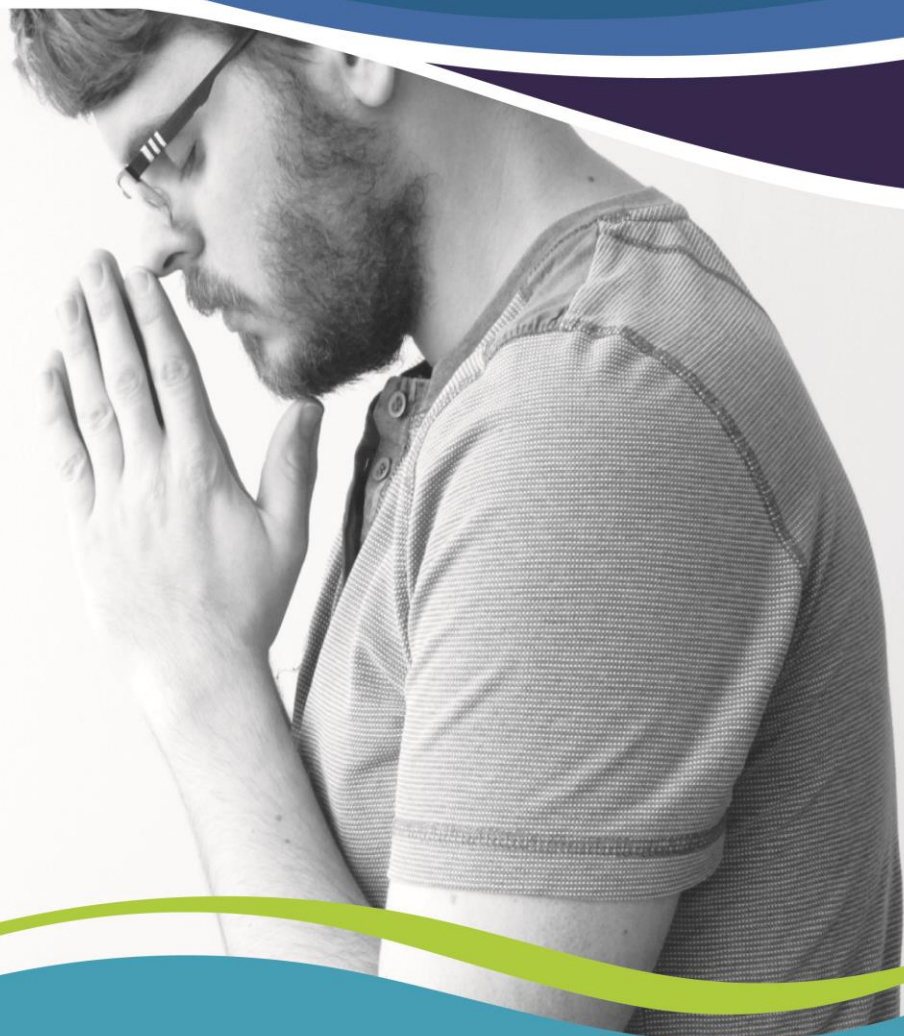


# THE WORLD OF SPIRITS

OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

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UNDERSTANDING  
AND  
RESPONDING TO  
THE WORLD OF  
THE SPIRITS:

A Study  
of the Old Testament View  
of Spirits  
And their Power

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction to the Spirit World**

As we begin looking at the study of spiritual powers it is important to understand the events that led to this study. To understand the background of events that makes the topic important, even essential, to one's ministry and life. When we see the process of events, it adds to our understanding.

### **A. Early Encounters**

#### **Camp Hickory**

When I was seventeen I had a summer job as a staff member at a Christian camp. During this year I was working with the horses and maintenance. It so happened that during one youth camp they were short of counselors and so I was also helping out in this area. This camp was especially difficult. The campers were disrespectful and the evening worship was anything but worshipful. Each day seemed to get worse and more out of control. Just before the evening service, about midway through the week I had to go down to the stables to retrieve a sweater that I had forgotten there. As I walked to the stable I sensed a force or presence which grew stronger the farther I went. It felt thick, like wading through water and very oppressive. It was clear in my mind that Satan was very present and was seeking to prevent God from working in this camp.

I returned to the chapel and found a couple of co-workers and shared what I had just experienced. We decided that rather than attend service we would join together in prayer to rebuke Satan and call on God to work in the camp. That night there was a dramatic change in the attitude of the campers and many went to the altar to confess their sin and to accept Jesus as their Savior. The rest of the camp was an incredible time of sharing in God's love and witnessing to people who needed release from Satan's power.

## **Hitchhiker**

A few years later as I was driving back to college I picked up a hitchhiker. As a rule I do not pick up hitchhikers but on this occasion I was impressed with a need to do so. The girl I picked up was heading toward Minneapolis because she had heard of a witch's coven there which she wanted to visit. She told me that she was hoping to become a witch herself. This was a bit unsettling as I had only heard of such groups and never met anyone who was actively seeking to join a coven. We talked for several hours with little result. I was hoping to change her mind but she was not interested. I finally pulled off the road and said I could not take her any further and hoped that she would not continue her journey.

I found it very frustrating to talk with this individual. My frustration came from two sources, a lack of knowledge of what God's word had to say and a lack of understanding of what draws a person to seek such power in their lives.

## **Seminary**

While in seminary I took a course on Satan and the Demonic. The professor who taught the course had been in several countries overseas and witnessed first hand demon possession and its affects. The class focused on a study of the theology of Satan and Demons. At the same time the professor had gathered tapes of sessions with people who were possessed and of exorcisms being performed by various Christian leaders. It made for some unsettling listening but did not bring a great deal of enlightenment or understanding.

## **B. First Term Encounters**

It would be several years before I would have to deal with anything in this area of life, not until my first term as a missionary in Sierra Leone. Then the lessons would come and the reality of the presence of Satan and demons would become very clear. Also would come the questions of how to



deal with the presence and power of Satan, even in the lives of the people of the church.

### **Sounds and Sacrifices**

Early in our term things began to happen that would challenge my understanding and my trust in God. One night, about the time I went to bed I heard this awful screeching noise go down the road. I got up and asked my security man what the noise was. His response was short and to the point. The noise was a demon passing by. I shined my flashlight up and down the road as if I might see something, but there was nothing to see. Just as I was heading back into the house the sound came again. It traveled down the road and was high in the trees. I again used the flashlight attempting to see what was there but saw nothing. I asked why it went down the road and the reply was simply it can't come on the mission property and therefore must use the road.

Over the next month other events happened that made my workers nervous. On several occasions in the morning my security guards would come to my house very excited and upset. They had found a sacrifice on the mission property and did not know how it had gotten there. On one occasion it was on the steps leading into the radio station building. My response was simple and direct. Using my foot I scattered the contents of the sacrifice and reminded them that this was God's property and they had no need to fear.

### **Thieves and workers**

Over the next year we also had problems with thieves. They would come and steal timber and rice from our fields. On one occasion one of my farm workers tied a fake sara (type of charm) to a stick and placed it in the rice field. He was hoping that a fake one would be enough to scare off the thieves. I quickly removed it and reminded him that this was God's property and Satan had no power here.

Though what he did was only a fake (even I could see that) it was clear that he believed in not only the existence of the spirits but in their power as well. This fact would become even clearer in the very near future.

My father was visiting us and became quite ill. I took him to our hospital in a village about 30 miles away. This happened in the early evening and so we spent the night at the hospital. That night, back home, thieves came and broke into the workshop stealing a generator and several tools. The security guard sent out a warning before they could steal anything else but the thieves managed to escape. We badly needed this generator because we were building a new dormitory at the school and had a work team coming in just a few weeks.

One of my workers suggested that we hire a local practitioner, called a looking ground man, their version of a soothsayer. He believed that he could find the generator. I was a little shocked and upset that he would make such a suggestion. My response though surprised him even more. I stated that, yes, the looking ground man could probably find it because his boss, Satan, had stolen it. With that I challenged the church to pray and they did. I said that that if God wanted us to have the generator back then we would get it back. It was only a week later that the thieves were caught and the generator found.

What a day of rejoicing we had in the church. What a lesson I had learned as well. God was truly more powerful than Satan and his demons.

### **Anthropologist**

About a year later a young anthropologist came into our area doing research for his doctorate. He said he had come to learn the language and wanted to learn about the secret rites and rituals of one of the secret societies for men. I suggested

that he may be asking for trouble and that he should be careful about playing with spiritual matters. He did not laugh at me but it was clear that he did not believe what I was telling him about the reality of the spirit world. He and his wife would often stop in for a visit and a cold glass of water and we would talk more but it was clear that he did not understand, much less believe in the reality of what he was trying to study.

A few months passed, and that same anthropologist, very frightened and shaken, arrived at our house. He badly needed to talk and so we sat down. He told me he had gone into the spirit bush, against our advice and had in fact met a spirit. The spirit was part animal and part man and chased him all over the place with a bush knife. He had become a believer of the spirit world and was terrified. I found I could not help with his fear. He did not believe in God either and thus had no relationship with the one who could protect him from what he had encountered.

It was clear that he needed help in understanding the spirit world. As I thought more on what had happened to him I began to realize that if I could not help him then how could I help the people that I was living with. Yes I believed in the existence of the spirit world and knew God had power over it, but how could I translate what I knew into meaningful information for the people that I had come to teach about God.

### **C. A course in Power Encounter**

On our next furlough I decided that it was time to get some more training and began exploring further some of the issues that had been raised. I enrolled in a couple of classes with the hope that I would learn something I could use.

## **Class at Trinity**

The course at Trinity was called Power Encounter with Professor Tim Warner. This course focused on the presence of spiritual powers and how they affect people. The issues would be, where does authority lie and how do we deal with these powers. The main lecture focused on learning about and dealing with spiritual powers in a North American context, while the seminars for doctoral students would open the discussion up to issues related to the mission field. Such issues as: how do we perceive the spiritual world as compared to the perceptions of those native to that country, and how does the presence of the spirit world affect the way we live and the way they live. This would lead to discussions of how do we decide how to deal with this area practically, and who should deal with the theology behind these decisions.

## **Night Visitations**

As if to emphasize the critical nature of these discussions and issues I became the object of an attack by Satan. On several occasions I felt the attack of Satan on my life. In the night I would wake up struggling to breathe as if some great object was sitting on my chest. As I gained consciousness I would begin to pray and call on God. I would claim the authority that is mine as a child of God and command the demon to depart. At this point the pressure would begin to subside and I would to relax and return to sleep. I shared this experience with my wife and the members of my seminar group who joined in praying for me. At that point the attacks ceased and never occurred again.

## **D. Return to Field**

After a year of home ministries it was time to return to Sierra Leone. The year of classes had served to challenge me to observe more closely what was happening and to talk with my national coworkers about these issues and how we could help the people.

## **Visible Reality**

When we arrived in Sierra Leone I began to notice different things related to the people's belief in spirits. I had seen them before but now they became more visible. The country was now in the midst of a rebel war and people were struggling with how to end the conflict. The Christians began to pray, but those that followed Satan began to make their practices more visible. One would often see a special bundle of sticks planted on the main road to a village. This was a symbol that they had performed a ritual to call on spirits to protect their village. Down the middle of village there would be a long vine rope and on it would be tied many saras (offerings) to the spirits. Everyone in the village had to participate in order for it to be effective, so there was a great deal of pressure on the Christians to perform the rituals lest they be blamed for any trouble that might come to the village. Any time a new house was built you would see a sacrifice pole in the middle to demonstrate that this family had performed a ritual calling on a spirit to protect this house. Even on the highways some villages built gates or passages that the vehicles had to pass through in order to prevent evil spirits from getting into the village.

## **Door to the Village**

One of the most significant events that happened during this time involved a funeral in a nearby village. I had been asked to be a part of the funeral, so the local pastor and I walked the seven miles to the village. The man who had died had been a Christian and his family wanted a Christian burial. The program had us going first to the village where he had died, on to the burial ground, and then to another village for a meeting afterwards. In the process we came to a 'spirit gate' on the trail. It had been placed there so that everyone going to that village would have to pass through it in order to prevent any bad medicine or evil spirits from entering the village. I looked at the gate turned to the people and told

them I would not walk through this gate and that Christians did not have to rely on spirits for protection. I then turned and walked around the gate. Over half of the people with us (the Christians) did likewise.

This may seem like people following the missionary but there was more to it than that. Several times in the past this village had been caught in brushfires and burned down. There had been a great deal of illness and other troubles as well. In all of this they had continued to seek the spirits for protection instead of God. Part of the reason for this was a lack of teaching and understanding of their dilemma. If you follow Satan, then God will not listen. Since that day there have been fewer problems in that village. That year they did not have a fire and the church has grown.

### **Class on traditional religion**

Shortly after this I began talking with my students about these things and encouraging them to take a stand against Satan. It would not be easy, but they needed to begin learning what God's Word said on this topic and they needed to share this truth with the people. I co-taught a class on traditional religion with the district superintendent for that area. He would deal with the cultural aspects of their beliefs and I would present the biblical material related to that particular practice. This teaching experience challenged me to do a more thorough study of the Old Testament and traditional religion and to look at how we apply theology to a cultural context.

### **Town Sacrifice**

It would not be long before the Christians of my village would face a new challenge. With the rebel war increasing in intensity, the people became more fearful of the war coming to the north and affecting them. As a result, the town leaders, many of which were not Christians, decided that they needed to renew an old practice from before the time Christianity

had come to the village. They wanted to have a town sacrifice and wanted all to participate. Key leaders of our church stood and clearly stated that this was wrong and that our church would have no part in this activity. There was another church in the village that did not take a stand. In fact, they said they would support any activity that would be useful in ending the war. (It is interesting to note that in the fighting that eventually came to our village, our church survived while the other church was burned to the ground).

The town sacrifice went ahead as planned. Though most Christians did not participate some did. It was a sad day and yet served to emphasize again the need for a more thorough study of spiritual powers and how to make theology practical in this situation.

### **Final Sermon**

We were scheduled to leave for our furlough and I would have one more opportunity to preach at our church. I chose to speak on spiritual powers and test out an idea that was forming. This message would in fact involve two preachers. My translator would be a highly respected man who had been a servant of the spirits before he became a Christian. I would give the biblical material and then let him make the application. He would translate my words but add to them from his knowledge and background. It became a powerful approach for teaching the people.

### **E. Choosing a Direction**

#### **What to Study**

As a result of all the things that have happened in my life I began to see the need for a careful study of the Old Testament scriptures. Up until that time I had noted that most of the material used in studying the theology of Satan and Demons was from the New Testament. As I had prepared for the class and the sermon I began to realize there was a great

deal of material in the Old Testament that needed to be explored.

The other thing I had noted from my classes is that the second largest source of information on traditional religion was from cultural studies. There are many books that give information on the types of practices and beliefs that exist within cultures that follow traditional religion. Yet there was little effort to connect this information with the content and context of the Old Testament.

Thus before I could do any real application and teaching I would need to gain a better understanding of the Old Testament view of spiritual powers. I would need to understand what practices were accepted and rejected by God. I would need to understand how God reacts to these practices and how the prophets (teachers of the Old Testament) interpreted what God was telling them. This would be the basis for the next step, the preparation of a database of Scripture to work with. This would allow for interaction papers on the key areas mentioned above.

### **Identifying Possible Applications - Which groups need this information**

In the events listed above I began to see there were two groups who could benefit from this information, missionaries and people involved in the practices of animism.

#### **Missionaries**

Missionaries, in particular those from a western world background, have a difficult time dealing with the existence and reality of a world that is inhabited and influenced by spirits and spiritual powers other than God. They often come from a materialistic worldview that depends on science to explain all the events that happen in their lives, both common and uncommon. When it is suggested that spirits



might be involved they have difficulty in relating to this as a possible answer.

Even missionaries who have been on the field for some time are often not comfortable with this area of reality. Part of the problem is that when they arrived they exhibited the normal lack of understanding and belief that comes with their worldview. As a result they become isolated from this area of concern. This occurs in two ways. Most often they avoid contact with this area. They do not interact with the nationals on the topic because they become uncomfortable and have no answers. The other reason is that the nationals themselves begin to shield the missionaries from further contact with these practices. They grow tired of trying to explain, to those who find difficulty in accepting any explanation regarding the spirit world and so hide it from the missionary. It will go so far as to deny the existence of the spirit world. This, then gives the appearance that the problem has gone away and reinforces the missionary's materialistic perspective. The result is great confusion because the national wants an answer and help and the person he should be able to turn is not able to help them.

Therefore there is a need to increase the missionary's awareness of the reality of the spirit realm and to help them see that the Bible accepts its existence and provides information and answers that can be helpful when dealing with this reality.

