

Celestial Council Revealed: God's Plan for Man

Introduction

On the sixth day of God's creation of the heavens and the earth, He made a profound and strategic announcement regarding His plan for the first man and woman, as recorded in Genesis 1:26-29:

“²⁶Then God said, ‘**Let Us** make man in **Our** image, according to **Our** likeness; and **let them rule** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ ²⁷God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; **male and female He created them**. ²⁹God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and **subdue it**; and **rule** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ (emphasis mine).

God's use of the cohortative “Let us” to announce that He was creating “man”¹ according to “Our image, according to Our likeness” should capture our attention. When God made this astonishing pronouncement, to whom was He speaking?

God's Celestial Council

Toward the end of the account of God's creation of the heavens and the earth, we are introduced for the first time in Scripture to the Celestial Council—a body of celestial beings who meet with God in divine deliberations. The English term “council” translates the Hebrew word, סוֹד (sôd),² “a confidential discussion: a) in the assembly of Yahweh.” This Hebrew word notably refers to this Celestial Council in Jeremiah 23:18, 22 and Job 15:8.³

¹The word “man,” which can refer to a man's gender, here signifies a collective, “mankind,” consisting of both male and female. See HALOT, s.v. אָדָם, 3:14).

² HALOT, s.v. סוֹד, 1.a:745.

³ סוֹד (sôd) is also used of confidential discussions convened by people (cf. Genesis 49:6; Psalm 64:3; 111:1; and Jeremiah 15:17) and the revelation of God's council towards prophets and the righteous (cf. Psalm 25:14; Jeremiah 23:18, 22; and Amos 3:7 (HALOT s.v. סוֹד, 1.b.2:745)).

“But who has stood in the council (סֹדֶר) of the LORD,
That he should see and hear His word?
Who has given heed to His word and listened” (Jeremiah 23:18)?

“But if they had stood in My council (סֹדֶר),
Then they would have announced My words to My people,
And would have turned them back from their evil way
And from their evil deeds” (Jeremiah 23:22).

“Do you hear the secret counsel (סֹדֶר) of God,
And limit wisdom to yourself” (Job 15:8)?

Bible scholars and theologians usually refer to this council as the divine or heavenly council. We have chosen the phrase “Celestial Council” to emphasize the participants of these meetings—celestial beings—and to avoid limiting the Council’s activities solely to the heavens.

This Celestial Council is also depicted in several other places in Scripture:

1. Psalm 82:1: “God (אֱלֹהִים) has stood in the assembly of God (אֱל); He judges in the midst of the rulers (אֱלֹהִים).”⁴
2. Job 1:6; 2:1:

“^{1,6}Now there was a day when the sons of God (בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים)⁵ came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.”

⁴ The psalmist states that God (אֱלֹהִים, 'ēlōhîm) took His stand (נִצָּב, niṣṣāb; Niphal masculine singular participle) in the Celestial Council, literally “the congregation of God” (בְּעֵדֶת אֱל, ba' "daṭ- 'ēl). All the other visions of God recorded in Scripture depict God sitting on His throne (cf. Psalm 47:8; Isaiah 6:1, Daniel 7:9-10, and Revelation 4:2-3). God, as the Commander in Chief, took His stand in the Celestial Council, indicating His resolve to pass judgment. The use of אֱלֹהִים ('ēlōhîm) at the end of the verse does not refer to God but to celestial rulers. The psalmist is depicting God judging the opposing celestial rulers who are the spiritual forces of wickedness influencing the earthly rulers depicted in the psalm (cf. Daniel 10:10-21 and Ephesians 6:10-12).

⁵ “The sons of God” (בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, b'nē hā' 'ēlōhim) in Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7 refer to rulers in the Celestial Council.

^{2,1}Again there was a day when the sons of God (בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים) came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD.”

3. 1 Kings 22:19-22:

¹⁹Micaiah said, ‘Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. ²⁰The LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said this while another said that. ²¹Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, ‘I will entice him.’ ²²The LORD said to him, ‘How?’ And he said, ‘I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ Then He said, ‘You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.’”

4. Psalm 89:5-7

⁵The heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD;
Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones.
⁶For who in the skies is comparable to the LORD?
Who among the sons of the mighty⁶ is like the LORD,
⁷A God greatly feared in the council of the holy ones,
And awesome above all those who are around Him?”

5. Daniel 4:17

“This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers⁷

⁶ Psalm 29:1 and 89:6 in the NASB reference the “sons of the mighty” (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, *bibnē ’ēlīm*). In both Psalm 29:1 and 89:7 in the Masoretic Text, the final “ם” is probably enclitic rather than a plural marker, so בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים would be translated as “sons of God,” referring to rulers in the Celestial Council (HALOT s.v. אֱלֹהִים, C.1.b:49). In the Septuagint, בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים is translated as “sons of God” (υἱοὶ θεοῦ; cf. Psalm 28:1 and 88:7).

⁷ “Watchers” is a translation of the Aramaic word, עֲרִינִין (*’ērîn*) from the Middle Hebrew word, עֵר (*’ēr*), meaning “protector, awake, watchful, guardian > angel” (HALOT, s.v. עֵר, 876; s.v. עֲרִינִין, 1946). This passage concerns a dream King Nebuchadnezzar had that Daniel would later interpret for him. Note that the judgment pronounced in the dream is by the decree of the “watchers” and this decision was a command of the holy ones (Aramaic, קְדִישִׁין (*qaddîšîn*), “holy, of gods” HALOT s.v. קְדִישִׁין, 1966.) We posit that the “watchers,” who are celestial beings, who are a part of the Celestial Council since they are able to make “decrees” or an angel, since they are delivering a message from the Celestial Council (cf. Daniel 4:13, 23).

And the decision is a command of the holy ones,
In order that the living may know
That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind,
And bestows it on whom He wishes
And sets over it the lowliest of men.”

6. There are a few other passages in Genesis where it seems that God is speaking to the Celestial Council:

“Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man was⁸ like one of Us, to know good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’” (Genesis 3:22).

“Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech” (Genesis 11:7).

6. There are several places in Genesis where it is not clear exactly to whom God is speaking, but His recorded direct discourse was probably directed to the Celestial Council:

“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him’” (Genesis 2:18).

Later in this paper, we will make the case that angels are not part of the Celestial Council but are agents of the council serving as their messengers, implementing the Council’s decisions.

⁸ This is the literal translation of Genesis 3:22. Almost all English translations mistranslate the Qal perfect 3rd masculine singular verb, הָיָא (hāyâ), as “has become,” implying a change of state has occurred with the man. First, this is totally illogical! Did the man become like God because he sinned? Does sin make someone like God? Preposterous! Second, the Hebrew absolute form of this copula (Qal perfect verb הָיָא, “to be”) is used 22 times in Genesis and always translated as a simple past tense or English perfect. For the verb הָיָא to indicate a change in state of the subject of the verb requires הָיָא to be followed by the preposition, לְ (lamed); cf. Genesis 2:10, 24; Exodus 8:16; 9:9; 32:1, Numbers 11:20; Deuteronomy 15:11, etc.). However, the narrator in Genesis 3:22 is not expressing that the man had a change of state or had undergone a transformation because of his disobedience to God, but a declaration of what he was or had been! The man was like God and the Celestial Council because he knew—that is he was obedient to—the knowledge of good and evil that had been revealed to him. Following his sin, the man was no longer like God and His Celestial Council.

"Then the LORD said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years'" (Genesis 6:3).

"The LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them'" (Genesis 6:7).

7. There are several verses in Genesis 1 that probably record the direct speech of the Logos⁹, as the self-expression of God.

"Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light'" (Genesis 1:3; see also 1:6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 29).

8. There is an interesting record in Genesis 8:21, where the narrator tells us that God is speaking "to His "heart" (לִבּוֹ, libbô).

"The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself (לִבּוֹ), 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.'"

This Celestial Council consists of many kinds of celestial beings:¹⁰

- the seraphim (cf. Isaiah 6:1-2), who may not be angels but a separate race of celestial beings;
- the twenty-four elders (cf. Revelation 4:4, 10-11; 5:11; and 7:11);
- the four living creatures (cf. Revelation 4:6-8; 5:11; 6:1; and 7:11);

⁹ The word, λόγος (*logos*), is a masculine noun used in the GNT 317 times. The Apostle John applies this word uniquely in John 1 to denote to God's self-expression. The root meaning of λόγος is the concept of self-expression (BDAG, s.v. λόγος, 3:598-99). The Apostle John states that "All things came into being through Him" (in context, the antecedent of "Him" is the λόγος, God's self-expression (cf. John 1:3). Thus, it is certainly possible that the direct speech recorded in these verses is that of the λόγος. This self-expression that was with God, and was God, and was in the beginning with God (cf. John 1:1-2), became flesh as a human being: Jesus Christ (cf. John 1:14)

¹⁰ The list of the celestial beings listed up to the "four cherubs" is based on a possible hierarchy indicated by combining what is revealed in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, beginning with the seraphim—who stand above the LORD and thus were the closest in proximity to Him—followed by the order of the celestial beings mentioned in Revelation 4-5.

