Tracing the Development of Angels and Demons:

Theological Consolidation, Conceptual Amalgamation, and Greek Influence

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the theological and cultural development of angelology and demonology from the Hebrew Bible through the Second Temple period to the New Testament. It argues that the concepts of angels and demons evolved through a process of theological consolidation,[1] conceptual amalgamation,[2] and Greek influence, culminating in the dualistic and structured portrayals found in the New Testament. The study begins by examining the Hebrew Bible's fragmented depiction of spiritual beings, including the roles of mal'akim (angels), shedim (demons), and bene elohim (sons of God).

It then traces the influence of Second Temple literature, such as 1 Enoch and Jubilees, which introduced hierarchical angelology and the connection of demons to the spirits of the Nephilim. The role of the Septuagint and Hellenistic culture is explored, highlighting how Jewish translators and thinkers reinterpreted Greek concepts of daimones to align with biblical theology. The paper concludes with an analysis of the New Testament's refined portrayal of angels and demons, emphasizing their roles in spiritual warfare and eschatology. Finally, the paper considers the implications of these developments for modern readers, encouraging a contextual understanding of these terms to avoid anachronistic interpretations.

[1] Theological Consolidation is the unifying of unrelated spiritual concepts into a coherent theological framework.

[2] Conceptual Amalgamation refers to blending different ideas or figures to form a more comprehensive understanding.

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of angelology and demonology in biblical literature reflects a dynamic interplay of theological refinement and cultural influences across centuries. In the Hebrew Bible, angels (mal'akim) serve as messengers and warriors of Yahweh, while references to demons (shedim) and other spiritual beings remain sparse and ambiguous. By the Second Temple period, Jewish thought significantly expanded on these concepts, introducing detailed hierarchies of angels and a clearer understanding of demons, particularly as malevolent spirits connected to the Nephilim. This evolution was further shaped by external influences, such as Persian dualism and Greek cosmology, which redefined spiritual beings within a framework of cosmic struggle.

This paper explores the progression of angelic and demonic concepts across four key stages: the foundational depictions in the Hebrew Bible, the theological innovations of Second Temple literature, the influence of the Septuagint and Hellenistic thought, and the New Testament's consolidation of these roles into a more structured framework. By tracing these stages, the study highlights how theological consolidation and cultural amalgamation transformed diverse and fragmented ideas into the structured angelology and demonology that underpin much of Christian theology today.

Central to this progression is the role of the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Translated at a providential moment in history, the Septuagint served as the primary text for the New Testament authors, written when Greek was the lingua franca of the ancient world. This timing was no coincidence; it prepared the way for the gospel to be delivered effectively in Greek, reaching both Jewish and Gentile audiences. Of the 418 Old Testament quotations in the New Testament,

approximately 340 (~81%) align more closely with the Septuagint than with the Hebrew Masoretic Text. [3] This reliance underscores the Septuagint's critical role in shaping the theological framework of the New Testament and highlights its function as a conduit for the gospel message to spread across the Greco-Roman world.

II. ANGELS AND DEMONS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Angels in the Hebrew Bible

In the Hebrew Bible, angels (mal'akim) primarily function as messengers and agents of Yahweh, carrying out His will on earth. The term mal'ak, meaning *"messenger,"* highlights their intermediary role between the divine and human realms. Angels appear as both deliverers of God's word and executors of His judgments. For example, in Genesis 18, angels visit Abraham to announce the birth of Isaac and later oversee the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Similarly, in 2 Kings 19:35, an angel of the Lord annihilates the Assyrian army, underscoring their role as powerful agents of divine justice.[4]

Another notable depiction is the ambiguous figure of the *"Angel of the Lord,"* who often speaks and acts as Yahweh Himself. This figure appears in Genesis 22:11–18, where Abraham's faith is tested, and the angel intervenes to stop the sacrifice of Isaac. Such accounts blur the lines between the divine presence and angelic intermediaries, emphasizing their unique role in representing Yahweh's authority and power.

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[3] Gregory Chirichigno and Gleason L. Archer, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), Reprint edition.

[4] Michael Heiser. *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015, 75–76

Demons in the Hebrew Bible

In contrast to the frequent mention of angels, references to demons in the Hebrew Bible are sparse and lack detailed descriptions. The term *shedim* appears in Deuteronomy 32:17 and Psalm 106:37, where it is linked to idolatry and sacrifices to foreign gods: *"They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known"* (Deut. 32:17, ESV).[5] These passages portray demons not as fully developed malevolent beings but as spiritual entities tied to false worship and moral corruption.

Isaiah 34:14 contains the sole explicit biblical reference to *Lilith* (*lîlît*), often associated with nighttime chaos and desolation. The Hebrew term *lîlît* has traditionally been connected with *laylâ* (*"night"*), but linguistic evidence suggests it is a loanword from the Akkadian *lilîtu*, ultimately derived from the Sumerian *líl*. In Mesopotamian traditions, *lilîtu* was a female demon linked to stormy winds and unfulfilled sexuality, often depicted as a ceaseless seductress of men. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* describes a similar figure, *ki-sikil-líl-lá*, who inhabits a sacred tree alongside a serpent and the Anzu bird, until Gilgamesh expels them.[6]

In Akkadian texts, *lilîtu* and her related demons (*lilû* and *wardat lilî*) are portrayed as entities who enter homes through windows, ensnaring men and deceiving children as a false wet nurse with poisoned milk. These demons, lacking husbands and unable to bear

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[5] Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), Deut. 32:17.

