

THE
KINGDOM
THE
BODY
THE
BRIDE
AND THE
TABERNACLE

STEPHEN A. DAVIS



FOOTSTOOL

THE KINGDOM, THE BODY, THE BRIDE AND THE TABERNACLE

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*Dedicated in loving memory to Wayne Stokely Anthony Davis.
For Isaiah, Abigail and Isabella.*

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I mention these men of faith to make the simple point that, though coming from vastly different (and sometimes, diametrically opposed) theological backgrounds, they have all contributed to my spiritual walk and the wealth of biblical insight that has made this book possible. Ironically, some of them subsequently corrected doctrinal errors that I had picked up from the others! But, I say all this to make the point that though we all have theological differences, though we come from different denominations, we all have something to contribute to the Body of Christ and to one another. My prayer is that we can all learn to appreciate those with whom we differ, and to realise that we all have something to contribute to the wealth and riches of God's Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

WHETHER WE REALISE IT OR NOT, WE'RE ALL BY-PRODUCTS OF TRADITION. NOT ALL traditions are bad, mind you. Paul spoke regularly of the apostolic and prophetic traditions that had been passed down to Kingdom Communities throughout first century Mesopotamia. As with culture and heritage, theological traditions typically pass from one generation to the next. It's important to note, however, that truth must always trump tradition. We endanger ourselves when we risk setting aside truth in favour of our traditions. That is very much what this book is about.

Because we are all by-products of tradition, many of us have unquestioningly inherited the beliefs and practices of our theological forefathers; not realising that some of these traditions are not only without biblical warrant but are antithetical to the way the Church is called to live. This book has been written to address that issue head on.

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.'" - (Matthew 28:18-20)

Jesus commanded us to proclaim the Good News and to make disciples of all

nations; that is, to usher in His Kingdom. The truth is, many Christians don't know what the Kingdom of God is, why we're meant to proclaim it or what it's meant to look like. This is primarily because we don't realise that the Good News is the Good News of the *Kingdom*.

The way the Gospel tends to be communicated detaches it from its Old Testament roots and context. As a result, believers remain ignorant of the Kingdom narrative that runs from beginning to end. When we study God's redemptive plan from Genesis to Revelation, a picture emerges that lays down the pattern for how we ought to live as the Kingdom. It's through the examination of this narrative that we can begin to carve a path through the dense forest that is Christianity.

When we misunderstand the Kingdom, we typically erect frameworks, systems and traditions to help us build it. Often, these frameworks don't come from the careful study of scripture; they're constructed so as to uphold a particular perspective on the truth. Subsequently, traditions and systems that seem to have a biblical basis can actually be fabrications that are superimposed onto the text. To be frank, I speak here of how we view and live out the life of the Church.

WARMING THE SEATS

For many years, I was happy, even comfortable, within the traditional church structure; but there was something that didn't quite sit right in my mind. When I looked in the mirror of God's Word and held it up to the church, the reflection didn't seem to match. Was this really all that there was? Was this really what it meant to disciple all nations?

As a child, my initial interest in scripture and spiritual matters was minimal. I spent most of my Sundays reading Usborne puzzle books in the pews rather than listening to the sermons. I enjoyed the worship well enough. It was entertaining, even moving; the church had some of the most gifted musicians I'd ever seen. But what really captured my imagination were the tales I heard about the end times; of this tumultuous future period called the "Great Tribulation."

My mind ran wild with images of the Anti-Christ; the seed of Satan incarnate in human flesh. He would dominate the world, instituting a one world economic and religious order. After three and a half years of peace in the Middle-East, deceiving the Jewish people into believing that he was the promised Messiah, he would rebuild the temple before turning around and laying waste to Jews and Christians across the globe. Oh, and did I mention the rapture? All those faithful to the Lord Jesus would be caught up secretly to meet Him in the air, whilst the rest would be given a second chance to prove their faithfulness by enduring the Great Tribulation. It all sounded fantastical; there was only one problem – I couldn't find any of it in scripture, at least not in the way I'd been taught. I had run into a tradition; one I could find scant biblical warrant for. And so began (though I did not know it at the time) my quest to uncover the Kingdom of God.

Upon leaving a church with a membership in the hundreds, I found myself in a

congregation that never rose above double figures. Everyone was accessible; you couldn't hide among the crowd. It wasn't what I was used to, but it was my first taste of what it felt like to have a "church family." And yet, the reduced scale of this congregation began to provoke further questions; *why do we need musical instruments? Are worship teams really necessary? What if we didn't have a church building? Why on earth does God require me to wear a suit while I worship?* Nevertheless, I eventually settled in. Over time, I went from questioning the traditional church structure to embracing it wholeheartedly. Whilst at one time I challenged the need for a building and even church leadership out of rebellion, I came to accept that these things were not only necessary, but entirely biblical. And yet, as the years went by and my thirst for God's Word grew, I began to see a disparity between what I read in the Word and what I saw on Sunday mornings.

It feels now like I have come full circle; whilst I once questioned church tradition out of rebellion, I now do so out of conviction. Thus, I have come to write this book; I want to take what I've discovered and share it with the Body of Jesus in the hope that it will spark a conversation—and perhaps a revolution.

RECOVERING GOD'S KINGDOM

This work will spend a great deal of time laying out the supernatural worldview that the biblical writers thought and wrote in. As you read, you may wonder why such a heavy emphasis is necessary for a book about the Kingdom of God. What you'll find is that a concrete understanding of heaven's history with mankind helps us grasp God's intention for the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is tied up with the purpose and destiny of humans and their interactions with God's heavenly host. Their role in the story is crucial for understanding our own; in fact, we cannot have a full grasp of the Gospel without it.

Unpacking the complete picture of God's Kingdom will require that we deconstruct several preconceived notions. For starters, that "Heaven" is our ultimate, eternal destination. Our ultimate destiny is expressed within the first few lines of what's called the Lord's Prayer; *"your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* The Bible doesn't end with Christians in heaven, it ends with heaven on a new earth. Interestingly, there tends to be a parallel between how we typically view heaven and how we typically view the church. Heaven is often viewed as an eternal praise and worship service, far beyond the reaches of this universe just as the church tends to be a weekly event, isolated from the world around it. If the ultimate end of heaven is to be on earth, perhaps the ultimate end of the church is to be in the world. As we shall see, the people of God are predestined to inherit this world with all its geography and nationalities, which brings me to the next point.

The Kingdom of God is neither western, "white", nor European; the Kingdom is not synonymous with American Evangelicalism or European Protestantism. The Bride of Jesus is multi-ethnic and God's intention has always been to redeem the cultures *He* created. Our failure to see this is due to the next tradition many tend to

hold dear; that the Old Testament is an irrelevant relic.

The Hebrew Bible was the only Bible the early church had, and every New Testament doctrine has an Old Testament root. All who name the name of Jesus have been adopted into a lineage, a family and a history that is told through the pages of the Old Testament. To neglect this is to completely misunderstand the Gospel. Consider for a moment how often we start reading through the first five books of the Bible (just about clawing our way through Leviticus) before jumping ahead to the Gospel of Matthew. All we really need to understand the Gospel is in Genesis 3, right? Maybe some stuff about Abraham, Moses and Israel? Sure, we'll dip into the Psalms for devotional purposes, Proverbs for some wise platitudes and Isaiah for some prophecies about the Messiah; but by and large we skip over two thirds of the Bible. In so doing, we fail to realise that we cannot understand scripture's sequel without its prequel. If the New Testament is the Return of the King, the Old Testament is the Hobbit, the Fellowship of the Ring and the Two Towers rolled into one (with the Silmarillion thrown in for good measure).

