

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible.* By Michael S. Heiser. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015, 413 pp., \$27.95.

Bizarre. Weird. Strange. Terms like these, Michael Heiser says, express how many Christians today feel about select Bible passages that deal with the supernatural—passages that the author targets in his treatise. Heiser works as a scholar-in-residence at Faithlife, the parent corporation of Logos Bible Software. A website promotes his book ([www.theunseenrealm.com](http://www.theunseenrealm.com)), while another website offers supplementary details concerning the book's contents ([www.moreunseenrealm.com](http://www.moreunseenrealm.com)). The primary audience includes pastors and scholars. A popular version of the work also appeared concurrently: *Supernatural: What the Bible Teaches about the Unseen World—and Why It Matters* (Lexham, 2015).

Forty-two chapters and eight parts fill out the volume. Helpful visual aids appear throughout, but numerous substantive footnotes distract the reader from the running text. The end matter consists of an epilogue, acknowledgments, subject index, and Scripture index.

The book reads like a biblical theology, moving through history chronologically, with a special focus on the world unseen. The author's launching point, Psalm 82, received a thorough treatment in his dissertation (p. 13). Verse 1 proclaims, "God (אֱלֹהִים) stands in the divine assembly; he administers judgment in the midst of the gods (אֱלֹהִים)." The latter use of אֱלֹהִים shows that God possesses a divine assembly—members of a divine council. At the book's outset, Heiser lists about forty biblical excerpts that many interpreters gloss over because those excerpts seem nonsensical to the modern Western mind (p. 19). Sample excerpts include Gen 6:1–4 (the sons of God), Ezek 28:11–19 (the king of Tyre), John 10:34–35 ("you are gods"), and Hebrews 1–2 (the divine council). The book aims to expound these excerpts and show their interrelatedness while accounting for the details. The author takes the reader on a journey through Scripture, building his case brick by brick.

Exegesis ought to shape our theology, rather than vice versa, Heiser stresses. We must allow Scripture to speak rather than "*filter the Bible through creeds, confessions, and denominational preferences*" (p. 16; emphasis original). He encourages readers to pursue the original intent of the authors of Scripture (p. 13).

Heiser devotes many pages to the identification of Bible characters. Chapters 17 and 18 insightfully discuss instances in which two separate Yahweh figures appear in the same scene. One interesting example goes unexplored: Gen 19:24. In this verse, Yahweh on earth tells Yahweh in heaven to rain fire on Sodom and Gomorrah.

Genesis 1–3 mentions the divine council in three verses according to Heiser (pp. 39, 62). First, God tells the members of his divine assembly, "Let us make humankind as our image" (Gen 1:26). Second, the serpent promises Eve, "You *both*

shall be like gods (אֱלֹהִים), knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). Third, Yahweh says to his council members (אֱלֹהִים), “The man has become as one of us, to know good and evil” (Gen 3:22). Heiser rightly denies the notion that the plural pronouns of Gen 1:26 prove the existence of the Trinity. Other scholars, however, maintain that the plural pronouns point to multiple persons of the Godhead without specifying the number of persons. Regarding Gen 3:5, the translation “gods” falls short because other deities did not exist prior to the fall of humanity.

The author (pp. 57, 326–27) asserts that the following guises do not represent the devil: the adversary (Job 1–2), the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2), and the god of this age (2 Cor 4:4). The cows of Bashan in Amos 4:1 constitute deities (p. 290). At the crucifixion, Jesus was surrounded by the bulls of Bashan (Ps 22:12), namely, demonic אֱלֹהִים (p. 291).

No text of Scripture depicts an original fall of angels that resulted in the origin of demons (p. 325). Interestingly, Heiser never interacts with the commonly held view that Rev 12:4 describes the fall of Satan and one third of the divine beings prior to the birth of the male child.

A few textual quandaries factor into the discussion. In Deut 32:8, the “sons of God” (4QDeut<sup>l</sup>) surpass the “sons of Israel” (MT), argues Heiser (pp. 19 n. 113). This reading forms the basis for the “Deuteronomy 32 worldview,” which “at many times looms large” (p. 254). Speaking of looming large, Goliath stood 6 feet 6 inches (4QSam<sup>a</sup>) rather than 9 feet 9 inches (MT) according to the author (p. 211). On the other hand, if the Philistine measured only 6 feet 6 inches, then Saul would have towered over him, because Saul stood taller than the tallest Israelite by about a foot (“from his shoulders upward,” 1 Sam 9:2; 10:23).

