

Three Imperatives for the Study of Angels and Demons

- *Keep your balance!*
 - The study of angels and demons is prone to extremes. Geographically speaking, Christians in Europe and America tend to downplay the influence of supernatural beings, while believers in the Third World tend to exaggerate it. Along theological lines, a similar contrast is evident worldwide between charismatic Christians, who often overemphasize the role of angels and demons, and believers of other traditions, who frequently understate it. We must seek the scriptural sweet spot in the middle.

- *Stay sober!*
 - The Bible lacks speculative and frivolous details about angels and demons, giving almost no descriptions of their appearances, details about their numbers and ranks, and so forth. What it does not reveal, we do not need to know (cf. Deut. 29:29). We must avoid unbridled sensationalism by steering clear of unbiblical speculation.

- *Don't be shy!*
 - Many outside the church, driven by an antisupernaturalistic bias, deny the existence of angels and demons altogether and mock any reference to them. Not only should we seek to know, understand, and embrace everything the Bible teaches about angels and demons (2 Tim. 3:16-17); we must not shrink away from proclaiming the full counsel of God on the subject and affording it its due place in the Christian worldview.

Ten Questions about Angels and Demons

1. What are angels?

- Angels are personal beings.
 - The words for “angel” (Heb., *malak*; Gk., *angelos*) mean “messenger,” a word which implies a real, personal agent (though, of course, such a word *could* be used figuratively).
 - Angels are presented in historical narratives as speaking and often as having human appearance. This includes the crucial, and historically supportable, narratives of Christ’s resurrection (Matt. 28:2–7; Mark 16:5–7; Luke 24:4–7).

- Two good angels are given names—*Michael* (Dan. 10:18–19; 12:1; Jude 7–9; Rev. 12:9) and *Gabriel* (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26); note that these angels existed over a long period of time.
 - Angels are called upon to worship Christ (Heb. 1:6).
 - Angels were interested in understanding the prophecies about the coming Christ (1 Pet. 1:12).
- Angels are disembodied spirits.
 - Scripture explicitly describes angels as spirits (Heb. 1:7, 14; possibly 1 Pet. 3:19).
 - When the words for “spirit” (*rûach*; *pneuma*) are used in the context of the material world they refer to breath or wind—incorporeal realities.
 - Demonic entities are commonly called “spirits” with qualifiers such as “evil” or “unclean,” implying that there are good spirits as well (e.g., Matt. 10:1; Mark 1:27; 3:11; 5:13; 6:7; Luke 8:2; Acts 19:12–13).
 - Angels are never said in Scripture to possess bodies, though they can appear in bodily form.
 - The reference to “celestial” or “heavenly” bodies in 1 Cor. 15:40 has to do with the sun, moon, and stars (v. 41), not angels.
 - A “spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:44) is not a body composed of spirit, but a body whose life comes from the Spirit (cf. “spiritual” in 1 Cor. 2:13, 15; 3:1).
 - The capabilities of angelic and demonic spirits are not compatible with their possessing bodies as intrinsic aspects of their natures.
 - They can appear to people in dreams (e.g., Matt. 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19). (In at least some cases these are evidently real angels coming to people in a dream, not dreams *about* angels.)
 - Wicked spirits sometimes inhabit or possess human beings’ bodies.
- Angels do not have bodily functions.
 - Angels do not need to eat, though they can eat when they assume human form.
 - The angels’ ability to eat (Gen. 18:5–8; 19:3) does not imply that they are permanently embodied, but only that they can assume bodily form.
 - Psalm 78:25 (“the bread of angels”) uses figurative language and does not mean that angels eat in heaven—just as v. 24 does not mean that the manna literally came all the way from heaven (cf. Exod. 16:14–15, 31)!
 - Angels do not have gender.
 - This follows from their not having bodies.

- Despite numerous references to angels in Scripture, none is ever spoken of as having a feminine gender.
 - If there are no female angels, presumably there are no male ones, either. The implication is that masculine language for angels is generic, not gender specific.
- Angels were created—but not procreated—by God.
 - They are numbered among God’s created works, along with the physical universe (Ps. 103:19–22; 148:2–5).
 - They are not to be worshiped (Col. 2:18 [possibly]; Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9).
 - The Bible never says that the angels were procreated by God.
 - The description of the angels as “sons of God” in the OT (Gen. 6:2 [possibly]; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) is therefore evidently figurative, descriptive of them as spirits or as immortal (note especially the comparison in Luke 20:36).
- Angels are neither preincarnate souls nor resurrected human beings.
 - Human beings did not preexist in heaven as nonphysical souls (as taught in Mormonism).
 - 1 Corinthians 15:46 (“it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual”) teaches we begin as physical beings and will in the resurrection receive spiritual (or supernatural) life as well; thus, we did not begin as spirits and then become physical beings.
 - Adam became a living being when God created him as a man (Gen. 2:7).
 - Departed or resurrected human beings are not angels and will not become angels.
 - Angels existed before Adam and Eve or any of their descendants died (since Satan, a fallen angel, tempted Eve, Gen. 3), and evidently before human beings were even created (cf. Job 38:7).
 - Departed human spirits, unlike angels, are generally not permitted to visit or speak with human beings (Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:11; Is. 8:19; Luke 16:27–31).
 - Resurrected human beings will be “like angels” (Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:36), but they will not *be* angels.
 - Resurrected humans will not be angels, nor will they be identical in nature to angels; but they will in some sense be “like angels.”
 - Resurrected humans in God’s heavenly kingdom will in at least one functional respect (not being married) and one substantive respect (being immortal) be “like angels in heaven.”