- the “seven spirits of God” (Revelation 4:5);
- “a spirit” as part of the “host of heaven” (1 Kings 22:19-23), who may be one of the “seven spirits of God” in Revelation 4:5; and
- the four cherubs in Ezekiel 10 (who may or may not be the four living creatures mentioned in Revelation 4-5).

Other celestial beings may also be part of the Council, but the Scriptures are not clear as to their exact role:

- angels, authorities, and powers (1 Peter 3:22); and
- thrones, dominions, rulers, or authorities (Colossians 1:16).¹¹

Angels are associated with the Celestial Council as its agents, who are messengers of the LORD and the Council, and implementers of the Council's edicts:

- the “watchers” in Daniel 4:13, 17, 23 (who could also be part of the Celestial Council; see footnote #7);
- the “Angel of the LORD” (see footnote #14);
- strong angels (cf. Revelation 5:2; 10:1; 18:21);
- myriads of angels (cf. Revelation 5:11; 7:11);
- “captain of the host of the LORD” (cf. Joshua 5:14; Daniel 8:11); and
- the host (הֹסֶט) ¹² of the Lord (cf. Joshua 5:14; Psalm 103:21; 148:2; 1 Kings 22:19).

The Structure and Function of the Celestial Council

While we don't have detailed “minutes” from the Celestial Council's meeting, several passages of Scripture offer insight into its structure and purpose.

¹¹ In speaking of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul says, “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” (Colossians 1:16). Therefore, “thrones, dominions, rulers, or authorities” could be earthly as well as heavenly.

¹² Host (הֹסֶט, ḥōṣṣā) can refer to heavenly bodies, such as stars (cf. Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 7:16, 21:3, 23:4; Isaiah 34:4; Jeremiah 8:2, 19:3, 33:22, Zephaniah 1:5; Daniel 8:10; and 2 Chronicles 33:3, 5). It may also refer to “the heavenly entourage of Yahweh” (HALOT, s.v. הֹסֶט, 4:995; 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Chronicles 18:18; Psalm 103:21; and 148:2).

1 Kings 22 records the dramatic deliberation between Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, and Ahab, the king of Israel, over whether they should join forces and attack Ramoth-gilead, a city then under the control of the king of Aram (Syria). Jehoshaphat demanded that Ahab seek God's counsel before making a final decision: "Please inquire first for the word of the LORD" (1 Kings 22:5).

King Ahab gathered the prophets of Israel, who claimed to speak for LORD, who assured him that "the LORD will give it (Ramoth-gilead) into the hand of the king" (1 Kings 22:12). Jehoshaphat demanded that a "prophet of the LORD" be called to prophesy concerning this battle decision. The prophet Micaiah—whom Ahab "hated" because "he did not prophesy good concerning me" (1 Kings 22:8)—was nevertheless summoned and delivered a devastating prophecy regarding the proposed battle plans:

"I saw all Israel
Scattered on the mountains,
Like sheep which have no shepherd.
And the LORD said, 'These have no master.
Let each of them return to his house in peace'" (1 Kings 22:17).

Needless to say, Ahab was not pleased with Micaiah's prophecy!

What Ahab did not realize was that he had been enticed and deceived by God to go to battle against Ramoth-gilead! Yet God in His mercy reveals to Ahab—through His prophet Micaiah—that he had been deceived and how this stunning deception was accomplished:

"¹⁹Micaiah said, 'Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. ²⁰The LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said this while another said that. ²¹Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.'"

"²²The LORD said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.'"

In these verses, we see the LORD sitting on His throne, functioning as the “Commander in Chief” with “all the host of heaven” summoned before Him. We are given a “front-row seat” to an extraordinary session of God’s Celestial Council, revealing how Ahab and his false prophets would be deceived into going up in battle against Ramoth-gilead, with the LORD ultimately commanding “a deceiving spirit” to go out to accomplish this task. Unfortunately for Ahab, he ignored the “word of the LORD” through the prophet Micaiah and was killed in the subsequent battle. Israel fled, humiliated in defeat, just as the prophet had foretold.

Based on insights from this passage and others in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, we can surmise the following about the structure and function of the Celestial Council.

- God functions as the “Commander in Chief,” summoning various types of celestial beings to present themselves before Him (cf. Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Daniel 7:9-10; and Revelation chapters 4-5).
- God allows dialogue and collaboration in the council meetings (cf. 1 Kings 22:19-22).
- God receives reports and demands accountability from council members (cf. Psalm 82).
- God is the final authority on all council decisions (cf. Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6 and 1 Kings 22:19-22).
- Angels, as a type of celestial being, serve as agents of the Council, conveying messages from the LORD/Council and implementing the Council’s commands and decisions (cf. Genesis 18-19; Joshua 5:13-15; 2 Samuel 24:15-17; 2 Kings 6:15-18; 19:35; Daniel 4:13, 17, 23; 9:20-23; 10:1-21; Revelation 12:7-12; and others mentioned in the following pages of this paper).

God Rules through the Celestial Council

The Scriptures paint a remarkable and breathtaking picture of how God implements His sovereign will and purposes through the Celestial Council and His Angels.

God Announces His Plans for His People

Genesis 18: This narrative is a striking and insightful account revealing how God speaks and interacts with Abraham—not only announcing the future birth of Isaac, but also revealing the impending judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. This occurs through Abraham's encounter with the three angels who have taken the form of men. Although the passage never explicitly identifies the three men as angels, Abraham refers to them as “my lords” (אֲדֹנָיִם) in Genesis 18:3, indicating that he understood them to be angels.¹³ What is fascinating is how the narrator presents the exchange between Abraham and God by means of these three angels as depicted in the following Scriptures.

- “Now the LORD appeared to him (Abraham) by the oaks of Mamre” (18:1) and “When he (Abraham) lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men (angels) were standing opposite him” (18:2).
- “Then they said (the three men - angels) to him (Abraham), ‘Where is Sarah your wife?’ And he (Abraham) said, ‘There, in the tent’” (18:9). He (the LORD) said (via the angels), “I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son” (18:10).
- “And the LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh. . .’” (18:13; what the LORD said was communicated by the angels).
- “Then the men (the angels) rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them (the angels) to send them off. The LORD said (via the angels), ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do . . .’” (18:16-17).

¹³ אֲדֹנָיִם (’adōnāy) literally, “my lords” or “O lords” (masculine plural construct of אֲדֹנָי (’adwōn) plus a 1st common singular pronominal suffix). While אֲדֹנָי may refer to an earthly lord or master, or to God, the use of the specific form אֲדֹנָיִם in Genesis 18:3 is a vocative of address referring to angels (HALOT, s.v. אֲדֹנָיִם, B:13).

- “And the LORD said (via the angels), ‘The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.’ Then the men (angels) turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD” (18:20-21).

Genesis 22:9-19: The angel of the LORD¹⁴ prevents Abraham from stretching forth his hand against his son, Isaac, provides a ram for the sacrifice in place of Isaac, and reiterates the covenant that God made to him previously.

Genesis 28:10-22; 32:1-2: Jacob sees a vision of angels ascending and descending on a steep ramp (מַלְאָכִים, *sulām*) as he prepares to leave the land and he sees the angels of God meet him upon returning to the land to meet Esau.

Exodus 3:1-22: The angel of the LORD appears to Moses by means of a burning bush and announces God's plan for Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to the promised land, revealing His unqualified unique name, Yahweh (יהוה).¹⁵

Judges 6: The angel of the LORD appears to Gideon and announces that He has been chosen to deliver Israel from the hand of the Midianites.

¹⁴ The intriguing phrase, “the angel of the Lord,” is found 56 times in the Masoretic Text and 12 times in the Greek NT (cf. Genesis 16:7, 9, 10, 11; 22:11, 15; Exodus 3:2; Numbers 22:23-27, 31-32, 34-35; Judges 2:1, 4; 5:23; 6:11-12; 21-22; 13:3, 13, 15-18, 20-21; 2 Samuel. 24:16; 1 Kings 19:7; 2 Kings 1:3, 15; 19:35; 1 Chronicles 21:12, 15-16, 18, 30; Psalm 34:7; 35:5-6; Isaiah 37:36; Zechariah 1:11-12; 3:1, 5-6; 12:8; Matthew 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19; 28:2; Luke 1:11; 2:9; John 5:4, Acts 5:19; 8:26; and 12:7, 23.) What is interesting is the “angel of the LORD” and the “LORD” are used interchangeably in many of these passages (cf. Genesis 16:7-11 versus 16:13; Exodus 3:2 versus 3:4; Judges 6:11-12 versus 6:14, etc.). The Scriptures never identify the identity of this angel. While some scholars choose to understand that the “angel of the LORD” as a possible theophany or erroneously as a Christophany, the latter is impossible since the adopted Son of God did not exist until His birth. Thus, this angel is more likely to be a high-ranking angel or simply an angel that is marked off for a special or specific purpose.