### **Animists and those involved in the practices of animism**

The second group that can benefit from this information would be those who believe in spirits and come out of an animistic worldview. In this situation the spirits and their powers are everywhere. Man believes he has little control of his life and thus little choice. Everything that happens is often blamed on the activity of spirits, both the good and the

bad. The end result of this is often a lack of responsibility by a person for his or her own actions.

This group needs to understand that the spirits do not have absolute control of the world in which they live. They need to see that they are responsible for what happens in their lives and that there is a way to deal with spirits. They need to know the truth that spirits can only affect them because they allow it. A lack of information on what the Bible teaches about the spirit world has been the source of much confusion on how to deal with spirits and their power.

Now begins the process of gathering the information and organizing it. After this has been done then one can make suggestions as to how to use it in each of the above settings.

## **Chapter Two - Methodology**

The focus of the research will be on a study of the terms used within the Old Testament as relates to the existence of a spirit world and the practices associated with the belief in this reality.

### **A. Word List**

In order to prepare the list of words there will be a need to read the Old Testament and list all words used that refer to any aspect of animism. This involves writing down every occurrence of a given word and the text where it is found. From this research each of these words is then cross-referenced to a concordance (such as Strong's concordance), which assigns each Hebrew word a number for reference purposes. This number is then used to create a list of all references where the term is used. When this list is created it is cross-checked against the original list, and those that are matched will be removed from the master list. This process is repeated until all words are identified and listed according to the Hebrew term.

The second step is to study the Hebrew terms to find any related terms, such as roots that might provide further texts related to the topic.

The final step is to reread the Bible watching for terms not necessarily specifically used of animism, but that in a given context may add information to the topic. These are added to the word list and researched as with the other terms.

### **B. Definitions**

Once the Hebrew terms are identified then definitions for the terms are gathered. These definitions come from Strong's Concordance, lexicons and dictionaries. This information is added to the document to provide a basis for definition and understanding of the meaning of the term.

### **C. Categories**

Once the terms have been sorted, defined and the texts listed it is necessary to create categories for reference. These will deal with major areas of belief. The key areas identified are words used for spiritual beings, names of gods, idols and images, practitioners and practices, prophets and visions, curse, and lastly other terms. All the terms are placed in the above categories in alphabetical order. This is based on the Strong's numbers for ease of reference.

### **D. Documents**

Once all of the above has been done, the papers dealing with key areas can be written. Through the above word study, key areas will be identified and become the basis on which the papers on those issues will be written. These documents will become the basis for the discussion of the material related to the spirit world.

### **E. Commentary**

In the writing of the papers key texts will be identified for further research. Commentaries will be selected to act as resources for background information and assistance in interpretation. The commentaries will be selected that indicate a familiarity with older materials on the subject. Access to early Hebrew commentary material will be important. This is important because this material will not be influenced as much by the materialistic environment of today's worldview. Hopefully it will stand between the animist view and the materialist view. These materials will be grouped in a biblical order sorted by reference.

### **F. Index**

Once all of the above material is compiled it will be necessary to create an index. This index would link current terminology used in the study of animism with the databases

that have been compiled. This would allow individuals to do their own study of the materials.

### **G. Application**

Once all the above has been completed then recommendations will be made regarding possible settings for the use of the material and ways to present the materials. These recommendations will grow out of interactions with other missionaries on this topic, interactions with those who live in the animist context, as well as what has been learned by going through the process of researching the topic.

## **Chapter Three - Spiritual Powers in the Pentateuch**

### **A. The Need to Review our Understanding of the Spirit World**

Today we live in a world that has little understanding of what the spiritual world looks like and how it interacts with the world that we are physically a part of. At least those of us who live in what is called a western context have had little to do with the spiritual world around us. Some of that is changing as is evidenced by the growth and development of the charismatic movement and of the New Age movement. Yet one must wonder what it is each of these groups is really aware of and promoting.

Another part of our world, generally called the third world, has a totally different experience in this area. They accept and deal with spiritual realities as everyday occurrences that are intricately woven into all aspects of life. For many years such attitudes and beliefs were relegated to the area of superstition and fiction. It was felt that if one but provided adequate education and development such structures and beliefs would simply disappear. They were backward and unaware of the science of things. As a Britisher might say it was all poppycock.

Yet it did not go away in the countries of the third world. Even in the western world there is a renewed interest in what is called the paranormal. There is an attempt to create a science of superstition, believing that the basis of such events can be found in some kind of unique physical capability to be found within certain types of individuals and thus scientifically measurable. Today the level of interest in such phenomena has gone far beyond such science right back to the beliefs and activities that are found in the third world. The supernatural is reappearing in many ways and we are not

well prepared for dealing with it. Our tendency has been to take a phenomenon and then try to match it to a scripture and thus explain it. Then from that we attempt to expand the categories. We have taken this approach because we have done a poor job of studying scripture in order to understand the real structure of things.

My experience in Africa suggests that we need to start over in our study of the supernatural and how it relates and interacts with us in the world that we live in. As I mentioned above we have tended to take note of various phenomena; and then sought out scriptures to support the phenomena and give us some method of dealing with it. From this we then extrapolate and create a system to help us deal with the whole. I have seen and heard of some very fascinating results of such approaches. Then there is the tendency to build a whole theology on the basis of a few texts. An example of this is the use of Paul's statement in Ephesians 6:12 which tells that we are struggling against, among other things powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, to build a number of theologies of the satanic kingdom, how it is structured and organized. To that many add Daniel's statements in Daniel 10:13 regarding the prince of Persia who resisted the angel sent to answer his prayer, to support and more fully develop their ideas. In all of this though there is a question that I would like to ask and get an answer to. Where did Paul get his information? As a Hebrew was there a source for his statement? In an attempt to get at this answer I would like to reexamine the Old Testament for any information or insight into what was known about the spiritual world and how it relates to our world.

For the purpose of this paper I would like to restrict the study to the Pentateuch. What then did these people know of and have experience with in terms of spiritual powers?

## **B. Supreme Being - Evidence and Status**

Let us begin with the existence of a supreme spirit. This seems to be a rather unnecessary area and yet I think much can be gained by reviewing it to some extent. Genesis begins with a statement of the existence of God and His creation of all things. This immediately divides the universe into two categories, Creator and creation. His spirit hovers over the world brooding and bringing into being all that exists.

From the beginning God is able to discourse with man. He walks and talks with man in the garden. He confronts Cain about the nature of his sacrifice and then later about the murder of Abel. God is in close contact with Enoch so much so that He takes Enoch out of this existence into another. Over and over He communicates with man about many issues, from Noah and the flood, to Abraham and the promises regarding his future to Moses and the people of Israel. It is interesting to note that in each of these encounters the people whom God meets with are very aware that the physical entity they are encountering is, in fact, God. How this fact is known is not made clear to us and yet it is certain that they are speaking with God.

On other occasions God speaks and they respond in a very clear manner indicating that what they have heard is, in fact, the voice of God. Noah is called on to build an ark (Ge 7:1f). Abraham hears the voice of God on many occasions. Moses and the burning bush (Ex 3:2f), as well as many other occasions. The people when presented to God at Mount Sinai are terrified by the voice of God and ask that they no longer be exposed to God in such a manner (Ex 20:18-21).

What is of greater interest is the awareness that God is greater than any other spirit being in the world. When Jacob departs from Laban, his wife Rachel steals the family gods (teraphim). As a result of this Laban is angered and pursues



Jacob to recover his gods. In the midst of this pursuit God appears to Laban in a dream warning him not to harm Jacob in any way. Laban responds to this and Jacob and his family are allowed to depart. Later Jacob, in fulfillment of a promise to God has his family dispose of all other gods.

Joseph, though in the land of Egypt and married to the daughter of the Priest of On, realizes that all that has happened is the hand of God. God has worked out the details of his life so that he will be in the right place to take care of his family in a time of need. In fact when challenged to commit sin by Potiphar's wife, Joseph says that he cannot sin against God. From beginning to end God is seen as supreme over events and the beliefs of others. He also requests that he not be buried in the land of Egypt but in the land promised to his father Jacob. Such a statement reveals much about who Joseph believes is truly in control of the world.

The next event of interest involves the plagues of God against Egypt. Initially Pharaoh's wisemen and magicians are able to duplicate the wonders of God given to Moses. They manage to turn their staffs into snakes, turn water to blood and even produce frogs from the land. The next plague defies their abilities and they come to Pharaoh with the confession that this is the "finger of God" (Ex 8:15[A3-6]). By chapter 9 a number of Pharaoh's officials have begun to believe and are listening to Moses and try to save their livestock from the hail (Ex 9:20). When all the plagues are over, the gods of Egypt have been humiliated and the people of Egypt, even the officials, are convinced that Israel is special. In Exodus 12:12 God states that this in fact is His purpose, "I will bring judgment on the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord."

Now they have crossed the Red Sea and are in Sinai. Moses father-in-law Jethro comes to meet them. Jethro is also a

priest of Midian and his name means friend of God. Upon meeting he makes the following statement, "Praise be the Lord, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly"(Ex 18:11[A3-7]). He then proceeds to offer a sacrifice to God. And so it goes. Wherever they travel God is present and revealing that He is supreme over all the gods.

An interesting story is told in Numbers 22-25 of the sorcerer Balaam. He is called on to curse Israel for Balak so that Balak will be able to defeat Israel. Balaam, though, is confronted by God and prohibited to do so. Though he performs sacrifices to gain control, he is blocked by God and can only pronounce blessings on Israel to Balak's dismay. Even though Balak takes Balaam to several locations, the result is the same. God overrules and the result is a blessing and not a curse. Later Balaam does show Balak a way to remove the blessing of God, at least until the sin of Israel is dealt with. The end result is that Balak is defeated and Balaam is killed. It is interesting to note that in spite of the contact Balaam had with God he still pursues his craft, ultimately to his ruin. I will come back to this interesting item later.

As we enter into Deuteronomy we hear over and over statements of challenge and comparison. Moses in hopes of convincing God to let him go into the Promised Land, states, "O Sovereign Lord, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do?"( Dt 3:24[A3-12). God is greater than any other god, as evidenced by the mighty works He has done. In Deuteronomy 4:32-35[A3-12] Moses challenges the people with this same fact, "Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on the

earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other, Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Have any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and mighty deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God; besides him there is no other."

This theme is repeated over and over in Deuteronomy, as the laws for the guidance of the people are given, statements concerning the supremacy of God are included, i.e. Dt 10:17[A3-14], "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of Lords, the great God, mighty and awesome,..."

Throughout the Pentateuch one of two things occurs when God confronts people. 1) They are aware that He is supreme and therefore to be obeyed and honored. 2) They are shown by various means that God is in fact supreme. The result of this is that they are now willing to make a statement or perform some action showing that they now believe that God is supreme.

### **C. The gods - Who are they?**

The statement often used is like that of Jethro when he states that God is greater than all the gods. This idea, though, raises a question about the identity of these gods. Today we tend to say people believed in gods because they didn't understand the universe around them and thus needed a means by which to explain what they saw and experienced. It does not take a great deal of study of ancient science and the Bible itself to realize that for the people of the Pentateuch this cannot be a totally satisfactory answer. They had knowledge and skill enough to build pyramids, design very accurate calendars

and many other areas of science that amazes one today. The Bible itself reveals an incredible understanding of the universe and how it operates. Information one would not always expect from those who believe in gods, spirits and magic, people who are non-scientific and therefore superstitious,

Are the gods real or not? If one looks at the scriptures one might be a little surprised at what is learned. From the garden we are made aware of the existence of another type of being which is not God and not man. We are quickly confronted with angels and the serpent and gods. They do not exist in this world, but can assume physical shape. They are not restricted in their movements and activities as is man. They appear and disappear at will. They have unique shapes, which are different from man, and yet they can appear in the form of man. A cherubim is placed at the entrance of the garden to prevent man from reentering. He has wings, and according to other scriptures outside of the Pentateuch also has several faces, some of which are animal in appearance, as well as many eyes all over his body. There is also the serpent who appears to the woman in the garden and is called into God's presence for judgment, just before Adam and Eve are cast out of the garden.

One of the most unique and debated references is that in Ge 6:1-4[A3-1], where we find a reference to the sons of God. There have been many ideas as to who these individuals were, from the children of Seth, to those who follow God, to royal people of the era and finally fallen angels. There is no final answer to this reference to be found and yet the question remains: who are they? Could angelic-type beings have existed on the earth at one time and maybe produced offspring? Many of the mythologies of other religions contain stories about such occurrences. The answer is not clear. If it is possible then this would change some of our understanding of the power and presence of the spirit world

in our existence.

As we read on in the Pentateuch we will be met time and again by beings that are not human. Yet over and over man immediately recognizes them as angels or something other than man. Abraham is met by angels on several occasions and appears to be able to recognize them easily. Hagar sees the angel of the Lord and recognizes him. When the angels leave God and Abraham and proceed on to Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot seems to be aware that they are unique even though the towns' people don't appear to know that they are not ordinary men. Jacob has a dream filled with angels and later wrestles with an angel. Again he seems to have no difficulty in identifying them.

In Exodus 14:19[A3-7] there is an angel of God who is leading the people of Israel who moves from the front to join the pillar of cloud in the rear to block the way of the army of Egypt. In Exodus 23:20[A3-8] and Exodus 33:1-6 God states that He is sending an angel ahead of the people to guard them and to guide them in the way. What is interesting is the statement in verses 21-23, "Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. If you listen to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies, and will oppose those who oppose you. My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land..." If I understand what is being said here there is an angel with the people whom they will follow. Visible, maybe, but in some way they will be able to ascertain his presence and be able to follow him. Now the form of this angel could in fact be the pillar of fire, by night and the pillar of cloud, by day. Still it is apparent that the people would have knowledge, visible or otherwise of his presence and activities. This will last for forty years until they cross over into the Promised Land.

Lastly we must return to the cherubim briefly for they figure

prominently in the decoration of the new tabernacle. The key area is the Ark of the Covenant. Here in the holy of Holies are two images of cherubim. They are attached to the ark and act as watchers over the holiness of God. Although here it is an image, it is clear that they represent in reality the presence of such beings in the holy of Holies. Beings whose function is to serve God. Though they would not be viewed by many after the completion of the ark, there would always be knowledge of such beings, as well as a yearly reminder of them when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies each year to offer the sacrifice for sin for the nation. There he would be confronted with and reminded of their appearance and existence.

This leads us into the other aspect of this discussion - the area of fallen angels. In truth there are no references regarding the fall of any angels from heaven within the Pentateuch. Still we have the serpent in Ge 3 and an unending list of references to gods throughout the Pentateuch. Ample evidence that there are beings who oppose God. At this point we need to return to the teraphim of Laban. This story has many interesting features to it. Rachel takes the family gods from her brother. This was a significant act in that it represents a belief in their power to assist those they serve or those who serve them. This is never quite clear. Laban though is not happy about the loss of these teraphim and so pursues Jacob in order to recover them. Again, there is a belief in the value of such items or the beings they represent.

The next part of this story is the most fascinating. Laban while pursuing Jacob is confronted by God via a dream and is told not to speak good or ill of Jacob. Previously Laban had learned that in fact Jacob was blessed. What is interesting is that in spite of the fact that he knows Jacob has been blessed and is confronted in a dream by God, who is blessing Jacob, Laban still wants his gods. When he is

unable to find them, Jacob responds in the following manner. Ge 31:42[A3-3], "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me... But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night rebuked you." Both Jacob and Laban know who God is and yet Laban wanted the teraphim. Were they really just objects or were they more, images of something else, which, though not always visible, were real and known by those who believed them.

Earlier in Genesis we have a story about Abraham and Ahimilech and how Abraham convinced Sarah to hide the fact that she was his wife. Here Ahimilech has a vision from God which reveals what is happening and is warned about impending doom (Ge 20:11[A3-2]). When asked why he lied, Abraham says he didn't know if the people feared the Lord. It is interesting to note that God is known but not always feared or served.

Jacob later tells his family to get rid of all their foreign gods. They then take them and certain other objects and bury them. With that act the terror of God falls on the people around them (Ge 35:5-6[A3-3]). Apparently serving other gods hinders the activity of God and conversely allows the other gods power to operate. God desires complete commitment and will not respond fully without that commitment. The gods though work under a different principle and so there can be many of them in one place.

