

## **Session 5**

### **Worldviews beneath Cosmological Kerygma: Demons as a Case Study (Sanna Urvas and Markus Nikkanen)**

#### **Abstract**

Pentecostal communities believe in the power of the Holy Spirit in a healthy and empowering way. However, beliefs in the power and influence of demons, especially in the case of illnesses, generate unhealthy practices for the ministries of deliverance and exorcism. This paper explores the underlying worldviews that inform such beliefs in the field of demonology, especially where they appear to distort the biblical emphasis on God's love and sovereign care for his people. The analysis focuses on the theological worldview of Derek Prince and the hermeneutical approach of Michael Heiser, particularly his Divine Council worldview. Within the forementioned worldviews the aim is to provide observations of theological conclusions that do not rest on the biblical base. This study seeks to highlight theological conclusions within the aforementioned worldviews that are not grounded in a sound biblical basis.

**Key Words:** Derek Prince, Michael Heiser, demons, worldview, divine council worldview, Gen 6:1–4, biblical hermeneutics

#### **Introduction**

Europe was once, half a millennium ago, a monocultural entity with one dominant religion, Western Catholic Christianity. Since the eras of Reformation and Enlightenment, that has changed, and today Europeans live amidst religious diversity 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 in Europe's distinctive political and educational history; however, he notes that Europe is an exception, and the earlier theories of inevitability of

secularization should be revised as they fail to accurately reflect the role of religion and religiosity in other continents.<sup>1</sup>

Jorge Botelho Moniz has engaged with theories of secularization that aim to understand this phenomenon in the context of Europe. One remark by Moniz is the diversity of worldviews—religious, irreligious, or nonreligious, and the mutual fragilization of these worldviews. This diversity 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. Secularization can become accelerated, per Moniz, when the relativization of beliefs are a result of the diversity of and competition between religious worldviews.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is difficult for any one of them to be declared as the true one.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence of this competition of worldviews, it is increasingly challenging to maintain the kerygma of a 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 an additional threat emerges from within a group of Christian religious worldviews.

James Sire explains worldview as a commitment, be expressed as a set of presuppositions—true or false—but that form the foundation on which a person lives and understands reality. Worldview answers the questions of what is real—material and spiritual realities, humanity, and how relationships between all these should be understood.<sup>4</sup> No singular

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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), 336–44.

<sup>2</sup> Jorge Botelho Moniz, “Secularization in Europe: Causes, Consequences, and Cultural Diversity,” *Religion, Quo Vadis? Secularization in the Modern World* 2023 14, no. 3 (March 2023), 8. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030423>.

<sup>3</sup> Botelho Moniz, “Secularization in Europe,” 8.

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

Christian biblical worldview remains entirely free from contextual influences. Therefore, when evaluating worldviews within a Christian framework, it is essential to discern the cultural, ideological, or other contextual elements that may compromise structural foundations for sound theology. Likewise, it is important to create a profound understanding of dogmas that form a robust foundation for Pentecostal theology and praxis—a strong Christology, pneumatology, and missional-trinitarian understanding of the church as the body of Christ. However, due to the limits of this essay, these dogmas are not elaborated further.

This paper focuses specifically on cosmology, and demons within the cosmic order. The aim is to present examples that have challenged or potentially will challenge traditional Pentecostal teaching on demonology, as well as practices of deliverance and exorcism. It is not easy to argue why these practices have gained platform in European Pentecostalism,<sup>5</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 see exorcism as part of the gospel commission. He describes the characteristics of common assumptions among Pentecostals:

Some argue [that] 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 [that a] 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>6</sup>

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<sup>5</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>6</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 relative to this topic.

Classical Pentecostals reject the possibility of demon possession of Christians.<sup>7</sup> However, various trends within global Pentecostalism contain features other than those confirmed within Classical Pentecostal doctrinal traditions. The possibility of the acceptance of a 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 focuses on the question of the possibility of demon possession in believers within the groups he names as New or Neo Pentecostals.<sup>8</sup> The African traditional worldview with a rich cosmology is inevitably one of the main causes for the growth of such views and practices. Nevertheless, 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>9</sup> Therefore, an enchanted worldview does not directly generate a cosmological hierarchy in which demons have exaggerated loci, status, and agency. The Church of Pentecost in Ghana, and globally, has produced an entire educational program to train their pastors against harmful theological beliefs that generate unhealthy praxis for Pentecostal and charismatic communities. These same harmful but influential voices have been recognized behind Afro-European Pentecostal communal life, as noted by Garrard.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, these voices and their influence have been recognized also in the Finnish Pentecostal Movement and other charismatic communities, for example the Evangelical Free

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<sup>7</sup> Sanna Urvas, "Theology of Sin and Evil in Classical Pentecostalism. Two Case Studies" (Doctoral diss., University of Helsinki, 2020), 81–86, <https://helda.helsinki.fi/items/e07f61f4-250f-480c-aeb7-f4cc8adb5c94>.

<sup>8</sup> David Garrard, "Witchcraft and Deliverance: An Exaggerated Theme in Pentecostal Churches in Central Africa," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 37, no. 1 (2017): 52–53.

<sup>9</sup> Urvas, "Theology of Sin and Evil," chap. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Garrard, "Witchcraft and Deliverance," 54.

Church of Finland. This paper is part of a larger project to provide sound theology together with solid biblical exegetics for the theology of sin and evil.

