
CHOOSE YOU THIS DAY

LESSON 9: GOD'S INHERITANCE

Objectives

- Recognize that a significant "turf war" began at the Tower of Babel.
- Learn to recognize and interpret passages in the Old and New Testaments that have theological connections to the Third Rebellion.
- Ponder the idea that God sometimes keeps his plans secret.
- Consider implications for us today, including the significance of God calling believers the "sons of God."

Introduction and Summary

We saw in the last lesson how God has a spiritual family, which we identified as the "Divine Council." He likes for his creatures, both spiritual and human, to participate in his work and he allows them to have meaningful choices as his ultimate goals are advanced. We learned to call these spiritual sons of God by the Hebrew word *elohim*, a term can be used either for God himself or for any being that originates in the spirit world.

We introduced the idea that 70 of the members of God's council were directly involved in God's judgment at the Tower of Babel. At that time, God disinherited the 70 nations of the earth and allotted each one to one of the lesser *elohim*, keeping just one old man for himself, through whom he would produce his own nation as his share of the earth (his "inheritance"). We closed by looking at Psalm 82, in which God dramatically rebukes the gods of the nations for oppressing the people in their care and declares that one day he will take all the nations back as his own inheritance.

A Cosmic Turf War

We have now established some very important points that help us understand the theological lens through which the ancient Israelites would have viewed their own nation and their God. As they made their covenant with Yahweh at Sinai, they acknowledged that he was superior to all others and that they were not to worship the *elohim* of the other nations. They understood that the lands outside of Israel belonged to other gods.

The incident at Babel and God's decision to disinherit the nations drew up the battle lines for a cosmic turf war for the planet. The corruption of the *elohim* sons of God set over the nations meant that Yahweh's vision of a global Eden would be met with divine force. Every inch outside Israel would be contested, and Israel itself was fair game for hostile conquest. The gods would not surrender their inheritances back to Yahweh; he would have to reclaim them.¹

¹ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*. 122.

It wasn't enough for Israel to know that Yahweh was the Most High. They were supposed to reflect His character in such a way that people from other nations would see it and come to know Him, too. They were supposed to see that Yahweh was superior to the other gods. Let's look at how that played out in some specific examples.

Egypt

This happened when Yahweh defeated the gods of Egypt through the ten plagues. Notice whom Yahweh was judging:

For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. Exodus 12:12

Dr. Heiser adds:

Pharaoh was the son of Re. Israel was explicitly called the son of Yahweh in the confrontation with Pharaoh (Exod 4:23; cf. Hos 11:1). Yahweh and his son would defeat the high god of Egypt and his son. God against god, son against son, imager against imager. In that context, the plagues are spiritual warfare.²

Canaan

The idea that Canaan belonged to Yahweh because it was the geographical territory that He had specifically allotted to His own people sets the stage for the conquest of the Land under Joshua. It was rightfully the Israelites' to take, and the *elohim* who had established their own people there knew it. The presence of the Nephilim in the land adds another dimension.

In the view of the biblical writers, Israel is at war with enemies spawned by rival divine beings. The Nephilim bloodlines were not like the peoples of the disinherited nations. Genesis 10 clearly casts the human inhabitants of those nations as owing their existence to Yahweh, as they descended from Noah's sons and, therefore, Noah—all the way back to Adam, Yahweh's first human son. The Nephilim bloodlines had a different pedigree. They were produced by other divine beings. They did not belong to Yahweh, and he therefore had no interest in claiming them. Coexistence was not possible with the spawn of other gods.³

David

David showed his understanding of the "turf war" when he expressed his distress at being separated from his land and people while being pursued by Saul.

Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king." And he said, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands? Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up

² Ibid., 151.

³ Ibid., 203.

against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day *that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.'*" 1 Samuel 26:17-19

David used the same language as that found in **Deuteronomy 32:8-9** to show his understanding that God's "heritage" (inheritance) was Israel. He knew God was omnipresent (see **Psalms 139**), but being separated from God's chosen land meant being unable to worship as he should because the surrounding lands belonged to other gods.

Naaman

Look at the fascinating request Naaman, the Syrian commander, made of Elisha after he was healed from leprosy:

[Naaman] came and stood before [Elisha]. And he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused. Then Naaman said, "If not, please let there be given to your servant *two mule loads of earth*, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD. In this matter may the Lord pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter." He said to him, "Go in peace." 2 Kings 5:15-19

What? He asked for dirt? Naaman recognized that the true God resided in Israel, yet he knew that he would still be required to enter the temple of Rimmon with his master. To show Yahweh that he was keeping his vow to worship Him alone, he took as much dirt as two mules could carry so that he could take God's domain back into Rimmon's territory! We don't know exactly what he did with the dirt (carried it with him into the temple or created a space for his personal prayer?)⁴, but we shouldn't miss the theological statement he was making.