With this we enter into the world of Exodus. Here we are confronted with a country filled with the worship of other gods. God attacks them through the plagues and humiliates all the gods of Egypt. In Exodus 12:12 God makes his purpose quite clear, "I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord." If these were only inanimate objects, being worshipped falsely by the people then why judge them? It would be more appropriate to judge the people for

their sin. This is highlighted even more when Moses receives the Decalogue. The first two commands are quite interesting in the light of the above judgment. The first forbids the people from having any other gods before Him. The second forbids the making of images/idols. The words used here are not the same. In the first, the key word is *elohiym*. This word refers according to Strong's, BDB and TWOT means gods. It is occasionally used as a title of God. BDB also includes in his definition the idea of divine ones or angels. Strong's adds the phrase god-like ones. In this context the angels would have to be fallen angels. They may be considered god-like only in the fact that their existence is not restricted to the physical world, as we know it.

In the next command the word is images. Here we find a different Hebrew word, *pesel*, which means simply idol or image. What follows though is interesting in that they should not be made of anything in heaven above, on earth below or in the waters below. The question would be, what does heaven above include? Does it include celestial and supernatural beings as well? When one studies the images of the various cultures it is interesting to note that many of the figures of the sun god, moon god etc. are not totally human nor totally animal but a mix. In some, the creatures are not like any creature on this earth. In Deuteronomy 4:15-19[A3-12] this idea is repeated with a little clearer definition of the objects involved. In here is a statement about the heavenly array. It seems to refer to celestial bodies. But could it also refer to angelic-type beings who live in the heavenly realm? This is hypothetical and such thoughts are not often pursued by the commentators because of the tendency of our approach to deny the supernatural and seek out natural explanations for what we experience.

What is to be remembered is that a distinction is made between gods and idols. In fact this distinction is maintained in the repeating of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5:7-9[A3-



13] where the same injunction is repeated and the same distinction is made between gods and idols, using again the same two words as before. In Dt 4:15[A3-12 it is to be noted that God reminds the people that when He revealed himself to the people on Mount Horeb they saw no form. The gods however have forms, which they reveal to the people, which results in the making of idols, which are images of them or the shape they have revealed to those who worship them.

What is also interesting to note is that there are only a few words used to refer to gods or fallen angelic beings. Elohiym being the main one. 'elil is used once to refer to objects of worship (Lev 19:4). The meaning according to TWOT being weak, deficient gods of this world. This could mean fallen angels posing as gods. There is also the word 'elowl which is a derivative of elohiym and means worthless gods. Finally there is the word shed which appears in Dt 32:17[A3-15]. This word is often translated demons, but can also be translated as gods. What is of interest here is the reference to the gods also contained in this verse. "They sacrificed to demons, which are not God-gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear." Here we have a clear statement of some differences between God and gods. They were not previously known but have now appeared. They did not always exist but have come recently. They were not always feared by man but times have changed.

If these gods are, in fact, demons or fallen angels then the above statements make a great deal of sense. They would not be tied to any given location but free to roam setting up shop, so to speak, wherever they found someone to listen to them. Thus they would appear as something new and wonderful. Again, since they are fallen angels they would in fact be recent in terms of their existence in relation to God. Finally, in regards to the statement about them not having been feared before. When man was closer to God it was less

likely that such beings could cause fear because such things were better known and understood. I am sure that having once been exposed to the serpent, Adam and Eve were very aware of him and his power and probably would be very conscious of the difference between angels of God and fallen angels. Knowing more intimately the power of God, there would be less concern regarding the fear of such lesser beings. Noah and his offspring would be very aware of God's power having just experienced the flood. By the time of Babel such things had changed. Men had new ideas and sought to reach God via a tower. Who knows what additional kinds of changes were caused in the life and beliefs of man when they were scattered. Their common knowledge was now fragmented and fear of one another may have allowed other types of fear to enter, so that that, which had not been feared, now was fearful.

As Israel moves towards Canaan they are reminded over and over of the supremacy of God and the weakness of other people's gods. Yet in all this the other people are unwilling to forsake their gods and turn to God. If all they had were mere idols then that was a very foolish act on their part. But, if in fact these were gods, or fallen angels, then they might have had some amount of power upon which these people felt they could depend for victory and safety. We will discuss this idea of power a little later. Some angels do appear to have power. In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah the angels are directly involved in their destruction and how far it will spread. Lot asks them to reduce the number of cities to be destroyed by one, Zoar (Ge 19). It is there that he will run to, to escape the destruction. Whether they are in communication with God or had some freedom allowed them for independent decision is not clear. The angel leading Israel has the power to destroy the people if they will not listen (Ex 33:1-6).

## **D. Images - Real or Representations?**

What is clear is that there are in fact gods and along side of them there are idols, many of them, and of many types, made to represent or at least to remind the people of the existence of the gods. In fact within the Pentateuch there are 8 different words used which refer to an object that is made in the likeness of something else for the purpose of worship. They are carved out of wood or metal, they are cast from metal. Empty of themselves, their significance is in what they represent and not in what they are.

It is also interesting to note that the word idol or image(s) does not appear in the text until we come to the giving of the decalogue in Exodus 20 and in relation to the golden calf in Exodus 32. The only exception would be Labia's gods or teraphim, but this is a distinct type of god/idol. There is in fact a very limited use of the words idol and image(s) within the Pentateuch. In contrast to that the word gods appears over 60 times and only a few of these are in combination with the word idol/image(s). Time does not permit a full study of how these all relate to each other but a listing of the verses and the text will help to show how and where the various terms are used (see appendix 2). In several cases it does not refer to an idol but to a pillar erected in a location for the purpose of worship. This term in the KJV has been translated idol/image(s) on several occasions. The main idea is that the idol/image is a representation of something else, a god or an attempt at a physical representation of God using a known creature.

This is likely the case for the golden calf made by Aaron for the people. It is their god, in that it represents God for them. This of course is unacceptable since God has no form, which is the basis of one of Moses' challenges to the people in Dt 4:15[A3-12] "You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt

and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moved along the ground or any fish in the water below. And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars - all the heavenly array - do not be enticed into bowing down to them..." This idea is also carried in both Exodus 20:3[A3-8] and Deuteronomy 5:8-10[A3-13]. There is to be no replacement of God by any idol/image of something,

which is then used to represent him, or of any other being which would then supplant him.

A key question to resolve in this is the meaning of the phrases, "in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below." Do these include or exclude heavenly beings? Are not the angels part of the heavenly and on occasion part of the earthly realm, and therefore so also the fallen angels would be part of that realm? If so then idol/images are not just objects, which are worshipped falsely, they are representations of other beings being worshipped in the place of God. The sin here occurs at two levels, first, worshipping other beings in place of God, which includes the adoration of the representations of those beings in the form of idols/images. Second, using an idol/image of some piece of creation as a visible representation of God and thus reducing God to something other than God.

In the end we still have the basic fact that gods and idols are not the same and are not treated the same. Gods most likely are fallen angels. Idols then are physical representations of those beings or are copies of some aspect of creation which is used thus to represent the creator. In so doing the creator is forgotten and the object is worshipped. In either case something that is not God is given priority in our worship.

We are then faced with the real existence of gods, created beings with the power to gain our attention and even our obedience in the form of worship.

### **E. Spiritual Forces - What are their source?**

This now opens the door to the issue of spiritual forces in the world around us. I have mentioned this idea in a couple places. The first instance of the existence of such power is from God himself. In creation He merely speaks and the universe comes into being. Then each day he speaks again and another item is created. This continues for six days. But that is not the end of His activity in regards to man. Along comes the story of Noah and the flood. There is now enough water to cover the earth; in fact even the tallest mountain is well underwater. The fountains of heaven open. Did God provide a little extra water and then remove it for this event. Later Jacob has an interesting time in building up his flocks from what appears to be a rather magical process which was given to him via an angelic message Exodus 30:37-43, 31:4-16[A3-3]. It would appear that God is controlling the genetics of the breeding process.

The most fascinating set of events focuses on the people of Israel. Moses is confronted by a bush that is on fire and refuses to burn. This is so fascinating to him that he decides to go get a better look and thus God meets Moses and calls him. While there, Moses has his staff turned into a snake and then back again to a staff, and his hand is made leprous and then healed in a matter of minutes. God is using His power to alter the physical universe, as we know it. But it only gets better and more fascinating. Moses meets Pharaoh and performs the staff/snake exchange. Then come the 10 plagues. Several of these involve significant alterations in the substance of objects or of the normal course of events. Water is turned to blood, enough frogs to cover all of Egypt are created, gnats are made out of dust and so the list goes. Each could have a natural explanation except that the scale

of what happens makes one wonder if such explanations are really adequate.

We have only begun. After the 10th plague we now are standing by the Red Sea with a pillar of Fire and cloud, both quite unusual, blocking the road of the Egyptians, while behind us water defies the laws of physics and gravity forming a solid wall on two sides of a path to let the people cross. Once they are across it collapses killing all of Pharaoh's army. Still it gets even more interesting, for in order to feed the people every day for forty years he creates manna out of nothing. You might be able to explain feeding over a couple million people one or two meals by some natural event but to do it for forty years is beyond such things. Remember also that the area they are wandering in is not fertile land and has very little to offer in the way of sustaining such a group of people.

Besides this are the plagues and various judgments on the people for their lack of faith and the sudden ending of them (Nu 11:33, 14:38, 16:46-50, 21:4-9). There are even miracle cures for snakebite and other ailments. Just look at a brass serpent and you will be cured. Does this sound a little on the fantastic side? Yes it does, but this is what the record shows. All throughout this is the visible evidence of God's power and presence in the form of a Pillar of Fire and of Cloud. I have by no means listed all of the events that occurred in this period that reflects the presence of spiritual power and its use.

Add to all of this the instances when beings or people other than God use some form of power to cause unique, even miraculous things, to happen. Pharaoh's magicians turn their staffs into snakes, only to have them devoured by Moses' serpent (Ex 7:12[A3-5]). If these were merely tricks or illusions how could such a thing happen. I would think that before they allowed their snakes to be swallowed they would

have made them disappear or at least changed them back into staffs in order to avoid such an embarrassment. They then manage to duplicate the first two of the plagues and in such a manner as to convince everyone that they have real power and that Moses and his God should not be feared (Ex 7:22, 8:7[A3-6]).

That is until the plague of the gnats. This time they fail and it is apparent to them that things are different. There is either something different about this feat or something is blocking their power (Ex 8:15[A3-6]). Either way they are now aware of the difference and are concerned. Later many of the officials are seen heeding Moses warnings and taking precautions to protect themselves from the plagues that follow (Ex 8:19). The magicians have power but not like what they are now witnessing.

Let us also remember the various abilities we have seen of the angels. They are not restricted to the physical world as we are; they can assume different forms when needed. One angel is called the angel of death and causes the death of Egypt's firstborn. And along side these are the fallen angels who would have similar abilities with one significant difference. They are not above using their ability to deceive man and cause man to worship them or anything else instead of God.

We have also seen as is mentioned above the confusing idea that even though a person is confronted in a clear manner that does not always cause him to forsake his gods. The question is if they are in fact powerless, why would this be? Could it be that in fact there was a certain amount of power and knowledge at work that caused their belief and thus their unwillingness to leave them completely?

Another interesting sidelight to all of this relates to the angel God said he would place with Israel to lead them in Exodus

23:20[A3-8]. They are warned to be careful because if they are disobedient he will not forgive them, he therefore is dangerous to them. Also in the following text are several reminders not to follow other gods, vs. 24,25,32,33. Though they refer to the gods of others it is a sobering reminder that the angel is not a god to be worshipped. He is God's angel and is under God's control. Still in spite of such clear statements and warnings, they call on Aaron to make them a god very shortly after this.

### **F. Spirits - Existence of Different Types of Spirits**

In all of this we have not considered what if any different types of beings there might be with the realm of fallen angels. By far the most common category is that of the gods. Before we reach the end of the Pentateuch we are given the names of several of these who occupy a higher level of power. They are Ashtaroath, Baal, and Molech. These will be present throughout the history of Israel and be a constant source of trouble. They and their shrines are attacked in the strongest language in the Pentateuch. They and their worship are to be completely destroyed.

Then there is the whole pantheon of Egypt. Though not named they are the targets of the plagues of God. He has chosen his plagues to prove to all that they are not to be feared or worshipped. Besides these there is the generalized category of the gods. Over and over Israel is warned not to follow any gods of any land that they will enter in their journey and later in the Promised Land.

There are also two other categories of fallen angels, the shed (translated Demon in the Septuagint) and the satyr. The shed are seen as some lesser form of the gods. In Dt 32:17[A3-15] they are sacrificed to. This is the only place this term is used in the Pentateuch and yet it is used in the context of a discussion of the gods. They would therefore be a type of god but it is not clear the level of their power and what form



they may have.

The other term, satyr, is translated hairy goat. It is a little more difficult to understand who and what they are. Lev 17:7[A3-9] reads "They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols (satyr) to whom they prostitute themselves." About all we can say is that there was some kind of being that had a form similar to a goat. According to mythology it was a half/man half/goat being, one of the lesser gods.

There is also the term azazel which is used in the discussion of the scapegoat. Some see azazel as a name for Satan and that he is receiving the scapegoat in the desert as part of the sacrifice for sin. This area appears to involve a lot of speculation and is not really very clear.

Against this background another set of people are also trying to use powers and abilities not normally associated with man. Moses has access to power, but we are very aware that this power is only available as God dictates. Yet man is not willing to be left in this state. The original challenge of the serpent in the garden was "you shall be as God." One aspect of this is to have power like God. Man though has not been given such power and yet we see him practicing powers or asked to perform things that are outside of what God has given him the ability to perform.

There are three main instances of such events in the Pentateuch. They have both been mentioned before: 1) the magicians as they duplicate the signs of Moses and the first two plagues, and 2) Balaam whom Balak tries to hire to curse the people of Israel. 3) Laban's use of divination. The first is a very clear example of an event where such power is used. In the second though the desired results are not actually accomplished, the belief in Balaam's power by Balak remains quite strong. Such that even after several blessings

he still takes Balaam to another site to attempt again. The reason for this move is probably that the source of Balaam's power is somehow being hindered by the present location or another god and that by changing the location the dynamics will change in Balak's favor. The real truth here is that God is blocking Balaam and Balaam knows it. The third would be Labia's use of divination to learn that Jacob is blessed

What is more interesting though is the amount of attention given to the practice and use of such power by man. Over and over God tells the people not to have anything to do with such people. In fact if such a person is found among them he is to be killed immediately. Even more interesting is that anyone caught suggesting that such a person be consulted or that another god be consulted they too are to be executed. If such things are merely the outgrowth of superstition and in fact not true then why give them such attention. Why give such strong warnings against their practice? Are they indeed mere superstition or is there something more here?

A test is given by which you may know whether or not a person evidencing such power of speaking prophetically is from God or serving a false god (Dt 13:1ff). The servant of God is to be absolutely reliable and accurate 100% of the time. The false prophet will not be. Does this mean that they are never correct or that sometimes they are and sometimes they aren't? The answer to that depends on what the basis for the claim is. You and I can make predictions and attempt to do various deeds. Usually we add a disclaimer though, such as I think this will happen or I will attempt to do this. It then is very clear that we are the source and that there is a possibility of error. The amount of error will depend on knowledge and experience. But if someone claims to have outside help such as a word or special power from God, then we have a different situation.

In the case of Pharaoh's magicians they could only

accomplish a few of the signs and plagues. No one denied that they had power but it was soon clear that their source was not the God of Moses and so they became less reliable. In this case, because of the beliefs of the people of Egypt, they were still respected, although I doubt at quite the same level as Moses. Still they were limited. In fact God says that he will make Moses as a god to pharaoh (Ex 7:1[A3-5]).

In the same way those who serve other gods might have access to power and knowledge that would be provided by those gods. It will be imperfect and unreliable in many ways because these other gods are not God and do not have unlimited knowledge and power. There will always be a limit on what they can do. Thus Balaam could not by any means accomplish the task set for him by Balak, to curse Israel because God wouldn't permit it. It didn't matter how many times he tried it wouldn't work. Still the scriptures do tell us that he told Balak how to remove the blessing, by leading Israel into sexual sin. The end result of this was the death of the Israelites who sinned and of Balaam because he still defied God.

And so it goes. Though their power is limited, because it is real they will not let go of it, even when it means their eventual destruction. And so Laban still wanted his teraphim. Ahimelech released Sarah but did not follow God and Pharaoh refused to release the people of Israel until all of Egypt lay in ruin. Add to this the incredible variety of people involved in practicing such powers and it is quite clear that more than mere superstition is at work. There are at least 10 different terms used to describe the people and the method being used within the Pentateuch alone (see appendix for list, definitions and references). When all of this is considered it is easy to begin to accept the reality of such people and that they had access to real power and knowledge which it is likely was obtained from the gods.

