

*The Theology of the Unseen Realm:  
How God Uses Angels, Demons and His Holy Assembly*

“Introduction”

I. Introduction

A. How we will proceed.

1. In order to penetrate the unseen world, we must make some observations about interpretation and also some concessions for our study.

B. Regarding interpretation.

1. Luther spoke of the “*sensus literalis*” which is the literal sense of Scripture.

- a. Literal means the understanding of words and grammatical syntax. Literal meaning is also found by employing the following:

1. Knowing the author and intended audience.
2. Determining if the section of Scripture is historical, didactic, prophetic, or poetical.

- a. Didactic portions are primary for understanding historical narratives.

3. Noting the language (words) of the author.
4. Before doing theology, let the Bible interpret itself.
5. When there is no New Testament correspondence be careful that interpretation fits the broader context of Scripture. Do not read into it.  
(Note Paul’s use of Old Testament texts in his letter to Rome. See Romans 3:10-18, c.f. Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1-4; Ps 5:9; Ps 140:3, Ps 10:7; Isa 59:7f, Ps 32:1- Seven Old Testament texts strung together by the apostle.)

2. The biblical text was written by men who lived in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean region between the second millennium BC and the first century AD.
  - a. Consequently, we must strive to make a connection (understand) to that world.
  - b. What were the worldviews at the time of the biblical writing and how do the biblical writers interact with them?

C. Regarding concessions:

1. There has been a deemphasized view toward the theological importance of the unseen realm. Some authors will use the term “demythologize” to refer to the stripping of the supernatural from the Scripture.
  - a. There is no expository clarification on the topic by Old Testament or New Testament authors.
  - b. In addition, in all my study in seminary, I never had a class on the unseen world of angels, demons, and God’s Holy Council.
    1. Perhaps an elective (can’t remember), but other courses were more of a priority.
  - c. The unseen realm may have been touched upon during a study of a particular text, but not explored in depth.
  - d. The entire field of study is peripheral to Systematic Theology or even Biblical Theology.
  - e. As Christians we claim to believe in the supernatural, but all too often we think like skeptics.
    1. Traditional theological teaching has for centuries kept the unseen world at arm’s length. We believe in the godhead (trinity) because there is no point to the Christian faith without it. The rest of the unseen world is handled with “a whisper and a chuckle,” Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, pg. 17. [Emphasis added]

2. Lloyd-Jones (died 1981) remarks:

‘I am certain that one of the main causes of the ill state of the Church today is the fact that the devil is being forgotten. All is attributed to us; we have all become so psychological in our attitude and thinking. We are ignorant of this great objective fact, the being, the existence of the devil, the adversary, the accuser, and his “fiery darts”.’

– Cited in John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 265.

2. However, things that are peripheral and odd really do matter.

- a. Side stepping texts because they are “too strange” is a mistake. This is particularly true when there are so many texts concerned with this field of study.

1. Example – I Peter 3:14-22

“<sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, <sup>15</sup> but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; <sup>16</sup> and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. <sup>18</sup> For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; <sup>19</sup> in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, <sup>20</sup> who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. <sup>21</sup> Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience -through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.”

- a. Who are these spirits, why are they in prison, and what proclamation (preaching) did Jesus make to them?

b. Heiser makes a valid point.

“Why is it that Christians, who would strenuously defend the belief in God or the virgin birth against charges that they are unscientific or irrational, do not hesitate to call out academic SWAT teams to explain away weird biblical passages.” Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 17.

3. The scriptural record offers no explicit expository explanation of the unseen realm.

a. No author expounds upon it, but they appear to assume its presence.

b. The Bible reveals the unseen realm as a tapestry.

1. Similar to the doctrine of the Trinity or dual nature of Christ.

2. Implied and assumed.

c. A design in a tapestry becomes clearer when we step back and view the larger piece of art.

1. In a sense, the design features of the unseen realm become visible by using a needle and thread to weave together many texts. Texts that on their own may appear odd or peripheral to biblical history, but when connected to one another, form a picture of the unseen world.


2. Consequently, the unseen world within Scripture is “hidden within plain sight!”

## II. Michael S. Heiser’s insights.

A. A prolific writer on the topic. Titles include:

1. *Unseen Realm* (Endorsed by Tremper Longman (W. College, M. Div., Westminster), Daniel Bock (DTS), John Goldingay (Fuller S.), Daniel Block (W. College), Richard Averbeck (TEDS))
2. *Angels*
3. *Demons*
4. *Reversing of Hermon*

No one within the Evangelical world has written more on the topic than Heiser.