Bashan

We do not have time to pull out the numerous appearances of this name in Scripture or to develop the full significance, but I cannot neglect to mention it. Bashan was in the northern region of Israel, the territory in which the tribe of Dan eventually settled. Mount Hermon was located there, and Og (the giant king with the huge iron bed in **Deuteronomy 3:11**) was the ruler at one time. It was known as "the place of the serpent."⁵ Even the name "Hermon" has underlying implications. In Hebrew it is pronounced *khermon* and has the same root as the verb *kharam*, "to devote to destruction"—the verb God used to command the extermination of certain people groups.⁶

For our purposes today, consider the time of the Divided Kingdom, immediately after Solomon's death. Jeroboam took possession of the ten northern tribes of Israel and set up two places of worship. For the first, he chose Bethel—the place where God had appeared to

⁴ The *ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, 2012) note for 2 Kings 5:17 says, "The earth is to be used in the construction of a mud-brick altar (cf. Ex. 20:24-25) for Naaman's worship of the Lord."

⁵ See Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 200, and the extensive footnote support.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

the patriarchs. For the second, he chose a place in Dan close to Mount Hermon (**1 Kings 12:26-33**).

No one faithful to Yahweh would have missed their intended contempt. Ten of Israel's tribes were now under the dominion of other gods.⁷

All of Psalm 68 is fascinating when read with the perspective that God will once again take the nations into His inheritance. It begins with statements about God's impending mighty victory. Verse 8 associates Yahweh with a certain mountain:

The earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the one of Sinai, before God, the one of Israel. Psalm 68:8

Then God turns His attention to another mountain:

O mountain of God, mountain of Bashan; O many-peaked mountain, mountain of Bashan! Why do you look with hatred, O many-peaked mountain, at the mount that God desired for his abode, yes, where the Lord will dwell forever? Psalm 68:15-16

The Hebrew word translated "God" is *elohim*, so it is better to understand Bashan as "the mountain of the gods." And in this passage, the mountain of God's abode is Mt. Moriah (or Zion) in Jerusalem. Bashan and Zion are rivals! But of course it is not the mountains themselves, it is the gods associated with the mountain of Bashan that look with hatred on Yahweh's chosen dwelling place. The rest of the Psalm describes a celestial battle for the territory of Bashan which will have a definitive ending:

But God will strike the heads of his enemies... The Lord said, "I will bring them back from Bashan, I will bring them back from the depths of the sea, that you may strike your feet in their blood..." Psalm 68:21-22

When you see Bashan mentioned in Scripture, always consider the underlying battle between Yahweh and the gods of the nations!

Babylon

We will have much more to say about Babylon in later lessons, but this is an important place to make some connections since we already know the significance of what happened at Babel. Babylon is the Greek word for Babel⁸, which in Semitic means "the gate of God."⁹ This is the place where Yahweh disinherited the nations and pulled out a man who would become the ancestor of Yahweh's chosen ones. Throughout the Bible, Babylon represents false religion. We will see in the next major section of our course just how much impact this civilization has had on false religion over the last few millennia.

⁷ Ibid., 231.

⁸ If you're interested in a lengthy discussion about how to pronounce "Babel," see Hodge, *The Tower of Babel*, 13-16. He concludes that the Hebrews probably said "baw-BELL" and that the English "ba-BELL" is probably closer than "BAY-bell." And now you know.

⁹ *Net Bible Study Dictionary*, Net Bible, <http://classic.net.bible.org/dictionary.php> I find the meaning of the name ("the gate of God" or "the gods") to be confirmation that the people of Babel were trying to bring spirit beings from another dimension into our own.

It was no coincidence that hundreds of years after the division of nations, God chose Babylon to be the nation that would take His people into captivity. It would have seemed to the Babylonians and all the surrounding nations that their gods had finally been victorious over Yahweh. The prophets made it clear, though, that Yahweh was still in control of the situation and had actually summoned the armies of Babylon in order to discipline His people.¹⁰

God's Strategy: Keep it Secret

And that brings us to another very important discovery about God: He doesn't seem to mind when it looks like He is losing. He doesn't react out of panic or fear, but faithfully and systematically moves forward with His plans. He's willing to take the risk that people will misunderstand what is happening or be unable to figure out how His actions all work together for good. In fact, much of the time He purposely veils His strategies so that they are not even discernable until later when all the pieces can be put together! Let's see why He does this.

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 1 Corinthians 2:7-8

If God had made His plans for Jesus' mission and purpose perfectly clear ahead of time, Jesus would never have been crucified. The evil ones would have known that his death and resurrection were God's means of getting the nations back!¹¹ We can look back at the various Old Testament references that point to Christ and see it all quite clearly (thanks to the indwelling Holy Spirit that illuminates it for us), but the people living at the time could only see in part. It's as if they were standing too closely to a mosaic and could only see one piece at a time and by the time they looked somewhere else, they couldn't see how it connected to the first piece. It's only by stepping back that one can see the beautiful picture that has been carefully crafted. I love the story of Jesus talking to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus because I imagine the profound impact of having the Artist suddenly pull them backwards so that they could see the whole picture!

