



## **Worldviews Beneath Cosmological Kerygma:**

### **Existence and Agency of Demons as a Case Study**

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## **PRECIS**

Pentecostal communities believe in the power of the Holy Spirit in a healthy and empowering way. Instead, beliefs on the power and influence of demons, especially over Christians, generate unhealthy practices for the ministries of deliverance and exorcism. This paper examines selected worldviews beneath these beliefs within the field of demonology which distort the biblical trust of the love and sovereign care of God for his own people. These observations focus on mainly Derek Prince and C. Peter Wagner as worldviews related to Platonist dualism and warfare worldview, and hermeneutical study of Michael Heiser and his Divine council worldview. Within the forementioned worldviews there are systems which do not rest on the biblical base. For example, the spiritual legal system which operates behind the interpretation of curses and demonic presence draws from a hermeneutical methodology which do not honour the authority of the Bible but the authority of a human experience. The aim is to provide healthy principles for both theological and exegetical hermeneutics.

## INTRODUCTION

Europe was once, half a millennium ago, a monocultural entity with one dominant religion, Western Catholic Christianity. Since the era of Reformation and Enlightenment, that has changed, and today the Europeans live in a religious diversity which has been impacted by secularization as well as many faith traditions other than Christianity. According to several studies, the importance of religion has diminished in Western Europe more than in any other continent. Peter Berger argues that the main reason could be found from Europe's distinctive political and educational history. However, Europe is an exception, and the earlier theories of inevitability of secularization should be revised while failing to be a correct way to reflect the role of religion and religiosity in other continents as noted by Berger.<sup>1</sup>

Secularization theories have been questioned by many scholars of sociology. Jorge Botelho Moniz has studied theories of secularization which aim to understand this phenomenon in the European context. One remark is the diversity of worldviews—religious, irreligious, or nonreligious, and the mutual fragilization of these worldviews. This is assumed to be a result of a contact and interpenetration between different understandings of the world, truth, and the concept of a good life. Furthermore, this will lead to fragmentation of religious truths in general. Moniz describes secularization and diversity with the following elements.

1. The processes of social and structural differentiation.
2. The assertion and hegemony of secular principles that aim to replace religious ones.
3. The removal of religion from the public space, especially at the level of control and reassertion of everyday interactions.
4. The fragmentation of the plausibility structures of religion.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter L. Berger, "Secularization and De-secularization," in *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformation*, ed. Linda Woodhead (Psychology Press, 2002), 336–344.

5. The relativization of beliefs since the diversity of and competition between religious worldviews makes it difficult for any one of them to be declared as the true one.<sup>2</sup>

As a consequence of this competition of worldviews it is increasingly challenging to maintain the kerygma of Christian biblical worldview even within a Christian context.

This study focuses on the importance of a healthy biblical worldview in relation to preaching and practices within church communities. Biblical worldview is challenged by other non-Christian worldviews and secularization but there is an additional threat that emerges from within a group of Christian religious worldviews.

James Sire explains that worldview is a commitment, and it can be expressed as a set of presuppositions. These may be true or false, but they form a foundation on which a person lives and understands the reality. Worldview answers the questions of what is really real, what are material and spiritual realities, what is a humanity, and how should the relationships between all these be understood.<sup>3</sup> It needs to be noted that there is no singular Christian biblical worldview, which would be constructed without any contextual elements. Therefore, for an evaluation of worldviews within a Christian context it is a necessity to distinguish the cultural, ideological, or other elements which potentially undermine the structural elements for healthy theology. Likewise, it is important to create a profound understanding of dogmas which form the robust foundation for Pentecostal theology and praxis. These are a strong Christology, Pneumatology, and missional-trinitarian understanding of the church as a body of Christ. However, due to the limits of this essay, these dogmas are not elaborated further.

The chosen topic for this paper is narrowed to cosmology, and the role and place of demons in the cosmos. The aim is to present examples which have challenged Pentecostal teaching of demonology, and deliverance and exorcistic practices. It is not easy to argue why

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<sup>2</sup> Jorge Botelho Moniz, "Secularization in Europe: Causes, Consequences, and Cultural Diversity," in *Religion, Quo Vadis? Secularization in the Modern World* 2023, 14(3), 423; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030423>.

<sup>3</sup> James W. Sire, *The University Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 4–9.

these practices have gained platform in European Pentecostalism,<sup>4</sup> but it is possible to observe some key elements behind the phenomenon.

Keith Warrington writes that Pentecostals generally accept the existence of demons and believe that exorcism is part of the gospel commission. He describes the characteristics of the common assumptions within Pentecostals.

Some argue it is helpful to think of demonic activity directed toward the Christian as on a sliding scale of intensity from temptation, through persistent oppression of the mind, to total control of a specific area of one's life. However, demonic influence in the lives of Christians should be differentiated from the dominating influence demon may have over a non-Christian, given that Christians are believed to have considerable supernatural resources available to combat demonic influence, as delegated to them by God.<sup>5</sup>

Classical Pentecostals do not accept the possibility of demons to possess Christians.<sup>6</sup>

However, there are various trends within Global Pentecostalism which contain features other than confirmed within Classical Pentecostal doctrinal traditions. The possibility of the acceptance of the variety of cosmologies within Pentecostal beliefs is embedded within the usual acceptance of an enchanted worldview as an umbrella term for more specific expression of cosmological views, structures, and hierarchies of immaterial beings and agents.

David Garrard describes the strong demonology, and practical challenges of these beliefs in Central African Pentecostal communities. Garrard's focus is on the question of the possibility of demon possession in Christian believers within the groups that he names as

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<sup>4</sup> There are no consistent studies available. However, there are remarks from local communities such as Finnish Pentecostal Church or Evangelical Free Church of Finland and how these demonological practices gained platform.

<sup>5</sup> Keith Warrington. "Exorcism". In *Handbook of Pentecostal Christianity*. Edited by Adam Stewart (Northern Illinois Cornell University Press, 2012), 81–84. Warrington provides also a helpful journey to the key biblical texts within the topic.

<sup>6</sup> Sanna Urvas, *Theology of Sin and Evil in Classical Pentecostalism. Two Case studies*. Doctoral dissertation. Faculty of Theology University of Helsinki (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2020), 81–86. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/items/e07f61f4-250f-480c-aeb7-f4cc8adb5c94>

New Pentecostals; also, the Neo Pentecostal name has been used.<sup>7</sup> The African traditional worldview with a rich cosmology is inevitably one of the main causes for the growth of such views and practices, but Opoku Onyinah has demonstrated in his research that this emphasis on deliverance, and the excessive need for exorcism were imported to Akan Pentecostalism from outside of Ghana.<sup>8</sup> The Church of Pentecost in Ghana, and globally, has produced an entire educational program to train their pastors against harmful theological beliefs which generate unhealthy praxis for Pentecostal Charismatic communities. These same influential voices have been recognized behind Afro-European Pentecostal communal life, as noted by Garrard.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, these voices and their influence have been recognized also in Finnish Pentecostal movement and other charismatic communities, for example the Evangelical Free Church of Finland. This paper is co-authored with a Bible scholar from that denomination, Dr. Markus Nikkanen, who will provide insights for the last presented worldview by Michael Heiser.