### **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>11</sup> While Prince and his ministry are well known for numerous commendable charitable initiatives, this study focuses on the more controversial and problematic aspects of his teaching—particularly the emphasis on the demonization of Christians and the perceived need for deliverance within believing communities. Several studies have raised concerns about these practices, especially regarding the implied causal link between health, illness—particularly mental health—and demonic activity. Of particular concern is the potential for such teachings to lead to the rejection of medical science and professional care, even in cases involving life-threatening conditions.<sup>12</sup>

Derek Prince was born in India to an upper-class British family. Prince recounts the early influence of his nanny from whom he learned to adore the esoteric wisdom of India.<sup>13</sup> Another significant source shaping his worldview was his studies of Greek philosophy at Cambridge University with a particular focus on Platonism. Reflecting on this period, Prince writes, “As I

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<sup>11</sup> Derek Prince, “Home Page,” accessed July 23, 2025, <https://www.derekprince.com/>.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Mercer, “Deliverance, Demonic Possession, and Mental Illness: Some Considerations for Mental Health Professionals,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 16, no. 6 (2012): 595–611, doi:10.1080/13674676.2012.706272; see also Michael J. Sersch, *Demons on the Couch: Spirit Possession, Exorcism and the DSM–5* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019); and Annah Paraffin, “Pentecostal Healing and Schizophrenia,” in *Pentecostalism and Human Rights in Contemporary Zimbabwe*, edited by Francis Machingura et al. (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 96–109. Additionally, Nathanael J. Homewood provides an ethnographic study: *Seductive Spirits: Deliverance, Demons, and Sexual Worldmaking in Ghanaian Pentecostalism* (Stanford University Press, 2024). Extreme belief can result also death, as in the case of parents who refused to give their daughter insulin: Talissa Siganto, “Instead of Giving Her Life-Saving Insulin, Elizabeth Struh’s Parents Prayed over Her Dying Body,” ABC News, January 29, 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-01-30/elizabeth-struhs-religious-group-guilty-manslaughter/104859334>.

<sup>13</sup> Derek Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons: What You Need to Know about Demons—Your Invisible Enemies* (Derek Prince Ministries International, 2020), 124–5. See also Stephen Mansfield, *Derek Prince: A Biography* (Derek Prince Ministries, 2005), 20–33.

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>14</sup> Additionally, his time living in Western Kenya exposed him to African worldviews, which also left a lasting impression.<sup>15</sup> Taken together, these diverse influences contributed to the formation of his theological outlook.

Prince published multiple volumes in which he teaches and explains his theology at a 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, demons, and the relationships between unseen world and humanity occasionally on a theoretical level but mostly as narratives from his life experience.

Despite naming Greek philosophers as a cause factor for his own demonic influence, Prince utilized the Platonist cosmology in several ways. First, he refers directly to Socrates as one source for the capacity and agency of demons.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, he derives the system and hierarchy of demonological spheres 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, or the exegetical context of the terms in question.<sup>17</sup> This does not follow the key exegetical rule that safeguards the authority of the text; the Bible should provide the context for its interpretation, not an outside source.

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<sup>14</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 125.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Stanley, “From Plato to Pentecostalism: Sickness and Deliverance in the Theology of Derek Prince,” in *Studies in Church History* 58 (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 401–2. See also Mansfield, *Derek Prince*, 191.

<sup>16</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 147.

<sup>17</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 14–18.

Prince combines the primary meaning of assumed Greek concept of demons from words that can be found in New Testament texts and applies it as an interpretation to the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup> This is an anachronistic way to read and relate these two texts together. This type of either narrative or symbolic hermeneutical reading was common during the Patristic Era, but early Greek church Fathers were renowned apologists who 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 that 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>19</sup>

Another problem adopted from the Platonist worldview is a strong dualism, evident in two ways. First, 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 still in 'the heavnlies'."<sup>20</sup> Prince continues to explain this by referring to the Greek Platonist system and uses that to interpret Ephesians 6:12 and Matthew 12:43–44. It is problematic to divide the world in two spheres under different dominances and to neglect the sovereign power of the Creator of all. Cosmos is part of the created sphere. Therefore, the presence of the Holy Spirit should be one of the ruling aspects to understand the world, both naturally and spiritually. This is part of the Pentecostal pneumatological kerygma. The presence of Satan's headquarters in the heavnlies is not a primary principle to interpret any natural or supernatural phenomena. Instead, the

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<sup>18</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 152–53.

<sup>19</sup> See Urvás, *Theology of Sin and Evil*, chap. 2, for further information about views of demonology during the patristic era.

<sup>20</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 149.

pneumatological reading of the theology of creation provides a better insight to observe the cosmos.

This can be viewed as a one-sided and dominant relationship between God and His creation but also as a relationship of mutuality and interaction through the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup> Most importantly, there is no dualistic reality with the two competing forces of good and evil. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen frames spirits in general as created, subjected under Christ's lordship, and if fallen, then parasitic.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, a system that treats Greek sources as primary and the Bible as secondary remains highly problematic. However, Prince does not create a definite systemic explanation for the origin of demons.<sup>23</sup>

Prince applies the principles of the Platonic dualism that elevates the immaterial realm above material reality. That is yet another problematic adoption from Platonic worldview into his cosmological system. 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>24</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 grounded in the theology of the Incarnation that proclaims the good news

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation. A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Fortress Press, 1993), 14.

<sup>22</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, vol. 4 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 107–10.

<sup>23</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 145–52.

<sup>24</sup> Derek Prince, *The Devil's Plan to Destroy Your Life*, rev. ed. (Derek Prince Ministries, 2007), 12.

for all creation.<sup>25</sup> The importance of the positive view of matter was precisely what distinguished early Christians from their pagan neighbours and fostered the development 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 Pentecostals during the early development of Classical Pentecostalism.<sup>26</sup> Fortunately, global Pentecostal communities exhibit a wide range of social engagement in today's world.<sup>27</sup>

Strong dualism between material and immaterial world also promotes the denial of scientific knowledge. This is especially dangerous in relation to medical science. Prince creates an opposition between psychology and psychiatric science, and an interpretation of related phenomena with demonic origin. Two layers of interpretive errors can be identified. First, the mental dimension of a person is explained with dualism, considering all negative emotions, feelings, and thoughts as harmful and alien to humanity. Second, those aspects in a person's mental health are assumed as originating from demons, and any sources pointed out in psychiatric evaluation are claimed as false. It can prove exceedingly dangerous for a suffering person if a diagnosis for mental illness is claimed to only cloak the real cause, assumed to be a demon or something from a demonic origin.<sup>28</sup>

One must always critically evaluate hermeneutical principles of any given theological construction. Prince describes his theological method in both theoretical and narrative ways. Obviously, the base is in the experiences of his own life story, which encouraged him to seek

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<sup>25</sup> See more about Irenaeus' contribution to the theology of the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Introduction," in *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus against Heresies*, trans. John Saward (Ignatius Press, 1990), 1–11.

<sup>26</sup> Progressive Pentecostalism pronounces the change in this paradigm; see Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (University of California Press, 2007), 1–5.

<sup>27</sup> Allan H. Anderson, "Pentecostalism and Social, Political, and Economic Development," *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 2020), 121–36.

