

Unseen Realm Session 9- Who are the “*elohim*” of the New Testament?

*All Bible references are from NASB unless noted otherwise.

The Background of Spiritual Beings in the Bible

We have been learning that there are different languages and words that describe the spiritual beings that inhabit the unseen realm. The Old Testament has Hebrew and Aramaic words and the New Testament has various Greek terms.

1. In the Old Testament Hebrew, the word is “*elohim*”. Even though there is minor debate about this word, the evidence is overwhelming that the word *elohim* refers only to spiritual beings which includes Yahweh and all others as revealed in the Old Testament.
2. In the New Testament, the various words create more complication, especially as we try to understand how the NT speaks in relation to the OT. In classical Greek the word “*daimonion*” was not necessarily evil. That word was an equivalent of the Hebrew *elohim*. It simply referred to any spiritual being or deity. However, when we get to the NT Koine Greek (common Greek), the semantic range of demon is universally negative (evil).
3. Nowhere does the Bible equate angels with demons. Angels are not the same as demons. This view became prevalent in the second and third centuries AD.¹ This is super important to overcome in looking at all the relevant information.
4. The term angel (messenger) in the OT (*malakh*) was a job description (function). However, in the NT, the writers used the term angel (*angelos*) not only as a job description, but also as a class of spiritual being. One example here will suffice. In Genesis 6:1-4, the “Sons of God” (never called angels in OT) came down and mated with human women. According to 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 which comment on this episode in Genesis 6, they both call the “Sons of God” angels. This reveals to us that the NT use of angel is different than the OT. This isn’t a contradiction, we just need to recognize the difference in language, culture, and development from the OT period into the NT period.

The Faithful and Righteous Spiritual Beings in the NT

1. **Michael** (means “who is like God”)- He is labeled as an archangel in Jude 1:9. He is the only one in the Bible called an archangel and the word is only used one other time in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Scholars aren’t sure if there is more than one archangel. Yet in the OT, Michael is called “one of the chief princes” which is plural and implies more than one. He appears also in Daniel 10:21; 12:1. These chief princes had territorial designations. This is very important. **Daniel 10:13** "But the **prince of the kingdom of Persia** was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, **Michael, one of the chief princes**, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. In Second Temple period writings (ca. 200 BC), we have this in 1 Enoch 20:1-7.

a. **1 Enoch 20:1-7**

¹ Angels of power:

² Uriel, one of the holy angels, the one over the world and Tartarus.

³ Raphael, one of the holy angels, the one over the holy angels and men.

⁴ Raguel, one of the holy angels, the one avenging the world of the lights.

⁵ Michael, one of the holy angels, the one having been appointed over the good people and over the chaos.

⁶ Sariel, one of the holy angels, the one over the spirits who are over those sinning in spirit.

⁷ Gabriel, one of the holy angels, the one over paradise and the serpents and cherubim; seven names of the **archangels**.

Michael is shown as the military opponent of Satan in Revelation 12:7-9 and is spoken of having “his angels” just as Satan has his own angels.

Revelation 12:7 And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war.

¹ See Dale Basil Martins, “When Did Angels Become Demons”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no 4 (2010), 657-677.

2. **Gabriel** (means “God is my strength”)- Apart from Michael and Satan, he is the only other named *elohim* in the Bible. He appears in the OT in reference to giving the prophet Daniel interpretations of visions (8:16; 9:21). He also appears in person to the priest Zacharias (father of John the Baptist and husband of Elizabeth). Gabriel says that he stands in the presence of God. What exactly this means is unknown. Is it a position of rank? Or status? He was also the angel who was sent to Mary to let her know that she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-28).
Luke 1:19 The angel answered and said to him, "I am **Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God**, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.
3. **Four Living Creatures**- Not a whole lot is known specifically about these creatures. They are often associated with the cherubim and seraphim of the OT since they are most likely throne guardians (Ezek 1, 10; 11:22; Isaiah 6:1-6).
Revelation 4:6-8 and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, **four living creatures** full of eyes in front and behind. ⁷ The first creature *was* like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature *was* like a flying eagle. ⁸ And the **four living creatures**, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY *is* THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME." (see also Rev 5:6, 8, 11, 14; 6:1, 3, 5–7; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4).
4. **Elect Angels**- This group most likely refers to all righteous *elohim* spiritual beings that were chosen by God not to rebel with Satan and or other evil entities.
1 Timothy 5:21 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of *His chosen angels*, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.
5. **Other serving angels**- The NT is filled with other beings that are serving God in various capacities. Where they “rank” on the hierarchy is unknown. The word angel or angels appears 175 times in the NT, so there is a lot of material that reveal information about these creatures. Many appear around the throne (Rev 7:11) and according to Hebrews there are innumerable angels (12:22). We know that they are faithful servants of God who also seek to help humanity as God directs.
Hebrews 1:14 Are they not all **ministering spirits**, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?
6. **Guardian Angels?** - An interesting verse describes little children (or new believers?) as having “their angels” who see the face of God constantly. Jesus warns it is wise not to harm “one of these little ones”.
Matthew 18:10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that **their angels** in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the **angels of heaven**, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

