

GOD AND THE gods – Lesson 1

The first big book I can remember reading as a child was the Hobbit. I was already familiar with the story, because in those days, there were certain shows that came on tv, year after year. You were guaranteed to see the Wizard of Oz, the Exodus and there was an animated version of the Hobbit. The thought of a quest where someone battled all sorts of goblins, spiders and even magic in the hands of an evil person was just more than a kid could resist. If you've ever read the book, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces," then you know that the pattern set out in books like the Hobbit are very common in literature. And to be honest, if we are paying attention to the details of the Bible, then we will see a similar pattern.

There was an original plan, then something went wrong and "adjustments" were made. The "second plan" was set in motion and then something went wrong. And then another "plan" goes into motion. All the while, there is something that has to happen in order for the "overall plan" to be brought to fruition. But we have to ask ourselves, "Why are these plans being thwarted?" Or maybe the better question to ask is, "Who is thwarting these plans?" And if God is God, then why are His plans

subject to being thwarted at all? The answers are in the Bible, and many answers have been given, but in my opinion, many of those answers are somewhat “pat answers.” They are over-simplifications of a much more detailed plot of an even more complex world. So, today we are going to set about in an attempt to identify the players in this quest for the ultimate prize – Heaven on earth.

This should be exciting to us. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God had put eternity in our hearts. There is just something about the unseen world that captivates most of us. This is why so many people watch movies and tv series about werewolves, goblins, quests, super-heroes and the like. This “yearning” is so pervasive in mankind that in Romans 1, Paul says that this “yearning” has to be willfully suppressed. Yet, many of us don’t think about our bibles in this way. The characters seem too ordinary or grandfatherly. But nothing could be farther from the truth. The Bible starts out in a super-natural mode and though it eventually settles into an ancient agrarian world, it is constantly being bombarded by super-natural encounters. And these encounters aren’t small things. They change history – the fate of individuals and even the fate of nations.

Let's look at what we think we know about the supernatural world and how many of those things are actually inaccurate. We need to realize that much of what we think we know about the supernatural world is gleaned from medieval theology, Milton's "Paradise Lost" or "Dante's Inferno." This is not where you go for good theology.

- 1. When people die, they don't go to Heaven where they are turned into angels. The bible says nothing like this, anywhere.**
- 2. Angels don't have wings. They are always in human form and always in the masculine, despite the figurines of female angels we see everywhere.**
- 3. Cherubs, or cherubim don't count – they're never called angels. And they aren't pudgy little babies playing harps. The bible knows nothing of this.**
- 4. Demons don't have horns or tails. Neither does Satan. And they aren't here to make us sin. We do a good enough job of that on our own.**

5. While demon possession is described in the bible in a horrendous way, intelligent evil has more to do than make puppets of us.

6. On top of all that, angels and demons are small time players in the meta-narrative. They are street level offenders. To get to the big players, the bosses, we have to climb the ladder a bit. We need to get to the big boys if we really want to understand what is going on in the world.

We need to understand that if we are taking the text seriously, then we have to believe the gods are real.

Let's look at some scripture.

Dan. 7:9,10

**9 "I watched till thrones were put in place,
And the Ancient of Days was seated;
His garment was white as snow,
And the hair of His head was like pure wool.
His throne was a fiery flame,
Its wheels a burning fire;
10 A fiery stream issued
And came forth from before Him.
A thousand thousands ministered to Him;**

**Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.
The court was seated,
And the books were opened.**

This is a courtroom scene in Heaven. God is on His throne and an innumerable host is before Him.

Ps. 89: 5 – 7 ESV

Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!
6 For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?
Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,
7 a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy
ones, and awesome above all who are around him?

Another scene from Heaven where God is in the assembly/ council of the Holy Ones.

Ps. 82:1

God has taken his place in the divine council;
in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:

separate slides for each line, if there are spaces between them.

Elohim has taken his place in the divine council;
In the midst of the Elohim he holds his judgment:

Elohim – God; singular, it's with a singular verb.

Elohim – gods; plural, plural verb.

Sheep – singular or plural?

The sheep are missing. Singular or plural?

The sheep is missing. Singular or plural?

The same grammar rules apply here in Hebrew as well as English.

Defining ‘gods’

We have seen the Hebrew word, Elohim and many of us have come to think of this mainly as a name for YHWH. In fact, it is hard for most of us to think of it in any other way. But the word actually refers to any inhabitant of the unseen spiritual world.

- It’s used of God Himself in Gen. 1:1.
- Demons in Dt. 32:17.
They sacrificed to demons, not to God,
- **To gods they did not know,**
- **To new gods, new arrivals**
- **That your fathers did not fear.**
- And it is used of the human dead, in the afterlife in 1 Samuel 28:13.
- **1 Samuel 28:13**
- **13 And the king said to her, “Do not be afraid. What did you see?”**
- **And the woman said to Saul, “I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth.”**
- This was the spirit of Samuel. Elohim is used on all these occurrences.

In short, any disembodied being whose home address is the spirit world is an Elohim. God is an Elohim, but so are the divine council, demons and spirits of the dead. It is the context of the verses that tell us just who each Elohim is.

Also, God is an Elohim, but not all Elohim are God. All Georgians are Americans, but not all Americans are Georgians.

This term, Elohim, doesn't refer to a specific set of abilities only God has. God is distinguished from the other Elohim in other ways, not by the use of the word Elohim.

