

THE LOST LEGACY OF THE REFORMATION: AN APOCALYPTIC METANARRATIVE

ABSTRACT

An Augustinian neoplatonic demythologised perspective came to dominate post-apostolic Christendom whereby Adam replaced Satan in the Bible's metanarrative. Such went unchallenged by the 16th century Reformers. Subsequent biblical research, particularly of Second Temple Judaism, suggests that Augustine had departed from the Jewish understanding of their own Scriptures. The Reformers embraced an historical-grammatical approach to Scripture using all the resources at their disposal and overturned much reception history of the church to date. To reevaluate the Reformers' acceptance of the Augustinian understanding in light of recent scholarly research is consistent with that legacy. When this is done, an apocalyptic metanarrative emerges clearly from the page of Scripture.

AN INTRODUCTION

Two statements made from the platform at the March 2021 Affinity Conference (UK) articulate a challenge to the principles of the Reformation:

The church has been guided by the Holy Spirit and we should give sufficient weight to its teaching.

But if the Reformers had not rejected this concept there would have been no Reformation—and no Affinity conference. Their three "Solus": Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fides did not give authority to reception history (what might be called "tradition").

The second comment was:

We should not claim to have more insight than Calvin.

But it is difficult to overestimate the growth in biblical theology studies in the academy in the last 50 years. There has been a large amount of research, for example, into biblical languages and the cultural context of such, material not available to Calvin. If he were alive today he would surely avail himself of that resource.

Thus, I suggest that neither statement is faithful to the Reformation legacy, which is surely to focus on the text of Scripture using all the available resources at our command—and if necessary, challenge reception history.

Consonant with that legacy, this paper will look to challenge the Augustinian metanarrative that has held sway since the fourth century CE. Such is not to diminish the place of the Reformers in history, many of whom were manifestly intellectual and spiritual giants—but they were battling on multiple fronts. Just as Copernicus introduced the world to modern astronomy, he did not get it right first time—and nor did our heroes of the Reformation. Any university astronomy department would rightly revere Copernicus—but their standard textbook would not be *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*.

THE AUGUSTINIAN METANARRATIVE

Adam and Original Sin

The emphasis of the protevangelium of Genesis 3:15 is the ultimate defeat of Satan. But John Walton points out that: "Classical theologians from Augustine to Aquinas began their theology with God and when they were finished found little room for the demons."¹

Western Reformed theology followed that same path. Thus, the Westminster Confession, the 1689 Baptist Confession, and the Anglican 39 Articles do not contain a doctrine of Satan—he is a shadowy background creature that tempted Adam in Eden. The emphasis is on Adam—the Westminster Larger Catechism stating that Adam failed in his task of "personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience." The consequence was an exile and an acquired sinful nature seen to be transmitted to all humanity—and such explains our present predicament. This Augustinian "Original Sin" teaching sees Adam as the one solely responsible for humanity's plight.²

In contrast, the Scripture text says that Adam was not to touch one particular tree. And what is more, the reason given for Adam's exile from Eden is not because of sin or disobedience *per se*, but because he had done that very thing:

"Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil ... therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden ... [God] drove out the man."
Genesis 3:22–24

Several scholars have pointed out this gap between the Scripture text and the Augustinian perspective:

"There isn't a single citation of ... Adam's fall in the entire Old Testament for an explanation of human depravity." Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 117.

Tom Schreiner of SBTS, whose academic post almost certainly depends on him affirming Augustinian Original Sin (it is in their doctrinal statement), contributed to the Madueme and Reeves book defending the concept and his comments include:

Whether Scripture teaches what is traditionally called "original sin" depends significantly on the exegesis of Romans 5:12–19 ... the interpretation of Romans 5:12 plunges us into a thicket of difficulties ... what Paul says is fiercely contested and difficult to understand ... I have changed my mind [on this] since writing my Romans commentary ... The text could be construed to say that death spread to all because all without exception sinned individually.³

Henri Blocher, in his book in defence of Original Sin states:

¹ John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *Demons and Spirits in Biblical Theology: Reading the Biblical Text in Its Cultural and Literary Context* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade, 2019), 95

² Augustine is employed as a representative for the post-apostolic church neoplatonic framework of understanding without suggesting that he alone was responsible for such. It is beyond the purpose and scope of this paper to examine the doctrinal development of the early church, but see: Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2001), 29–49

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, "Original Sin and Original Death," in *Adam, The Fall, and Original Sin* (ed. Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2014), 271–75

Romans 5:12 fully deserves the appellation as the “seat” of the doctrine of original sin. This seat is not very comfortable! [his emphasis]. Whenever this doctrine is discussed Romans 5 is in the eye of the storm.⁴

And then:

When the two rival approaches that together hold the field still fail to satisfy, it is worth asking whether they could share a hidden uncriticized presupposition—valid or not.⁵

Surely this is a classic case of eisegesis—having a doctrine and then looking for it in the text? In this case Henri Blocher is seemingly unabashed about admitting such as he attempts a different, third approach to try and find it. But his paraphrase of Romans 5:12 is clear:

Just as through one man, Adam, sin entered the world and the sin–death connection was established, and so death could be inflicted on all as the penalty of their sins.⁶

That connection between actual sins committed and death is evident in Scripture, but the Augustinian Original Sin/fallen nature imputation by birth (or the seemingly more recent federal concept) is difficult to find in Romans 5, or anywhere else in Scripture.⁷

A change of nature?