<sup>28</sup> See Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 94, 101, 169, 173–6.

answers from the Bible. Rather than keeping the biblical text as an authority in itself, though, he merely used the Bible 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>29</sup> Additionally, this was transformed into theological claims that were then preached in the church. Prince served only a short period within a Pentecostal denomination; due to the criticism of his methods and teaching, he left to form an independent deliverance ministry.<sup>30</sup>

Prince does not utilize explicitly any biblical sources nor any analytical method to draw observations from the Bible. This opens a door to an unconscious application of unbiblical worldviews. Pentecostals must construct their view of the world with a strong biblical base but also rely on a vivid pneumatological understanding of cosmos and humanity. This includes thorough investigation of the Pentecostal principles of theological anthropology and the biblical basis for sound theological proposals to understand humanity. A robust Pentecostal theology of sin requires the acknowledgement of human problems residing primarily in the sinfulness of the human heart.<sup>31</sup> Second, the use of sciences such as psychology, psychiatric diagnostic techniques, and a sociological understanding of communities are required as a basis for healthy churches. It is also necessary to create a precise terminology for a ministry of deliverance and exorcism, to clearly communicate the meaning of the various levels of influence, harassment, or

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<sup>29</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons*, 107. See also Mansfield, *Derek Prince*, 194–5.

<sup>31</sup> Urvás, “Theology of Sin and Evil,” chap. 2.6.

possession of demons. This needs both observations and clarifications at the ontological level both in the fields of theological anthropology and demonology.<sup>32</sup>

Pentecostal theological enterprise requires dialogue with communal experiences and contextual interpretations, but these things cannot override the Bible. Therefore, it is crucial to construct one's cosmological insights based on knowledge available in Scripture. The following section examines the exegetical methodology and current academic discourse related to demonology and cosmology.

### **Michael Heiser and the Divine Council Worldview<sup>33</sup>**

Michael S. Heiser (1963–2023) was a North American evangelical biblical scholar best known for his books,<sup>34</sup> podcasts,<sup>35</sup> and documentary films<sup>36</sup> that explore the unseen realm and the divine council worldview. His work sought to reintroduce readers to the supernatural framework of the Bible, particularly as it relates to the interplay between the seen and unseen realms and the roles of both human and nonhuman agents in the biblical narrative.

Heiser's theological journey was shaped by a movement away from the "selective supernaturalism" of his non-charismatic background toward a more comprehensive embrace of

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<sup>32</sup> Sean M. Tobin's thesis presents a helpful collection of studies of exorcism and related sciences: Sean M. Tobin, "Exorcism, Deliverance, and Psychotherapy from a Catholic-Christian Perspective: A Critical Literature Review," Doctoral diss. (Azusa Pacific University, 2019).

<sup>33</sup> I wish to thank Nathan French (personal communication) for his insights on Heiser and Genesis 6:1–4.

<sup>34</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Lexham, 2015); Michael S. Heiser, *Supernatural: What the Bible Teaches about the Unseen World and Why it Matters* (Lexham, 2015); Michael S. Heiser, *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, the Watchers, and the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (Defender, 2017); Michael S. Heiser, *Angels: What the Bible Really Says about God's Heavenly Host* (Lexham, 2018); Michael S. Heiser, *Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness* (Lexham, 2020). 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. See Michael S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature" (PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004). See also Heiser's resumé at <https://drms.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Cumulative-Resume-2020.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Michael S. Heiser, "The Naked Bible Podcast," accessed July 22, 2025, <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com>.

<sup>36</sup> See Heiser's films at Faithlife TV, accessed July 23, 2025, <https://faithlifetv.com>.

the Bible's supernatural worldview.<sup>37</sup> Despite this shift, he remained committed to the doctrines of biblical inspiration and inerrancy. His project was not an embrace of speculative mysticism but an attempt to allow the text of Scripture to speak on its own terms—without the interpretive filters imposed by later theological traditions, creeds, or denominational frameworks.<sup>38</sup>

Central to Heiser's approach was the conviction that many of the Bible's more obscure and neglected passages are not peripheral, but integral, to its overall message. He argued that these so-called strange texts help to construct a sweeping metanarrative that “informs *every* Bible doctrine in significant ways.”<sup>39</sup> This metanarrative is laid out most fully in Heiser's major work, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, where he traces a cosmic conflict involving God's imagers—both human and divine—some of whom rebel and corrupt creation.

According to Heiser, the biblical narrative unfolds through three divine rebellions. The first occurs in Eden, where the serpent—a divine throne guardian—rebels and seduces humanity into sin (Gen 3). The second involves the sons of God fathering the Nephilim with human women (Gen 6); Heiser links this to Mesopotamian and Second Temple traditions, arguing that these beings become the demons of the New Testament. The third rebellion follows the Tower of Babel (Gen 11), when God disinherits the nations and assigns them to lesser divine beings (Deut 32:8–9). These beings subsequently rule unjustly, provoking divine judgement (Ps 82) and initiating God's plan to reclaim the nations, beginning with the call of Abraham and culminating in the mission of Christ. Through Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, he disarms the rebellious divine powers and restores redeemed humanity as the true sons of God. The Great

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<sup>37</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 17–18.

<sup>38</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 14–15, 18–20.

<sup>39</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 13.

Commission thus becomes not only a call to evangelism but a cosmic mission to recover the nations.

### Critical Evaluation

As an exegete, Heiser deserves recognition for elucidating the Mesopotamian traditions that underpin some of the most obscure passages of the Bible. However, his theological interpretations of these obscure texts often appear forced and exceed what the biblical author was claiming precisely because of his heavy reliance on extrabiblical material. Heiser's interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 demonstrates this: "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>40</sup> Three key moves in Heiser's interpretation stand out: (1) the identification of the sons of God with the members of God's divine council, (2) the emphasis placed on their contribution to human sin and the ensuing judgement (the Flood), and (3) the use of extrabiblical sources. In the following, these will be discussed in order.

Several exegetes largely concur with Heiser that sons of God should be identified with the members of God's divine council.<sup>41</sup> While alternative interpretations have been proposed in

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<sup>40</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 102.