The Gospel is about more than the crucifixion of Jesus and the wrath of God. The Good News is about a Kingdom, not a cross. The cross was a means to that end; a doorway to something far greater than what we tend to focus on. The Good News looks to a renewed humanity living on earth as God's royal Family. God's consistent pattern throughout the Bible is to dwell with His people in a way that is tangible, audible and visible. As we proceed, we will see examples of how this thread is woven throughout the entirety of scripture.

TACKLING TRADITIONS

As we begin to dismantle our traditions and rebuild on a foundation of truth, we must address the issue of bible translation. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm no expert in translation or the original languages; but thankfully God, in His providence, has gifted the Kingdom with skilled men and women who have given us tools to delve more deeply into the text than any generation before us could have imagined. They are the Bezalels and Oholiab's to our craftsmen.

An unfortunate by-product of English Bible translation is that certain terms don't always reflect the underlying Greek or Hebrew text they're meant to translate. As a result, the meaning intended by the author is often lost or muddled. These practices persist, not because of a desire to produce clarity, but because of tradition. It's what people are used to reading. Many of our English translations are bound by unnecessary traditions for the sake of convenience or nostalgia. Therefore, as you read through this book, you will see that certain words, both in scripture quotations and in the body of the text, have been substituted for ones that better reflect the original meaning or intent of the author. To help you understand the reasoning behind this, we shall look at few examples.

THE “CHURCH”

First off is the word “church.” Though this is the common English rendering of the Greek word *ekklesia*, it isn’t a translation of the Greek word at all; rather, “church” comes from the Old English word *cirice*, which itself is derived from an entirely different Greek word; *kuriakon* meaning “of the Lord.” Ironically, this word *does* appear once in scripture, namely in 1 Corinthians 11:20:

“When you come together, it is not the Lord’s [kuriakon] supper that you eat.” – (1 Corinthians 11:20)

Now, whilst the church is indeed “the Lord’s” the word “church” doesn’t reflect the meaning of *ekklesia*, so we are prone to misunderstand what the biblical writers intended to communicate. Now, one may wonder, is it really that important and should we really care? Well, yes. With the exception of four verses, *ekklesia* is translated as “church” approximately 115 times in the New Testament. Of those exceptions, the one in Acts 7:38 is most relevant to this discussion:

“This is the one who was in the **congregation** [ekklesia] in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai. And with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.” – (Acts 7:38)

Luke used the same word, *ekklesia*, to refer to the assembly of Israel in the wilderness. The Hebrew word for “assembly” is *qalah*. In the Greek Septuagint, *qalah* is translated as *ekklesias*. So, *ekklesia* describes either a “congregation” or an “assembly” of people. The *ekklesia* refers to a people whereas “church” has become associated with a building or weekly event. When the emphasis is correctly placed on a people rather than a place, it changes the way that we view the church. Not only this, but by translating *ekklesia* as “church”, it creates a thematic disconnect between the assembly of God’s people in the wilderness (i.e. Israel) and the assembly of God’s people in the Messiah (i.e. the Church), when the biblical writers intended for us to draw a connection between them both. In this book, I have chosen to use the phrase “Kingdom Community” in place of “church.” I believe it’s a nice balance between the meaning of *ekklesia* and the picture the biblical writers intended to convey. I believe that “congregation” and “assembly”, whilst accurate, carry too much anterior baggage today. Hopefully, by the end of this book, you’ll understand why.

THE “GENTILES”

We find a similar situation with the word “gentiles.” It comes from the Latin *gentilis*, meaning “of the same family or clan.” It was used in the Latin Vulgate to translate the Greek words *ethnikos* and *ethne* (from which we get the English words “ethnic” and “ethnicity”). *Ethnikos* was the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *goyim* (the plural

of *goy*). Both terms mean “nations.” Typically, *goyim* is used in the Bible to refer to nations other than Israel, but *goy* is also used to describe Israel itself:

“...and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation [*goy*].’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” - (Exodus 19:6)

Whilst *goyim* is usually translated as “the nations” in the Old Testament, most English translations render *ethne* as “the gentiles” in the New Testament. For someone unfamiliar with the Bible or common Christian lingo, the word “gentile” is meaningless; but everyone understands the word “nation.” In addition, rendering *ethne* as “gentiles” creates a disconnect between the Old Testament and New Testament picture of the nations. The story of the Old Testament isn’t just about the nation of Israel but about how God was going to use Israel to reclaim *all* nations. If there is a disconnect in language across the testaments, there will be a disconnect in thought also. Why this tradition persists in English translations I cannot say, but it certainly doesn’t help in communicating the message of the Kingdom.

THE “CHRIST”

One of the most important words in this book, and indeed the Bible, is the word typically rendered as “Christ.” Of all our Christianese habits, this one may be the hardest to break. Rather than a translation, it’s a transliteration of *christos*, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *maschiach*, meaning “anointed one.” Now, at the least, *maschiach* has found its way into the English language through the transliteration, “Messiah.”

Ironically, it was a Muslim who once had to explain to me that Messiah meant “anointed one” rather than “saviour” as I had previously thought! Why didn’t I know this? Because tradition had always rendered the word as “Christ” in the New Testament (as though it were a name) and no one really took the time to explain what *christos* or *maschiach* actually meant¹. Transliterating *christos* rather than translating it does little to help with our biblical literacy. Whilst you will see “Christ” replaced with “Messiah” at several intervals in this book, simply transliterating *maschiach* doesn’t do justice to what this word came to symbolise for the Jewish people either.

In the Old Testament scriptures, the king of Israel was anointed with oil when he was appointed. Thus, the “anointed one” was a term that became associated with the king of Israel; specifically, the one who would one day sit upon the throne of King David forever, ushering in God’s Kingdom rule throughout the earth. As such, I have made the decision, in as many cases as possible, to substitute “Christ Jesus” or “Jesus Christ” for “King Jesus” or “Jesus the King.” Again, the significance of this rendering will become clearer as you progress through the book, but I believe it more

¹ Now, by no means do I assume that this was everyone’s experience, but it was my own and it is common. Nevertheless, there are countless ministries and ministers who take the time to delve into these subjects with their fellowships, and the Body of Christ is indebted to them.

readily connects the mission, position and work of Jesus to the Kingdom that He proclaimed. When we think of the word “Christ” we typically think of a name. But when we see the word “King” we think of a position. Look at it this way, how different does “The Bride of Christ” sound to “The King’s Bride”? And what is the wife of a king if not a queen? Does that make you think differently about the Kingdom of God? If it doesn’t now, I’m confident it will by the end of this book.

THE “GOSPEL”

Considering how important it is to the mission of Christians, you would think we would go some lengths towards making “the Gospel” more palatable to the uninitiated; yet our very word “Gospel” can itself be a stumbling block. Again, unless you’re familiar with Christian theology, would you have any idea that the word “gospel” was meant to mean “good news”? We’re told that the gospel *is* good news, (i.e. “the good news of the Gospel”) but we’re generally not taught that the word behind “gospel” should actually be rendered “good news.” That is the meaning of the original Greek word *euaggelion* (from which we get “evangelist”, “evangelism” and “evangelical”). This simply isn’t reflected in the word “gospel”; at least, not in modern English. “Gospel” is a carry-over from the Old English *godspel*; from *god* meaning “good” and *spel* meaning a “story or message.” In other words, good news! So why do we not translate *euaggelion* as *good news* rather than “Gospel”? Again, the answer is tradition. I can’t speak for anyone else, but as an old-fashioned relic of a bygone era, I’m happy to leave the word “gospel” behind in the hope that it will bring more clarity.

By this point, my hope is that you can see how seemingly innocent traditions can influence the way that we think about and understand the Kingdom of God. My prayer is that by rendering these words in this way, God’s message for humanity will be more readily communicated to you the reader and will help you grow in your understanding of God’s Kingdom. With this ground covered, let us now proceed.