### **DEREK PRINCE AND THE WORLDVIEW BEHIND HIS DELIVERANCE MINISTRY**

Derek Prince (1915–2003) was an international and influential speaker, author, and a teacher. Derek Prince Ministries has spread to almost all corners of the globe.<sup>10</sup> Prince and his ministry have become famous from many charitable projects which needs to be commended but the focus of this study is the controversial and unfortunate emphasis on teaching of the demonization of Christians, and the need for deliverance within the believing Christian communities. There are studies which raises the concern of these practices. The

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<sup>7</sup> David Garrard, “Witchcraft and deliverance: An exaggerated theme in Pentecostal churches in Central Africa”. In *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*, Vol. 37:1 (2017), 52–53.

<sup>8</sup> Urvas, *Theology of Sin and Evil*, ch.4.

<sup>9</sup> Garrard, “Witchcraft and deliverance”, 54.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.derekprince.com/>

main concern is the causality between health, illness—and especially mental health—and demons, and the potential denial of medical science and professionals even in the cases of life-threatening illnesses.<sup>11</sup>

Prince was born in India to an upper-class British family. Prince describes the influence of his nanny and esoteric wisdom of India which he adored in his early years.<sup>12</sup> Another source behind the construction of a worldview was his studies of Greek Philosophy in Cambridge University. Prince especially studied Platonism. Prince writes. “As I gained further insight into the way people become exposed to demons, I saw that my admiration for Socrates and Plato kept open a door in my personality that made me vulnerable to demonic influence.”<sup>13</sup> Additionally, he was influenced by African worldviews from his time living in Western Kenya.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, there are several sources which have influenced his worldview.

Prince has published multiple volumes in which he teaches and explains his theology in the practical level. The key volume is, *They Shall Expel Demons*. This is the most reliable source to understand his worldview according to the primary source principle. Prince was not a systematic theologian or systemic thinker. However, he describes his view of the cosmos,

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<sup>11</sup> Jean Mercer, “Deliverance, Demonic Possession, and Mental Illness: Some Considerations for Mental Health Professionals,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 16 (6) 2012: 595–611, doi:10.1080/13674676.2012.706272; Michael J. Sersch, *Demons on the Couch. Spirit Possession, Exorcism and the DSM-5*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019).

Annah Paraffin has written an interesting and informative case study. Annah Paraffin, “Pentecostal Healing and Schizophrenia”. In *Pentecostalism and Human Rights in Contemporary Zimbabwe*. Edited by Francis Machingura, Lovemore Togarasei & Ezra Chitando (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 96–109.

Nathanael J. Homewood provides a descriptive study together with ethnographic methodology. Nathanael J. Homewood, *Seductive Spirits. Deliverance, Demons, and Sexual Worldmaking in Ghanaian Pentecostalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024).

The extreme belief in the healing power of God and the denial of medicine can result in death and conviction of manslaughter. This case is from 2022 Australia. The group is not official members of Pentecostalism, but their beliefs are similar. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-01-30/elizabeth-struhs-religious-group-guilty-manslaughter/104859334>

<sup>12</sup> Derek Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons. What You Need to Know about Demons – Your Invisible Enemies* (Derek Prince Ministries International, 2020), 124–125. See also Stephen Mansfield, *Derek Prince. A Biography. A Teacher For Our Time* (Derek Prince Ministries, 2005), 20–33.

<sup>13</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 125.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Stanley, “From Plato to Pentecostalism: Sickness and Deliverance in the Theology of Derek Prince”. In *the Studies in Church History* 58 (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 401–402. See also Mansfield, *Derek Prince*, 191.

demons, and the relationships between unseen world and humanity occasionally on a theoretical level but mostly as narratives from his life experience. These have been used as a source. Additionally, there are several studies on his theology which have been utilized.

Despite naming Greek philosophers as a cause factor for his own demonic influence, Prince utilized the Platonist cosmology in several ways. Firstly, he refers directly to Socrates as one source for the capacity and agency of demons.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, he derives the system and hierarchy of demonological sphere by utilising Greek words *daimon* and *daimonion* in the New Testament text without referring to wider cosmological insights given within an entire revelation of God, both Old and New Testaments.<sup>16</sup> Prince combines the primary meaning of assumed Greek concept of demons derived from the New Testament and applies it to the Old Testament. Obviously, this is an anachronistic way to read and relate these two texts together in light of revelation and information given via the Scriptures. This type of either narrative or symbolic hermeneutical reading was common during the Patristic era, but early Greek Church Fathers were famous apologists which safeguarded their theology from Hellenistic syncretistic errors. The main concern for the church fathers was to defend Christian proclamation of Christ and salvation, not to create an alternative worldview which would utilize the exact errors they were fighting against. Therefore, it is not possible to defend Prince's views by finding similarities from the Patristic material.<sup>17</sup>

There is another problem which is adopted from the Platonist worldview, namely a strong dualism. This is evident also in two ways. Firstly, dualism appears in a dichotomy of God and Satan in which Satan as Devil, and his demons receive a major sphere and power to influence all aspects of life. Per Prince, "Satan's headquarters and permanent residence are

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<sup>15</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 147.

<sup>16</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 14-18. The case study of Michael Heiser will focus on the Old Testament hermeneutics.

<sup>17</sup> See Urvas, *Theology of Sin and Evil*, ch.2 for further information about views of demonology during the patristic era.



still in ‘the heavenlies’.”<sup>18</sup> Prince continues to explain this by referring to Greek Platonist system and reflects that to interpret Paul’s letter to Ephesians 6:12 and Gospel of Matthew 12: 43–44. The challenge can be found in dividing the world in two, and neglecting the sovereign power of the Creator of all. Furthermore, the system of reference to Greek source as a primary and Bible as a secondary is highly problematic. However, Prince does not create a definite systemic explanation for the origin of demons.<sup>19</sup>

Additional problem is the Platonic dualism which places the immaterial realm as primary over material reality. Prince writes.

A lot of people imagine that what we see, touch, hear and taste are the only truly real items. Down through the ages, however, philosophers have come to the conclusion that what we see, touch, hear and taste are not truly real; they are temporary, and they are very often deceptive. These philosophers have warned us that you cannot rely on your senses.

And the Bible agrees! Paul said that the things that are seen are fleeting; the things that are not seen are eternal. In other words, our sensory world is passing away, and therefore only partly real because it does not endure.<sup>20</sup>

This view on matter was a major concern of early apologists who defended the Christian witness against pagan Greek metaphysics. Irenaeus was one of those voices and today we have a strong and robust Christology with the theology of Incarnation which proclaims the good news for all creation.<sup>21</sup> The importance of the positive view to the matter was precisely the things that separated early Christians from their pagan neighbours and promoted the birth of caritative love towards all human life and wellbeing. Otherworldly orientation within early Pentecostalism generated a neglect of social and societal awareness especially among White

<sup>18</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 149.

