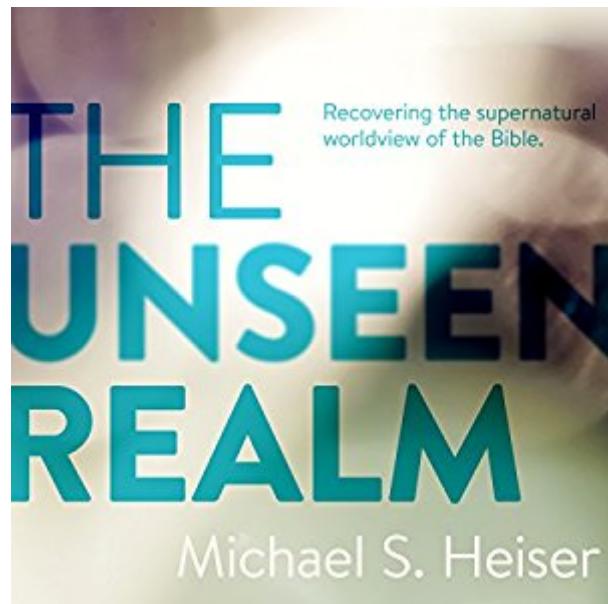


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# The Unseen Realm



## **Synopsis**

In The Unseen Realm, Dr. Michael Heiser examines the ancient context of scripture, explaining how its supernatural worldview can help us grow in our understanding of God. He illuminates intriguing and amazing passages of the Bible that have been hiding in plain sight. You'll find yourself engaged in an enthusiastic pursuit of the truth, resulting in a new appreciation for God's word. Why wasn't Eve surprised when the serpent spoke to her? How did descendants of the Nephilim survive the flood? Why did Jacob fuse Yahweh and his angel together in his prayer? Who are the assembly of divine beings that God presides over? In what way do those beings participate in God's decisions? Why do Peter and Jude promote belief in imprisoned spirits? Why does Paul describe evil spirits in terms of geographical rulership? Who are the glorious ones that even angels dare not rebuke? After listening to this book, you may never read your Bible the same way again. There is a world referred to in the scripture that is quite unseen, but also quite present and active. Michael Heiser's The Unseen Realm seeks to unmask this world. Heiser shows how important it is to understand this world and appreciate how its contribution helps to make sense of scripture. The book is clear and well done, treating many ideas and themes that often go unseen themselves. With this book, such themes will no longer be neglected, so listen to it and discover a new realm for reflection about what scripture teaches.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I finished reading Unseen Realm last night. It was an intriguing book and it was refreshing to read a point of view striving to stay close to the Hebrew and Greek contextual witness as well as the

Ancient Near East understanding of spiritual things without bias to previous systematic theologies. Heiser does a great job connecting the dots in support of his thesis. I especially appreciate his insight as to the WHY of God's harsh command to annihilate the seven Canaanite nations (cf Deut 20:16-18, Joshua 6:21, 1 Sam 15:2-3, etc). I always wondered why God would command that babies and animals be annihilated (what the heck did they do??), but the answer he proposes makes sense in light of the biblical cosmology he presents. I also appreciate Heiser's ability to connect the dots regarding the biunity of YHWH and the Malak YHWH (Angel of the Lord) in Tanakh (aka: Old Testament). Being a Jewish believer myself (and one who engages frequently in messianic apologetics), Dr. Heiser has a good command of the textual and contextual understanding. However, the book in many ways leaves me with more questions than answers. If Heiser's thesis is correct, then it introduces many more mysteries heretofore unexplored by the general evangelical mainstream. Below are some of the questions that I found myself asking as I was reading through the book. (I would love it if someone else would weigh in here):

- 1) Did Satan fall BEFORE he tempted Eve in the garden (as we are accustomed to thinking) or was his fall CONCURRENT with his seduction of Eve (in Gen 3)? Note: We don't see Satan ñ cursed until Gen. 3:14-15.
- 2) Regarding the ñ sons of God ñ cohabiting with humans in Gen 6, how do we know these are necessarily those of the ñ ñ Divine Council Members ñ of Gen 1:26 as Heiser proposes? Could they not be another group of fallen divine spiritual beings/angels/principalities/powers (apart from the council members) that defected from God?
- 3) Did the ñ sons of God ñ (or other group of created spiritual beings) defect BEFORE Gen 1:26 or sometime BETWEEN Gen 1:26 and Gen 6?
- 4) Was there MORE than ONE ñ fall ñ of the ñ sons of god ñ? It seems there must have been if the Nephilim turn up again after the flood (See Numbers 13:33, etc). This also begs the question: are the ñ sons of God ñ/elohim and/or lesser angels CURRENTLY capable of ñ falling ñ? In other words, can they STILL be in the process NOW of defecting from YHWH, and is this going to be continuing until Yeshua returns? (i.e. was Jesus speaking prophetically forward or past tense in Luke 10:18, cf Rev. 12:4).
- 5) Regarding Heiser's view that prophecy is cryptic by DESIGN (so that enemy forces cannot ultimately thwart God's redemptive plans), were the demonic forces (and Satan) aware during Jesus' earthly sojourn that he was God incarnate, or did they believe he was YHWH's co-regent, but as a created being (therefore capable of falling)? This, of course, would require that the "elohim" of Gen 1:26 were not necessarily aware of "the second YHWH's" inextricable unity with the Father as being part of the triune deity. (Cf: Mark 1:24, Matt