THE HOLY PROJECT

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”
(Genesis 1:26)*

IT ALL STARTED WITH A SIMPLE PROJECT; GOD, A MAN, HIS WIFE AND A GARDEN. God created the universe to be a place where He could live with His royal human family. Not only would we live together, we would also *work* together on His Holy Project; to conform all creation to the state of existing under His rule. It’s what scripture calls the *Kingdom of God*. God is the King of all creation and we, humanity, are His joint heirs. Our job is to make creation a reflection of life under His reign. We’re told in Genesis 2 how Yahweh placed the man and woman within this garden to “work it” (that is, cultivate it) and “keep it” (i.e. maintain order in it). To *cultivate* is to promote growth. In the case of a garden or a patch of land, it’s to prepare it for raising crops. God had already created a beautiful garden, and yet He invited mankind to participate in making that garden more than it was. This was God’s Holy Project for all humanity. He intended for it to be a blueprint for the rest of the world; the cultivation of all creation to promote growth and life.

Many have said that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Whilst this is a noble notion, it isn't what scripture really defines as mankind's great vocation, as summarised in Genesis 1:26-28:

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in [or 'as'] our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" - (Genesis 1:26-28)

God made man to fill the earth and rule over it. Scripture has a term for this; it's called being the *Image of God*. The chief end of man is to be the Image of God. The Image isn't just something we carry, it's something we are; it's the way we *function*. In the foreign nations that surrounded Israel, the peoples fashioned images of their gods and placed them within their temples. The purpose was to "localise" the deity; to represent his or her presence in the temple and their rule upon the earth. Images were points at which heaven and earth met. As such, when God created mankind, He made *us* to be His Images, dwelling in His temple; His temple being all creation. It is for this very reason that Israelites were not to erect images in the tabernacle or the temple. God already had an image (humanity) dwelling in His temple (the world).

We are *Imagers* of God, in that we conform creation the same way that He did. In the Genesis narrative, God revealed Himself primarily through acts of creation. In like manner, the way we cultivate creation is through *creativity* and *innovation*. Whether via artistic pursuits, technological advancement or scientific discovery, we use our creativity as a tool to serve creation and conform it to God's Kingdom rule. We serve through the way that we care for the world; founded on the central, binding principle in all scripture; that is *love*. This isn't just emotionalism (though it's accompanied by emotions), love is shown primarily through one's actions. Therefore, to truly live as God's Imager is to love His creation. An Imager of God is one who is made to rule creation on His behalf, but this rule doesn't look like what we're used to. It isn't a single figure exercising authority over others, it's a community working together for the benefit of all. Kingship in God's Kingdom is always reciprocal.

This is what it means for mankind to have "dominion" over the earth; to fill it and subdue it. But why do we need to subdue the earth? Doesn't this imply that something was wrong with it when God first created it? Well, not exactly. The assumption is that because God pronounced the creation as "very good", everything was "perfect" or as good as it could be when He created it. When we reason this way, we're bringing an extra-biblical understanding of perfection to the Bible and erroneously reading it onto the text. For example, does the creation account mention the

world being perfect? No, it doesn't. But does that mean something was wrong with it? No, it doesn't. We *assume* that when God declared the creation as "very good", this meant that it was "perfect." Biblically speaking, perfection is associated with maturity, wholeness and completion. Something is "perfect" when it's fit for the purpose for which it was made. It's "perfect" when it's everything it needs to be to do everything it's meant to do.

When *we* think of perfection, we tend to think "without blemish", but this depends on whether we know the purpose for which something has been made. A pair of frayed skinny jeans with holes in the knees may look imperfect until you realise they were designed to look that way. Biblically, we can only say that something is imperfect if we fully understand the purpose for which it was made. So, to say that creation was perfect or became imperfect is to presume to know how it was intended to function, and for that we need revelation. So, what did it mean for man to subdue the earth? Although the world was "very good", this doesn't mean that it was as good as it *ever* could be. Everything was ready to function in the way God had designed it to, but He left room for mankind to innovate and shape the world using his creativity.

The world we live in is physical. By default, it is neutral to the Law of God which is spiritual (Romans 7:14). In and of itself, a physical ball will not fall unless *made* to do so by the Law of Gravity. Physical matter coheres together in accordance with natural laws. The planets, stars and moons maintain their motions because of these laws. Without being made to obey, they would not do so. Such is the case with nature; the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, everything that creeps on the ground, and all the foliage that fills the earth. Whilst they obey the natural instincts that God has given them, they are neutral to God's Kingdom.

There is a specific purpose for which all life has been made and God has commissioned mankind to make sure they are brought in subjection to that purpose. So, whilst creation was indeed "very good" and fit for the basic purpose for which it was made, the world was not yet fully subdued to God's intended order. His order was to have everything be as good as it could ever be for the mutual benefit of all life. God planted the garden, but it was up to man to make it function optimally. God has a blueprint for creation and mankind is responsible for the administration of that blueprint upon the earth. This is what the Kingdom of God is.

In God's Kingdom, to reign and to rule is to cultivate creation in order to promote growth and life. God made man to be fruitful and multiply (i.e. raise families), fill the earth (that is, explore it) and subdue it (cultivate it to promote growth and life); and to do all of this alongside Him. We are made to do this across several spheres; the sea, the air, and the land with all their inhabitants. This engenders having a particular care for the life that dwells within said sphere. We don't dominate it; we serve and preserve it. The thing is, this isn't exactly what the world looks like today. When Genesis 6 tells us that violence filled the earth and all flesh had "corrupted its way", it's because mankind had failed to exercise dominion over creation in the way that he was supposed to; sadly, this trend continues to this day. Whilst humanity has

made incredible strides, we've also wrought terrible destruction upon ourselves and our world. The earth, as it is today, is a far cry from God's Kingdom in the Garden of Eden. So, what happened?

In brief, mankind started to use his creativity and ingenuity for his own selfish purposes. By Genesis 6, we're told that, "*every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*" (Genesis 6:5 KJV). Man went from using his imagination to fulfil the purpose of God's Kingdom to using it to build his own kingdom. This had dire consequences for the rest of the world. The question is, why? What happened to so shift the status quo?

In our modern-day theology, we typically turn to a singular event in order to explain this decline; we call it *the Fall*. Man and woman were tempted to rebel against God's rule, eating from the tree of which He had told them not to eat. The result was exile from the Garden of Eden and the gradual onset of death. The ground was cursed, making man's toil upon the earth difficult, whereas the woman's pain in childbearing was greatly increased. Fulfilling God's Holy Project would be wrought with difficulty. But this is not how the ancient Israelites would have understood "the Fall." Mankind's descent into depravity wasn't seen as a one-off event in the garden, rather it was a gradual decline that was spread out across ancient human history. Case in point, though it is central to our modern-day theology, the Fall of Adam and Eve is given scant mention throughout the rest of the Bible. Isn't that peculiar? Rather, as the Bible traces the history of mankind from Adam & Eve's first children through to Abraham, Moses and the nation of Israel, what we see is the hardness and evil of the human heart intensifying through the actions of the biblical characters.

The Fall is not a single, one-off event, rather it's a sequence of events that play out across hundreds and thousands of years. Interestingly though, scripture doesn't lay the blame solely at the feet of mankind; in fact, it implicates *other* created beings in humanity's fall, a class of heavenly beings who were *also* made in the Image of God.

WHO ARE THE "US"?

"Then God said, '**Let us** make man in **our image**, after **our likeness**. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" - (Genesis 1:26)²

When God said, "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*", most assume that this was the triune Godhead speaking. The Father was communing with the Son and the Holy Spirit, unveiling His plan to create mankind. However, where more than one person of the Godhead is present, Yahweh doesn't tend to speak using plural

² Emphasis added by the author.

pronouns. In other words, He doesn't refer to the Godhead as a group, He speaks of Himself as though He were *another person*:

"I overthrew some of you, as when **God** overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to **me,**' declares **Yahweh.**" - (Amos 4:11)

The speaker is *clearly* Yahweh, yet He refers to "God" (i.e. Himself) as though He were someone else³. The passage in Amos is a call back to the events of Genesis 18-19:

"And Yahweh appeared to him [Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, **three men** were standing in front of him...