When it is said Adam will know good and evil it is not that they become *capable* of good and evil—they were clearly already capable of disobedience. But Adam and Eve had not yet experienced evil ... they had never made a willing, conscious decision to disobey God. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 62–63

It is a clear sign that subsequent generations were not to be held morally accountable for the sins of their parents based on this teaching. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 63

In other words, Adam had free will and chose freely—and wrongly. And he did so without a sinful nature—and no teaching of Scripture explicitly suggests he ever acquired one? We are just like Adam—blinded and incapable of turning to God, not by Original Sin, but by the god of this world:

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:3–4

⁴ Henri Blocher, *Original Sin* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1997), 63

⁵ Blocher, *Original Sin*, 76

⁶ Blocher, *Original Sin*, 78

⁷ David Instone-Brewer (on the NIV translation committee) decisively rejects Augustine’s Original Sin teaching—and Anthony Thiselton points to the sparse support Scripture gives for the concept: David Instone-Brewer, *Church Doctrine & The Bible: Theology in Ancient Context* (Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham, 2020), 100; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 283–93

In Christ or in Satan

“You are to deliver this man to Satan.” 1 Corinthians 5:5 (also 1 Tim 1:20; 5:15)

In Paul’s mind sin belongs outside ‘holy ground’—that is, the church, the visible body of Christ—thus it is to be removed “outside the camp” into the world—the dominion of Satan. Heiser, *Demons*, 215

Paul never says: “deliver this person to Adam.” It is either ‘in Christ’ or ‘in Satan.’

Just as Adam and Eve were seduced by Satan and found themselves in his grip, so now human beings find themselves in the grip of Satan. Bell, 245

Thus: “He [Jesus] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.” Colossians 1:13

I suggest the concept that Jesus came to deliver us from Adam/our sinful nature is based on a false syllogism. In Romans 5:14–16 and 1 Corinthians 15:22 Christ delivers us from death, not from Adam. Our problem is not our relationship to Adam—our problem is the relationship Adam took us into.

Jason Meyer, from within the Reformed tradition, believes that for the Pauline corpus the two communities that are crucial to an understanding of the gospel are those who belong to Adam, and those who belong to Christ— thus the cross “puts an end to our relational ties with Adam.”⁸ But Derek Brown points out that an apocalyptic (cosmic evil) hermeneutic is central to Paul (#7.2, #7.3 below) and Adam does not appear in his definition of such (Brown, 63).

Furthermore, a deliverance from Adam seems to contradict the Adam/Christ typology of the Bible’s story. Jesus came incarnate as the “Son of Man” (i.e., “son of Adam,” Luke 3:38) to *restore* Adam;⁹ not to take us out of Adam:

Israel was the collective progeny of Abraham. Adam was Yahweh’s son, Israel was Yahweh’s son ... we are God’s sons, his children. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 156

The good news is not the end of Adam—or the “end of the law” as per Jason Meyer. Neither Adam, nor the law, are thrown into the lake of fire—it is Satan. In effect, much Reformed theology, when analysing the human condition follows an Augustinian demythologising path substituting Adam for Satan. Even though Adam outside Eden gets only two (?) mentions in the OT, and perhaps six in the NT—compared with the hundreds of references to Satan/demons/cosmic evil throughout the Scripture record.

Thus, there seems to be little or no basis for believing that Adam was expelled from Eden for failing to fulfil a ‘works’ contract, or that he acquired and gave (in some way) all his progeny a sinful nature—or that the cross removed us from our relationship to Adam.

It is surely surprising that this teaching has found its way into so many Confessions and considered by many as fundamental to understanding the gospel?

⁸ Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H, 2009), 41–46

⁹ John Ronning argues that Jesus is the true Adam and that his “Son of Man” title refers primarily to his sonship of Adam: *The Jewish Targums and John’s Logos Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2010), 105–15

In Summary

What is clear is that:

- Satan was instrumental in Adam’s disobedience.
- There is a connection between actual sins committed and death—such is taught in Romans 5, and elsewhere in Scripture.
- Satan is an ongoing problem for humanity—Jesus teaching us to pray “Deliver us from the evil one” (Matt 6:13, NIV¹⁰)—and speaking of the cross: “Now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” John 12:31

THE APOCALYPTIC METANARRATIVE

Derek Brown describes the Bible’s story as apocalyptic in that it embraces: “the belief in angels and demons and other cosmological figures in relation to historical events (especially in the end time).” Brown, 63

This apocalyptic metanarrative will be outlined by means of a selection of quotes (or more often paraphrases) from scholars (as per the Select Bibliography) alongside comments from myself. I have chosen in the main to quote from Michael Heiser as he has specialised in the field and published the most—but primarily because his books are readily available and accessible to the general reader. His viewpoint is largely consonant with that of the other works represented in the Bibliography written principally for the academy.