1 Peter 1:10-12 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who predicted the grace that would come to you searched and investigated carefully. ¹¹ They probed into what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating when he testified beforehand about the sufferings appointed for Christ and his subsequent glory. ¹² They were shown that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things now announced to you through those who proclaimed the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven— **things angels long to catch a glimpse of.**

The Unfaithful and Unrighteous Spiritual Beings in the NT

1. **Satan, Devil, Dragon, Belial, etc.**- Satan is a word that means adversary and Devil means slanderer. He has many names (Rev 12:9; 2 Cor 6:15) but Jesus called him the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). This is very important as we understand that Satan has some level of authority over the nations (Luke 4:6) and the rest of mankind and the world (2 Cor 4:4- god of this age). He is also called the prince/ruler (same as John 12, 14, 16 in Greek) of the authority of the air (Eph 2:2). In addition to being the ruler of the authorities (a special class of evil beings; see below), he is the ruler of the demonic entities (Matt 12:24-27- Beelzebub is another name for Satan) and is the leader of his own kingdom (Matt 12:26).

We know from the NT that he is the main antagonist and enemy of God, holy angels, and mankind. He was a liar and murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). We do not know exactly when Satan rebelled against God. Take a look at the last page of this packet for a brief overview of his origin, mission, destiny.

2. **Theoi** (Greek for gods; Hebrew would be *elohim*)- other spiritual beings that exist and are worshiped through idols.
1 Corinthians 8:5-6 For even if there are those called **gods**, whether in heaven or on earth (**as indeed there are many gods and many lords**), ⁶ yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.
3. **Archai**² (principalities or rulers) – Romans 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10; 2:15.
Colossians 2:15 When He had disarmed the **rulers** and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.
Colossians 2:10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over every **ruler** and authority.
4. **Exousia** (authorities) – 1 Corinthians 15:24; Eph 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10; 2:15. Scholars will note that some of these might be designations for good and faithful spiritual beings, but that some of them of these ranks rebelled, but still retain their original positions. Even evil beings have not yet been removed from their authority.
Colossians 2:15 When He had disarmed the rulers and **authorities**, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.
Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or **authorities**-- all things have been created through Him and for Him.
5. **Dynameis** (powers)- Romans 8:38; Ephesians 1:21. The verse in Romans 8 might bring up a distinction that Paul is making between angels and principalities (*archai*) and powers (*dynameis*). Different classes? Ranks?
Romans 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor **powers**, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
1 Corinthians 15:24 then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and **power**.
6. **Kyriotetes** (dominions)- Ephesians 1:21; Colossians 1:16.
Ephesians 1:20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and **dominion**, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
7. **Thronoi** (thrones)- Colossians 1:16. This might be a future designation that believers receive (Rev 4:4; 11:16; 20:4).
Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether **thrones** or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him.
8. **Angeloi** (angels)- Romans 8:38; 1 Cor 4:9; 6:3; 11:10; 2 Cor 12:7 (messenger); Gal 1:8; Col 2:18; Jude 6. The ability to judge over the world and over angels is similar to issuing decrees as found in Daniel 4:17.
1 Corinthians 6:2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to constitute* the smallest law courts? ³ Do you not know that we will judge/rule **angels**? How much more matters of this life?
9. **Kosmokratores** (world rulers)- Ephesians 6:12.
Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the **world forces of this darkness**, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.
10. **Pneumatika** (spiritual hosts or spiritual forces)- Ephesians 6:12.
Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the **spiritual forces of wickedness** in the heavenly *places*.
11. **Archontes** (rulers)- 1 Corinthians 2:6, 8; Matthew 12:24; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11.
Matthew 12:24 But when the Pharisees heard *this*, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the

² The rest of this list is partially adapted from book, *Powers of Darkness* by Clinton E. Arnold, page 218.

ruler of the demons.