...So **the men turned from there and went toward Sodom,** but Abraham still **stood before Yahweh.** Then Abraham drew near and said, 'Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?' - (Genesis 18:22-23)

Three men approached Abraham whilst he was under the oak trees of Mamre. Of those three, two were revealed to be angels traveling down to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1). The last figure was revealed to be Yahweh Himself in visible, human form. After a brief exchange about whether Yahweh would judge righteous Lot alongside the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord Himself departed to rain destruction down upon the cities. It's during this judgement scene that we read the following:

"Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire **from Yahweh** out of heaven." - (Genesis 19:24)

Yahweh alone overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and yet there seemed to be *two* Yahweh's present; one on earth and one in heaven. Yahweh was already on the earth, and yet He was simultaneously raining down fire and brimstone, out of heaven, *from Yahweh*. This is why Amos 4:11 reads the way it does. At Sodom and Gomorrah, Yahweh was present as two persons, in two places at the same time. Where two who are co-identified as Yahweh are present, Yahweh doesn't speak of Himself as a group. He doesn't say *"We overthrew some of you, as when we overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah"*; rather, Yahweh speaks of God as though He were someone else.

This isn't the only time God speaks of Himself in the third person:

"After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said,

³ An in depth treatment of the trinity is beyond the scope of this book; but for a more thorough analysis of the subject that flows with the position of this work, I recommend Dr Michael Heiser's *"The Unseen Realm"*

‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you...’

...Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the **Angel of Yahweh** called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you **fear God**, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, **from me.**” – (Genesis 22:1-2, 10-12)

Again, *God* is the one who called Abraham to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice *to Him*, and yet the Angel of Yahweh said, “*I know that you fear God, seeing as you have not withheld your son from me.*” He didn’t say, “*I know you fear us...*”, He said, “*I know you fear God...*” Since God was the one who originally called Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the Angel was not only speaking *as* God, He was simultaneously speaking *of* God as though He were someone else. Though Yahweh is characterised as a singular entity, more than one personage is identified as Yahweh; the Old Testament presents Him as a plurality. Even so, though He exists as a plurality, God doesn’t refer to Himself collectively.

If Genesis 1:26 was really a passage where one person of the Godhead was speaking to the others, we would expect it to read something like this: “*I will make man in my own image, after my own likeness.*” Or “*I will make man in the image of God, after God’s likeness.*” This isn’t what we see and thus we should cease to view this text as a Trinitarian passage⁴. So, if God the Father wasn’t addressing the Son and the Holy Spirit in Genesis 1:26, just who was He talking to? Were there any other parties present when Yahweh created mankind?

GOD’S CHILDREN

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?... when the morning stars sang together and **all the sons of God shouted for joy?**” – (Job 38:4,7)

According to Job, when Yahweh laid the foundations of the earth, He had an audience. They were called the *Sons of God* (bene elohim or bene elim), also known as the “morning stars.”⁵ But who or what were the Sons of God?

Sonship language wasn’t limited to a set class of beings in scripture. Adam was called the Son of God (Luke 3:38). The heir to David’s throne was to be God’s son (1 Chronicles 17:11-14). Israel was called Yahweh’s “firstborn son” (Exodus 4:22); but what they all had in common was that they were all made to rule in one way or

⁴ Now, some will object seeing this verse as a crucial defence of the doctrine of the trinity. It may even be a persuasive argument but the truth is it isn’t necessary. The examples we have looked at above are far finer and clearer examples of the plurality of the Godhead, and many more abound in scripture.

⁵ A morning star was the last star visible before sunrise, hence the name. They were present at dawn.

another. That being said, there are specific places in the Old Testament where sonship language was applied to beings who were more than human.

PSALM 82:6

“God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: ‘How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?

Selah

Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.’ They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, ‘**You are gods, sons of the Most High** [ben elyon] , all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.’ Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!” – (Psalms 82:1-8)

The entirety of this psalm will be the topic of a later chapter. For now, our focus is specifically on verses 6 to 7, “*I said, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.’*” These sons of the Most High were condemned to “die like men.” If they were already mortal men, this wouldn’t be much of a punishment; rendering the wording superfluous. The logical conclusion is that these were beings that possessed immortality. We’re told that they stood within Yahweh’s “Divine Council.” This was another term for the heavenly host. Psalm 89 specifically placed this council and its members within the skies:

“Let the **heavens** praise your wonders, O Yahweh, your faithfulness in the **assembly of the holy ones!**

For who **in the skies** can be compared to Yahweh?

Who among **the heavenly beings** [“bene elim”; Sons of God] is like Yahweh, a God greatly to be feared in the **council of the holy ones**, and awesome above all who are around him?” – (Psalms 89:5-7)

Here, the Divine Council is called the “assembly” and “council” of the holy ones. Seeing as God’s council is in the skies, and that the Sons of God are placed within this council, the “sons of the Most High” from Psalm 82 cannot be referring to human beings but heavenly ones.

JOB 1:6, 2:1

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Yahweh, and Satan also came among them.” – (Job 1:6)

“Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before

Yahweh, and Satan also came among them to present himself before Yahweh.” - (Job 2:1)

Both passages present the same sequence of events. The Adversary comes in amongst the Sons of God as they go to present themselves before the Lord. If we take this setting to be amongst the heavenly host, we are again looking at a heavenly location. This is made all the more conspicuous by the fact that the Adversary too presents himself before Yahweh. As near as I can tell, there is not an analogous scene elsewhere in scripture where the Adversary presents himself before God amongst a council of human beings. The only other passage like this is in Zechariah 3 where the location is clearly before the throne of Yahweh.

GENESIS 6:1-2

Some say that the Sons of God in Genesis 6 were devout human beings from the “godly” line of Seth; making the “daughters of man” descendants of Cain. Now, the text itself gives no indication that this was the case; such a view must be imposed onto the text:

“When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose.” - (Genesis 6:1-2)

Note that a distinction is drawn between man and the Sons of God. We’re told that mankind (the Hebrew “adam”) began to multiply on the earth and daughters were born to *them*. A single lineage is not specified. To assume that this refers either to Cain or Seth’s line is unfounded. Second, the Sons of God see that human women are beautiful⁶; again, not the daughters of a single human lineage, here called “man”, but mankind in general. As the text continues, the mystery only deepens:

“The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.” - (Genesis 6:4)

Apparently, Hebrew grammar indicates that verse 4 could legitimately (and even more naturally) be rendered “*The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, whenever the Sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them...*”; whatever this was, it was a repetitious event. Whenever the Sons of God “came in” to the daughters of men (a euphemism for sexual intercourse), whether in

⁶ (Lit. “good” the Hebrew, *tov*). The language is meant to draw a parallel between the temptation of man in the garden and the temptation of heavenly beings. The woman *saw* that the tree was *good*, she *took* of the fruit and ate. The Sons of God *saw* that the daughters of men were *good*, and they *took* as wives any they chose.

the days of Noah or afterwards, they produced the Nephilim; elsewhere identified as giants (Numbers 13:33). So, whilst this text doesn't definitively identify the Sons of God for us, we can surmise that they weren't human. Their union with human women produced unnaturally large offspring who became the stuff of human legend.

Coupled with the passages we've looked at already, the identification of the Sons of God as heavenly beings is without question. They were members of God's heavenly host, there to witness the birth of humanity. If they were the addressees in Genesis 1:26, it means that *they too shared the Image of God*. God was essentially saying "Let's make man like us; let's make mankind to rule."