<sup>41</sup> For a recent review of evidence, see Ronald Hendel, *Genesis 1–11*, Yale Anchor Bible (Yale University Press, 2024), 265f. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 94–97, builds his case 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, no. 4 (2010): 277–320, and Helge Kvanvig, "Primeval History: Babylonian, Biblical, and Enochic: An Intertextual Reading," *Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement* 149 (Brill, 2011); Helge Kvanvig, "The Watcher Story and Genesis: An Intertextual Reading," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 18, no. 2 (2004): 163–83. See also Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, eds., *The Fall of the Angels*. Vol. VI of *Themes in Biblical Narrative. Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Brill, 2004). For critical evaluation, see John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *Demons and Spirits in Biblical Theology: Reading the Biblical Text in Its Cultural and Literary Context* (Cascade, 2019), 113–20, 177–86.

the past, the evidence supporting the divine council interpretation is comparatively stronger, as seen in the table below:

(1) Biblical authors employ the phrase “sons of God” to describe God’s entourage.	4QDeut <sup>l</sup> /LXX Deut 32:8; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Pss 29:1; 82:6; 89:7
(2) Many biblical texts either refer to the divine council or presume its existence.	Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; 1 Kgs 22:19–22; Isa 40:1–2; Dan 7:9–10
(3) Second Temple texts interpret Genesis 6:1–4 as referring to a fall of God’s angels.	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, <i>Ant.</i> 3.1.73; Philo, <i>Gig.</i> 2.6; 13.58; <i>Quest.</i> 1.92; Jude 6, 14-15 cf. 2 Pet 2:4
(4) Early Church Fathers endorse this interpretation.	Justin, <i>2 Apol</i> 5; Irenaeus, <i>Haer.</i> 4.36; Pseudo-Clementine, <i>Homilies</i> 7.12–15; 8.11–15; Clement of Alexandria, <i>Paed.</i> 3.2; Tertullian, <i>Virg.</i> 7

Jewish exegesis of the passage remained unchanged until the mid-second century, at which point “sons of God” is reinterpreted as humans.<sup>42</sup> In early Christian circles, this shift occurred even later: the human interpretation emerged in the third century, while the traditional angelic interpretation persisted until the fifth century.<sup>43</sup>

Accordingly, Heiser seems to have the correct exegetical insight: the author of Genesis views the sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4 as angelic beings, not humans. This does not mean, however, that one should adopt Heiser’s theological interpretation of the passage. One must ask what the author of Genesis is doing through the text and what the Bible is claiming.

### A Subtle Critique of Seth’s Lineage

Heiser’s reading of Genesis 6:1–4 betrays a lack of attention to the structure and detail of the text itself, for he treats the events mentioned in Genesis 6:1–4 as the reason for the Flood, a kind of tipping point after which there is no return. According to his reading, evil is not solely

<sup>42</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude–2 Peter*. Word Biblical Commentary 50 (Zondervan, 1983), 51.

<sup>43</sup> Bauckham, *Jude*, 51. See John Chrysostom, *Serm. Gen.* 22.2; Augustine, *Civ.* 15.23.

the result of human sin but also of supernatural rebellion—an idea that is a significant deviation from traditional interpretations of the Flood account but foundational throughout his work.<sup>44</sup>

Genesis 6:1–4 is part of a broader narrative showing how human actions threaten God’s cosmic order.<sup>45</sup> After the fall in Eden, this growing disorder is evident in Cain’s lineage, marked by violence and the establishment of human culture apart from God (4:1–24). In contrast, Seth’s descendants pursue communion with God, though not without inconsistencies (4:25–6:4). These appear in the mixed unions of Genesis 6:1–4, which, while notable to the original audience, are not described as sinful.<sup>46</sup>

Genesis 6:5–8, the prologue to the Flood account, explains the reason for God’s ensuing judgement. While a connection between verses 1–4 and 5–8 is indicated through repeated key words,<sup>47</sup> the text attributes moral culpability exclusively to humans and makes them the sole recipients of the judgement. The sons of God are not in view. Walton and Walton even argue that the placement of Genesis 6:1–4 in a different *toledot* than the Flood narrative indicates that “the sons of God and Nephilim are not actually associated with the flood at all.”<sup>48</sup> In any case, Genesis 6:1–4 is best understood as a sophisticated critique of Seth’s lineage rather than as the final justification for the Flood.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 105ff.

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of the Flood narrative, see Hendel, *Genesis*, 283–345; and Tremper Longman III and John Walton, *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate* (IVP Academic, 2018).

<sup>46</sup> 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 this. See Hendel, *Genesis*, 265. Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 119, 180 argue that the text does not view the actions of the sons of God as morally culpable. 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, ed. Christoph Auffarth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Brill, 2004), 12, takes a slightly different view while ascertaining that it is humans who are held accountable.

<sup>47</sup> Hendel, “The Nephilim,” 12. These include “humans began to multiply,” “the wickedness of humans was great,” “the sons of God saw that,” and “the Lord saw that.”

<sup>48</sup> Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 179–80. 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>49</sup> Similarly, Longman and Walton, *Lost World*, 126.

### The Book of Watchers as an Interpretive Lens

In his effort to read the Bible without filters, Heiser has, paradoxically, adopted a new, extrabiblical interpretive lens. His interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 is rooted in his close reading of the Book of Watchers (1 Enoch 1–36), a third-century BCE pseudepigraphal text that includes a peculiar retelling of the Flood narrative (1 Enoch 6.1–10.22).<sup>50</sup> According to this retelling, 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 demonic offspring (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.

According to Heiser, Genesis 6:1–4 and the Book of Watchers draw from a common Mesopotamian material, implying that they share the same worldview.<sup>51</sup> While the parallels are notable, the relationship is more nuanced than Heiser suggests. After reviewing the evidence, Walton and Walton acknowledge that while Mesopotamian material may have informed 1 Enoch’s reading of Genesis, this does not necessitate that Genesis 6:1–4 itself shares the same interpretive framework.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, even if Genesis incorporates earlier Mesopotamian motifs, its theological message is distinct. The author was free to reuse common material from the “cultural river”<sup>53</sup> of Mesopotamia for a distinct theological purpose, differing from the interpretive trajectory of the Book of Watchers.

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<sup>50</sup> See Susan Docherty, *The Jewish Pseudepigrapha: An Introduction to the Literature of the Second Temple Period* (Fortress Press, 2015), 125–37.

