

The Satan and Demons

SPIRITUAL BEINGS: EPISODE 6 – VIDEO NOTES

One of the most striking things about the stories of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels is his awareness 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 Gospels accounts.

SECTION 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 categoric 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>“the devil” or “the satan” MATTHEW 4:1-2 MARK 1:12-13</p>	<p>“Beelzebul” which means “Lord of the house” MATTHEW 12:24</p>
<p>“Ruler of demons” LUKE 11:15</p>	<p>“The power of darkness” 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, חיות), 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*, שׁוֹנֵן) 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

<p>“Yahweh sent snakes (Heb. <i>nakhash</i>), venemous snakes (Heb. <i>seraphim</i>) among the people, and they bit the people.</p>	<p>“Yahweh led you in the great and terrifying wilderness, of the snake, the venemous snake (Heb. <i>seraph</i>).</p>
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NUMBERS 21:6

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 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>Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife and they will become one flesh (בשר).</p> <p>GENESIS 2:24-25</p>	<p>And it came about when humanity began to multiply on the face of the land...and the sons of God saw (ראה), the daughters of humanity (בנות האדם) that (כי) they were good (טוב), and they took (לקח) for themselves wives from all which they chose.</p> <p>GENESIS 6:1-2</p>
<p>“And the woman saw (ראה) that the tree was good (טוב) for eating and that (כי) it was enticing to the eyes and it was desirable for gaining wisdom and she took (לקח) its fruit and she ate and she gave to her husband with her and he ate.</p> <p>GENESIS 3:6</p>	<p>And Yahweh said, “My Spirit will not dwell with humanity forever, in as much as he also is flesh (בשר), and his days will be one hundred and twenty years.”</p> <p>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"> • The men of Sodom want to have sex with the angelic men who visit the city • Lot offers his daughters • Angels rescue Lot and his daughters • The city is destroyed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sons of God visit human daughters • The sons of God have sex with them • God rescues Noah and his sons • The land is purified by the flood

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. SEE NUMBERS SCRIPTURE ON THE RIGHT.

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!

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."

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

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

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

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 ארך), 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 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 kosmokratōras (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.

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

MARK 1:27-28

- 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

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.

FURTHER READING

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

MICHAEL HEISER

[The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6:1-4 in Early Jewish Literature](#)

ARCHIE WRIGHT

[The Last of the Rephaim: Conquest and Cataclysm and the Heroic Age in Ancient Israel](#)

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