2. What are the Cherubim and Seraphim? Do they sit atop the angelic hierarchy?

- No one really knows for sure what the word *cherub* means.
- Other than Satan (who came as a serpent), the first reference to angels in the Bible speaks of cherubs (Heb. *cherubim* is a plural of *cherub*) guarding the garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were expelled (Gen. 3:24).
- The cherubim were features of Israel's worship architecture.
 - Two cherubim of gold were made as part of the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:18–22; 37:7–9).
 - The Lord is said to sit enthroned above the mercy seat of the ark between or above the two cherubim, and to speak from there (Ex. 25:22; Num. 7:89; 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chron. 13:6; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16; Ezek. 10:1, 18).
 - The tabernacle was decorated with cherubim (Ex. 26:1, 31; 36:8, 35), and later two large cherubim made of wood and overlaid with gold were placed in the temple (1 Kings 6:23–28; 8:6–7; 1 Chron. 28:18; 2 Chron. 3:10–13; 5:7–8) along with other decorative cherubim (1 Kgs. 6:29, 32, 35; 7:29, 36; 2 Chron. 3:7, 14).
 - Cherubim are pictured with wings (Ex. 25:20; Ezek. 10:5). The ones on the ark are specifically said to have two (note 1 Kings 6:24; 2 Chron. 3:11–12).
- The cherubim were part of Ezekiel's fantastic visions.
 - The four living beings (Ezek. 1:5–25) are later identified as cherubim (10:15).
 - They are described as having four faces (those of a man, lion, bull [or ox], and eagle) and four wings (1:6, 10; 10:14, 21–22). These recall the engravings in Solomon's temple of lions, oxen, and cherubim (1 Kings 7:29, 36).
 - The four cherubim are said to have beside them four wheels (Ezek. 1:15–21; 10:9–19). These recall the four bronze wheels on the stands in the temple on which the lions, oxen, and cherubim were decorated (1 Kings 7:27–33).
 - In the midst of the cherubim are burning coals (Ezek. 1:13; 10:2–7), recalling the burning coals which the high priest was to take from the altar when approaching the mercy seat to make atonement (Lev. 16:12–13).
 - The four cherubim, along with the wheels, are said to be “full of eyes” (Ezek. 10:12).
 - The departure of these cherubim is part of a vision of the departure of the glory of God from the temple (Ezek. 10:18–19).
- The seraphim were part of Isaiah's vision of God (Isa. 6:1–8).
 - This is the only place in the Bible using the word *seraphim* (the plural of *seraph*, which probably means something like “burning one”).
 - The seraphim attend the Lord in the temple, standing above him, as he sits on his throne (vv. 1–2).
 - They are described as having six wings (v. 2).
 - They cry “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts” (v. 3).

- They take a burning coal and touch it to Isaiah’s lips, representing forgiveness of his sins (vv. 6–7) and recalling the burning coals of both Lev. 16 and Ezekiel.
- The four living creatures in Revelation 4:7–9 evoke the cherubim of Ezekiel’s visions.
 - The four living creatures, “full of eyes,” are said to be like a lion, a calf (i.e., a young ox or bull), a man, and an eagle—obviously drawn from Ezekiel but not quite identical.
 - They are before God’s throne in heaven (vv. 2–6), described in terms reminiscent of Ezekiel (e.g., Ezek. 1:22, 26–28; 10:1).
 - They have six wings and cry “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty,” recalling the seraphim of Isaiah 6.
- Conclusions about the cherubim and seraphim:
 - The cherubim and seraphim are never called angels, probably because their work is to attend God in heaven (or, in Gen. 3:24, guard the way to Eden), not to deliver messages to human beings.
 - The cherubim and seraphim are associated consistently with the presence of God, especially in the temple (including in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation).
 - The notion that cherubs are sweet, babylike little beings with wings looking down on earth with big smiles is completely foreign to the Bible.
 - The visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John (in Revelation) were obviously symbolic visions; the details vary (four wings or six wings, compared to the two wings for the cherubim in the temple; four faces each, four creatures each with a different face; etc.) but the general idea is the same.
 - Isaiah’s term seraphim may be simply another description of cherubim. John’s vision seems to combine elements of Ezekiel’s and Isaiah’s visions.
 - Since angels are (as we have argued) incorporeal and these visions of angels are spiritual experiences using symbolic forms, we may conclude that these angels do not really have wings (no angel appearing on earth is described in the Bible as having wings).
 - We know very little about the order of angels in heaven, beyond these facts:
 - Jesus is the creator and Lord of the angels.
 - Michael, who is one of a group of archangels (chief angels), apparently is the captain of some or all of the good angels.
 - The different words used to designate angels (archangel, seraphim, cherubim, sons of God) tell us nothing about the order or classification of angels.
 - The classification of celestial beings into nine orders (see *The Celestial Hierarchy*, a 5th century document penned by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.108), with seraphim and cherubim (in that order) at the top and angels at the bottom (and archangels second from the bottom!), was well meaning. However,

even though the nine orders are given names taken from Scripture, the hierarchy goes beyond what Scripture teaches.

3. What is the heavenly “council”?

- Several passages in the OT represent the Lord God in heaven meeting with assembled supernatural beings (notably, 1 Kings 22:13–28 // 2 Chron. 18:12–27; Job 1:6; 2:1; Pss. 82:1–8; 89:5–8; cf. Rev. 5:11). The question is what these passages intend to teach.
- Because these beings are called “gods” in Psalm 82:1, 6, many OT scholars in recent decades have referred to this heavenly assembly as “the divine council,” understood to be a council of gods headed by a supreme deity. This view was popularized among evangelicals by the late Michael Heiser. Commenting on Psalm 82:1, Heiser wrote: “There it was, plain as day: *The God of the Old Testament was part of an assembly—a pantheon—of other gods.*”¹
- In general, reading these passages literally seems to be a mistake. God is not an anthropomorphic being literally sitting on a throne in heaven to preside over a literal assemblage of beings. God is incorporeal spirit, as are the “sons of God” by whatever name they are given.
- The parallel accounts of Micaiah telling Jehoshaphat and Ahab that God had sent “a lying spirit” that inspired all of the false prophets to predict Ahab’s victory in battle are clearly (1 Kings 22:13–28 // 2 Chron. 18:12–27) not to be taken literally.
 - In Micaiah’s story he told the kings, Yahweh is seated on his throne, but the reader has already learned that Yahweh is an immense and/or transcendent being who cannot be contained even within the highest of the heavens (1 Kings 8:27 // 2 Chron. 6:18).
 - The reference to the spirit beings in the LORD’s presence as the “host of heaven” uses language that normally refers to the stars and other astronomical bodies, which cannot be the literal reference or meaning here.
 - The statement that the spirit became “a lying spirit in the mouth of” Ahab’s four hundred prophets cannot be taken literally to mean that a single embodied being of spirit inhabited the mouths or bodies of four hundred men simultaneously.
 - It is unlikely that Micaiah is claiming to have heard a literal conversation between the LORD and a spirit planning Ahab’s deception.
 - If God had literally intended to deceive Ahab, it is strange that he would inspire Micaiah’s revelation, the whole point of which was to warn Ahab that the spirit to which he was listening was deceiving him!
 - The historical books of which 1 Kings is a part reveals that God does not lie (1 Sam. 15:29; see also Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).
 - True prophets could engage in mocking or other forms of humorous communication (e.g., 1 Kings 18:27).

¹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 11, emphasis in original.

