

# 301: Systematic Theology

## Week 4 - The Spiritual Realm TEACHER NOTES

Welcome back. To give you a brief recap since last time - week 1 we talked about how everyone is a theologian, we all live by a story - and for the Christian, we ground our story based on the Bible. We looked at the apologetic arguments for that. Week 2 we talked about the character of God and His Trinitarian nature. Last week we talked about how he created everything and all the spectrum of beliefs that are among Christians about how that exactly happened, and we also did some biblical anthropology.

Today we're talking about the spiritual realm - specifically angels, demons, and Satan.

Before we really get into it, a word of warning: don't brush this off. It's very easy as modern Americans to think angles and demons are either not real or, if depending on the church you grew up in, it's either not important or that's all you talk about. "My coffee was too hot and burned my tongue." "Maybe there's an evil spirit in your coffee."

When you look at history there were two movements that shaped us in the cultural West that point to why we disregard this topic:

- Medieval period - arts in the church depicting bible stories, but using their own cultural lens to reinterpret the Bible. So all the biblical figures were white and pasty. Jesus was seen as a blonde-haired blue-eyed guy. Likewise, angels were seen as chubby babies. Demons and Satan were seen as red monsters with horns. None of these descriptors are found in the Bible, but this is what was depicted and this becomes the dominant go-to image of what we think about when it comes to the spiritual realm.
- Modernity - the rise of modernity in the 20th century that brushes off the supernatural.

Combine these two factors and of course, you get where we are now. Viewing the supernatural is seen as out-of-date, but to even talk about supernatural forces like angels and demons, even in the American church, you're treated with weird looks. Even as I've studied this I've had to keep pushing back my own cultural biases that keep me from seeing what the Bible talks about.

Whereas, when you look at Scripture - angels and demons, spiritual warfare, this served as a backdrop to how the Jewish people looked at the world and read their Bibles. The spiritual realm was a crucial component to understanding their story.

And so that's what we want to do here too. To view these categories biblically. C.S. Lewis talks about putting angels and demons in their proper theological place:

**C.S. Lewis**

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

So let's see what the Bible has to say.

Let's get into it, we're going to go back once again to Genesis 1 to draw out a major theme.

**Genesis 1:1**

In the beginning God...

Ok, let's stop right there.

The word "God" here, is the Hebrew word "elohim."

Elohim in English is often translated "God" - it's used 2,300 times in the Old Testament but there's a wide range of meaning as to what elohim means based on the context. This word is flexible. And there are times in the Hebrew Bible where the word "elohim" is used, and it's not referring exclusively to the God of the Bible.

One of the biggest examples of this is in 1 Samuel 28:12-13. King Saul goes to a witch to talk to the dead spirit of Samuel the prophet (which he's not supposed to do):

**1 Sam 28:12-13**

When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul." **13** The king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I see a god coming up out of the earth."

We see elsewhere in the OT, in one verse, the same word "elohim" being used to describe God in one instance, and other gods in another instance.

**Psalms 82:1**

God (elohim) has taken his place in the divine council;  
in the midst of the gods (elohim) he holds judgment.

This Psalm is saying God is standing before other gods.

So this word elohim to keep it vague and flexible is used to describe generally, a spiritual being. Most of the time it's referring to the God of the Bible, but elohim can be used to describe other spiritual beings as well.

Now keep that in the back of your mind. As we talk about the spiritual realm, we're going to look at two main categories of spiritual beings: angels and demons. And when we talk about demons, we'll also be talking about the Satan that we see in the Bible as well.

So let's first look at angels and what the Bible has to say.

## **Angels**

The Bible says that angels are spiritual beings - in the Greek - angelos - or messenger. They serve as mediators or messengers for God.

Here are some of the things angels do:

### **a. Angels protect and serve people.**

#### **Psalm 91:11-12**

For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

#### **Hebrews 1:14**

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

Just a few examples of Angels working to defend and care for God's people throughout the Bible:

- Shutting the mouths of lions in Daniel 6:22<sup>1</sup>
- Assisting Elijah on his fast - 1 King 19:7-8
- Delivering the Apostles from prison in Acts 5:19-20
- Delivering Peter from prison in Acts 12:7-11
- Ministering to Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew 4:11<sup>2</sup>

### **b. Angels worship God:**

#### **Psalm 148:1-2**

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts!

