

THE  
forgotten  
HEAVENS

Six Essays on Cosmology

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canonpress  
Moscow, Idaho



Published by Canon Press  
P.O. Box 8729, Moscow, ID 83843  
800.488.2034 | www.canonpress.com

*The Forgotten Heavens: Six Essays on Cosmology*  
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All Scripture quotations are taken from the Authorized Version unless otherwise noted.

Cover illustration: Detail of *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, Frans Floris, oil on canvas, 1554.

Cover and interior design by Laura Storm.

Printed in the United States of America.

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

The forgotten heavens : six essays on cosmology / Douglas Wilson, editor ; [contributions by] Terry Morin [... et al.].

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-1-59128-071-2 (pbk.)

ISBN-10: 1-59128-071-0 (pbk.)

1. Biblical cosmology. 2. Angels. 3. Demonology. I. Wilson, Douglas, 1953- II. Morin, Terry. III. Title.

BS651.F68 2010

235'.4--dc22

2010001014

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

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## PREFACE

It is regrettable that evangelical Christians are not always to be trusted when it comes to handling the Scriptures. Those who should be the staunchest defenders of the Word of God against all comers are sometimes not. And why is this?

On some issues, the theological liberal is better able to state what the teaching of the Bible is. This is because he is able to say that, for example, the apostle Paul thought this way, and wasn't it quaint? The evangelical, on the other hand, is required to *believe* whatever Paul taught in the Scriptures; the conservative is stuck with the results of his exegesis. Therefore, if Paul taught anything that is extremely out of step with modern prejudices, that aspect of his teaching must be ignored, or at least reinterpreted.

For example: Evangelicals do believe in the spiritual realm, but they have divorced that realm from the world we actually live in. Angels, or spirits, are in another dimension somewhere. But the Bible teaches that "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire" (Heb. 1:7; Ps. 104:4).

But aren't winds just the motion of molecules in the air? This answer of the scientists is of course true, but it is not *exhaustive*. We have to be careful to avoid the fallacy of reductionism; what Donald Mackay calls "nothing buttery." The materialist can point out that a human being is made up of the following chemicals, and then list them all. Within this list, he does not find the constituent parts of a soul, or a spirit. Do they therefore not exist? The Christian answers clearly—the soul cannot be analyzed in that

way. Hamlet is “nothing but” paper and ink, and yet we rightly feel that such an account of it leaves out the most important part.

But why do we defend God’s creation from the materialist at only the point of man’s dignity? He says that we are “nothing but” certain chemicals, and we beg to differ. He then says that the winds are “nothing but” atoms in motion, and we, for some strange reason, agree. He says that stars are “nothing but” flaming balls of gas, and we agree with this as well.

Now the Bible does not teach that all winds are necessarily angels. We are not required to believe that there is no such thing as an inanimate object. But the Bible does teach that there is intelligence behind many things that the modern materialist dismisses as “processes,” “forces,” or just plain “matter.”

Man is not rattling around inside a big empty universe. The Creator of all is not an impersonal force, and the creation reflects that. The biblical view of the cosmos is not the one of modernity—infinite depths of lifeless space punctuated by dead rock, or chaotic fire. On the contrary, the universe is filled with intelligence and life.

*The New Bible Dictionary* confirms this observation:

[T]he implied angelology of C. S. Lewis’s novels (*Out of the Silent Planet*, etc.) would probably have commended itself with some force to the biblical writers. The Bible certainly suggests that angels of different ranks have charge of individuals and of nations; no doubt in the light of modern cosmology this concept, if retained, at all (as biblically it must be), ought properly to be extended, as the dual sense of the phrase “Host of Heaven” suggests, to the oversight of the elements of the physical universe—planets, stars, and nebulae.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the only difference between what we are doing here in this symposium, and what C. S. Lewis did—apart from his

1. J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 543.

# 1

## THE HEAVENS, HADES, & MAN BETWEEN

*Douglas Wilson*

The task we have set for ourselves in this essay is to take a tour of the biblical cosmos—a sort of biblical cosmography, if you like. As we begin, we need to recognize that we will have to cover a great deal of territory, and that we must lighten our loads considerably. Perhaps the best things to leave behind, at least for the time being, are our prejudices. For, as C. S. Lewis pointed out in *The Allegory of Love*, the present must also be recognized as a “period.” When we consider that future scholars will one day be studying our quaint notions, it will perhaps supply us with necessary humility as we study the past. The need for such humility is even greater when we consider that, as Christians, we possess a divinely inspired book which contains in it many assumptions which are not shared by the natives of modernity.