The story of the cross is the biblical-theological catalyst to God's plan for regaining all that was lost in Eden. It couldn't be emblazoned across the Old Testament in transparent statements. It had to be expressed in sophisticated and cryptic ways to ensure that the powers of darkness would be misled. And it was. Even the angels didn't know the plan (1 Pet 1:12).^{12,13}

¹⁰ "The point of view in Lamentations 2 is not that of widow Zion. The poet distances himself somewhat from the pain of the people to describe the actions of Yahweh against Israel. This steadfastly precludes the notion that Yahweh has been overcome by the gods of the nations that routed Israel and asserts instead that it is Yahweh who has used the nations to discipline his wayward people." Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 310.

¹¹ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 241.

¹² *Ibid.*, 243.

¹³ This is just my own pondering: We know that Satan is not omnipresent or omniscient. John 13:27 tells us that Satan personally entered into Judas, who then left Jesus' presence. After this, Jesus began talking and didn't stop for four chapters. Among other things, he said "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). I wonder whether Satan would have proceeded with the plan to kill Jesus if he had heard everything contained in these chapters. Sometimes we give him too much credit, as if he is everywhere and knows all things!

A New Lens for the Bible

We started the previous lesson with a barrage of passages that we may have been inclined to just skip over because they seemed too strange. I'd like to go back and take a look at the ones we haven't already covered, as well as some others, in light of what we've learned. I expect you'll find yourself skipping fewer parts of the Bible in the future!

Old Testament Passages

Job 1:6 and 2:1

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. Job 1:6

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. Job 2:1

This is an example of a meeting of the divine council. I concur that these verses raise more questions than answers! Was this meeting pre-scheduled, or does God call random assemblies of His host? Where were they all and what were they doing when they weren't appearing before God? Is Satan a "son of God" like the rest of them, or is he mentioned separately because he is different? How often do (or did) meetings like this happen? Who told the author about this event?

I won't be able to answer since the Bible gives no hints. But the content of the meeting is revealed in the next verses, so it's reasonable to conclude that at least one of the purposes of the meeting was for God to present Job for testing. It's similar to the account in **1 Kings 22** and **2 Chronicles 18**, in which God brought up the matter of enticing Ahab to His death. In this case, though, we only see Satan's participation in the conversation and are left in the dark about what the others present may have contributed.

Job 15:7-8

We find another direct reference to the divine council in the book of Job, spoken by Job's "friend," Eliphaz:

**"Are you the first man who was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills?
Have you listened in the council of God? And do you limit wisdom to yourself? Job
15:7-8**

We learn from this that in Job's day, people were aware that God had a council and that they spoke about things when they met. In mentioning the first man, we also get the implication that Adam, the first man, was in fact able to listen in on the deliberations of the divine council.¹⁴

¹⁴ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 233. Dr. Heiser uses this and other passages to further make the case that Eden was a meeting place for the council.

Leviticus 16

In the Festivals lesson, we talked about the *Azazel*/scapegoat that was taken out into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement and was released or pushed off a cliff. This illustration reveals something about the ownership of territories outside of Israel.

And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord and use it as a sin offering, but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel. Leviticus 16:7-10

Azazel is the name of a demon or a leader of the Watchers, as found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and elsewhere.¹⁵ In many English Bible translations it is capitalized, indicating a proper name. His realm was said to be in the wilderness, symbolizing a place that is hostile to God.

After symbolically placing the sins of the Israelites on the goat for Azazel, it was sent away into the wilderness. It was not as though they felt they owed something to Azazel or were giving him any kind of sacrifice. The idea was that sending the goat to Azazel banished their sins away from God's holy dwelling place. Evil belonged outside of Israel because that is where the other gods reigned, so sin had to be removed to that territory. "Azazel was getting what belonged to him: sin."¹⁶

Daniel 7:9-10

I am proceeding through these passages in historical order, but this one stands out when it comes to significance. It's one of the most explicit passages about the divine council in the Bible. Daniel tells of his vision:

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. Daniel 7:9-10

We see here multiple thrones in heaven, as well as a seat for Yahweh, the Ancient of Days. It is obvious that this is a judicial scene. The council has been called to determine the fate of the beasts, which represent national empires. In the next scene we find that the final beast of Daniel's vision is killed. Then Daniel sees the following:

And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13-14

¹⁵ Janowski, B. *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd Edition (edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst; Leiden; Boston; Cologne; Grand Rapids, MI: Cambridge: Brill, Eerdmans, 1999). 128.

¹⁶ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 177-178.