This narrative contrasts with the Augustinian neoplatonic demythologised narrative familiar to those of us within the Western Reformed tradition:

Contrary to the dominant *Christian tradition* [emphasis added] the fall of Adam is not the exclusive touchstone for the depravity of humankind. Our study will show that New Testament theology is in concert with Second Temple Judaism. Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 103; *Brown*, 27

The *unanimous testimony* [emphasis added] of Second Temple Judaism is that the Watchers [albeit led by Satan, *Reversing Hermon*, 152] are to blame for the proliferation of evil on the earth. Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 3

The serpent took Adam with him. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 123

1 THE DIVINE COUNCIL

God created many non-human divine beings hidden to human eyes, and every reference in the Hebrew Bible to the “sons of God” is a reference to such. They represented his authority in the unseen realm and participated in his rule. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 155

The Bible writers processed life in supernatural terms—in contrast many today do so by a mixture of credal statements, Augustinianism, and modern rationalism. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 13, 16

¹⁰ The Greek has “deliver us from the evil” and thus many translations go with “deliver us from evil.” However, “Satan” in the OT is usually prefixed with the definite article (see analysis in: Bell, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 10–11) and Matthew would have been aware of this.

1.1 A contingent immortality

There is, in biblical theology, only one eternal being—God—who is the source of all things visible and invisible, in the heavens and on earth (Col 1:15–16). This means that spirit beings are not timeless in the sense of being eternal. They had a beginning as created beings. They are immortal (Luke 20:36, NIV) but that immortality is ultimately contingent, based on God’s authority and pleasure. Heiser, *Demons*, 19 fn. 45

1.2 Human imagers

The divine council, consisting of Yahweh and the other spiritual beings created by him—that is, the “sons of God” —say “let us” (Gen 1:26) have a human creation who would be God’s representatives on Earth. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 41–43

To be human, Heiser asserts (Gentry concurs¹¹), is “to image” God (i.e., not made in his image), treating it as a verbal concept. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 41–43

This mirror-council on earth was to be composed of human imagers. These two family-administrations were together in his presence. Heaven had come to earth at Eden. Humanity was charged with extending the earthly presence and rule of God throughout the whole earth. God wanted to live and rule with all his children in his new creation. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 155

1.3 Other references to the divine council

“God has taken his place in the **divine council**; in the **midst of the gods** he holds judgment.” Psalm 82:1

“Are you the first man who was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills? Have you listened in the **council of God**? And do you limit wisdom to yourself?” Job 15:7–8

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and [when] **all the sons of God** shouted for joy?” Job 38:4–7

“I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, **a watcher, a holy one**, came down from heaven.”

“Behold, a day is coming for the LORD ... And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and **all the holy ones** with him.” Zechariah 14:1, 5

2 THE FALL OF SATAN

The fallen one (the serpent) is a divine rebel who had wanted the most prominent position in the assembly (the divine council). Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 89; Brown, 23–24

¹¹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom Through God's Covenants* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2015), 220ff.

Isaiah 14 ("How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!" v. 12) gives a glimpse of the event in "the mount of assembly," as it is described. Also, Ezekiel 28 where the 'Prince of Tyre' is a description of Satan. Heiser, *Unseen Realm* 75–82; Heiser, *Demons* 71–75

After his expulsion from Eden, the original rebel was no longer part of God's council. Heiser, *Demons*, 190

It is clear Satan 'fell' not Adam—thus at this point (and elsewhere) Reformed theology has substituted Adam for Satan (see #7.3 below).

2.1 The Serpent is Satan

Death was brought to humankind by a supernatural antagonist called the serpent the characterization of this figure in the Old Testament is complex ... The vocabulary for evil spirits in the OT appears to have no underlying principle. Heiser, *Demons*, 6, 8

It is not preposterous to read Genesis 3 and conclude God has an ancient cosmic enemy who had evil intentions with respect to both God's authority and human destiny. The only way to avoid that conclusion would be to assume God had no qualms about the deception of Eve by the serpent and that the deception did no harm. Both propositions are obviously false. Consequently, viewing the serpent as a divine enemy hostile to God's intentions for humankind is a coherent conclusion. Heiser, *Demons*, 102

To this conclusion another can coherently accrue. Even though the OT does not identify the serpent as Satan, the confrontation between the Satan of Job 1–2 and God was adversarial, not collegial. That means the Satan of Job 1–2 could be perceived as an enemy of God. That conclusion could be read back into Genesis 3 (and Second Temple material informs us that it was). Heiser, *Demons*, 102