Now, if the "us" of Genesis 1:26 refers to Yahweh and these Sons of God, are we saying that they had a hand in the creation of mankind? Not necessarily. Genesis 1:27 is implicit that Yahweh alone created mankind:

"So God created man in **his** own image, in the image of God **he** created him; male and female **he** created them." - (Genesis 1:27)

All these statements are in the singular, indicating that the Sons of God were not involved in the actual act of creation. When Yahweh says, "Let's make man..." He's speaking on behalf of the *Kingdom of Heaven*. For example, if the Prime Minister said, "We [i.e. England] are going to war", this wouldn't mean that every person who lives in England would be involved in the fighting. That would be down to the military. But England, as a country, would be going to war. So, in like manner, when Yahweh says, "Let us", He is announcing what the Kingdom of Heaven, His Kingdom, is about to do. To use another analogy, if I say, "Let's use an analogy", though I'm saying "Let us..." I (the author) am the only one making the analogy whilst you (the reader) bear witness to the analogy. In like manner, when Yahweh says "Let us make man...", He is the only one involved in the act of creating while the Sons of God bear witness⁷. So, Yahweh was saying they were going to make the earth like the Kingdom of Heaven. Even so, though we are like *them* we are more specifically like *God*.

SWALLOWING THE PILL

Now, this is a tough pill for us to swallow because we are accustomed to viewing the Image of God as something intrinsic to mankind. Of all of God's creatures on the earth, none are like us! But the problem isn't whether we are unique, it's how we traditionally define the Image of God. So, let's debunk some of our most common

⁷ An alternate view is to take the work of John Walton where he argues that creation in Genesis 1 was about establishing functional order, rather than material origins. In which case, the Sons of God could have been involved in "creation" without being the ones who formed or fashioned mankind, breathing life into him. Rather, if they were involved in maintaining the order and function of mankind, it would make sense for Yahweh to say "let us make."

assumptions about the image of God:

1) Humans possess a spirit or soul, whilst animals do not.

This would imply that the “image” has something to do with our “inner-man”, yet scripture says:

“Who knows whether the **spirit of man** goes upward and the **spirit of the beast** goes down into the earth?” – (Ecclesiastes 3:21)

Both humans and animals possess a spirit. In Genesis 1:20 and 1:24, the phrase *chay nephesh* (living soul or creature) is used to describe sea creatures, birds and land animals. The same phrase appears in Genesis 2:7 when God creates Adam:

“...then Yahweh God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a **living creature** [*chay nephesh*].” – (Genesis 2:7)

Anything that has the “breath of life” has a spirit and is thus a “living creature.” Other translations render this as “living soul” or “living being.” It describes that which is animated by life; the spirit⁸. It encompasses everything that you are; physical body and spirit. In scripture “spirit” is used interchangeably with “heart” and “mind.” The state of one’s spirit is used to describe both their inner thoughts and their emotional state. If we say that animals do not possess a spirit like mankind, we render them incapable of thought, emotion and life, something that scripture, study and experience show is not the case. Animals possess the same living attributes as mankind; a physical body and a spirit. Now, you may be thinking, “What about the soul?”, is that not something that leaves the body when you die? Though this is a common idea, the Hebrews used the word “soul” to describe the *totality* of you. It wasn’t a separate component distinct from the spirit, body or mind. The “soul” described the spirit and flesh in unison. To be a living soul was to be a body animated by spirit. The Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” both mean “breath” or “wind”, describing that which “animates” or makes something move. Your body is your physical body, your flesh and all its components and organs. Your spirit and body, together, make you a living soul. There is no case for a “soul” that humans possess and animals do not.

2) Mankind’s intelligence.

⁸ Our word “animal” comes from the Latin *animale*, which means “living being, being which breathes”; as derived from *anima*, “breath, soul.” So technically, any living thing that moves and breathes is an animal, including mankind (think *animate, animation, inanimate object*). In the Latin Vulgate, Genesis 2:7 reads, “*formavit igitur Dominus Deus hominem de limo terrae et inspiravit in facile eius spiraculum vitae eat factual est homo in animam viventem.*”

The problem with this line of thinking is that intelligence is not an attribute that all humans share in equal measure. Is one of below average intelligence made less in the Image of God than someone of average or above average intelligence? Is someone with a mental disability made less in God's image? Part of the "pro-life" argument against abortion hinges on the fact that unborn infants are made in God's image. Yet, if the image is connected to one's level of intelligence, this would undermine that argument. The status of an unborn child as God's image could be called into question seeing as their mental faculties are not yet fully developed. Not to mention, man's intelligence is finite compared to the infinite intelligence of Yahweh; and yet we are still made in His image. If humans can have finite intelligence and be made in His image, why can't animals have finite intelligence and be made in God's image? Since animals are never called Imagers of God, intelligence is unlikely to be the criteria.

3) Mankind worships God

This assumption is also problematic because many things, both living and non-living, are said to worship Yahweh. Even the cosmos is said to give praise to Yahweh. Psalm 148 calls sea creatures, land animals, birds and even insects to praise God! If everything in creation, whether the host of heaven, the stars in the sky or creatures in the deepest depths of the ocean are commanded to give praise to Yahweh, the fact that mankind can worship God is not unique.

Now, we *do* have a unique relationship with Yahweh because we are made in His image, but most of the attributes that we think of as intrinsic to being His image aren't unique to us. Being made to rule over the earth and exercise dominion over it, however, *is*. It's a feat that no other creature on this planet can accomplish and should raise questions about mankind's status before God. As the psalmist says:

"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have **given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet**, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas." - (Psalm 8:3-8)

SUMMARY

So, to recap, human beings were uniquely made to function as God's Imagers on the earth. An Imager is a representative of Yahweh created to rule over His creation, conforming it to the state of His Kingdom rule. In so doing, they advance His Kingdom throughout the earth. Human Imagers cultivate the resources of this planet to promote growth and life. To Image God is to rule, yet this is not the rule of a single authoritarian head exercising dominion over others. The Kingdom of God is

reciprocal. It manifests itself through humble, loving servitude; just as Jesus came and washed the feet of His disciples.

Mankind has been uniquely endowed with this vocation amongst earth's creatures, and yet humans were not the only beings created in the Image of God; there were heavenly beings who were also made in His Image, that scripture called the Sons of God. They were made to rule the heavens on God's behalf, and yet scripture implicates them in mankind's fall and descent into depravity.

Tradition has taught us to view "The Fall" as a singular, one-off event, when in actual fact, it was a series of events spanning from Genesis 3 through to chapter 11. Whilst scripture doesn't explicitly link the Sons of God with mankind's fall, they are implicated by their presence at three key episodes that changed the course of human history; the Garden Temptation, the events leading up to the Flood and the Tower of Babel.

They weren't just innocent bystanders or passive observers; rather, they were directly involved in what transpired. If you were to ask an Ancient Israelite why the world was not as it ought to be and why God's Kingdom needed to be re-established on the earth, they wouldn't just point to the Garden; they would also point to the Flood and to Babel. These events dramatically altered the status quo of the earthly and heavenly realms, setting heaven and earth on a collision course.

SHINING LIKE THE STARS

“And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” (Daniel 12:3)

SCRIPTURE DRAWS A THEMATIC CONNECTION BETWEEN STARS AND HEAVENLY BEINGS. Whilst there isn't always a one-to-one correlation, the biblical writers expected us to draw parallels between the two. They inhabit the same realm (the heavens), they are spoken of in tandem with one another and heavenly beings are figuratively referred to as “stars” throughout scripture. So, essentially, by “reverse engineering” the text, we can learn more about the Sons of God, who they were in the grand scheme of things and the influence they held over the affairs of mankind.