Baal was known as the god who "rode the clouds,"¹⁷ and the biblical writers liked to take this language and assign it to Yahweh instead to make the point that the God of Israel was the one who deserved to be worshipped—not Baal.¹⁸ But in verses 13 and 14, the one coming on the clouds of heaven is "one like a son of man" (a human), not the one referred to as the Ancient of Days. He is given everlasting kingship, which is what was promised to David. In case we can't tell who this is talking about, peek ahead into the New Testament where we find Jesus on trial before Caiaphas:

**And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."
Matthew 26:63-66**

The question seemed very clear, yet Jesus' answer comes across as cryptic to us—but not when we know how the Jews at the time would have been thinking! Jesus was actually directly quoting **Daniel 7:13** and identifying himself as the Son of Man who will be glorified and given a kingdom. Instead of a cryptic answer, He gave one that was so bold and shocking that the high priest reacted by tearing his robes (which was specifically prohibited by the Law for the high priest in **Leviticus 21:10**) and the decision was immediately pronounced that he deserved to die for blasphemy. Jesus had clearly identified Himself as this man who was also God in **Daniel 7**. This has caused a multitude of interpretive problems for Jewish scholars over the centuries.¹⁹

Just to complete the narrative and see who will win this turf war, look ahead in Daniel 7 and see the interpretation Daniel was given for his vision:

And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people [nation] of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them. Daniel 7:27

This kingdom was given to the Son of Man by the Ancient of Days in verse 14, but in verse 27 we see that it will be given to God's spiritual nation, which would later be identified as the Church! As saints, we will hold a higher rank than the other "dominions" that exist.

Isaiah 6:8

A noticeable usage of a plural pronoun in Isaiah's famous vision of God's throne room alerts us to the presence of the divine council.

¹⁷ Hermann, W. "Rider upon the Clouds" in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd Edition (edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst; Leiden; Boston; Cologne; Grand Rapids, MI: Cambridge: Brill, Eerdmans, 1999). Page 703-705.

¹⁸ See Deuteronomy 33:26, Psalm 68:32-33, Psalm 104:1-4, and Isaiah 19:1.

¹⁹ Take a good look at Hebrews 1 in light of Jesus' uniqueness as the only begotten Son of God compared to the angels, then revel in how *we* are the ones united to him! While you're at it, go on and read Hebrews 2, which builds on it. The word *congregation* in Hebrews 2:12 means "assembly" and refers to the heavenly council. See Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 314-319 for commentary.

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." Isaiah 6:8

God (singular) will do the sending, but the person sent will represent a group. God makes the final call, but the commission comes from his *elohim*, as well.²⁰ Again, scholars sometimes deal with this plural pronoun by claiming it to be a reference to the other members of the Trinity, but we must recognize that the ancient Hebrews would not have interpreted it this way so they must have had some other understanding.

Isaiah 24:21-23

The members of the council are sometimes called "elders." Here we see a distinction between those who have been faithful to God and those who have been unfaithful.

On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders. Isaiah 24:21-23

Yahweh is going to punish His divine foes (the host of heaven) and his human foes (the kings of the earth). He will reestablish His rule before his council (elders) in His rightful territory—Mount Zion.

Jeremiah 23:18-22

In this passage, God is speaking against false prophets who claimed that no disaster would fall upon Judah for her disobedience.

For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened?

"I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds." Jeremiah 23:18, 21-22

False prophets have not stood and listened in the council. By implication, true prophets have done so.²¹

New Testament Passages

Let's move into the New Testament as we look for evidence of the divine council throughout Scripture. These two passages make a similar claim.

²⁰ "The rule of the cosmos is in the hands of Yahweh, but the context in which that rule takes place is the activity of the council where Yahweh's decrees directing the human community and the divine world are set forth and through whom they are communicated or enacted." Miller, *Cosmology and the World Order*, 426.

²¹ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 239. This is a small statement that is part of a much larger case he makes for the qualifications of a true prophet of Yahweh.

Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it. Acts 7:52-53

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? Hebrews 2:1-3a

Earlier, we would not have known what it meant when we read that the Law was “delivered by angels” or “declared by angels,” but now we know that God makes His decrees with and through the created *elohim*. It would be surprising if the council were *not* present at such a significant event as the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai!

Not convinced that we should conclude from these passages that the council had anything to do with the giving of the Law? Look at Deuteronomy 33:1-4.

This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the people of Israel before his death. He said, “The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran; he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand. Yes, he loved his people, all his holy ones were in his hand, so they followed in your steps, receiving direction from you, when Moses commanded us a law, as a possession for the assembly of Jacob. Deuteronomy 33:1-4 (ESV)

The Septuagint translation (done by Jewish scholars from Hebrew into Greek) makes it clear that the “holy ones” that came with God were understood to be angels. It also indicates that they were at God’s right hand, which is the position of authority. The language indicates that the angels bore witness to the covenant.²² It seems that they were more than just witnesses, though.

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Galatians 3:19

Paul is making the case that the intermediary here was Jesus (Yahweh present in two persons at Sinai)²³, but for our purposes today it seems quite clear that other divine beings were directly involved with the Sinai Covenant. This understanding helps these phrases seem far less mysterious. Yet let’s begin to bring it closer to home as we explore how Jesus himself perceived the realities of the unseen world, and then how it all relates to us as the Church.

²² Heiser, *The Unseen Realm* 166.