<sup>51</sup> Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 102. Heiser suggests that the genealogies in Gen 4 and 5 reflect the Sumerian King List, where early kings ruled with divine sages called *apkallu*. These beings taught humanity culture and knowledge, and later kings claimed descent from them, implying a divine-human lineage. See especially Annus, “On the Watchers,” Kvanvig, *Primeval History*, and Kvanvig, “The Watcher Story and Genesis.” For a critical evaluation of this material, see Hendel, *Genesis*, 259–62, and Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 115–20.

<sup>52</sup> Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 116–17.

<sup>53</sup> Longman and Walton, *Lost World*, 6. See John H. Walton, *New Explorations in the Lost World of Genesis: Advances in the Origins Debate* (InterVarsity, 2025), 18ff, for an explanation of the term, “cultural river.” Similar river imagery is used by Hendel, *Genesis*, 278.

This is demonstrably true with questions pertaining to the origin of evil: while the Book of Watchers attributes the origin of evil to an angelic fall, biblical texts, and many other Second Temple texts link it to human disobedience.<sup>54</sup> In fact, the Book of Watchers' theological divergence in this key matter likely contributed to its decline in influence within the Early Church,<sup>55</sup> which did not adopt its theological framework but held onto the one found in her own Scriptures.

The key to interpreting Genesis 6 lies within the text itself—not in equating its worldview with that of the Book of Watchers. Thus, citing the widespread influence of *1 Enoch* within Second Temple Judaism and the Early Church does not justify the conclusion that its interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 was (or should be) universally accepted or authoritative.<sup>56</sup> The same is true about the New Testament authors who refer to or even cite the Book of Watchers (1 Pet 3:19–20; 2 Pet 2:4–10, and Jude 6–15). Their use of the Book of Watchers is not a wholesale endorsement of its views.<sup>57</sup>

### **Biblical Worldview**

Heiser's attempt to allow the text of Scripture to speak on its own terms is commendable, but his execution of the project runs into problems. His reading of the text is predicated on an assumed worldview of the biblical author—a worldview he pieces together through extrabiblical sources and expects modern readers to adopt.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</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>55</sup> Bauckham, *Jude*, 51.

<sup>56</sup> Contra Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 99–100.

<sup>57</sup> On the question of Jude calling Enoch a prophet, see Titus 1:12, John 11:51, and Acts 17:28. Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Eerdmans, 2006), 75, suggests that the idea of prophecy combined with the quotation formula is an indication of Jude's belief in "divinely inspired speech." Bauckham, *Jude*, 90, agrees with Davids on divine inspiration of 1 Enoch's prophecy but denies that Jude has elevated *1 Enoch* to scriptural status.

<sup>58</sup> See Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 99–100, on the adoption of an interpretive framework.

This is unfortunate, since the author's assumed worldview is not the same as a biblical worldview. Biblical inspiration does not pertain to the worldview of its authors. Rather, it pertains to the text itself (locution) which was accommodated to a high-context, ancient Israelite audience.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, biblical authority does not rest on the beliefs of its authors. Rather, biblical authority "is tied to the message the author intends to communicate as an agent of God's revelation" (illocution).<sup>60</sup> Thus, as Kevin Vanhoozer argues, interpretation is an act of justice—of correctly ascribing to an author the illocutionary acts actually performed.<sup>61</sup> Heiser, by contrast, overlooks the author's illocutionary act by disregarding questions of genre, literary structure, and the text's role within the broader narrative. This is why the shortcomings of Heiser's exegesis should not be underestimated. While Heiser himself was cautious in terms praxis, those who read him may not be.

### Concluding Thoughts

This paper examines two influential authors within Christian communities: Derek Prince and Michael Heiser. While they write in different fields, both have developed significant followings that shape how people perceive reality and form their worldviews. Pentecostal and charismatic communities approach the world with a deep trust in an all-powerful God and in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Whether in secularized Europe or elsewhere, all believers and churches are

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<sup>59</sup> Longman and Walton, *Lost World*, 5.

<sup>60</sup> Longman and Walton, *Lost World*, 9.

<sup>61</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 et al. (Paternoster, 2001), 25. John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (IVP Academic, 2013), 200, suggest that scriptural authority lies precisely in what "the communicator was actually asserting in his illocutions." Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 18, go as far as to argue that all biblical statements about demons (including those in the New Testament) are references, not affirmations. Their position is too restrictive. 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): 364–8. See Walton, *New Explorations*, 17–69, for clarification and methodological discussion.

called to study the Word of God within its own context—while also humbly acknowledging that they are not immune to the influence of their surrounding culture and prevailing worldviews. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to develop sound doctrine and healthy principles for church practices—especially when ministering to those afflicted by the burdens of earthly life.

We propose the following principles be applied. First, the Bible does not provide specific information about the origin or creation of demons. This fact alone should be seen as an indication that such knowledge is not beneficial to humans, as our attention should be directed primarily and unwaveringly toward Christ, and the sovereign rule of the ever-loving triune God. Second, we are not encouraged to seek deeper knowledge of evil beyond what is revealed in Scripture and the visible world. Therefore, one should neither invent origin narratives nor rely on knowledge derived from sources outside the Bible. Third, all theological hermeneutics should keep Christ as the primary focus. Fourth, when interpreting the Bible, we should respect its message and avoid adding ideas or systems that do not belong. Finally, we must define clear terminology (deliverance, exorcism, possession etc.) to have a fruitful dialogue between pastors, theologians, and those serving in the deliverance ministry.

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**Response to Sanna Urvas and Markus Nikkanen’s “Worldviews  
beneath Cosmological Kerygma: Demons as a Case Study”  
(Chiong Xiao Ting)**

**Introduction**

According to Sanna Urvas and Markus Nikkanen, “Pentecostal communities believe in the power of the Holy Spirit in a healthy and empowering way,”<sup>1</sup> and we firmly aim to uphold this in our understanding of demonology. Urvas and Nikkanen highlight four principles in constructing a healthy doctrine of demonology. First, since the Bible does not reveal the origin or creation of demons, this is not a subject we should fixate on. Second, we must avoid exploring the nature of evil beyond what Scripture reveals. Third, Christ must remain the focus of our demonology. Last, all theological reflections must stay within the boundaries of the biblical framework. I fully agree with these four principles, as they are essential and foundational to a sound understanding of demonology.