[6] M. Hutter, in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 520–521.

children, reflect an unsettling distortion of female sexuality and nurturing.[7] The Greek translators of the Septuagint rendered *Lilith* as *onokentauros* (a donkey-centaur), evoking associations with the Akkadian Lamashtu, another demon often depicted atop a donkey. Later Jewish traditions, including the Talmud, describe Lilith as a winged demon with long hair who preys on men and newborn children, giving rise to apotropaic practices like the use of protective amulets.[8]

Although Isaiah 34:14 remains the only explicit biblical reference to *Lilith*, her legacy continued to evolve in post-biblical literature, where she was depicted as Adam's rebellious first wife who fled from him, becoming the archetype of female demons and witchcraft.[9] [10] The mythos surrounding Lilith, with its origins in Mesopotamian demonology, reflects the broader cultural and theological currents that influenced the Hebrew Bible's portrayal of spiritual beings.

Sons of God and the Divine Council

The *"sons of God"* (*bene elohim*) are another enigmatic group in the Hebrew Bible, appearing in texts such as Genesis 6:1–4, Job 1:6, and Psalm 82. In Genesis 6, the sons of God are described as taking human wives, resulting in the birth of the Nephilim, a race of giants.[11] Though brief, this passage has sparked extensive theological speculation

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[7] W. Fauth, in *Serta Indogermanica: Festschrift für Günter Neumann*, ed. J. Tischler (Innsbruck, 1982), 53–64.

[8] Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 151b; *Eruvin* 100b; *Niddah* 24b.

[9] W. Krebs, *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 27 (1975): 141–152.

[10] *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, trans. in Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 221–223.

[11] John J. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 133–134.

and forms the basis for later developments in Second Temple literature, particularly *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees*, which describe these beings as rebellious angels who descended to earth and corrupted humanity.

In *Job 1:6*, the sons of God are depicted as members of Yahweh's divine council, a heavenly assembly of divine beings who present themselves before God. This council reflects a common motif in the ancient Near East where a supreme god presides over a divine assembly. Similarly, Psalm 82 portrays God presiding over a council of divine beings, rebuking them for their failure to administer justice: *"God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment"* (Ps. 82:1, ESV).[12] For a more detailed discussion, see my study *From Babel to the Nations*.[13]

Psalm 82 goes further to critique these divine beings for their corruption and failure to uphold righteousness, culminating in God's pronouncement of judgment: *"I said, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince'"* (Ps. 82:6–7).[14] This passage underscores the fallen nature of some members of the divine council, who abandoned their assigned roles.

The Divine Council and the Broader Cultural Context

The divine council motif found in the Hebrew Bible has clear parallels in other ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean traditions. For instance:

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[12] Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 25–30.

[13] D. Gene Williams Jr., *From Babel to the Nations*, accessed December 14, 2024, https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr; https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html.

[14] Ibid., 83–86.

- In Ugaritic texts (c. 14th century BC), the high god El presides over a council of gods, known as the *assembly of the gods*. The Ugaritic *Baal Cycle* reflects this divine bureaucracy, where gods debate, strategize, and act under El's authority.[15]
- In Mesopotamian mythology, the chief god Anu ruled a similar council, with lesser gods (*Igigi*) serving various administrative roles.[16]
- In Greek mythology, Zeus presides over Mount Olympus, where gods deliberate and carry out divine judgments.

These cultural parallels highlight a shared ancient worldview where a supreme deity governs alongside subordinate divine beings. However, the Hebrew Bible uniquely positions Yahweh as the uncontested sovereign, with even rebellious divine beings operating within His authority.

From Divine Council to Cosmic Rebellion

In the biblical narrative, the sons of God originally function within Yahweh's divine order, but certain members of this council become corrupted. Genesis 6:1–4 alludes to this rebellion, which Second Temple texts expand upon in detail. In *1 Enoch 6–15*, the Watchers—a group of rebellious sons of God—descend to earth, take human wives, and teach forbidden knowledge, leading to the corruption of humanity and the rise of the Nephilim.[17]

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[15] Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 41–49.

[16] Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 145–148.

[17] Michael A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 6–15.

This rebellion culminates in the Watchers' punishment, where they are bound in the abyss until the final judgment. This theme reappears in the New Testament, where *2 Peter 2:4* and *Jude 6* reference angels who *"did not stay within their own position of authority"* and were subsequently *"kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness."*[18]

Theological Development

The progression of the divine council motif—from the Hebrew Bible to Second Temple literature and the New Testament—reveals a theological shift. In the Hebrew Bible, the sons of God function as part of Yahweh's administration, with no clear distinction between good and evil spiritual beings. By the Second Temple period, these divine beings become increasingly associated with rebellion and cosmic conflict, a development influenced by Persian dualism and Hellenistic thought.