4:6)6) Had ALL seventy "sons of god" (or "elohim") from YHWH's ruling council in Gen. 1:26 ALREADY fallen when YHWH allotted the 70 nations to them in Deut 32:8, or were they/are they individually, at various times in history (past, present, future) defecting from YHWH? If we take Psalm 82:1-7 as YHWH warning or admonishing His council members to "judge righteously" (vs 3-4) over their allotted nations, then this would seem to imply that some of them at least were/are still capable of "ruling justly", and thus not YET "fallen". This also opens the possibility that those of the seventy not yet "fallen" CAN and possibly WILL remain loyal to YHWH.7) And finally, tied to Psalm 82 (and to #6 above), here is the question I found MOST nagging at me throughout the book. If the "elohim/spiritual imagers/70 heavenly council members" are being addressed in Psalm 82 verse 1 (as oppose to YHWH's "human imagers"/earthly rulers), and we take these "spiritual imagers" to be ruling in an ALREADY FALLEN STATE, how is it that they can STOP doing unjustly and START doing justly??!! Verses 2-4 would then be suggesting that fallen "spiritual imagers" (and by extension other fallen angelic beings) can possibly be REMEDIATED/redeemed (something NOT supported by other Scripture). ( Would love it if Dr. Heiser himself would answer this one. :) ) Though this book opened up more questions than answers for me, and though I really wish questions #6 and #7 above (re Psalm 82) had been explored at the get-go, I am giving it 5 stars because I think it's high time that evangelicals delve into the Hebrew framework of the times in which the Tanakh and NT were written. We can't properly understand Scripture without understanding the mindset of the Ancient Near East world to which the Hebrew nation was called to be a light. I look forward to any follow up books that Dr. Heiser may have in the works. ;) PS: Suggestion: Don't read this book on Kindle. Although the links to Scripture references are very helpful it is difficult to refer back and forth between subjects, references, and reader highlighted areas (at least it was for me on my Touch Kindle).

Michael Heiser's "The Unseen Realm" has been a long time coming. In many ways, Heiser was the one who introduced me to study of the Old Testament in the first place. I remember listening intently to his lectures on the divine council and reading with amazement his articles on the "Angel of Yahweh" or the "Word of Yahweh" in the Old Testament. He showed how to find Christ in the Old Testament, and how to discover how God's war with Satan is not an NT innovation, but is rooted all the way back in the book of Genesis. This book represents Heiser's biblical-theological development in its maturity, and I heartily recommend it. I truly want to give it five stars: because the insights are definitely worth five stars- but Heiser says enough things I find problematic that I'm giving this four. Before evaluating, I'll briefly summarize the thesis of the book. The thesis of "The

"Unseen World" is that the divine council forms one of, if not the major thread uniting biblical theology. God's council in the Old Testament is a host of created divine beings (like angels) surrounding God. Some of these beings went bad, and they sinned with human women in Genesis 6:1-4. After the fall of humanity at the Tower of Babel, God divided mankind and turned them over to the jurisdiction of these fallen divine beings. Because Deuteronomy 32:8-9 says this explicitly, Heiser calls this the "Deuteronomy 32 worldview." Immediately after Babel, however, God called Abram to bless all the families of the earth and stitch humanity back together. Psalm 82 calls the gods to account, and declares that God would judge them, they would die like men and He would inherit all the nations. From day one, He took Israel as His own portion so that He might one day defeat the fallen divine beings. The victory of God occurs in the Cross of Christ, so that now humanity, joined to Christ, is "seated in Heaven" and becomes "sons of God." We are now members of God's heavenly council. It's a very compelling thesis, and it's well argued. The benefits of the book far outweigh the problems, but I disagree with enough aspects of the book that I'll start with the problems: but feel free to skip to the good bits, because I want to end on a positive note.