<sup>19</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 145–152.

<sup>20</sup> Derek Prince, *The Devil’s Plan to Destroy Your Life*, revised edition (Charlotte: Derek Prince Ministries, 2007), 12.

<sup>21</sup> See more about Irenaeus’ contribution to the theology of Incarnation. Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Introduction,” in *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus against Heresies. Selected and with an Introduction by Hans Urs von Balthasar*, translated by John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 1–11.

Pentecostals during the early development of Classical Pentecostalism.<sup>22</sup> Fortunately, global Pentecostal communities have a large variation in social engagement in today's world.<sup>23</sup>

Strong dualism between material and immaterial world promotes also the denial of scientific knowledge. This is especially dangerous in relation to medical science. Prince creates an opposition between psychology and psychiatric science and interpretation of related phenomena with demonic origin. There are two layers of interpretative errors. Firstly, the mental dimension of a person is distinguished with dualism in which all negative emotions, feelings and thoughts are considered harmful and alien to humanity and a Christian. Secondly, those aspects in a person's mental health are assumed to be originating from demons, and any sources pointed out in psychiatric evaluation is claimed to be false. It is exceedingly dangerous for a suffering person if a diagnosis for mental illness is claimed to only cloak the real cause which is assumed to be a demon or from a demonic origin.<sup>24</sup>

There are four key rules and principles for a healthy construction of demonology. Firstly, Bible does not provide any specific information for the origin or the creation of demons. This fact alone should be regarded as a hint that humans do not benefit from that information because our attention should be directed primarily and uninterruptedly only towards Christ and the sovereign rule of ever loving trinitarian God. Secondly, there is a warning of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden, from which a man was not supposed to eat (Gen. 2:18). Therefore, we are not encouraged to seek deeper knowledge of the evil outside the Scriptures and the visible world. Thus, one should not invent any birth narratives, and one should not operate with the knowledge taken from other sources than Bible. Thirdly, all theological hermeneutics should keep Christ as a primary focus. Fourthly,

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<sup>22</sup> Progressive Pentecostalism pronounces the change in this paradigm. Donald E. Miller & Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism. The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 1–5.

<sup>23</sup> Allan H. Anderson, "Pentecostalism and Social, Political, and Economic Development," *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 2020), 121–136.

<sup>24</sup> See Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 94, 101, 169, 173–176.

the hermeneutical methodology in theologizing should remain respectful of faithful reading of Bible within its own inspired revelation; not intruding any alien ideas or systems. Prince follows the first rule, not to create a narrative for the birth of demons but fails with the rest.

It is always necessary to critically evaluate hermeneutical principles of any given theological construction. Prince describes his theological method both in theoretical and narrative ways. It is obvious that the base is in the experiences of his own life story, which then encouraged him to seek answers from the Bible. But rather than keeping the biblical text as an authority in itself, Bible text was utilized to confirm his own experiences. Prince tells how he was delivered from demonic presence in his life, and he fluently utilizes this personal experience as a key method for constructing his theology. He writes. “Now, as I studied the gospel accounts in the light of my new experiences...”<sup>25</sup> Additionally, this was transformed to theological claims which were then preached for the church. Prince served only a short period within a Pentecostal denomination and due some critique against his methods and teaching, he left to form an independent ministry of deliverance.<sup>26</sup>

It is notable that he does not utilize explicitly any biblical sources neither any analytical method to draw observations from the Bible. This opens a door to an unconscious application of other worldviews than those presented in the Scriptures. Worldview can also distort the terms which can be found from the Bible but again, the interpretation of a concept does not remain within the biblical boundaries. Curses are an example of this. The power of curses has been promoted by for example Derek Prince, Rebecca Brown<sup>27</sup>, Charles Kraft and Ed Murphy. It is possible to observe the above-mentioned systemic problems which combines curses and demonic influence or demonization together, which furthermore, lead to off-balanced teaching and practices. Cheong Weng Kit provides a balanced and theological

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<sup>25</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 94.

<sup>26</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 107. See also Mansfield, *Derek Prince*, 194–195.

<sup>27</sup> Rebecca Brown, *Unbroken Curses: Hidden Source of Trouble in the Christian's Life* (Kensington: Whitaker House, 1995).

sound analysis of curses from the biblical perspective and reminds that “there is no explicit mention of demonisation as a result of curses on believers.”<sup>28</sup> He also equates such a belief linear to animistic assumptions.<sup>29</sup> Biblical view of curses acknowledges the force of the flesh on humans and power of Christ to break it via redemption and personal salvation. The only generational curse applicable to Christians is the result of the Fall of humanity and the remaining effects are the failure to live according to the call to imitate Christ in a personal life.

### **SPIRITUAL WARFARE PRAYER AND A WARFARE WORLDVIEW**

The last example of distorted worldview in theological constructions is related to spiritual warfare prayer. The idea of spiritual battle is very old. For example, one of the early church fathers, Evagrius Ponticus (345–399) taught his disciples of eight evil thoughts which prevented monks to advance in their spiritual growth.<sup>30</sup> Pseudo Macarius, who was greatly loved by John Wesley, wrote about the spiritual battle against sin and evil within a human heart.<sup>31</sup> A robust Pentecostal theology of sin requires the acknowledgement of human problems firstly in the realm of sinfulness of human heart than outside influences, and especially related to demons.<sup>32</sup> Cory May writes about Cyprian of Carthage (c200–258) and his theo-psychology of sin in light of Spirit-empowered Christianity.<sup>33</sup> This reveals the importance of the correct reading of a human, sinfulness and the world around us.

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<sup>28</sup> Cheong Weng Kit, “Spiritual vulnerability through demonization in curses? A critical reassessment,” *Jurnal Teologi Amreta* Vol.1 No. 1 (December, 2017), 76.

<sup>29</sup> Cheong Weng Kit, “Spiritual vulnerability through demonization in curses?”, 76.

<sup>30</sup> Learn more about Evagrius Ponticus from Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius Ponticus: Beyond Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Kallistos Ware, “Preface,” in the *Pseudo-Macarius. The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and The Great Letter*. Translated, edited and with an Introduction by George A. Maloney (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 4.

<sup>32</sup> Urvas, *Theology of Sin and Evil*, ch. 2.6.

<sup>33</sup> Cory J. May, “The Ethics, of St. Cyprian: Exploring Repentance, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation for Contemporary Spirit- Empowered Communities,” in *The Pandemic & Holy Spirit. From Lament to Hope and Healing*. Edited by Wonsuk Ma, Opoku Onyinah and Rebekah Bled (Tulsa: Oral Roberts University Press, 2024), 46–47.

Satan has always been an adversary to church and Christians, but New Apostolic Reformation advanced the vision of spiritual warfare to the level which did not cohere with the biblical worldview. Yvie Ruth Baker has described the development of the modern views of spiritual warfare prayer. Baker demonstrates how, again, there was very little biblical ground for entire prayer tactic and especially the concept of spiritual mapping. The base of gaining knowledge is via human experience, as Baker writes, “method of locating demons was the process of ‘sensing’ or ‘discerning’ through prayer.”<sup>34</sup> Pentecostal spirituality acknowledges the gift of discernment, but it should never operate outside of the healthy boundaries provided in the Scriptures.