Another area of concern deals with the spirits of man. When man dies outside of the realm of God and thus is not allowed to enter heaven, what happens to him? The reason I raise this question is that in Numbers 16:22[A3-11] and 27:16[A3-11] the phrase "God of the spirits of mankind" appears. In Numbers 16:22[A3-11] because of the behavior of Dathan and others, God is about to destroy the people. Moses and Aaron fall down and cry out, "O God, God of the spirits of all mankind." In Numbers 27:16[A3-11] Moses has just been informed that he will not enter the Promised Land when he makes this statement, "May the Lord, God of the spirits of all mankind," as he asks the Lord to choose a successor to lead the people.

On several other occasions a phrase is used to identify God with those who believed in Him. God is referred to as the "God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob." On one occasion God is referred to as the "God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father" Genesis 31:53. Jacob calls him "the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac" (Genesis 31:42[A3-3]). He is the God of real people who have died and yet the reference contains within it the idea that they are still present or exist in some way. The question that I would like to raise here is, are these spirits somehow still active or considered present in some manner. The idea is that God is not just God of those spirits whose bodies are currently alive but of all spirits of those who have lived, are living and will live. This idea is not clearly supported by the texts. But how does this relate to the fact that Enoch did not die. Where is his spirit? This is an area that needs a more thorough study done.

### **G. Rituals and Curses - Evidence of Spiritual Power**

Beneath all this another layer of power exists in the area of rituals and curses. Here again there is a wealth of examples to choose from. Looking at ritual first, we that it plays a key role in one's ability to relate to the spiritual world. Abraham

is involved in an elaborate ritual in Genesis 15 when God makes His covenant with Abraham. Here Abraham prepares a special sacrifice and God appears in the form of a smoking firepot and a blazing torch to pass through the area marked by the sacrifice. There is also the ritual of circumcision, which is present throughout as a sign of acceptance of the covenant.

One of the more interesting rituals relates to testing to see if a woman has committed adultery. Found in Numbers 5:11-31[A3-10] it involved taking dirt from the floor of the temple and writing on a scroll. The writing was then washed off into some water and the dirt was added to this water. The woman then drank of the water, if her belly swelled and she became sick then she was convicted of the sin and killed. If not she was returned to her husband. Similar to this is the making of the water of purification for the temple. A red heifer was burned and the ashes gathered. When there was need to purify some person or object the ashes were added to water which was sprinkled on the person or object. At that point it was purified (Numbers 19:1-22). It is not clear why such practices are effective or what the basis is for their effectiveness except that God was in it.

In the same way, when snakes bit the people they were then told to look at the bronze serpent that Moses made. Merely looking at the snake would bring healing. Add to these the various feasts and festivals and sacrifices. None of which really change the reality of a given situation but nonetheless are required if the people wish to continue to receive the blessings of the Lord. What is the active agent in this form of spiritual power. For there is really a result from such activities. God states quite clearly what will happen to the people if they obey or disobey what they have been told. Deuteronomy 27-29 is a clear statement of the blessings and curses that are associated with keeping the laws and rituals.

That leads into the other realm of power, that of curses and its opposite blessings. These words of power begin right from the garden and continue throughout the Pentateuch. Adam, Eve and the serpent are all cursed (Ge 3:14-19) and we quickly see how that curse changes their lives. Cain is cursed so severely that he cries to God who responds with a mark so that no one will overstep God in the punishment of Cain (Ge 4:10-14). After the flood God promises never again to curse the ground because of man (Ge 8:21-22). Noah curses his son Canaan for inappropriate behavior (De 9:25-27). God, on several occasions, promises a special blessing to Abraham if he will obey Him (Ge 12:2-3[A3-2], 15:1ff, 17:1-8).

A small sidelight is the story of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah. When told to flee he was also warned not to look back. There was a curse (?) on these cities, a curse of destruction. If ten righteous could not be found within them, then they were to be destroyed along with all who lived in them. Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. Something in her looking back suggests that she was unwilling to let go of something tied to those cities and so, she too, was punished. The effect of the curse is being carried out with finality. At this point one could ask if I am pushing the idea of a curse to the extreme, but I wonder.

There are other specific types of curses. He who curses his parents will be cursed (Ex 21:17, Lev 20:9). It was the source of the punishment of the woman accused of committing adultery, mentioned above (Nu 5:11-22[A3-10]). There is a curse of God on those who are hung from a tree (Dt 21:23) and so they must be taken down from the tree before the sun sets lest a further curse come on the land.

The most involved story is that of Balaam who is hired by Balak to curse the people of Israel. God intervenes and causes him to bless the people. Still later Balaam gives

Balak advice that brings a curse on the people of Israel. He advised them to send women to the men of Israel to get them to sin. The result was a plague that killed 24,000 people (Numbers 25:1-9). Balaam is later punished and his part in this curse is revealed (Numbers 31:16).

Curses and blessings are present and they work. As to how they work and why they work that is not clear. What the principle is, or the underlying power that makes them effective is never revealed, other than the fact that God's will is at work. Those who oppose the will of God will suffer and those who cooperate will be blessed. What is also apparent from stories like that of Balaam is that the belief in curses and blessings is not restricted to those who follow God. Balak believes that the people of Israel can be cursed and when Balaam offers only blessings he is furious and frightened. In Genesis 20 we have the story of Ahimelech and how God has placed a curse on him for taking Abraham's wife Sarah into his harem. This terrifies him and he pleads with God for release from the curse. There is a power at work that makes curses and blessings effective and real.

## **H. Communication with the Spirit World**

The last area I wish to mention is the communication of God with man (see appendix 6 for a list of terms and some of the references). Dreams and visions are prevalent throughout the text. From the dreams of Jacob and Joseph who clearly serve the Lord. To the dreams of the baker, butler and Pharaoh (of Joseph's era), people who do not serve God yet receive a message that is clearly from God. In each case God is supplying important information regarding his plans for an individual or a nation.

Communication with the realm of the spiritual. Balaam receives a message from God in the night while the messengers of Balak wait a reply. It is a dream or some

other form of communication. Balaam is definitely not a servant of God and is not interested in doing God's work. Laban is ready to attack Jacob except that he has a dream warning him to be careful. Ahimelech is warned by God in a dream not to touch Sarah or he and his household will be cursed. Pharaoh as well discovers by some means that Sarah's presence in his household is the cause of the sickness he and others are experiencing.

God in speaking to Miriam and Aaron in Numbers 12:6 states that he will reveal himself to his prophet through visions and dreams. In contrast to that is the passage in Deuteronomy 13:1-5 where God talks about a false prophet or one who foretells by dreams, announces a sign which then takes place and then tells the people to worship other gods. The people are not to listen to him because he has used the sign to encourage the worship of other gods. What is interesting is that the false prophet has had a true event, which did occur. Where did he gain this information? The text says that God has allowed it as a test of the people, but it does not state the source. Since it is a false prophet, one who foretells by dreams, could the source not then be the demons or gods? It is an important question, which needs an answer.

### **I. Reflections**

In the introduction I suggested that we do not really understand the spiritual world and the powers present in it. There are many cultures that do and would quickly see the meaning of such information as is present in the Pentateuch as reasonable. They deal with gods, spirits, practitioners of various spirit arts and things like ritual, curses and blessings and visions/dreams. To them they are real and effective. As is apparent in the material at hand such a belief existed in the Pentateuch. God in fact never denies it but deals with it very directly. He does not state that there are no other spiritual beings or realities. He does state that they are limited and not to be trusted or followed. Over and over the message is



made clear through history, special signs and explanations that He alone is Lord of all. They have no real power. What power they do have is very limited at best.

We should also consider the challenge of the serpent to Adam and Eve was that they would be like God, knowing good and evil and that they would not die. Couple this with the fact that angels have powers and that the serpent is a fallen angel, maybe the greatest of those who fell. Would they not be quite willing to use such power to confuse man into a belief that he really did have god-like power? He could convince them that they could know the future, could control physical objects and rule nature if they followed the gods. Yet each time those with such powers are confronted by those who serve God it is clearly revealed their power is quite weak and limited.

There is a very clear message in the Pentateuch. Yes there is spiritual power in the world and it is of two types. A false copy provided by fallen angels, and the real source, which is in God. We must choose which we will serve. That was the choice that Israel was involved in making. Many failed to do so and paid for that choice dearly. Others saw the truth and received the blessings of God and a real awareness of His presence and power.

One other thing, while there is a power active that is not of God, there are two things to be noted about it. 1) It always tends to copy some aspect of God's power in some way. Thus making it appear as if it is from God. 2) It is always limited in time, space and scope. Time in that it only exists as long as there is someone who believes and adheres to the structures set in place by the fallen angels/gods that are supporting it. Space in that it only occurs where the belief and practice are currently in practice. Scope in that it is not 100% reliable nor unlimited. God though is not dependent on any of the above. His power operates at any time, is not

restricted in location and is unlimited in its scope. The message is clear. Yes, there are other powers at work in the world around us, but there is only one that is supreme. Yes, there are spiritual powers being used in the world around us but there is only one that is always reliable. Yes, there are spiritual powers present around us but there is only one that is always and everywhere present and thus worthy of our worship. That one is God, the creator of all that exists, for even those fallen angels owe their existence to God and thus their power is ultimately from God.

They are corrupt, unreliable and inconsistent in all that they do and say. God is incorruptible, reliable and consistent. We cannot depend on them, but God can be depended on. The choice is ours.

At this point there is a real need to do more study and then begin to make some comparisons to the worldviews regarding the spiritual view of various people from a traditional religious background. Though some of the structures that have been created by man to catalogue the various phenomenons he experiences in his life may vary. It is the overall structure and broad categories that would be looked at. It will be interesting to learn if this material will touch them where they are.

A lot of questions have been posed in the process of this paper. Not all have been fully answered. That was not my intent. It will take more study of the scriptures involved and comparison with what was known about the beliefs of the people of that era. There will be a need to look into the rest of the Old Testament in the hopes of filling in some of the gaps and clarifying some of the details that are not clear at this point.

As one reviews the material one can quickly see the key areas at which this material touches key areas of belief

within traditional religion. Let me list them at this point.

- 1) Belief in a supreme
- 2) Belief in demons, angels, spirits and gods and a hierarchy in these beings
- 3) Use of idols/images as part of worship
- 4) Belief in powers of those who are in contact with beings listed above
- 5) Belief in a supernatural power which can be controlled by man
- 6) Concern about the spirits of ones ancestors
- 7) Power of rituals, curses and blessings
- 8) Ability to communicate with the beings listed above via dreams and other means

I have by no means exhausted all that is to be found in the material at hand. Still there is much that is useful in helping us to better approach these areas. It is clear that God has not ignored the issues and that there are real answers to be found which will give us solid ground on which to deal with the presence of spiritual powers in our world. What is clear is that God is on one side as Creator of all things. On the other side is creation. God has made it very plain as to how he interacts with his creation. What we need to understand is how we interact with creation at all of it's levels? And so the journey continues, to recognize God and serve him and not what he has created.

## **Chapter Four - Two Kingdoms, Two Missions**

### **A. Introduction**

Within the Bible we will find the existence of two kingdoms. Though God is the supreme ruler of the universe, His supremacy is challenged by another, thus resulting in this division within creation. Along with the existence of the two kingdoms are the two missions that are at work promoting and guiding the activity and direction of these two kingdoms. The ultimate objective of both missions is to win man over as a member of their respective kingdom. Each kingdom wants to prove its validity and worth so that man will join. Yet the methods employed are quite different. These two kingdoms are the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God. Let us look briefly at the kingdom of Satan and then more extensively at the kingdom of God.

### **B. Kingdom of Satan and his mission**

The first evidence we see of Satan's desire to establish a separate rule is found in the garden. He comes to Eve and tries, successfully to cause her to doubt God and look to herself. She then draws Adam into the same action and the result is a split between God and man (Gen. 3) Man is driven out of the garden, which easily can be seen to represent God's kingdom, into the world in general. Now the conflict begins in earnest. Murder and hatred seem to be key themes, but they are not the mission. The mission of Satan is to destroy God's kingdom by any and all means. If murder will bring the desired result, then that's fine.

The events leading up to the flood reveal how effective Satan can be in his mission. God responds with judgment. Man is almost annihilated, but one family is spared and a new start is made. Satan again is quite effective and man thinks to conquer heaven by building a tower. God confuses man with multiplicity of languages and for a period of time things slow down. Satan remains active; we see this from the story about Sodom and Gomorrah. He is busy creating a complex

network of religions and gods, with many avenues for contact and power. Man seems to be serving only the kingdom of Satan as we come to the start of the book of Exodus. There is the notable exception of Abraham and his family line.

As we move into the rest of the Pentateuch and the historical books we begin to understand the extent of Satan's organization and can glimpse a picture of what Paul talks about in Ephesians 6:12. Satan is the overseer of a vast kingdom that is organized. A review of the material in Appendix B will again reveal how extensive it is and how pervasive it is. There is a multitude of gods leading people away from God and a multitude of means to obtain power and information, made available to man, so long as he remains part of the kingdom of Satan. Satan's kingdom would appear to be vast and powerful. Yet it is weak because it relies not on a true power of its own but on deception and false promises. At key points it can and often breaks down. Satan is not truly God and cannot do everything he wants the members of his kingdom to believe he can do.

Satan's kingdom is one that is doomed. It is based on destroying not building. It is based on accusation and diversion. His mission is to get man to either rely on the kingdom of Satan or for man to rely on himself and his strength. This idea is behind the temptation of David to count the people[A3-40]. Satan rises up against David in an attempt to get David to rely on something other than God. This is also the focus of Achan's sin in Josh. 7:1, getting Achan to, covet he destroys much more. Satan wants to destroy God's name and people's faith in God. If the act of one will bring shame on the whole, then so much the better. Then God will punish and others will laugh and continue to follow Satan. This is the focus of Moses comments in Ex. 32: 9-13 [A3-8] and Num. 14:10-17 [A3-11] and of Joshua's response to the defeat of Israel at Ai in Josh. 7:8-9 [A3-17].

If this more direct plan does not work then there is always syncretism. Fine worship God, but treat him as just another god. This appears in the later life of Solomon as his wives turn his heart from worshipping one God, to worshipping many gods (1 Kings 11:4-9[A3-32]). Jeroboam in an attempt to control his new nation introduces syncretism in the form of two golden calves (1 Kings 12:28-30[A3-32]). This particular move on Satan's part is so effective that it is the most common item in judging whether a king of Israel was evil or not. (Here is a list of references to that effect; 1 Ki. 15:26, 33-34; 16:18-19, 25-26, 29-32; 21:20-23; 22:51-53; 2 Ki 3:1-3; 10:28-29, 30-31; 13:1-3, 10-11; 14:24-25; 15:8-9, 17-18, 23-24, 28.) In the summary of why Israel had been judged it is a key part

of what brings about God's final judgment, they had followed the practices of the nations God had driven out, "as well as the practices that the kings of Israel introduced, " (2 Ki. 17:7-8[A3-46]). Even the kings of Judah fall prey to this idea. Amaziah after winning a key victory with God's help brings back the gods of the Edomites and worships them (2 Chr. 25:15-16[A3-42]).

Satan's approach to this is at many levels. He often uses individuals like Balaam, the witch of Endor, a false prophet, and even a queen, i.e., Jezebel and Athaliah, to turn people from God. Sometimes the attempt fails at one point but succeeds at another. Balaam was unable to curse Israel but he was able to give advice that brought trouble to Israel. He uses groups of people when necessary. He used the Midianite women to draw the Israelite men into worshipping gods. The priests of Baal and Asheroth turned the people of Israel away from God, and there were always the false prophets ready to confuse and mislead.

On occasion he even attempts to use a nation to bring down Israel as we see when Assyria ridicules Hezekiah and the God he serves (2 Ki 18:19-22[A3-38]). This attempt on a large scale fails but the book of Judges records how on a smaller scale and for short periods of time the people of Israel followed the beliefs of other nations.

Satan appears to be succeeding. By the end of the historical record both Israel and Judah have been conquered, destroyed and deported. The reason, following after other gods. One would think that Satan is doing quite well in his mission of destroying God's kingdom and drawing man away from God. That might appear to be the truth, until one begins to look at what God's kingdom and mission are in all of this.

### **C. Witness in the Old Testament**

Before we go into a discussion of what God's mission is, we need to look at another concept, witness. This term plays a big part in our modern day understanding of witness. We often refer to three key passages from the New Testament in developing our understanding of mission and of witness; Acts 1:8, You will be my witnesses; Mark 16: 15, go to the whole world and preach the gospel, and Matthew 28:1-20, All authority is mine, go into the world and make disciples, teach them all that I have taught you. While we may think of the mission as ours, it is clearly God's. He is the one giving the directions as to how and where it is to be carried out.

