

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

“The Third Primeval Rebellion” – Part A

I. Introduction

A. The third rebellion closes out the primeval narrative.

1. The **first rebellion** was noted in Genesis 3.

a. Satan’s temptation and man’s fall into sin were not previously discussed because of many comments noted in my other courses and sermons.

2. The **second rebellion** was recorded in Genesis 6:1-5.

a. In both the first and second rebellions, man was fully culpable for his sin.

b. Nonetheless, divine beings played a diabolical role.

1. All rebellion is an affront to God and results in judgment.

2. The powers of darkness played a critical role in man’s continuing descent into sin.

3. The **third rebellion** concerns Genesis 10 (The Table of Nations) and Genesis 11 (The Tower of Babel incident).

1. This event closes out the primeval history of the Book of Genesis.

a. Genesis 1-11: Primeval History

Genesis 12-50: Patriarchal History

4. In this lesson, I want you to understand how God decided to temporarily set aside the nations of the earth and chose to build a new nation from Abraham. Secondly, we will begin to see how the “powers”, that became the powers of darkness, came to have regional authority.



B. God's original (revealed) intent.

1. After Eden, God still intended to dwell with all of humanity, but there was opposition.
 - a. Divine beings could still defect.
 - b. Heiser notes, "Enemies of Yahweh and his rule, from human to divine to something in between, lurked over the horizon. Heaven and earth were destined to be reunited, but it would be a titanic struggle." (Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, p. 110).
2. The order seems backward with the table of the nations (Genesis 10) preceding the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11).
 - a. There is no contradiction. Moses merely put the effect before the cause.

Genesis 10 gives an overview, and then Genesis 11 fills in the details. For example, Chapter One of a history book may contain an overview of World War I – along with a list of major events. But the very next chapter might detail what the world was like in the years before the war and what events led up to it. "The Tower of Babel sequence is explanatory – it tells the reader why and how the nations were developed." See Currid, *Genesis*, Vol. I, p. 238.

C. Introducing Nimrod

1. Genesis 10:6-12 chronicles the descendants of Noah's son Ham. It was Ham's son Canaan who was cursed (Gen. 9:25). Great detail is given concerning a descendent of Cush whose name was Nimrod.
 - a. He was a powerful leader and influential.
 - b. He was known as a "mighty warrior on the earth" (Gen. 10:8-9).
2. He is noted as a mighty hunter before Yahweh. Currid notes: (*Genesis*, Vol. I, p. 233)

Some commentators view this remark in a positive light – for example, Speiser, who argues that the preposition ‘before’ carries the meaning, ‘by the will of’. On the contrary, it may be argued that the preposition bears a hostile sense, on the lines of ‘openly before Yahweh’; in other words, Nimrod is flaunting his human prowess. The name ‘Nimrod’ may add weight to the latter interpretation because it probably means, ‘Let us rebel!’ ... Babel is obviously Babylon. [emphasis mine]

3. Nimrod as a possible giant. The term “powerful man” and “great warrior” is the Hebrew “*gibbor*” elsewhere translated as “mighty man,” a term used to describe the Nephilim in Genesis 6:4). All Nephilim were “mighty men”, but not all mighty men were necessarily Nephilim. So why consider Nimrod a giant? The main reason is that the LXX calls Nimrod a giant when it states that he “was the first giant (Greek: *gigas*) on the Earth” (Gen. 10:8). See LXX online Genesis 10:8-9: “⁸ And Chus begot Nebrod: he began to be a giant upon the earth. ⁹ He was a giant hunter before the Lord God; therefore they say, As Nebrod the giant hunter before the Lord.” Nimrod is therefore identified as the first giant to walk the earth after the Flood. Some speculation suggests that Cush’s wife could have had an affair with one of the sons of God. See Tim Chaffey, *Fallen*, pp. 281-284. I will not go to war over Nimrod being a giant, but it does have merit and fits the narrative.

4. Regarding Babylon – the location of the region is clearly the Mesopotamian context. “Assyria and Babylon are the two civilizations that will later destroy the dream of the earthly kingdom of God in Israel, dismantling, respectively, the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern (Judah).” Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, p. 115.

a. The mentioning of Nimrod, with his warlike description in the Table of Nations (Genesis 10:8-12) serves as a theological bridge between the violation of Genesis 6:1-4 and the Tower of Babel.

II. Tower of Babel

A. It was here, Babylon, where people sought to “make a name for themselves” (Gen. 11:4).

1. The Tower would reach to the heavens into the realm of the gods. The Tower was located in what would later be called Babylonia – modern day Iraq.