As we proceed, it will become clear that we must rethink our assumptions about the universe around us.

But if we submit to the biblical cosmology, it will not be found necessary to submit to a caricature of it—we are not living in a universe built like a three-decker London bus, riding on the back of a turtle. Nothing said here conflicts with what modern scientists know scientifically to be true. It does conflict, however, with a good deal of modern pseudo-scientific speculation.

It is necessary to make this point because it is easy for modern men to dismiss the ancients as primitives and to reject as nonsense the idea of the heavens above, and Hades below. To that idea we now turn.

## The Supremacy of Christ

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9–11, cf. Rev. 5:3)

Paul is telling us here that the supremacy of Jesus Christ will one day be acknowledged by all, everywhere. His authority extends to every nook and cranny of the universe; to the heavens above, to the earth we live on, and to the Underworld, or Hades. In the Greek, he is not referring to these three places, but, rather to the creatures inhabiting them, i.e., heavenly creatures, earthly creatures, and subterranean creatures.

As Jesus tells His disciples in the Great Commission, all authority is His, whether it is in heaven or on earth. The authority of Christ is completely universal, and includes all the forces of wickedness. The One who saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven has triumphed over all power and authority through His cross and resurrection (Lk. 10:17–20).

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority . . . And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:9–10, 15)



The significance of this triumph was not lost on the early Christians. They knew that they were partakers of that triumph, and that Satan would soon be crushed under their feet (Rom. 16:20).

So Jesus did not die in order to set an ethical dualism in stone, with God and Satan forever opposed. He spoke of the condemnation of the prince of this world (Jn. 16:7–11); He appeared in order to destroy the devil’s work (1 Jn. 3:8); He died to destroy the devil himself (Heb. 2:14); and He stated that in His death the prince of the world would be driven out (Jn. 12:29–32).

As we examine the biblical cosmology, we should keep in mind that we are studying, because of the resurrection, the domain of Christ. Nothing is outside that domain. Let us begin with Heaven, or as the biblical writers frequently would have it, the heavens.<sup>1</sup>

## The Glory of God

Is not God in the heights of heaven? And see how lofty are the highest stars! (Job 22:12)

God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. (1 Tim. 6:15–16)

The Bible teaches that God’s glorious presence is manifested beyond the highest stars, and that He dwells in light that cannot be approached. This is not a limitation of God’s glory or presence, for He is omnipresent, i.e., everywhere. As the Scriptures so clearly declare, not even the heavens contain Him. “But will God really

1. The heavens. In Matthew, 76% of the references to heaven are plural in the original; in Mark only 29% are plural; in Luke, 12% are plural; in John, 100% are singular; in Acts, 9% are plural; in the epistles it is 50/50; and in Revelation, all the references are singular.

dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kgs. 8:27).

Nevertheless, God's glory is manifested beyond the stars, and it is a place where creatures are undone. He has set His glory above the heavens (Ps. 8:1; 113:4–6). He must stoop down to look at the heavens.

The Bible does not identify beyond question where this is. What direction is it? Surely it is not sufficient to simply point "up." With the information we have, we can only offer a suggestion, but it is worth considering as a possibility.

Out of the north he comes in golden splendor; God comes in awesome majesty. (Job 37:22; cf. Job 26:7)

Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. (Ps. 48:1–2)

In this second quotation, Mount Zion is compared favorably to Zaphon, the "Olympus" of Baal. Zaphon's connection with the north can be clearly seen when you consider the kjv translation of this—is Mt. Zion on the sides of the north." Zaphon *means* north.

This term "Zaphon" shows up again in Isaiah 14, in the boast of the king of Babylon: "I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the north" (v. 13b).

Another passage, this one in the Psalms, shows the connection between God and the north. "No one from the east or the west or from the desert [south] can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, He exalts another" (Ps. 75:6–7).

The implication here is clear. No one from east, west or south can determine who is exalted and who not. That can only be done by the one from the north.

According to angelic census, laid  
Before the bounds for nations were  
Established by the One who nations made,  
Those nations drew their numbered lot.

But now the ruling principalities  
Behold their realms begin to shake  
And try to keep the gain from such as these  
Who preach with all the zeal of men.

The archon falls and from that place retreats  
(The place where he received his wound),  
And from that lower vantage he defeats  
All those who listen to his words.