¹⁵ In Acts 7:30-31, Stephen, commenting on this encounter between Moses and the LORD, asserts that “an angel appeared to him (Moses) in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush (7:30). “When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord” (7:31). Given that no one has seen God at any time (cf. John 1:18 and 1 Timothy 6:16) or heard His voice (cf. John 5:37), we assert that, as at the burning bush, when the Scriptures record that “the LORD said,” it is in reality an angel speaking the very words of God.

Judges 13: The angel of the Lord announces to Manoah and his barren wife that they would have a child who will deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. This child would be named Samson.

Daniel 9: Daniel receives the distinctive prophecy of the "Seventy Weeks" as a result of a season of intense prayer and fasting. The chapter begins with Daniel studying Jeremiah's prophecy that Jerusalem's desolation would last seventy years. Realizing that this period was nearly complete, Daniel enters into intense prayer with "fasting, sackcloth, and ashes" (9:1-3).

In his prayer, Daniel confesses his sin and the sins of the people of Israel, acknowledging that their exile was justly deserved for failing to keep God's covenant and commands, and ignoring the appeals of His prophets. Daniel acknowledges and proclaims God's righteousness, and appeals to His compassion to hear his prayer, forgive the sins of His people, and turn His wrath away from the city of Jerusalem:

"¹⁶O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all those around us. ¹⁷So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary. ¹⁸O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. ¹⁹O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

While Daniel is still praying, the angel Gabriel appears to give him understanding and the prophecy concerning the "seventy weeks":

"²⁰Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God

in behalf of the holy mountain of my God, ²¹while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. ²²He gave me instruction and talked with me and said, 'O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding. ²³At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision.'"

The result of Daniel's prayer was that he received help from the angel Gabriel to understand one of the most important prophetic announcements concerning the end times in the Scriptures: the prophecy concerning the "seventy weeks":

"²⁴Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place."

What is important to realize is that apart from Daniel's earnest prayer and fasting, Gabriel would have not been sent to grant his earnest request. Likewise, apart from the angelic assistance Daniel received, he would not have been able to receive and understood this prophecy.

Luke 1:18-23: The angel Gabriel¹⁶ announces to Zechariah, the priest, that his wife, Elizabeth, who is barren, will bear a son named John, who will "turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God, and go before the Lord in the spirit and

¹⁶ Only four celestial beings are named in the Scriptures: the angel Abaddon/Apollyon (cf. Revelation 9:11); the angel Gabriel (cf. Daniel 8:16; 9:21 and Luke 1:19, 26); Michael, called "the great prince" and the "archangel" (cf. Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; and Revelation 12:7); and Satan (שָׂטָן, *hasśātān*), an "adversary, opponent" (HALOT s.v. שָׂטָן, 1:1317), declared as a cherub (cf. Ezekiel 28:14,16), and referenced 17 times in the Masoretic Text (with the article - שָׂטָן) and 35 times in the GNT (σατανᾶς, *satanas*). The word, Devil (διάβολος, *diabolos*), synonymous with Satan, occurs 34 times in the GNT. The Septuagint consistently translates the Hebrew שָׂטָן as διάβολος. Isaiah 14:12 refers to one who has fallen from heaven as "O star of the morning" (הֵילֵל; *hêlêl*). The Latin Vulgate translates הֵילֵל as *Lucifer*, meaning "light bringer or morning star." While Isaiah 14:12-15 occurs in the context of the downfall of the king of Babylon, these specific verses may suggest a secondary meaning depicting Satan's expulsion from the Celestial Council.

power of Elijah" (1:16-17). Due to Zechariah's lack of faith in Gabriel's message, he is rendered mute until the birth of his son, John.

Luke 1:26-38: The angel Gabriel appears to Mary announcing she will conceive by means of the Holy Spirit and give birth to a son and name Him, Jesus, who "will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father, David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His Kingdom will have no end" (32-33).

Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19; and Hebrews 2:2: These passages affirm that the Law was communicated by means of angels.

Revelation 2 and 3: Jesus dictates a specific message to the angels of each of the seven individual churches, who then communicate the message to their respective assembly of believers.¹⁷

God Overthrows the Enemies of His People

Exodus 12:23: God gives Moses and Aaron detailed instructions for the institution of the Passover meal, directing the Israelites to place the blood from an unblemished lamb on the doorposts and the lintel to prevent the LORD from smiting them:

"²³For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you."

The "destroyer" is referenced in two New Testament passages: 1 Corinthians 10:10 and Hebrews 11:28, in connection to Exodus 12:23. Although Scripture does not explicitly identify this "destroyer," this being is certainly a celestial being under

¹⁷ Jesus, as the λόγος (*logos*) that became flesh, is God's ultimate self-expression. He is the One who is now the primary communicator to God's people (cf. Hebrews 1:1-4). The angels serve the Son and they are no longer the primary communicator of God's message (cf. Acts 9:1-6; Matthew 13; Matthew 24; 1 Peter 3:22; Hebrews 1:6; and the many references in Revelation).

God's authority—either an angel or a member of the Celestial Council¹⁸ (cf. 2 Samuel 24:16).

Joshua 5:13-15: As Joshua prepares to lead the Israelites to take Jericho, he encounters the “captain of the host of the LORD”¹⁹:

“¹³Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, ‘Are you for us or for our adversaries?’ ¹⁴He said, ‘No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the LORD.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, ‘What has my lord to say to his servant?’ ¹⁵The captain of the LORD’S host said to Joshua, ‘Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.’ And Joshua did so.”

This encounter with the “captain of the host of the Lord” undoubtedly strengthened Joshua’s confidence as the battle for Jericho loomed before Him, for now he knew that the LORD’s invisible army would ensure his victory, just as God had promised him (cf. Joshua 1:1-9 and 6:2).

2 Kings 6:8-19: Elisha the prophet reveals the battle plans of the King of Aram to the King of Israel. The Aramean king is furious that his battle plans have been thwarted, and his officers inform him that Elisha “tells the King of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom” (6:12). Despite his officer’s report, the King of Aram sends his army to Dothan to capture Elisha. When Elisha’s attendant sees the enemy army surrounding the city he is frightened. But Elisha reassures him, “Do not fear for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

¹⁸ “The destroyer” is a translation of the Hebrew word, מַשְׁחִית (mašhîṭ), which is a military term referring to a raiding party (cf. 1 Samuel 13:17 and Jeremiah 14:15; HALOT, s.v. מַשְׁחִית, 1:644). HALOT notes that for Exodus 12:23, this word refers to a demonic being (HALOT, s.v. מַשְׁחִית, 1b:644). Given the context of this verse, it seems most likely that this celestial being is an angel sent from God versus a “demon” under Satan’s authority (cf. 2 Samuel 24:16 and Isaiah 54:16).

¹⁹ The “captain” (שָׂר, śar) of the host of the Lord” indicates that rank and hierarchy exist among the host of the LORD, like earthly military organizations. This suggests a clear chain of command, beginning with God as the Commander in Chief and various ranks and positions serving underneath Him.

“¹⁷Then Elisha prayed and said, ‘O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ And the LORD opened the servant’s eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

Elisha’s servant must have been astonished to witness a visible mass of celestial horses and chariots of fire surrounding them!

After Elisha prays for the enemy army to be struck with blindness, he coyly leads them to Samaria, where they are captured by the King of Israel but ultimately released, never to trouble the northern kingdom again.

2 Kings 18:13 – 19:37: King Sennacherib of Assyria invades Judah after defeating and sending the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity. He captures all the fortified cities of Judah except for Jerusalem. King Hezekiah initially pays tribute to the Assyria king in hopes of appeasing him. However, the Assyrian king continues his siege of Jerusalem and sends envoys to mock the God of Israel and taunt the city’s defenders. Recognizing that his only hope is to turn to God, Hezekiah seeks out the prophet Isaiah and enters the temple, earnestly petitioning God to deliver the city from the Assyrian King:

“¹⁵Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, ‘O LORD, the God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. ¹⁶Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. ¹⁷Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have devastated the nations and their lands ¹⁸and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone. So they have destroyed them. ¹⁹Now, O LORD our God, I pray, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O LORD, are God.’”

God sends word to Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah that He will defend Jerusalem and “save it for My own sake and for My servant David’s sake” (19:34). That evening, “the angel of the Lord struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians”

(19:35). Frustrated and defeated, Sennacherib departs and returns to Nineveh, where he is ultimately killed by two of his sons.

God Executes Judgment for His People and the World

Genesis 19:1-26: Two angels arrive in Sodom. Lot welcomes them and invites them to spend the night at his house. When the men of Sodom discover Lot's two guests, they demand that he send them out for immoral purposes. In response, the angels strike the men with blindness to protect Lot and his family. The angels then inform Lot that Sodom will be destroyed and urge him to gather his family and leave the city.