#### **Isaiah 6:2-3**

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<sup>1</sup> Check out Daniel 10:13 too. The dominant interpretation is the angel Michael on his way to talk to Daniel was interfered by an evil spiritual being..."He was the 'prince of Persia,' evidently a fallen angel who, under Satan's authority, had a special responsibility for Persia (cf. v. 20; Eph. 2:2). Clearly "prince" here refers to an angel since Michael was also a "prince" (vv. 13, 21).<sup>[415]</sup> "The prince of Persia" must have been an evil angel since he opposed God's purpose. Angelic hostility in the unseen world had resulted in the 21-day delay of this good angel's arrival with God's message (cf. v. 2). Thomas Constable. <https://netbible.org/bible/Daniel+10>

<sup>2</sup> Side note: What about "guardian angels"? This is a popular belief by many Christians today - that God has given us all a guardian angel that specifically watches over us. Does this hold up with Scripture? *Maybe*. It seems likely based on what we see in Scripture that this isn't the case. As one pastor put it, angels are probably playing zone defense instead of man-to-man. But we just don't have enough evidence in Scripture to make a firm stance.

**2** Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

**Luke 2:13-14**

**13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, **14** “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

So think about it - when we come before God in worship, we are actually joining in the worship that is already taking place in the heavens. We don't just join other believers here on earth in worshipping God, but we are also joining all of the heavenly hosts in praising and worshipping Him.

**c. Angels carry out God's plans:**

**Psalm 103:20**

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

Angels do what God says.

Oftentimes, they even act as carriers of judgement. The destruction of Sodom and Gamorrah for example, was done by two angels. (Angels weren't seen as these cutesy Precious Moments kinda things.) Likewise in Genesis 3, God keeps Adam and Eve from ever entering the Garden again and how does He block them? By setting an angel with a flaming sword to protect the entrance (Gen 3:24).

That's why people in the Bible often freaked out when they saw angels. People knew that if they saw an angel it wasn't this “Awww, how cute moment.” It was this idea of, “Oh no, I'm about to die.”

That's why later in Isaiah 6, when Isaiah sees the angels shouting, Isaiah immediately falls over. He's like, “This is it!”

That's why in the New Testament,

**Luke 1:26**

**26** In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, **27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” **29** But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. **30** And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

**Luke 2:9**

**9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

This concept that angels were agents of God's wrath and judgement.

Angels are simply doing what God commands them to do. They serve as intermediaries to human beings. Now there are times when God directly speaks to human beings or shows up in a certain form or brings down His wrath and judgement, but we see angels a lot of times doing God's work for him.

Think of it like a spiritual staff team. God is the boss, He has all the power and authority, and He delegates some of His power and authority to lesser spiritual beings.

This is what's known in the biblical story as the divine council.<sup>3</sup>

#### **d. Angels are part of a divine council**

This is what Psalm 82:1 is talking about.

##### **Psalm 82:1**

God (elohim) has taken his place in the divine council, in the midst of the gods (elohim) He renders judgment

##### **Psalm 89:5-7**

O Lord, the heavens praise your amazing deeds, as well as your faithfulness in the angelic assembly. **6** For who in the skies can compare to the Lord? Who is like the Lord among the heavenly beings, **7** a God who is honored in the great angelic assembly (his divine council)

Now does God *need* a spiritual staff team to do His work? No way, He's God but our God is one of partnership - who shares in His power and authority because He's relational.

And this shouldn't sound too radical for us because the divine council is **a mirror picture** of what He does with humanity. Why did He create humanity and give them power and authority as Image Bearers? He didn't need to do that. But He chose to do that out of the overflow of His love because He's a sharing God.

Adam and Eve act as the first human workers partnering with God and reflects what the angels are doing in the spiritual realm.

And when you go back to the Genesis, where is God in the Garden? He's with Adam and Eve. The spiritual and the physical are overlapping. Part of God's command to Adam and Eve is to spread the Garden out into the rest of the Earth. God's saying "Build a home out there for me in the same way I built this home for you."