He lies . . . the lying does him little good  
Beneath the wielded iron rod.  
All blinded effort vain; he never could  
Withstand this nation's sovereignty.

Incoming days the God of peace will crush  
That ancient seraph underfoot,  
And then will all the frantic demons rush  
Into the black, reserved pit.

# 2

## CELESTIALS & THRONOPHANIES

*Terry Morin*

There is a class of life within God's creation whose history and destiny parallels that of the human race in several respects. Some members of this class were present in Eden after our parents' fall, and some fell from their own first estate. Some will join redeemed and glorified humanity before the throne of God, and some will join the devil in the lake of fire. They are the celestials, otherwise known as the seraphs, cherubs, and living beings generally associated with the presence of God and pictured in the thronophanies<sup>1</sup> of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and St. John. These celestial ones are neither chubby, naked infants nor lithe, effeminate wall-flowers,<sup>2</sup> but are fearsome, majestic, winged creatures, clothed in fire and speaking in thunder.

God's revelation of these creatures includes both cautions and encouragements to those who would attempt to survey the mighty race. The metaphor of a survey is a fit one for the study of this topic, and for this essay. As we shall see, the biblical data enables one to study the celestials from a safe distance, but does not give one leave to mingle informally. It is the purpose here to collect and correlate

1. The word is a compound of the two Greek words, *thronos*, and *phaino*, meaning "throne," and "appearing," respectively.

2. These are only two of the reported caricatures of angelic beings. In the author's preface to *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis comments on the attempts of Raphael, Dante, Milton, and Goethe to give description to angels and cherubs.

the biblical data, to answer questions which are answerable from the texts, and to define the bounds of those which are not.

One could argue, and with considerable evidence from history, that the “hidden agenda” is the exegete’s equivalent to the sandals of Moses. They are forbidden on holy ground. The presence of this contraband pollutes the scholar’s study as easily as the archeologist’s diggings. Theological systems have all kinds of intended and unintended consequences, some of them contrary to the biblical teaching. The clear and present danger of commitment to a system is that the clear teaching of the text may be set aside.

Just as with every text there is a context, so with every context there is a worldview. Actually, in any context there are several worldviews, the prophet’s, the hearer’s, and the one progressively unveiled through the revelation, to which the first two must conform. Much of the labor of Bible study for the late twentieth-century believer is the reconstruction of those first two worldviews, in order that the revelation may be more fully understood. Unfortunately for many today however, the reconstruction of the prophet’s worldview is replaced by the imposition of the modern reader’s worldview. The consequences of this practice are easily seen in cosmology and are illustrated with the examples of the Gnostic,<sup>3</sup> the neo-orthodox, and the higher critic.

The Gnostic brings a dualistic worldview to the Bible. It is not, however, the biblical dualism of good and evil, but a dualism of spiritual and material. The spirit realm is good, and the material realm evil beyond redemption. The Gnostic would rewrite Habakkuk 1:13 to read, “You are of purer eyes than to behold matter, and cannot look on created beings.” Accordingly, the throne room scenes represent impossible realities. The transcendent God could not actually have a throne surrounded by four created beings. The one on the throne is therefore not the transcendent God but the

3. The English word “gnostic” is a transliteration of the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge.”

umpty-umpth emanation of Him, and therefore, the throne room scenes tell us little or nothing about Him.

The neo-orthodox also brings a dualistic worldview to the Bible, but it is a distortion of the biblical one. The neo-orthodox correctly perceives the “otherness” or transcendence of God, while denying to Him genuine immanence. For him, God is “wholly other” and no genuine contact is possible. The Scriptures are not the word of God; they become God’s word to each of us in personal, mind-numbing encounters which leave us or the prophets unable to relate their real content. What Isaiah saw in his vision of the heavenly palace did not have objective, observer-independent reality, but was only the emotional after-effect of an encounter with the Christ, and is therefore not suitable material for analysis and classification.

The practitioners of the historical-critical brand of exegesis have contributed very little to the church’s understanding of the message of the texts of Scripture. Historically, use of this exegetical method has given us analysis of the literary form, textual history and variants, linguistic context of a text, indeed, everything except what the prophet meant to say. Instead of enabling the text to live and speak to men, they content themselves with producing a silent, dissected corpse. In their application of rules of scientific evidence to the Scriptures, they at once dismiss the miracles, visions and theophanies, and with them, any possibility for serious consideration of the celestial creatures.