John 3: 16 helps us get the focus a little clearer. God is the one sending the Son and we are the witnesses of this fact. John in his book (Jo 20:31) and in his letter (1 Jo 1:1-4) deals with the idea of witness. He says that he was a witness of all that God had done and said in Jesus. In these passages one could easily get the impression that we are the active agents and the witness is, in fact, our words and deeds.

Recently I read a book that has challenged me to reconsider this line of thinking. The title alone was a critical part of this shift in my thought. A.W. Tozer is the author and it is titled "The Pursuit of God." When I first saw the title and began to read this book I began with the thought that this book would help in my mission of pursuing God. To seek him out and gain from Him all the blessings that He had promised. As I think about this, this is the approach of much of the devotional material that we make use of in our Christian life. Yet as I read this book my grand plan of pursuing God was brought into question.

As I reflected on the words of Tozer it became very clear that I was not the one who was pursuing, rather God was pursuing me. This then began me thinking about the idea of witness. How is it that God is pursuing me? What is he using to do so? It begins with the idea that witness in fact has two aspects to it. There is the testimony of those who have seen. Like John we speak of what we have seen and heard. But behind this there is a greater witness. It is something that gives basis to the words. It is the activity of God that is the real witness. To explain what I mean we need to go back to the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament the idea of witness is present but has a different character than what is found in the New Testament. Witness existed in the form of stones, the Ark of the Covenant (which was also called the ark of testimony), even an altar. The idea being something other than words that would be a witness to the parties involved or to the larger community.

Let's look at each of these separately. First let us consider the use of stones as a witness. In the life of Jacob there are three instances of stones being used as a witness. Two of these



relate to events at a place given the name of Bethel. The first is tied to the night Jacob had a vision of a stairway leading to heaven. He takes the stone he has been sleeping on and sets it up as a pillar (Gen 28:18-22). He sets it up and calls it "God's house" and then makes a promise. Later when returning to his family he again comes to Bethel. This time God meets him and repeats the promises of Abraham to Jacob. Again Jacob sets up a stone pillar (Gen 35:13-15[A3-3]). The idea is that the stone will be a witness, a means of reminding Jacob and his family of God's promise. It is also interesting to note that in preparation for this meeting Jacob orders his family to get rid of all their gods. The focus is on remembering one God and His fulfilled promise of protection and the hope of future fulfillment of His other promises.

The third instance of a stone witness in Jacob's life relates to an event between him and his father-in-law Laban. Laban is pursuing Jacob and God warns him in a dream that God protects Jacob and Laban must be careful. When Laban finally catches up with Jacob he finds he cannot take any action against Jacob and Jacob is upset at him. They agree to set up a stone pillar as a witness (Gen 31:43-44). It will be a witness to them and others of the covenant they are about to make. It is to be a reminder that God is the real witness (Gen 31:50-53) of all that has happened, and of the promises they are about to make. This object is to point them to God and help them keep their promises.

There are several other instances of stones being witnesses. Joshua, at God's direction took 12 stones from the center of the Jordan River and placed them on dry ground. They were to be a witness to the people of what God had done (Josh 4:9[A3-16]). At the end of his career Joshua sets up a stone pillar to remind the people of their promise to follow only God (Josh 24:26-27[A3-19]). They were also used as reminders of God's judgment (Josh 7:26, Achan; Josh 10:27,

burial place of 5 Amorite kings). The problem with stones is that, though the stone may be more or less permanent of itself, it could be moved or destroyed. They just did not last long enough.

I will only deal with the Ark of the Covenant in a brief manner. Its significance goes far beyond the scope of this material. There is one instance where we will see how it functioned as a witness of God's presence. In Josh 6:4-6 the Ark of the Covenant is carried before the people as they march around the city of Jericho. It is here used as a witness of God's presence and power. In fact, contained within the ark are three objects that are to remind the people of what God has done. These three witnesses are, the stone tablets, to remind them the law is from God, a pot of manna, to remind them that God provides, and Aaron's rod, to remind them that God is in control.

Again as with the stones there is the potential for trouble. This is clearly seen in a story from 1 Samuel 5:3-4 [A3-26]. The people of Israel make the mistake of treating the ark as a talisman that can control God rather than a witness of his presence. It is to be a witness to the people to serve only God. Unfortunately they are not doing so and God does not respond. They do not realize their mistake and the result is disastrous. They are defeated and the enemy captures the Ark of the Covenant. When Judah is finally defeated by Babylon, the Ark of the Covenant disappears totally from history.

Altars are a common item used as a witness. In particular is the altar built by the eastern tribes when they return home (Josh 22:26-28[A3-19]). It is set up to remind those of the West Side of the Jordan that those on the East Side also had a portion in the Lord and in Israel. We are uncertain how long it stood but by the time of the Judges its message was forgotten. In fact, altars could be used to remember any

number of the other gods, as well, and so could be confusing to the people. This became very true later on as people set up altars on all the high places and worshiped both God and various gods. They seemed to be always in the process of either being built or torn down by various kings. What is needed is a more permanent type of witness. In order to understand what that would be and how it would come about, we now need to talk about God's kingdom and mission.

## **D. God's Kingdom and His mission**

### **1. Mission - Israel the living witness**

As we have seen above the use of objects as a witness is filled with various types of difficulties. Time results in their destruction or erosion and time often results in men forgetting why they were setup or constructed in the first place. Beginning with Abraham we see God working on another type of witness. The promise contains two elements of importance to this. They are I will make of you a nation and you will be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:2-3[A3-2]). This promise is repeated to Jacob as well (Gen 28:14-15[A3-2]). How God will do this is not really explained until we come to the story of the Exodus and then we begin to learn what God is intending to do.

God plans to establish Israel as his witness. They will become a living stone. His actions in and through Israel will be a witness to two things. First they will become a living testimony of the one true God (Deut 4:32-40[A3-12]). Second through them he will reveal the false nature of the gods and the dangers of following them (Deut 7:5-6[A3-13]). Let's first look at the testimony regarding God.

In Exodus 6:6-8[A3-4] we hear God's intentions clearly stated. You will become a nation of priests. The role of the

priest was to stand before the people and bring them into God's presence. He was a living witness of God's activity and presence among men. Israel was to become a nation of priests so that they could represent God to the nations. To do so he must reveal himself in a clear way to the world. Thus he chooses Israel, not for its greatness or might, but because of a promise made to a faithful man.

It all begins by getting the attention of the people of Israel and the most powerful nation of that time, Egypt. God reveals to Pharaoh, Egypt and Israel that he is about to act in such a way that the nations will begin to understand there is no God like him (Exod 9:13-16[A3-6]). What happens now becomes a focal point for the people of Israel; they are forever marked by God. It will be repeated over and over, never before has such a thing happened. Starting with Moses (Deut 4:32-40[A3-12]) going straight through to Nehemiah (Neh 9:10[A3-43]) this story and its importance will be repeated over and over reminding the people of Israel that God has chosen them to be a witness to the nations. That through them God will make a name for himself.

The truth of this idea is found in the response of Moses on two occasions (Exod 32:9-13[A3-8]; Num14:10-17[A3-11]) and Joshua's response when defeated by Ai (Josh 7:8-9[A3-17]). In Moses case God suggests that he is tired of Israel's constant complaining and disobedience, hence he will destroy them and start over with Moses and rebuild the nation and his witness. Moses responds that that would not look good in the eyes of the nations. It would make God look weak. Yes he had defeated Egypt, but then could not finish what he started. The nations would laugh in derision at such a weak god. He would then be like any other God. . God responds to the words of Moses. By the time Israel reaches Canaan the people of the land are terrified as seen in the testimony of Rahab (Josh. 2:8-13[A3-16]) and the reaction of the Gibeonites (Josh 9:9, 24-25[A3-18]).

Joshua saw this truth from another perspective. Israel had been defeated. Joshua did not understand the cause but he saw clearly the potential harm it could bring to God's name and thus his witness among the nations. God responds to Joshua by revealing the cause of the problem. After this incident there are no further problems of this kind and the conquest of Canaan moves on with no further problems.

Unfortunately other things have begun to creep in. The Israelites are not listening to the warning of both Moses (Deut 8:19-20[A3-14]) and of Joshua. Joshua hears their words and still tells them they will fail to follow God and will lose His blessing (Josh 24:19-20). God has warned them through Moses that they can be a positive witness to the nations or if necessary he will use their punishment to communicate to the nations (Deut 28:24-25[A3-15]). God is fully capable of accomplishing his mission of setting up a witness to the nations through Israel. If they want to enjoy a life of blessing because of God's presence they need merely to worship only God. Or they can follow the other gods and he will punish them in the eyes of the nations to prove who he is.

Judges records the sad truth. They did not listen (Judg 2:17-19[A3-21]) and God turned them over to their enemies (Judg 3:6-8[A3-21]). Gideon realized that God had abandoned them but he too had forgotten the command to serve only God and was confused about what was happening (Judg 6:13[A3-23]). God responded to their cries for one key reason. He had promised to bless the nations through them, promised to make them his witness. He could not and would not fully abandon them. This is the reason he heard the cry of Samson on that fateful day in the temple of Dagon (Judg 16:24-28[A3-23]). The people of Dagon were mocking not just Samson but God. His response to Samson was as much recognition of Samson's repentance as it was to maintain the truth about His identity in the land and relationship to Israel.

And so down came the temple.

God's goal of creating a witness to the nations would see some daylight in the ministry of Samuel and the reign of David. David would express this truth over and over in the Psalms. The pinnacle of the period would come at the dedication of the temple. Solomon's prayer was that God would use the temple to draw people from the nations to worship him (1 Ki 8:41-43[A3-30]). He further asks God to uphold the cause of the people of Israel (1 Ki 8:59-60[A3-31]). This cause is that the people of Israel will be all that God wants as a witness. It will be a witness such that "the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that there is no other. (Vs. 60)."

God is more than willing for this to happen. Yet there is a stern warning of what will happen if the people serve any other god. If the people follow any other gods, even as he is now using this temple to draw both Israel and the nations to himself, he will then use the destruction of this same temple as a witness. When God acts it will be clear to the nations that the Israelites have forsaken the true God to follow other gods (I Ki 9:6-9[A3-31]). This theme will be repeated over and over by the prophets.

## **2. Results of this mission**

Israel has survived its captivity in Egypt. Egypt and Pharaoh have become painfully aware of the truth (Exod 9:13-16[A3-6]). The God of Israel is powerful. As the people move towards Canaan the fear of God precedes them. By the time they get to the Jordan the fear can be felt. Rahab speaks of it as she confesses her belief in God (Josh 2:8-13[A3-16]). The proof that she sincerely believes is found in the inclusion of her name in the lineage of David. God's witness in the form of Israel is affecting at least one life.

The Gibeonites also respond to this witness. They though are overwhelmed with fear and resort to deception to deal with the effect of the truth on their lives (Josh 9:9[A3-18]), (Josh 9:24-25[A3-18]). Their belief combined with their deception saves their lives but does not result in a relationship with God. The result is a loss of identity; they become the slaves of the Israelites. There is another who knows the truth but refuses to heed the information given him. He instead continues to follow his own thoughts and the result is death. This is Balaam, son of Beor (Josh 13:22[A3-18]). God let him see the truth in a vivid way through the mouth of a donkey. He instead ignores this information and pays for it.

Hiram responds to Solomon with a statement that reflects his understanding of this truth. He praises the Lord as the maker of heaven and earth (2 Chr 2:12[A3-41]). Not long after the temple is completed the Queen of Sheba arrives to find out if all she has heard is true. She sees the truth of God's love for Israel and praises him (1 Ki 10:6-9[A3-31]). In fact the effect of God's witness is so widespread by this time that the bible records that all the kings of the earth came to hear the wisdom that God had put in his heart (2 Chr 9:23[A3-41]).

It would be great if we could say the end, but things began to change. From now to the end of the existence of the two kingdoms of Israel the reverence of the name of God would fluctuate. When there was a king who honestly served God, then the nations would be filled with awe and respect. This would be true of the reigns of Asa (2 Chr 14:14[A3-41]) and the time of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:10[A3-41]), (2 Chr 20:29-20[A3-41]). They would trust God for the victory and the nations would see the Lord work. There would still be men who heard the message like Naaman (2 Ki 5:15[A3-36]) who would hear the message and believe. There would be others who would try to deny it and die, like Sennacherib (2 Ki 19:33-34[A3-39]).

God would now begin to use his punishment as the means to keep his witness alive. He had promised that the punishment of Israel's sin of following after other gods would cause the people to think in this way. The words of three kings of Persia suggest that in fact it was effective. Cyrus, understood who had made possible his victory and honored the Lord of the Heaven by rebuilding his temple (2 Chr 36:23[A3-42]). The next king in this line, Darius, continues in this line of thinking. When the local people challenge the rebuilding of the temple he commands them not to interfere with this work. They are further ordered to draw from the royal treasury to support this work (Ezra 6:6-8[A3-43]). Yet another king of Persia, Artaxerxes, responds. He sends Nehemiah back to supervise the work and orders that Ezra be given whatever is necessary for his work. His motive why should the wrath of God fall on them (Ezra 7:21-23[A3-43]).

The final result of God's work is seen in one other fact. As a nation Israel never again follows after other gods. There is more that we could look into in the area of the history between the two testaments that would further support this. The very fact that the people return and the nation is reborn. That is manages to survive a very turbulent time. The very interesting fact that of all the nations Israel is not required to hand images of Caesar in the temple or anywhere else. There is also the growth of belief in God and the coming into existence a whole group of people called the God-fearers. God's witness to the nations has been effective. This aspect of mission, the creation of a witness to the nations has laid the foundation for what is yet to come. When Jesus dies and rises again, representatives from the nations are there ready to for the next step in God's mission.



### 3. Mission - Defeat of the "gods"

In the scope of God's creating of a witness for himself is the destruction of the witness of the gods. That the gods are prominent in this era is clear by the amount of material that exists dealing with them and their methods of operation (see Appendix Two for a listing of terms and scriptures related to this subject as seen in the historical record). Not only are they prominent they are everywhere. Since the main function of the gods is to draw man away from God, God will now judge them and reveal their unworthy nature.

The first conflict of God and the gods may be found in Genesis 6. Some feel that these sons of God were in fact angels consorting with man. There is some controversy over this idea, let us move on to a story that is clearer. Egypt had its gods and it had Pharaoh a human god. The people worshiped these gods and depended on them. God though does not want Israel to follow after the gods of Egypt and so begins the ten plagues. Each is design to humiliate a particular God and Pharaoh. At first the magicians are able to duplicate a few of the plagues but then things move to a different level and they begin to admit that this is from a God far superior to what they worship (Exod 8:19). By the time of the last plagues things are getting serious (Exod 7:3-5[A3-5]). God is at work in such a way that they will know by their defeat who the Lord is. In fact God clearly states that he planned all of this to prove just that point (Exod 9:13-16[A3-6]).

God is finished with Egypt and turns to the next target. But before they move further they are to understand better what it means to have the one true God on their side. There will be only one form of worship, there will be guidelines to follow so that people understand that Israel serves the one true God. These instructions fill up most of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This period of Israel's history is

a time of testing and training to make sure they fully understand what is about to happen. God is about to reveal himself even further but this people must be ready to follow him. What is about to happen now will reveal very clearly that there is no other God (Deut 4:32-40[A3-12]). They are given instructions, which include another aspect of God's mission. It is not just about how to live, but how to treat the other gods. Destroy the idol and their altars, their places of worship. Burn them with fire (Deut 7:5-6[A3-13]). Destroy even the people who worship these idols. This will be a campaign of destruction and humiliation of the gods (Deut 7:5-6[A3-13]). Even the silver and gold used to build the images or witness of these gods is too be destroyed. There is nothing of value to the gods, it is all absolutely detestable (Deut 7:25-26[A3-14]). God will create in these actions a further witness to his greatness. Using the people of Israel and individuals to drive home this point, there is only one God, Yahweh is his name.

There follows a strict warning that if they do not follow these orders for destruction God will treat them like the idols and completely destroy them (Deut 8:19-20[A3-14]). Even as they are to make the gods of the nations something to abhor they themselves will become a thing of horror (Deut 28:24-25[A3-15]). The reality of this instruction is brought home in the events surrounding their defeat at Ai and the sin of Achan. He has taken into his house and the camp of Israel something that had been dedicated to another god. God is angry and the people suffer. Until this sin is dealt with there will be no further victory.