1 Corinthians 2:8 *the wisdom* which none of the **rulers of this age** has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

12. **Stoicheia** (elemental spirits; basic spirits)- Galatians 4:3, 8; Colossians 2:8, 20.

Galatians 4:3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the **elemental beings** of the world.

Galatians 4:9 So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless **spiritual principles** of this world? (NLT)

13. **Daimonia/Daimon** (demons **or unclean spirits**)- When you compare the words in Luke 8:29, the evil entity is called a demon and an unclean spirit synonymously. These are wicked, evil spirits who seek to do harm to mankind and are in rebellion to God. They sought to interfere with Jesus' mission, but were terrified when they saw Him. They know their future includes judgment in the abyss (bottomless pit).

Matthew 8:29 And they cried out, saying, "What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to **torment** us before the time?"

Luke 8:31 They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the **abyss**.

We also know that just as the OT *elohim* did not influence mankind for the good (Psalm 82:1-7) demons are called deceitful spirits and are influencing mankind with doctrines of evil and wickedness. The demons are teachers of evil.

1 Timothy 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to **deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons**.

14. **Doxas** (glorious ones/angelic majesties- evil? Good?)- this word is ambiguous, but speaks of rank or status of spiritual beings that righteous angels will not slander. The fact that an accusation would be made at all reveals that the beings Peter and Jude are discussing are most likely evil.

2 Peter 2:10-11 especially those who indulge their fleshly desires and who despise authority. Brazen and insolent, they are not afraid to insult the **glorious ones**,¹¹ yet even angels, who are much more powerful, do not bring a slanderous judgment against them before the Lord. (2:10 NET)

Jude 1:8-10 Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile **angelic majesties**.⁹ But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"¹⁰ But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.

There is debate about the nature and origin of demons. The Bible does not give specifics. The article mentioned in footnote #1 is helpful in showing that there is a problem with associating angels with demons. We are left with speculation from an inspired text standpoint. However, other Second Temple period books that are well known by NT writers gives some information that may or may not be accurate. Yet we can be certain the NT writers knew this information (see Jude 14-15).

1 Enoch 15:8-12 and 16:1 (written from 3rd to 2nd century BC and found among the Dead Sea Scrolls)

⁸ ""But now the giants, those who are born of spirits and flesh are mighty spirits upon the earth, and in the earth their dwelling will be.

⁹ ""Evil spirits went out from their body, since they came from the higher places, and from the holy watchers -- the beginning of their creation and beginning of a foundation -- they will be called evil spirits.

¹⁰ ""Spirits of heaven, their dwelling will be in heaven, but the spirits who are begotten on the earth, their dwelling will be on the earth.

¹¹ ""And the spirits of the giants, while doing wrong in the clouds, were destroying, falling, wrestling, and throwing together on the earth, harsh spirits of giants, carrying out a mission, eating nothing, but fasting and thirsting, spirits causing stumbling.

¹² ""And the spirits will rise up to the sons of men and of women, since they have gone out from them.""

16:1 From the days of slaughter and destruction and death, from which the spirits proceeding from the life of their flesh, they will be ruined without judgment; in this way they will ruin until the day of fulfillment, the great judgment, in which the great age will be fulfilled.

Jubilees 10:1-13 (written around 150 BC and found among the Dead Sea Scrolls) teaches that 9/10 of the demonic spirits were cast down into judgment, but Satan (Mastema) requested to have 1/10 remain to do his bidding. God agrees and lets them remain on the earth until the end time judgment.

“ANGELS OF THE NATIONS” (article from Dictionary of NT Backgrounds)

Early Jewish understandings of the spiritual world included the notion of particular angels in authority over the nations. This basic understanding, though variously conceived, finds its roots in the Jewish Scriptures.