**On Derek Prince’s Demonology**

Urvas and Nikkanen’s main critique on Derek Prince has to do with how Prince has been influenced by Greek philosophy and mythology. However, we must note that while Prince does speculate on the nature of demons, he models his exorcism after the deliverance ministry of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Although the Bible is not explicit on the origin of demons, there is no denying that deliverance is one of the “most obvious and important aspects” of Jesus’s ministry, which implies that this ministry cannot be neglected in the life of the church.<sup>3</sup> In the Great Commission,

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<sup>1</sup> Sanna Urvas and Markus Nikkanen, “Worldviews beneath Cosmological Kerygma: Demons as a Case Study,” in *Pentecostal Voices Across the Continents*, ed. Kong Hee et al., Regnum Studies in Mission, (Regnum, 2026), 113.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Prince highlights Jesus casting out demons in a Capernaum synagogue (Mark 1:21-26), after the Sabbath (Luke 4:40-41), and from the man in Gadara with a legion (Mark 5:9). Prince also draws from the Early Church, referencing Philip’s deliverance ministry in Samaria (Acts 8:6-7) and Paul’s ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-17); see Derek Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons* (Chosen Books, 2020), chap. 3, eBook.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* (Baker Academic, 2007), 46.

Jesus commands his disciples and believers to cast out demons in his name (Matt 10:1; Mark 16:17).

Urvas and Nikkanen highlight the extremes in Prince's teaching that overemphasise the immaterial world, which may lead to a denial of genuine psychological and medical conditions and diagnosing them as demonic instead. They also critique Prince's Platonist dualistic worldview. Some of these critiques are valid, and we should seek to restore balance to demonology within Pentecostal churches. Nevertheless, Scripture affirms that while God is sovereign, Satan still "rules over a hierarchy of evil spirits in the heavenly realms"<sup>4</sup> (cf. Dan 10:13, 20–21). It is vital to acknowledge that the Christian life involves "wrestling with principalities and powers"<sup>5</sup> (Eph 6:12, NJKV), which most scholars agree are hostile demonic powers, and this implies that spiritual warfare is still a normal part of the Christian life. Even in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches believers to pray, "deliver us from the evil one" (Matt 6:13), making spiritual vigilance part of our daily walk. At the same time, He assures us that we have been given authority over the spiritual realm, including the demonic (Luke 9:1; 10:19).

### **On Michael Heiser's Divine Council Worldview**

In addition, Urvas and Nikkanen challenge the divine council worldview proposed by Michael Heiser, who uses Ancient Near Eastern traditions and pseudepigraphal texts to present theories on the origins of demons and evil. I agree that we should not build our theology on such theories, especially those developed outside the framework of Scripture, though they can provide helpful references and context for studying the Bible.

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<sup>4</sup> Opoku Onyinah, "Principalities and Powers," in *Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity*, ed. Wonsuk Ma et al. (Regnum Books, 2014), 153.

<sup>5</sup> All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the NIV.

### Do Christians Need Deliverance?

Beyond Urvas and Nikkanen’s critique of Prince and Heiser, one crucial question arising from their paper is this: Do some Christians need deliverance? They highlight that Classical Pentecostalism does not believe Christians can be demon-possessed. The Assemblies of God position paper rejects the possibility that a believer can be possessed by demonic forces. While it affirms that “believers will engage in spiritual warfare and will be oppressed,” it stops short of saying that Christians may need deliverance.<sup>6</sup> Despite this, an increasing number of Assemblies of God ministries are now exploring the possibility that Christians can be influenced by demons and may require deliverance.<sup>7</sup>

Many in the Global South agree that while Christians cannot be owned or possessed by a demon, they can be subject to demonic influence or even infestation.<sup>8</sup> In the Gospels, the Greek term *daimonizomai* (e.g., Matt 4:24; Mark 5:15-16, 18; Luke 8:36; John 10:21), often transliterated as “demonised,” does not imply “ownership” but rather suggests a form of “temporary control” or influence by demons.<sup>9</sup> In other cases, the Bible simply states that some had a demon or unclean spirits (Mark 1:23; Luke 4:33; 6:18; 13:12). Though Scripture may not state it explicitly, the Gospels show that demonisation can vary in degree—from a woman in Luke 13:10–16 described as “a daughter of Abraham” bound by *a* spirit of infirmity to the

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<sup>6</sup> Assemblies of God, “Spiritual Warfare and the Believer,” accessed April 25, 2025, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Spiritual-Warfare-and-the-Believer>.

<sup>7</sup> Doug Lowenberg, “Demonisation and the Christian Life: How the Devil Influences Believers,” *Enrichment Journal* (Summer 2013): 87-97, <https://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/Issues/2013/Summer-2013/Demonization-and-the-Christian-Life>.

<sup>8</sup> American biblical scholar Merrill Unger defines demonic influence as “the action of demonic powers working to corrupt a person.” [See Merrill Unger, *What Demons Can Do to Saints* (Moody Publishers, 1991), 50]. African scholar J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu differentiates between demonic possession and oppression, defining oppression as “malevolent supernatural powers [that] influence a person’s life for ill,” while possession takes place when spirits “take over the executive faculties of a person.” [See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Signs, Wonders, and Ministry: The Gospel in the Power of the Spirit,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no 1 (2009): 41, <https://theology.worldia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ERT-33-1.pdf>].

<sup>9</sup> A. Scott Moreau, “Demon,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Baker Reference Library (Baker Book House, 1996), 164, Logos.

Gerasene man possessed by *many* demons (Mark 5:1-9). This suggests that while a believer may not be fully possessed, they can still be bound by Satan, as seen in the case of the bent-back woman in Luke 13.

One common argument against the idea that Christians can have demons is this: if our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19), how can a demon and the Holy Spirit dwell in the same place?<sup>10</sup> However, it is difficult for this argument to withstand scrutiny. Paul speaks of the Christian having two natures warring between us—the desire to do good and the presence of sin at work in our bodies (Rom 7:21-23). At conversion, the Holy Spirit indwells within us, but the process of salvation is yet to be completed. Christians still sin against God, and this can be a plausible reason for demonic strongholds to remain in their lives. After all, Paul warns believers not to “give the devil a foothold” (Eph 4:27), implying that it is indeed possible for Christians to do so. The term “foothold” can mean a “place, position or opportunity”<sup>11</sup>—suggesting that ongoing sin can give Satan access to areas of our lives. The Scripture warns us against the “wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11, NKJV), and Peter admonishes believers to stay alert, as Satan “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Sadly, some believers may have failed to withstand his flaming arrows and succumbed as casualties in this spiritual battle.