This brings us to Joshua and the conquest of the land and the punishment of these nations. God had judged them for their worship of idols and now was the time of punishment for the people and their gods. This law is still in effect in the time of David. When he conquers a people he destroys their idols (1 Chr 14:12[A3-39]). It is this wholehearted commitment to

God that wins David a special place. Several other kings follow this pattern and are honored; Asa (2 Chr 14:2-5); Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:6); Hezekiah (2 Ki 18:3-4); Josiah (2 Chr 34:3-8). There are those who don't and are judged, i.e., Jeroboam (1 Ki 13:1-3[A3-33]) and Amaziah (2 Chr 25:15-16[A3-42]).

Even when Israel is disobedient God is at work to bring about the humiliation and downfall of the gods. He works in Samson's life. Samson is a failure in many ways but on that last day he has a chance to make a point. He has shamed God and the Philistines are enjoying themselves and claiming victory of Dagon over God because of the defeat of Samson. Samson now understands and prays for strength to destroy not merely the men but the temple of their god, Dagon. God sees both the sincerity of Samson and the ridicule of his name and responds. Samson dies but the temple of Dagon is destroyed by the power of God (Judg 16:24-28[A3-23]).

The story of the capture of the Ark of the Covenant is interesting in that there are no people directly involved in what happens. Israel is in the wrong when they use the ark as a talisman (1 Sam 4:3-8[A3-27]). The result, God allows the ark to be captured. The Philistines, typical of this era take the ark into the temple of Dagon and place it in a position of subservience, then they begin to praise the might of their god over Yahweh. God will not support Israel's error, but at the same time he is not going to allow the Philistines to believe Dagon is powerful. By the next morning it is Dagon who is on the ground in a position of subservience and worship. The Philistines do not see clearly what has happened and stand the idol up again. By the next morning things are very clear. Dagon is not only on the ground but he has lost his head and hands and they are now lying on the threshold. Removal of the head and hands was a humiliating act done by the victors to key enemies. God uses this act to make his message clear (1 Sam 5:3-4[A3-26]).

The story of David and Goliath furnishes us with some very clear statements of what was involved. Goliath curses David in the names of his god (1 Sam 17:43[A3-27]). He thus calls on his gods to bring victory. This in David's mind is not an attack on him or even Israel. Goliath has defied God and seeks to humiliate God. David's response makes this clear to everyone. My victory as a boy, without a weapon of war will reveal to all who is really in charge (1 Sam 17:45-47[A3-27]). This concept is what is behind God's defeat of the Arameans (1 Ki 20:28[A3-34]). He will not be humiliated by any one or even equated with the gods of other nations. Sennacherib and his officers make this same mistake (2 Ki 18:32-35[A3-38]). Hezekiah is thus given a great victory over the powerful Assyrian army, because is willing to reveal to the nations who the true God is and hear the prayer of a faithful servant (2 Ki 19:17-19, 33-34[A3-38]). The really humiliating bit for Sennacherib and his god comes after the battle is over. Sennacherib is worshipping in the temple of his god. It is in this time of worship that Sennacherib's two sons enter and kill him (2 Ki 19:37). The god of Sennacherib is so weak that he cannot protect his own servant, in his own temple from the completion of God's judgment against him.

There is one more individual that plays a major part in this mission of Gods to humiliate the gods and make it clear that he will not accept and form of syncretism. There is no place in God's kingdom for the gods. That person is Elijah. In a dark time he shines out as a beacon for God. A constant reminder that God is in control and looking after his name and witness to the people of Israel and the nations.

The story begins with a call for drought in the land because the people have forsaken God to worship Baal. When Elijah reappears, Ahab blames him for the trouble. What he is saying is that because Elijah is not worshipping Baal, Baal has caused the drought. Elijah knows better. God called him to

pray for drought because Ahab and his wife Jezebel are not worshipping God. They have added to this sin by leading the people of Israel into this sin. The solution, a challenge to find out which god is responsible and truly has power (1 Ki 18:24[A3-34]). There is no possibility of mistake in this challenge. God proves himself the clear victor and Baal is brought down in humiliation.

This story is followed by another piece that is often missed. We know that Jezebel was angry and wanted to kill Elijah for what he had done. We usually get all wrapped up in the story of Elijah fleeing from her and coming to meet God on the mountain. In doing so we miss another piece of what God does to further humiliate Baal and those who worship him. Jezebel utters a curse against Elijah. She calls on Baal to strike her dead if she does not find a way to kill Elijah (1 Ki 19:2[A3-34]). Yes Elijah runs away, but Jezebel does not die. She, at the hand of God, becomes a living testimony of the ineffectiveness of her own god, Baal.

In the meantime Elijah is learning more about the greatness of his true God. When he returns it is with greater power than before. He moves right back into his home and Israel, calls an apprentice begins the wheels of the downfall of the line of Ahab. Jezebel knows where he is, as does her family. When her son Ahaziah is injured from a fall, they send to consult Baal. Elijah intercepts them and pronounces God's judgment because they have failed to consult God (2 Ki 1:3[A3-35]). Because they know where Elijah lives they send soldiers to arrest him. The soldiers fail to do so and due to their arrogant denial of the prophet of the true God, 100 of them are killed by fire (2 Ki 1:9-12[A3-35]). It is a not to subtle reminder to Jezebel of her failure to carry out her threat and possibly a real reminder of the failure of Baal to respond in kind by killing her. Again she is unable to do so and Elijah remains. In fact as further insult God prevents Elijah from dying and takes him straight to heaven.

Unfortunately the lessons given are not learned. Or if learned they do stay learned. God will act one more time to reveal himself to Israel and defeat the gods. The gods appear to have taken control of Israel and Judah. First Israel is destroyed because they have worshiped the gods (2 Ki 17:7-8[A3-36]). Then Judah is destroyed step by step. He has said he would do so and do so in such a way that the nations will see and understand the truth (2 Ki 21:12-15[A3-39]). When Israel is finally allowed to return to the land it is in humility and with a very clear understanding of the truth. Never again will the nation be guilty of following after other gods. They have both seen what God can do to the gods and see what he does to those who follow them from personal experience.

## **E. Conclusion**

God's mission in the Old Testament can be summarized by these two texts found in

1 Chr 17:19-22[A3-40]

O LORD. For the sake of your servant and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made known all these great promises. "There is no one like you, O LORD, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. And who is like your people Israel-- the one nation on earth whose God went out to redeem a people for himself, and to make a name for yourself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? You made your people Israel your very own forever, and you, O LORD, have become their God. (NIV)

1 Chr 16:23-26[A3-40]

Sing to the LORD, all the earth;

proclaim his salvation day after day.

Declare his glory among the nations,

his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;

He is to be feared above all gods.

For all the gods of the nations are idols,

but the LORD made the heavens. (NIV)

The first text expresses clearly the first part of God's mission to create a witness for the nations in the form of the nations of Israel. The second text expresses clearly the second part of God's mission, to reveal to the nations the true nature of the gods and to reveal the one true God to all nations. The call to be witnesses is based on this fact. It is God who is creating the witness, we are in fact either those who cooperate and allow ourselves to be used by God in the ongoing presentation of that witness. Or we are in opposition to that witness and will be subject to the second aspect of God's mission, the judgment and destruction of the kingdom of Satan.

## **Chapter Five - Worldviews in Conflict: The prophets and the gods**

### **A. The theme of the Prophets**

The theme that appears in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel over and over again is that Israel has left the one true God to follow other gods. Many ideas and illustrations are used to portray clearly what has happened. The main one is that Israel has played the harlot and sought out other lovers. The judgment is clear and final. There will be punishment for this sin. The other side of the presentation though is one of a future hope. There is a chance for a change. God offers to forgive them even in the midst of the punishment. It will not prevent the punishment but it will open the door for a new relationship with God in the days ahead.

The point though of this presentation is to look into the reason why they were abandoned to judgment. What was the reason for this action? Isaiah gives us a clear statement regarding this in 2:6-9[A3-43]. He lists four key areas: 1) They are full of superstitions from the east. 2) They practice divination like the Philistines. 3) They clasp hands with Pagans. 4) Their land is full of idols. Jeremiah, in 2:11[A3-56] accuses the people of changing gods. They have exchanged the true God for worthless idols. Ezekiel gives us a vision of the extant of this following after other gods in chapter 8[A3-64,65,66]. God shows him that even in the temple itself they are worshipping other gods.

It is not such things as lying, stealing, cheating and murder that have offended God. No, what has offended God is that the people are no longer worshipping Him, they are following after other gods and performing all the practices associated with such worship. They no longer look to Him to meet their needs. They no longer depend on Him to care for



them. They no longer admit His supremacy, and have taken to serving the creation instead of the creator. It is for this sin, the violation of the first and second commandments that the people are being punished.

At this point I would like to redirect our thinking. While it is clear that the people have failed, I would like to know why they failed. Why did they follow other gods? God had revealed himself time and again as being capable of caring for and protecting His people and yet they follow other gods. What is it about these other gods and their powers that have attracted their allegiance? Are they really only objects created by individuals to serve as a means of answering the unknown? Or are they more than that? Could it be that behind the images/idols there are real beings with limited powers on which the people may call and expect a response, at least some of the time?

What we need to do then is begin to look into the terms used by the prophets concerning these beings and their powers. What is being said about the gods, the various practitioners, the idols/images and other key areas related to spiritual powers and those who cause them and employ them.

## **B. THE "gods"?**

Let us start with the gods or other spiritual beings and the terms used to describe them. Within the major prophets we will find five terms used. *el* is the main one and the rest are derivatives of this root.

The most common one is the term *elohiyim*[430:A2-2]. It is used only by Isaiah and Jeremiah and except in one case (Is 50:10[A3-55]) only refers to the gods of other nations. In one other situation God is compared to the other gods (Is 36:18-20[A3-51]). This comparison though is done by the general of Sennacherib's army when he is coming to attack

Jerusalem. He tries to liken God to the gods of the other nations that have been defeated by their army. The end result of this insult to God was the annihilation of Sennacherib's army and proof of who the true God is.

The common thread in the use of this term is that these are the gods of other people and they have proved inadequate to protect their people or to succeed in overcoming the one true God. Isaiah challenges them to do something that will cause the people to believe that they are truly gods (Is 41:23[A3-52]).

Jeremiah accuses them of not being gods after all (Je 2:11[A3-56]). They are unable to save those that serve them (Je 2:28[A3-56]). Serving them will only provoke the Lord to anger (Je 7:10[A3-56]), which means, in the minds of the prophets, that the curse of Dt 28[A3-15] will be carried out in full. God will destroy the nations who serve them to show Israel their weakness (Je 48:35[A3-62]). (Note: If one reads through the prophets one will find a large number of prophecies or oracles dealing with the punishment of the nations which served these gods). God is indeed against the gods.

The next term to consider is the root word *'el* [410:A2-1]. This is a very common term and is used extensively as the name for God. Generally it appears in combination with another term for God such as Lord, thus the form The Lord God. The meaning of this is the god who is Lord of all, the one true God, or the supreme God. Thus this God is distinct from all other gods.

What is interesting to note is that within the context of the major prophets about one fourth of the occurrences of this term refer to the gods. Also about half of the uses involve comparing God with the gods. By comparison in the Pentateuch there is only one occurrence of this term where it

means gods. This term in many ways has been restricted as a title for God. Here though the attempt is to contrast the one true God and the other gods (Is 43:10-12).

There is also a derisive element in that these gods were made so by man. Even their images are the creation of man and thus their status as gods is due to the action of man. The use of wood, silver and gold to fashion their images highlights even further their limited nature and their dependence on man for their position. Since they are only wood, silver and gold they cannot save (Is 44:15-17[A3-54]).

There is another derivative of *'el*[430:A2-1] that is only used once within the material in question, *elahh*[426:A2-1]. It is found in Je 10:11[A3-58] and gives us an interesting bit of information about the nature of the gods. They exist, but one day they will perish. The life they now have will cease to exist, for they did not make the heavens and earth and thus have become dependent on the God who did create them for their very existence as gods. The interesting question that one might ask is, will these beings cease to exist when the earth and heaven vanish or will their status as gods cease because there will be no one to give them such recognition? Such a question poses many more thoughts about the nature of these gods and their existence, hopefully as we proceed some of these will present themselves along with some possible answers.

The term *elowah* [43:A2-3] is also used only once in Is 44:8[A3-53] and states that God is the only god. Such a statement does make clear that there is something intrinsically different between God and these beings who call themselves gods. It would appear critical that a clear definition of the character and nature of God is essential to this. There is something of the character of God that is lacking in these beings. Though they call themselves gods they do not measure up. That statement in itself does allow

for their existence and that they have some abilities greater than man but less than God. This would be a helpful area of study as we deal with gods and spirits in the world around us and especially as we deal with those from backgrounds where such beings are prominent in their belief systems. It would mean accepting that such beings are real and have real power, but they are not God and thus quite limited.

To complete this area we have one more term to be looked at, *'eliyl*[457:A2-4]. This word is most often used as a term of ridicule. It contrasts the greatness of God with the weakness and vanity of the gods. Some examples will be helpful: 1) Is 19:11[A3-48] They tremble at the coming of the Lord, 2) Is 19:3[A3-48] Their plans will result in nothing, 3) Is 31:7[A3-49] They will be rejected as the Lord brings his judgment, 4) Ez 30:13[A3-72] They will be destroyed.

The Ezekiel 30:13[A3-72] is interesting for it contains another statement within it, "their will no longer be a prince in Egypt." It is not clear if this is a man or one of these beings that we have been talking about. If he is a spirit being, then he is part of a category similar to the prince of Persia in Daniel 10. There is nothing more but it suggests a hierarchy within these gods, and each group has a leader. This fits with much of the material describing the gods of the various countries of this era. There was a stronger being, although he is not all-powerful and is often resisted and rebelled against by his own fellow gods.

That brings us to the key question. If these beings who are being served by the people are not the true God and if they are not merely imagined then who are they? From the discussion presented it is apparent that they are more than imaginary beings. People follow them for a reason. There is something real behind what is happening. Not once is it said that they do not exist. It is said that a man may make one or

create the image of one. But even in that act there is a key question to be answered, where did he get the idea for that image?

These images are mocked for being unreliable, but does that mean that they have no reality? While it is true that the representation is a joke and has no real ability, the possibility remains that what is being represented may in fact be real. Thus making the object or representation may be an attempt to attract the attention of the real being. This opens the door to the question of what is an idol really. We will save that for later.

The problem lies then in the inability of the being; being represented to respond to all the callers or image-makers. Another way in which it is revealed that they are not God, and by extension cannot even be gods (small g). Looked at from this perspective, the ridicule of the prophets becomes even more sarcastic and pointed. They are unreliable, empty, vanity, and thus truly worthless. One thinks of the taunts of Elijah (I Kings 19[A3-38, 39]) when challenging the prophets of Baal on the mount. Is he on a trip, or is he asleep, or is he busy elsewhere? Are these really denials of their existence or a very clear statement about the nature of their existence and their power? The discussion of the event though falls outside the scope of this paper.

### **C. Spiritual Beings**

Who then are these beings? Within Isaiah 6[A3-45]] and Ezekiel 1[A3-64] and 10[A3-66] we have the descriptions of several beings, which are present with God in heaven and active in the world around us. In Isaiah we are given a limited description of a seraph. It has six wings and a bright flaming appearance. Its function is to fly around the throne of God and proclaim His holiness. They communicate with Isaiah and perform an act of purification so that he may stand

in the presence of God.

In Ezekiel chapter one we have the description of an incredible being which is only called the living creature. No title or name is given, but a detailed description is provided. This creature has four faces, a lion, an ox, an eagle and a man. Their feet were like those of a calf and they had four wings. They also had the hands of a man and they appeared like burning coals with fire flashing between them. They could move in any direction with out turning.

In Ezekiel 10[A3-66] we have another being which is called *cherubim* [3742:A2-5]. These also have four wings and the hands of a man. Their bodies were covered with eyes and they had four faces, a cherub, a man, a lion, and an eagle. In verse 20 he says that these were the ones he had seen by the river Kebar in chapter one. Yet there are two differences, the first ones did not have eyes over all their bodies and one of the faces was an ox and not a cherub. Still maybe a cherub looks like an ox and he may have simply omitted the other item from his first description.

In Ez 28:14[A3-71] it is suggested that Lucifer was just such a cherub, a guardian cherub. He became proud of his position and tried to exalt himself. The result was expulsion. If this passage is true, and the traditions related to it, then here is a more realistic description of Satan. The descriptions from Exodus concerning the appearance of cherubims with six wings suggests that there may have been different types and that the term relates more to function than appearance. If so then the possibility of beings of similar power but with varied appearance presents itself and thus the variations one sees amongst the gods becomes more feasible.