5. *Unacknowledged*

6. *The World Seen Upside Down*

7. Additionally, he has done numerous video presentations available on YouTube.

8. The Naked Bible podcast.

a. Died February 2023 of pancreatic cancer.

## B. Background

1. Old Testament scholar with special emphasis on Hebrew and other semitic languages.

2. Formerly, a distance professor for Liberty University and Midwest Baptist Theological Seminary.

3. He has had many articles published in scholarly journals.

4. He was a scholar in residence at Faithlife Corp, the parent company of *Logos Research Systems*. Faithlife has recently produced new video presentations featuring Heiser on “The Unseen Realm,” “Angels,” and “The Supernatural.”

a. No novice to be sure.

5. He attended Celebration Church in Jacksonville, FL.

a. Church is 12,000 members with multiple campuses, is charismatic and egalitarian on women’s service as Elders and Pastors.

6. He is an ardent monotheist, and not charismatic. He is critical of the demonology found in charismatic churches.

7. He does not equate the demonic with UFO sightings.

## C. Concerns for those who read his numerous books, scholarly papers, and video presentations.

1. He is definitely not Reformed and is somewhat hostile concerning historical confessions including the Westminster Confession of Faith.

2. His recordings and interviews do occur on some Deconstructionist websites.

- a. Evolution is possible for him.
- b. Adam may be allegorical.
- c. Paul does not intend that all human beings have Adam's guilt "... Romans 5:12 does not teach that all humans need Jesus because they inherited Adam's guilt." *The Evolution of Adam: Additional Thoughts* posted by Dr. Heiser, June 2, 2012 and Accessed on 6/6/2020.

3. He is a biblical Theologian as compared to a Systematic Theologian.

- a. No systematizing while focused upon the words alone of the text.

4. There are points of his biblical analysis that lead to faulty theological conclusions.

- a. On freewill
- b. On Predestination
- c. On the Sovereignty of God

All of which are central to Reformational Protestantism. See I Sam. 23:1-13. "God's foreknowledge did not necessitate predestination."

5. While critiquing Calvinistic understanding of man's will (bondage) prior to regeneration, he misrepresents Reformed Theology on this point. He states, "A person is void of any volitional element prior to regeneration. How is it possible for anyone to respond to anything in any way prior to being regenerated? Our experiences are contrary to that. We weren't passive; we weren't inactive. Our brains weren't disengaged ... otherwise you have a brainless and mindless being. You have human beings that no longer are self-aware in a Calvinistic system prior to regeneration which just does not make any sense." Michael S. Heiser, "Calvinism and Its Problems". *Sentinel Apologetics*. The Naked Bible Podcast.

- a. Exceedingly weak understanding of Reformed Theology!

**D. Warning:** He has many insightful remarks based on the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old Testament, the Second Temple period (Approx. 500 BC – 70 AD) and Ancient Near East culture, but some of his theological framework is wrong.

1. While he is an accomplished linguist and specialist in the Hebrew Bible, his theological conclusions are incorrect on some points. In addition to C. 2c above, note the following:
  - a. Example: “The choices made by human and non-human beings described in Genesis 3 were neither cohered (held together in a mass that resists separation) nor needed by Yahweh for the sake of His greater plan. The risk of creating image bearers who might freely choose rebellion was something God foresaw but did not decree.” *Unseen Realm*, p. 54-55. In addition, he writes, “One of these attributes is freedom – free will that reveals itself in decision making,” *Unseen Realm*, p. 58-59. [Emphasis Mine] He questions predestination on page 60 of *The Unseen Realm*. His understanding of human depravity does not include the inability of the will to choose the good (Lordship and salvation of Christ) because of a depraved nature.
  - b. He maintains that he is not an “open theist”, but his views are similar on some points.
    1. God does not know or chooses to not know the future perfectly as it relates to the choices of human beings or heavenly beings.
    2. God’s foreknowledge does not affect predestination. Definitely Arminian and leads to open theism. His main text on this point is I Samuel 23:1-13 “God’s foreknowledge does not necessitate predestination.”  
(Supernatural Seminar with Dr. Michael Heiser, Part III, YouTube.)
  - c. Nonetheless, he is adamant that salvation is by grace alone with no added works by humans.

