments work when it comes to corporate or individual guardianship.

The concept of individual guardian angels raises several additional questions, among them:

- When is an angel assigned to an individual—at birth, at salvation, etc.?
- Is it possible to know the name of a personal guardian angel if we truly have one?
- If each person has a personal guardian angel, should believers pray for their angel to fight strongly on their behalf?

If a person is assigned their own guardian angel, Scripture remains silent on when this happens.

Regarding the names of personal guardian angels, the Bible is also quiet. While Gabriel and Michael are named in the Bible, the idea that we have named guardian angels is a textless doctrine.

Lastly, on the topic of praying for a guardian angel to be empowered on our behalf, we find no textual support. We never find a person praying to an angel, only to God. In fact, the prayers found in Scripture seem less inclined to instruct God regarding how to answer them. We tell God our needs and then trust Him for the answer. For example, Daniel prayed words of confession, repentance, and praise to the Lord (Daniel 9). In response, God chose to dispatch an angel to bring him a message but not at Daniel's suggestion. Perhaps, in his close relationship with the Lord, Daniel trusted that God knew best how to answer his prayers. We have no need to pray for angels or to angels. Instead, we pray to the Lord believing He is righteous and good. He knows best how to intervene in our lives and answer our prayers.

A NOTE OF CAUTION

As we consider angels as guardians, we want to exercise caution in not overfocusing on God's creation and miss the wonder of our Creator. The writer of Hebrews tells us that angels are a help to believers in the spiritual realm. In a teaching about the preeminence of Christ over angels, he wrote, "Therefore, angels are only servants—spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Angels are servants of God, but they are not God. Jesus is God. He is worthy of our attention and praise (Hebrews 1:2-4).

It's amazing that among their other responsibilities, angels guard God's boundaries. They minister to believers, and Scripture revealed their history of protection of God's people. But Jesus is far greater. May we never get so caught up in the idea of guardian angels that we lose sight of the perfect Son of God who radiates God's glory, sustains everything, cleanses our sins, and sits at the place of honor at the right hand of our majestic God in heaven!

ARTICLE SEVEN

Stars and Lampstands

Revelation contains the most angel mentions of any biblical book. The vision was given to John by Jesus through an angel (Revelation 1:1). Then toward the end of the first chapter of Revelation, John's vision expands to include stars, lampstands, and one like the Son of Man standing among the lampstands (Revelation 1:12-20). John wrote, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (v. 20).

Over the centuries much ink has been spilled in debate surrounding the identity of the seven stars. Remember that the Greek word for angel is *angelos* and simply means "messenger." Some scholars would associate the seven stars with seven human messengers. We will briefly look at their arguments. However, most conservative scholars would hold that the seven stars are seven angels, heavenly messengers who were associated with each of the seven churches. We will explore their explanations as well.

HUMAN MESSENGERS

Those who hold the view that the seven stars of Revelation are human messengers might point to a few key ideas in support of their view. While the Greek word *angelos* is often associated with supernatural heavenly beings, it can occasionally refer to a human messenger in the New Testament. Examples where *angelos* refers to people in Scripture include:

- **Luke 7:24** – "After John's disciples left, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. 'What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind?' The original Greek used the word *angelos* that was translated "disciples."
- **Luke 9:52** – "He sent messengers ahead to a Samaritan village to prepare for his arrival." Once again, the original Greek used the word that is often translated "angels," but the context suggests the messengers were human in this case.
- **James 2:25** – "Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away

by a different road.” James referred to an Old Testament story and used the Greek word *angelos* to refer to the messengers that Rahab hid, which we know were Israelite spies.

Proponents of this view might also suggest that the letters to the churches were addressed to human leaders—for example pastors or elders—who would then communicate the messages to their congregations. Because these letters contain encouragement and also correction, it would imply responsibility for the state of the church, which would rest on their human leaders, not angels.

ANGEL MESSENGERS

Those who interpret the stars as referring to heavenly beings who serve as God’s messengers might use any of the following arguments to defend their position.

- While Luke and James used the word *angelos* to refer to human messengers, the Greek word is never associated with human messengers in apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is a genre of biblical writing that speaks of the end times. In early Christian literature—even documents or readings that weren’t included in the canon of Scripture—no historical person is ever called an *angelos*.
- These stars are also clearly linked with the seven spirits of God in Revelation 3:1, “Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis. This is the message from the one who has the seven-fold Spirit of God and the seven stars: “I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead.” This association of the stars with the sevenfold Spirit of God also lends support toward the view of heavenly rather than human messengers.

It would not be out of step with all we have learned about angels over the course of our study for the Lord to employ them as His heavenly agents in oversight and communication with earthly churches. The overlapping of heaven and earth has been a common occurrence as we’ve traversed the terrain of angelic mentions from Genesis to Revelation. The churches (lampstands, Revelation 1:20) can be understood as the earthly counterpart of the seven stars (angels), and Christ holds authority to rule and judge over both heaven and earth.

CONCLUSION

Most conservative scholars today believe the context of the book of Revelation suggests that these stars in the right hand of Jesus should be understood as heavenly messengers who Christ has given responsibility over the churches. However, no matter which view is held, we can get on the same page in finding hope in God who rules over heaven and earth.