The New Testament builds on these foundations, consolidating the cosmic rebellion narrative. Satan emerges as the leader of these rebellious beings, while angels serve as entirely righteous servants of God. This development reflects a transition from the Hebrew Bible's broad and less dualistic depiction of spiritual beings to a clearer good versus evil framework in Christian theology.

Second Temple Developments: Expanding Angelology and Demonology

The Second Temple period marked a significant expansion of angelology and demonology, with texts such as *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and the Dead Sea Scrolls providing detailed depictions of the spiritual realm. These writings elaborated on angels as hierarchical beings, introducing roles like archangels and watchers. For instance, *1 Enoch*

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[18] Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 54–58.

20 identifies Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel as key archangels.[19] The Watchers, a subset of angels, are portrayed as rebellious beings who descended to earth, taking human wives and fathering the Nephilim.[20] These Nephilim, upon their destruction, became the spirits that roam the earth as demons, as described in *1 Enoch 15:8–11*.[21] The division of spiritual beings into righteous and rebellious categories also becomes more prominent in this period. Angels are portrayed as loyal servants of God, while demons emerge as agents of corruption and chaos. This dualistic framework sets the stage for the New Testament's portrayal of spiritual warfare.

Demons in Second Temple Literature

Demons are intricately linked to the Nephilim in Second Temple literature. According to *1 Enoch 15:8–11*, the disembodied spirits of the Nephilim become malevolent entities that torment humanity.[22] Similarly, *Jubilees 10:1–14* describes how Noah prayed for protection from these spirits, leading to the partial binding of demons while others were left to test and challenge humanity. [23] In this narrative, Mastema, a chief adversarial figure, requests that one-tenth of the spirits be allowed to remain on earth to fulfill his purposes: *"Lord Creator, leave some of them before me; let them listen to me and do everything that I tell them Let a tenth of them remain before him,… and let*

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[19] Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch*, 1 Enoch 15:8–11.

[20] John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 10:13; 12:1.

[21] O. S. Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), Jub. 15:31–32.

[22] Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 100–102.

[23] Pietersma and Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, Gen. 28:12.

nine parts descend into the place of condemnation."[24] This concession reinforces Mastema's role as a tempter and accuser, paralleling the emerging concept of Satan. These texts not only expand the roles of demons but also establish their connection to the Nephilim, providing a direct theological link to New Testament demonology.

Cultural and Religious Context

The Second Temple period was deeply influenced by Persian and Hellenistic thought, which shaped Jewish angelology and demonology. Persian dualism, with its cosmic struggle between good and evil forces, likely contributed to the heightened dualistic portrayal of angels and demons.[25] The eschatological themes in these writings, such as final judgment and the defeat of evil, reflect a growing concern with cosmic justice and the ultimate triumph of God over rebellious spiritual forces.

III. SECOND TEMPLE DEVELOPMENTS

Expanding Angelology and Demonology

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[24] James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees: A Commentary on the Book of Jubilees, Chapters 1–50*, ed. Sidnie White Crawford, vol. 1 & 2, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 394–397.

[25] Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 180–182.

[26] Ibid.

subset of angels, are portrayed as rebellious beings who descended to earth, taking human wives and fathering the Nephilim.[27] These Nephilim, upon their destruction, became the spirits that roam the earth as demons, as described in 1 Enoch 15:8–11.[28]

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Angels in Second Temple Literature

The roles of angels were further expanded during the Second Temple period, a time when Jewish thought significantly developed angelology under the influence of Persian, Hellenistic, and Jewish traditions. Named angels such as Michael and Gabriel emerge prominently as protectors and messengers of divine will. Michael, in particular, is depicted as a warrior angel who defends Israel against cosmic adversaries. In *Daniel 10:13* and *12:1*, Michael is described as *"the great prince who has charge of your people,"* indicating a specific role as Israel's national protector.[29] This portrayal reflects a growing belief in angels as intermediaries responsible for guarding specific nations and executing God's plans in the spiritual realm.

The guardian angel concept begins to take clearer shape in Second Temple literature, particularly in texts like *Jubilees*. In *Jubilees 15:31–32*, angels are described as

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[27] Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch*, 1 Enoch 6–7.

[28] Ibid., 1 Enoch 15:8–11.

[29] Collins, *Daniel*, 10:13; 12:1

overseeing nations and individuals, reflecting an evolving belief in divine oversight and personalized protection:

"He appointed angels and spirits to guard them, to lead them into the right way and to guide them."[30]

This text highlights the emerging idea that angels were not only God's servants but also personal guardians, guiding and protecting individuals and specific groups. These ideas likely developed in response to Persian dualism, which emphasized a cosmic struggle between good and evil forces, and the need for divine agents to preserve the faithful amidst spiritual opposition.[31]

The concept of guardian angels was further shaped by Hellenistic influences. In Greek thought, daimones (spiritual intermediaries) often acted as protectors and guides for individuals. Plato, in works like *Symposium* and *Phaedo*, describes these spirits as intermediaries between the divine and humanity, offering protection and guidance.[32] This philosophical backdrop likely influenced Jewish thought during the Hellenistic period, merging the idea of national angels (like Michael) with personal protective spirits.