Spiritual warfare advocates several errors as related to the worldview. It places Satan and demonic realm too high, and in the seat of unrealistic importance. It pictures human as capable to operate with spiritual power through prayer which has no support from the Bible and thirdly, it promotes a way of life which neglects the ordinary living as mundane. The life with Jesus seems a battle from morning to evening. Charles Kraft, one inventor of these view wrote.

“When evangelicals ask me how to gain insight into what is going on in the spirit world, I frequently recommend reading *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*. Though Peretti uses imagination to construct his stories, he offers great insight into what probably goes on in the invisible spirit world. He knows what he is dealing with and deserves to be taken seriously.”<sup>35</sup>

This reveals the sources of the knowledge that are not biblical. Therefore, it is necessary to construct the cosmological insight strictly within the knowledge available in the Old and New Testament. Now it is time to look at the exegetical methodology and the current discourse related to demonology and cosmology in the academic discourse.

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<sup>34</sup> Yvie Ruth Baker, *From Peter Wagner to Bill Johnson: The History and Epistemology of the "New Apostolic Reformation"*. Doctoral thesis (University of Otago, 2021), 187. Italics original.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Kraft, *The Evangelical's Guide to Spiritual Warfare: Practical Instruction and Scriptural Insights on Facing the Enemy* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2015), 22-23. Quoted in Baker, *From Peter Wagner to Bill Johnson*, 202.

### MICHAEL HEISER AND THE DIVINE COUNCIL WORLDVIEW<sup>36</sup>

Michael S. Heiser (1963–2023) was a North American evangelical biblical scholar who earned his doctorate in Hebrew and Semitic Studies from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, a leading research university, in 2004.<sup>37</sup> He is best known for his books,<sup>38</sup> podcasts,<sup>39</sup> and films,<sup>40</sup> which focus on the unseen realm and the so-called divine council worldview. Heiser defined this worldview as “God’s rule over all things, visible or invisible, through his intelligent agents—his imagers—both human and nonhuman.”<sup>41</sup>

Heiser’s personal story is one of awakening to the supernatural worldview of the Bible from what he calls the “selective supernaturalism” of his own noncharismatic background.<sup>42</sup> For Heiser, this meant embracing an enchanted worldview while holding fast to biblical inspiration and inerrancy.<sup>43</sup> He wanted to “recover a biblical theology of the unseen world ... not derived from tradition but rather framed exclusively in the context of the Bible’s own worldview.”<sup>44</sup> In order to do this, the Bible had to be read without filters,<sup>45</sup> that

<sup>36</sup> I wish to thank Dr Nathan French for his insights on Heiser and Genesis 6:1–4.

<sup>37</sup> Heiser’s dissertation and academic articles focus on the question of YHWH’s divine council and seek to invalidate the idea that Israelite religion progressed from polytheism to monotheism. Instead, Israelite religion was monolatrous. See Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature” (PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004). Heiser has written extensively. For a list of his articles, see <https://drmsb.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Cumulative-Resume-2020.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *A Companion to the Book of Enoch: A Reader's Commentary, Vol I: The Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36)* (Crane: Defender, 2020). *A Companion to the Book of Enoch: A Reader's Commentary, Vol II: the Parables of Enoch (1 Enoch 37-71)* (Crane: Defender, 2020); *Demons: What the Bible Really Says About the Powers of Darkness* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2020); *Angels: What the Bible Really Says About God's Heavenly Host* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2018); *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, the Watchers, and the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (Crane: Defender, 2017); *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2015); *Supernatural: What the Bible Teaches about the Unseen World and Why it Matters* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> The Naked Bible podcast (<https://nakedbiblepodcast.com>).

<sup>40</sup> Heiser worked as a scholar-in-residence with the Faithlife Corporation and produced three over 60-minute documentary films: “The Unseen Realm,” “Demons,” and “Aliens and Demons: Evidence of an Unseen Realm,” and a documentary series “Angels.”

<sup>41</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 27n5.

<sup>42</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 17–18.

<sup>44</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 18, 20.

<sup>45</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 14–15.

is “creeds, confessions, and denominational preferences,”<sup>46</sup> while taking into account every biblical text, even the strange passages.<sup>47</sup> It is these odd passages that Heiser uses to create a sweeping metanarrative that “informs every Bible doctrine in significant ways.”<sup>48</sup>

### HEISER’S METANARRATIVE

In his main work, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, Heiser frames the biblical narrative as a struggle between God’s human and divine imagers, some of whom rebel and corrupt humanity.<sup>49</sup> The first rebellion occurs in Eden, where Heiser identifies the serpent as a divine throne guardian, citing Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 as examples of texts that draw on underlying tradition concerning this original rebel.<sup>50</sup> He rejects a pre-creation angelic fall, arguing that the first rebellion takes place in the garden, leading to human exile and the original rebel’s consignment to the underworld.<sup>51</sup>

The second rebellion precedes the flood (Gen. 6:1–4). Divine beings descend on Mount Hermon, fathering the Nephilim, whom Heiser links to the Rephaim and Anakim (Num. 13:33 cf. Deut. 2:10–11). He connects this narrative to Mesopotamian traditions and Second Temple literature, asserting that the spirits of the slain Nephilim become New Testament demons.<sup>52</sup>

The third rebellion follows the Tower of Babel incident (Genesis 11). Heiser, drawing on Deuteronomy 32:8–9 and Psalm 82, claims God disinherited the nations at Babel, placing them under lesser gods while keeping Israel as His own. These beings later ruled unjustly, prompting God’s judgment and plan to reclaim the nations.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 18–20. See a list of passages on page 19.

<sup>48</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 13.

<sup>49</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 90. Heiser talks about “an ongoing conflict between followers of Yahweh and human and divine beings who follow the spiritual path of the *nachash*.”

<sup>50</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 73–91.

<sup>51</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 91.

<sup>52</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 92–109, 183–191.

<sup>53</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 110–122.

Christ's mission, Heiser argues, reverses these rebellions.<sup>54</sup> His transfiguration on Mount Hermon symbolizes reclaiming rebel territory.<sup>55</sup> Jesus' declaration in Matthew 16:18 to build His church on "this rock" refers to Mount Hermon, near the "Gates of Hades," the supposed entrance to the underworld.<sup>56</sup> Through His death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ nullifies the authority of fallen divine beings, restoring believers as sons of God. The Great Commission, then, is a mission to reclaim the nations (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 17:26).<sup>57</sup>

### GENESIS 6:1–4 AS A TEST CASE

Heiser deserves recognition for elucidating the Ancient Near Eastern traditions that underpin the biblical texts and making them accessible to a wider audience within the church. However, while his thesis is based on accurate data, his interpretations often appear forced, relying on selective readings that are not always substantiated by the text itself. Heiser's interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 serves as prime example:

When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. 3 Then the LORD said, "My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years." 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown. (Gen. 6:1–4 NRSV)

#### *Accurate Data*

Scholars largely concur with Heiser that sons of God should be understood as referring to God's divine council.<sup>58</sup> While alternative interpretations, such as the Sethite view

<sup>54</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 267ff; *Reversing Hermon*, 87ff.