“¹²Then the two men said to Lot, ‘Whom else have you here? A son-in-law, and your sons, and your daughters, and whomever you have in the city, bring them out of the place; ¹³for we are about to destroy this place, because their outcry has become so great before the LORD that the LORD has sent us to destroy it.’”

God destroys the city through the angels, and Lot, his wife, and two daughters escape. Lot's wife, however, is turned into a pillar of salt because she disobeyed the angel's instructions and looked back while the city was being destroyed.²⁰

2 Samuel 24:1-17: David ordered a census of Israel and Judah, despite the objections of the commander of the army, Joab. The census took ten months to complete. Afterward, David became convicted that the census was sinful and prayed to God for forgiveness. Through the prophet, Gad, God offered David three options for the consequence of his sin, each of which involved a severe judgment. David chose three days of pestilence. The Lord sent the pestilence by means of an angel, and 70,000 men from Beersheba to Dan died.

When the angel of the Lord stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD showed mercy toward the city:

²⁰ Why was Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt? The chief commercial commerce of Sodom was salt. She probably turned around because of her worldly attachment to the wicked city was more important than obeying the angel who had spoken on behalf of God—a “measure for measure” judgment. The judgment is as if God thought, “Since you like the city of salt so much, then salt you will become for not obeying Me.”

“¹⁶When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, ‘It is enough! Now relax your hand!’ And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. ¹⁷Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, and said, ‘Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father’s house.’”

The prophet Gad visits David again and instructs him to erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite.

“²⁵David built there an altar to the LORD and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus the LORD was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel.”

There are several intriguing features related to this event:

First, how it began. In 2 Samuel 24:1 we are told, “Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited (סוּת, swt)²¹ David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah.”

How did the anger of the LORD incite David to number Israel and Judah?

1 Chronicles 21:1 gives us some insight into the question of how this was accomplished: “Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.”

Notably, The Hebrew word translated “Satan” (שָׂטָן; śāṭān) in this verse does not have the definite article. שָׂטָן (śāṭān) occurs with the definite article only 10 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, and in all of these uses, it does not refer to the being called

²¹ The actual inflected form of סוּת (swt), “to incite” in 2 Samuel 24:1 is וַיַּסֵּת (wayyāset), a Hiphil waw consecutive 3rd singular masculine singular noun. The subject of this verb is, אָף (’ap), a masculine singular noun in construct state with the masculine noun, יְהוָה (yhwh), in the absolute state. Thus, the antecedent of the pronoun “it” that incited David to number Israel and Judah is the anger of the Lord.

Satan, but to some kind of adversary or opponent.²² Based on the context of both of these passages, the LORD appears to be the adversary who incited David to number Israel.

Second, why was God angry with Israel? In the preceding chapter, 2 Samuel 23:8-39, we find a list of the David's "mighty men" (23:8). These were exceptionally brave and skilled warriors, steadfast and loyal to the King during his reign. Evidently, David took great pride in these men and the great victories they achieved together. This view is reinforced by the results of the numbering of Israel and Judah: only the number of valiant warriors is listed: ". . . In Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men" (cf. 2 Samuel 24:9; see also 1 Chronicles 21:5).

Evidently, David had a character flaw at this time, and it was pride in the might and size of his fighting force. The psalmist of Israel would have done well to remember the words from one of the psalms he penned, "Some boast in chariots, and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God" (Psalm 20:7). The LORD was the One who brought about David's great victories on the battlefield (cf. Deuteronomy 20:1-4).

David also forgot another important truth: The people of Israel did not belong to King David, but to God (cf. Deuteronomy 7:6; 10:14; 14:2). God alone determined when to number His people (Numbers 1:1-3). Furthermore, when a census was taken of God's people, each male age twenty-one and older was to give a "ransom" so that "there will be no plague among them when you number them" (Exodus 30:11-16). God reminded David of these important truths through the

²² Satan (שָׂטָן; śāṭān) does not have the article in this verse, although the NASB and most EVVs translate it as a proper name. HALOT indicates that this use of שָׂטָן without the article is "clearly also a celestial figure who incited David to make a census" (HALOT, s.v. שָׂטָן 3.1317). However, of the 27 times שָׂטָן is used in the Masoretic Text, 10 times it is used without the article, including this verse (Numbers 22:22, 32; 1 Samuel 29:4; 2 Samuel 19:23; 1 Kings 5:18, 11:14, 23, 25; Psalm 109:6; and 1 Chronicles 21:1). When שָׂטָן is used without the article, the term refers to a personal or national adversary, with context determining the identity of the adversary. The adversary is always a personal or national reference with the exception of Numbers 22:23, 32, where the angel of the LORD serves as the adversary of Balaam, and this verse where the adversary is the LORD. The 17 times that שָׂטָן is used with the article, the term refers to the spiritual entity known by the proper name, Satan (cf. Job 1:6, 7(2x), 8, 9, 12(2x); 2:1, 2(2x), 3, 4, 6, 7; Zechariah 3:1, 2(2x)).

consequences he and the nation suffered because of his sinful pride, all of which honed his heart to be a man after God's heart.

After receiving the report of the census, “. . . David's heart troubled (נָסַח, “strike or smote,” HALOT, s.v., נָסַח, Hiphil, 697) him” and he realized that he had “acted foolishly” (24:10), and he repented of his sin and asked God for forgiveness.

Yet the nation had to experience the consequences of David's actions. The consequences of David's sin were the very plague that God had spoken about to Moses in Exodus 30:11, resulting in the death of 70,000.

We would do well to remember some important lessons from this account of David's sin. First, there are always consequences for sin, though they are not usually apparent at the time we commit sin. The consequences of our sin do not affect us alone, but those around us. Second, “God is opposed to the proud, but give grace to the humble” (James 4:6). Finally, God owns everything, and we are His servants and stewards. As David eloquently states after the people of Israel gave so extravagantly and willingly to fund the temple that his son, Solomon would build:

“¹⁰So David blessed the LORD in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, ‘Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. ¹¹Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. ¹²Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. ¹³Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name” (1 Chronicles 29:10-13).

Matthew 13:36-43: Jesus' disciples ask Him to explain the parable of the tares of the field. As part of the explanation, Jesus reveals how the “tares” will be judged at the end of the age:

“⁴¹The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, ⁴²and will

throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

Matthew 13:47-50: Jesus proclaims the parable of the dragnet and reveals how the fish will be divided into “good” and “bad” at the end of the age:

“⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, ⁵⁰and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Jude 5-8: Jude records the judgment placed upon angels “who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their own domain” (Jude 6ab): ²³

“He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day . . .” (Jude 6c).

Jude 14-16: Jude records a prophecy about the patriarch Enoch (Genesis 5: 18, 21-24), who, during his lifetime, proclaimed God's impending judgment, which probably took place during the flood (Genesis 6:8-8:22):

“¹⁴It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, ¹⁵to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him. ¹⁶These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.’”

²³ Some believe that this verse refers to the outlandish claim that the Nephilim in Genesis 6:4 were the by-product of angels having sexual relations with women. However, prior to Genesis 6:4, angels have never been mentioned in the biblical text; cherubs yes, but not angels (Genesis 3:24). Furthermore, the “the sons of God” in Genesis contextually refer to the descendants of the line of Seth and not angels, and “the daughters of men” refer to the descendants of Cain. The Hebrew term Nephilim (נְפִילִים; *nēp̄îlîm*) literally means “the fallen ones,” and are simply the descendants of Seth intermarrying with the daughters of Cain's line. The Nephilim were “mighty men who were of old, men of renown” (Genesis 6:4), meaning that they were the well-known business, cultural, and entertainment leaders during that time. See Bill Ramey's paper for greater detail: *The Sons of God: An Excursion of Hebrews 1:5-14*, which is also available on this website.

Revelation 7:1-4: Between the sixth and seventh seals during the Tribulation, four angels hold back the four winds of the earth. Then another angel arises and commands the four angels not to harm the earth, the sea, or the trees until the 144,000 bondservants of God are sealed on their foreheads.

Revelation 8-9: The 7th seal is opened which brings about a series of terrifying and catastrophic judgments on the earth, facilitated by angels.

God is Personally Involved in the Affairs of His People

Exodus 23:20-23: God promises to send an angel before the Israelites to bring them safely into the land God had promised to them through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob:

“²⁰Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. ²¹Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him. ²²But if you truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. ²³For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them.”

Psalms 34:7: This psalm of David was written after he was delivered from grave danger at the hands of Abimelech, before whom David feigned madness. David sought the LORD who “answered me, and delivered me from all my fears” (34:4). As part of his praise for God’s deliverance, David proclaims, “The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them” (34:7).