2.2 Sheol

The third abstract trajectory concerns death and the realm of the dead. The serpent became associated with death because expulsion from Eden meant the loss of immortality and because the divine rebel was cast down to the underworld—Sheol, the pit. Since Second Temple Jewish literature had the Watchers (the errant 'sons of God'—see #3 below, are described as such in Dan 4:13 and 1 Enoch 6–15) sent to the abyss for their transgression, they also became connected conceptually to the realm of the dead. Heiser, *Demons*, 102–03

2.3 The seed of the serpent

But for now, all who oppose Yahweh's kingdom—in its earthly or spiritual dimension—whether human or divine—are the metaphorical seed of the serpent (see John 8:44 and 1 John 3:8–12).¹² God would ultimately restore God's Edenic vision and destroy the *nachash* [i.e., the serpent]. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 89, 92

¹² John Ronning affirms the concept of the metaphoric seed of Satan: *The Jewish Targums*,

3 THE REBELLION OF THE SONS OF GOD

“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. Then the LORD said, ‘My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.’ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came into the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.” Genesis 6:1–4

Many of these “sons of God” rebelled and took human women as wives and Nephilim were born to them—Heiser thus rejects the Augustinian demythologised ‘Sethite’ godly line interpretation.¹³ Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 92–100, 105–07

The supernatural interpretation of the passage was not an issue until the late fourth century when Augustine was influential in the promulgation of the Sethite view, a more rational “this world” interpretation, where the “sons of God” are humans from the godly line of Seth. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 97–100

It is thought that Satan gave the “Watchers” (the rebellious sons of God) the idea to go and claim human women. (Heiser makes an interesting comment on the purity of the 144,000 in Revelation—*contra* the Watchers). Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 152–53, 167, 180

Thus, Heiser argues for a literal reading and that such demonstrates a Hebrew mindset (also Doedens, 244) —and that this world view is evidenced in the Second Temple literature, in particular in 1 Enoch.

3.1 The Nephilim

Heiser argues that the Nephilim (or ‘giants’¹⁴) of the Genesis 6 rebellion created a bloodline that continued after the flood and such were an ongoing problem in Israel (Numbers 13:28–29, 33). Thus, both the divine and the new human ‘sons of God’ continued in the ongoing rebellion against Yahweh.

The death of the Nephilim is the point of origin for demons ... in this perspective the transgressions of the Watchers prompted the giving of the law—Galatians 3:19 is saying that the law was added to restrain evil ... not that the law produced transgressions. Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 110, 118

3.2 The Flood

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.’” Genesis 6:5–7

¹³ It seems Hebrew grammar is on his side, Peter Gentry of SBTS agreeing with him, but not about the ongoing presence of Nephilim: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKtHwc3mMY8>

¹⁴ Goliath, a descendant of the Anakim (Nephilim) being an example—the Masoretic Text put his height at 3 metres, but the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate 2 metres: *Unseen Realm*, 211, 228–29

The actions of the errant sons of God gave rise to the flood, the narrative of which begins immediately after that rebellion.

3.3 The goat demon

“And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot for Yahweh fell, and he shall *sacrifice* it as a sin offering. But he must present alive *before* Yahweh the goat on which the lot for Azazel [“scapegoat” ESV et al] fell to make atonement for himself, to send it away into the desert to Azazel.” LEB, Leviticus 16:9–10

On the Day of Atonement one goat is for Yahweh, one is for Azazel—a goat demon (see Leviticus 17:7 and the DSS). Thus, God hands over Israel’s sins to the goat and Azazel “gets what belonged to him: sin.” Heiser, *Demons*, 24–27

3.4 The deceased of the bloodline of the Nephilim mentioned in the NT

In Jude, and 1 and 2 Peter—the *angels*, *spirits*, and the *unrighteous* in prison are all the original transgressing sons of God, the Nephilim, i.e., demons, from Genesis 6. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 107–09, 293

“And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.” Jude 6

The terms “angels” and “demons” are broad and do not shed light on how NT writers thought of their rank and power in the unseen world. ‘Angel’ indicates a task, not what a divine being is. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 293, 323–32

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah ...” 1 Peter 3:18–20

“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.” 2 Peter 2:4

3.5 A summary

The divine transgressions of Genesis 3 and 6 are part of a theological prelude that frames the rest of the Bible ... heaven and earth were destined to be reunited but it would be a titanic struggle. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 110

This is one reason why I would argue for the primacy of the *Christus Victor* model of the cross (also in #7 below).