- The OT historical books frequently represent evil spirits as coming “from YHWH” (Judg. 9:23–24; 1 Sam. 16:14–16, 23; 18:10; 19:9; 2 Kings 19:5–7 [=Isa. 37:7]). Such statements do not mean that God directs them to do evil but that they do so only under his sovereign rule of the world (i.e., making it clear that ultimately there is only one God).
- Psalm 82 is not affirming that heavenly beings are genuinely “gods,” but is in fact deconstructing that common view in ancient Near Eastern religion.
 - Heiser, along with most OT scholars today, is most likely correct in interpreting the “gods” of Psalm 82:1, 6 as celestial beings. The older view that these were unjust human judges is not tenable.
 - The psalm does indeed use the imagery of a heavenly council or assembly. The question is whether this imagery is to be taken literally. We have already explained why that is probably incorrect.
 - Psalms in the immediate context denigrate the “gods” of the nations as worthless idols (Pss. 96:4–5; 97:7, 9) and affirm that Yahweh is the only God (Ps. 86:8, 10).
 - Psalm 82:6–7 reads: “I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are sons of the Most High,’ nevertheless you will die like man and fall like any one of the princes.” The contrastive wording “I said . . . nevertheless” (*’amarti . . . aken*) is a rhetorical device in which the speaker (even God!) makes a statement in order to set up the listener for the actual, contrary truth (e.g., Zeph. 3:7). In Psalm 82, the meaning is evidently, “I called you ‘gods,’ but you are anything but gods and will in fact die like even the greatest human beings.”
 - In the psalm’s ancient Near Eastern context, the announcement that the “gods” will “die” may be a poetic way of saying that the false religions of the nations will come to an end, or that the wicked supernatural beings that inspired those false religions will be condemned to death, or both.

4. Are there guardian angels?

- Biblical evidence:
 - Genesis 48:16 (“the angel who has redeemed me from all evil”) is probably referring, not to Israel’s (Jacob’s) guardian angel, but to the “angel of the LORD.”
 - The previous two lines are calling on Israel’s God, and the line about the angel is parallel. The next line calls upon God/the angel to bless Israel’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh.
 - Jacob/Israel had several encounters with God/the angel of God, who was the one who took care of him (Gen. 28:13–15; 31:3, 11, 13; 32:24–30; 35:1–3; cf. Hosea 12:2–5).
 - Psalm 91:11 (“he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways”) refers to protection by angels.

- God’s angels are available to protect his people at his command.
 - There is no suggestion that individual angels are assigned to individual persons.
 - Matthew 18:10 (“in heaven their [children’s] angels always see the face of my [Christ’s] Father”) suggests a special relationship between certain angels and children.
 - The fact that these angels are said to be in heaven and “always see the face of my [Christ’s] Father” seems to conflict with their being assigned to watch continually over the children on earth.
 - On the other hand, the angels do seem to have some special relation to the children.
 - It is possible that the children’s angels in heaven are prepared at any time to avenge those who despise the children or cause them to stumble (vv. 6–10).
 - Acts 12:15 (“And they kept saying, ‘It is his [Peter’s] angel.’”)
 - This text does show that some of the Christians at that time believed that Peter had a guardian angel.
 - However, they also thought Rhoda was out of her mind when she told them it was Peter. Did they think that a person’s guardian angel looks like that person, or that Peter had died and returned in angel form? Neither of these ideas has any biblical support.
 - Luke said that it was “an angel of the Lord” (v. 7), and Peter said, “the Lord has sent *his* angel” (v. 11).
- Theological assessment:
 - No biblical text clearly supports the idea of a personal guardian angel assigned to each person or each believer.
 - Although no biblical text *explicitly* contradicts the idea, texts which speak of God sending angels on specific occasions to help believers (Ps. 91:11; Acts 12:15) imply that angels are not permanently assigned to guard individuals.
 - By no means does this conclusion lessen the protection available to God’s people.
 - God does not *need* any angels to protect people, since he is omnipotent.
 - God can send large numbers of angels to protect any individual or group he chooses at any time.
 - The notion of a guardian angel easily leads to some serious abuses (though not everyone who believes in guardian angels draws these conclusions).

- Contrary to popular opinion, *only believers* have any assurance from Scripture of the availability of angels to help them (cf. Ps. 91:11; Heb. 1:14).
- Scripture gives no encouragement whatsoever to the idea of forming a relationship with one's angel, giving a name to one's angel, calling upon one's angel for help, and the like.

5. Will angels always protect us?

- Psalm 91:10–13 (“he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways”) refers to protection by angels.
 - There are some good reasons to see this Psalm as speaking partially of believers but fulfilled ultimately in the Messiah.
 - Many of the Psalms are interpreted in the NT as Messianic.
 - The psalmist speaks of himself in the first person (vv. 2, 9) and seems to distinguish himself from the one on whom this complete protection will come (spoken of in the second person).
 - The reference to trampling down the serpent (v. 13) recalls Gen. 3:15, which is certainly referring to the Messiah (see also Isa. 11:1, 6–8).
 - The reference to this passage by the devil in Matt. 4:6 and Luke 4:9–11 has more force if the passage is Messianic (“if you are the Son of God”).
 - If this interpretation is correct, it coheres perfectly with Matt. 26:53 (“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?”).
 - The Messianic interpretation does not deny that angels are called upon by God to protect believers, but allows that this protection will not be constant or absolute.
 - One thing is clear from Jesus' response to the devil's use of this text: it does not offer protection to those who behave recklessly or try to put God's promise of protection to the test (Matt. 4:7; Luke 4:12).
- Scripture suggests that angelic protection from harm is not absolute.
 - Acts 12: Peter was delivered from imminent execution by an angel (vv. 7–11), but James was not similarly protected (v. 2). It is true that the church prayed for Peter (v. 5), while nothing is said about them praying for James. However, while this is certainly an encouragement to prayer, it does not prove that James's execution represented a failure (it appears he was summarily executed).
 - Daniel 3:17–18: Daniel's three friends knew God *could* deliver them, but would refuse to compromise *even if he did not*. (The fourth person whom the king saw

in the fire, whom he described as “like a son of the gods” and as God’s “angel” [3:25, 28], is likely the angel of the LORD again, i.e., Jesus Christ [cf. also Dan. 6:22]. But the principle is the same for literal angelic protection.)

- 1 Corinthians 4:9 (“we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men”): Paul appears to mean that the apostles suffered while angels simply watched. The implication is that God sometimes has greater purposes to accomplish through suffering (cf. Rom. 8:28).
- Hebrews 11:35b–38 (“tortured... mocking and flogging... chains and imprisonment...sawn in two... killed with the sword... destitute, afflicted, mistreated... of whom the world was not worthy”): these women and men exhibited just as much faith as those who were miraculously delivered (cf. vv. 33–35a).