E. Consequently, if you choose to study his writings, do so with a critical eye.

1. I have found his research and analysis useful, but not without deficiencies.
2. He has much to offer, but keep in mind to eat only the wheat and not the chaff.

3. As far as this course is concerned, all teaching material is consistent with Reformed Theology and broader-based evangelicalism.

F. I could have simply led a book study on one of his works, but I wanted to analyze what he is saying.

1. This, in turn, has led to a sizable bibliography which underpins this course.

III. This study is a great exploration, but is it essential?

A The story of the Bible

1. The central theme is the revelation of Jesus Christ (the ultimate seed of the woman – Gen. 3:15) and God’s design for man’s redemption through Him.

2. Cover to cover this is the story.

B. Yet, there is a backstory. (Note metaphor of actors upon a stage.)

1. It includes entities and events that are behind the curtain that bear upon the human actors on stage within the world.

2. The curtain analogy is pertinent to this inquiry.

a. We will be, in effect, parting the curtain or peering under the curtain to gain greater insight to that which is unseen in order to understand more fully God’s design for that which is seen.

C. Consequently, it may be one of the most interesting studies of Scripture that is non-essential, when compared with central Christian doctrines. Nonetheless, there is value in this study.

1. There are more essential and urgent biblical doctrines that the Christian must comprehend.

a. Doctrine of God

b. Doctrine of salvation

c. Doctrine of atonement, etc.




D. Nonetheless, there is great benefit in this study.

1. Keith Mathison, a former Ligonier editor and now a Reformed Bible College professor, reviewed Heiser's *Unseen Realm* on his website *Light in Dark Places*. He adds clarity on Heiser's work and the Unseen Realm.

“Generally speaking, I think Heiser is correct to be concerned that Western Christians have allowed an anti-supernatural worldview to distort their view of the Bible. To the degree that books like his can get Christians to think about the fact that the biblical writers had anything but a naturalistic or materialistic worldview, they are helpful. Regarding the theme of the “divine council,” I think it is also laudable that Heiser is attempting to synthesize and make available information on the “divine council” texts. This is information that has been around for a while (pp. 385–6) but is usually accessible only to advanced graduate and post-graduate students and scholars with expertise in biblical Hebrew and other Ancient Near Eastern languages.”

Mathison's criticisms include:


1. Sensationalism
2. A biblicism hermeneutic which pits Scripture against creeds and confessions. Arianism (denial of Godhood of the Son) and Socinianism (also denial of Christ's divinity) are movements grounded in biblicism.
3. The word “divine” carries connotations of deity particularly for English speakers. This can produce confusion.
4. The divine council” understanding is not the key to everything. It does not unlock all the mysteries of the Bible.



Mathison concludes: “The Unseen Realm has as its primary topic a subject that should be more carefully explored. Many of Heiser's observations are interesting and deserving of further study.”

2. Andrew Moody of the Gospel Coalition Website, Australia Edition. His review is generally positive, but he notes some oddities. Nonetheless, he endorses the study.

“Heiser dares to do what few Evangelical scholars dare to do by taking a serious interest in the heavenly council ... where mainstream commentators have often



attempted to downplay or explain away the parts of the Bible that speak of the gods ... who function as God's heavenly deputies." The author continues: "Classical Reformed Theology focuses upon God's transcendent existence ... but doesn't generally think enough about the heavenly middle where God accommodates Himself."

3. This field of study will convey many ideas and concepts that will be new to most people. Consequently, greater effort from students is necessary to grasp the content.
  - a. Note Geometry illustration: Geometry as a field of study contains terms and concepts (points, lines, line segments, rays, endpoints, parallel, etc.) which are in addition to basic math (addition and subtraction, etc.). Even though students may be familiar with basic math, geometry is a whole new world. In the same way, students may be familiar with the Bible, but the content of this course will, in most cases, be very new.
4. This study is revealed in Scripture and as such is still of great value.
  - a. II Timothy 3:16

“<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”
  - b. It causes wonderment.
  - c. It causes appreciation for God's plan to redeem man while also realizing there is no plan to redeem fallen divine beings.
  - d. It causes greater sensitivity concerning the nature of temptation.
  - e. It causes worship for the Most High God.

[This Page Intentionally Left Blank.]