<sup>55</sup> Heiser, *Demons*, 258.

<sup>56</sup> Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 87–99.

<sup>57</sup> Heiser, *Demons*, 258–9.

<sup>58</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 94–97. See John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *Demons and Spirits in Biblical Theology. Reading the Biblical Text in Its Cultural and Literary Context* (Eugene: Cascade, 2019), 113–120, 177–186 for a recent discussion of the Mesopotamian background of Genesis 6:1–4. Heiser builds his case especially on Amar Annus, "On the Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 19.4 (2010): 277–320, and Helge Kvanvig, *Primeval History: Babylonian, Biblical, and Enochic: An Intertextual Reading* (Journal for the



and the identification of the sons of God with divinized human rulers, have been proposed in the past, the evidence supporting the divine council interpretation is comparatively stronger: (1) biblical authors employ the phrase “sons of God” to describe God’s entourage,<sup>59</sup> (2) the use of plural verbs in some texts suggests that biblical authors presuppose the existence of a divine council,<sup>60</sup> (3) Second Temple texts interpret Genesis 6:1–4 as referring to a fall of God’s angels,<sup>61</sup> and (4) early Church Fathers endorse this interpretation.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Jewish exegesis of the passage remains unchanged until the mid-second century, at which point “sons of God” is reinterpreted as humans.<sup>63</sup> In early Christian circles, this shift occurs even later: the Sethite interpretation emerges in the third century, while the traditional angelic interpretation persists until the fifth century.<sup>64</sup>

### *The Origin of Evil*

Problems arise when Heiser interprets the passage through the lens of the divine council. He proposes.

Genesis 6:1–4 describes an event where divine beings (‘sons of God’) intentionally violated their proper domain by fathering offspring with human women. This episode, in turn, leads to great wickedness and judgment, underscoring that supernatural rebellion was an active force in human depravity.<sup>65</sup>

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Study of Judaism Supplement 149; Leiden: Brill, 2011); Helge Kvanvig, “The Watcher Story and Genesis: An Intertextual Reading,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 18:2 (2004): 163–183. See also Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, eds., *The Fall of the Angels. Themes in Biblical Narrative. Jewish and Christian Traditions. Volume VI.* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> 4QDeut/LXX Deut 32:8; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Pss 29:1; 82:6; 89:7.

<sup>60</sup> Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8, 40:1–2.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Enoch 6–11, 15–16; Jub. 4.15; 5.1; 7.21–22; Sir. 16.7; Wis. 14.6; Bar. 3.24–28; T. Reub. 5.5–6; T. Naph. 3.5; 1 QapGen<sup>ar</sup> II.1; CD II.16b–19; 2 Bar. 56.12–15; 3 Bar. 4.10; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.1.73; Philo, *Gig.* 2.6; 13.58; *Quest.* 1.92; Jude 6, 14–15 cf. 2 Pet 2:4.

<sup>62</sup> Justin, *2 Apol* 5; Irenaeus, *Ad Haer.* 4.36; Pseudo-Clementine, *Homilies* 7.12–15; 8.11–15; Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 3.2; Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins* 7.

<sup>63</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude–2 Peter*. Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 50 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 51.

<sup>64</sup> Bauckham, *Jude*, 51. See John Chrysostom, *Homilies in Genesis* 22.2; Augustine, *The City of God* 15.23.

<sup>65</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 102.

Heiser's claim has multiple problems,<sup>66</sup> but the focus should be on Heiser's suggestion about the supernatural origin of evil. While traditional accounts emphasize human disobedience, Heiser suggests that evil is not solely the result of human sin but also of supernatural rebellion, and that Genesis 6:1–4 is one of the passages that further “the theme of conflict between divine rebels, the seed of *nachas*, and humanity that will impede the progress of Eden's restoration.”<sup>67</sup> It is impossible to arrive at this conclusion from the text.

Genesis 6:1–4 nowhere emphasizes the role of supernatural rebellion in the increase of human depravity. Rather, the actions of the sons of God are depicted as contributing to what is fundamentally a human enterprise—they are not the cause.<sup>68</sup> While a connection between verses 1–4 and verses 5–8, which function as a prologue to the Flood, is indicated through *Leitwörter*; “humans began to multiply,” “the wickedness of humans was great,” “the sons of God saw that,” “the Lord saw that,”<sup>69</sup> the text attributes moral culpability exclusively to humans (v. 5), who alone suffer the consequences of their actions (vv. 6–7).<sup>70</sup> Indeed, given that Genesis 6:1–4 is embedded within the *toledot* section spanning from Genesis 5:1 to 6:8, it is better understood as a sophisticated critique of the Sethite lineage rather than as the ultimate justification for the Flood. Although Seth's lineage is depicted as the more righteous line, inconsistencies emerge even within it. Indeed, John and Harvey Walton go so far as to

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<sup>66</sup> For instance, how does one derive an “intentional violation” from a text that presents events neutrally? The same is picked up by Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 180, 183 who write: “The traditional assumptions that the sin of angels is lust, cultic contamination, or mixing of categories (or all of these) are all derived from activities prohibited in Leviticus. Genesis 6 only says that the sons of God ‘married’ and ‘bore children,’ neither of which are inherently sinful.” Rather, “The divine beigns—*sons of God*—mixing with the human daughters of men is an indication that the order that is supposed to characterize the human world has not been established.”

<sup>67</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 109.

<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 185.

<sup>69</sup> Ronald Hendel, “The Nephilim Were on the Earth: Genesis 6:1–4 and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” in *The Fall of the Angels*. Themes in Biblical Narrative. Jewish and Christian Traditions, ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 12.

<sup>70</sup> Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 119, 180. Walton and Walton argue that the text does not view the actions of the sons of God as morally culpable. Hendel, “The Nephilim”, 12, takes a slightly different view while ascertaining that it is humans who are held accountable. Lev 19:19; 20:16 and Deut 7:3; 22:9–11 prohibit the mixing of two unrelated substances, and it is often suggested that ancient readers/hearers would have picked this up even though mixed unions are never explicitly criticized in the narrative.

argue that the placement of Genesis 6:1–4 in a different *toledot* than the Flood narrative suggests that “the sons of God and Nephilim are not actually associated with the flood at all.”<sup>71</sup>

### *The Nephilim*

Similar issues arise in Heiser's interpretation of the Nephilim in verse 4. While it is true that the disjunctive clauses in verses 3 and 4 are most naturally understood as qualifying and further explaining the narrative in verses 1–2,<sup>72</sup> the text never explicitly asserts that the Nephilim are the result of the sexual unions between the sons of God and humans.<sup>73</sup> This, however, constitutes a central element in Heiser's Divine council worldview, as he suggests, drawing on 1 Enoch 15–16, that demons were created when the sons of God had sex with women who then gave birth to quasi-divine Nephilim. When these Nephilim, then, perished in or after the Flood, demonic spirits were released from their bodies.<sup>74</sup>

The idea that some Nephilim survived the Flood arises from Heiser's interpretation of Numbers 13:33, the only other passage in the Hebrew Scriptures where this exact term is used.<sup>75</sup> By reading Numbers 13:33 as referring to the same Nephilim as the ones in Genesis 6:1–4, Heiser is able to interpret many other passages as referring to the quasi-divine Nephilim or their demonic spirits, for example, Anakim, Rephaim, Goliath, and Og.<sup>76</sup> This interpretation, however, contradicts the Flood narrative, which explicitly states that “everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died” (Gen. 7:25). Instead of

<sup>71</sup> Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 179–180. This may be, however, too strong a statement. See Chris de Jong, “Adam and Humanity. Meaning and Consequences of the Use of the Word Toledot in Genesis 2.4 and 5.1,” (MTh Diss. University of Utrecht, 2015) for a view of the use of the toledot that keeps them separate and yet belonging together.