By the New Testament period, the belief in guardian angels had become well established. Jesus' statement in *Matthew 18:10* explicitly refers to angels who oversee and advocate for individuals, particularly children:

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[30] Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Jub. 15:31–32.

[31] Boyce. *Zoroastrians*, 100–102.

[32] Plato, *Symposium* and *Phaedo*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 202–203.

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."[33]

This passage reflects the culmination of Second Temple developments, where angels are understood as personal protectors who maintain access to the divine presence. Similarly, in *Acts 12:15*, when Peter is miraculously released from prison, the disciples mistakenly believe that it is his angel at the door, further demonstrating the widespread belief in guardian angels during this period.

Over time, early Church Fathers such as Origen (3rd century AD) and Clement of Alexandria expanded on the role of guardian angels. Origen posited that each individual has an angel assigned to them, drawing on the precedent set by Jewish and early Christian texts.[34] This idea continued to evolve in Christian theology, where angels were seen as both messengers and personal protectors, solidifying the guardian angel concept as a key element of angelology.

Thus, the role of angels as protectors expanded significantly from the Hebrew Bible's portrayal of general divine messengers to the Second Temple period's hierarchical and personalized angelic guardianship. Influences from Persian dualism and Greek philosophy contributed to this development, which was later solidified in the New Testament and early Christian thought.

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[33] Matthew 18:10 (ESV)

[34] Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G.W. Butterworth (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973), 1.8.1.

Cultural and Religious Context

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IV. THE ROLE OF THE SEPTUAGINT AND HELLENISTIC INFLUENCE

Translation Choices in the Septuagint

The Septuagint's translation choices played a pivotal role in redefining spiritual beings for both Jewish and Christian thought. The rendering of *shedim* as *daimonia* in Deuteronomy 32:17, for example, aligned Hebrew concepts with Hellenistic understandings of intermediary spirits.[36] Likewise, the consistent translation of *mal'ak* as *angelos* reinforced the identity of angels as divine messengers. These translations reflect not just linguistic equivalence but also theological adaptation to a broader Hellenistic audience. The Septuagint's influence was profound, bridging Jewish tradition and Greek cosmology in ways that directly informed the New Testament writers' interpretations of angels and demons. [37]

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[35] Boyce. *Zoroastrians,* 100–102.

[36] Pietersma and Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, Deut. 32:17.

[37] Ibid., Gen. 28:12.

Building upon the foundations laid by the Septuagint and Second Temple literature, the New Testament consolidates the roles of angels and demons into a dualistic framework. Angels are portrayed as wholly good, faithful servants of God, while demons are consistently malevolent spirits opposed to His kingdom. This consolidation owes much to Hellenistic dualism, which sharpened the distinctions between good and evil in the spiritual realm. For example, Paul's references to demons in 1 Corinthians 10:20 reflect the Septuagint's terminology, showing a continuation of its interpretive legacy.

The divine council worldview underpins Paul's theology here. In the Ancient Near East (ANE), idols were not thought of as gods themselves but as vessels that a deity could inhabit, transforming them into sacred objects imbued with divine presence. Through rituals like the Mīs Pî (*"mouth-washing"*) and Pīt Pî (*"mouth-opening"*), idols underwent consecration, transitioning from man-made objects into holy manifestations of the deity. Once the god or goddess was believed to indwell the statue, it was no longer considered a mere representation but was thought to be the living presence of the divine. Statements from these rituals proclaimed, *"The statue is born in heaven,"* emphasizing that the gods themselves, not humans, were seen as the true creators of the idol. Destroying an idol did not harm the deity but rendered it *"homeless,"* forcing it to leave the physical vessel.[38]

In the ANE worldview, the divine inhabitation of idols also meant that these objects were treated with reverence and regarded as extensions of the gods themselves. If

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[38] Christopher Walker and Michael B. Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Mīs Pî Ritual*, State Archives of Assyria Literary Texts, vol. 1 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 5–10.

an idol was damaged, it was mourned as if the god's presence had been diminished. Repairing or reconstructing the idol involved complex rituals to *"revive"* the divine presence, symbolizing a kind of death and resurrection. This ritualized care reflects the deep belief in the idol as a living, holy vessel.

This understanding shaped how Paul approached idolatry. He recognized that, while idols were man-made objects, the spiritual forces associated with them were real. The inhabitation of idols by deities was more than symbolic to ANE worshippers; it represented an active spiritual connection between the worshipper and the divine realm. For Paul, this spiritual connection was dangerous, as the entities inhabiting idols were not gods but demons. Paul states:

"What pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God" (*1 Cor. 10:20, ESV*).

This statement builds on the divine council worldview articulated in *Deuteronomy 32:17*, where Israel's sacrifices to foreign gods are described as sacrifices to demons (*shedim*). Paul's point is not merely to mock idols as inanimate objects or gods that *"do not exist,"* as might be inferred from *1 Corinthians 8:4*. Instead, Paul denies their authority, not their existence. He acknowledges these beings as spiritual entities in opposition to God's kingdom. By warning believers not to participate in idolatrous practices, Paul highlights the real threat these entities pose to their spiritual well-being.

