

“Epiphany: God’s Revealing in Human History”- Part 1

The first Sunday of the Epiphany season – Jan 10, 2021

Holy Trinity Church - Tom Mount

Introduction

- “Epiphany: God’s Revealing in Human History - Part 1”. According to the early church.

Exposition

1. Sometime in the distant past, God created a large family of spiritual beings in heaven of considerable diversity.

- We normally think of God as being alone in heaven. He’s not. He is surrounded by a large family (cf. Eph 3:14).
- We get a glimpse into this heavenly family when we read the biblical throne room scene passages: e.g., Isa 6; Ezk 1, 2; Dan 4, 7; Rev 4-6.
- The various cosmic family members were created for diverse purposes and have different levels of authority and responsibility. They include: angels (Heb. *mal’ak*; Gk. *angelos* = messenger), archangels: 1 Thess 4:16; Jude 9, seraphim (royal throne guardians): Isa 6:1-8, cherubim (throne guardians): Gen 3:24; Ezk 1:5-11, cf. Ps 99:1, living creatures (throne guardians): Ezek 1:5-21; Rev 4:6-9, watchers: Dan 4:13,17,23;5:21, holy ones: Dt 33:2; Dan 4:13,17,23; Zech 14:5; Jude14, rulers (*arche*): Ep 1:21, authorities (*exousia*): Ep 1:21, powers (*dunamis*): Ep 1:21, dominions (*kureotes*): Ep 1:21, cosmic powers (*kosmakrator*): Ep 6:12, thrones (*thronos*): Col 1:16, etc. Some of these names likely overlap and refer to the same creatures, with certain names signifying “type of being” and others, their “rank.” What should strike us is the sheer diversity of cosmic life.
- Collectively, these beings are known in the OT as sons of God (Gen 6:2,4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:4-7, Ps 29:1-2; 89:6), holy ones (Dt 33:2; Ps 89:5,7; Dan 4:13,17,23; Zech 14:5; Jude14), the heavenly host (1 Kin 22:19; Dan 8:10; Lk 2:13) or *elohim* (Dt 3:24; 32:17; Ps 82:1,6). In the NT, the most common referent is *angeloi*. *Elohim* is a plural Heb. noun but can be used of a singular entity (i.e., “God”) or plural (“gods”): e.g., Ps 86:8-12. Mike Heiser refers to *elohim* as “place of residence term”, designating where a member of the spiritual world lives. Demons (*shedim*) are called *elohim* in

Deut 32:17 (cf. 1 Cor 10:21-22). Even the deceased Samuel is called an *elohim* in 1 Sam 28:13.

2. God collaborates with the *elohim* in governing the cosmos.

- The *elohim* are the divine equivalent of an ANE dynastic family.
- Some of the higher-level spiritual beings serve on a divine council (*edah, cowd*): Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps 82:1; 89:6. Tradition says there were seventy members of El's council. There would later be seventy elders at the time of Moses and, still later, seventy members of the Sanhedrin. Traditionally, there were 70 nations on earth (Gen 10).
- The *satan* ("adversary, prosecutor") apparently was a member of this council. It is conceivable that the fallen *elohim* that we know as Satan or "the devil" once functioned as a *satan*. Additionally, Satan appears to have originally been a throne guardian (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; cf. Ezek 28:11-19).
- God's council appears to be advisory, deliberative and collaborative. It is not a mere formality. The council helps make decisions (cf.: Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Dan 4:14,24; Zech 3:1-10).

3. While these *elohim* looked on, God created our world and the earthly family that would be put in charge of it (Job 38:4-7). Humans were created to "image" God to the earth and rule it on God's behalf in wisdom and love (Gen 1:26).

- The humans were placed in a beautiful paradise, Eden, a kind of intersection between the spiritual and material realms, a touch-point between heaven and earth. In this garden paradise, God, his heavenly family and his earthly family lived together in harmony, love and cooperation (Gen 2:5-3:24).
- The humans were tasked with "caring" for Eden and spreading the harmony, order, beauty and shalom of Eden throughout the rest of world (Gen 1:26-28).