These three descriptions are incredible in nature. In fact normally we would think they were unbelievable. But if these beings truly exist and we remember that many of them

followed Satan, then much becomes clear concerning the appearances of the gods worshipped by the people. The mixture of human, animal and other characteristics in the description of beings that serve God in heaven makes one wonder about the nature and appearance of those, which fell. Is it possible that these images/idols, which are made by man, actually represent something that does exist?

Let us quickly look at the other terms used to describe these beings. One of the more important which appears throughout the Bible is *mal'ak*[4397:A2-6]. It is a term again that relates mainly to function. This is often translated as messenger, or more specifically the angel of the Lord. He functions generally as a messenger from God. In Is 37:36[A3-51] though, this angel was sent as a destroyer. Overnight he slew 185,000 soldiers in the Assyrian camp. This suggests great power in this being.

The word *tsaba'*[6635:A2-7] is translate host and can refer to any large group of individuals. Most commonly it refers to an army. In a few instances it refers to the celestial bodies in the heavens which at various times become objects of worship (Je 8:2[A3-57], 19:13[A3-59, 79]). Included in this might be those that dwell within that realm.

Within the context of the prophets there are only two words that clearly are not present with God. *sa'ir*[8163:A2-10] which is often translated satyr is described as a hairy goat man. In Isaiah 13:21[A3-47] and 34:14[A3-50] this term appears. Often it is simply translated as wild goat. Yet it could be translated as a type of demon that dwells in a desert place. The other term is *tsaphaph*[6850:A2-8]. This term is more of a sound word meaning chirp or peep and is used to describe a type of ghost by the sound it makes when answering the spiritist or medium (Is 8:19[A3-46], 29:4[A3-49]).

In reviewing the material up to this point it becomes apparent that these beings are not imaginary. They have an existence but they are not really gods. This is an assumed title. They have fallen for the sin of Adam and Eve, wanting to be like God. In the effort to do so they have presented themselves to man and he has responded by believing them to be gods. They have been given names to indicate the level of their power. Some are more powerful some are less.

Let me give you a list of those that appear within Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and what peoples may have claimed them as their own gods.

**Ashera** [842:A2-12] - Babylon, Canaan, Phoenicia. Often seen as the consort of Baal. She supposedly had seven sons

**Bel** [1078:A2-13] - Baal of the Babylonians

**Baal** [1168:A2-13] - Phoenicia, Canaan, Egypt. Also called Haddu, he is the storm god, the supreme male divinity

**Heylel** [1966:A2-16] - Lucifer Used of the king of Babylon and Satan

**Kemosh** [3645:A2-16] - Chemosh Moab. Key deity of Moab, some see similarities to Mars and Saturn. Also identified with Baal-peor

**Molek** [4432:A2-17] - Ammon, Phoenicia. Chief deity of Ammonites, also called Milcam a Phoenician deity. Infant sacrifice was a part of his worship

**Merodak** [4781:A2-17] - Babylon. Also called Marduk, son of Enki. He is a god of storm

**Nebo** [5015:A2-18] - Babylon: Corresponds to Greek Hermes, Latin Mercury and Egyptian Thoth. Deity of learning and letters.

**Shemesh** [8121:A2-21] - Egypt Re. Supreme God, he is the sun.

**Tammuz** [8542:A2-21] - Phoenicia Sumer. Food or vegetation deity. Adonis was similar to Tammuz. Both were seen as a god of fertility



This is only a small list of the gods of the lands that Israel came in contact with. It is interesting to note how many of them are claimed by two or more peoples. It would be an interesting study to look at the names of the various gods and their functions to see how many of them are similar in their phonetic structure and in their function. We might find some interesting parallels and that they are in fact, one being that has merely relocated for better effect or to gain better service from the people they wish to control. The other side of this in terms of Missiology would be to make a comparison of the gods, spirits, demons of various beliefs to see what similarities there might be. This would mean that these beings are not restricted in location and thus free to move about. That also means that they could not respond to every request because they cannot be in two places at once. This would explain why they do not always do as expected. This could be useful in confronting people about their beliefs. The word of God would then be of great help in showing people who and what they are dealing with.

#### **D. Idols and Images**

Whenever one talks about false religion one usually faces these two terms, idols and images. Often the discussion of belief is centered around them and that they are false and without power. While this is in fact true, that the object itself has no power, there is much more to this than merely the object. In fact the prophets seemed to enjoy finding ways to belittle and poke fun at these objects. There are a large number of terms used in this area. Each tells us a little about their understanding of this aspect of the beings they may represent and peoples attitudes toward them. It is also here that the struggle over two worldviews is focused. The prophets challenge the truth of the idols, while the people continue to serve them instead of God.

What I would like to do is quickly present a number of the terms and a few comments on each as is appropriate and then make a few more observations.

*'aven* [205:A2-22] - The key idea behind this word is that they are a source of trouble and confusion (Is 41:29[A3-53])

*'eymay* [367A2-23] - They are a source of terror (Is 33:18[A3-5]). The question here is whether the source of terror is the idol or fear of the judgment of God.

*gilluwl* [1544:A2-25] - The strict meaning of this word is a log. It is used as a description of the source of the idol and thus a means of ridiculing them. Only Ezekiel uses this word but he uses it extensively. Here are a few examples: 1) Ez 14:3-7[A3-69] They are a stumbling block which separates the people from God, 2) Ez 20:1-30[A3-70] Following them will bring judgment from God, 3) Ez 22:3-4[A3-71] They cause the people to be defiled and thus unacceptable to God. The key idea here is that following these wooden objects will defile oneself before God and result in judgment. It is to be noted that nothing is said about whether they represent a real power or being, only that their presence brings defilement.

*maccekal* [4541:A-26] - This is a cast image and thus refers to the manner in which it was made (Is 30:22[A3-51]).

*massebet* [4676:A2-26] - Here we have a stone monument that has been erected to a god and thus becomes an object of worship (Je 43:13[A3-62]).

*maskiyth* [4906:A2-28]- Here we have a carved image which explains the manner in which it was made (Ez 8:3-5[A3-64]).

*necek* [5262:A2-28] - This term means molten image showing that it was cast from some metal (Is 48:5). It is interesting to note that in this reference God acts in

such a way so that to prevent the people from claiming that the idols had done it and not God. Does this mean that they could do some things and in this case were unable? Another reference says that they have no breath in them (Je 51:17[A3-63]), but again what kind of breath or life are we referring to?

**cemel** [5566:A29]- In this case we have a statue which is shaped like a god (Ez 8:3-5[A3-64]).

**Peciyl** [6457:A2-29] - This is a graven image which describes the method by which it was made (Je 51:47). It is also stated in this reference that God will punish the idols. If they are not real or do not represent something that is real then why punish them?

**peger** [6297:A2-29]- This word could mean a corpse or a monument. If one combines the meaning then we have an interesting description of an idol as a dead monument (Ez 43:7-9[A3-71, 81]).

**pecel** [6459:A2-30]- The means a carved image (Is 40:19[A3-52]). Is 44:10-17[A3-54] gives us a description of how the process of obtaining the material and forming the image is accomplished. The description is one of ridicule, pointing out the foolishness of what is being done and of how foolish it looks to worship such an object.

**tselem** [6754:A2-30] - This term clearly means a representative figure (Ez 7:20[A3-64]).

**shiqquwts/sheqets** [8251:A2-30] - These two terms have the similar meaning of an object which is detestable or unclean (Je 7:30[A3-56], Ez 5:11[A3-64]). This is descriptive of God's opinion of the object and its affect on the one who worships it.

**tow'ebah** [8441:A2-32] - This word clearly means abomination or something which is disgusting, detestable (Is 44:19[a10], Je 16:18[a17], Ez 7:20[a23]) This is one of the favorite terms to describe idols and the practices associated with them.

The idols are detestable because they lead the people away from God and into practices that have been forbidden by God.

This is just a partial list of the terms used by the prophets when talking about idols/images. These terms for the most part deal with either the method by which they were made or the nature of the behavior generated by worship of them.

Terms like worthless, false and dead are attached to them and yet the use of these terms seems to relate more to the material being used for the idol than to the being they represent. The strong idea is that they are severely limited and that very soon the truth of their limits will be made quite clear to the people of Israel. Judgment is coming on them and those who follow them for relying on these objects and what they represent. Destruction of the images quite clearly reveals the weakness of the being, which they represent. This destruction also is a way of bringing shame onto these beings, for if I destroy their images and they do not respond then what kind of power do they really have?

It is apparent that the prophets seemed to relish finding terms to use to ridicule these gods and to highlight their weakness. Along the same line such ridicule and the lack of response by the idols points out the foolishness of believing in them instead of God. We need to remember that the prophets were able to make such statements because of their intimate knowledge of the one true God. They were trying to show to others the weakness of their beliefs and draw them back to God.

Now it is quite plain to us that such objects are truly dead and have no power and yet people the world over continue to create them and worship them in hopes of gaining help or power. If we only had the objects to deal with, and there were no beings of power behind them, would they really

continue to be in such demand? But if in fact they are only representations of beings of limited power that are being used by man to some how attract the attention of these beings then we have a totally different situation.

So often we read these passages and take the first option as the truth. This decision reveals much about our worldview. With that kind of worldview these passages seem to be part of an era of superstition and simple knowledge to which we can no longer relate. Taken from this view of course these objects are dead, of course they can have no power and of course it is foolish to believe in them. And yet....

There is more here than just objects. We have talked about beings other than God that exist in the spiritual world. If they are there then how do they manifest themselves in order to convince men of their existence and power and attract attention to themselves? Attention that easily can take the form of worship.

### **E. Practitioners and their Practices**

What is it that draws people, what gets their attention? If someone were to tell you about tomorrow's events or help you get something you wanted, would you not be interested in how they did that? If they claimed that by doing certain things or believing in something would make it possible for you to have that kind of help and information, would you not be interested in what they have to say? If the potential benefits to yourself and others were great enough would you not join them? These are the kind of issues that were behind the prophet's fight against the gods and people worshipping them.

There is again quite a list of practices and those who practice them. At this point it again might be useful to list them by various groups.

### Those with familiar spirits or mediums

*'owb* [178:A2-34] - A necromancer or one who has a familiar spirit. These are individuals who consult the dead. A key element in their practice is that the sound from the spirit rises up from the ground (Is 8:19[A3-46], 29:4[A3-49]).

*'at* [328:A2-34] - A necromancer who made low chirping sounds as part of the ritual which apparently was caused by the spirits (Is 19:3[A3-48]).

### Astrologers

*habar* [1895:A2-35] - The root of this word means to divide and thus the meaning of one who divides the heavens in order to make predictions (Is 47:13[A3-55]).

### Charmers, Magicians

*cheber* [2267:A2-35] - One who makes spells and enchantments (Is 47:9, 12[A3-55]).

*keceth* [3704:A2-37] - These are the amulets worn by the people which would be produced by the magicians (Ez 13:18,20[A3-68]).

*lahash* [3908:A2-39] - Another type of charm used by the people (Is 3:3, 20[A3-44]).

### Sorcerer, Witch

*yiddeoni* [3049:A2-37] - One who knows what is forbidden in the way of occult knowledge (Is 8:19[A3-46]).

*kesheph* [3785:A2-38] - This is a verb relating to the practice of witchcraft or sorcery (Is 47:9, 12[A3-55]).

*kashshaph* [3786:A2] - One who practices magic or sorcery (Je 27:9[A3-61]).

### Fortunetellers

*'aran* [6049:A2-40] - One who knows the art of magic and soothsaying (Je 27:9[A3-61]).

*qacam* [7080:A2-41] - This word is used of those who practice divination and of false prophets of Israel (Is 44:25[A3-54], Je 27:9[A3-61], Ez 13:9[A3-67]). To know the future is an important skill to have if one wants to be worshipped or served. Yet in the context

of these scriptures we have a group of prophets from Israel and they are called false prophets. What is it that makes them false?

*qecem*[7081:A2-41] - This word is a derivative of *qacam* and carries much the same meaning. Ez 21:21[A3-70] gives us some detail as to what is involved in the practice of divination. They cast arrows, consult idols and examine the liver of an undisclosed animal.

The key issue that becomes apparent as one looks at the terms involved in this area is that there are individuals who have access to various powers that help them and others gain control of the world around them. This is either by knowledge of the future, which is gained by various means, or by gaining control of certain forces which will then be used to affect the events of the future. This is accomplished either by protecting us from unknown forces or events or by causing something to happen which will benefit us.

Referring back to Ez 21:21[A3-70] we also see that there are two different groups who have access to these powers. Such passages as Is 3:2[A3-44], 44:25[A3-54], Je 27:9[A3-61] also support this fact. There are individuals who are outside the main cults or worship centers who practice such skills (Is 8:19[A3-46], 47:8-13[A3-55]). Then there is the main group who serves within the structures of a defined religion and are identified repeatedly as false prophets. This group comes under attack by Jeremiah and Ezekiel repeatedly.

My question of before as to who are these false prophets and what is it that makes them false needs to be dealt with at this point. As near as I can tell within this group there are two subgroups which are both called false prophets. In Ez 8[A3-64, 64, 66] we are shown a group of false prophets that exist even within the temple in Jerusalem who serve other gods and prophesy in their name. Chapter 14[A3-69] identifies what is false about them. They have set up idols in their

hearts, which has become a stumbling block to them resulting in their deserting the Lord. They have defiled themselves with detestable practices. The key fact that makes them false is that they have left the one true God to serve false gods. All who serve false gods are then false prophets. This does not mean that they have no power. What it means is that they have denied the true God and put in His place a false god.

I mentioned earlier that how we define god and develop our theology of god will be critical to continuing this discussion. If we use a biblical understanding of the character and nature of God then all other gods become false for they cannot meet the standards set for defining god. This then helps us to define such things as false prophets not in terms of the extent of their abilities, but in terms of their character and their consistency in maintaining that character. Such an approach to theology will greatly affect how we deal with those who believe in and follow such false gods.

Then there is the other group of false prophets. Jeremiah helps us identify them (Je 14:14[A3-58]). Here we have a group of prophets who claim to serve the Lord within the palace and the temple. They are giving him false information, and to get this information they are using unacceptable practices. Thus in the eyes of the people they are the prophets of God but in reality they are false prophets who do not know God.

In Jeremiah 27[A3-61] we have a letter written to the kings of the other nations, those who serve false gods. He warns them not to listen to their prophets for they are giving false information. In Jer 23:9-14[A3-61] we have both groups mentioned. In verses 11 and 14 he accuses both the prophet and the priest of being godless and living lies. In verse 13 he states that in Samaria the prophets of Baal are leading the people astray. In Je 29:24-32[A3-62] he identifies Shemaih



as one of these false prophets within Jerusalem and pronounces judgment on him. Here is shown a second characteristic of the false prophets, not only do they not serve God but they lead others astray, causing them to serve things that are not God.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel spend a great deal of time dealing with these false prophets and pronouncing judgment. (A good example of this is found in Jeremiah 23: 9-40[A3-60,61] and Ezekiel 13[A3-67,68]). Only their hatred and attacks on the gods and idols is more severe. The truth is clear these prophets are false. It is not because they have no knowledge but because the source of their knowledge is something other than God.

In all this there is a sad fact that appears to those who have studied God's word. It has been forgotten by all save the true prophets. God provided a clear means by which one could test a prophet or even a god if so desired to see if it were true or false (Dt 13:1-6). Getting it right once in a while or performing a miracle a couple of times is not enough to qualify as a true prophet. To be a true prophet one has to be right all of the time and will always be able to do what they claim they can do. The focus is not on whether you have power or insight but whether you have a perfect score. One mistake lands you in the category of false prophet. This gives us a third characteristic of the false prophet and that is their inability to always be right and always perform as promised.

This discussion has focused on a different approach to what is meant by false and lie in the prophets. Here it is anything that turns one away from the one true God. This approach does allow for the possibility of limited power and limited insight on the part of all three participants, the false gods, the false prophets and the other practitioners.

Such an approach does open up another line of thought. How can people follow such beings and ideas if there is nothing real in what they do. To tell the truth, if someone claimed to be able to know the future but was never right, or claimed to be able to perform something we knew to be impossible and never succeeded I would wonder how anyone could follow that person or belief. Some may want to believe so much they might join but eventually only those who fooled themselves would be left. I don't think it would last very long because there was nothing there to prove the claims being made.

But say this person was right one time in ten or say he performed the miraculous one time in ten then we have a whole new situation. Now people will come and hope that if they believe enough then they might be the one in ten that experiences the successful prediction or action. I wonder if the percentage even needs to be as high as 10% for people to come and join the group. People who bet on races and other forms of gambling are playing with much worse odds in the hope of getting the winner. In fact today the lotteries have some incredible odds and still people will spend their money hoping that it will be their lucky day. They will consult all manner of sources in the hope that this will be the one. Even today people consult psychics who don't always get it right (Jeane Dixon is a prime example). If it gets me what I want and there is evidence that it has worked before man will try it.