4 THE ALLOCATION OF THE NATIONS TO THE SONS OF GOD

At Babel God assigned the errant gods of the divine council as “gods of the nations” — whereas Yahweh took Israel for himself. Heiser claims a key storyline of the Hebrew Bible is the outworking of that conflict.¹⁵

¹⁵ “It is interesting that the number of nations is seventy in Genesis 10 ... the same as the number of the sons of El in the divine council at Ugarit”: Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 112, 114 fn7; 156

The Babel event is the OT explanation for the devolution from humanity's corporate relationship with the true God to individual nations with rival pantheons. Heiser, *Demons*, 22

The "sons of God" at the Babel event are the gods of the nations in OT theology (Deut 4:19–20; 17:1–3; 29:23–26). The focus of Psalm 82 is the corruption of these *elohim*. The *elohim* being judged in council in Psalm 82:1 are called "sons of the Most High" in Psalm 82:6. Heiser, *Demons*, 22

"When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the *sons of God*. But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage."¹⁶ Deuteronomy 32:8–9 [See footnote re *sons of God* translation.]

"God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds 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.' Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!" Psalm 82:1, 6–8

Both the serpent (identified by this time as Satan) and the sons of God were allotted to rule the [Gentile] nations and showed their disdain for human life by sowing chaos in the world. In contrast, Israel/Zion was the place where Yahweh intended the revival of Eden as his home and place of rule. Heiser, *Demons*, 183

5 THE EXODUS FROM EGYPT

Yahweh was Most High among all gods and Israel was his portion. The other nations had to know that as well. Israel was in Egypt precisely so that Yahweh could deliver them and thus convey that theological message. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 150

We must not overlook the fact that the exodus is viewed as a victory over the gods of Egypt—evil spirits in rebellion against Yahweh in the wake of Babel's allotment of the gods over the nations. Heiser, *Demons*, 185

The exodus event is repeatedly cast as a conflict between Yahweh and the gods ... From the fourth dynasty onward in Egypt, Pharaoh was considered the son of the high God Re. Heiser, *Unseen Realm* 150–51

The Exodus was a defeat over cosmic evil.¹⁷ Boyd, 33

"And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that [God] had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians. Jethro said, 'Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of

¹⁶ The NIV in Deut 32:8–9 follows the Hebrew Masoretic Text (fixed c.100 CE) and has "*sons of Israel*." But the LXX (a Second Temple translation, c. 100 BCE) has *sons of God* and in Heiser's view, in combination with the Dead Sea Scrolls (c. 300–100 BCE), they "demonstrate conclusively" that *sons of God* is the correct reading—not least because the passage is referencing Babel when Israel did not exist, and the *sons of Israel* number many thousands—there are not thousands of nations. In other words, the later Masoretic Text reading is a scribal demythologising amendment: Heiser, *Demons*, 146–48

¹⁷ Nick Lunn who suggests Pharaoh wore the symbol of a serpent on his headgear: Nicholas P. Lunn, *Jesus in the Jewish Scriptures: How the Old Testament Bears Witness to Christ* (Pontypool: Faithbuilders, 2020), 145

Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now [Jethro] know[s] that the LORD is **greater than all gods**, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.” Exodus 18:9–11

6 THE BATTLE FOR THE PROMISED LAND

This would not be just a battle for the land. It was a battle between Yahweh and the other gods—gods who had raised up competing human bloodlines that were opposed to Yahweh’s plan and people.... Adam was Yahweh’s first human son. The Nephilim bloodlines had a different pedigree. They were produced by other divine beings. They did not belong to Yahweh, and he therefore had no interest in claiming them. Heiser, *Unseen Realm* 192–95, 197, 203

6.1 Cosmic geography

Heiser is particularly good on this and points out the significance of many places in both the Old and New Testaments that reinforce a conflict theology hermeneutic but are lost to a modern reader.¹⁸

7 THE NEW EXODUS

7.1 The rulers of this age

In recent years it has been increasingly recognised that the New Testament is framed as a typological fulfilment of the original exodus from Egypt. An apocalyptic hermeneutic underlines this concept. Thus, just as Israel was freed from a foreign god represented by Pharaoh (considered to be the son of the high God Re¹⁹) —the elect are to be freed from the *rulers of this age* whose representative is Satan.

The *rulers of this age*, non-human spiritual beings, have many referents in the New Testament. We have principalities, powers, authorities, dominions, and thrones in Ephesians 1:20–21; 3:10; 6:12. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 120–21

Paul in 1 Cor 10:14–22 is thinking as a Jew who believed not so much in monotheism as in what was henotheism [adherence to one particular god out of several]. The one God is superior to all other beings of the celestial realm.²⁰

However, Heiser believes that henotheism is not a biblical concept in that it implies that Yahweh is just one god out of many, whereas the Hebrew Bible portrays him as a unique God among a pantheon of gods.²¹

“Only begotten son” (*monogenes*) should be “one of a kind” or “unique.” Note Hebrews 11:17, where Isaac is called Abraham’s *monogenes*—even though Isaac had a brother—Ishmael. Thus, God created other gods, but Jesus is the only God like Yahweh. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 36–37

“We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” 1 John 5:19

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkWaVBjaONE>

¹⁹ Heiser, *Unseen Realm* 150–51

²⁰ J. Moffatt, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London, 1938, 139; cited in: Tom Holland, “The Paschal-New Exodus Motif in Paul’s Letter to the Romans with Special Reference to its Christological Significance” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales, 1996), 432