2. Genesis 11:1-9

“¹ Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. ² It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.’ And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. ⁴ They said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’ ⁵ The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. ⁶ The Lord said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.’ ⁸ So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.”



B. Key Observations

1. Note the plural language in verse 7. This is similar to Genesis 1:26.

2. The people used clay because stone was unavailable. Asphalt pits were in abundance. See Currid, *Genesis*, Vol. I, p. 240.

3. The purpose is three-fold.

a. To build a tower whose top is “into the heavens” (11:4).

1. The idea was not to reach heaven, but rather bring heaven down to Earth.

God did come down, but they did not get what they desired.

b. They desire to build a name for themselves.

1. The quest of Humanism. To build a name has a long history.

a. Genesis 4:17

“¹⁷ Cain had relations with his wife and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son.”

b. The Sethites have no cities and their personal names disappear like a zephyr.

c. They believe they are mighty because of their numbers.

1. In Genesis 9:1, God commanded humanity to be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth. However, they condensed and wickedness increased – very similar to today’s cities.

4. The tower was actually a ziggurat. In ancient Mesopotamia (Iraq and Iran), they are noted as being a rectangular stepped tower.

a.



b. Similar structures are found all over the world.

III. Noting the interface between Genesis 11:1-9 and Deuteronomy 32:8-9.

A. In one of Moses' many sermons, he harks back to the pivotal moment when God disinherited the nations. Note the following variations in English versions.

1. Deuteronomy 32:8-9:

a. NASU

⁸ When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,
When He separated the sons of man,
He set the boundaries of the peoples
According to the number of the sons of Israel.
⁹ For the Lord's portion is His people;
Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance."

b. NET

⁸ When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,
when he divided up humankind,
he set the boundaries of the peoples,
according to the number of the heavenly assembly.
⁹ For the Lord's allotment is his people,
Jacob is his special possession."

c. ESV

⁸ When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
when he divided mankind,
he fixed the borders of the peoples
according to the number of the sons of God.
⁹ But the Lord's portion is his people,
Jacob his allotted heritage."

d. NRSU

⁸ When the Most High apportioned the nations,
when he divided humankind,
he fixed the boundaries of the peoples
according to the number of the gods;
⁹ the Lord's own portion was his people,
Jacob his allotted share."

B. Reasons for alternate readings.



1. The ESV, NET, and NRSU incorporate renderings from the DSS and LXX. The DSS read “the number of the sons of God” while the LXX reads “number of the angels of God.” See textual note in *Holman Christian Study Bible*, Deut. 32:8, p. 332.
2. The DSS “demonstrate conclusively that ‘the sons of god’ is the correct reading and that the traditional Hebrew text (MT) was altered, most likely because of a scribal concern about divine plurality,” Heiser, *Demons*, p. 147. [Emphasis Mine]



- a. Witherington confirms this conclusion. (Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Footnote 236, p. 527):

“There is a significant textual problem here. The earliest Hebrew text we have of this verse comes from Qumran and reads as we have translated it above (see QDtq), and furthermore the LXX and the Greek Targums seem to be compatible with this reading.”



- b. Christensen further notes the incentive to alter the MT (Christensen, *Word Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, Vol. 6B, p. 796.):

“It is easy to understand the change that was made in the MT to remove a text that seems to suggest the existence of other gods. ... These ‘divine beings’ are also mentioned in a variant reading of verse 43 [see page 820]. ... The idea of subordinate divine beings with whom God holds council, see Ps 82....”

- c. Additional scholars also note the change in the MT.

1. Telford Work, *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, p. 283.
2. Gerhard Von Rad, *Deuteronomy: The Old Testament Library*, p. 197.
3. Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy*, p. 297.

C. Nonetheless, orthodox and some reformed scholars resist the LXX and Dead Sea Scroll evidence.

1. John Currid is representative. In *Genesis*, Vol. I, p. 497-498 he writes:

“According to the Masoretic Text, God separated and established the nations of the world ‘**according to the number of the sons of Israel**’. There is much disagreement regarding this statement. Many commentators follow a textual variant that reads ‘according to the number of the sons of God’. A fragment of this text from the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q Deut 8) gives the alternative reading, as does the Septuagint.... If the alternative reading is correct, who are these sons of God? Some argue that they are a second tier of divine beings, a sort of divine council that serves Yahweh. Each nation is thus assigned a divine protector. A few commentators even suggest that this is an assembly of gods, in which certain gods are given to particular nations. The later view is certainly untenable given the ardent and strict monotheism in the Hebrew Bible, and Deuteronomy in particular.” [Emphasis Mine]

a. The concern in this matter is always over divine plurality and monotheism. Yet, biblical belief in lesser *elohim* does not disparage Yahweh because He is the Most High and has no equal. Lesser *elohim* do not possess His attributes.