By participating in idolatrous practices, worshippers aligned themselves with demonic powers and opposed the reign of Yahweh. This perspective builds on the Hebrew Bible's depiction of idols as spiritually potent objects tied to rebellion against

God. Paul's argument is not a dismissal of idols as irrelevant, but rather a condemnation of the spiritual forces behind them.

Paul's theology directly confronts this ANE understanding of idolatry. By framing idols as inhabited by demons, he emphasizes the cosmic stakes of idolatrous worship. It is not merely false devotion but active participation in spiritual rebellion against Yahweh. This aligns with the divine council worldview, where lesser spiritual beings (*elohim*) who were meant to oversee the nations became corrupt, leading humanity astray into idolatry. Paul's warning in *1 Corinthians 10* is thus an extension of this worldview, demonstrating its continuity in New Testament theology.

Paul's awareness of the divine council worldview—in which the nations were placed under the authority of lesser *elohim*, as described in *Deuteronomy 32:8–9*—is critical here. These beings, tasked with overseeing the nations, became corrupt and led their peoples astray into idolatry, turning them against Yahweh. For Paul, these hostile spiritual entities still operate as adversaries to believers, making idolatry not only an act of false worship but also a form of spiritual rebellion. This theological connection demonstrates Paul's continuity with the Second Temple Jewish worldview, in which idolatry was not merely misguided devotion but participation in the worship of hostile powers.

Thus, *1 Corinthians 10:20* does more than critique the futility of idol worship; it highlights the spiritual conflict underlying idolatry. By acknowledging the reality of these spiritual entities and their influence, Paul frames the believer's participation in idolatrous practices as a direct engagement with forces opposed to God's authority and reign. This

theological perspective reinforces the New Testament's dualistic framework of spiritual warfare and eschatological hope for God's ultimate victory.

On the Veneration of Icons

This raises the question of whether Christian veneration of icons could dangerously approach the practices Paul critiques. In traditions that use icons, such as Eastern Orthodoxy, a distinction is made between veneration (*proskynesis*) and worship (*latreia*). Icons are not viewed as divine in themselves or as vessels for divine inhabitation, as in ANE rituals. Instead, they are regarded as sacred art that directs the worshipper's focus toward God, Christ, or the saints. For example, the Second Council of Nicaea (AD 787) explicitly affirmed the veneration of icons while condemning idol worship, stating:

"The honor paid to the image passes to the prototype, and he who venerates the image venerates the person represented in it."[39]

However, the theological distinction between veneration and worship can become blurred in practice. For instance, excessive reverence or belief in miraculous properties associated with icons might inadvertently approach the type of idolatry Paul critiques.[40] If icons are treated as possessing inherent divine power or as intermediaries replacing direct worship of God, such practices could align with the spiritual danger Paul warns about in *1 Corinthians 10*.

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[39] Second Council of Nicaea, Session VII, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1899), 549–550.

[40] Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 187–188.

Furthermore, the cosmic conflict Paul emphasizes highlights the potential for spiritual deception. In ANE contexts, idols were understood as conduits for spiritual beings—often malevolent ones—to interact with humanity.[41] While Christian theology holds that icons are tools for spiritual devotion rather than objects of inherent power, the risk of elevating them to a status beyond their intended purpose remains. Paul's admonition calls believers to remain vigilant, ensuring that practices meant to honor God do not inadvertently substitute Him with created objects or intermediaries.

Thus, while veneration of icons as practiced in accordance with orthodox Christian teaching does not equate to idolatry, Paul's warnings about idolatrous practices rooted in spiritual rebellion remain a cautionary framework. Believers must critically assess whether any practice draws them away from the direct worship of Yahweh, even if culturally or traditionally accepted.[42]

Hellenistic Concepts of Daimones

In Greek thought, daimones were seen as intermediary spirits that could be either benevolent or malevolent, often serving as mediators between the gods and humanity.[43] However, Jewish interpreters in the Second Temple period redefined daimonia to exclusively represent malevolent spirits opposing Yahweh.[44] This reinterpretation reflects

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[41] G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, trans., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 1:309.

[42] Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 173–175.

[43] Sarah Iles Johnston. *Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, 57–60.

[44] Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 180–82.

a polemical response to Greek religious ideas, aligning the term with the biblical framework of idolatry and spiritual rebellion.

Impact of Greek Dualism

The influence of Greek dualism on Jewish thought during the Hellenistic period is evident in the increasingly sharp distinction between good and evil spiritual beings. Angels were portrayed as entirely loyal to God, while demons were depicted as wholly corrupt.[45] This dualistic framework also shaped Jewish and Christian eschatology, emphasizing the ultimate victory of good over evil and the judgment of rebellious spiritual entities. The cosmological struggle between these forces became a dominant theme in apocalyptic literature and later Christian theology.[46]

Interplay of Jewish and Greek Thought

The interaction between Jewish and Greek thought during this period led to significant theological developments. Greek hierarchical views of the spiritual realm were integrated into Jewish theology, influencing the depiction of angels as a structured celestial host with specific roles and rankings.[47] Additionally, Greek cosmological terminology was adopted to articulate Jewish beliefs, as seen in the use of kosmos to describe the order of creation and its spiritual dimensions. These adaptations demonstrate

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[45] John J. Collins. *Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 133–134.