6. What about angelic appearances?

- Hebrews 13:2 (“do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware”) is an intriguing passage.
 - Possible biblical background:
 - The angels who visited Lot, who showed hospitality toward the two angels evidently without knowing who they were (Gen. 19:1–16). This is almost certainly the primary incident the writer of Hebrews had in mind.
 - Jesus’ statement that whoever shows hospitality to one of his brothers does so to him (Matt. 25:35, 39). Although this passage does not bear directly on the question of angelic visitations, it does seem to stand behind Hebrews 13 (note the references to loving the brothers [13:1] and remembering the prisoners [13:3, cf. Matt. 25:36]).
 - The meaning of the statement and its relevance to angelic appearances.
 - The point of Heb. 13:2 is to encourage hospitality.
 - Hebrews is not encouraging Christians to be on the alert for angelic encounters.
 - The text gives no encouragement to speculation that mysterious encounters with strangers involved angels. Lot knew the two men were angels because they told him they had come from the Lord to bring judgment on Sodom.
 - The appearance of angels to Lot was not a happy thing. They came to judge Sodom, whose people were quite inhospitable (cf. Ezek. 16:49), and to deliver Lot from that judgment.

- What do we learn from angelic appearances in Scripture?
 - Never in Scripture are believers told to expect angelic encounters.
 - Angelic appearances in the Bible always have some identifiable purpose in the unfolding history of redemption:
 - Announcing the birth of a key figure (Abraham, Samson’s parents, John the Baptist’s father Zacharias, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds)
 - Protecting family members of the patriarchs (Hagar and Ishmael; Lot; Isaac)
 - Calling prophets and other leaders to ministry (Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, Ezekiel)
 - Giving assurance of God’s fulfillment of his covenant promises (Jacob, Joshua)
 - Delivering or strengthening prophets and other key figures (Elijah, Elisha, Daniel and his friends, Jesus, the apostles, Peter, Paul)
 - Warning of chastisement or judgment from God relating to Israel or its enemies (Balaam, people of Israel, David, Nebuchadnezzar)
 - Announcing Jesus’ resurrection (the women at the tomb)
 - Directing the expansion of the church to new groups of people (Philip, Cornelius)
 - Revealing God’s purposes for his people in the future (Ezekiel, John)
 - Angels might appear in other sorts of situations, but such appearances would be extremely rare. And if the biblical accounts are representative, they would usually be frightening. “In Scripture the visitation of an angel is always alarming; it has to begin by saying, ‘Fear not.’ The Victorian angel looks as if it were going to say, ‘There, there.’”²
- The following principles and tests are applicable to claims of angelic encounters:
 - Possible scenarios in any reported angelic appearance:
 - The person saw a human being (and mistook that human for an angel).
 - The person was mistaken (he did not see anyone).
 - The person lied (he did not see anyone).
 - The person saw an actual angel, but it was a demon (fallen angel).
 - The person saw an actual, good angel.
 - Negative tests:
 - Theological tests:

² Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, ix.

- Angels whose messages conflict with Scripture are demonic or imagined (Gal. 1:8; 2 Cor. 11:14; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:1).
 - Angels who are thought to add to the revelation of Scripture in the form of new doctrine or new practical truths are not from God (Jude 3).
 - Angels who encourage or permit worship or excessive devotion to angels are not from God (Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; 22:18).
 - Angels who claim to be departed human beings are not from God (since, as we have seen, they are not departed human beings).
 - Angels whose appearances leave unbelievers with a feeling of peace or spiritual security are not from God, even if the angels say nothing wrong.
- Phenomenological tests:
 - Persons who report numerous angelic appearances are probably mistaken or deceiving others.
 - Even the greatest prophets and apostles in the Bible apparently saw angels only once or twice in their lifetime.
 - Most authors or celebrities who report numerous angelic encounters accept an event as angelic with little or no discrimination.
 - Persons whose descriptions of angels go far beyond biblical parameters are probably mistaken or deceiving others. Cases in point:
 - Angels identified with names other than Michael or Gabriel.
 - Angels described in detail, e.g., handsome, masculine appearance, seven feet tall, about 25 years old, wearing blue jeans, etc., etc.
 - Any angel who is described as female, or as overtly male (i.e., beyond the simple use of masculine pronouns and the like), or which is described in sensual terms, is almost certainly not from God.
 - Angels in Scripture have no apparent gender.
 - Angels in Scripture are never sensual creatures. (If the “sons of God” in Gen. 6:2 were angels, they were bad ones.)
 - Persons who engage in long conversations with an angel, or who receive lengthy messages from angels, are almost certainly mistaken or deceiving others. In Scripture, angelic appearances are always brief, and their messages short and to the point.
 - Invalid positive tests (cases in which angels may or may not be from God):
 - The angel is a figure of bright light (cf. 2 Cor. 11:14).

- The angel seems to be good (cf. 2 Cor. 11:15).
 - The angel claims to be from God or heaven (cf. Gal. 1:8).
 - The angel predicts some future event accurately or performs some amazing sign (cf. Deut. 13:1–5; Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9).
 - The angel quotes Scripture (cf. Matt. 4:6; Luke 4:9–11).
 - The supposed angel seems to appear or disappear mysteriously.
 - In crisis situations, people often seem to come or go suddenly because we have a distorted perception of our surroundings.
 - “Good Samaritans” often slip away because they don’t want attention.
 - Granted, some encounters of this type might involve angels. We should not regard this “test” as proof and we should be sparing in its application.
- Valid positive tests (*all* of these tests should be passed—and *none* of the negative tests undermine the story—before an angel story is accepted):
- The experience is not explicable in natural terms.
 - In Scripture, angelic visitations were always unmistakable when they were over, typically with the angel in some way identifying himself as such.
 - Experiences in which nothing is seen but a person feels something, or in which a person narrowly or amazingly avoids injury or death, might or might not have involved angelic intervention (there is no way to know).
 - The experience brings glory to Christ, not to angels (cf. Acts 12:11, 17).
 - The experience is either one’s own or it can be properly documented.

7. What do we know about the fall of Satan and his angels?

- The timing of Satan’s fall:
 - From Gen. 3:1–5 we know that Satan (who was the being speaking through the serpent, 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9) must have fallen before Adam’s sin.
 - Little else can be stated with any dogmatism.
 - From Gen. 1:31 (“God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good”) it might be inferred that Satan had not fallen when Adam was first created. But Gen. 1:31 might be speaking only of the physical universe and not of the angelic realm.