2. However, Jewish sources of the Hellenistic and Talmudic periods elaborate on the point that God assigned the nations to lesser gods while retaining Israel (Jacob, Deut. 32:9) as His own. This picture...

“... indicating that God appointed divine beings to govern the nations on His behalf. Ben Sira paraphrases our passage as follows:

In dividing up the peoples of the world,
Over every people He appointed a ruler,
But the LORD’S Portion is Israel.

The ‘rulers’ are Ben Sira’s equivalent of Deuteronomy’s ‘sons of the divine’. The book of Daniel, from the same period as Ben Sira, refers to them as ‘governors’ or ‘princes’ (Heb. *sarim*) and describes them as angelic patrons and champions of various nations.”

– Jeffrey Tigay, Deuteronomy. [Emphasis Mine]

3. Some recent Jewish scholars echo the same sentiment. Lesser *elohim* understanding is simply an acknowledgement of the sovereign “Most High’s” prerogative to administrate the universe with lesser deities. Weinfeld notes: “The heavenly bodies as objects of worship were assigned to the nations by God himself.” (Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy* 1-11, p. 206).

IV. Further analysis of the scribal difference in the rendering of Deuteronomy 32:8-9 between the LXX, DSS and MT.

A. A similar alteration was made in Deuteronomy 32:43 where the NASU reads, “Rejoice, O Nations, with His people.”

1. Paul Sanders notes in *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, p. 156.

“The same kind of alteration is present in Deut. 32:43 where the Dead Sea Scrolls have plural *elohim* (‘Rejoice with Him O heavens, bow down to him, all gods’ ... The scribal hand is clearly censoring a reference to supernatural beings.”

2. Both the NRSV and the ESV use the DSS on this reading.

B. The dating and development of the MT to the exclusion of the LXX. (The Dead Sea Scrolls were not even discovered until 1947 and 1956.)

1. The LXX was completed, particularly the Pentateuch, by the middle part of the third century BC to the first century AD. Two fragments of Deuteronomy 32:7-9 have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls which obviously predates the MT (Formulation began around the 6th century and was completed in the 10th century by Talmudic scholars in Babylonia and Palestine). One fragment has *bene ‘elohim*, and the other is incomplete, but reads ‘*el* _____ (the rest of the word is not present). There is no way that the word was “Israel” in this text. However, ‘*elohim*’ or ‘*elim*’ could have easily been the missing word. Either word form would convey “sons of God.” See Chaffey, *Fallen*, pp. 442-443.

2. The incentive to change the reading from “the sons of God” to “Israel” would have been very strong during the formation of the Masoretic Text. Note the following:

a. It is highly unlikely that a scribe would be motivated to change “sons of Israel” to “sons of god,” but the reverse would be very understandable. If there was a concern over the existence of other gods, it would be problematic for Israelite theology, particularly for the Jewish propensity toward idolatry.



b. Chaffey makes an insightful point in *Fallen*, pgs. 443 and 444:

“... Why do we currently have ancient copies of the Greek Septuagint that often match both the Hebrew Dead Sea Scrolls and the writings of Josephus, but differ from the Masoretic Text? What other scenario could explain the differences. If the Septuagint translators were responsible for the changes, then why did Josephus possess Hebrew texts matching the LXX? And why do the Dead Sea Scrolls also match the LXX in these places, at least in those instances where we possess copies from Qumran?” [Emphasis Mine]

1. For more detailed analysis regarding general variations within the MT and LXX, see Henry Smith, “Setting the Record Straight on the Chronology of the Septuagint: A Response to Cosner and Carter.” Originally published in the Fall 2018 issue of *The Bible and Spade* in electronic form.

C. Furthermore, the context of Deuteronomy 32:8-9 supports the “sons of God”

designation. “Sons of Israel,” vs. 8, simply does not make sense.

1. Deuteronomy 32:8-9

“⁸ When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,
When He separated the sons of man,
He set the boundaries of the peoples
According to the number of the sons of Israel.