1. Jewish Scriptures

The particularity of God’s election of Israel was not easily reconciled with the notion that all nations of the world are accountable to the rule of Israel’s God. An attempt to hold these ideas together is reflected in some passages among the Hebrew Scriptures that place Yahweh at the pinnacle of an assembly of deities called “sons of God” (see Pss 29:1; 89:7: bny ʾlym; 82:6: ʾlhym, bny ʾlywn; LXX Deut 32:8 and 4QDeut = 4Q44: *angeloi theou/bny ʾlhym*; LXX Job 2:1: *angeloi theou/bny ʾlhym*; LXX Dan 3:92 to MT 3:25: *angelou theou/br ʾlhyn*). In Deuteronomy 32:8 the nations are assigned to the “sons of ʾEl”/“angels of God,” while the privileged people of Israel come under the sole jurisdiction of Yahweh as his “portion” and “inheritance.” In Psalm 82 this arrangement of the pantheon is further elaborated. The assemblage of deities is, as members of the divine council, responsible for the rule over and the dispensation of justice among the nations. The psalmist has God accuse these deities for failing to ensure that justice is properly administered, and as a result they are to be punished by death (Ps 82:7).

2. Early Jewish and Rabbinic Literature

In the later Jewish literature, these ideas are picked up and variously developed. In one exegetical tradition, preserved in some of the rabbinic writings, the special relationship between God and his people is illustrated by the stories about how God was chosen by Israel while the nations were merely content to associate themselves with angels. Thus according to the mid-rashic interpretation of Song of Solomon 3:2–4 in relation to the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4, the Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:34 likens the election of Israel to the reception of a king and his entourage into a city. While some citizens have chosen the king’s officials to be their patrons, the smart one (Israel) has settled for nothing less than the king himself. The tradition is anchored within the context of the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, to which God and the angels were believed to have descended.

By contrast, the medieval Hebrew Testament of Naphtali 8–9 applies this tradition to the situation of Abraham. Whereas “each and every nation chose an angel [seventy in number], and none of them remembered the Holy One, blessed be he ... Abraham answered, ‘I choose and I select only the one who spoke and the world came into being, who formed me within the inside of my mother’s womb ... him I will select and to him I will cleave, I and my seed forever.’ ” These angels function as advocates on behalf of the nations before God (T. Naph. 9:4).

Another strand of the tradition is anchored in the dispersion of the peoples after the tower of Babel. Drawing on Deuteronomy 32:8–9, Philo of Alexandria (first century A.D.) declared that God “set boundaries of nations according to the number of the angels of God,” while “Israel became the lot of his inheritance” (Philo Poster. C. 89, 91–92; cf. further Targum Onqelos to Gen 11:8). In the much earlier Sirach 17:11–18 (second century B.C.; see Sirach), the special status of Israel as God’s “portion” is declared over against the assignment of celestial beings to rule over the Gentile peoples. Here the sovereign will of God is emphasized.

In addition to generally underlining Israel’s privileged status, all these texts presuppose a function of angels as guardians of or advocates for the Gentile nations, which is analogous to the role ascribed to many national deities in the ancient Near East. This analogy between pagan deities and angels of the nations may underlie many rabbinic passages that engage in a polemic against the worship of angels by associating this with idolatry (so esp. Mek. Rabbi Ishmael, BaHodeš 6 to Exod 20:4–5; t. Ḥul. 2:18; b. Ḥul. 40a; cf. y. Ber. 9:13a–b; b. Sanh. 38b; Exod. Rab. 32:4).

As in Deuteronomy 32:8 the documents just cited do not characterize the nations' angelic rulers as either good or bad. In other early Jewish compositions, however, these angelic beings are absorbed into a dualistic cosmology in which (as Ps 82:7) they are held accountable for evil attributed to the impious nations. According to Jubilees 15:30–32 (mid-second century B.C.), Israel's election as God's people is contrasted with the appointment over the nations of spirits or angels who "lead them astray" from following God (see also Jubilees 48:9, 16–17). The author presupposes that these celestial rulers such as Mastema (Jub. 48:9, 12) are not always under God's control, whereas the angels who remain strictly obedient to God act on behalf of Israel (cf. Jub. 48:13; Jude 5 may identify Christ = *kyrios* with the angel of the Lord who delivers the Israelites from Egypt).

In the Book of Dreams of 1 Enoch, which is roughly contemporary to Jubilees, the nations correspond to seventy angelic "shepherds" who, in their respective eras, are given the task of carrying out divine punishment against the faithless of Israel (1 Enoch 89:59–90:19; see Enoch, Books of). However, the shepherds become disobedient when of their own accord they exceed the limits set by God on the assignment. The angelic being appointed to monitor the shepherd's treatment of Israel seems to presuppose a tradition that aligns the people of God with an angel. Here the coordination of Israel's position among the Gentiles with a myth about a conflict between bad and good angels surfaces in an incipient form.

