


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

“Divine Image Bearers”

I. The earliest view of the Divine Council.


A. Let’s take a look at a familiar portion of Scripture.

 1. Genesis 1:26-28

“²⁶ Then 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.’ ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ God 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.’”

a. Note carefully the plural pronouns in verse 26.

1. “Us” “Our”

 2. How do we understand the plural pronouns?

a. A use of the royal “we” also known as the plural of majesty asserted by Keil, Dillman and Driver. However, Hebrew syntax does not allow for this view.

1. “The plural of majesty does not occur in Hebrew. ‘We’ as a plural of majesty is not used with verbs has led to the rejection of this interpretation.” Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Bible Commentary*, p. 27-30.

 b. An early reference to the Trinity.

1. Why would the godhead need to speak to one another since they are co-equal in power, knowledge and presence? The Jewish reader would never have thought of a trinitarian understanding.
2. Most Evangelicals ascribe to this view, yet, this is highly unlikely. Monotheists (Moses and editors) would not have been thinking in trinitarian language.
3. It is also reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament which is not a sound interpretive method. Regarding the Trinity, F. F. Bruce notes "... it does not carry conviction." F. F. Bruce, *The New International Bible Commentary*, p. 115. Hamilton adds, "The theological battle of Moses' day was not trinitarianism verses Unitarianism. The battle centered around the belief in one God who is Himself uncreated, merciful and sovereign versus a belief in multiple gods...." Victor P. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary of the Old Testament, Chapters 1-17*, p. 133.
4. The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (p. 2) notes in regard to the plural found in Genesis 1:26: "The plural 'us', 'our' (3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8) probably refers to the divine beings who compose God's heavenly court (I Kings 22:19; Job 1:6)."



B. An address to the heavenly assembly.

1. The Jewish scholar view – From Philo onward, Jewish commentators have generally held that the plural is because God is addressing his heavenly court, i.e. the angels.
 - a. DeMars cites a Jewish scholar: "The Answer to the question is simple. If you search the Bible you will find that when the Almighty speaks of "us" or "our", He is addressing His ministering angels" Jason DeMars, "Jewish

Understanding of ‘Let Us’ in Genesis 1:26”, Cited by Rabbi Tovia Singer.
Present Truth Ministries, May 14, 2010.

b. The additional texts that utilize first person plural are Gen. 3:22; 11:7 and Isa. 6:8. “In all these passages there is good reason to see in the background echoes of the mythological picture of the heavenly court with whom the supreme God takes council when important decisions have to be made.”

[Emphasis Mine] Robert Davidson, *The Cambridge Bible Commentary*, p. 24.

1. In regard to Isaiah 6:8, Mackay (reformed writer) notes ... it is probably that Yahweh here graciously condescends to include his court attendants. (cf. Ps. 89:7; Dan. 4:13-19) in the execution of his purpose....” –

Mackay, Isaiah, p. 173. [Emphasis Mine]

2. This third view is most consistent with the text, but does God really need council of the heavenly host before making a big decision? No.

a. The text indicates that we have a single person (God) addressing a group (members of His divine council).

b. To understand the interplay between God and the heavenly host consider this illustration.

1. “Let’s have pizza,” spoken to the group. I drive to the pizzeria, I order, I pay for the pizza and bring it to everyone at home to eat. I did it all.

2. Genesis 1:27 makes clear God created man and not the heavenly court ... God created him ... He created them. God acted alone in the creation.

3. Solidifying this point is Wenham’s comment, “ ‘Let us create man’ should therefore be regarded as a divine announcement to the heavenly court, drawing the angelic host’s attention to the master stroke of creation, man, as Job 38:4,7 puts it ‘When I laid the foundation of the earth ... all the sons of God shouted for joy’ (c.f. Luke

2:13-14).” Gordon J. Wenham, *The Word Bible Commentary, Genesis*, p. 28.

[Emphasis mine]

4. Consequently, God included the heavenly host in the event of man’s creation, but only God (the Most High Elohim) did the creating of mankind. The lesser elohim watched. “And God created man in His own image....” Gen. 1:27.
5. Further note that the Scripture is clear that the court was present at creation.
 - a. Job 38:7

“⁷ When the morning stars sang together
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

C. Of note as well is the verbal exchange between the serpent and Eve. The text may reveal a plural construction of “God”.

1. Genesis 3:5

“⁵ For God (*elohim*) knows that on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil.”

2. “Elohim” may be translated singular or plural depending upon context. Most translations render the term as singular – “God”, But the New English Translation Bible translates “elohim” as plural with the words “divine beings”.
3. The New English Translation Bible includes the following detail on if “elohim” should be translated “Gods”.