These few examples are included as a reminder of how anti-biblical worldviews or views of revelation may emasculate the text and give theological or moral refuge to those who wish to evade its consequences.

In taking these cautions to heart one must remember that a caution is not a prohibition. There are, in fact, many encouragements to our study contained within the sacred texts themselves, and we would be wise to be encouraged thereby.

One which would appear to even a casual reader of the Bible is the frequency and distribution of references to angelic and celestial beings. References appear in thirty-two of the sixty-six books of the Bible. Of the seventeen Old Testament books containing such references, eleven are historical books. Fifteen of the New Testament books refer to angelic or celestial beings.

A second encouragement to the study of the celestials is the variety and detail of the descriptions given for these creatures. The variety almost defies one's powers of description and classification. The detail is selective, giving considerable data on some features and completely ignoring others.

Another reason for a serious study of these creatures is their close association with the presence of God. Seven times in the Old Testament the Lord of Hosts (*Yahweh Sabaoth*) is said to be "enthroned between the cherubim" (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kgs. 19:15; 1 Chr. 13:6; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Is. 37:16). With a few minor exceptions, all appearances of the seraphim, cherubim, and living ones are as throne attendants.

The cherubim are most frequently mentioned in the Old Testament historical books, and are physically represented in the tabernacle of Moses and the temple of Solomon. The physical representations include the solid gold and gold-overlay cherubim overshadowing the mercy seat, as well as the carvings of cherubim on the walls, doors, and furniture of the Holy Place. The physical form of the cherubim was made known to Moses on Sinai (Exod. 25:40), and to David by the Spirit (1 Chr. 28:12, 19). The presence of cherubim is thus an important feature of both the earthly and heavenly tabernacle, and even though their exact form was forgotten by the time of Josephus,<sup>4</sup> there are sufficient references to attempt a partial description, to which we now turn.

4. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960), viii, iii, 3.

# 3

## THE GOVERNING PRINCES

*Evan Wilson*

It takes a certain nerve to delineate governmental systems. Teaching anything from constitutional law to high school civics demands a detailed understanding of the formulae that stand in place to guide our nation.

Imagine the difficulty if a request to understand the system of some place like Burma were to be placed before you. The task is finite, and yet a long way off. There is a philosophy distinct from the one which formed your own home politic, and we suspect that in the Burmese citizen's experience the law is understood with just as much historic and processed subjectivism as we possess.

So it is with a certain amount of fear that I approach the halls of heaven as though they were in Burma, and hope to make out for my audience some vision of the gods of nations, their doings and their purpose.

The task is not without another fear. Unlike Burmese laws, the government of heaven rules all of us. That being so, the teaching of St. Jude on the subject of the Glorious Ones is not unhealthy for us to remember at this point. "But these men revile whatever they do not understand" (Jude 10).

J. R. R. Tolkien says it neatly: "The gods are after all gods, and it is a matter of some moment what stories are told of them."<sup>1</sup>

1. "On Fairy Stories," *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, C. S. Lewis, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 56.



I trust that this essay will clear the vapors of some traditional misunderstandings, and will be a help in comprehending a monumental realm. We have before us the government of the universe. God Himself, not James Madison, built *this* hierarchy. I trust such a lofty endeavor does not discourage the interested with its presumption. The task is finite, if only because the beings studied are created.

It is, by very nature, ordered and quantifiable. No system of law, especially from a perfect source, could be anything else. Not only is the realm finite but our access to it is also. The God of gods has revealed windows to that realm, and those in a document of limited size.

Do not think for an instant that this realm is therein codified like the Bill of Rights. We do not have at our disposal a constitution of the heavenlies. Other than the character of God, I am not so sure that one exists. The Word of God is predominantly a history. We see in it the manifestations of the principalities and powers, as in their history they define for us their nature.

Prior to the Flood mankind was one in nationality and language (if Genesis 11:1 is retroactive). The wickedness of man had consequently direct and quick communication to all in this early world (Gen. 6:5). The culmination of this was the rise of the mighty men of old, the Nephilim, born in unholy union from celestial sons of God (Hebrew, *bene elohim*), and earthly women.

It could be suggested that God's response to this perversion was a continuation of His reason for casting Adam and Eve out of the Garden (Gen. 3:22). When He brought on the Flood, His desire was that His "Spirit would not contend with man forever for he is flesh" (Gen. 6:3).