- The “gap theory” speculates that Satan was already fallen when the creation work began in Gen. 1:3, and further speculates that man was created to battle spiritually with Satan’s forces. This view is certainly wrong. Not only is the gap theory’s interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2 exegetically indefensible, but also the idea that the earth was a spiritual battle zone contradicts Gen. 1:31.
- The cause of Satan’s fall:
 - No passage in Scripture clearly describes the fall of Satan. Two passages in the prophets (Isa. 14:12–15; Ezek. 28:15–17) are often thought to be speaking of pagan rulers in terms meant more literally about Satan. However, while the attitudes condemned in these texts are no doubt satanic, there is no evidence that Satan’s own history is being given.
 - It is not unreasonable to suggest that pride was the problem, since it seems that in a sense all sin is rooted in the creature’s foolish belief in his self-sufficiency, and since Paul implies that conceit was the reason for Satan’s fall (1 Tim. 3:6).
 - What we can know is that Satan must have fallen, because God creates only good (Gen. 1:31).
- The fall of Satan’s angels:
 - It is reasonably clear that all of the wicked angelic spirits followed Satan in his rebellion. They are thus designated *his* angels (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:7, 9).
 - Rev. 12:7–9 is evidently describing not the original fall of the Satanic hosts, but rather a spiritual conflict which resulted in Satan being permanently ousted from heaven, where he formerly enjoyed at least limited access (cf. Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6). This severe blow to his power is associated in some way with the coming of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:10; cf. Luke 10:18; John 12:31; 16:11).
 - Scripture offers no support for the theory that wicked human beings become demons when they die. Rather, the spirits of the wicked await judgment in the abode of the dead (e.g., Luke 16:23).

8. What are Satan and his angels like?

- Descriptions of Satan:
 - He is a personal being. He is described as speaking to God in heaven (Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6) and to Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11), and he is everywhere spoken of as a person.
 - He is the enemy of God’s people, thus commonly called the devil (Greek *diabolos*, accuser, as when he slandered Job) or Satan (lit., adversary). He is also “the tempter” (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5), trying to get human beings to sin so he can then bring accusations against them!

- He is “the evil one,” the epitome and architect of evil (Matt. 13:19, 38; Eph. 6:16; 1 John 2:13–14; 3:12; 5:18–19).
 - He is the leader or ruler of all rebellion against God: thus he is the self-installed “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), the prince or ruler of the demons and of the world as a system in rebellion (Matt. 9:34; 12:24; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19), who claimed control over all the kingdoms of the world (Matt. 4:8).
 - He is a liar and a murderer (Gen. 3:4–5; John 8:44).
- Descriptions of Satan’s angels:
 - They are commonly called *daimonia*, or “demons” (“devils,” KJV). The demons are uniformly regarded as evil (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:20–21; 1 Tim. 4:1; Jas. 2:19).
 - They are also often called “spirits” or “unclean spirits” (e.g., Matt. 8:16; 12:43, 45; Acts 8:7; 1 Tim. 4:1), indicating their incorporeal nature.
- Basic facts about Satan and his angels:
 - They are not divine and are not to be worshipped (Matt. 4:9–10; 1 Cor. 10:20–21; Rev. 9:20).
 - They are powerful but limited in their power and knowledge (e.g., Mark 5:1–13; John 10:21). They can only do what God allows (Job 1:12; 2:6).
 - The primary way in which Satan and the demons trouble human beings is by tempting them through lies and deception to sin against God (Gen. 3:1–5; Matt. 4:1; John 8:44; 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:3; 1 Thess. 3:5; Rev. 20:7–8).

9. What is the fate of Satan and his angels?

- They are irremediably lost (Matt. 25:41 [“eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”]; Heb. 2:16 [“it is not angels that he helps”]).
- Some of them are already imprisoned, awaiting judgment (2 Pet. 2:4 [“God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell... to be kept until the judgment”]; Jude 6 [“the angels who... left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains... until the judgment”]).
 - These verses are taken by some interpreters as referring to a judgment on some of the demons when they originally rebelled against God.
 - Other interpreters understand these verses to be referring to an imprisonment of some fallen angels who “abandoned their proper abode” (Jude 6) by cohabiting somehow with women during the generation prior to the Flood (Gen.6:1–4). Although this interpretation of Genesis 6 has been greatly debated, it is now the dominant view for various reasons, including the fact that elsewhere in the OT the expression “sons of God” (used in Genesis 6:2, 4) clearly refers to spiritual beings (notable in Job 1–2 and 38:7).

- All of them will be judged and suffer endlessly (Matt. 25:41 [“eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”]; Rev. 20:10 [“the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire”]).

10. What is “spiritual warfare”?

- The main biblical text on which discussions about “spiritual warfare” focus is Ephesians 6:10-20:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For 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. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

- Some observations:
 - Paul’s statement that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood” (v. 12) makes it explicit that spiritual warfare is not a conflict with unbelievers but with the spiritual “powers” that dominate the world.
 - This “spiritual warfare” is both defensive (enabling the believer to “stand” firm, vv. 11, 13–14) and offensive (advancing “the gospel,” vv. 15, 19).
 - The means of wrestling against the hostile spiritual powers are the traditional Christian disciplines of knowing the truth, especially of the gospel, as found in the Scriptures (v. 17); prayer (v. 18); and proclaiming the gospel (vv. 15, 19).
 - The believer’s spiritual warfare generally does not involve direct “engagement” with the devil or demonic beings but with the lies and temptations they inspire.
- What about “deliverance” models of spiritual warfare?
 - “Deliverance” models of spiritual warfare claim support primarily from the Gospels (and to some extent Acts) rather than the Epistles. This is because there is (perhaps surprisingly) little or nothing in the Epistles about casting out demons or the like.

- A major issue of contention here concerns whether believers can be “demon-possessed” or “demonized.”
 - The relevant Greek word is literally “demonized” (δαιμονίζομαι, *daimonizomai*), used 13 times, only in the Gospels (Matt. 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22; Mark 1:32; 5:15, 16, 18; Luke 8:36; John 10:21). It is variably translated “oppressed by demons,” “demon-oppressed,” “possessed by/with demons,” “demoniacs,” and “demon-possessed” (most versions do not stick to one rendering). At least lexically, there is no distinction between being demon-possessed and being oppressed by demons.
 - The Gospels say that Jesus “cast out” demons, or ordered them to “come out,” from those demonized (Matt. 8:16, 28–33; 9:32–34; 12:22–28; Mark 1:32–34; 5:8–18; Luke 8:29–36).
 - In every instance, the demonized person is either brought to Jesus by someone else (usually a family member) or Jesus initiates the confrontation with the demonized person. The demonized person never asks for help and never does anything to cooperate with Jesus in being freed from the demon.
 - Jesus’ ministry was to people who had not yet heard the gospel and who became his disciples as a result of his work. This means that he did not generally have opportunities to cast demons out of people who were already believers. However, the accounts make it clear that the “demonized” were completely controlled by the demons and could not even seek assistance.
 - In the Gospels, the symptoms of those who had a demon included extreme strength, epileptic-like fits, self-destructive behavior, screaming, and revulsion at Jesus Christ (a symptom no Christian can have!).
 - For the reasons given above, the deliverance ministries that claim that many Christians are demonized and need to be “delivered” from demons are inconsistent with the Gospels.
 - Some Christians have been persuaded that believers can have a demon based on modern reports of such occurrences. [Famously, late Dallas Theological Seminary professor Merrill F. Unger changed his published position on the subject for this very reason. Compare his *Biblical Demonology* (1969) with his later works *Demons in the World Today* (1971) and *What Demons Can Do to Saints* (1977).] Where the affected individuals exhibit the sorts of symptoms we find in the Gospels, we may conclude that they were really demonized without conceding that they were genuine, regenerate believers. Where they did not exhibit such symptoms, they may have had psychiatric or spiritual problems without being demonized.
 - Neil T. Anderson’s view of spiritual warfare is a hybrid of the classic Christian view and modern deliverance theory. He argues that believers can often be under demonic influence, but the solution is the practice of