FIRST, SECOND & THIRD HEAVENS

In 2 Corinthians 12:2, the apostle Paul implied that there was a three-tiered structure to the heavens. Writing in the third person, he described his ascent to the “Third Heaven” where he heard things spoken that no man could repeat. He didn't say

much else about this realm, other than to call it “Paradise.” I believe that this “Third Heaven” was the location of Yahweh’s throne and that the cosmos we can see through our telescopes (the universe within which our galaxy, solar system and planet exists), is the “First Heaven.” Between these first and third heavens lies an intermediate realm that sits parallel to our own. This realm is inhabited by the various spiritual entities encountered in scripture. Though we associate the heavens with what’s above us, the spiritual realm isn’t literally “up there”; it’s a parallel reality that overlays our own. Hence, spiritual beings can be in specific places in our world and yet remain invisible to our senses. They live and move on a parallel plane.

The “Third Heaven” exists in the same “location” relative to both realms. If you were to stand in the First or Second Heavens, the Third Heaven would seem to be in the same location relative to both; far above everything else. This is the place where Yahweh dwells. It’s the location of His Most Holy throne room and the site on which the New Jerusalem is built. This correspondence between the First and Second Heavens explains why biblical writers could simultaneously speak of stars as the literal luminaries in the cosmos and as Yahweh’s heavenly host.

When God created the cosmos (our observable universe) He formed an expanse that separated the deep into two bodies of water. He called this expanse *heaven*.

“And God said, ‘Let there be an **expanse in the midst of the waters**, and let it **separate the waters from the waters**.’ And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God **called the expanse Heaven**. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.’ And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.” – (Genesis 1:6-10)

It was within this expanse, the First Heaven, that God placed the sun, the moon and the stars. We know this is so because a few verses down we read:

“And God said, ‘Let there be lights **in** the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night...And God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars. And God set them **in** the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.” – (Genesis 1:14-18)

Competing traditions teach us to view the First Heaven either as the sky or the cosmos. In actual fact, both can be true. Strictly speaking, there isn’t a definitive barrier that delineates the edge of earth’s atmosphere. The further above the surface you go, the more the atmosphere simply dissipates until it’s gone. Since scripture predates our modern scientific understanding, technically anything above the clouds

was counted as the First Heaven⁹.

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly **above the earth across the face of the firmament** of the heavens.’”
– (Genesis 1:20 NKJV)

Some modern translations render this as the birds flying *through* the expanse itself when the Hebrew word *paniyim* literally means “the face.” Birds fly *across the face* of the expanse, not within it; from the perspective of man looking up at the sky, it appears as though birds are flying across the surface of the sky. Thus, in Genesis 1, Heaven described everything from above the clouds to the far reaches of our universe.

LOCATING THE THIRD HEAVEN

So far, we have identified the First Heaven and asserted that a Second Heaven lies between it and what Paul called the Third Heaven. The problem is, a Second Heaven is never mentioned in scripture; so how do we know it's there? Though it's not explicitly mentioned, its existence is implied. By discerning the Third Heaven we can begin to see the Second poking out “between the lines” as it were. So, let's take a closer look at the Third Heaven.

Our first stop is Genesis 1. The creation account contains an indirect reference to the Third Heaven. Recall that when God created the First Heaven, He formed an expanse that divided the deep into two bodies; the waters above the expanse, and the waters below the expanse:

“And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were **under the expanse** from the waters that were **above the expanse**...And God said, ‘Let the **waters under the heavens** be **gathered together into one place**, and let the dry land appear.’ And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.” – (Genesis 1:7, 9-10)

The waters that were gathered beneath the expanse (that is, beneath the First Heaven) became the oceans of our planet. So, what about the waters above? If the expanse is the First Heaven, and there are waters *above Heaven*, this means that these waters lie beyond the observable universe. The reason why this is important is that the Hebrew word for “heaven”, *shamayim*, may actually be a compound word. The

⁹ Some will say that the “Waters Above” refers to the clouds and earth's atmosphere, but this is problematic. The Israelites would have known from observation that clouds covered the stars, the moon and the sun; thus, they would reason that the heavenly bodies existed above the clouds. In like manner, simple observation would show that rain comes from the clouds; thus the “Waters Above” couldn't be a reference to the clouds. A cosmology that places clouds above the heavenly lights would run contrary to the biblical witness and observation.

word *sham* means “there” and *mayim* means “waters.” Heaven was the place associated with the waters. Could the Waters Above have been a reference to another heavenly realm? I believe so, and it is between this other heavenly realm that we find the Second Heaven.

“Praise Yahweh! Praise Yahweh from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts! Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you **highest heavens**, and you **waters above the heavens!**” – (Psalm 148:1-4)

Here we have the *highest heavens* and the *waters above the heavens*. Just what are the highest heavens?

“Behold, to Yahweh your God belong **the heavens and the heaven of heavens**, the earth and all that is in it.” – (Deuteronomy 10:14 Authors translation)

There are heavens (plural) and a heaven beyond those heavens. This phraseology shows up several more times in scripture (1 Kings 8:27, 2 Chronicles 2:6, 2 Chronicles 6:18). In each of these passages, the idea is that no house is truly suitable for Yahweh to live in, for even the highest heavens cannot contain His majesty. But more importantly, this text tells us that there is a heaven of the heavens; a heaven *above* the heavens in which Yahweh dwells. Just as the earth has a heaven, so the heavens have a heaven. It is within this heaven of heavens that biblical writers placed Yahweh’s throne:

“Thus says Yahweh: ‘**Heaven¹⁰ is my throne**, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares Yahweh.’” – (Isaiah 66:1-2)

“Yahweh has established **his throne in the heavens**, and his kingdom rules over all.” – (Psalm 103:19)

“To you I lift up my eyes, o you who are **enthroned in the heavens!**” – (Psalm 123:1)

Returning to Psalm 148:1-4, the final line reads: “*Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!*” Since God sits on the heavens (plural) and there are no heavens above Him; the “highest heavens” must refer to the Second and Third Heavens. So, what of the “waters above the heavens”? The psalmist wants us to

¹⁰ It is worth noting that though the translation interchanges between the plural and the singular for “Heaven”, the Hebrew *shamayim* is in the plural in all three texts. Isaiah 66:1 would more accurately read “The Heavens are my throne.”

associate the waters above the heavens with the highest heavens. We read elsewhere in the Psalms:

“Bless Yahweh, O my soul! O Yahweh my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendour and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent. He **lays the beams of his chambers on the waters.**” – (Psalms 104:1-3)

The “chambers” are a reference to Yahweh’s abode in the Heaven of Heavens. He laid its beams, the foundation of His dwelling place, upon the waters; in other words, the Third Heaven sits atop the waters above the heavens.

To bring all this together, Yahweh dwells in the Third Heaven, the “Heaven of Heavens.” This Third Heaven lies beyond the Waters Above the Heavens. Since it is the Heaven of *Heavens* (plural), the implication is that somewhere between the First Heaven, the Waters Above the Heavens and the Third Heaven, is the Second Heaven.

PARALLEL REALMS

Genesis 2:1 concludes the creation narrative, saying:

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” – (Genesis 2:1)

All the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth are called their “host.” In the heavens that we can see, this refers to the sun, the moon and the stars; they’re all known as the Host or Armies of Heaven. This language is also applied to the assembly of God’s Holy Ones; the heavenly host of angels and spiritual beings within the Divine Council. In fact, there are places in scripture where “Host of Heaven” refers to both groups simultaneously. When we read about the “air”, the “skies” or the “heavens”, sometimes the biblical writers want us to think about the cosmos we can see and the spiritual world that we can’t see simultaneously. For example, in Psalms 148:

“Praise Yahweh!
Praise Yahweh from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!”

First, we are given the location; praise is to be given to Yahweh *from* the heavens.

“Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his hosts! “

Then, we are given a list of heaven's inhabitants; all His messengers and all His armies. All the heavenly host are called to praise Yahweh.

"Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars!"

And here we are introduced to the rest of heaven's inhabitants; the luminaries. They too are inhabitants of the heavens, called to give Yahweh praise.

"Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!
Let them praise the name of Yahweh!
For he commanded and they were created. And he established them forever and
ever; he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away." - (Psalms 148:1-6)

What's important to note here is that the angels, the sun, the moon and the stars are all inhabitants of the same realm; the heavens. They are all called the heavenly host. As the psalmist goes on, he applies the same methodology to inhabitants of the earth:

"Praise Yahweh from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and mist¹¹,
stormy wind fulfilling his word!
Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
Beasts and all livestock,
creeping things and flying birds!
Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!
Let them praise the name of Yahweh, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is
above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his
saints, for the people of Israel who are near to him. Praise Yahweh!" - (Psalms
148:7-14)

Just as praise was called *from* the heavens, here it is called *from* the earth. The psalmist lists all the earth's inhabitants; sea creatures and oceans, the weather, geography and plant life, land animals and human beings¹². The parallels between the two sections

¹¹ As an aside, notice how weather phenomena is located on the earth rather than in the heavens, which we would expect if the skies of the earth were counted as the First Heaven.

¹² It's interesting to note that the earth is conceived of as a three tiered realm (the air, the land and the sea), just as the heavens have three tiers. Each tier contains different inhabitants that co-exist in one realm, the earth.

of the psalm are unmistakable, but the key point is that the heavenly beings and the heavenly bodies inhabit the same space; *the heavens*. In fact, the two are so intimately connected, that sometimes to worship the inhabitants of one was effectively to worship the inhabitants of the other. For example:

“And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, **all the host of heaven**, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them...” - (Deuteronomy 4:19)

The Hebrew words for the sun (*shemesh*) and the moon (*yareach*) were the names of foreign gods in the Ancient Near East¹³. The First and Second Heavens are parallel realms, thus idol worship was an act that could span both spheres. “All the host of heaven” in one instance can refer to the heavenly bodies but simultaneously refer to heavenly beings as well. Let’s take another example:

“On that day Yahweh will **punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth**. They will be **gathered together as prisoners in a pit**; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. Then **the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed**, for Yahweh of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders.” - (Isaiah 24:21-23)

“All the **host of heaven** shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. **All their host shall fall**, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree. **For my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens...**” - (Isaiah 34:4-5)

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and **the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.**” - (Matthew 24:29)

When Jesus described His return to judge the world, He lifted language from Isaiah that depicted the punishment of the host of heaven; He made explicit reference to the stars. Did He mean the heavenly beings or the heavenly bodies? The implication seems to be both. In Isaiah 24:21-23, it’s clear that spiritual beings are in mind as the punished host of heaven are gathered and imprisoned in a pit. Isaiah 34:4-5 talks about the host of heaven falling like leaves from a fig tree. The Lord says His sword has “*drunk its fill in the heavens*”, calling back to the judgement imagery of Isaiah 24:21-23. In Jesus’ own words, the *stars* shall fall from heaven and the “powers of the heavens” will be shaken. This is an explicit reference to heavenly beings.

As we can see, there is a thematic connection between the Sons of God and the

¹³ *Shamash* was the East Semitic term for the ancient Mesopotamian sun god, Utu. This is seen as part of the rationale for why Genesis 1 doesn’t call them *shemesh* or *yareach*, but rather the “greater light” and the “lesser light.” It served as a polemic to foreigners who deified the sun and the moon; the point was that they were heavenly bodies created by Yahweh, not gods.

stars. Just as the stars were made to serve a function in the First Heaven, so too the Sons of God (and other heavenly beings) were made to serve a similar function in the Second Heaven. Having laid the groundwork, let us now proceed in more detail.

GIVING LIGHT UPON THE EARTH

“And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.” – (Genesis 1:14-18)

The lights of the heavens were made and appointed to do four things:

- 1) To separate day from night; i.e. light from darkness.
- 2) To mark appointed times.
- 3) To give light upon the earth.
- 4) To rule over the day and the night.

Now, this may sound like a rabbit trail, but bear with me. Although the sun was created to govern the day, Genesis 1:1 and Revelation 21-22 show us that the sun wasn't necessary for the day to be governed. If you look closely at the first creation day account, you may notice that Yahweh pronounced the day as good, but *not the night*. This “goodness” was not a moral quality, rather it was a statement about the *order* Yahweh was establishing; the suitability or completeness of the subject in question. In the beginning, you had disorder and you had chaos. God began bringing order to that chaos by dividing order from chaos. The division of order from chaos is what's called “good.” In other words, night wasn't pronounced as “good” because, on day one, it wasn't finished; thus, it represented *disorder*. It wasn't completed until day four when the moon and the stars were placed in the heavens to govern the darkness, bringing order to the night. Likewise, in verses 6 to 8, the expanse of the heavens wasn't called “good” because it wasn't yet finished; the heavens were in a state of disorder. Order was brought to the cosmos once they were inhabited by the heavenly bodies. By the end of the creation week, the whole of creation was pronounced as “very good”, as in, “well ordered.” Now, all that being said, the light on day one was called good, even though *the sun didn't exist yet*. This means that the sun isn't what brings order to the day. Now compare this to the state of creation in Revelation 21-22:

“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” – (Revelation 21:23)

“And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” – (Revelation 22:5)

There is no night, therefore there is no moon; i.e., there is no disorder in God’s New Creation. We won’t need the sun because the Father and the Son will be the light of the new city. The sun isn’t necessary to govern the day. God Himself will personally bring order to the cosmos through His visible presence. Before there was a sun, God was the source of order and light that governed the day. It’s a sign that, though the sun exists, it doesn’t truly rule the day; that has always been God’s role and the sun is just a placeholder or proxy for that rule. Almost like an *Imager*.

OVERCOMING DARKNESS

Throughout scripture, darkness serves as a metaphor for disorder, ignorance, unrighteousness and sin. As punishment for breaking the covenant, God declared to Israel that He would strike them with madness and blindness; they would grope around in the day as in utter darkness (Deuteronomy 28:28-29). In 2 Samuel 22:29, David wrote of the Lord as the God who *“lightens my darkness.”* In the midst of his sorrow, Job recalled the days of old when God watched over him; His lamp shone upon his head, allowing him to walk through darkness (Job 29:2-3). According to Proverbs 4:18-19 *“the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn”,* whereas *“the way of the wicked is like deep darkness.”* In this context, “evil” is the natural consequence of bringing disorder, darkness and chaos into God’s good creation. The apostle John carried this metaphor over into the New Testament:

“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” – (John 3:19-21)

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’ – (John 8:12)

“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.” – (John 12:46)

As such, we who follow in the footsteps of our Lord and saviour are called to live as people of light, shining into the darkness of this world, restoring humanity to its true, ordered status:

“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for **at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.** Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. **But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light.**” - (Ephesians 5:6-14)

The light is God’s Kingdom rule and darkness is rebellion against that rule. We are the light of the world; those called to walk in the light exposing the darkness of this world to the light of God’s Kingdom. To be in darkness is to lack wisdom and understanding; it is to deny the reign of Yahweh. In other words, walking outside of God’s order destabilizes His creation. We are called to reinstate His order on His behalf throughout the world. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

If the heavenly beings inhabit the skies in parallel to the heavenly bodies, what does this mean? It means that the heavenly beings were created to govern disorder and maintain God’s Kingdom by shining light onto the earth. Their role was to function in heaven as we do on the earth, to expose darkness to the light of God’s Kingdom rule. They were made to maintain God’s Kingdom order. In so doing, they separated light (order; leading to truth & goodness) from darkness (disorder; leading to evil & deception).