[46] David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), 76–78.

[47] Everett Ferguson. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, 174–75.

the dynamic exchange between cultures, shaping a more systematic understanding of the spiritual world.

V. NEW TESTAMENT PORTRAYAL OF ANGELS AND DEMONS

Angels in the New Testament

The New Testament presents angels with well-defined roles that reflect their consolidation as entirely good and loyal servants of God. They appear as messengers, warriors, and worshipers, contributing to the overarching narrative of redemption and eschatology. Gabriel exemplifies their role as messengers, delivering divine announcements to Mary in Luke 1:26–38[48] Michael, identified as the archangel, is portrayed as a cosmic warrior in Revelation 12:7, where he leads the heavenly host against Satan.[49] Angels also act as worshipers, glorifying God in scenes such as Revelation 5:11, where they join the heavenly chorus.[50] The New Testament also mentions guardian angels, suggesting their protective role over believers, as seen in Matthew 18:10.[51] Finally, angels play significant eschatological functions, participating in events of judgment and the gathering of the faithful during the end times (Revelation 7–9).[52]

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[48] Darrell L. Bock. *Luke 1:1-9:50*. Vol. 1 of *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994, 123–25.

[49] David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 684.

[50] Ibid., 5:11.

[51] Craig S. Keener. *Matthew*. Vol. 1 of *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997, 304.

[52] Grant R. Osborne. *Revelation*. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002, 291–94.

Demons in the New Testament

Demons in the New Testament are consistently portrayed as **malevolent spirits** actively opposing God's kingdom and seeking to disrupt humanity's relationship with Him. They are often depicted as agents of chaos and corruption, influencing individuals to act against divine order. Jesus' ministry prominently includes confrontations with demons, which serve to demonstrate His authority over the spiritual realm and symbolize the arrival of God's reign on earth. For example, in *Mark 5:1–20*, Jesus exorcises the Gerasene demoniac, liberating a man possessed by a *"legion"* of demons and restoring him to wholeness. Similarly, in *Matthew 12:22–28*, Jesus heals a man who was blind and mute due to demonic possession. When accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, Jesus responds by affirming that such acts are evidence of the kingdom of God breaking into the world.[53]

Beyond these direct encounters, the New Testament also links demons to idolatry and spiritual rebellion. In *1 Corinthians 10:20*, Paul warns believers to avoid sacrifices to idols, stating: [54]

"What pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons" (1 Corinthians 10:20 ESV).

Here, demons are portrayed not only as disruptive forces but also as spiritual entities tied to false worship and rebellion against God. This reflects a continuity with the Hebrew Bible's portrayal of demons (*shedim*) in *Deuteronomy 32:17* and *Psalm 106:37*,

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[53] William L. Lane. *The Gospel of Mark: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, 179–80.

[54] Richard B. Hays. *First Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, 171.

where they are associated with idolatry and corruption. However, the New Testament expands their role, presenting demons as active participants in the cosmic struggle between good and evil.

Theological Consolidation

The New Testament draws upon Second Temple traditions to solidify this dualistic framework. Texts like *1 Enoch 15:8–11* describe demons as the disembodied spirits of the Nephilim, a view implicitly echoed in *Jude 6* and *2 Peter 2:4*, which reference rebellious angels who are bound in darkness. These malevolent spirits are consistently depicted as working under the leadership of Satan, the primary antagonist in the New Testament's narrative of spiritual warfare.[55]

This theological development underscores the eschatological dimension of Jesus' ministry. Each exorcism not only liberates individuals from demonic oppression but also serves as a sign of the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom over the forces of evil. The New Testament thus presents a comprehensive demonology, portraying demons as entities deeply intertwined with idolatry, rebellion, and cosmic opposition to God's purposes.

The New Testament builds upon Second Temple traditions to present a cohesive theology of angels and demons. Demons are implied to be the disembodied spirits of the Nephilim, as suggested in *Jude 6* and *2 Peter 2:4*, which reference rebellious angels and their punishment. The term *Tartarus* in *2 Peter 2:4* provides a significant connection between Jewish traditions and Greek mythology. Peter writes:

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[55] Michael A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 15:8–11.

"God did not spare angels when they sinned but cast them into hell [Tartarus] and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment" (2 Peter 2:4, ESV).

The use of *Tartarus* here is notable because it is a unique term not found elsewhere in the New Testament. In Greek mythology, *Tartarus* referred to the deepest, most dreadful part of the underworld, a place where the Titans—primordial beings who rebelled against the Olympian gods—were imprisoned after their defeat.[56] This imagery likely resonated with Peter's Hellenistic audience, as it evoked a realm of punishment for cosmic rebels. However, Peter adapts the term to align with Jewish traditions regarding the punishment of rebellious angels, such as those described in *1 Enoch 10:12–13*[57] and *Jubilees 5:6–11*.[58]

In these Jewish texts, rebellious angels (often identified as the *Watchers* from Genesis 6) are bound in a deep abyss as punishment for their transgressions. *1 Enoch* describes this place as a *"prison"* of darkness where the angels are confined until the final judgment.[59] The concept of the abyss or Sheol as a place of imprisonment in Jewish thought gradually converged with Hellenistic ideas of *Tartarus* during the Second Temple

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[56] Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 717–735.