traditional Christian disciplines—especially reading Scripture and prayer, with an understanding of a believer’s “identity” in Christ.

- We ought to be able to agree to reject the extreme form of deliverance ministry that blames ordinary human vices and weaknesses on demons. The classic example is Frank and Ida Mae Hammond’s book, *Pigs in the Parlor* (1990). They identify as symptoms of people with a demon such things as worry, procrastination, gossip, addiction to caffeine, shyness, daydreaming, headaches, embarrassment, and “intellectualism” (but not ignorance or stupidity!). Shockingly, more than thirty years after it was written, as of November 2024 this book ranks on Amazon as the #4 book in Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity and #22 in Christian Spiritual Warfare (as well as boasting more than 6,8000 customer ratings!), showing that this seemingly extreme view is actually quite popular.
- Should we wage spiritual warfare against “territorial spirits”?
 - Based almost exclusively on references in Daniel to angelic beings as “princes” of certain nations—specifically Persia and Greece (Dan. 10:13, 20)—some Pentecostals and charismatics teach that there are demonic beings that rule over nations and other corporate entities (such as cities) as “territorial spirits.” Identifying these “territorial spirits” and praying against them (a process often called “prayer mapping”) is the supposed key to effective ministry in specific spheres.
 - We know next to nothing about the “princes” in Daniel, but what the text says is that Michael, “one of the chief princes,” and other angelic beings fight against “the prince of Persia” and “the prince of Greece.” There is nothing in Scripture about believing human beings contending with such spirits.
 - The practice of praying for one’s city or nation is commendable (1 Tim. 2:1–4), but such prayers are not predicated on identifying so-called “territorial spirits.”
- Christians have been “delivered from the domain of darkness” by the Father when he “transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). Preaching the gospel of Christ to bring about this result would seem to be the real “deliverance ministry.”

Suggested Books

Beilby, James K., and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds. *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012.

Boa, Kenneth D., and Robert M. Bowman Jr. *Sense and Nonsense about Angels and Demons*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.

Gilhooly, John. *40 Questions about Angels, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare*. 40 Questions series. Benjamin L. Merkle, series ed. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020.

Ingram, Chip. *The Invisible War: What Every Believer Needs to Know about Satan, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.

Noll, Stephen F. *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness: Thinking Biblically about Angels, Satan & Principalities*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

Appendix: Biblical Terms for Angels and Demons

A. “spirit(s)” (Heb., *rûach*; Greek, *pneuma* [πνεῦμα])

1. OT (consistently negative; always in the singular)
 - a. “evil spirit”: Judg. 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:14–16, 23; 18:10; 19:9 (all 1 Sam. refs. “harmful spirit,” ESV, because the “spirit” is said to have come from God)
 - b. “Divine for me by a spirit”: 1 Sam. 28:8
 - c. Lying spirit: 1 Kings 22:21–23 (see 22:19–21) // 2 Chron. 18:20–22 (see 18:18–19)
 - d. Statements about “a spirit” that may or may not refer to a personal spirit entity: “a spirit of confusion” (Isa. 19:14); “a spirit of deep sleep” (Isa. 29:10); “a spirit . . . so that he shall hear a rumor” (Isa. 37:7); “a spirit of whoredom” (Hosea 4:12; 5:4)
 - e. The spirit of uncleanness (ESV; or, “the unclean spirit,” KJV, NASB, NRSV, etc.; τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον, *to pneuma to akatharton*, LXX): Zech. 13:2 (cf. exact expression in Mark 1:26; 5:8, and essentially the same elsewhere; see below)
2. NT
 - a. “(the) spirits” (plural, negative), Matt. 8:16; 12:45; Luke 10:20; 11:26
 - b. “a/the spirit,” Mark 9:17, 20 (note other uses in Mark 9:17–25, listed below); Luke 9:39; Acts 16:18; 23:8, 9 (apparently neutral or positive); 2 Thess. 2:2
 - c. “(the/an) unclean spirit(s),” 22 times: Matt. 10:1; 12:43; Mark 1:23, 26, 27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:25a; Luke 4:36; 6:18; 8:29; 9:42; 11:24; Acts 5:16; 8:7; Rev. 16:13; 18:2
 - d. “the spirit of an unclean demon,” Luke 4:33; “demonic spirits,” lit., “spirits of demons,” Rev. 16:14
 - e. “mute and deaf spirit,” Mark 9:25b; “a disabling spirit,” Luke 13:11
 - f. “evil spirits,” Luke 7:21; 8:2; Acts 19:12, 13, 15, 16
 - g. “a spirit of divination,” Acts 16:16
 - h. “a different spirit,” 2 Cor. 11:4
 - i. 1 John 4:1–6: “every spirit,” 4:1, 2, 3; “test the spirits,” 4:1; “the spirit of the antichrist,” 4:3; “the spirit of error,” 4:6
 - j. “who makes his angels spirits/winds [πνεύματα] . . . ministering spirits,” Heb. 1:14; only Heb. 1:7, 14 use πνεῦμα for good or holy spiritual beings in the LXX or the NT, and it does so with the qualifier “ministering.”
 - k. “the spirits in prison,” 1 Peter 3:19 (hotly disputed as to whether these are departed human spirits being given the gospel or demonic spirits informed of their judgment).

B. “angel(s)” (Heb., *mal’ak*; Greek, *angelos* [ἄγγελος])

1. There are as many as 99 references in the OT and the NT to the angel of YHWH/God. Evangelical and other orthodox Christians disagree about whether these expressions refer to the preincarnate Christ.