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<sup>3</sup> "They perform many roles and go by many titles; they are the sons of God or host of heaven who celebrate God's decisions (Job 38:4-7), dialogue about his policies (Job chs. 1-2 and 1 Kings 22:19-23). Moses and the prophets tell us that some of these beings were behind the rebellion of Babylon in Genesis 11 (Deuteronomy 32:7-1 and Isaiah 14:1-23), where they lured the nations into worshiping them, leading to corruption and injustice (Deuteronomy 4:19-20 and Psalm 82). These are the spiritual powers that Jesus confronted in his mission to bring God's Kingdom (Luke 4:1-13 and 10:17-20), and when Jesus was raised from death, he assumed authority over all of these powers (Matthew 28:18-20 Ephesians 1:18-21). Jesus' victory over these powers will be completed when he returns to do away with the ultimate enemy: death itself (1 Corinthians 15:22-27). So the divine council is a really important biblical theme that helps us understand the cosmic significance of the story of Jesus and the Kingdom of God." *The Divine Council, The Bible Project*

Fast forward to Genesis 3 and suddenly the serpent showing up in the Garden doesn't sound nearly as far-fetched to a Jewish reader. Because:

- Adam and Eve have been walking with God (as implied in Gen 3:8)
- The Garden was the overlapping of spiritual and physical
- There are other spiritual beings out there
- God has a divine council

On top of that, in Ancient Near East cultures, a serpent was seen as symbol a spiritual guardian of the divine throne.<sup>4</sup>

All that to say - Genesis 3 is trying to show us that the snake is more than an animal. This is a spiritual being, created by God but who goes rogue. (Now did he show up as a literal talking snake? Is him being depicted as a snake a symbolic picture of his divine role? Is it a literal device to foreshadow his cursing later in Genesis 3? Many Bible-believing, Jesus-following scholars have different opinions, I think all of these are true, and the author is a brilliant thinker packing all these different ideas in.)

And what's he say?

#### **Genesis 3:1-5**

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" **2** And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, **3** but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" **4** But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. **5** For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Now think about it, if you're Adam and Eve and you hear the words of the serpent, what's going through your mind? You're thinking, "I do want to be more like God." And this spiritual being must know what they're talking about since they act on behalf of God, even though this guy's telling me to go against God. So he must know way more than I do. He must have some secret knowledge that I don't."

And so they take of the fruit as this willful act of disobedience.

And then God searches for them and curses both humanity and the serpent. God says to the serpent:

#### **Genesis 3:14**

"Because you have done this,  
cursed are you above all livestock  
and above all beasts of the field;  
on your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.

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<sup>4</sup> Even the spelling of the serpent is brilliant. The Hebrew is "nacash." In the original writing of the Old Testament, there are no vowels. So "nacash" is originally spelled as "ncsh" which could mean serpent, it could also mean, the diviner - someone who speaks on behalf of a divine power. It could also mean "bronzed" - perhaps used to describe his appearance.

Later on in the Old Testament, the book of Isaiah will speak further into what's going on in Genesis 3 to give some commentary:

**Isaiah 14**

**12** “How you are fallen from heaven,  
O Day Star, son of Dawn! (literally “Bringer of Light” Latin, lux + ferre, where we get Lucifer)  
How you are cut down to the ground,  
you who laid the nations low!  
**13** You said in your heart,  
‘I will ascend to heaven;  
above the stars of God  
I will set my throne on high;  
I will sit on the mount of assembly (mount of assembly...divine council/Eden imagery)  
in the far reaches of the north;  
**14** I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High.’  
**15** But you are brought down to Sheol,  
to the far reaches of the pit.

Now in the immediate context, Isaiah 14 is referring to the King of Babylon, a human figure but when you read this passage, Isaiah starts talking about this human figure as a symbolic picture of something something (or someone) bigger than the king - like the king is a snapshot of a bigger spiritual reality. And Jesus in Luke sheds light on that passage in Luke 10. Jesus says, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” Jesus is echoing the language in Isaiah 12:14.<sup>5</sup>

So once again we see this **mirror image**. Angels and humanity were both partners of God to carry out His work. Both of them didn't like their original status and wanted more. Satan wanted to be like God through his disobedience. Adam and Eve wanted to be like God through their disobedience.