Heiser claims the biblical writers sometimes relied upon other ANE writings for their material (p. 372). Two “textbook examples” include Ps 48:2 (“the heights of the north”) and Isa 14:13 (“the mountain of assembly” and “the summit of Zaphon”). The author does not, however, provide criteria that help the reader evaluate the possibility of literary dependence.

An issue arises concerning the clarity of Scripture. According to Heiser (pp. 241–43), the OT does not clearly predict the death and resurrection of the Messiah. If it did, the evil spirits would have known that Jesus needed to die and would not have killed him. Even the holy angels could not anticipate God’s plan for the death and resurrection of Christ. The absence of the term “anointed one” (מָשִׁיחַ) in Isaiah 53 confused everyone enough to prevent them from discerning that the Messiah would die. Other interpreters, however, believe that the OT clearly taught the death and resurrection of the Messiah, even without the added perspective of the NT (Luke 24:25–27; Acts 26:22–23; 1 Cor 15:3–4).

Heiser indicates that the NT writers could alter the original meaning of an OT text: “Although Psalm 22 wasn’t originally messianic in focus, Matthew’s use of it fixes that association” (pp. 290–91). For him, “The New Testament writers who speak about prophetic fulfillments *didn’t* always interpret the Old Testament literally” (p. 349, emphasis original). One of Heiser’s favorite passages, 1 Pet 3:14–22, purportedly employs typology (p. 18). Peter “assumes that the great flood of Gene-

sis 6–8, especially the sons of God event in Genesis 6:1–4, *typified* or foreshadowed the gospel and the resurrection” (p. 336; emphasis original).

According to Heiser, Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God on earth when he exorcized the demon in Mark 1:25 (p. 280). The prediction concerning the Davidic kingdom in Ezek 37:24–26 received its fulfillment at Pentecost (p. 364). Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles fulfilled the prophecy of Isa 66:15–23 (p. 305). Concerning eschatology, Heiser goes his own way: “My own eschatological views are not those of Kline’s (amillennial), nor would my views align with any of the other systems” (p. 371 n. 3). Moreover, “an identification of Armageddon with Megiddo is unsustainable” (p. 368). The author also touches upon matters relating to God’s foreknowledge and the presence of evil. He believes God took an awful risk in granting his creatures free will (pp. 66, 68).

Two of the book’s typographical errors need mention. The Mosaic law contains 613 commands, not 663 (p. 163). And the Scripture index incorrectly lists 1 Maccabees with the Bible books rather than with the “Other Citations” (pp. 406, 413).

Heiser succeeds in demonstrating the existence of a divine assembly in the unseen realm. He addresses an important and fascinating topic, fills a gap in the academic literature, and skillfully synthesizes the material. At the same time, Heiser’s audience will not always agree with his interpretive conclusions. I encourage readers to carefully compare the claims of this contribution with the teachings of Scripture.

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*Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Framework for Hearing God in Scripture.* By Craig G. Bartholomew. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015, 623 pp., \$44.99.

Those familiar with the fields of OT study or hermeneutics will no doubt recognize the name of Craig G. Bartholomew, professor at Redeemer University College. He is the author of numerous OT commentaries and books on biblical theology, hermeneutical methods, and living wisely in light of our place within the scriptural story and the contemporary world.

His interest, experience, and expertise suited him well as the founder and chair of Scripture and Hermeneutics Seminar (SAHS). This project, which ran from 1998–2008, was created in response to the perceived, growing crisis in biblical interpretation. Each of these annual meetings was focused upon a particular topic or theme and involved critical engagement of papers by esteemed international and interdisciplinary scholars. These resulted in an eight-volume series co-published by Paternoster and Zondervan. Information regarding the history, purpose, and distinctives of these annual meetings and subsequent volumes are available at their website (<http://www.paideiacentre.ca/what-we-do/scripture-and-hermeneutics-seminar/history>).