<sup>72</sup> Hendel, “The Nephilim,” 15–16.

<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 118.

<sup>74</sup> Heiser, *Demons*, 136–144. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 105–109, 185–191.

<sup>75</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 189.

<sup>76</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 189–191, 192–214. A connection is made by using texts like Deut 2:10–11. 21; Josh 11:21–22; 14:12, 15. Heiser connects the theme of holy war with the attempt to annihilate the remaining Nephilim.

providing an alternative explanation for Numbers 13:33, Heiser contends that either the Flood was a local one or “the same kind of behavior described in Genesis 6:1–4 happened again”.<sup>77</sup> The point here is that Heiser is not reading the texts in their literary context. Rather, he is connecting passages with keywords based on ideas that are foreign to the text itself.

The problems surrounding Heiser’s selective and forced interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 carry on to other parts of his work. For example, in *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, the Watchers & the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* Heiser utilizes his interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 to make sense out of a Pauline text that continues to puzzle interpreters.

For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of<sup>78</sup> authority on her<sup>79</sup> head, because of the angels (1 Cor 11:10 NRSV).<sup>80</sup>

Heiser suggests that the text has to do with the lustful angels of Genesis 6:1–4,<sup>81</sup> ancient medical conceptions associating “woman’s hair with the conceiving of children” and men’s testicles,<sup>82</sup> Jewish sexual modesty, and “cosmic boundaries.”<sup>83</sup> Heiser writes the following.

Paul was concerned that if women didn’t show this sign [veil] of sexual fidelity and “ownership,” a woman could be at risk of sexual violation by angels. After all, it had happened before (Gen[esis] 6:1–4). Paul didn’t want to see such a violation of cosmic order happen again.<sup>84</sup>

There are multiple problems here.<sup>85</sup> First, the text does not explicitly refer to the husband’s authority over his wife, nor does it mention a sign signifying such authority.

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<sup>77</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 189.

<sup>78</sup> I have overlined the words “symbol of”, because they do not appear in the Greek text and are not otherwise supported.

<sup>79</sup> “Her” is not in the Greek text, but implied in the context.

<sup>80</sup> For a quick overview of translational issues surrounding 1 Cor 11:10, see Kendrick (The Bible Translator vol 46:3)

<sup>81</sup> Heiser receives this idea from Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “Why Should Women Cover Their Heads Because of the Angels? (1 Corinthians 11:10),” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 4 (2001): 205–234.

<sup>82</sup> This idea goes back to Troy W. Martin, “Paul’s Argument from Nature for the Veil in 1 Corinthians 11:13–15: A Testicle instead of a Head Covering,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123/1 (2004): 75–84.

<sup>83</sup> Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 133, 134, 135.

<sup>84</sup> Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 135.

<sup>85</sup> For a general review of scholarly literature on 1 Corinthians 11:10, see W. Gerald Kendrick, “Authority, Women, and Angels: Translating 1 Corinthians 11.10,” *The Bible Translator* 46/3 (1995): 336–343.

According to Gordon Fee, “there is no known evidence either that the word *exousia* was ever taken in ... passive sense” to designate a sign of authority “or that the idiom ‘to have authority over’ ever referred to an external authority different from the subject of the sentence.”<sup>86</sup> Consequently, the authority in question must be the woman’s own authority,<sup>87</sup> freedom, or right to choose.<sup>88</sup> After all, in the context of worship, the woman is obedient to God alone.<sup>89</sup>

Second, while some scholars have interpreted the broader passage (1 Cor 11:2–16) as addressing concerns related to modesty within the Corinthian church, they nevertheless reject the argument Heiser presents to support his interpretation, namely that ancient medical conceptions would have associated women’s hair with men’s testicles.<sup>90</sup> While such ideas do appear in Hippocratic texts,<sup>91</sup> there is no evidence to suggest that they would have persisted in Paul’s day, on the contrary.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the Greek term for a veil or covering (*περιβόλαιον*) in verse 14 is in the singular, which poses a problem for reading it as plural “testicles.”<sup>93</sup>

Third, while there are no direct linguistic connections between 1 Corinthians 11:10 and Genesis 6:1–4,<sup>94</sup> the interpretive possibility that Heiser advocates remains open to

<sup>86</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to Corinthians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Revised Edition. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 754.

<sup>87</sup> Morna D. Hooker, “Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. XI. 10,” *New Testament Studies* 10/3 (1964): 410–416.

<sup>88</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle*, 575–576

<sup>89</sup> Hooker, “Authority on Her Head,” 415–416.

<sup>90</sup> Martin, “Paul’s Argument from Nature.” See Mark Goodacre, “Does *περιβόλαιον* Mean ‘Testicle’ in 1 Corinthians 11:15?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130/2 (2011): 391–396. Heiser does not engage Goodacre’s arguments. Instead, he merely notices the article and suggests Martin’s subsequent response was “thorough.” See Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 305n219 and Troy W. Martin, “*Περιβόλαιον* as ‘Testicle’ in 1 Corinthians 11:15: A Response to Mark Goodacre,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132/2 (2013): 453–465.

<sup>91</sup> See Martin, “Paul’s Argument from Nature,” 78–80.

<sup>92</sup> Margaret Mowczko has shown that by the time of Paul women were actually thought to have testicles in place of what are nowadays called ovaries (see footnote 4). She argues this based on Galen’s texts. See Margaret Mowczko, “‘Covering’ or ‘Testicle’ in 1 Cor. 11:15? (Part 2),” <https://margmowczko.com/peribolaion-testicle-or-covering-part-2/>

<sup>93</sup> Goodacre, “Does *περιβόλαιον* Mean ‘Testicle’?,” 394–396.