²³ “The startling reality is that long before Jesus and the New Testament, careful readers of the Old Testament would not have been troubled by the notion of, essentially, two Yahwehs—one invisible and in heaven, the other manifest on earth in a variety of visible forms, including that of a man.” Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 134. This is part of a much larger discussion about the frequency of God appearing in the likeness of a man in the Old Testament so that He could be comprehensible to the lesser minds of humans. This avenue of exploration clarifies several perplexing elements of the Old Testament.

Jesus and the Kingdom

Jesus often talked about the kingdom of God. Sometimes he spoke of it as something that was near and at hand (e.g., **Mark 1:15, Luke 6:20**) while other times he talked as if it was something yet to come (e.g., **Luke 19:11, Mark 14:25**). All of this talk about kingdoms is enhanced when we understand the battle that has been going on behind the scenes between Yahweh and His enemies. They have been at war with Him since He disinherited the nations. How is it that Jesus' kingdom was firmly established nearly two thousand years ago, yet our world is still in such a mess? The short answer is that He is not yet exercising his full rights. We know that the all-powerful God can step in and end the battle at any time, yet He patiently takes things one step at a time as He accomplishes the legal and definitive defeat of His enemies.

The Temptation

The Jewish reader of the eyewitness accounts to the life of Jesus would have been alerted to the similarities between Jesus' temptation and the testing of Israel after they left Egypt. Both happened in the wilderness. Both were led by God to be tested. Israel's testing was for forty years, Jesus' testing was for forty days. In fact, the Scripture passages Jesus used to refute Satan all came from **Deuteronomy 6-8**, in which we find Moses reminding the people (who are about to enter the Promised Land) of the education they have received over the last forty years.

At the time he approached Christ, we must assume that Satan actually hoped to be successful at swaying Jesus away from His goal. We know that he did not understand the full extent of what Jesus would accomplish, but he knew Jesus was the Son of God (**Matthew 4:6**). Because of the way demons feared Jesus (e.g., **Mark 1:23-24**) we can conclude that the powers of darkness recognized him as a threat to their rule over the nations.

Satan, the experienced tester, started with the obvious: food for a hungry man. When that didn't work, he tempted Jesus to make a public display of his power by hurling himself off the top of the Temple. But I find the third test to be the most surprising. Satan took Jesus to a very high mountain and offered to give Him all the kingdoms of the world if He would only bow down and worship him. Isn't God in charge of all the kingdoms of the world? Not according to our understanding of the disinherited nations! Luke's account of the temptation includes a bold claim made by the devil that is often overlooked:

And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will." Luke 4:5-6

Satan declared that the kingdoms had been delivered over to him! We do not know precisely how he came to be the leader over the other forces of evil, but he seems to be speaking for all of them when he places a potentially world-changing offer on the table: If Jesus will worship Satan, he can have the kingdoms back! They were legally in Satan's possession at that moment because God had allotted them to the *elohim*. Jesus did not refute his claim. But they were not Satan's to keep! God had been stating all along in no uncertain terms that He would once again inherit *all* the nations, and He would do it on *His* terms, not Satan's! If Jesus had given in, He would have been acknowledging that He needed Satan's permission to possess the nations. He would have given up all that was to be accomplished through His

death and resurrection—the reversal of the Curse and eternal life for mankind.²⁴ It would have been a poor bargain.

Power Over Demons

From the gospel accounts, we can piece together the order of events that happened next. Jesus went back to his hometown of Nazareth and read aloud to them from Isaiah's scroll, then claimed that this particular section was being fulfilled through him. Their approval was short-lived, however, as Jesus went on to speak of God's favor to foreigners instead of Jews. They tried to push him off a cliff for such offensive talk, but he escaped (**Luke 4:18-30**). From there, he went to the Sea of Galilee and called the first disciples (**Mark 1:16-20**), and then moved on to nearby Capernaum where something new happened.

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." Mark 1:23-27

Note that this is the very first time in the biblical record that we see anything about demons being cast out of people. It seems that Jesus went straight from his victory over Satan in the Temptation and began the process of reestablishing the kingdom of God on earth as he began to defeat the offspring of the *elohim*. The term "unclean spirit" very likely points to the fact that these spirits were formed from the forbidden mixture of *elohim* and humans. Jesus directly connected the casting out of demons with the coming of the kingdom of God:

If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Luke 11:20

The Seventy

From there, Jesus did more miracles (including healings and exorcisms) and continued calling disciples until He had twelve in his inner circle—corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel. Then He appointed seventy more disciples and sent them ahead to prepare the way in the places He was intending to go minister.

Jesus sent out seventy disciples. The number is not accidental. Seventy is the number of the nations listed in Genesis 10 that were dispossessed at Babel. The seventy "return with joy" (Luke 10:17) and announce to Jesus, "Lord, even the demons are subject to your name!" Jesus' response is telling: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (10:18). The implications are clear: Jesus' ministry is the beginning of the end for Satan and the gods of the nations. The great reversal is underway.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid., 279.