[57] Rick Brannan et al., eds., *The Lexham English Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), Enoch 10:12–13.

[58] James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Expansions of the and Legends, Wisdom, and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*, vol. 2 (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985), 64–65.

[59] George W.E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 10:12–13.

period. This blending of traditions is seen in the New Testament's use of *Tartarus* as a symbolic location for divine judgment against rebellious spiritual beings.

In Christian theology, Satan emerges as the leader of these demonic forces, further solidifying his role as the adversary of Christ and the primary antagonist in the cosmic struggle against God. This depiction builds on earlier Second Temple literature, such as *Jubilees 10:8*, where Mastema (a Satan-like figure) leads spirits to test and torment humanity.[60] The New Testament fully integrates Satan into a dualistic framework, portraying him as the head of the demonic realm and the enemy of God's kingdom.

Meanwhile, angels are consistently depicted as entirely good and faithful servants of God, a departure from earlier Hebrew Bible depictions that left room for ambiguity regarding the moral alignment of divine beings. The hierarchical structures of angels established in Second Temple literature—such as archangels (Michael, Gabriel)—are further consolidated in the New Testament, where angels act as messengers, protectors, and agents of divine judgment. For example, Michael reappears in *Revelation 12:7*, leading the heavenly host in battle against Satan and his angels. This theological clarity highlights the ultimate triumph of God over the forces of evil, a theme central to Christian eschatology.

By incorporating *Tartarus* and other Second Temple motifs, the New Testament emphasizes the seriousness of rebellion against God and affirms the inevitability of divine justice. This synthesis of Greek cosmological imagery with Jewish traditions

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[60] Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Jub. 10:8.

demonstrates the theological adaptability of the New Testament writers as they communicated profound truths to their Hellenistic and Jewish audiences.

VI. THEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

Theological Consolidation

The New Testament offers a unified portrayal of angels and demons compared to the more fragmented depictions found in the Hebrew Bible. In the Old Testament, spiritual beings such as angels, demons, and the sons of God appear in scattered contexts with limited narrative connections. By contrast, the New Testament integrates these concepts into a cohesive framework, presenting angels as wholly good and demons as wholly evil. This theological consolidation is most evident in the New Testament's characterization of Satan as the central antagonist. He is depicted not only as the leader of demons but also as the personification of rebellion against God's authority, uniting various threads of opposition introduced in earlier texts.[61]

The theological evolution of angels and demons reflects a synthesis of Jewish tradition and cultural influences, culminating in the unified portrayals found in the New Testament. This development demonstrates the adaptability of biblical theology to cultural contexts, making the ancient worldview accessible to modern readers. However, these connections can also lead to anachronistic interpretations if readers impose New Testament concepts onto Old Testament texts without accounting for the intervening

[61] Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 250–53.

historical and cultural developments. For a more detailed discussion, see my study on the *Sons of God and the Nephilim*.[62]

Conceptual Amalgamation

The development of angelology and demonology in the New Testament reflects a synthesis of Second Temple Jewish traditions and Hellenistic philosophical influences. Second Temple literature contributed hierarchical structures for angels and expanded the narrative of rebellious spiritual beings. Hellenistic dualism, particularly the clear distinction between good and evil, further shaped the New Testament worldview.[63] Additionally, Persian dualistic concepts and Greek cosmology left an indelible mark on Jewish-Christian thought, influencing the New Testament's emphasis on cosmic struggle and eschatological judgment.[64] These combined influences enabled the New Testament writers to articulate a robust theology of spiritual beings that resonated with both Jewish and Gentile audiences.

Practical Implications for Modern Readers

Understanding the theological and cultural context of angels and demons is crucial for modern readers to avoid anachronistic interpretations. For example, projecting New Testament demonology back onto Old Testament texts can obscure the original intent of passages like Genesis 6 or Deuteronomy 32. Instead, readers must appreciate the

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[62] D. Gene Williams Jr., *Sons of God and the Nephilim*, accessed December 14, 2024, https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr; https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html.

[63] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 133–36.

[64] Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 175–77.

historical development of these concepts, recognizing how Second Temple and Hellenistic influences shaped their New Testament expressions.[65]

Moreover, modern believers can draw practical insights from the New Testament's portrayal of angels and demons in the context of spiritual warfare. Angels serve as models of faithfulness and divine assistance, while the depiction of demons highlights the reality of spiritual opposition and the need for vigilance and reliance on Christ's authority.[66] By situating these beings within their historical and theological contexts, readers can engage with Scripture more deeply and responsibly.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study has traced the development of angelology and demonology from the Hebrew Bible through the Second Temple period to the New Testament. The Old Testament presents a fragmented and limited view of spiritual beings, while the Second Temple literature expands these concepts, laying the groundwork for the New Testament's cohesive and dualistic portrayal. The New Testament integrates these ideas into a framework emphasizing cosmic struggle, divine victory, and the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Understanding the historical and cultural influences that shaped these theological developments is essential for interpreting Scripture accurately. The interplay between Jewish traditions and Hellenistic thought highlights the dynamic and adaptive nature of

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[65] Richard B. Hays. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, 22–24.