After all had been destroyed (except eight persons), mankind, after a period of wandering toward the southwest from the mountains of Urartu, came back to the Plain of Shinar. The place was good for the raising of civilization and they proceeded to build a

city and a tower. The morality of their actions is not recorded but their rationale is clear.

Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. (Gen. 11:4)

As admirable as this thinking was, God had seen its results before. If successful, “nothing would be impossible for them.” The founding of Babel and the subsequent confusion of speech, are the beginnings of the rule of the Princes over man.

The Table of Nations in Genesis 10 and 11 surround and center on the story of Babel. It was a geographic center as “from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.” In the Table we see a record of the descendants of the three sons of Noah, and some of the nations descended from them.

Do I expect to be trusted in saying that this moment is the advent of Princes over nations? If nations, then princes? No, the Scripture bears witness to this interpretation. In Deuteronomy 32:8 it says:

When the Most High gave to the Nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God.<sup>2</sup>

2. Certain texts read “sons of Israel,” which is difficult to compute no matter how it is read. If it means the 12 sons of Jacob, it does not match any sensible numbering of the nations. If it refers to the nation in total, it is equally far-fetched, unless one is merely addressing enough room being made for these between .xed bounds of the peoples. Looking at the Conquest, it seems they weren’t adequately “fixed.” Also, the time reference in this verse is around the time of Babel at which time neither the nation nor individual Israel existed. The LXX reads “angels of God.”

The association of a select group of celestials with the various nations is witnessed in antiquity by the writers of the pseudepigraphal books of 1 and 3 Enoch. Their mystical tone and arguable accuracy notwithstanding, they still show that the connection was made.

First Enoch is vague with a reference in 89:59 to “seventy shepherds” which is the traditional numbering of the nations from Genesis 10 (all the names minus Noah and his three sons), but 3 Enoch is more clear.

Above them are seventy-two princes of kingdoms in the height, corresponding to the seventy-two nations of the world.  
(3 Enoch 17:8)<sup>3</sup>

How many princes are there? There are seventy-two princes of kingdoms in the world, not counting the Prince of the World.  
(3 Enoch 30:2; see also 18:3)

In the rabbinic work *Pirke de-Rabbi Efezer*, this clarifying quote occurs, “The Holy One, Blessed be He, descended with the seventy angels that surround the Throne of Glory, and they confounded their speech into seventy nations and seventy languages” (PRE 24).

This notion of the Sons of God as equivalent princes (versus the Sons of Israel reading) is in agreement with, though not confirmed by, God’s remark at the time to some unknown plurality, “Come, let us go down, and there confuse their speech.”

At this point the student of these things will be asking about for the purposes of God in assigning such angelic lordship. The

3. The LXX renders seventy-three, but eliminating the scribal error of the extra Cainan brings it to seventy-two. This also adds another argument for the proof of that scribal error. See my article “Are the Biblical Chronologies Between Abraham and Adam Reliable?” in *No Stone Unturned* (Moscow: Canon Press, 1989).

choice to separate men was due to mankind's corporate ability and it was effective in creating the provincial strife we know to this day. Yet why the Princes?

It could be shunted aside by the structural of "God likes to delegate authority," but that must be obvious. It is delegated therefore He must have wanted to delegate. Are there any reasons given in scripture? Yes, and in a very non-mystical passage, to be sure. The Apostle Paul, speaking to the Areopagites in the seventeenth chapter of Acts, verse 26 says, "And he made from one every nation of men to live on the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him."

This initial burden of spiritual guidance we now know to have gone somewhat astray. Not so much that Paul could not point to the altar to the Unknown God in Athens and say that in agreement with Epimenides the Cretan prophet that "we are indeed his offspring."<sup>4</sup>

The purposes of God at Babel were still operative on the hearts of men, but somehow not as fruitfully as might be hoped. The Princes had, by Paul's time, become enemies of God, as we will cover later. Some evidence for their failure is what we turn to next. In the Psalms the lament and accusation is clearest. In Psalm 58:1 we see David's concern:

Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods? Do you judge the sons of men uprightly? Nay, in your hearts you devise wrongs: your hands deal out violence on earth.

4. See Acts 17:28. Epimenides was a religious teacher and wonder worker in the Greek world. There are varied dates for him. Plato puts him at 500 B.C. (*Laws* 1.642), while Aristotle places him at 600 B.C. (*Athēnaion Politeia* 1, etc.). There was a rumor that he had an unusually long life span, with a sleep of some fifty years. He was a worshipper of the Cretan Zeus, and is referred to as a prophet by Paul in Titus 1:12.