²¹ Heiser, Michael S. “Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism.” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 18.1 (2008): 1–30

Jesus's whole ministry was about overpowering the fully armed strongman [Beelzebub, i.e., Satan] who guarded what he considered to be his "property" (Luke 11:21)—the earth and its habitants who rightfully belong to God. Boyd, 36

Casting aside or rationalising the myth of deliverance from the power of Satan impoverishes New Testament theology. Bell, 358

An apocalyptic hermeneutic is not only the mother of Paul's theology it constitutes the indispensable framework for his interpretation of the Christ event ... Paul interpreted the death and resurrection of Jesus as a *proleptic defeat* of all powers of evil, and especially of the apocalyptic "power alliance" [*rulers of this age*]. Brown, 64, 67

The new exodus story is the Bible's marital imagery story (God is the 'husband' of Israel, Jesus is the 'bridegroom' of the church). Thus, Jesus died to release us from Satan (the representative of the rulers of this age) to enable us to be betrothed to himself.²² The "proleptic defeat" Brown describes is the anticipated final defeat of Satan allowing the consummation of history at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The new exodus follows the same trajectory as the original exodus—"a victory over the gods of Egypt" (Heiser, *Demons*, 185), thus fulfilling the typology:

- On Passover day a first exodus from captivity to a foreign god, a ruler of this age.
- Followed by a journey to the 'marriage' at Sinai.²³
- On Passover day a new exodus, not from personal sins or a sinful nature, but from the rulers of this age who hold mankind captive.
- Followed by a journey to the eschatological marriage supper of the Lamb.

However, the rulers of this age were not certain of their ultimate fate:

"Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the *rulers of this age* understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." 1 Corinthians 2:6–8

In other words, the errant gods were not omniscient, and their fate was deliberately concealed in the obscurity of Old Testament prophecy of the coming Messiah. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 241

But the rulers of this age seemed to sense that Jesus represented a new challenge:

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." Mark 1:24.

²² "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law [of marriage] by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead." Romans 7:4, KJV

²³ Cohen points out that it was at Sinai that "the house of Israel was given the Torah as its 'marriage-ring': Gerson Cohen, "The Song of Songs and the Jewish Religious Mentality," in *The Samuel Friedland Lectures 1960-1966* (ed. Louis Finkelstein; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1966), 12

Jesus had come to do just that. Speaking of his imminent crucifixion Jesus says: "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out." John 12:31

The arrival of the one who would bruise the serpent's head could explain the NT emphasis on Satan against the more scattered references in the OT.

7.2 The role of Satan

Farrar and Williams point out that Satan is mentioned in the NT at least 137 times, by every NT author, and 'topically' (that is, when Satan is the subject of the discourse) in 14 out of the 27 books.²⁴

The NT profile of Satan has much in common with Second Temple Judaism, in which Satan, or the devil, is leader of all other evil spirits. His scope of authority is the whole world (i.e., the nations). This perception would effectively assign to Satan ruling authority over the gods allotted to the nations at the Babel event (Deut 32:8 cp. Deut 4:19–20; 17:1–3; 29:23–26). The OT does not attest this power structure, though its logic is discernible. Heiser, *Demons*, 182

Satan emerges as the chief demon in the NT. Heiser, *Demons*, 90

Certain NT descriptions of evil spirits unmistakably point to an intelligent, conscious spirit entity. For example, certain passages straightforwardly present Jesus in an adversarial stance and in conversation with an evil/unclean spirit, with no hint that Jesus was "playing along" with a deluded, mentally ill individual who only thought he was possessed (Mark 1:23–27; Mark 3:11–12). Heiser, *Demons*, 198–99

Paul believed that his apostleship was pivotal in spreading the gospel to the Gentiles at a crucial point in salvation history and that Satan opposed his apostolic labour to frustrate the work of God in the present age. Brown, 70, 74

The Gentile nations were the nations of the 'other gods' —Satan was determined not to give up those that he saw as belonging to him?

7.3 Sin —or Satan?

In Romans there are several passages which one might expect the apostle to refer to Satan, for instance Romans 5:12–21 and Romans 8:38–39. Brown, 102; Bell 232

But Tom Wright argues that in Romans 5:12 "sin" is Satan, the "enslaving power" —thus: "... just as *Satan* came into the world through one man" —and similarly in Romans 6:10: "For the death he died he died to *Satan*, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God."²⁵

And Anthony Thiselton points out that in Romans 7:9–11 some scholars see that Paul is speaking as if he were Adam in Eden.²⁶ Thus "sin" in the passage becomes Satan:

"I [Adam] was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death

²⁴ Thomas J. Farrar and Guy J. Williams, "Talk of the Devil: Unpacking the Language of New Testament Satanology," *JSNT* 39 (1) (2016): 79–96

²⁵ N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of the Crucifixion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 77, 280

²⁶ Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 288

to me. For sin [that is, Satan], seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me." Romans 7:9–11

Tom Holland suggests the reason Paul uses sin to denote Satan was because the Jews sought to avoid using Satan's name lest it contaminate them.²⁷ He cites other scholars who consider that "sin" in Paul can be a reference to Satan—in addition to Tom Wright these include James Dunn and E.P. Sanders.²⁸

Thus, Tom Holland argues that in Romans 5–8 (in line with the expectations of Brown and Bell) Paul is primarily referencing Satan ("sin")—not personal sins. If so, this vindicates Brown's claim that the climax of Romans 5–8 is contained in the closing verses of chapter 8 where Paul sees an apocalyptic victory.