²⁵ Ibid., 280-281.

The Gates of Hell

Later on, Jesus asked his disciples who they thought He was. After Peter answered that Jesus was the Christ and Jesus commended him for it, Jesus added this comment:

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. (Matthew 16:18)

Although this verse is hotly debated, especially between Protestants and Catholics (who have built a doctrine of papal authority out of it), we learn much from looking at where Jesus was standing when He talked about "this rock." We can see from a few verses earlier that they have just arrived in Caesarea Philippi, which is in the northern part of what used to be Bashan, right at the foot of Mount Hermon! It's not surprising that the "spiritual headquarters" of the enemy would by then have developed into a center of worship for Pan and Zeus. This very location was known as the "gates of hell."²⁶ Not to disregard the important wordplay having to do with Peter's name meaning "stone" and the profound statement he had just made about Jesus' identity, but Jesus was looking at a highly significant rocky mountainside and proclaiming that He would be taking this territory for Himself!

The theological messaging couldn't be more dramatic. Jesus says he will build his church—and the "gates of hell" will not prevail against it. We often think of this phrase as though God's people are in a posture of having to bravely fend off Satan and his demons. This simply isn't correct. Gates are defensive structures, not offensive weapons. The kingdom of God is the aggressor. Jesus begins at ground zero in the cosmic geography of both testaments to announce the great reversal. It is the gates of hell that are under assault—and they will not hold up against the Church. Hell will one day be Satan's tomb.²⁷

The Transfiguration

After this statement to Peter declaring the certainty of his enemies' defeat, we find the record of the transfiguration. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all place it as the next event, although none of them give the name of the mountain where it happened. The idea that it took place on Mount Tabor can be traced back to a couple of casual mentions in the fourth century A.D.²⁸ and many scholars still hold to this as the correct location. However, many have come to agree that the greater height of Mount Hermon (Matthew and Mark say it was a "high mountain") and the proximity to the recent conversation make this a more logical choice. Jewish tradition identifies this as the place where the Watchers descended, and we already saw the reference in **Psalm 68:15** to the mountain that "hated" God's own mountain. By revealing his glory to Peter, James, and John and making it clear to them that he was God in the flesh, it's as if Jesus was declaring in that place that He had come to take back what was His. From this point, we see (especially from Mark's succinct account) that He begins to move toward Jerusalem and His ultimate death. He has thrown down the gauntlet. He has baited the enemy to take action, knowing that His death will secure the Kingdom.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., 201.

²⁷ Ibid., 284-285.

²⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem and Jerome both identified the Mount of Transfiguration as Tabor. Mussies, "Tabor," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 828.

²⁹ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 286-287.

The Church and God's Kingdom

As we know, Jesus won the victory over His enemies at the cross. We also know that He did not take immediate possession of His kingdom. I liken it to buying a home. The day you sign the papers and the title is placed in your name is not the same day that you move in. There is some time in between, during which preparations are made to vacate the previous owners and take possession.

God's preparations to occupy His full inheritance were set in motion at Pentecost. Luke uses two particular words in the Acts account that indicate he may have been drawing on the Old Testament record of the Tower of Babel when he told the story of how the Holy Spirit came and indwelt believers.³⁰ First, he said the people who had gathered in Jerusalem were "bewildered" (Acts 2:8) The Greek word is *syncheo* and it means "confused." It's the same word the Septuagint uses to translate God's *confusion* of the languages in Genesis 11:7. The second matching word is found in Acts 2:3.

**And *divided* tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.
Acts 2:3**

The word "divided" is the Greek word *diameizo*, which means "distributed."³¹ This same word is used in the Septuagint to translate "divided" in Deuteronomy 32:8.

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. Deuteronomy 32:8

The connection between Babel and Pentecost goes much deeper than a couple of matching words, though. These words simply draw our attention to the things that Pentecost did that began to reverse Babel. Where initially there was confusion, the Jews from various nations that were gathered for Pentecost began to hear a unified message in their own languages. They began to take the message of Christ crucified and risen to their own nations. Where God once disinherited the nations, distributing them among the sons of God, He now distributed His Spirit upon all who believed and united them into one family.

The list of nations in **Genesis 10** does not include places like China or South America because these places were not part of the known world at the time it was written. Likewise, the list of nations that were represented in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2:9-11** encompassed the known world of that time. The rest of the book of Acts chronicles an east-to-west sweep of the known world.³²

The Turf War Continues

Naturally, there is opposition to this movement of God by his spiritual enemies. The New Testament gives glimpses of the battle that is being waged for the nations. The Greek words that Paul used to identify the spiritual powers of darkness show that his worldview was

³⁰ Ibid., 298.

³¹ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³² See Heiser's discussion, including Paul's mission to get to Spain (the farthest west in the known world) and the links between his mission and Isaiah 66:15-23. *The Unseen Realm*, 299-306.

shaped by an understanding of lesser *elohim* controlling the nations.