<sup>94</sup> While the Septuagint version of Genesis refers to daughters, and sons of God, 1 Corinthians employs the terms women and angels.

consideration given that the Septuagint sometimes translates sons of God as angels.<sup>95</sup> Its likelihood, however, is already diminished, and in need of strong contextual support. However, Heiser does not engage with the actual text of 1 Corinthians in any detail. A thorough contextual analysis would have revealed a church deeply fascinated with angels, to the extent that its members believed they were speaking in angelic tongues (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1). Indeed, scholars suggest that angels are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:10 because they observe human actions, or because they function as guardians of the created order.<sup>96</sup> The first suggestion is based on 1 Corinthians 4:9 which mentions angels as observers and the second one notices that the argument in 1 Corinthians 11:7–10 is an argument from creation. There are no contextual indicators that link 1 Corinthians 11:10 to the fallen angels—a view Heiser adopts despite the greater plausibility of alternative interpretations.

Finally, recent scholarship has increasingly recognized that 1 Corinthians contains multiple citations from a letter the Corinthians had previously sent to Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 7:1). Lucy Peppiatt has argued that the seemingly incoherent and internally conflicted argument in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 becomes more intelligible when certain verses are understood as quotations from the Corinthians' own letter, which Paul then engages with.<sup>97</sup> While Peppiatt cannot definitively prove her thesis, her interpretation offers the most explanatory power for this notoriously difficult Pauline text. If Peppiatt is correct, 1 Corinthians 11:10 reflects the Corinthians' own position rather than serving as evidence that Paul was referring to fallen angels and the sexual threat they pose to women.<sup>98</sup> That is, Paul is opposing a view grounded in an idea Heiser wants to see lurking behind Paul's theology.

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<sup>95</sup> As seen in 4QDeut<sup>i</sup>/LXX Deut 32:8. Scholars agree that 4QDeut<sup>i</sup> 32:8 has the more ancient textual tradition.

<sup>96</sup> Kendrick, "Authority," 338-339.

<sup>97</sup> Peppiatt, *Women and Worship at Corinth: Paul's Rhetorical Arguments in 1 Corinthians* (Eugene: Cascade, 2015), 82-84.

<sup>98</sup> Peppiatt, *Women and Worship*, 139-140

Ultimately, Heiser's interpretations seem selective and unconvincing. He is not engaging in exegesis but in eisegesis, imposing meaning onto the text rather than drawing it from the text.

### INTERPRETIVE LENS: THE WATCHERS MYTH

In his effort to read the Bible without filters, Heiser has, paradoxically, adopted a new interpretive framework as the primary lens through which he engages with biblical texts. This approach is rooted in his close reading of the *Book of Watchers* (1 Enoch 1–36), a third-century BCE pseudepigraphal text which includes a peculiar and elaborated retelling of the Flood narrative (1 Enoch 6.1–10.22).<sup>99</sup> According to the pseudonymous Enoch, the Flood was caused by the fall of the Watchers—angels who violated divine boundaries by descending to earth, taking human wives (6.1–2), producing gigantic offspring, that later became demons, (15.9–12), and imparting forbidden knowledge (8.1–2). In essence, the Book of Watchers attributes the origin of evil to an angelic rebellion against God rather than to the sin of Adam.<sup>100</sup>

Heiser justifies the utilization of *the Book of Watchers* by arguing the following.

#### *Argument from Underlying Tradition*

First, Heiser states that the Flood narratives in the *Book of Watchers* and Genesis both draw upon the same underlying Mesopotamian tradition, which, for him, implies that the two texts fundamentally share the same worldview.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>99</sup> The Book of Enoch is a pseudepigraphal work, consisting of a collection of writings composed over a span of approximately three centuries (c. 200 BCE–100 CE). It is a Jewish apocalyptic text, though some later additions may reflect Christian influence (e.g. 1 Enoch 71:14). As an apocalyptic work, 1 Enoch features revelatory visions, heavenly journeys, interpreting angels, and historical retellings. See Susan Docherty, *The Jewish Pseudepigrapha: An Introduction to the Literature of the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 125–137.

<sup>100</sup> See e.g. Docherty, *The Jewish Pseudepigrapha*, 131. This is recognized by virtually every scholar.

<sup>101</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 102. Heiser draws on the recent scholarly discoveries concerning the *apkallu*, suggesting that the genealogies in Genesis 4 (Cain) and Genesis 5 (Seth) derive from an ancient Sumerian King

While the parallels between Mesopotamian tradition, Genesis 6:1–4, and the *Book of Watchers* are relatively clear, the exact relationship between these texts is more complex than Heiser suggests. It is one thing to assert that Genesis and the *Book of Watchers* draw from a common source, a shared cultural river to use John Walton’s term, and another to claim that they both reflect the same worldview.

After reviewing the evidence put forward by Amar Annus, John and Harvey Walton conclude that while it is possible to argue that the recently discovered Mesopotamian traditions “informed the interpretation of Genesis found in 1 Enoch and afterward, we cannot assume that Genesis 6 in context is also referring” to the same tradition.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, even if the author of Genesis incorporated elements of an earlier Mesopotamian tradition, he was within his rights to utilize them for a distinct theological purpose, differing from the interpretive trajectory of *the Book of Watchers*. The key to understanding Genesis 6:1–4 lies within the text itself, and its message is not identical to that of *1 Enoch*.

#### *Argument from Second Temple Interpretive Tradition*

Second, Heiser states that all Second Temple Jewish traditions interpret Genesis 6:1–4 as describing an angelic fall, which, for him, implies that Second Temple authors—including those of the New Testament—would have understood it the same way.<sup>103</sup>

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List that records the reigns of both antediluvian and postdiluvian kings. According to Sumerian tradition, antediluvian human kings ruled alongside sages known as the *apkallu*, fully divine beings who imparted knowledge of writing, agriculture, craftsmanship, and ritual practices to humanity. Later postdiluvian kings traced their lineage to the *apkallu*, implying descent from these divine figures. For example, Gilgamesh is described as two-thirds *apkallu* and one-third human, a hybrid resulting from a mixed union akin to those described in Genesis 6:1–4. See especially Annus, “On the Watchers”, Kvanvig, *Primeval History*, and Kvanvig, “The Watcher Story and Genesis.” For a critical evaluation of this material as the underlying tradition of Genesis 6:1–4 and the *Book of Watchers*, see Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 115–120.

<sup>102</sup> Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 116–117.

<sup>103</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 99.



Once again Heiser has the correct data,<sup>104</sup> but his conclusion is overstated. As noted, *1 Enoch* attributes the origin of evil to fallen angels, whereas biblical and many other Second Temple Jewish texts link it to human disobedience.<sup>105</sup> This theological divergence likely contributed to *1 Enoch*'s decline in influence within the early church,<sup>106</sup> which did not adopt its theological framework but held on to the one found in her own Scriptures. Consequently, it is untenable to argue for the wholesale acceptance of the Enochian interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 based solely on the recognition of one interpretative tradition, as key aspects of it were clearly not embraced by Second Temple and biblical authors.