[66] Craig S. Keener. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993, 372.

biblical theology, demonstrating how ancient authors engaged with their cultural contexts to articulate eternal truths.[67]

Modern readers are encouraged to delve into Second Temple literature and the Septuagint to bridge the gap between ancient and contemporary perspectives. Such engagement fosters a richer appreciation of the biblical worldview and equips believers to apply its lessons on spiritual warfare, divine sovereignty, and human responsibility in their daily lives.

For a deeper exploration of the development of Satan as the central adversarial figure in biblical theology, see *Tracing Satan's Development*, which examines how Satan's identity evolved from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Together, these works provide a fuller understanding of the spiritual realm, its key figures, and their roles in God's redemptive story.[68]

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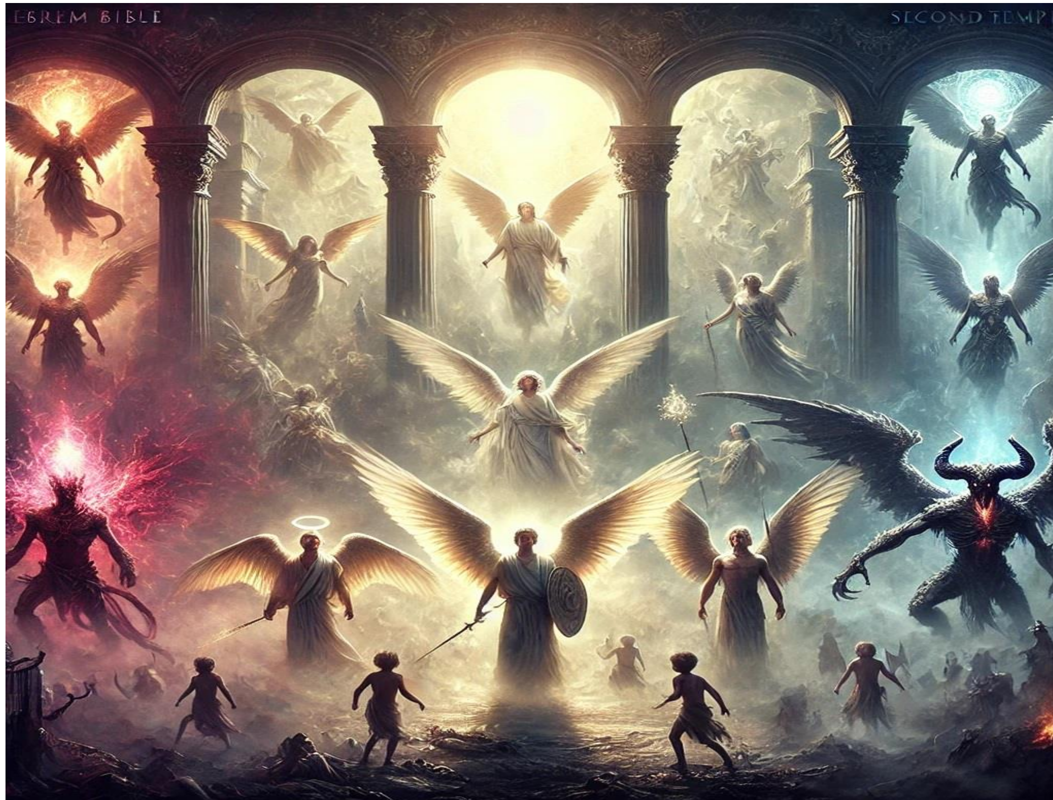
[67] N.T. Wright. *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, 245–47.

[68] D. Gene Williams Jr., *Tracing Satan's Development*, accessed December 14, 2024, https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr; https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html.

APPENDIX A: PROGRESSION ANGELS AND DEMONS IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY



Description:

This visually striking image portrays the progression of angelic and demonic roles across biblical eras. Divided into three symbolic sections, it highlights key theological developments.

- On the left, shadowy angels and fiery demonic figures evoke the ambiguous portrayal of spiritual beings in the Hebrew Bible, where angels act as divine messengers and shedim remain enigmatic forces.
- In the center, angels appear radiant and hierarchical, reflecting Second Temple literature's detailed depictions of archangels and watchers. Their celestial majesty contrasts with the emerging presence of rebellious spirits and Nephilim-inspired demons.
- On the right, the New Testament is illustrated with a vivid cosmic battle: glorious warrior angels confront monstrous demonic entities, symbolizing the dualistic struggle between good and evil.

The ascending divine light throughout the image unifies the three scenes, symbolizing God’s sovereignty, and ultimate eschatological victory, culminating in the New Testament’s theological clarity regarding angels and demons.

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