Psalms 91:11: David composed this psalm to proclaim that there is safety and security in taking shelter and refuge in the LORD. David confidently asserts that those who trust in the LORD will be delivered from “the snare of the trapper,” from “deadly pestilence,” and from the “terror by night or of the arrows by day” because the LORD’s angels will protect them:

“¹¹For He will give His angels charge concerning you,
To guard you in all your ways.

¹²They will bear you up in their hands,
That you do not strike your foot against a stone.
¹³You will tread upon the lion and cobra,
The young lion and the serpent you will trample down.”

Daniel 3: This chapter recounts the well-known and compelling story of three Jewish men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who refused to worship a golden image created by King Nebuchadnezzar because of their faithfulness to God (3:8-12). After being given a final warning by the King to worship the image or be thrown into the fiery furnace, the three men boldly declared they would not worship the statue, stating that their God could deliver them from the furnace, but even if He chose not to, they still would not worship the golden image (3:16-18). Nebuchadnezzar ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and ordered his valiant warriors to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were then thrown into the flames (3:19-23).

Nebuchadnezzar was astonished to see not three, but four men walking amidst the flames, with the fourth looking “like a son of the gods”²⁴. God sent an angel to deliver his three faithful servants—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—from the fiery furnace, not only unharmed but without even a hint of smoke on them! Nebuchadnezzar, overcome with awe and wonder at their deliverance, publicly praised their God who was able to deliver them in such a dramatic fashion, and issued a royal decree declaring that anyone speaking anything against their God would lose their life and possessions.

Daniel 6: This chapter recounts the well-known story of Daniel and the lions’ den during the reign of King Darius. The King appointed Daniel as one of three commissioners over his kingdom, and Daniel quickly began to distinguish himself above the other commissioners and government officials, to the extent that the King planned on appointing Daniel to administer his entire kingdom (6:1-3). The other commissioners and officials, jealous of Daniel’s success, sought grounds to accuse Daniel, but they could find no evidence of corruption or negligence (6:4).

²⁴ “A son of the Gods,” Aramaic, **בֶּר-אֱלֹהִין** (*bar-’ēlahin*) “son of Gods; divine beings, angel” (HALOT, s.v. **אֱלֹהִים** 2.b.y:1813)

However, knowing Daniel's faithfulness to God, the officials devised a trap by convincing the King to issue a decree that for thirty days "anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den" (6:7). Despite the king's edict, Daniel continued his practice of praying three times daily toward Jerusalem (6:10). The conspiring officials caught Daniel praying and reported him to King Darius. Reluctantly, the king ordered Daniel to be thrown into the lions' den, while encouraging him that "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you" (6:16).

The next morning, the king arose early and rushed to the lions' den, and cried out to Daniel: "'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?'" (6:20). Then Daniel spoke to the king:

"²¹O king, live forever! ²²My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime."

God sent an angel to prevent Daniel from being harmed, resulting in the king ordering his accusers to be thrown into the lions' den with their children and their wives, "and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones" (6:24). Following this, King Darius issued a decree throughout his kingdom:

"... to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: 'May your peace abound! I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel'" (6:25-26).

This narrative of Daniel in the lion's den teaches us the importance of unwavering faith, God's protection, and the importance of remaining true to one's beliefs even in the face of adversity. It also puts the spotlight on God's unimaginable power in unbelievable circumstances to deliver those who are His, and illustrates the consequences of envy and misguided authority. Moreover, the narrative demonstrates how trials can become opportunities for God's glory to be revealed.

Daniel's deliverance leads to King Darius' acknowledging God's power and subsequently decreeing that everyone in his kingdom should fear and worship Him.

1 Corinthians 11:1-16: In Paul's instruction to the Corinthians about the importance of women covering their heads during the assembly, Paul indicates that one of the reasons women are to cover their heads is because the angels are present when believers assemble together:

“¹⁰Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.”

In this passage Paul directs his attention to women wearing head coverings in the assembly meetings. Unfortunately, Paul's instruction is ignored and dismissed by many pastors and scholars today, and thus Paul's instruction is excluded from church practice on the grounds that his teaching was a cultural issue in Corinthian society. However, why would Paul include this instruction if it was cultural? According to the Apostle Paul, the practice of women wearing head coverings supersedes culture, as all the churches of God are to participate in this practice: “But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God” (11:16).

Most readers of this passage also fail to notice the context of Paul's teaching on head coverings occurs in a section of the letter dealing with idolatry (8:1-11:34). So, from Apostle Paul's authoritative perspective, if women do not wear head coverings and men do not have their head uncovered in the assembly meetings while praying or prophesying, everyone in the assembly is guilty of idolatry.

Paul teaches that women should wear head coverings in assembly meetings, and should look forward to this, because of its great significance. In the assembly meeting, the men represent the image and glory of God while the women represent the image and glory of man (11:3; 7). During the assembly meeting, the glory of man is to be covered during prayer or prophesying, as symbolized by the women wearing a head covering, and men are to have their heads uncovered to symbolize that God's glory is preeminent. Thus, based on Paul's apostolic

authority, those assemblies not observing women wearing head coverings in the assembly meetings are committing idolatry because they are not worshipping God properly, but prioritizing themselves and their own desires. Furthermore, those assemblies not observing this symbolism are not even to be considered an assembly of God!

Paul also teaches that the practice of women wearing head coverings symbolizing man's glory being covered is "because of the angels" (11:10). The symbolism of the women wearing a head covering is paramount for proper worship in the assembly meeting, and also for the angel(s) present, who have been assigned to serve the believers in the meeting, who are observing and perhaps even participating in worship (Hebrews 1:14). Certainly, the angels properly worship God in the Celestial Council. Therefore, it is imperative that as they observe and participate in earthly assembly meetings of believers, orderly worship must be properly conducted, giving God His glory which He alone deserves. In the same vein, Paul further instructs:

"¹¹A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹²But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. ¹³For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:11-13).

Just as he instructed the Corinthians while they participated in worshipping the LORD in their assembly according to the man and woman's created order, so Paul consistently instructs Timothy. Moreover, Paul tells us that believers will not only be administrators of the world, but also administrators over angels (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). These verses are part of a larger discourse about Christians being able to settle disputes among themselves rather than adjudicating them before secular courts. Thus, Paul's instruction underscores that since an important aspect of the believers' future role is to administer alongside Christ in matters concerning this world and that of angels, therefore, we should be able now to resolve petty disagreements among ourselves. And since we are going to be administrators over the angels, how important is it for us to properly worship God with believers and the angels present?

Hebrews 1:14: At the end of an extended scriptural explanation of why the Son is better than the angels because of the name the Son has inherited, the author of the letter to the Hebrews reveals that those who will inherit salvation are served by angels:

“¹⁴Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?”

Prayer and Celestial Warfare

At the beginning of Paul's letter to the faithful and holy ones in Ephesus, he draws their attention to their former state before “listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation”:

“¹And you being dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” (Ephesians 2:1-2).

Paul reminds the Ephesian believers of what they had been redeemed from. This was certainly a cause of great joy and thanksgiving among them as they reflected on God's work in their lives. But Paul also highlights the battle that created the environment for them to be formerly dead in their trespasses and sins—a battle that still rages today. This unseen warfare continues to threaten them, seeking to divert them from a life of obedience and devotion to Christ and the Gospel, as Paul underscores throughout his letter to them.

That is why Paul concludes his letter to the Ephesian believers with a stirring exhortation: their perseverance in the faith depends on them being able to “stand firm against the schemes of the devil”:

“¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For 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. ¹³Therefore, take up

the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ¹⁵and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; ¹⁶in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

“¹⁸With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit [sic, spirit], and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, ¹⁹and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

Paul recognizes that an unseen battle rages in the heavenlies—one with profound consequences for the Ephesians’ faithfulness, the perseverance of all believers, and the fulfillment of God’s will on the earth. In stunning detail, Paul reveals what is found nowhere else in Scripture: the Devil’s schemes are carried out, not by “flesh and blood,” but by unseen celestial forces aligned with Satan—rulers, powers, world forces of this darkness, and spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (6:12).

We get a glimpse of this type of warfare in Daniel 10.

During the third year of the reign of King Cyrus, Daniel received a profound message and vision of great conflict following an intense three-week period of mourning and fasting. Daniel recounts receiving this revelation while on the bank of the Tigris River, through a man with astonishing appearance:

“⁵I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. ⁶His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like

flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult.”

Daniel reports that “I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground” (10:9).

Then Daniel recounts his encounter with a celestial messenger that had been sent in response to Daniel's prayers:

“¹⁰Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. ¹¹He said to me, ‘O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you.’ And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. ¹²Then he said to me, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. ¹³But 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. ¹⁴Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future.”