It is unclear how the plural participle translated “knowing” is functioning. On the one hand ... (*yodé’e*) could be taken as a substantival participle functioning as a predicative adjective in the sentence. In this case one might translate: “You will be, like God himself, knowers of good and evil.” On the other hand, it could be taken as an attributive adjective modifying ... (*elohim*). In this case ... [*elohim*] has to be taken as a numerical plural referring to “gods,” “divine beings,” for if the one true God were the intended referent, a singular form of the participle would almost certainly appear as a modifier. Following this line of interpretation, “You will be like divine beings who know good and evil.” The following context may favor this translation, for in 3:22 God says to an

unidentified group, “Look, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” It is probably that God is addressing his heavenly court....

-- *New English Translation*, First Edition. Gen. 3:5 [Emphasis mine]

4. Translators will opt for the singular translation “God” because of monotheistic concerns.

D. Secondly, how do we understand being made in ‘our image’ and ‘our likeness’.

1. Some would say that this designation means that the following features are present in man because they are shared with the creator.

a. Reasoning ability Language Emotions
Presence of soul/spirit Self-awareness Free will

b. If this is all, it works against the pro-life position. Keep in mind that the single cell zygote cannot do any of these things. Potentiality does not work either. This is the pro-choice position.

2. “Image” in Hebrew – (*selem*) originally meant something cut from an object.

“For example, a piece of clay cut from a sculpture. In such a case there exists a concrete resemblance between the object and the image. In the Bible (*selem*) also denotes a statue of himself that a king would erect to serve as a symbol of sovereignty (e.g. Daniel 3). The fact that (*saalem*) is applied to humans at creation indicates that they are God’s representatives on earth and have a character and being in keeping with that of the deity.” John D. Currid, *Genesis*, Vol. 1, p. 85. (Emphasis mine)

3. Regarding the angels’ image, Calvin remarks, “it cannot be denied that the angels were also created in the likeness of God, since as Christ declares (Matt. 22:30) our highest perfection will consist in being like them.” John Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. I, Chapter 15, p. 164.

a. Matthew 22:30

“³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”

1. Calvin is drawing this point from us being like the angels.

b. Berkof disagrees. “In many cases the assumption that the angels were also created in the image of God results from a conception of the image which limits it to our moral and intellectual qualities. But the image also includes the body of man....” Louis Berkof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 206.

4. Berkof has a point in that our physical bodies, which will also be renewed in the afterlife (I Cor. 15:42-50) is something unique to humanity and unlike divine beings. Also note that there is no help for angels.



a. Hebrews 2:16

“¹⁶ For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.”

II. Are humans that different than lesser *elohim* even though our abode is Earth while theirs is the spiritual world?

A. Things we do share with divine beings:

1. Things we share:



Intellectual Ability

Note cleverness and cunning	Gen. 3
Logic in attacking Job	Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5



Worship of God

They praise God as we do	Hebrews 1:6; Luke 2:13-14
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Language and Communication

Note Job again	Job 1-2
Satan understands Christ	Mark 8:33
The Legion spoke to Christ	Mark 9:5
Angels spoke to Mary, Daniel, John	




They sing and have Creative Expression

Sang at creation	Job 38:7
Before the Lamb	Rev. 5:8-10



Immortality

Those who do not fall	Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:12-15
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Emotions such as Joy, Love, Desire, Anger and Pride

When a sinner repents	Luke 15:10
The Devil's wrath	Rev. 12:12
Desire to understand salvation	I Peter 1:12

2. *Answers in Genesis*, Bodie Hodge writes:

“Of the many attributes Christians often cite as distinctions between mankind and animals as evidence man is made in the image of God, these same attributes are found in heavenly beings. ... I am not aware of any major theological problems if one considers spiritual beings made in the image of God. Therefore, it may be wise to leave open the possibility that heavenly beings are made in the image of God.” *Answers in Genesis*, “Were Angels Created in the Image of God”, June 8, 2010. Bodie Hodge. (Emphasis mine.)

B. Note the Westminster Shorter Catechism.


1. Question #10: How did God create man?

Answer: God created man, male and female, in his own image with knowledge, righteousness and holiness, to rule over the creatures.



Colossians 3:10

“¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—”



Ephesians 4:24

“²⁴ and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

- a. How can divine beings possess less? True image bearers must all possess these three – righteousness, holiness, truth (knowledge).

C. All of this leads me to conclude that in a large measure, humans share image bearing with divine beings.

1. One significant difference is in the human physical body. The host of heaven do not share this.
2. Hugh Ross states: “The Bible never refers to angels being made in the image of God, but the angels being called sons of God implies that in some context God did make them in His image.” Hugh Ross, Reasons.org. “Were Angels Made in the Image of God?” July 9, 2021.