**a. Demons are corrupted angels**

This is where we get the concept of demons. While angels are created to do God's word and help humanity, demons are spiritual beings following the pattern of Satan in Genesis 3.

Like Satan, they still have some power and authority left over from their original creation but they use it now to corrupt everything. Human beings are the same way. We are Image Bearers given power and authority from God, and prior to faith in Jesus we use that to corrupt.

**b. Demons can harm individuals**

This is not the main way Satanic/demonic attack happens in the Bible but there are some examples of this.

Matthew 12:2

Mark 5:1-20

Luke 22:3-4

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<sup>5</sup> So when did the angelic fall happen? Before humanity fell or during? You can take either side, that's an openhanded issue. Because of Isaiah 14 echoing Genesis 3, and with Satan's cursing at the same time as the human's cursing, the implication seems to be both humanity and angels fell at the same time.

### **c. Demons are worshipped (seen most notably in the Old Testament)**

This is in part why we see so many wars played out early in the Old Testament - the ancient Israelites saw the other pagan nations, worshipping other gods as being controlled by demonic forces. Other nations worshipped other gods, and if we posit that they are other elohim, other spiritual beings out there, then they weren't worshipping make believe fairy tales. They were worshipping real spiritual beings with real spiritual powers. It's like demons and corrupt human beings are on the same team to bring about the same purposes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> We actually see a snapshot of this early on in the biblical narrative, depending on your interpretation in Genesis 6 -

#### **Genesis 6:1-4**

When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, **2** the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. **3** Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years." **4** The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came into the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.

The interpretive tension is how you interpret "sons of God" in v.2 and v.4. Literally means descendants of elohim. Up until that point, people were not called "sons of God," they were called the "image of God" but not "sons of God."

Also in v.2 the sons of God "saw" and "took" - that's the same language used to describe Eve in Genesis 3 when she tried to rise above God.

So who are the "descendants of elohim" referring to? The modern interpretation you land on is that "sons of God" mean human beings with power and authority, perhaps people of royalty and the Nephilim are descendants of royalty gone corrupt and sleeping with people. But if you take "sons of God" with the elohim interpretation, then "sons of God" means spiritual beings. Fallen divine council members, demons, sleeping with human beings and their offspring become literally the embodiment of demons and humans working together.

Which if that sounds radical and weird, you're right. But we have in the Old Testament angels taking on human form - the two angels showing up to Lot in Genesis 19. And we have theophanies scattered in the Old Testament of God showing up in human form as well.

Another thing, notice the description of the Nephilim - mighty men. Men of renown. Anyone know when the Nephilim get brought back up? Joshua and Caleb spying in the Promised Land.

#### **Numbers 13:30-33**

**30** But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." **31** Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." **32** So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. **33** And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

The Nephilim are back! These mighty men, described in vv.32-33 as being giants. Now if you take a modernist approach of the Nephilim, the other guys are just being wimps. It's like, big deal, their just human beings who happen to be a little taller than you. But if you take a supernatural approach of the Nephilim, and they're actually descendants of demons and humans tearing apart the things of God - then the spies really do think these are the same guys from Genesis 6.

If that's the case, this helps explain why in the book of Joshua, the Israelites go on an all-out rampage with the other nations. It gets extremely violent quickly in Joshua when they wage war against the other nations. With the Nephilim interpretation, they see the other nations as being controlled by demonic forces - a disease that's plaguing God's creation.

Which is interesting because when you get near the end of the book of Joshua, they settle into the Promised Land and decide not to destroy some of the surrounding nations. Those surrounding nations end up becoming the Philistines in 1 Samuel. And who's the most popular Philistine in the Bible? Goliath.

Which again, a modern lens just sees Goliath as very tall. Weird but we think nothing of it. But depending on if the Nephilim is referring to demons and humans working together to make offspring who want to destroy the things of God then there's more going on to the story. The defeat of Goliath at the hands of David - David chopping off his head - is mirroring the defeat of the nations at the hands of Joshua - where Joshua bludgeons the heads of the foreign rulers (Josh 10:22-27). Which is just a tiny picture of Genesis 3, the seed of man crushing the head of the seed of the snake.