The belief that religious-political conflicts mirror a struggle among angels in the sphere of heaven is attested during the second-century B.C. compositions of Daniel, the Testament of Levi (see Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs) and the War Scroll preserved in Qumran Caves 1 and 4.

In Daniel 10–11 the Persian and Greek empires are each represented by an angelic prince (Dan 10:13, 20) opposed by the angel appearing to Daniel and Michael the prince (Dan 10:13, 20–21; 11:1) and "great captain, who stands guard over" the faithful (Dan 12:1). In a similar way, the eschatological struggle between "the sons of light" and "the sons of darkness" in the War Scroll is described as a conflict between forces led, respectively, by Michael (probably the one designated "the prince of light") and Belial (1QM 13:9–13; 17:5–8; cf. 1QS 3:20–25).

A conflict among angels may be implied in Testament of Levi 5:3–6: the interpreting angel, who assists Levi in avenging the defilement of Dinah against the sons of Hamor, identifies himself as one "who makes intercession for the nation of Israel, that they might not be beaten." The threat posed against Israel by the Parthians and the Medes in the Similitudes of 1 Enoch is attributed to the work of angels who have stirred the kings of these nations to unrest (1 Enoch 56:5–6).

The conflict between Jacob and Esau in Jubilees 35:17 is also portrayed in terms of a contest between angels: Jacob's guardian "is greater and mightier and more honored" than the guardian of Esau. Despite the impression that the text seems concerned with angelic guardians of individuals (e.g., 2 Bar. 12:3; 13:1; 2 Enoch 19:4; Adam and Eve 33; T. Jos. 6:7; Mt 18:10; Acts 12:15), Jacob and Esau ultimately function as symbols of their progeny. The representation of the faithful by an angel instead of God directly (as in texts discussed above) is to be understood against an increasing emphasis on divine transcendence during the Second Temple period. Rather than denoting distance, however, the good angels functioned to guarantee the presence of God's effective activity in the world on behalf of his people (e.g., Tob 3:17; 11:14–15; 12:11–22; 2 Macc 10:29–30) while the notion of distance from God may only be presupposed with regard to the nations' angels.

3. New Testament

Though the "angels of the nations" motif does not surface explicitly in the NT, several passages have arguably been influenced by the tradition.

3.1. Revelation 12:7–9. In a heavenly battle, Michael and Satan (the dragon), along with their respective armies of angels, engage in a conflict in which the latter group is defeated and thrown to the earth. There they stir up trouble for faithful Christians, eventually in the form of beasts representing Rome (Rev 12:13–13:18). The author, who dispenses with a heaven-

earth correspondence between bad angels and the enemies of the faithful (both are on earth), is careful to emphasize the mythical dimension of this story in order to underscore for his readers the defeated nature of Satan's existence.

3.2. Revelation 2:1–3:22. Given that a human being can mediate God's communication to wayward angels in apocalyptic tradition (1 Enoch 12:1–15:7; 4Q203 frag. 8; 4Q530 2:21–23 to 3:4–11), the possibility is strengthened that the seven messages to the churches of Asia Minor take the form of a literary fiction that addresses celestial beings. In this instance, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the angels and the congregations. Though there are no exact parallels for this in early Jewish and Christian literature (cf. the similar, yet distinct, ideas in Ascension of Isaiah 3:15 and Herm. Sim. 5:5–6), it is likely that the author has adapted the motif of the nations' patron angels. Formally, with only few exceptions, the angels and not the churches are addressed in the messages, and, as the angelic rulers over the Gentiles in Jewish tradition, they are potentially disobedient. Various praised and reprimanded, they are apprised of the consequences for their faithfulness or disloyalty to Christ.

3.3. Revelation 16:12–16. The demonic powers who assemble the kings from beyond the Euphrates River may well refer to angels who are expected to rouse nations to war in the end time (cf. 1 Enoch 56:5–6).

3.4. Acts 16:9. an angelic figure, appearing as a "man" in Paul's vision, acts as a representative of Macedonia sent by God to plead that Paul and his associates introduce the gospel there.

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