"In Romans 8:34 and 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 Paul [references] the final destruction of God's enemies." Brown, 108.

The law, Adam, sins, or a sinful nature, do not appear in either list.

7.4 Two functions of the cross

"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross." Colossians 2:13–14

"He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." Colossians 2:15

A descendant of Eve would come forth who would someday undo the damage caused by the divine rebel [i.e., Satan, not Adam]. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 89, 110

In Ezekiel 45 the vision of the eschatological temple brings together Passover and the Day of Atonement—both freedom from Satan and atonement for actual sins committed are to be achieved on the same day. The Western church has tended to either ignore the defeat of evil or roll the two aspects into one.²⁹

Matthew draws attention to the conception/birth narrative—a non-sexual union with a celestial being and a woman 'reverses' the fall of the Watchers. Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 73

The divine transgressions of Genesis 3 and 6 are part of a theological prelude that frames the rest of the Bible.... Taken together, these episodes are a theological morality tale about the futility and danger of trying to recover Eden on any terms other than God has set. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 89, 110

Thus, any concept that access to Eden could be regained by subsequent obedience to any law, whether achieved by us, or imputed to us, with or without the forgiveness of sins—

²⁷ Tom Holland, *Romans: The Divine Marriage* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 160

²⁸ Holland, *Romans*, 216

²⁹ I argue in a paper on Academia the chronological and ontological primacy of the defeat of Satan, i.e., a *Christus Victor* model: "A critique of the James Bejon critique of The Day the Revolution Began" #4.

seems to be antithetical to the Genesis 3:15 promise, to the subsequent storyline Heiser (et al) outlines, to a new exodus paradigm, and to the pervasive marital imagery.

The atonement was required to enable us to be brought back into God's holy presence—but a vicarious atonement for sin is not an automatic route back to Eden. It is a battle to free us from an evil enemy that allows a return, and that enemy is not Adam, or even "sins." There are multiple unambiguous NT attestations that Christ on the cross delivered us from Satan/evil—and not one to say he delivered us from Adam.

Thus Hebrews 2:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Hebrews 2:14–15

7.5 A theosis

"We shall be like him." (1 John 3:2). Thus, Heiser argues for a *theosis* (divinisation of believers) —we become the brothers of Jesus in the divine council. Thus Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:17–18; 2 Peter 1:2–4; 1 Corinthians 15:44–54. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 314–21

Believers displace the defeated, disloyal sons of God who now rule the nations. They will be the fulfilment of God's plan to have humanity join the divine family-council and restore Eden. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 314

Israel failed to fulfil God's plan to revive his Edenic rule ... God adopted a new strategy that would not fail ... the new covenant. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 315

The writer of Hebrews (Heb 1:7–14) explains the distinction between Jesus and angels ... Jesus inherits rulership and dominion, angels do not. Angels, part of the divine council, are ministering spirits who serve human believers who inherit salvation and are adopted into Yahweh's family. We are the ones united to Christ and elevated into his family, not angels; we are the ones who will be put over the nations (1 Cor 6:3). Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 316–18

Although the kingdom and fatherhood metaphors of Scripture receive much attention, it is the marital imagery that Scripture repeatedly goes to in order to explain the concept that we are to be united to Christ and brought into ("elevated into") his family—that is, via the marital affinity union of Genesis 2:24, and thus "counted as" Abraham's seed (Romans 9:8) as Ephesians 5 explains:

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:31–32

Jesus will introduce us and not be ashamed of our humanity. He became as we are so that we might become as he is—this same Jesus brought many sons into glory (the divine family). Far from being embarrassed before the gods of his own council, he is bold as he says look at me and the children Yahweh has given me (Hebrews 2:10–13). We are all together now forever and that was the plan from the beginning. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 318–20

The goal was to bring Eden full circle—fulfilling God’s desire to have a human family with him forever. Heiser, *Demons*, 259

8 A THEODICY

It is curious that the evil one to whom the Bible directly or indirectly attributes all evil has played a rather insignificant role in the theodicy of the church after Augustine. Boyd, 37

NT writers did not attribute all illness to demons. There were well known maladies like fever, leprosy and paralysis which were not thought necessary to attribute directly to Satan or to demons (Mark 1:29–31, 40–44; 2:1–12). Heiser, *Demons*, 198

However, Boyd believes that all sickness, ultimately, derives from cosmic evil: Boyd, 36 (see #8.2 below).