4. The *elohim* have rebelled multiple times against God's rule at various points in human history, ensnaring humans in these various insurrections. Three rebellions are recorded in the early chapters of Genesis.

- **Genesis 3:1-24: The rebellion of the *nacash* and the deception of humans**
 - Place: Eden (a paradisaal mountain garden of God)
 - Rebel characters: "Serpent" (*nacash*) and humans (Rev 12:9; 20:2)

- Background texts: Isa 14:12-17; Ezk 28:11-16 (each a prophetic compression of two accounts: cf. Isa 14:7ff.)
 - Offence: Enticed to “become like God,” knowing good and evil experientially
 - Consequences: Adam and Eve experienced evil first hand; relational alienation
 - Judgment: exile from Eden, effects of sin (curse), death
- **Genesis 6:1-8: The cohabitation of the “Sons of God” with female humans**
 - Place: Not in text, but Jewish tradition says it occurred at Mt. Hermon in northern Israel.
 - Rebel characters: “Sons of God” (Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps 29:1-2; 89:5-7) and humans
 - Background texts: 2 Ptr 2:4-10; Jude 6-7
 - Offense: Crossing of spiritual/material boundary line through illicit, trans-species sex between *elohim* and female humans
 - Consequences: 1) The offspring of these unnatural unions were *nephilim* (giant clans) who later populate the Levant, becoming idolatrous and immoral snares to the future Israelites. 2) Jewish tradition taught that these *elohim* imparted forbidden knowledge to humans: occult, idolatry, war, weaponry, seduction, immorality. This is when things got really ugly and violent (Gen 6:5-7).
 - Judgment: the flood. God mercifully makes a fresh start with Noah’s family.
- **Genesis 11:1-9: The building of the Ziggurat of Babylon**
 - Place: Babylon (Plain of Shinar)
 - Rebel characters: Humans (likely led and aided by spiritual beings)
 - Background texts: Deut 32:8-9; 4:19-20; Ps 82:1-7
 - Offense: Built ziggurat as new Eden to make a name (*shem*) for themselves and render the *elohim* accessible and controllable.
 - Consequences: The division of humankind into competing geopolitical units
 - Judgment: God temporarily disinherits the nations, putting them under the control of members of the divine council (the “Sons of God”). God mercifully makes a fresh start with Abram and Sarai (Gen 12:1-3).
- These rebellions were disastrous to humans and *elohim* but did not alter God’s original purpose to one day rule a beautifully restored, peace filled “heaven-earth” in collaboration with humans and *elohim*. His “decree” or eternal purpose is unchangeable (cf. Eph 1:4-5,11; Rom 8:18-23, 28-30).
- His restorative purpose unfolded in three movements: 1) The forming of Israel to whom he bound himself in covenant relationship and through whom would come Messiah, 2) The sending of Christ and the Holy Spirit as part of a new covenant with all everyone who turns to him, and 3) The second sending of Christ to restore all things.

Take away

- Marvel at our God, who is so loving as to hang with us no matter how we've turned from him, so brilliant as to be able to counter every creaturely evil and so powerful as to undo whatever damage we've done by our repeated insurrections (Rom 11:33-36)!

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?"

³⁵ "Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?"

³⁶ For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Recommended resources

- The Bible Project video series on "Spiritual Beings":
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/spiritual-beings/>
- Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (PDF):
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254783182_Dictionary_of_Deities_and_Demons_in_the_Bible
- Heiser, Michael. *Unseen Realm* (footnoted); *Supernatural* (distillation of *Unseen Realm*)
- Heiser, Michael. YouTube videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZKy1Xt2Ow0>
(Part 1 of 4 hour long talks; there are many others on YouTube as well)