### **Spiritual Experiences**

Urvas and Nikkanen caution against building our theology on subjective experiences, a major critique they have of Prince. While their concerns are legitimate, experience has always played an important role in Pentecostal theology, as long as it does not go against the teachings

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<sup>10</sup> The General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, *Can Born-Again Believers Be Demon Possessed?* (Gospel Publishing House, 1972), 2.

<sup>11</sup> H. Daniel Zacharias, *Biblical Greek Made Simple: All the Basics in One Semester* (Lexham Press, 2018), 285, Logos.

of Scripture. Theologian William MacDonald describes Pentecostal theology not as “experience-centred” but “experience-certified.”<sup>12</sup> William Menzies and MacDonald regard experience as a crucial element in theology, and its role is “certifying or verifying the theological enterprise.”<sup>13</sup> Roger Stronstad goes a step further to propose that Pentecostals bring an “experiential presupposition” to the Scripture that validates it and helps us understand it better.<sup>14</sup> In addition, although Prince started off with his own journey, his experience is not unique; it echoes the stories of innumerable believers throughout history and around the world, particularly in the Global South.

### **The Early Church**

Research into Early Church literature reveals that exorcism was very much part of baptismal rites of believers. In the third century, baptismal candidates had to have hands “laid upon them daily in exorcism” and anointed with the “oil of exorcism” during baptism.<sup>15</sup> It was not assumed that a believer would no longer have demons within them after conversion or baptism; instead, extra steps were taken to ensure that evil spirits were driven out of a believer. In the *Apostolic Constitutions* of the fourth century, candidates who had “a demon” could not become clergymen and had to be cleansed and freed from the demon. Once again, this example shows the possibility that even a believer could be possessed by a demon.<sup>16</sup> In Roman

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<sup>12</sup> William G. MacDonald, “Pentecostal Theology: A Classical Viewpoint,” in *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism*, ed. Russell Spittler (Baker, 1976), 64, quoted in Roger Stronstad, *Spirit, Scripture and Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2019), 42, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>13</sup> Stronstad, *Spirit, Scripture and Theology*, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Stronstad, *Spirit, Scripture and Theology*, 43; The Wesleyan Quadrilateral suggests that our Christian faith is revealed in Scripture but also “vivified in personal experience.” [See Ming Shun Chiang, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: What Is It and Is It Relevant Today?” *Methodist Message*, February 1, 2023, <https://www.methodist.org.sg/methodist-message/the-wesleyan-quadrilateral-what-is-it-and-is-it-relevant-today/>.] As such, experience does not replace Scripture but helps us understand and apply it in real life.

<sup>15</sup> Antipope Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus: Translated into English with Introduction and Notes*, trans. Burton Scott Easton (Cambridge, 1934), 44–45.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 7* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1885), 1102. CCEL PDF, <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07/anf07>.

Catholicism, exorcism has always been part of the church's ministry, and even the "faithful" can be demonically afflicted.<sup>17</sup> During the Protestant Reformation, although Martin Luther rejected many Catholic practices, he still retained the rite of exorcism in his baptismal handbook for Christians.<sup>18</sup>

### **Pentecostalism in the Twentieth Century**

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Azusa Street revival was characterised by signs and wonders, which included healings and deliverance from demons.<sup>19</sup> Even William Seymour himself believed that the body of believers can be afflicted by demons.<sup>20</sup> Although classical Pentecostalism did not believe that Christians need deliverance, British professor Stephen Hunt argues that "the growth and appeal of deliverance has come with the expansion of the 'classical' Pentecostal movement at the beginning of the twentieth century."<sup>21</sup> Across the Global South—in Africa, Latin America, and Asia—countless believers have experienced powerful deliverance and freedom from demonic oppression.

In Africa, where witchcraft is widespread, it is commonly believed that even Christians can be demonised and require deliverance from witchcraft, demonic spirits, generational curses,

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<sup>17</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Exorcism," accessed April 25, 2025, <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/sacramentals-blessings/exorcism>.

<sup>18</sup> Paul L. King, "A Historical Survey of Belief and Practices regarding Deliverance of Demonized Christians," *Refleks* 3 no. 1 (2004): 53–65, <https://pentecostalarchives.org/?a=d&d=REF2004-Issue3-1.1.55&e=-----en-20--1--img-txIN----->.

<sup>19</sup> Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street* (Whitaker House, 1982), 64.

<sup>20</sup> See William Seymour, "Pentecost with Signs Following," *The Apostolic Faith Mission*, December 1906, [https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5e17afe412fc21ddcb6e961c/5fab0c0e25a290e51f211641\\_Azusa-Paper-Original-04.pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5e17afe412fc21ddcb6e961c/5fab0c0e25a290e51f211641_Azusa-Paper-Original-04.pdf), who writes, "Can a man have salvation and yet his body be afflicted, which is the work of demons? Yes, we may have salvation and yet disease of the body for, 'though our outward man perisheth, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' Job said when Satan had afflicted his body, 'I know that my redeemer liveth. And though after my skin worms shall destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.' (Job 19:26, 27) So though demons were in his flesh, he had Christ within his soul. The demons had afflicted his body with sickness, but yet his soul was free from sin. But did he send for a doctor? No, his trust was in his God, and God delivered him and gave him twice as much as he had before. God has always been the healer of His people, for He says, 'I am the Lord, thy God that healeth thee.'"