- a. OT: “angel of the LORD [*YHWH*]”: 56 times, and “angel of God,” 10 times: Gen. 16:7–11; 21:17 (of God); 22:11, 15; 31:11 (of God); Exod. 3:2; 14:19 (of God); Num. 22:22–35; Judg. 2:1, 4; 5:23; 6:11–12, 20 (of God), 21–22; 13:3, 6 (of God), 9 (of God), 13–21; 1 Sam. 29:9 (of God); 2 Sam. 14:17, 20 (both of God); 19:27 (of God); 24:16c; 1 Kings 19:7; 2 Kings 1:3, 15; 19:35 (=Isa. 37:36); 1 Chron. 21:12–18, 30; Pss. 34:7; 35:5–6; Zech. 1:11–12; 3:1, 5–6; 12:8
 - b. NT: “angel of the Lord,” 11 times, Matt. 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19; 28:2; Luke 1:11; 2:9; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7, 23; “angel of God,” 2 times in the NT, Acts 10:3; Gal. 4:14 (see also John 5:4, “angel of the Lord,” textual issue). Of these, only Gal. 4:14 is understood by some interpreters as referring to Christ.
 - c. “his/my angel,” 10 times: “his [God’s] angel,” Gen. 24:7, 40; Dan. 3:28; 6:22; Acts 12:11 (cf. 12:15!); Rev. 1:1 (Jesus’); 22:6; “my [God’s] angel,” Exod. 23:23; 32:34; Rev. 22:16 (Jesus’).
 - d. Other likely instances (10): “the angel who has redeemed me from all evil” (Gen. 48:16); “the angel of his presence” (Isa. 63:9); see also Exod. 23:20; 33:2; Num. 20:16; 2 Sam. 24:16a, 16b, 17; 1 Kings 19:5; Hosea 12:4
2. OT, “angel(s),” 26 times: Gen. 19:1, 15; 28:12; 32:1; 1 Kings 13:18; 2 Chron. 32:21; Job 4:18; 33:23; Pss. 78:25, 49; 91:11; 103:20; 148:2; Zech. 1:9, 13, 14, 19; 2:3 [twice]; 4:1, 4, 5; 5:5, 10; 6:4, 5
 3. NT, “angel(s),” excluding “angel of the Lord/God,” 168 times.
 - a. These do not include 7 uses of *angelos* that mean “messenger.”
 - b. Of the remaining texts, three refer to the devil’s “angels” (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:7, 9), and two to “angels” who sinned (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Fallen angels are also possible referents elsewhere (Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 6:3; 11:10; Heb. 2:16; 1 Peter 3:22); some of these are more questionable than others.
 - c. This leaves 151 uses of “angel(s)” in the NT that clearly refer to holy angels (164 if we count the 13 NT references to “angel of the Lord/God”), too many to list here. These include 19 in Matthew, 36 in Luke–Acts, 10 in Paul, 13 in Hebrews, and 67 in Revelation.

C. “demon(s)” (Greek, *daimonion* [δαίμόνιον])

1. OT: LXX uses δαίμόνιον 7 times, referring to spiritual beings in the Hebrew text only twice (Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37); see also in the LXX, Pss. 90:6 [91:6]; 95:5 [96:5]; Isa. 13:21; 34:14; 65:3.
2. NT: The word δαίμόνιον occurs 63 times (including twice in the Long Ending of Mark, 16:9, 17). 53 of these are in the Gospels: 11 in Matthew, 11 in Mark (+2 in LE of Mark), 23 in Luke, and 6 in John. Acts 17:18 uses the word in its cultured Greek sense of divinities, its only occurrence in Acts (striking compared to Luke’s Gospel), using “spirits” instead. Singular “demon” (19), plural “demons” (44). (NASB adds “the demons” in italics in Mark 5:12; Luke 8:32.) James 3:15 uses the adjective δαίμονιώδης (*daimoniōdēs*), “demonic.”

D. “powers” and related terms

1. In his Olivet Discourse, Jesus said that the “stars” would fall from the heaven (probably meaning the sky) and that “the powers [*dynameis*] of/in the heavens” would be “shaken” (Matt. 24:29 // Mark 13:25 // Luke 21:26). Some (not all) scholars see this statement as referring to spiritual beings. “Jesus’ imagery may well also point to the overthrow of the cosmic and demonic powers often associated in paganism with the sun, moon, and stars.”³ How this is to be understood will vary depending on one’s interpretation of this controversial part of the Discourse.
2. Pharisees called the devil “the ruler [*archonti*] of the demons” (Matt. 9:34; 12:24), and Jesus called the devil “the ruler [*archōn*] of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).
3. The epistles (especially Paul’s) contain several references to “powers” or similarly named entities subjected to Christ:
 - “nor angels nor rulers [*archai*, translated “principalities” 6 times in the KJV], nor things present nor things to come, nor powers [*dynameis*]” (Rom. 8:38).
 - “after destroying every rule [*archēn*] and every authority [*exousian*] and power [*dynamin*]” (1 Cor. 15:24).
 - “in the heavenly places, far above all rule [*archēs*] and authority [*exousias*] and power [*dynameōs*] and dominion [*kyriotētos*]” (Eph. 1:20b–21a).
 - “the ruler [*archonta*] of the authority [*exousias*] of the air, the spirit that is now at work in/among the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2, lit. trans.).
 - “the rulers [*archais*] and authorities [*exousiais*] in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10).
 - “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers [*archas*], against the authorities [*exousias*], against the cosmic powers [*kosmokratōras*] over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil [*ta pneumatika tēs ponērias*] in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:11–12).
 - “who has delivered us from the authority [*exousias*] of darkness and transferred is into the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13, lit. trans.).
 - “in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones [*thronoi*] or dominions [*kyriotētes*] or rulers [*archai*] or authorities [*exousiai*]*—*all things were created through him and for him” (Col. 1:16).
 - “the head of all rule [*archēs*] and authority [*exousias*] . . . He disarmed the rulers [*archas*] and authorities [*exousias*] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them” (Col. 2:10, 15).
 - “with angels, authorities [*exousiōn*], and powers [*dynameōn*] having been subjected to him” (1 Peter 3:22).

³ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 362.

But note:

- “And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers [*archas*] and the authorities [*exousias*]” (Luke 12:11; see also Luke 20:20; Rom. 13:1–3).
 - “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities [*archais exousiais*]” (Titus 3:1).
4. The parallels to “angels” (Rom. 8:38; 1 Peter 3:22) and the location of these entities “in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:20–21; 3:10; 6:12) supports viewing them as spiritual beings, with at least many of them allied with the devil (Eph. 6:11–12). On the other hand, Colossians 1:16 can be interpreted as including earthly, visible rulers.