This celestial messenger reports an epic account of a conflict between the celestial forces of God and Satan that resulted from Daniel's period of mourning and fasting. “From the first day” that Daniel set his heart to understand the message and vision, Gabriel was dispatched to give Daniel understanding of “what will happen to your people in the later days” (10:14). Gabriel describes a celestial being associated with Satan, apparently assigned to a geographic territory—the prince²⁵ of the kingdom of Persia. Gabriel states that he was “standing in front of me” (עֹמֵד לִפְנֵי; *ōmēd l'negdî*) attempting to prevent him from serving and assisting Daniel. Then, the “kings of Persia” joined in the conflict before Michael, one of the “chief

²⁵ The Hebrew word, עֹמֵד (*śar*) refers to “a higher being, a guardian angel” (HALOT, s.v. עֹמֵד, C:1352). Thus the “prince of the kingdom of Persia,” is an angelic being as is also Michael, and the “prince of Greece” in Daniel 10:20.

princes,” came to help. Finally, Gabriel was able to give Daniel the understanding of the vision and message regarding revelations of future kingdoms and conflicts.

Daniel then humbles himself toward the ground and became speechless, sapped of strength and breath:

“¹⁵When he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. ¹⁶And behold, one who resembled a human being was touching my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke and said to him who was standing before me, ‘O my lord, as a result of the vision anguish has come upon me, and I have retained no strength. ¹⁷For how can such a servant of my lord talk with such as my lord? As for me, there remains just now no strength in me, nor has any breath been left in me.’”

After encouraging and strengthening Daniel, the celestial messenger declares that he must return to the celestial battle:

“¹⁸Then *this* one with human appearance touched me again and strengthened me. ¹⁹He said, ‘O man of high esteem, do not be afraid. Peace be with you; take courage and be courageous!’ Now as soon as he spoke to me, I received strength and said, ‘May my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.’ ²⁰Then he said, ‘Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come. ²¹However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince (10:18-21).

From this encounter, and other passages that have been examined in this paper, we can confidently proclaim the following statements.

1. The Sovereign God rules through a Celestial Council with angels as the agents who serve as messengers and implementers of the Council's decrees and commands.

- a. God has chosen to primarily rule through the Celestial Council versus acting unilaterally (cf. Genesis 1:26-28; 1 Kings 22:19-22; and Job 1:6; 2:1).
- b. The Council's decrees and commands are communicated and carried out by angels, who have extraordinary powers and abilities.
 - 1) Angels can take on the form of man (cf. Genesis 18:1-2 and Daniel 10:16), strike people with blindness (cf. Genesis 19:12 and 2 Kings 6:18), strike people with a pestilence (cf. 2 Samuel 24:13, 15 and Zechariah 14:12-15), hold back winds (cf. Revelation 7:1), conduct battles (cf. Joshua 5:13-15), kill thousands of people (cf. 2 Kings 19:35), and execute judgment (cf. Jude 14-16 and Revelation chapters 6, 8, 9, 12, 16).
 - 2) Angels are probably behind extraordinary, miraculous deeds that are so often called, "acts of God," which are in reality edicts and judgments being carried out by these celestial beings, such as the Flood (cf. Genesis 6:9-8-22), the plagues in Egypt (cf. Exodus 7-12), the parting of the Red Sea (cf. Exodus 14) and the Jordan River (cf. Joshua 3), and the sun standing still (cf. Joshua 10:12-14).
 - 3) Angels communicate the very words of God (cf. Acts 7:30-34, 38, 53; Galatians 3:19; and Hebrews 2:2) as exemplified in the episodes of Abraham and the "three men" (cf. Genesis 18:1-33), or Moses and the burning bush on Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 3:1-9).
2. Satan, the ruler of this age (cf. John 12:31 and 2 Corinthians 4:4), operates a deceptive, demonic shadow government in the present evil age. He orchestrates and promotes a world system that strives to discredit God, aims to thwart His will, seeks to blind outsiders to God and His gospel, endeavors to discourage and derail God's called and chosen, and ultimately attempts to prevent God's design for a man to rule the inhabited Earth.
 - a. "The thief (Satan) comes only to steal, kill, and destroy; I (Jesus) came that they might have life, and have abundance" (John 10:10).

- b. "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4).
- c. "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road" (Matthew 13:19).
- d. "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3).
- e. "¹⁵Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:15-17).
- f. "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?" (James 4:4).
- g. "¹And being dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you formerly walked according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:1-2).
- h. "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19).
- i. "¹³Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish

ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:13-18).

- j. “Your adversary, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).
 - k. “³¹Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; ³²but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32).
3. Celestial beings aligned either with God or Satan are engaging in a cosmic battle, aggressively attempting to prevent the faithfulness of believers and seeking to disrupt the implementation of God's will on the inhabited Earth.
- a. Angels are depicted as being in conflict with celestial beings affiliated with Satan, dispatched to try to prevent the angels from completing their assignments (Daniel 10:10-21; Revelation 12:7-9).
 - b. These cosmic conflicts between angels and Satan's celestial associates are attempts to impede answers to prayer and subvert the will of God as decreed by the Council.
4. Therefore, it is imperative that all believers engage in this battle by putting on the “full armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11).
- a. Notably, Paul places an emphasis on believers being spiritually equipped for battle with Satan's unseen forces before praying.
 - b. Hannah, Daniel, Elisha, David, Paul, and so many others in the Scriptures were those who walked with God, that is they lived a life of faithful obedience. Their prayers and the answers to their prayers are recorded in the Scriptures.

- c. Believers are to be “strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might,” by putting on the full armor of God so we can withstand the schemes of the devil (cf. Joshua 1:8; Psalm 19:7-11; 119:1-176; Matthew 4:4; 5:18; Acts 17:11; Ephesians 6:10-11; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17; and Hebrews 4:12).
- d. The Believer's battle to persevere in faith is not against human beings (Ephesians 6:12), but against unseen satanic beings and forces. This type of battle requires spiritual preparation and divine methodology, which begins with putting on the “full armor of God.”
- e. The full armor of God allows us to “resist” and “stand firm” against the schemes of the Satan (Ephesians 6:13).
 - 1) “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8).
 - 2) We are to resist sexual temptation, by fleeing from it (1 Corinthians 6:18).
- f. The putting on the armor of God requires us to do the following actions.
 - 1) “Gird (our) loins with truth” (6:14a). Reading, meditating, and memorizing Scripture enables us to know the truth. Satan is the “father of lies” (John 8:44) and we must know the truth to recognize the lies.
 - 2) “Put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14b). Righteousness comes by living by faith in the gospel of the Kingdom (cf. Romans 1:16-17). We must daily remind ourselves of the joy and rewards of living by faith now and remember that righteousness is God's best life for us now, and preparation for us to reign with His Son in the Kingdom of God (cf. Psalm 1).
 - 3) “Shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15). We must know, be prepared, and be willing to proclaim the Good News of God, despite opposition and persecution

(cf. 1 Peter 3:13-16). Our proclamation of the gospel affects Satan himself:

- Jesus sent out seventy disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God and heal the sick (Luke 10:1-16). When the seventy returned, Jesus told them, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning” (Luke 10:18), indicating the unseen spiritual battle that was taking place as they were proclaiming the Kingdom of God and healing the sick.
- 4) “Taking up the shield of faith” to “extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Ephesians 6:16). We “overcome” by “hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches” and reminding ourselves of the great reward awaiting those who are faithful (cf. Revelation 2:7; 10-11. 17, 26-29; 3:5-6; 3:12-13; and 3:21-22).
 - 5) “Take up the helmet of salvation” (Ephesians 6:17a). Being aware that as believers, our salvation ensures that we have nothing to fear, because resurrection and reward awaits us (cf. Philippians 1:27-28; 1 Peter 3:13).
 - 6) “Take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17b). This is the only offensive weapon Paul lists in his description of the “full armor of God.” We must learn to “wield” the Scriptures as a sword, learning and actively thinking “scripturally” as we navigate our lives as pilgrims on this earth.
5. Moreover, fervent prayer and fasting is also our great offensive weapon in our battle against the schemes of the devil.
 - a. God has given us access, through prayer, via our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, to God and His Celestial Council. It is in the midst of that council that decisions are made and God rules. What a privilege! The Apostle John records seeing the prayers of the saints before the Celestial Council (cf. Revelation 5:8 and 8:3-4).

- b. Therefore, prayer is an absolute necessity for the believer who seeks not only to resist the schemes of the devil, but to bring our praise, petitions, needs, and prayers before God and His rulers for: fellow believers, for the proclamation of the gospel, and for God's Kingdom to come.
- c. We are to live our lives demonstrating that prayer is a priority by being alert to opportunities and circumstances that call for prayer, and then devoting time to pray.
 - 1) "In the morning, O Lord, You will hear my voice; in the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly wait" (Psalm 5:3).
 - 2) "But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me" (Micah 7:7).
 - 3) "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
- d. It is critical to persist in prayer, as we do not know God's timing for our answers, or the status of the battles that are being waged regarding the answers to our prayers (cf. Daniel 10:2-3 and Luke 18:1-8).
- e. We must believe that many of the problems we face can only be solved through prayer and fasting. When Jesus' disciples were unable to cast a spirit out of a man's son, He said to them, "This kind does not come out by anything but prayer" (Mark 9:28-29). If that was true for the disciples in that situation, is it not also true for challenges we face? We must also assume that Jesus was able to cast out the spirit because He had been praying.
- f. We are to pray with the expectation that God answers the prayers of His own, even in the most difficult and challenging circumstances. We must recognize that He is our only true hope, the source of all that we need, and that nothing is impossible for Him.
 - 1) Our attitude in prayer should be like that of King Jehoshaphat, when faced with an approaching, overwhelming military campaign, "O our

God, will you not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (2 Chronicles 20:12).