The life God desired for human beings on earth had been diverted and corrupted. The fears and threats of the natural world were consequences of divine rebellions, from which death and chaos over spread the world of humanity. Heiser, *Demons*, 6

The threats of the natural world were somehow tied to a cosmic struggle involving the spiritual world. Heiser, *Demons*, 31

The consensus among the early church fathers (*contra* Augustine) was that everything in nature that obviously looks contrary to God's character appears that way because it is contrary to God. All evil/chaos is the activity of the ruling prince and the demons. Boyd, 294–98

It seems we have lost the theology of evil that the apostolic/early post-apostolic church had. Thus, Tom Wright says: “Alongside this Israel-and-God story there runs the deeper story of the good creation and the dark power that from the start has tried to destroy God's handiwork ... I do not claim to understand that dark power.”³⁰

God does not delight in evil and suffering. Nor does he need it for his sovereign plan. Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 60

Greg Boyd calls this sovereign plan concept of suffering the “Augustinian blueprint” (with a perceptive comment on Calvin’s *Institutes*, #1.17.13, Boyd, 98). Thus, the church has been caught flat-footed by the pandemic, the C of E archbishops reduced to saying we should “reflect” on the 100,000 deaths—but to what end?³¹

8.1 Job

It is Satan who afflicts Job. Brown, 25

Satan, albeit with God’s permission, has power to inflict all sorts of disasters on Job and his family. But Job (e.g., Job 7:20; 30:18–31), and his friends, see such as coming from God. Boyd, 220–26

³⁰ Wright, N. T. *God and the Pandemic*. London: SPCK, 2020, 14

³¹ <https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/covid-deaths-archbishop-canterbury-york-uk-reflection-letter-full-846170>

Eliphaz comments: "Who, being innocent, has ever perished?" (Job 4:7); "Is not your evil abundant?" (Job 22:4–5). Bildad asks: "Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right? If your children have sinned against God, he has delivered them into the hand of their transgression." Job 8:3–4 Boyd, 220–26

But God refutes this: "I am angry with you [Eliphaz] and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me" (Job 42:7). And specifically, to Job: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" Job 38:1–2; Boyd, 220–26

Job 40 and 41 —rather than speaking of God's control over an orderly universe, they paint a world of chaos and danger involving the Behemoth and Leviathan: Boyd, 222–23

In Job, these monsters represented the forces of chaos held in check by the power of the creator deity. *Demons*, 32 God's truthfulness is challenged by Satan. Heiser, *Demons*, 78, 102, 105–06; Brown, 25–26

By giving the reader [in the prologue] a glimpse of heaven that Job never becomes privy to, the work suggests in poetic fashion that things go on in heavenly realms that we are totally ignorant of but that nevertheless greatly affect our lives. Boyd, 225

Citing Frederick Lindström: "Job explicitly held YHWH responsible for all the evil of existence, so YHWH rebuts this charge by pointing to his own continuous combat with evil as manifested in these chaos creatures." Boyd, 223

In Job, these monsters represented the forces of chaos held in check by the power of the creator deity. Heiser, *Demons*, 32

8.2 The New Testament

Jesus never treated disease and demonization as anything other than the work of the enemy. Boyd, 36

The NT depicts sickness and disease as originating from the devil. Boyd, 238

While it is accepted by conflict theologians that God did use means to punish ethnic Israel or her enemies from time to time, they do not see that God is directly and arbitrarily inflicting punishment on mankind—rather that such comes from fallen members of God's council who looked, from the very beginning, to destroy God's handiwork. *Contra* John Walton:

"Unfortunately, many conflict theologians believe that there are such things as Satan and demons" and comments that the "cosmic powers" etc., are the equivalent for a modern audience of climate change or a nuclear holocaust—it is simply "a message of comfort and assurance; whatever we happen to be afraid of, Christ is superior to it."³²

However, there are many problems with this, not least that the NT distinguishes between illness and demon possession—and why would Jesus himself say of the woman he healed in

³² Walton and Walton, *Demons and Spirits*, 226, 255

Luke 13, “whom Satan bound for eighteen years”? And it would suggest that when the NT teaches that Jesus died to defeat “the devil” (e.g., Hebrews 2:14–15)—he in fact died to release us from “our fears,” for example, about “climate change.”

A CONCLUSION

Both the Augustinian system and the Bible’s apocalyptic metanarrative support the understanding of TULIP³³ in that the outcome is the same—although the Bible’s apocalyptic metanarrative would suggest that ‘T’ should be for Total bondage to Satan.

But a theology which has no place for Satan—or at least one where Satan makes no difference to our understanding of the Bible story, surely impacts a theodicy, and the perception of our human plight.

8 April 2021
Colin Hamer

³³ Reformation teaching has been encapsulated in the acronym: Total depravity; Unconditional election; Limited atonement; Irresistible grace; Perseverance of the saints.

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