**Problems:**

1. Heiser's hermeneutic is extremely heavy on the idea of Israel's "adaptation" of Near Eastern ideas, with many of the descriptions of God being described as "polemic." Take the idea of the council of God itself. Heiser sees this as a Near Eastern idea which the biblical authors appropriate and modify. In other words, there is an objective truth which is communicated in the language of the Near Eastern worldview, even if that language does not convey the truth with exactness. Heiser is unclear to what degree this affects the objective truth of certain biblical claims. For example: when Micaiah sees the vision of God's council in 1 Kings 22, is this a true vision of God's throne-room? Or is God "translating" events in Heaven into Near Eastern terms? Or take the idea of the descent of the sons of God to marry the daughters of men in Genesis 6:1-4. Heiser repeatedly states that this is a "polemic" against Babylon. Well, if the story is there for polemical purposes, then did it really happen? Heiser apparently does believe that it happened, but this causes problems with the hermeneutic. If you're going to read the story as a polemic, then you will only find significance where it differs from the "original." If, by contrast, you study it as history, then the Bible provides the pristine account, and later Babylonian accounts are a garbled tradition. You can get more out of the Bible by studying it this way.
- Just to address these two examples, then. It is abundantly clear that Israel's divine council is a feature shared with the rest of the Near East. If this belief was concentrated in the Near East, then it would lend credence to the idea that this is the "husk" God uses to communicate the real "seed" of divine truth (see Peter J. Leithart's comments on this hermeneutic in "Deep Exegesis"). However, the divine council is

actually found outside of the Near East as well. For example, traditional African religions speak of a council of God headed by the Creator in the same way that Near Eastern peoples do. This indicates that the Bible is not borrowing from the worldview of the Near East so much as the Bible reflects the pristine form of a common cultural heritage for all mankind stretching back to Noah. The same is true with the intermarriage of the sons of God with the daughters of men before the Flood. Stories like this are found all over the world. There are Native American tribes which speak of a race of half-human giants overrunning the Earth before a global flood. The Greeks spoke of a race of Titans catastrophically destroyed. And so on. Charles Martin has written a short book addressing this important question.<sup>2</sup> Heiser is not well-acquainted with Biblical theology as a discipline. This doesn't mean that Heiser isn't a good biblical theologian, but only that he's not well acquainted with others who study the Bible as theology and not just as academic scholars. He references G.K. Beale's marvelous works on the Temple a few times, but Beale's insights could have been appropriated at a much more profound and structural level. There is no interaction at all with the mind-blowing work of Peter Leithart and James Jordan. I can understand not referencing Jordan (since, despite being a genius, he is very little known- but he needs to be read), but Leithart has written some truly fantastic books on biblical typology and theology that could have strengthened Heiser's thesis. We need to integrate the various disparate threads that these authors identify in the Scripture.<sup>3</sup> Heiser isn't a preterist (I am speaking of the view that Revelation 1-19 is fulfilled, that Revelation 20 is now, and that Revelation 21-22 are future), and this damages his reading of Revelation. When Satan is placed in a pit in Revelation 20 for the duration of the millennium, this is the fulfillment of Isaiah 14. When St. John speaks of a "star fallen from Heaven", he is quoting Isaiah 14, a massively important passage, as Heiser recognizes. By putting the fulfillment of this text off to the future, Heiser leaves us confused as to how victorious Christ actually has been. Is Satan still in God's council? A preterist would say he was cast out in Revelation 12:7-9. James Jordan has pointed out that the entire structure of the book is about the elevation of men to God's council. The twenty-four elders in Revelation 4-5 are angels, as we see by the fact that exactly twenty-four angels act throughout the book- only once you subtract "Another Angel" who appears several times with characteristics reminiscent of Old Testament theophanies. Each of them acts once and walks off stage: and in Revelation 20, the beheaded (those who were marked on the head with a Nazirite vow in Revelation 7) are given the authority to judge and replace the angels. Revelation confirms Heiser's thesis wonderfully in such a diversity of ways: but Heiser doesn't recognize it. Readers of this book should consult James Jordan's "The Vindication of Jesus Christ", with his massive 204 lecture series on Revelation for a detailed look. These are available on wordmp3.4. Heiser strangely

rejects the view that the Satan in Job 1-2 and Zechariah 3 is equivalent to the Serpent of Genesis 3 (whom he recognizes as NT Satan, on which see below). He cites a number of scholars on this, but their arguments are quite weak. The figure of the Satan in Job 1-2 is moving in the council of God. As Heiser points out, the prophecy of the Serpent's being placed under the Earth is a prophecy of when the Serpent is finally cast out of the council (as in Isaiah 14). We should expect to see him in God's council in the Old Testament. The clincher is that the figure of Satan is linked with Leviathan in Job 41. Leviathan has eyes "as the Dawn", just as the Bright One (see below) in Isaiah 14 is the "Day Star, Son of the Dawn." Zechariah 3 is a divine-council scene, and the Satan is rebuked.