- **The Bible commands the gods to worship the God of the bible: Ps. 29:1.**
- **He is their creator and king. Ps. 95:3; 148:1-5; Ps. 89:6,7; 1 Kings 8:23; Ps. 97:9.**
- **The Bible makes it clear that God has no rivals, no equal. He is the God of gods. Dt. 10:17; Ps. 136:2.**

If we don't see these beings as real, then we are merely paying lip-service to the spiritual reality.

And since the Bible identifies these divine council members as real, then we know that they aren't just idols made out of wood or stone.

- Statues don't work for God in a heavenly council.
- People in the ancient world who worshipped pagan gods did make idols, but they never thought the idols were the real powers.

- They believed the powers would inhabit the idol if sacrifices were given to the idol. Generally speaking, these were ceremonies to open the nostrils or the mouth in order to allow the power/ the god to enter the idol. But they never believed the idol itself held any power.

THE BUSINESS STRUCTURE OF THE COUNCIL

The gods of Psalm 82:1 are called “sons of the Most High.” Later, in verse 6, we see that God, YHWH, is the Most High. The “sons of God” appear several times in the Bible, usually in God’s presence, (Job 1:6, 2:1). Job 38:7 tells us they were around before God began to fashion the earth and create humanity.

Job 38:4-7

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Tell Me, if you have understanding.

5 Who determined its measurements?

Surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

6 To what were its foundations fastened?

Or who laid its cornerstone,

7 When the morning stars sang together,

And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Why are they called sons?

This “family language” makes sense since God created them. We refer to our offspring as sons and daughters

since we participated in their creation. But God is more than their father, He is their king.

- In the ANE context, kings often ruled through extended families. The throne was passed down to an heir. Dominion was a family business.
- God is Lord of his council and His sons have the next highest rank by virtue of their relationship with Him.
- But then something happened and some of these sons became disloyal.

STRUCTURE OF THE COUNCIL

These sons of God are decision makers.

1Kings 22:19-23

19 Then Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left. **20** And the LORD said, ‘Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?’ So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. **21** Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, ‘I will persuade him.’ **22** The LORD said to him, ‘In what way?’ So he said, ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And the LORD

said, 'You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.' 23 Therefore look! The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the LORD has declared disaster against you."

In 1 Kings 22, when God decided it was time for King Ahab to die, He left it up to His council to decide how it would happen. God then signed off on the plan.

Some of the meetings of the council even determined the fate of empires. In Daniel chapter four, God punishes Nebuchadnezzar with temporary insanity. **This decree came down by, "the decree of the Most High" (Dan. 4:24) AND "the decree of the watchers," (Dan. 4:17)**

'Watchers' is another term used for divine beings of God's council.

All these things teach us that God's council members participate in God's rule. In at least some cases, God decrees what He wants done and lets the council decide the means. But God always has veto power. Angels participate in God's council as well. But they are lower level figures. **In the biblical languages, the term simply means, "messenger." Angel is a job description. They**

deliver messages to people. We'll learn more about the later.

So, this is all groovy stuff, but what does it mean to me? How does all this effect my life or even life in the church? How does it help me to become a better person?

ANSWER: It has everything to do with our understanding of who God is, how we relate to Him and our purpose here on earth. The workings of the council give us insight into how God relates to His creation – and that means us! God's heavenly family business is a template for how He relates to His earthly family.

You may wonder why God even needs a council. If He is God, He shouldn't need any help at all. And that is correct. He doesn't NEED any help, either from a divine council or from humanity, but He desires it. The Bible is clear that He uses lesser beings to get things done. He doesn't need a council, but He chooses to use one. And He doesn't need humans either, but He chooses to include us in His plan of redemption. If He chose to do so, He could speak audibly to everyone. He could persuade people to love others, etc. But He chooses to use free moral agents to accomplish His will.

God could predetermine events to make things happen the way He desires. But He doesn't. In the story of King Ahab, God allowed the council to decide how to carry out Ahab's death sentence. In other words, He allowed them to exercise their free will. And that isn't true only of the unseen world, He does the same in ours also. The unseen realm has structure. God is the CEO and those who work for Him are his family. We see the parallel here on earth.

From the very beginning, in Eden, God created humanity to rule the earth with Him. **God gave Adam and Eve the "dominion mandate." He told them to multiply and rule – be stewards over the earth, to bring it under their control. (Gen.1:28)** Adam and Eve were the "children of God" – God's earthly family. God wanted to live with them and let them participate in making the whole world like Eden.

But as we shall see, Adam and Eve weren't the only ones in the garden. His divine family was there also. Eden was where God lived, (on earth) and where God lives, so does His family.

We think of Heaven as a place where we will live with God and His angels. That was the original intention and one day it will be that way. It's no coincidence that the

book of Revelation ends with Heaven coming back in a new global Eden. **(Rev. 21-22)**

To fully understand our destiny as well as our history, we need to go back to the time when God's two families occupied the same space. As Larry Norman said, "We need to go back to the garden."

This week think about how we, as Christians, as God's earthly family, how our relationship, put in the perspective of the council - how that relates to us. Does that put things in a different light? How does it speak to our relationship with God? How does it speak to our purpose here on earth? There's a lot to chew on, so get to chomping. Y'all be blessed this week.