- "principalities" (*arche*)
- "powers"/"authorities" (*exousia*)
- "powers" (*dynamis*)
- "dominions"/"lords" (*kyrios*)
- "thrones" (*thronos*)

All of these terms are used in the New Testament and other Greek literature for *geographical* domain rulership.³³

Once these *elohim* had been "put to public disgrace" by Jesus' triumph (**Colossians 2:15**), they knew their time was short (**Revelation 12:12**). They knew from the judgment passed on them in **Psalms 82** that their impending mortality was due to their oppression of humanity and that God was going to reclaim humanity by inheriting all the nations. Perhaps they believed that if humanity could be lured away from God once again, their judgment could be postponed.³⁴

Our role in the conflict is to be loyal to Yahweh. This is always what salvation is about, even in the Old Testament. Salvation was never merited through obedience to the Law. Instead, the Law was the way to demonstrate loyalty to God and to establish a community that was set apart where His holiness could dwell. One had to believe His covenant promises were true and avoid worshipping other gods, not just meet the external requirements.

Personal failure, even of the worst kind, did not send the nation into exile.
Choosing other gods did.³⁵

In the same way, on this side of the cross we are still saved through believing loyalty. We demonstrate this loyalty through obedience to the "law of Christ" (**1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2**) and we show that our faith is alive through our works (**James 2:14-26**). Even when we experience personal failure, we are not trading Jesus for another god. The enemy constantly seeks to convince us that we are worthless failures (and most of us are fully aware of our persistent battle with the sin nature), but we should focus instead on the God we belong to. *If only we realized that the same God whose presence once filled the Temple now dwells in us!* We are participating in God's victory over the enemy by being His corporate Body here on earth, to make His image visible. We are adopted into His family as His dearly loved children. We are the Bride that He is dressing in fine linen!

If we could see with spiritual eyes, we would see a world of darkness peppered with the lights of Yahweh's presence, spreading out to meet each other, inexorably pressing and spreading out to take back the ground of the

³³ Ibid., 121. To find these terms in Scripture, see Ephesians 6:12, Ephesians 1:20-21, and Colossians 1:6. There are times in the Bible that these particular words do not refer to geographical authority, but there are times that they certainly do.

³⁴ Ibid., 322.

³⁵ Ibid., 170.

disinherited nations from the enemy... Wherever believers are and gather, the spiritual ground they occupy is sanctified amid the powers of darkness.³⁶

Consider baptism in light of the spiritual battle. Baptism is a public statement that a person belongs to Yahweh. It's a loyalty oath. Early baptismal ceremonies actually included a renunciation of Satan and his angels!³⁷ Baptism is spiritual warfare because as the person is "buried and raised," it is a reminder to the defeated ones that God is taking back His inheritance.³⁸

Our Future Role

When Jesus finally does take possession of what He has legally regained, we will be right there beside Him. We will be participating with Him in ruling the nations, displacing the corrupted *elohim* that will come under God's judgment and die like men. Has it sunk in yet that these *elohim* were called "sons of God" in the Old Testament, yet we are declared to be children of God and are legal heirs to His inheritance?

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become *children of God*. John 1:12

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, *heirs according to promise*. Galatians 3:27-29

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, *so that we might receive adoption as sons*. Galatians 4:4-5

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but *you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons*, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that *we are children of God*, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:14-17

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that *we should be called children of God*; and so we are. 1 John 3:1

The one who conquers will have this heritage, and *I will be his God and he will be my son*. Revelation 21:7

A heritage is an inheritance! We will govern God's inheritance as sons and daughters of his royal, divine household-council.³⁹ As God's own adopted children, we will be in a higher position than messenger-angels in His kingdom as we participate in ruling the nations.

³⁶ Ibid., 333.

³⁷ Ansgar, Kelly. *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 94-105.

³⁸ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 338-339.

³⁹ Ibid., 381.

Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! 1 Corinthians 6:3

While I'm not certain about which people will comprise "the nations" in the Kingdom, it's clear that we will exercise authority over them, too.

The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. Revelation 2:26-27

Jesus is going to inherit His kingdom and then share his authority with His children! We are the fulfillment of God's plan for humanity to join the divine family and restore Eden.⁴⁰

The idea of divinization, of redeemed human nature somehow participating in the very life of God, is found to a surprising extent throughout Christian history, although it is practically unknown to the majority of Christians (and even many theologians) in the west.⁴¹

A crucial point is raised here that requires clarification. By using the word "divinization" and claiming that we will join the divine family, *I am in no way claiming that we will become equal with God*. It is not as though we will join the Trinity! We will become *like* Jesus in the sense that we will have glorified bodies that are no longer formed out of the dust of the earth.⁴²

I love how the information in this lesson unlocks so much of Scripture, but there is a very practical reason that we need to understand how God's heavenly family functions. We must be equipped to refute the very dangerous concept being taught by TV preachers and others that we are "little gods."⁴³ Some go so far as to say that as gods, we have the power to call things into existence and to sustain ourselves with our positive words and thoughts. They use some of the same passages to support these claims as I have been using to explain the function of God's divine council, but now you know how to rightly interpret those passages. Avoid like the plague any teacher who encourages their followers to think of themselves as gods! If by "gods" we simply mean that one day we will have bodies that are not formed from this earth and that we are part of Yahweh's family, then it would be technically correct to say that we will "become gods." But I discourage the use of this kind of terminology because of how easily it can be misunderstood and misused. Teachers who are rightly dividing the Word will be encouraging their congregations to think *less* of themselves when compared to Yahweh, not elevating or inflating our sense of self to the point where we believe we are powerful in and of ourselves.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 314.