III. The Two Families

A. Man created in our image and likeness.

1. Plural form in use and also after the fall.

- a. Genesis 3:22

“²² Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’.”

B. If likeness and image entail freewill, reasoning ability, language, etc. plus knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, then how do lesser *elohim* possess less?

1. It is difficult to categorically state since the Bible is not explicit, but it seems inferred that we share image status with divine beings in some way.

IV. The Divine “Sons of God” and the Earthly “Sons of God”.

A. Divine Sons – “Divine” is a problematic term for Christians.

1. These divine beings are called “sons of God”.
2. They are in effect God’s heavenly family.


3. Divine refers to origin rather than communicable and incommunicable attributes of God alone.

B. The Unseen Family of God and the Human Family of God


1. Hebrew designation – “Sons of God” (*beney elohim*)

a. This Hebrew designation does not correspond to the term “angel”. The term “angel” is never used of the “sons of God”.


2. Texts.

 a. Job 38:7

“⁷ When the morning stars sang together
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

 Job 1:6

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

 Job 2:1

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

 Isaiah 14:13

“¹³ But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
And I will sit on the mount of assembly
In the recesses of the north.’”

b. It is obvious from these texts that the “sons of God” are not human.

c. Note designation “stars” – ancient people believed “stars” were living entities.

These “stars” saw the beginning of life as we know it (Job 38:9).

3. The term “Sons of God” is a family term. God has an unseen family, too. In fact, they are the original family. They originated in and are created and sustained by God.

a. Paul used similar understanding in describing us.

1. Acts 17:28

“²⁸ for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’”

6. They bear God’s image in some spiritual sense as we do in a physical sense because this is an original likeness.

C. Humans as “sons of God.”

1. Note some texts.

a. Matthew 5:9

“⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

b. John 1:12

“¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”

c. I John 3:1-3

“¹ See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

2. Having fallen, it would take an adoption for us to become sons of God.

a. Galatians 4:4-5

“⁴ But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”



b. Ephesians 1:4-5

“⁴ Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.”

V. The interface between the two families.

A. “Image” is key.

1. Note the preposition “in the image of God.” In English we use the preposition “in”



to denote many different ideas.

a. “Put the dishes in the sink” – denotes location.

b. “Broke the mirror in pieces” – result of some action.

c. “I work in education” – denotes work as a teacher or principal.

2. Heiser maintains the last example directs how we should understand the Hebrew preposition in Genesis 1:26.



a. Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, pgs. 42-43:

If we think of imaging as a verb or function, that translation makes sense. We are created to image God, to be his images. It is what we are by definition. The image is not an ability we have, but status. We are God’s representatives on Earth ... But he [God] has also created the other elohim of the unseen realm. They are also like Him. They carry out His will in that realm, acting as His representatives. They are his heavenly council in the unseen realm. We are God’s council and administration in this realm. Consequently, the plurals inform us that both God’s families – the human and non-human – share imaging states, though the realms are different.

B. When we are glorified, the two families will worship God in the new Eden.



1. Revelation 21:1-2

“¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.”

2. Yet, redeemed man will sit in judgment over fallen divine beings.

a. I Corinthians 6:2-3

“² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?”


1. This comment by Paul is stated nowhere else in Scripture.

2. Strange as it sounds, redeemed man will sit in judgment over divine beings who fell from positions of authority. See Pratt, *New Testament Commentary, I & II Corinthians*, p. 86.


VI. Yet, Jesus is the first Son of all. Note uniqueness of the second person of the Trinity.

A. Jesus as the “only begotten Son of God.”

1. Key texts:

 a. John 1:14, 18

“¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... ¹⁸ No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”

 b. John 3:16, 18

“¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

“¹⁸ He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

 c. I John 4:9

“⁹ By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.”

2. If He is the only divine Son, how can there be others? Note further explanation of “only begotten” below.

B. “Only begotten”

1. The phrase is translated by the Greek “*monogenes*”.
2. It does not mean begotten in a birthing sense.
 - a. It literally means “one of a kind” or unique.
 - b. First in preeminence
3. Jesus is identified with Yahweh which means He is unique among the other elohim who serve God. He is the Son of God.
4. Another New Testament writer uses the same Greek word “*monogenes*” of Isaac.
 - a. Hebrews 11:17

“¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son.”
 - b. The Old Testament notes that Isaac was not the only begotten son of Abraham. Ishmael was fathered earlier. (Genesis 16:15; 21:3).
 1. Isaac was Abraham’s only unique son as a son of the promise covenant.
5. As saved human beings, we are sons of God as are the unfallen host of heaven, but Jesus is intrinsically and completely unique as “God’s Son.”

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