E. archangel

1. The word “archangel” (*archangelos*) appears in the Bible only twice, 1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 9. Jude 9 refers to “Michael the archangel.”
2. Views on Michael and the term archangel
 - a. Christians prior to the modern era often understood Michael to have been the preincarnate Christ and the term archangel to denote the head *over* the angels (and thus not one of the angels).
 - (1) Calvin thought that Michael in the book of Daniel might have been the preincarnate Christ, yet he interpreted the term “archangel” in the NT texts as referring to created angels, not to Christ.
 - (2) Adam Clarke thought that Michael in Daniel and Jude was Christ, but that the unnamed archangel in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 was not.
 - b. Many Adventists (especially in the nineteenth century) and the Jehovah’s Witnesses to this day have held that Christ was Michael, the chief angel. In JW teaching, Michael-Christ is the only archangel and is definitely a created being.
 - c. Contemporary biblical scholars generally deny that Christ is Michael or an archangel.
3. More than one archangel
 - a. Although the word archangel occurs in the NT only in the singular, the term originates in Second Temple Judaism to denote a group of chief angels (just as there are multiple “chief priests” in the NT). Daniel introduced Michael as “one of the chief princes” (Dan. 10:13), which of course means there are others comparable to him.
 - b. Jews typically recognized four or seven archangels, including Michael, Gabriel and others, most famously Raphael.
 - c. A common description of archangels is that they stand before or in the presence of God. In the NT, Gabriel tells Mary that he “stands in the presence of God” (Luke 1:19 NASB, cf. Testament of Abraham [A] 7.11, regarding Michael; Tobit 12:15,

regarding Raphael). When John says in Revelation 8:2, “Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God,” this is a clear reference to the seven archangels.

- d. All theories identifying Christ as the archangel presuppose that there is only one archangel. Since that assumption is incorrect, and since the NT never actually describes Christ as an archangel or calls him Michael, we should conclude that Christ is not Michael and is not an archangel. He is, rather, the Lord worshiped by all the angels (Heb. 1:6).⁴

F. Other terms

1. *Cherub(im)* (used 93 times in the OT and once in the NT, Heb. 9:5) and *seraphim* (used only in Isaiah 6:2, 6).
2. “hosts,” always plural; mostly in the name “YHWH of hosts” (239 times) or “God of hosts” (45 times), only in the OT. The word translated “of hosts” (*tseba’ôt*)
3. “holy ones,” 8 times in the OT, Deut. 33:2, 3; Job 5:1; 15:15; Ps. 89:5, 7; Dan. 4:17 (see on “watchers” below); Zech. 14:5; once in the NT, Jude 14, quoting the Book of Enoch but also alluding to Deut. 33:2.
4. “sons of God”: The OT uses the expression “sons of God” 6 times (Gen. 6:2, 4; Deut. 32:8 [in some versions]; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), as well as “sons of the Most High” (Ps. 82:6b). Most contemporary interpreters view these texts as referring to supernatural or heavenly beings, though the interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 remains disputed. The Israelites are also called God’s “sons” or “children,” though not in that specific expression (e.g., Deut. 14:1; Isa. 1:2, 4; 45:11; see also Isa. 43:6; Jer. 3:19), and Hosea prophesies that non-Israelite people will also be given that status (Hosea 1:10). This prophetic or eschatological sense dominates the NT usage; in contrast, the NT never calls angelic beings God’s “sons” (although Luke 20:36 comes close).
5. “watcher(s),” in the Bible only in Daniel 4:13, 17 (pl.), 23; also called “a holy one,” 4:13, 17 (the only such singular use of “holy one” for an angel in the Bible), and “holy ones,” 4:17, confirming that these are angelic beings (see also Dan. 8:13).
6. *ta stoicheia*, τὰ στοιχεῖα, Col. 2:8, 20, often interpreted as “elemental spirits” (ESV, NET, NRSV), but arguably not referring to spiritual beings.⁵
7. “stars”: Some interpreters understand some OT references to “stars” as referring to heavenly beings, or at least to stars as having been viewed by ancient Israelites as heavenly or divine beings (Deut. 4:19; Judg. 5:20; Job 38:7 [“the morning stars”]; cf. Jude 13; Rev. 1:20; 12:4).
8. “gods”: Although most occurrences of the numerical plural term “gods” refers clearly in context to idolatrous objects of worship, in some places the term appears to refer to spiritual or celestial beings (most notably, Deut. 32:43 [ESV, NRSV; there is a textual issue here]; Ps. 82:1, 6). In most and arguably all such instances, the celestial beings are called “gods” in irony or in the context of denigrating them as powerless, false gods.

⁴ See further Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics: A Biblical Defense* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2024), chap. 19.

⁵ See Markus Barth, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Astrid B. Beck, Anchor Yale Bible 34B (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 373–78.

G. Terms for the devil

1. “(the) Satan,” in Hebrew Bible, always with the article except in 1 Chron. 21:1; 14 times in Job 1–2; Zech. 13:1–2; in the Greek NT, *Satanas*, 36 times, 29 times with the article, 7 without it—3 of which are vocative and thus cannot have the article. The other 4 lacking the article (Mark 3:23; 2 Cor. 12:7) show that the word is understood as a name for a specific being. The Hebrew noun *satan* is related to a verb usually understood to mean to accuse, to slander, to oppose, to be an adversary. The noun occurs several times in reference to a human adversary (1 Sam. 29:4; 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kings 5:18; etc.).
2. “the devil,” (*ho*) *diabolos*: 34 times in the NT; also used in the LXX to translate “(the) satan” (1 Chron. 21:1; 13 times in Job 1–2 [except 1:8]; Zech. 3:1–2).
3. “Beelzebul,” used only by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, Matt. 10:25; 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 18, 19.
4. “the evil one,” clearly in Matt. 13:19, 38; John 17:15; Eph. 6:16; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 John 2:13–14; 3:12; 5:18–19; arguably also in Matt. 5:37; 6:13 (in the Lord’s Prayer).
5. Beliar/Belial, only in 2 Cor. 6:15; of uncertain origin, often construed to mean the worthless one.
6. “the adversary,” *ho antidikos*, only in this sense in 1 Peter 5:8, explicitly called “the devil” (cf. its use for a human adversary in Mark 5:25; Luke 12:58; 18:3). Cf. *ho antikeimai*, also translated “the adversary,” only in 1 Tim. 5:14, which likely refers generically to human critics (though it could be construed to refer to the devil).
7. “the tempter,” Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5.
8. “the enemy,” Luke 10:19, cf. Matt. 13:39.
9. “the accuser,” *ho katēgōr*, only in Rev. 12:10, said to be “thrown down” referring in context clearly to the devil (12:9).
10. “the god of this age,” 2 Cor. 4:4, although a minority of scholars (mostly in the past) have understood this text as referring to God.