#### *Argument from Inspired Authors*

Third, Heiser states that inspired New Testament authors allude to and cite the *Book of Watchers*, which, for him, implies—when considered alongside his previous arguments—that modern interpreters who affirm the inspiration of Scripture should read Genesis 6:1–4 in light of its Mesopotamian background as reflected in *1 Enoch*.<sup>107</sup>

Clear allusions to *the Book of Watchers* appear in 1 Peter 3:19–20, 2 Peter 2:4–5, 10, and Jude 6–7, 13, 14–15.<sup>108</sup> Among these, Jude's epistle is particularly debated. In verse 14, Jude states that “Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam” prophesied against the false teachers of his time (*Προεφήτευσεν δὲ καὶ τούτοις ἑβδομος ἀπὸ Ἀδὰμ Ἐνὼχ λέγων*) and then cites *1 Enoch* 1:9 at length. Some scholars interpret Jude's intention here as mere literary

<sup>104</sup> See 2 Apoc. Bar. 56:10–14; 1 Enoch 6–19; 21; 86–88; 106:13–17; Jub. 4:15, 22; 5:1; T. Reub. 5:6–7; T. Naph. 3:5; CD 2:17–19; 1QapGen 2:1; Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 6:1–4.

<sup>105</sup> See 4 Ezra 3:20–26; 4:30; 7:118; 2 Bar. 23:4; 48:42–43; 54:15; 56:5–8; Gen 3:1–24; Rom 5.

<sup>106</sup> Bauckham, *Jude*, 51.

<sup>107</sup> Unseen Realm 99–100. Heiser writes: “Scholars agree that the Second Temple Jewish literature that influenced Peter and Jude shows intimate familiarity with the original Mesopotamian context of Genesis 6:1–4. For the person who considers the Old and New Testament to be equally inspired, interpreting Genesis 6:1–4 ‘in context’ means analyzing it in light of its Mesopotamian background as well as 2 Peter and Jude, whose content utilizes supernatural interpretations from Jewish theology of their own day.”

<sup>108</sup> Cf. 1 Enoch 6–19.

borrowing, while others suggest that Jude regarded 1 Enoch as authoritative Scripture.<sup>109</sup>

While Heiser does not argue that 1 Enoch is inspired,<sup>110</sup> he maintains that Jude viewed it as having authority. Indeed, Heiser dedicates two appendices in *Reversing Hermon* to the question of inspiration of 1 Enoch in the early church and its use in the New Testament.<sup>111</sup>

While Jude is clearly familiar with the *Book of Watchers*, it is good to bear in mind that he never calls *1 Enoch* Scripture, and that the title prophet is used elsewhere in the Bible without any implication of scriptural or inspired authority.<sup>112</sup> For instance, the author of Titus writes concerning Epimenides, the Cretan poet, philosopher, and seer, who was known for his prophetic abilities: "It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said, "Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons." (Titus 1:12 NRSV).<sup>113</sup>

Jude probably utilizes *the Book of Watchers* simply because he found its message particularly apt for the task of condemning the false teachers. Furthermore, since Jude does not show signs of endorsing the theological framework of *the Book of Watchers*, it would be misguided to argue that the New Testament's use of *the Book of Enoch* necessitates reading its theological framework, and worldview, into other parts of the Bible. Such an approach would effectively elevate 1 Enoch to canonical status while disregarding the authorial intent of both Jude and Genesis 6:1–4.

As demonstrated above, Heiser exhibits minimal concern for the actual text within its literary context. Instead, his argument is predicated on an assumed worldview of the

<sup>109</sup> The issue is further complicated because the Christian canon did not yet exist when Jude wrote his letter in ca. 60 CE, and even the Jewish canon remained uncertain.

<sup>110</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 9n15.

<sup>111</sup> The second appendix, "New Testament Allusions to Books of the Pseudepigrapha", is particularly illuminating: the list includes all verses where a similarity with the Pseudepigrapha was detected in the New Testament. There is no discussion as to what constitutes an allusion. Heiser merely notes that scholarly definitions vary, but proceeds immediately to call the list "a reference resource for establishing the extent to which New Testament writers were exposed to the pseudepigraphal books." Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 204.

<sup>112</sup> Contra Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 75, who suggests that the idea of prophesy combined with the quotation formula λέγων is an indication of Jude's belief in "divinely inspired speech." Bauckham, *Jude*, 90, agrees with Davids on divine inspiration of 1 Enoch's prophesy, but denies that Jude has elevated *1 Enoch* to scriptural status.

<sup>113</sup> Other similar passages include John 11:51 and Acts 17:28.

author.<sup>114</sup> This is unfortunate, as the text itself—its literary genre, structure, role within the broader argument or narrative, and key terminology—provides the most reliable foundation for accurately interpreting its meaning. As Kevin Vanhoozer argues, interpretation is an act of justice—of correctly ascribing to an author the illocutionary acts actually performed.<sup>115</sup> Heiser, by contrast, prioritizes locution and treats even the most peculiar biblical texts as propositional content, regardless of literary genre and other factors that weigh in when trying to determine authorial intent.

In the case of Genesis 6:1–4, the literary genre is narrative, or more precisely, myth. This genre must be interpreted with attention to the broader storyline, its characters, and key events to discern the author’s intended message. As demonstrated above, Heiser does not approach the text with these considerations in mind. While he acknowledges that many scholars view Genesis 6:1–4 as a polemic that seeks “to undermine the credibility of Mesopotamian gods and other aspects of that culture’s worldview,”<sup>116</sup> he fails to reflect on what this implies in terms of the illocutionary act the author is performing. Instead, Heiser prioritizes the text’s locution and proceeds to interpret it through the lens of an assumed worldview, treating it as propositional truth. A proper reading of Genesis 6:1–4 in its larger context of Genesis 3–11 reveals that it does not align with the theology of 1 Enoch. Within this broader context, Genesis 6:1–4 is more plausibly understood as a sophisticated critique of the line of Seth which utilizes Mesopotamian tradition. If the illocutionary act represents what the inspired author intended to convey, then it is this message that the Bible affirms.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> One cannot help but think about Friedrich Schleiermacher’s attempt to get inside the author’s head through psychological and historical reconstruction in order to determine meaning.

<sup>115</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts: The Covenant of Discourse and the Discourse of the Covenant,” in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 25. John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 200, suggest that scriptural authority lies precisely in what “the communicator was actually asserting in his illocutions.”

<sup>116</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 102.

<sup>117</sup> John and Harvey Walton argue in *Demons and Spirits* that the Bible affirms only those things that do not participate in the “cultural river.” I find this position too narrow, since it means that the Bible has next to

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS.

Healthy communities are led by pastors and leaders who worship God with their hearts and knowledge, who know their Bible, love their people, and listen the academic voices of their communities. A balanced view to conduct church practices are constructed with careful studying of the Scriptures, theological evaluation of various views and collective discerning of everything. Worldviews are behind every level of these constructions and it is a helpful tool to evaluate the foundations of teachings or practices. Above presented case studies from Derek Prince and Michael Heiser, including the Warfare worldview, are only providing the example of the work that needs to be done among any charismatic and Pentecostal Christian communities, which value a balanced worship and aims to hold the Bible in the position of authority in its own right.

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nothing to say about demonic powers. For a criticism of their position, see Thomas J. Farrar, review of *Demons and Spirits in Biblical Theology: Reading the Biblical Text in Its Cultural and Literary Context*, by John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *Journal of Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2021): 364–368.