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Hunt, "Managing the Demonic: Some Aspects of the Neo-Pentecostal Deliverance Ministry," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 13, no. 2 (1998): 216, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537909808580831>.

or diseases. African theologian Opoku Onyinah writes about the Church of Pentecost in Ghana, which establishes prayer centres for the sick, where “deliverance becomes a major activity.”<sup>22</sup>

In Latin America, Argentinian evangelist Carlos Annacondia’s revival meetings are characterised by deliverance ministry for both believers and non-believers alike.<sup>23</sup> Pablo Bottari, Annacondia’s crusade director, compiled and systematised these deliverance materials, influencing movements like G12.<sup>24</sup> Founded by Columbian pastor Cesar Castellanos, the G12 movement encourages believers to attend an “Encounter” retreat, where they receive ministry, including deliverance from past sins and trauma.<sup>25</sup>

In Asia, at the world’s largest church, Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, there are testimonies of both believers and non-believers experiencing deliverance from demons.<sup>26</sup> Research into the religious climate of Singapore reveals that many Pentecostal/charismatic pastors emphasise deliverance ministry, often requiring new converts to sever ties with past

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<sup>22</sup> Opoku Onyinah, “Deliverance as a Way of Confronting Witchcraft in Modern Africa: Ghana as a Case History,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5, no. 1 (2002): 122, [https://www.academia.edu/63615905/Opoku\\_Onyinah\\_Deliverance\\_as\\_a\\_Way\\_of\\_Confronting\\_Witchcraft\\_in\\_Modern\\_Africa\\_Ghana\\_as\\_a\\_Case\\_History\\_pp\\_109\\_136](https://www.academia.edu/63615905/Opoku_Onyinah_Deliverance_as_a_Way_of_Confronting_Witchcraft_in_Modern_Africa_Ghana_as_a_Case_History_pp_109_136). It is believed that generational curses manifest in hereditary diseases, mental breakdowns, and repeated unnatural deaths, supported by Scriptures like Exodus 20:4-6 and Deuteronomy 28.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford University Press, Inc., 2006), 106, ProQuest eBook Central; Carlos Annacondia writes about Christians being spiritually oppressed (see Carlos Annacondia, *Listen to Me, Satan* (Creation House, 2008), 46).

<sup>24</sup> Fernando Adolfo Mora-Ciangherotti, “Latin American Megachurches in a Changing Culture: An Integrative Review and an Exploration of Future Research Directions,” *Religions* 13, no. 843 (2022): 12, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090843>.

<sup>25</sup> Philip Wingeier-Rayo, “The Transculturalization and the Transnationalization of the Government of 12: From Seoul to Bogoto to Charlotte, North Carolina,” in *Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity*, ed. Younghoon Lee et al. (Regnum Books, 2014), 261.

<sup>26</sup> Yonggi Cho’s mother-in-law, Choi Jasil, who co-founded Yoido Full Gospel Church with Cho) frequently encountered demon-possessed cases. One example is described in Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology* (Regnum Books, 2010), 252. One Yoido Full Gospel Church member shared how “a demon which caused sickness in her for ten years, was driven out” when Yonggi Cho laid hands on her and prayed (see Myung Soo Park, “Korean Pentecostal Spirituality as Manifested in the Testimonies of Believers of the Yoido Full Gospel Church,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 1 (2004): 42, [https://www.academia.edu/63604223/Myung\\_Soo\\_Park\\_Korean\\_Pentecostal\\_Spirituality\\_as\\_Manifested\\_in\\_the\\_Testimonies\\_of\\_Members\\_of\\_Yoido\\_Full\\_Gospel\\_Church\\_pp\\_35\\_56](https://www.academia.edu/63604223/Myung_Soo_Park_Korean_Pentecostal_Spirituality_as_Manifested_in_the_Testimonies_of_Members_of_Yoido_Full_Gospel_Church_pp_35_56).)

dedication to idols or demonic associations.<sup>27</sup> For many in the Global South, these experiences with the diabolic and demonic are genuine, and deliverance is not automatic at conversion. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge these realities and thoughtfully consider the role of deliverance ministry in the local church.

### **Restoring Balance in Deliverance Practices**

In our Pentecostal communities, we acknowledge that abuses and extremes exist in some deliverance practices. For example, deliverance patients have undergone beatings, chaining, and long fasting in some African prayer centres, and this has brought about a stigmatisation of deliverance practices.<sup>28</sup> However, these extremes do not represent the whole and should not invalidate the importance of deliverance ministry in our churches today.

In a 2012 think tank on *Magic, Witchcraft, Demon Beliefs and Deliverance* held in Asia and Africa, it was proposed that “deliverance ministry should be one of the forms of a contextualized ministry in Asia.”<sup>29</sup> They affirmed that Christians, even pastors, may need deliverance because “they can be possessed, traumatised, and oppressed.” Pastors Jaharionson Saragih and Parulihan Sipayung propose a holistic ministry approach called “Psycho-Del-Si,” which integrates psychology, deliverance, and spirituality in diagnosing problems.<sup>30</sup> This is a fine example of how we can redeem deliverance practices instead of rejecting them, putting them back where they belong in the church. Onyinah suggests that this ministry should not be

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<sup>27</sup> Jean DeBernardi, “Global Christian Culture and the Antioch of Asia,” in *Religious Diversity in Singapore*, ed. Lai Ah Eng (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), 137.

<sup>28</sup> Moses Kumi Asamoah, “Leveraging the Deliverance Phenomenon: Penteco/Charismatic Vista,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 55, no. 5 (October 2016): 1659, doi: 10.1007/s10943-016-0209-8.

<sup>29</sup> Jaharionson Saragih and Parulihan Sipayung, “Deliverance, Mental Health, and Prosperity: A Holistic Diaconial Perspective from Indonesian Context,” in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*, ed. Godwin Ampony et al. (Regnum Books, 2021), 492.

<sup>30</sup> Jaharionson Saragih and Parulihan Sipayung, “Deliverance, Mental Health, and Prosperity: A Holistic Diaconial Perspective from Indonesian Context,” in *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia*, ed. Godwin Ampony et al. (Regnum Books, 2021), 494.

“suppressed” or “pushed to periphery,” but our theology of the spirit-world should complement it; experientially, we should allow the Holy Spirit to lead us into exorcism in our services when the need arises.<sup>31</sup>

In conclusion, Urvas and Nikkanen correctly argue for sound hermeneutics that will influence our beliefs—in this case, beliefs about demons, especially over Christians. I propose that deliverance can have a rightful place in the church when situated in sound theology and good praxis. By avoiding extremes and not forsaking the genuine need for psychological and psychiatric care for those suffering from mental illnesses, we can redeem the deliverance ministry and make it a healthy, empowering part of Pentecostal life, helping believers live in freedom and fullness.

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<sup>31</sup> Onyinah, “Deliverance,” 134; Onyinah, “Principalities and Powers,” 160.

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