⁹ For the Lord’s portion is His people;
Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance.”

a. Verse 9 mentions Israel’s inheritance (Jacob). So how can verse 8 also refer to Israel? A reference to “Israel” twice makes the text incoherent.

b. Additionally, Israel as a nation did not even exist during the Babel event. What would be the point for first and second generation Jews who had departed Egypt? The reference in verse 9 indicates God’s love for His covenant people.

1. Heiser remarks in *Unseen Realm*, p. 113:



“Frankly, you don’t need to know all the technical reasons for why the ‘sons of God’ reading in Deuteronomy 32:8-9 is what the verse originally said. You just need to think a bit about the *wrong* reading, the ‘sons of Israel’. Deuteronomy 32:8-9 harks back to events at the Tower of Babel, an event that occurred *before* the call of Abraham, the father of the nations of Israel. This means that the nations of the earth were divided at Babel *before Israel even existed as a people*. It would make no sense for God to divide up the nations of the earth ‘according to the number of the sons of Israel’ if there was no Israel. This point is also brought home in another way, namely by the fact that Israel is not listed in the Table of Nations.” [Emphasis Mine]

c. The Lord’s portion is His covenant people “Jacob”. Deuteronomy 32:8-9 makes the most sense if the nations were previously disinherited and assigned “allotted” to other gods. God’s portion “Jacob” indicates a new people (Gen. 12:1-3). Note how Abraham’s call immediately follows the Babel incident. I believe this reasoning is persuasive.

d. Babel is also in view within Deuteronomy 4:19-20.

¹⁹ And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. ²⁰ But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today.”

1. While Deuteronomy 32:8-9 concerns the apportionment of the nations by God to the sons of God, Deuteronomy 4:19-20 concerns Gods allotment of the gods to the nations.

2. Heiser remarks in *Unseen Realm*, pg. 114:

“It is as though God was saying, ‘If you don’t want to obey me, I’m not interested in being your god – I’ll match you up with some other god.’ Psalm 82, where we started our divine council discussion, echoes this decision. That psalm has Yahweh judging other *elohim*, sons of the Most High, for their corruption in administering the nations. The psalm ends

with the psalmist pleading, ‘Rise up, O God, judge the earth, because you shall inherit all the nations.’”

3. John Currid notes in his commentary on *Deuteronomy*, p. 104:

“...these astral bodies were the principal objects to be regarded as personifications of the deities among the peoples of the ancient Near East. In Egypt, for example, the sun (represented by the god Re) was the most important object in the cosmological scheme. In Mesopotamia, the highest and most authoritative of the gods was Anu, god of the sky.”
[Emphasis Mine]

V. Summation and Conclusion

A. Bringing it all together.

1. The third rebellion, like the first two, causes cosmic and earthly disorder. God would no longer be dealing with humanity in general and will bring a new people into being (Abraham – Gen. 12:1-3).

a. Paul notes God’s sanction of the nations and warning to mankind to turn to Him.

1. Acts 17:26-27, 30-31:

“²⁶ and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ... ³⁰ Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

 2. Patrick Miller notes (*Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology*, pg. 438):

“As in Gen. 3:22, the building of the tower at Babel is a sin against God as an effort to move into the divine world, the divine domain. The threatened loss of creature limits (3:22a and 11:6-7) leads in both instances to the judging activity of God. In its judgment speech, Genesis 11, like 3:22, reflects a decree within the

assembly to create human disorder for the sake of cosmic order, the confusion among humankind to inhibit the breakdown of the orderly relationship between divine and human worlds.” [Emphasis Mine]

B. Note the rendering of Deuteronomy 32:43 as recorded in the MT, Q4Deut and LXX.

This verse buttresses 32:8-9.

1.



MT	4Q – DSS (Qumran)	LXX
O Nations, Rejoice His people	O Heavens, Rejoice with Him. Bow to Him, All gods (<i>elohim</i>)	O Heavens, Rejoice with Him. Bow to Him all the sons of God (<i>huiou theou</i>). O Nations with His people and let the angels of God (<i>angeloi theou</i>) strengthen themselves in Him.
Hebrew	Hebrew	Greek

- a. The summary point is that second temple period Jews would have been reading about lesser gods allotted to the nations in their Old Testament.
- b. The case is further confirmed by additional second temple writings which reflect this understanding.

C. Finally, there is familiar wording from God found at Babel.

1. “Let us go down” (Gen. 11:7) is familiar but the plural changes when action is required. “So the Lord scattered them.” (Gen. 11:8).
2. The divine council is, once again, included in the decision, but God Himself did the actual work!

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