Revelation 12 makes allusion to Zechariah 3 and refers to Satan as the "accuser of our brethren." There is little question that the authors of the New Testament linked the figures of Genesis 3, Job 1-2, Isaiah 14, Zechariah 3, and Ezekiel 28. Had Heiser challenged the conventional academic reading of these texts, he could have made his case stronger. Okay. Done with the bad. Notice how the review has four stars? That's because the book is still really, really good. Good:1. Heiser is the first person I have read to actually integrate Genesis 6:1-4 into a cohesive biblical theology. Most proponents of this view note that "sons of God" refers to divine beings in the Old Testament, conclude that it means the same in Genesis 6:1-4, and move on. But wait. Isn't this a weird event? Surely it must have some implications for the rest of Scripture! Heiser argues that it does. The fallen sons of God wish to prevent the birth of the Seed who will crush the head of the Serpent. As such, they attempt to pollute the human family. We discover them again when Israel is on the verge of conquering the land. Indeed, Heiser demonstrates that Joshua was only required to "devote to complete destruction, leaving none alive" areas dominated by these giants. While this does not fully resolve the moral quandaries surrounding this commandment, it most certainly adds additional and important insight. Furthermore, the remnant of the Nephilim come down to Goliath and his brothers, whom David slays. There is a lot of fun stuff one can do with this important theme.2. Heiser, by far, provides the best treatment ever written on the Serpent (Nachash) of Genesis 3. I cannot count how many times I have read a secular scholar (and occasionally, even a traditional Christian scholar) say that there is no evidence that the Serpent of Genesis 3 is Satan. Heiser eviscerates this idea. He points out that "Nachash", when translated according to its adjectival form, means "Bright One." This is a heavenly being who is serpentine in appearance. Indeed, the same is true of the seraph: when translated according to its noun form, it means "Serpent" and when translated adjectivally, it is "Burning One." Yet nobody doubts that the seraphim of Isaiah 6 are heavenly beings! This is why, Heiser points out, the story of Isaiah 14 is indeed about Satan. The "Bright One" is the "Day Star, Son of the Dawn." Isaiah 14 is not so much a narrative about Satan's fall as it is a prophecy written

in prophetic perfect, much like Isaiah 53 (which, as David Dorsey points out, it is chiastically linked with). When God tells Satan that he will "eat dust", He is prophesying that Satan will one day be cast out from the Heavenly Council (above the stars) and be placed beneath the Earth: where his only food will be dust. This is why Hell, or eternal death, is prepared for the Devil and his angels.3. Many, many fascinating insights about how this narrative shows up in the rest of Scripture. Heiser notes how the region of Bashan is dominated by Rephaim-giants throughout the Bible. The Tribe of Dan, who inherits Bashan, is called in Genesis 49 a "serpent by the way" and is scrubbed out of Revelation 7. In Bashan is Mt. Hermon, which was the location from which Og, the king of Bashan, ruled. When Jesus predicts that the "gates of Hades" will not prevail against his Kingdom, He is standing right under the nose of Mt. Hermon. The Kingdom is on the offensive against the Gates of Satan's Kingdom, represented by this mountain of giants. Likewise, the bulls which attack the Davidic servant in Psalm 22 are "bulls of Bashan." This is the root of the NT idea that it was Satan and his angels who attacked Jesus. The same is true of the "cows of Bashan" in Amos 4, where allusion is made to Psalm 82, discussed above. And of course, the heart of the book is how the fallen angels are replaced by men. The members of God's council are the "sons of God" and they are seated in Heaven. But now, in the Eternal Son, we are the "sons of God" and we are "seated in Heaven with Christ." This was God's intent from the beginning: to mold and divinize the human family into a council for Himself. Heiser recognizes the connections with the Orthodox doctrine of theosis, which of course tickles me as an Orthodox Christian. Altogether, this is a mind-blowing, amazing, incredible- and infuriating- book. Heiser is a deeply gifted scholar, and he has the capacity to see worlds that nobody knew were there. His work ought to be thoroughly integrated into the biblical-theological paths paved by scholars such as James B. Jordan, Peter Leithart, G.K. Beale, and N.T. Wright.

It is rare for a single book to force a complete paradigm shift to how you read the entire Bible, but this book does it. I'm an extremely sceptical reader when faced with such over-arching claims, and the whole Nephilim "scheme" is full of crackpots and scam artists. But this is true academic work here. The book delivers everything it promises. After having this new information, you'd better start another read-through of the Bible, because there will be a lot of new things you'll see in it.

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