Lots of Western modern readers have a big problem with OT war narratives. Why would God command them to do that? Why does God sometimes order a complete annihilation of cities? For one, because the other nations were viewed as being controlled by and freely worshipping demonic-human forces trying to corrupt the things of God. The other nations were this disease on God's creation that needed to be eradicated.

Just hear briefly about the gods these other nations worshipped -

The God of Baal - involved imitative magic, the performance of rituals, including sacred prostitution

The God of Molech - ritual child sacrifice

We often quick to assume these nations were innocent and minding their own business, worshipping their own religion. But we see what was going down was actually wicked and profane. God sending the Israelites to them to wipe them out was seen as an act of God's justice to end their demonic spiritual evil. These other nations were worshipping demons that had power, and were, in turn, tearing apart the very creation of God that He loves so dearly.

That's partly why commandment number one of the Ten Commandments was what? "You shall have no other gods (elohim) before me." The Israelites were called to only worship Yahweh. They weren't called to worship or be influenced by lesser elohim - demonic forces.

This is what was originally intended by monotheism - it was a devotion, a heart posture to live your life as though Yahweh is the only God worthy of your devotion. There will be other gods with power of their own that will go after your attention, but they have nothing compared to Yahweh.<sup>7</sup>

This is in part why the story in 1 Kings 18. Where Elijah is on Mt Carmel is so radical. Elijah is going up against the 450 prophets of Baal. Now if Baal was just made up, pure fiction, then why did the encounter ever happen in the first place? But if Baal actually did have power, then the story has so much drama and depth. Who's gonna win? The elohim named Baal or the elohim named Yahweh? And Yahweh proves his power by silencing the demonic power and destroying the pagan prophets in the process.

### **Jesus wages war**

Now all of this sets the stage for Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus is God's chosen seed. He's the representative that acts on behalf of humanity to wage war against darkness.

John the disciple lays this out in 1 John:

### **1 John 3:8**

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

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<sup>7</sup> What do we make of passages that suggest that false gods aren't real? (Jer 10:14, Ps 135:16-18, Ps 115:4-8, Rom 1:22-23) In short, these are references to images that pagan worshippers made of their gods, not the gods themselves. Pagan nations would create statues (images) of their gods and then perform sacrifices and rituals in order for those spiritual beings to inhabit those statues with their "breath." Sounds similar to Genesis 1:26 and 2:7 huh? This isn't a coincidence. The story of humanity is that we are the images of God and He breathes his breath in us.

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and demonic forces, to usher in the light.

**a. Satan influences individuals<sup>8</sup>**

We see back in Genesis 3, Satan influences individuals to appeal to their disordered desires so that they act out in sin. Sin destroys the things of God.

We see this in the New Testament too. Jesus connecting the dots from the Garden to what he does now.

**John 8:44**

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Satan at work in Judas in the gospel to literally kill God.

**Luke 22:3-6**

**3** Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. **4** He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. **5** And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. **6** So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

Note, Judas didn't go into convulsions with his eyes rolling in the back of his head. Satan influenced Judas to act selfishly. The same tactic we see in Genesis 3.

Matthew 16, Jesus says He will need to go die and be raised again - in part to destroy the works of Satan. But Peter rebukes Jesus saying He shouldn't do that. And what's Jesus' response?

**Matthew 16:23**

But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Notice, Jesus saw Peter's actions as Satanic. Why? Because what Peter was saying was going against the things of God.

Last example of Satan and humans working together on an individual level. Acts 5:

**Acts 5:1-3**

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,**2** and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. **3** But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?"

Peter knows that Ananias is being deceptive with his money and Peter sees the spiritual demonic force at work. Satan influenced Ananias to act selfishly. Now in our modern lens in all of these examples, we

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<sup>8</sup> From here out I refer to the devil and Satan interchangeably. Satan in Hebrew means "adversary." Devil (diablos in Greek) means slanderer. Theologians have pointed at that these names are more titles than actual names, suggesting that the nature of sin and evil destroys and corrupts what it means to be a person; when we are enslaved to sin we lose our identity and what it means to be human.

would just view these people acting selfishly or destructively but in the biblical lens where spiritual forces are at work - there's more going on to the story.