- 2) “And those who know Your name will put their trust in You, for You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You” (Psalm 9:10).
 - 3) Mary asked the angel Gabriel, when he announced that she would bear a son, Jesus, how she could become pregnant, since she was a virgin. Gabriel explained that the “Holy Spirit” would come upon her, and “the power of the Most High would overshadow her,” and reminded her that her relative Elizabeth was expecting a son in her old age. Gabriel then proclaimed to Mary, “For nothing will be impossible with God” (cf. Luke 1:37; see also Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; and Luke 18:27).
- g. We can learn how to pray and what to pray for by studying the prayers of those who walked with God.
- 1) Jesus would often “slip away to the wilderness and pray” (cf. Mark 5:16; Matthew 14:23; and Luke 6:12).
 - 2) Jesus taught His disciples how to prayer in what is commonly called “The Lord’s Prayer” (cf. Matthew 6:5-15).
 - 3) John 17 records Jesus’ prayer shortly before his crucifixion.
 - 4) The Scriptures record Jesus’ prayers while He was hanging on the cross (cf. Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; and Luke 23:34, 46).
 - 5) Paul’s prayers give us great insight into his priorities as He prayed for the chosen whom he served so faithfully (cf. Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Philippians 1:19-11; and Colossians 1:9-12).
 - 6) Hannah’s prayer after the birth of her son Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10).
 - 7) Daniel’s prayer of repentance for his sins and the sins of the nation of Israel (cf. Daniel 9:1-19).

8) Jonah's prayer from the belly of the great fish (cf. Jonah 2:1-10).

James, the half-brother of Jesus, closes his epistle by encouraging prayer for those who are suffering and those who are sick (James 5:13-16a). After providing instruction for how we are to pray for the sick, James encourages us with this statement: "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16b). Then James gives us a powerful example of the prayer life of the prophet Elijah:

"¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit" (James 5:17-18).

King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, established the worship of the Canaanite false gods of Baal and Asherah throughout the Northern Kingdom. It appeared that the whole nation of Israel had turned away from the LORD, except for one man. The narrator in 1 Kings tell us that "Thus Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before Him" (1 Kings 16:33b).

Yet in the midst of this apostasy and godlessness, one man was willing to take a stand against the Ahab and Jezebel—one who believed that "the LORD, the God of Israel lives." That man, Elijah, boldly proclaimed to Ahab:

"As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word" (1 Kings 17:1).

Elijah undoubtedly knew what God had decreed in the Law: the seasonal rains that were necessary for the crops to survive and thrive were dependent on God's people being obedient to Mosaic Covenant (Deuteronomy 11:13-17). With this scriptural knowledge and his faith that he served the living God, Elijah prayed that that it would not rain. Based on his faith and prayers, he boldly proclaimed to King Ahab that there would be neither dew nor rain, except by his word—and it didn't rain for 3 years and six months!

Elijah was "a man just like us."

The question for us is, “Are we men and women like Elijah?”

- Do we believe, like Elijah, that we serve the living God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? The God of King David? The God of the prophets? The God of Jesus Christ?
- Do we know the Scriptures well enough to pray with insight and understanding, with conviction and passion, with weeping and mourning, with the hope and expectation that the living God will answer?
- Are we able to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might, able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil?

Every believer must be informed and engaged in the celestial battle that has been thrust upon us. We must be willing, engaged, passionate, persistent warriors, fully attired with the full armor of God, and “with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit [sic, spirit], and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18). We must be faithful stewards of the amazing access we have been given to participate in this battle—through our faithful obedience and through our payers at the time of our need.

“¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

¹⁶Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

So, we must pray for our earthly lives and spiritual future depend on it; for our fellow believers are counting on us; and because our God is expecting us to fight the good fight of faith—for ourselves, His Kingdom, for His Son, and for His glory.

The Ultimate Celestial Battle

Perhaps one of the most important examples demonstrating Satan's desire to try to thwart God's will is his relentless determination to prevent Jesus, the Son of God, from fulfilling God's plan for a man to rule the inhabited earth.

As Jesus approached the end of His earthly ministry, Satan is uncertain how to respond to Jesus' stated plan to be crucified. Jesus had already told His disciples of the plans for His suffering, death, and resurrection:

“From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day” (Matthew 16:21).

Satan, however, faced a dilemma: should he try to prevent Jesus' crucifixion so He would not be raised from the dead, or should he devise a scheme to ensure Jesus' crucifixion would occur?

First, he tries to prevent Jesus from being crucified by using the Apostle Peter:

“²²Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You. ²³But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.”

Jesus immediately recognized that Peter's well-intended concern was actually a scheme and temptation designed to keep Him from His divine appointment at the cross.

Later, Satan, changes his strategy, and his human agent, turning to Judas Iscariot:

“³And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. ⁴And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them. ⁵They were glad and agreed to give him money. ⁶So he consented, and began seeking a good opportunity to betray Him to them apart from the crowd” (Luke 22:3-6).

Through Judas, the religious leaders were led to arrest Jesus, setting in motion the events that culminated in His crucifixion (cf. Matthew 26:47-50).

Even after Jesus' resurrection, which thwarted Satan's strategy to prevent Jesus from fulfilling His role to rule the inhabited earth, Satan has not ceased in his

attempts to prevent God's announced plan in the Celestial Council from being fulfilled.

God's Plan for Man

It is in this same auspicious Celestial Council that God announces His purpose for creating man and woman:

“Let them rule: (וַיִּרְדּוּ; w^yirdû)²⁶ in “Our image (צֶלֶם; šelem), according to Our likeness (דְּמוּת; d^mût).”

In Near Eastern culture, the idea of being “in the image” of a king or ruler was someone who would rule as the king or ruler's representative.²⁷ However, God was creating the man and the woman to rule in His image absolutely, as far as He would grant them the authority and ability. And they were to rule in His likeness,²⁸ reflecting God's character, wisdom, and righteousness.

The first man and woman were given the authority to rule over all the air-breathing animals and subdue them. Jesus Christ, however, has been granted far greater authority and power: He will rule not only over the inhabited earth, but over the entire cosmos, including all celestial beings, as will His companions (cf. Ephesians 1:15-23; Colossians 1:15-17 and Revelation 21)! He will rule with a rod of iron, ushering in a reign of justice, righteousness, and peace (cf. Psalm 2 and Isaiah 9:1-7). God will be at His Son's right hand, to ensure the success of His Son's rule (cf. Psalm 2; 110:5 and Hebrews 1:8-9).

Let us imagine the impact of God's momentous announcement to the Celestial Council. God, who has just created the heavens and the earth—the sovereign and

²⁶ When a cohortative, “Let us make” (נָעֲשֶׂה, naʿ^ašê), is followed by a jussive + a waw conjunctive (וַיִּרְדּוּ, w^yirdû, “let them rule”) the second clause usually reflects the idea of purpose or result (see Ross, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 153).

²⁷ צֶלֶם (šelem) can be used as an image or statue, or metaphorically as a representation. Here it reflects man ruling absolutely, within the confines God would permit, in a manner consistent with God's nature and purposes (HALOT, s.v. צֶלֶם; 1, 2, 5:1028).

²⁸ The verbal root of דְּמוּת (d^mût < דָּמָה), means “to be like, resemble” (HALOT, s.v. דָּמָה, 225). Since God is spirit (John 4:24), here the likeness and resemblance of God indicates His intrinsic nature. The author of the letter to the Hebrews states that Jesus Christ, the man who will fulfill God's original purpose to rule, is “the exact representation of His (God's) nature” (Hebrews 1:3).

supreme Ruler—had decided to create “man” to rule over all the air-breathing creatures on the newly created earth! Perhaps the Celestial Council rejoiced as Job recounts:

“When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

Regardless of their reaction, God’s original intent was set in motion. Since His authoritative purpose was announced, nothing has changed about God’s intention for man to rule over the inhabited earth.

However, during this time some of the Celestial Council may have defected, including God’s chief rival, Satan—likely the most powerful being in the Council—and other celestial beings who followed him, commonly known as demons. These defecting celestial rulers had not anticipated the prospect of a man, formed from the “dust of the ground,” being granted authority to rule.