Since the First and Second Heavens exist in parallel realms, what the heavenly beings do in one realm has influence over the other. As a result, their actions have a direct influence over the affairs of mankind; and this was by design. It is for this reason that God created the Divine Council; to administrate His Kingdom rule throughout creation.

THE DIVINE PECKING ORDER

The Divine Council is the name given in Psalm 82 for the heavenly host. Whilst He is sovereign Lord over all creation, Yahweh elects to use the Hosts of Heaven as His means to bring order from heaven to earth. It was through the Divine Council that Yahweh elected to rule over His creation and administrate His affairs from heaven. Not to be confused with “counsel”, they were not beings from whom Yahweh sought advice, rather, they were an assembly of spiritual beings appointed to act on God’s behalf. Now, like all things that our Father made, the Divine Council was ordered. It was structured and divided into three tiers:

- 1) The Godhead (Yahweh, the Angel of Yahweh & the Spirit of Yahweh)
- 2) The Bene Elohim (the Sons of God)
- 3) The Malakim (Messengers)

Yahweh sat enthroned over the assembly, with the Angel of Yahweh (The pre-incarnate Son of God) as His co-regent; the heir of the throne. Below Him were the Sons of God. The Sons of God were unique amongst the assembly in that they played the most active role in the administration of Yahweh's affairs over creation. Yahweh set a blueprint for humanity and the Sons of God were responsible for making sure humanity stayed within the bounds of that blueprint. Their dominion over mankind wasn't meant to be one of "lordship" but rather of servitude. The Sons of God were summoned to deliberate over how God's will and decree would be carried out. They were like chamberlains, seeing to the affairs of their master's house.

"As I looked, **thrones** were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat...a thousand thousands **served him**, and ten thousand times ten thousand **stood before him; the court sat in judgment**, and the books were opened." – (Daniel 7:9-10)

If the multiple thrones here referred to the seat of the Divine Council, and if the Sons of God played the most active role in the administration of Yahweh's decrees, this would mean that they sat in judgement over mankind.

Beneath the Sons of God were ministering spirits called *malakim*, commonly known as "angels." The word *malak* literally means "messenger." Thus, "angel" describes what something does rather than what something is. The word isn't only used of heavenly beings, it can also apply to people.

We're not explicitly told what heavenly angels *are* (other than flaming spirits), all we know is that they are spiritual beings made to serve in God's Council. The angels served under the Sons of God doing most of the "foot work" as it were. Their role was to directly carry out the decrees of Yahweh and the rest of the Divine Council. They served mankind in a more direct, hands-on fashion than the Sons of God.

How it worked was that Yahweh decreed His will, the Sons of God deliberated over how to carry out that will, and the angels went forth (if necessary) to execute that will upon the earth. God's agents made real choices that had real consequences on the earth; even so every decision was ultimately from the Lord.

THE SANDWICH OF SOVEREIGNTY

If you're someone who believes in the absolute sovereignty of God, you're probably wondering how His sovereignty is affected by ruling through His chosen Imagers. This isn't actually a problem at all. In His sovereignty, Yahweh employs various means to bring about His will. The Divine Council is just one of those means.

"Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him. **The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones**, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he

will and sets over it the lowliest of men.' ...

...this is the interpretation, O king: **It is a decree of the Most High**, which has come upon my lord the king." - (Daniel 4:16-18,24)

King Nebuchadnezzar had been made mighty upon the earth, amassing great wealth and power. Yet there came a time when he exalted himself in boast, failing to acknowledge that Yahweh, the God of all creation, had raised him up. To humble him, Yahweh decreed that the King would enter a four-year period of madness¹⁴. The sentence placed upon King Nebuchadnezzar was described as both "*the decree & decision of the watchers / holy ones*"¹⁵ and the "*decree of the Most High*." Well which was it? Was it by the decree of the Holy Ones or the decree of the Most High? The answer is, both! In like manner, the Bible speaks to Yahweh's complete sovereignty over all things (including the individual decisions of mankind) whilst acknowledging that we make real decisions with real consequences that we are ultimately responsible for. Let's see another example:

"I saw Yahweh sitting on his throne, and all the **host of heaven** standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and Yahweh said, '**Who will entice Ahab**, that he may go up and **fall at Ramoth-gilead**?' And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a **spirit came forward** and stood before Yahweh, saying, '**I will entice him**.' And Yahweh said to him, '**By what means**?' And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You **are** to entice him, and you **shall succeed**; go out and **do so**.'" - (1 Kings 22:19-22)

By His sovereignty, Yahweh decreed *what* would happen, to *whom* it would happen, *where* it would happen and *when* it would happen. And yet, Yahweh called upon the Divine Council to deliberate over *how* His sovereign decree would be carried it out¹⁶. Even then, the final word rested with the Lord as to whether such a plan would succeed. From beginning to end, the decision was the Lord's; yet His creatures still had a choice.

To what then can we liken this interplay between Yahweh's sovereignty and the choices of His creatures? Imagine a sandwich; more specifically, a *Sovereignty Sandwich*. Two slices cut from the fresh bread of God's sovereignty, encompassing a

¹⁴ The text reads "seven periods" rather than years. These periods are likely a reference to seasons. The Babylonians only had two seasons, thus "seven seasons" would equate to roughly 3.5 years. Some believe that an ancient inscription written by Nebuchadnezzar and translated by British archaeologist Sir Henry Rawlinson, describes this period of madness; it reads: "*For four years the seat of my kingdom in the city...did not rejoice my heart. In all my dominions I did not build a high place of power; the precious treasures of my kingdom I did not lay out in the worship of Merodach, my lord, the joy of my heart. In Babylon the city of my sovereignty and the seat of my empire I did not sing his praises, and I did not furnish his altars; nor did I clear out the canals.*"

¹⁵ "Watchers" was a term used in 1 Enoch to refer to the Sons of God.

¹⁶ This should alert us to the parallels between the Sons of God and how God created mankind to function on the earth. Though He created the Garden and established His order over all things, He left it to mankind to decide how His order would ultimately be manifested on the earth.

hearty filling of creaturely volition:

- a) Yahweh's Sovereign Decree
 - a. The Desires and Decisions of Yahweh's Creatures
- b) Yahweh's Sovereign Decree

Without Yahweh's sovereign decree, nothing holds together and nothing comes to pass; everything would fall apart. As Jesus said in Matthew 10:29, not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from the Father; and we are of more value than sparrows. Though the following proverb is spoken in regards to man, I believe it equally applies to the heavenly beings:

"The heart of man plans his way, but Yahweh directs his steps." - (Proverbs 16:9)

SUMMARY

To recap, there are three heavens; the Third Heaven is God's abode, sitting high above everything else. It's the Heaven of the Heavens. The First and Second Heavens lie beneath the Third Heaven as parallel realms. The First Heaven is in the physical realm, the Second is in the spiritual realm. The earth is inhabited by physically embodied creatures, such as man, animals and creeping things, whereas the spiritual realm is inhabited by immaterial spirits. Yahweh rules heaven and earth through His faithful Imagers; the Sons of God in heaven, and humanity on the earth. In both realms, His Imagers are tasked with manifesting His Kingdom rule throughout the cosmos.

In the Heavens, He administrates His rule through the Divine Council. Existing as parallel realms, what happens in the heavens has a bearing on what happens on the earth. The Divine Council maintains God's Kingdom order in the heavens and thus His order on the earth. Through the Divine Council, the Sons of God exercise a degree of influence over the affairs of mankind. They are called to deliberate over the fate of specific individuals, families and entire people groups at any one time. As such, they sit in judgement over mankind to bring them in conformity to the will of Yahweh.

Now, if their job was to ensure that everything functioned in the heavens as it ought, and if maintaining God's order had a direct impact on the course of human history, what would happen if this delicate balance was broken? If God's Kingdom agenda wasn't followed, what would happen to mankind?