### **b. Satan influences the world**

But not only do Satan and demons influence people to act selfishly and tear down the things of God, according to the Bible, Satan and demons partner with cultures at large to destroy the works of God.

This is when Satan tempts Jesus:

#### **Matthew 4:8-9**

**8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Satan's implication here is that he has power and authority over the entire world. Jesus echoes this in John 14:30, he calls Satan the "ruler of this world."

Paul in Ephesians 2 and 2 Corinthians 4 echoes a similar sentiment:

#### **Ephesians 2:1-2**

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience

#### **2 Corinthians 4:4**

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Satan is the prince of the power of the air, the god of this age - god in the greek here, same word used for the God in the New Testament (Theos) - similar to how elohim in Old Testament is used. Satan is influencing individuals and people groups towards his destructive rule.

Later on in Ephesians:

#### **Ephesians 6:12**

...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places

The devil isn't some lame bad guy with a pitchfork, he has cosmic power over darkness and works with worldly rulers and authorities.

Paul saw wicked people and demonic forces as not an either/or, it was a both/and. Working together. Partnering together.

He saw the world as being controlled by demonic forces, humanity being influenced by Satan and demons.

That's why in part some of Jesus's first words in Matthew 3 are "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." He's saying turn your devotion back to Yahweh and His kingdom because He's about to destroy the works of Satan and his demons. You're either living for the kingdom of God or living for the kingdom of darkness, and only one of them is going to come out victorious.<sup>9</sup>

That's why in Matthew 4, just after Jesus begins His ministry and gets baptized, He goes into the desert to be tempted by Satan. To show that He is victorious over the influence of Satan in the way Adam and Eve weren't.

That's why later in Matthew 4 some of the very first miracles Jesus does is He casts out demons. Coincidence? No. He's continuing the Old Testament thread we saw in Elijah - exercising authority over the spiritual forces of evil.

That's why later in Matthew 16 Jesus uses war language to talk about Hell:

**Matthew 16:13,18**

**13** Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi...

**18** "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Jesus is going on an all out rampage on demonic forces. This is war.

That's why in Matthew 28:18-20 - Jesus can say go and make disciples of all nations. Why does he say all nations? It's pointing back to conquest terminology - the nations are held in Satanic bondage - and instead of wielding a sword to destroy people, you wield the power of the God to destroy the works of Satan and turn people into followers of Jesus.

That's why in the book of Acts, church planting is so crucial to the mission of God. Paul never settles in one spot for too long, but he's constantly traveling planting new churches in new locations. He takes the Matthew 28 command as a battle strategy to destroy Satanic bondage and usher in the Kingdom. Churches were cosmic battlegrounds to push back Satanic forces.

Now all that to see three main actions points for us:

**1. Recognize there is a spiritual war going on**

Ephesians 2:1-3 tells us we have three enemies in our spiritual battle working together - the devil, the world, and our flesh. As one pastor put it the enemies work together so that "deceitful ideas appeal to our disordered desires and become normalized in our culture."<sup>10</sup>

There is a spiritual world around you. Angels and demons are real and are active in our world. It's critical to have more than just a natural view of this world. What we said about sin earlier is true about all aspects of our lives. We live in a world that is more than just what we can experience with our sense - see, hear, feel, taste, touch. There is a supernatural war going on all around us for our souls.

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<sup>9</sup> This two kingdom dichotomy is seen in Colossians 1:13, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,"

<sup>10</sup> From the Bridgetown Church series, "Fighting the World, the Flesh, and the Devil." Would highly recommend. <https://bridgetown.church/series/fighting-the-world-the-flesh-the-devil/>

It requires an awareness and an ability to see what's going on around you - yes the world is broken, AND that's both sin and demonic power at work. Yes, you are broken, and that's both sin and demonic power at work.

I was thinking about all of this stuff recently - and I heard my wife talking about how she had this terrible dream where she woke up feeling unloved and worthless. And it was weighing her down and visibly messing her up for the first part of the day. And I thought about this point, there is a spiritual war going on, and I was able to say, "Hey, that stuff is not true of you. That's demonic." That's one way how Satan attacks you, when your mental defenses are down.

