

God at War

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Mile high view

When we have traditionally viewed Jesus death, resurrection, and ascension, it has been through the lens of personal guilt and forgiveness from sin. This is a valid perspective, however, it misses much of what Jesus did through His redemptive work. The Reformers were working theologically in a context that was framed by the Roman Catholic Church and its view of sin, confession, and forgiveness. Closely allied with the RC church were the totalitarian governments of Europe. Meanwhile philosophically the Enlightenment with its enchantment with Greek philosophy was captivating the universities. Personal freedom was the answer to the oppressed state of the people. So the Reformers found in the Gospel a message of personal salvation and freedom. The message fit the medium. However, the medium was quite unique among the cultures of the world. The result was a unique view of salvation.

I will be attempting to broaden our conception of Jesus' work by acknowledging the cultural context of both the OT and NT and show how the Gospel meets the questions and needs of all cultures and settings. I believe that our culture no longer resonates with the Reformation gospel of purely personal salvation as forgiveness from sin. We need a gospel which fits the questions of our time. That is what I will attempt to provide in this series.

Introduction

At the beginning of the creation account in Genesis, God brings order to the chaos and disorder that existed (Gen. 1:2). God is the Sovereign over creation, and He gives Adam and Eve the mandate to function as His co-regents over the creation (Gen. 1:26, 28). That much is clear from Scripture. Today I want look at the context for the creation of Adam and Eve and what it appears God had it mind as the grand project. Pretty much of this will be "reverse engineered" from what we see later in Scripture, since we are told virtually nothing in Genesis.

What was Eden?

We can surmise some things about Eden from other scenes in Scripture and from writings from the neighboring cultures during the period of the writing of the Scriptures.

"The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed." (Gen 2:8, NKJV)

We see a number of things here. The garden was limited in size and it was located in a place called Eden. We don't know geographically where Eden was, but some geographic markers would place it in the area between the Mediterranean Sea and Babylon. (With no physical reason for my position, I suspect it was in Israel. Eden ends up associated conceptually with Jerusalem, although in terms of the rest of Genesis 1-11, Mt Hermon is much more prominent.)

It was a garden

Gardens in mid eastern thought were associated with the dwelling place of the gods. It would appear that Eden was God's "earth residence" and the seat of His government on the earth. More on that later.

It was probably a mountain

Gen 2:11 The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold.

Gen 2:12 And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there.

Gen 2:13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush.

Gen 2:14 The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

Stating the obvious, rivers flow downhill! We don't know which mountain it might have been. Nor do we know if the current geography is the same as it would have been prior to the flood. My point here is less geographical than it is theological. The garden of Eden was located on a mountain in Eden.

As with gardens, mountains were believed to be the dwelling place of the gods.

Putting these two things together, it would appear that Eden was the place where God's dwelling on the earth was located, and He put Adam and Eve in "His space" as it were. It appears that God moved the seat of His government from somewhere in the heavens to the earth. At a minimum, Eden would have been an outpost of His kingdom government.

Home and capitol

In near eastern ancient thought, the king's residence was the seat of his government. He didn't "go to the government headquarters." He ruled and held court in his palace. It appears that Eden was to be that place on earth.

The spiritual/heavenly realm

(The following concepts/material are taken from [The Unseen Realm](#), Michael Heiser, Lexham Press, 2015.)

"As in heaven, so on earth" appears to be the pattern God has used in relating to the earthly realm. This will be a key thought moving forward. What can we know about the spirit realm both prior to and after creation?

God is not a control freak!

God has a governing council to whom He has delegated authority in the heavenly realms. How these governors rule will determine their ultimate fate. God is the Sovereign over all. He is the Most High God. Everything exists because of His mercy and will. However, He utilizes co rulers to carry out His decrees and judgments. The following are a few snapshots to illustrate this principle.

1 Kings 22

Earthly context: Ahab, king of the northern kingdom, wants to recover Ramoth Gilead from Assyria. This area was part of Israel and had been taken over by Assyria. Ahab wants it back. He asks Jehoshaphat, king of the southern kingdom, to join with him in waging war against Assyria to recover Ramoth Gilead. That's the earthly realm activity. Jehoshaphat would like some divine confirmation for the battle.

Heavenly context

Micaiah is invited into the heavenly realm to observe a courtroom scene in heaven which is happening simultaneously to the earthly activity. This is what he sees, which is the most explicit divine council scene in Scripture.

1Ki 22:19 Then Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left.

1Ki 22:20 And the LORD said, 'Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?' So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner.

1Ki 22:21 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, 'I will persuade him.'

1Ki 22:22 The LORD said to him, 'In what way?' So he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the LORD said, 'You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.'

Main points

1. God is seated in the courtroom surrounded by spiritual beings
2. He has rendered a judgment against Ahab for his wickedness
3. Ahab must die
4. He holds a council session
5. And delegates the execution of His judgment to them
6. He allows "a lying spirit" to be part of His plan. This is particularly interesting. There is no evidence that the spirit who will be a "lying spirit" is in any way "evil." Deceptive tactics in war apparently is not evil. Just a thought.
7. The judgment is then carried out on the earth (1 Kings 2:29-40)

Free will in heaven

Just as God has given free will to humanity, even so the angels have free will. There is only one "system" for both realms. God is consistent with Himself and rules both realms by the same law. I would suggest, in fact, that "both realms" is the way we see it from earth. While there is separation and distinction with limitations on "crossover" between the realms, I would suggest they are more "one realm" than we tend to imagine. To establish this point, we will look briefly into Deuteronomy 32, Genesis 11, and Psalm 82.

Deuteronomy 32 worldview (Heiser's term)

Deu 32:8 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**.

Deu 32:9 But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

"These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these **the nations were divided on the earth after the flood.**" (Gen 10:32, NKJV)

Psa 82:1 A Psalm of Asaph. **God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods.**

Psa 82:2 How long will you judge unjustly, And show partiality to the wicked? Selah

Psa 82:3 Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy.

Psa 82:4 Deliver the poor and needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked.

Psa 82:5 They do not know, nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are unstable.

Psa 82:6 I said, "You are gods, And all of you are children of the Most High.

Psa 82:7 **But you shall die like men, And fall like one of the princes."**

Psa 82:8 **Arise, O God, judge the earth; For You shall inherit all nations.**

Concept summary

After the flood and man's immediate rebellion in Babel where they a built a "mountain" (ziggurat) for communion with the gods, God divided the nations (70 or 72) and gave rulership to them over to the spiritual "sons of god." They were to judge justly, but demonstrated

themselves to be corrupt and subject to God's judgment. God would one day re-inherit the nations and bring them back under His rulership.

Additional thoughts

Apparently we (human beings) are the replacements for the rebellious angelic beings. They seem to know this, and therefore want what we have for themselves. Therefore the original temptation in Eden and Satan's temptation of Jesus by offering Him the nations.

The war

The war between God and his spiritual enemies (the gods) is for the rulership of the cosmos. Adam turned the creation over to God's adversaries and so the plan for the recovery was kicked into motion. The biblical story is about this battle. Jesus death and resurrection are the central point of this battle and they determine the final outcome.

We will be exploring this, and more, in the weeks to come.