⁴¹ Rakestraw, Robert. "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40.2 (1997). 255.

⁴² We don't have time to cover 1 Corinthians 15:42-54, but be sure to read it!

⁴³ For two minutes of video clips of those making such claims, see "Ye are little gods' False trinity teachers speak." Updated 14 November 2008. *Defender of the Almighty God In Jesus Christ: YouTube*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qp1iHYOyHkk>

Another common false teaching in our day that we are now equipped to recognize is the idea that as we learn to “manifest ourselves as divine sons of God” we will bring in Christ’s kingdom on this earth. These teachers (many associated with the Emergent Church Movement) claim this is supposed to happen *before* the return of Christ. But *we* are not the ones who will set up or usher in Christ’s kingdom! He will do it Himself and we will inherit it. When we do not understand what the passages about the sons of God (divine council, host of heaven, gods, *elohim*, etc.) actually mean, we remain ignorant to these types of serious errors.

One day we will receive our glorified bodies, but we don’t have a full, clear picture of exactly how events will play out in the final days leading up to that moment. Interpretations abound among godly men and women who study prophecy! Doesn’t the nature of the spiritual battle require that God keep some things hidden? Just as He kept the events of redemption through the cross and resurrection “veiled in plain sight” in the Old Testament so that the enemy would not thwart the offering of the necessary sacrifice, so we will find that future prophecy is shrouded in mystery. As much as I enjoy exploring it and trying to piece things together, we will be approaching the unfulfilled prophecy section at the end of our study with the humility that comes from knowing some things simply will not be clear until it is time for them to be revealed. Even though all the details are not clear, we must have absolute clarity about dangerous heresies that creep into teachings about end-times events.

Implications for Today

In the time we are given on earth, we are in the process of becoming like Him.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. 1 Corinthians 3:17-18

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 2 Peter 1:2-4

“Conformed to the image,” “transformed to the same image,” and “partakers of the divine nature.” It is my observation that the Church of the 21st century does not realize how profound these phrases are. We are human and we will still get caught up in the pressures of daily life, but my intention in presenting these concepts is that it will go far beyond some interesting “new” knowledge and that it will transform your thinking. It certainly has changed me! Here are a few specific ways:

- While I pray that I will never become desensitized to sin in my life, I no longer believe the enemies’ lies that I am worthless and will never do enough for God to be significant in His eyes. I am part of the plan that He has initiated to reclaim His inheritance.

- Better yet, *we* are part of that plan. I now think so much more in terms of *we* instead of *me*, knowing that I am being built together with my brothers and sisters into a dwelling place for the Lord (**Ephesians 2:22**). God would have a poor inheritance if it were just me or if I stood out as better than others! This is incredibly freeing because I can stop comparing myself to everyone else and wondering if God likes me as much. I get to be about what *He* is doing and participate with Him in His Master Plan, which is so much more rewarding than pursuing my own agenda.
- Along with this, I am genuinely less critical of my fellow believers. We all fail and we're all in different places in our journey, but we have all joined the same team. Why would I fight against my own teammates? I am acutely aware of the joy that comes from being an agent of unity. The small things I can say and do to settle disputes or smooth ruffled feathers are important Kingdom work. When we do not understand the nature of God's actual enemies, we start to view each other as enemies. By having the "turf war" in view, we will keep a proper perspective of who we are really fighting against.
- My corporate worship experience is enriched beyond measure. When I stand in the congregation and sing songs that magnify the Lord and His specific characteristics, I am constantly in awe that we are doing this. I am part of a group of people that has gathered to intentionally proclaim our loyalty to Yahweh, not to the other gods! We take communion together and clap for baptisms as we rejoice that victory is assured! It seems that every ceremony, every prayer, every note we sing or play has profound meaning in light of the cosmic battle for this planet.

Perhaps when I began talking about the divine council you were concerned that by speaking of other "gods" and highlighting their inclusion in Yahweh's activities that I was dangerously close to blurring the lines between the two. I hope you have come to see that by exposing the ancient Near Eastern view of God's divine council, we actually exponentially increase our perception of His sovereignty! Is it easier for God to do everything Himself or to allow His creatures to participate?

Remember our cookie-making process? God wants to be with His creatures so much that He lets us make certain choices and maybe even do some mixing and pouring. That's what the divine council is. Even though God allowed choices and even failures, He's going to get His inheritance and He will delight in sharing it with His beloved creatures.