When we are believing lies about ourselves or the world around us, or you hear someone in your LifeGroup who is believing things about God or themselves that aren't true - that's spiritual warfare taking place! That's Satan actively at work trying to influence his power and authority over you. It's more than just you as this isolated individual self who just needs more self-help. The Bible says you need the authority of God at work in your life to destroy the demonic effects at war within your heart.

Which brings me to the next point...

## **2. As Christians, we fight back with truth and Spirit**

Satan's main weapons are lies. We see this in Genesis 3. Satan doesn't usually come with what we call hard power - with physical attack or harm (although sometimes it does happen in the Bible, but this is rare). Satan's main weapon of attack is soft-power - deceptive ideas, things that sound truthful but are just a little off for you to build your life on so it can inevitably destroy you.

So the way we fight back is with truth. God's Word. When you look in Matthew 4, Jesus gets tempted in the wilderness by Satan and Jesus's main weapon is truth. Biblical faithful truth.

In Matthew 4, Satan tempts him three times by appealing to Jesus' desires. His desire for provision, for protection, for power. And Jesus every time fights back by quoting Scripture.

Which is a good reminder for us. If Satan's main weapon is distorted truth, then we fight back with biblical truth. So the next time you are tempted to sin or doubt the things of God, start quoting Scripture.

But not only do you need to know Scripture, you need to know its context. In Matthew 4, Satan quotes Scripture right back at Jesus.

Which means, Satan knows the Bible. He probably knows more than you do. James 2:19, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder."

It's not enough to know some verses, you need to know it's context and stand firm in it.

What if you had Matthew 4 moment, where Satan could offer you something you really wanted more than anything and he used Scripture to back it up? All you had to do was twist God's Word just a little bit.

- "You want to feel loved, right? Just be sexually promiscuous. God's wired you for intimacy. He wants you to delight in this good gift, not deprive you." ← that's real Satanic attack
- "You want to be successful, right? It's ok to lie and cheat a little bit. God wants to provide for you but you need to do your part."

This is how the devil operates, and you can fight back.

**James 4:7**

resist the devil and he will flee from you.

**1 John 4:4**

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

So when you're feeling tempted to believe lies, or someone in your LifeGroup is struggling with sin, remind them of that. This is your sinful tendency and demonic forces at work - AND God's Word when used rightly is far more powerful.<sup>11</sup>

All of this sets the groundwork in the New Testament for the Holy Spirit too.

Today we looked at how there's real supernatural forces at work against us, AND you have the power and presence of God indwelling in you.

Although there is a supernatural war going on, we, as Christians, do not have to live in fear. Jesus died to defeat Satan, sin, and death. You have the Spirit, you have Scripture. Those two things can push back cosmic darkness.

Which brings me to my last point...

**3. God's Kingdom will prevail**

We don't hold to dualism. As though Satan is an equal and competing force with God. He's not. Satan and demons are created, which means God owns them.

Satan and demons are not omnipotent. God is.

Satan and demons are not omniscient. God is.

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<sup>11</sup> Not only that - for those who place their faith in Jesus, do you know one of the titles you're given? Sons of God. It means you are adopted into the family of God, God is your father and you have brothers and sisters - and when was the first time we see that phrase in the Bible? Genesis 6. Sons of God referred to the divine council. Spiritual entities that had power and authority given to them by God. When you place your faith in Jesus you are a son of God. You are infused, through the Spirit, with divine authority to fight back, to push back against darkness, to help reverse the curse of sin, and bring about God's kingdom.

Because God is way more powerful this means Matthew 28 - the Great Commission - is going to happen. That's God's plan A. He doesn't have a backup plan because He doesn't need one. His main tactic to bring His Kingdom fully here is to do it through redeemed humanity, empowered with His divine presence, equipped with the truth of God.

He's bringing about a whole force of renewed Adam's and Eve's to fight back Satanic lies and remove the dominion of darkness on this planet.

Satan and demons will be destroyed once and for all - and God is using you as one of the primary ways He's going to do it.

So we hope, we fight, we persevere. The battle of the spiritual realm is real. Our battles against the flesh are not simply carnal and natural. And yet, as the people of God, we can live without fear. He is in control.