In Ezekiel 28:11-19, we find a prophecy given by Ezkiel concerning the king of Tyre. While this prophecy laments the pride and downfall of the king of Tyre, it also depicts a stunning celestial being and his prideful rebellion against God.²⁹

Although the passage never names this celestial being, the description of his astonishing beauty, exalted status with God, overwhelming pride, and precipitous downfall strongly suggests a being like Satan. Who else in Scripture bears the name, Satan, the chief adversary of God? He was a cherub (28:14, 16),³⁰ “full of wisdom and perfect in beauty,” adorned with an exquisite, jeweled covering

²⁹ Isaiah 14:12-15, referring to the king of Baylon, may also have a secondary meaning depicting Satan’s expulsion from the Celestial Council.

³⁰ A cherub (כְּרוּב, *kṛûḇ*) is a very powerful celestial being who has a unique role as one who watches over or protects locations or objects. They protect (שָׁמַר, *šmr*; “to watch over”; HALOT s.v. שָׁמַר, 1.c:1582) the way to the “tree of life” (Genesis 3:24). Moses gave instructions for two gold cherubim to be crafted as a part of the mercy seat whose wings were to cover (סָכַךְ, *skk*; “to shut off as a protection”; HALOT s.v. סָכַךְ, 754) the mercy seat, the lid that covered the Ark of the Covenant (cf. Exodus 25:17-22). God is said to be enthroned above the cherubim (cf. 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; Isaiah 37:16; Psalm 80:2; 99:1; and 1 Chronicles 13:6). No celestial being had access to God without passing through the protection offered by the cherubim. Prior to his expulsion from the celestial council, Satan would have served as a protector of the LORD.

(28:12-13). He occupied a position of great honor on the “mountain of God,” reflecting his significant role in the Celestial Council. From the day he was created, he was “blameless” in all his ways (28:15) and was “in Eden, the garden of God” (28:13).

Yet, his heart and his wise nature were corrupted due to pride in his beauty and splendor (28:17). He sinned and was thus found unrighteous and filled with violence (28:16). He was cast down from the mountain of God, as “profane” (28:16), losing access to God and the celestial council.³¹

If Satan's removal from the Celestial Council was somehow precipitated by God's announcement in the Celestial Council (Genesis 1:26-28), it is unsurprising that we see the actions by the serpent in Genesis 3, attempting to derail God's plan for the man and the women to rule, by tempting them to sin.

A major threat to God's strategy for man is and always has been sin—that is, to live independently of His purposes. How could someone rule in the image and likeness of God when sin and unrighteousness are anathema to Him? Yet man largely has chosen to disobey God and to live independently from His ways. We are reminded early in Genesis of this reality.

- The betrayal of the first man and first woman, who disobeyed God by committing the one and only action that He had commanded them not to do (cf. Genesis 3:1-8). This opened the floodgates for sin to invade and eventually dominate the world, and because of sin, came death.
- Cain maliciously killing his brother Abel (cf. Genesis 4:1-15), which led to a legacy of evil as Cain's descendants perpetuated his evil deeds throughout his lineage (cf. Genesis 4:17-24).

³¹ While Satan is no longer permitted to approach God and the Celestial Council any time he wishes, believers can always and wondrously approach God through our great High Priest, Jesus Christ (cf. Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-16; 8:1-2; and 10:19-25). Only one heavenly altar (cf. Hebrews 13:10-14) and sanctuary (cf. Hebrews 8:2) exists where we all may worship God. All earthly altars and sanctuaries are null and void after Jesus ascended into the heavenly Sanctuary (cf. John 4:21-24). Although many Christian denominations tout that they have an “altar” or “sanctuary” where worship services are conducted, they err, for all of those who worship God do so only at the heavenly altar and sanctuary.

- The eventual rise of evil and wickedness through Seth's descendants, the sons of God, marrying Cain's evil descendants who were the daughters of men (cf. Genesis 6:1-7).

In spite of all of this, God was never deterred from His goal and commitment to establish man to rule, albeit always through a small remnant (cf. Isaiah 10:30-21; 1 Kings 19:18; Matthew 7:13-14; and Romans 9:27-28). For example, He accomplished His purpose through Noah and his family—eight-in-all—whom God preserved through the Great Flood, unlike the rest of mankind who died because of their wickedness. His preservation of His remnant continued through Noah's son Shem, from whom would eventually come forth Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David, and, over the course of centuries, Jesus Christ.

“⁴But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba Father!’ ⁷Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God” (Galatians 4:4-7).

God has always been at work—traced through the genealogies in the Hebrew Scriptures—preparing for the day when one man, whose faith would be evidenced through his obedience and character, would be appointed to govern the inhabited earth and the cosmos. That man we now know is Jesus Christ, together with His companions, the remnant.

Interestingly, the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures contain more than 340 genealogies.³² The last two genealogies in the Scriptures are recorded in the New Testament, in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38. These two genealogies confirm that Jesus is the promised descendant of Abraham and David, tracing His lineage back to Seth and Shem. He is the One who will ultimately fulfill God's original purpose for man to rule—extending that rule beyond the air-breathing creatures and the inhabited earth to all the cosmos.

³² Nancy S. Dawson, Eugene Merrill, and Andreas Kostenberger, *All the Genealogies of the Bible: Visual Charts and Exegetical Commentary*, Zondervan Academic, 2023.

Since these two genealogies are the final genealogies recorded in all of Scripture, and end with Jesus Christ as the promised ruler as the Messiah and the Son of God, then if Jesus Christ, the man, is not the one who is to rule, or was not raised from the dead so He could reign, or is unsuccessful in His rule over His realm, God has no “plan B,” for Jesus Christ had no children! According to the inspired Scriptures, there are no additional human descendants to take the place of Jesus if God fails to install His Son as King and ensure His success when the government will rest on His shoulders (cf. Isaiah 9:6-7).

Furthermore, if Jesus Christ is not God's promised ruler, God's people have no hope of being raised from the dead, to have life beyond the grave. However, the Apostle Paul emphatically proclaims Jesus as our only hope of resurrection because He was raised from the dead, never to die again. He will rule until He abolishes all rule, authority, and power—even death itself—and hands over the Kingdom to the God and Father:

“¹²Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”

“²⁰But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. ²¹For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, ²⁴then 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. ²⁵For He must reign until He has put all His enemies

under His feet. ²⁶The last enemy that will be abolished is death" (1 Corinthians 15:12-26).

"⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him" (Romans 6:8-9).

Furthermore, God's pronouncement for a ruler to govern the inhabited earth was to be fulfilled by "man." Thus, to fulfill God's original purpose, His rulers would have to be physical, earthly men and women whom God would create, ultimately fulfilled in the man, Jesus Christ, and His companions. Thus, God's original intent for a physical man to govern is another nail in the coffin of those who espouse the unbiblical theories of a "God-man" or the "eternal Son." In fact, if God's purpose can only be fulfilled by a "God-man" or an "eternal Son," then one would be forced to conclude that God is not sovereign—that is God does not have the will and the ability to bring about His original intent for a physical man to reign, making His original purpose inherently flawed and impossible.

But God is sovereign. He has undeniably demonstrated both His infinite wisdom and His determined will to accomplish His plan for men and women to rule. God has undertaken unparalleled actions to ensure the success of His strategy, such as the Flood, the captivity of His people by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, even the crucifixion of His Son, Jesus Christ! God has advanced His strategic intentions for mankind in the face of the repeated sin and rebellion of His own people, even those in the genealogical line through whom the ultimate ruler, Jesus Christ, would come forth.

In the midst of the continued wickedness and rebellion of mankind in this present evil age, God has made it possible for His chosen ones to die to their sin, be cleansed of their sin, and live for righteousness through the High Priesthood of His resurrected Son, to rule with Him as His companions. In doing so, God fully achieves His promise for mankind to rule (cf. Hebrews 2:10-18; 8:1-2; and 10:1-31). There should be no doubt about the extent God will go to ensure the success of His original masterful plan for mankind to rule, and thus every believer should

have absolute confidence that God's goal for mankind to rule will be perfectly fulfilled.

What should be a believer's response to the sovereign, all-powerful, and matchlessly wise God? First, we should rejoice and worship our God for His infinite wisdom and unparalleled ability to bring about His perfect purpose for man to rule. We should be in awe that God has made it possible for us to rule with His Son in His coming manifested Kingdom. And we should humbly commit our lives to submit to His rule now, regardless of the cost, so we can join His Son as His companions to bring about justice, righteousness, and peace on earth, even in the cosmos in the ages to come.

All believers desiring to obtain the "so great a salvation" (cf. Hebrews 2:1-3) that God has provided for His faithful ones through His Son, Jesus Christ, would do well to embrace the encouragement and commandments the Apostle Peter gave to those who had "received a faith of the same kind as ours:"

²Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. ⁵Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, ⁶and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, ⁷and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. ⁸For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; ¹¹for in this way the entrance into the

eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you" (2 Peter 1:2-11).

And likewise, to pray the same prayer that the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the holy and faithful ones at the assembly in Ephesus:

¹⁵For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far 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. ²²And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:15-23).