If we allow this line of thought then the battle the prophets were waging becomes more intense and critical. People wanted a type of control of life they were not meant to have and to get it, turned to other false gods and those who served them or had access to this power. This separated them from God. The prophet's cry is just that, your view of spiritual realities is incorrect. These are not really gods, though they do exist and have power they are worthless, unreliable and

vain. There is only one true God and he has pronounced judgment on us for foolishly following after them. Your attempts to gain control of these beings through making idols and following their detestable practices is just that detestable and doomed to failure.

Thus another key theme of the prophets is the judgment of God. Over and over they receive visions and oracles detailing what God will do to not only Israel but also all the nations who are around Israel and have served these false Gods. The reason for all of this is to give evidence that in fact it is God who is supreme over all. He directs all things and no other god in fact exists. Such statements as "I will destroy the idols..."(Ez 30:13[A3-72]), "So I poured out my wrath... (Ez 36:18[A3-72]), "I will pursue them with the sword..." (Je 49:37[A3-63]) are a few samples of the nature of God's wrath against these nations.

Contained within many of these prophecies are direct statements regarding what is about to happen to the idols of these nations. In Ez 30:13[A3-72] the passage goes on to state that not only will the idols be destroyed but all of the images in Memphis as well. Jer 48: 46[A3-62] states that in the judgment on Moab it is the people of Chemosh (a god) who are destroyed. And though Babylon was used of God to punish Israel they too will be judged, "Her images will be put to shame and her idols filled with terror," (Je 50:2[A3-63]). And so it goes in many of the words of judgment against the nations there is a word about judgment and destruction for the idols and gods of those nations.

Here is a list of the countries being judged by God. The judgment often includes one of three themes or combination of them, 1) they have not honored God and have claimed for themselves what God has accomplished, 2) they have injured the people of God, Israel, 3) they have relied on false gods and caused Israel to join them in this sin. God is judging

them for their sin. Here is a list of the nations and where the judgment may be found:

Babylon: Is 13:1, 21:1; Je 50:1 Je 48:1; Ez 25:8	Moab: Is 15:1;
Damascus: Is 17:1; Je 49:23 49:1; Ez 25:1	Ammon: Je
Edom: Is 21:11; Je 49:7; Ez 28:12, 35:1	Cush: Is 18:1
Egypt Is 19:1; Je 46:1; Ez 29:1 21:13	Arabia: Is
Tyre: Is 23:1; Ez 28:1 14:28; Je 47:1	Philistines: Is
Elam: Je 49:34 28:20	Sidon: Ez
Assyria: Is 10:5, 14:24 Je 49:28	Kedar/Hazor:

This is a sample of the material on this area. It becomes clear that God is aware of them and their sin and that He will punish them for their sin.

One of the more interesting items along this line is the conversation recorded by Isaiah in chapter 36 and 37[A3-50,51]. Here we have the general of Sennacherib making a speech to the people of Israel prior to attacking them. In it he equates the god of Israel with the gods of all the other nations they have conquered. Hezekiah is incensed at the lack of honor given to God and asks Isaiah to pray. The result is that a rumor comes and the army moves off to meet the army of Egypt. The general though responds that God had nothing to do with this and that Israel and its god will fall like all the rest. This time Hezekiah himself goes to God in pray. He is deeply affected by the lack of respect given to God and asks God to respond and thus reveal Himself to these people.

Hezekiah's closing statement is, "Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may

know that you alone, O Lord, are God" (Is 37:20). God does respond and sends out one angel who destroys the army of Assyria. God shows clearly that He is supreme and that He has made possible the rise of Assyria and thus can bring them down just as easily. In Is 10:5ff[A3-47] we have a warning being given to Assyria that this would in fact happen. They have been the tool of God. If they are not careful in understanding this, another nation will be sent which will destroy them. That nation was to be Babylon. Interestingly enough Babylon repeated the same behavior of Assyria. Even as they attack Jerusalem to fulfill God's promised judgment on His people they are warned that a day of judgment awaits them as well for their reliance on other gods(Je 50:18, 51:47[A3-63]).

One of the interesting natures of these words of prophesy is that the most common word used to describe them is the word 'massa. Though this word is translated oracle, its root meaning is burden. Eleven times Isaiah uses this word when introducing a prophecy concerning a nation. It could be stated this way, Here is the burden of the Lord for you. The idea is that you will bear the results of your actions. (In Ezekiel it is simply, the word of the Lord. In Jeremiah it is thus says the Lord.) It would be interesting to pursue the quality of each of these forms and yet it is quite clear that when the Lord speaks, so shall it be, and it does not matter what any other god may attempt, it will fail for He alone is God. In connection with this is the fact that though others (i.e. false prophets, practitioners) may receive visions, only those from God, given through a true prophet, are reliable.

## **F. Curse**

I would like briefly to highlight this word. Though it is not used extensively it is present. It takes two forms, that of the curse and of curses. The curse is the predominant idea presented. All three of the prophets refer to this curse. It can be found in Dt 27,28. Here we have the oath of God. It has

two parts, a blessing, for those who obey the covenant, and a curse, for those who break the covenant. In Isaiah 24:6[A3-48] it is this curse that is responsible for the desolation of the land. In Jeremiah 23:10[A3-61] we have a similar thought in that "because of the curse the land lies parched." In Ez 16:59[A3-69] the idea is that because you have broken the oath, or covenant, then you will be punished, or experience the curse.

The curse is an unknown power in our world and yet I think that behind God's judgment of His people we will find the effects of the curse pronounced in Deuteronomy. It is an unseen power at work and its effects are often not quickly seen. From the passages above it would appear that God is making it clear that many of the distressing things that are happening to the people of Israel are from the effects of this curse. How a curse works though is unclear. Is it maintained by the power of God or is it intrinsic to the nature of God's creation? Thus it will take affect anytime and anyplace we or those around us are in violation of the basic reality of the world God has made. Is it the world's response to our sin? Is such a response even possible? Within many cultures such a truth would be readily accepted. In fact many of the beliefs people hold concerning false gods relate to nature and health. When we are doing what the gods want then all is well. If we fail then things go wrong in nature and in our life.

There is also the second type of curse. It is often pronounced by one individual against another. There are several occurrences of this format within the prophets (Je 29:18[A3-61], Is 8:21[A3-46], Je 15:10[A3-59]). How this type of curse works is even less clear and yet here are people pronouncing words of doom on others. The word *'arar*[779:A2-42] which is translated curse does include the idea of binding one with a spell. Apparently there is a type of power that can be controlled in such a way as to bring

harm on another. This though is different from the form of curse mentioned above. It results from the breaking of an oath (Je 11:8[A3-78]), the second seems to be an attempt to do harm to another for personal gain or revenge.

It is an area of little understanding and needs more study. Within the context of the writings of the prophets the idea of curses is not dealt with to any great extent. That the existence of one key type of curse is real is accepted and its impact on the people is explained as a real event to be understood. What we learn from this could be helpful in dealing with a key area of ministry within traditional cultures and within the folk religion area of major religions. What makes a curse effective? Is it a power that can be tapped by anyone for good or evil? Maybe it is another way in which false gods operate in order to lead people away from God and make them dependent on what amounts to a false truth. How is this different from the curse pronounced by God? Lots of questions and no clear answers readily available.

### **G. Concluding Remarks**

Within the world of the prophets arose a clash of views about how the universe was structured. The prophets believed that God was supreme and in control of all else. This did not discount the existence of other spiritual beings nor did it deny that they might have some limited power. It did state that they were false and unreliable when compared to the true God. This was the challenge before them, to communicate to the people what this meant.

Idols were representations of these beings. As a representation it was quite clear that they had no real power in themselves. It was only as one of these other beings responded to those who made the idol that anything would occur. Their response though was not consistent. Even more important when they are come into direct contact with God they prove to be totally incapable of responding at all.

The result being the destruction of the idols and the rituals by invaders who are being used by God to show just that, the ineffectiveness and foolishness of serving such beings.

Along side of this lies a secondary group. They have access to various powers but make no claim to be serving a particular god. They have familiar spirits or occult knowledge, which allows them to access a power present throughout the world for their own purposes.

I have attempted to diagram this in the following manner. Over all things exists God, the creator and sustainer of the universe as we know it. Though there is a line between him and everything else this does not mean that he is not active in this world. It only indicates that He as Creator is distinctly different from all other categories. Below this line are four categories. The first is the material world, rocks, water, air and all else that exists but has no life in it. Also within this would be all life that is not human. This would be the case because none of these two groups possesses a spirit.

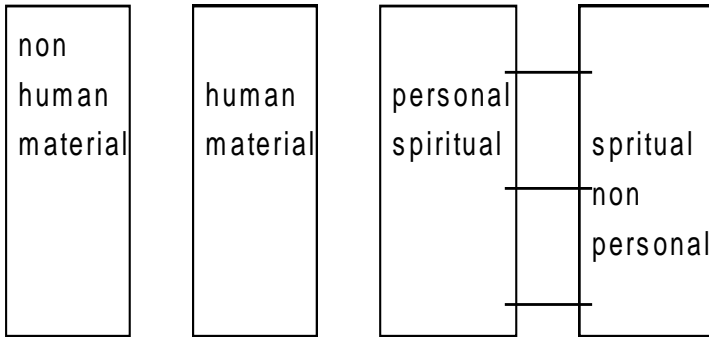
The second group is the realm of man. He is in the image of God but is restricted to the material world at this point in time. He interacts with all the other categories in a variety of ways, some of which are acceptable to God and others which are not.

The third group would include angels, demon, false gods and any other being that exists outside of the material world. It is obvious, from the descriptions found within the Bible that they can make themselves visible to us if they desire. God has sent angels as messengers to man and has used them as warriors in a number of key battles.



## The One True God

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The fourth area is the most difficult to define. This deals with spiritual forces. Here we would place such things as curses, enchantments, manna and other such undefined powers that are effective but not available to any one. The reason for the lines between this area and that of spiritual beings is that I am not sure that such a power exists. It may be made to appear as real but actually be tied to the presence of a spiritual being, even God. When one of them is present this power is available, when none are present then it is ineffective. In relation to God the guidelines for the effectiveness of this power are different. It is not tied to His presence but rather His willingness to act. This makes sense when one remembers that God is everywhere present all the time. Spiritual beings are not. This area opens up many questions of how spiritual forces operate within the world around us. We will need a better understanding of how God operates and performs His miraculous acts. To simply say that God sets aside the natural process and acts is not enough. One must remember that He in fact is the source of the power behind natural law as we know it. If that can be clearly seen then we will begin to understand the miracle of our existence, and then understanding miracles in general

will be a little clearer.

From there we would move on to how other beings operate within this context. I am not ready at this time to make any hypothesis as to how they accomplish what they do. Yet one cannot discount that they have ability. Even as we review the description of the cherubims and seraphims one can quickly see that they are incredible in appearance. They are not bound to space as we are and can move in and out of it. They can appear and disappear very easily. That alone could cause awe and wonder in the mind of a person, even a scientific person of today. What is the source of their ability is a valid question? Is it part of this fourth category and thus they can tap into it in a limited way, or do they possess certain powers just because of their very nature.

There is so much to study here. The prophets battle line is clearly drawn. These beings exist but they are not worthy of the worship the people give to them. They are false and unreliable. They will fail, but God will not. As long as we continue to serve them we will suffer. Only when we come to the one true God will we understand what has happened to us. And so the discussion continues. Look at yourself and what you are doing. Does it really make sense? Are they truly worthy of your worship and service? Do they really give you all that they promise?

One could continue along this line indefinitely. I think the point is quite clear and a thorough study of what the prophets had to say to Israel and the other nations about these questions will be quite useful in talking with others who are involved in such practices and worship. We need to take a long look at what is true and not true about the spiritual world and how it interacts with the material world. When we do we may find clearer and more effective ways in dealing with the questions that have been raised in this paper. Hopefully the discussion has helped us begin to find answers

for some of them and open the doors to pursuing answers for the others.

We need those answers in order to win these people to the Lord. Ridicule and denial will not work. Their worldview is not too dissimilar from that of the people who received the words of the prophets. By listening to the prophets afresh we may open our eyes to the wonder of the one true God and thus find strength to share that with those who need to hear but are worshipping false gods today.

## **Chapter Six - Recommendations**

We are encouraged by God to know His word and learn to apply it to our lives and to use it as a guide for dealing with the questions and issues that confront us while we live on this earth. We are also encouraged to help each other in following God and understanding our relationship to God. When we learn some truth about all of this we then are in a position to help others who may need that same piece of knowledge to help them grow in their relationship to God.

In the case of the topic of this project, spiritual powers, there are two key groups of people that could use the information that has been gathered. They are those whose lives are surrounded by the reality of these powers and those who seek to minister to these people. We call these groups animists and missionaries. Let us look at a few ways in which we might use this material to help those who are seeking to go to people who are animists in background.

### **Missionaries**

The most basic thing we could do for this group is provide the materials in written form as part of a list of required reading on the topic. I have noted that many fields have developed a reading list related to their field. Providing these materials would then expose them to the topic and give them resources that they could refer to as they are confronted by the issues that will be raised by the peoples belief in spiritual powers. It would also be wise to provide for opportunity for the new missionary to interact with those already on the field and even with a national who feels comfortable sharing about this topic so as to reinforce the importance of what has been read.

This material would also be of help to those who are already on the mission field and are finding they need help and information in dealing with the issues that are raised.

For those planning on becoming missionaries, simply supplying materials to read is probably not adequate. Many times they have no frame of reference in which to fit the information they are receiving. Besides that they have no belief in this area. They have lived in a materialistic and scientific world that does not allow for the existence of a spiritual realm. The reading may be interesting but does not fit. There needs to be some form of reinforcement of the truth of what is being read.

This would lead to the organizing of seminars or sessions dealing with the topic. This would provide opportunity to reinforce what is being read. Many mission agencies provide for some type of pre-field orientation, which usually includes sessions on cultural issues. A useful structure for dealing with this topic would be to have two sessions. The first to present the topic to those who are attending the training and get them thinking about what they believe and understand. After that session, the papers could be assigned for reading before a second session is held, which would be a discussion time focusing on what they believe about the realm of spiritual powers. It would be ideal if a national leader could be part of the presentation and discussion of this topic.

The next step in this process would be preparing a class on spiritual powers or traditional religion for those in a school setting. Many young people who are interested in missions are encouraged to get training in a bible school or college. The course structure should include a look at what the Old Testament has to say about spiritual powers and the beliefs associated with them. As a part of this course the materials could be part of the assigned reading and for use in discussions of the topics involved. There are many ways to

approach this subject. I would prefer to deal with key areas of belief and practice and then look at what the Bible has to say about them. The students would then be assigned a paper involving research in to a particular belief or practice.

All of these approaches are approaching the topic from mainly a cognitive level. We are merely gaining information about something we do not fully understand much less believe to be true. Until we are actually confronted with the reality we have a hard time accepting what we have heard and read.

That brings us to the missionaries already on the field who is actually being confronted with the beliefs and practices associated with belief in spiritual powers. It would useful for a group of missionaries to meet to discuss the topic and to look at how they are dealing with the issues raised. So often when there is an area of concern there is no time given to discuss the need. Each missionary is in a sense left to fend for himself or herself. This results in varying responses to key issues, which can result in confusion. If one missionary treats the topic as unimportant or foolish and another treats it as crucial then the national Christian may be unclear as to what to do because he is getting a mixed signal. As a result of not giving time is not giving time to dealing with such issues on the field we are often unprepared for meeting some of the real needs and issues of our brothers and sisters in Christ

### **Christians from Animist Background**

As before, a minimal approach would be to make the materials above available to this group in written form as a resource they can make use of. This may be more effective since they are looking for help and already know that spiritual powers exist. Their concern is how do they respond to this reality and are there answers to the issues raised.

The next level would be the structuring of a class as part of their pastoral training programs. The format would be to look at the practices and beliefs related to traditional religion and then study what the Bible has to say about these things. The papers would be part of the assigned reading and the appendices could be used to help them apply the truth to particular practices and beliefs of their locality. They would be asked to formulate a biblical response to a specific practice or belief. To make this more effective it would be good for this class to be taught by a national teacher or at least team-taught by a missionary and national. Truth is always received better if those listening believe the person they are listening to. In the area of spiritual powers the missionary is not one of those people and so there is a need to deal with this barrier to receiving information.

While the inclusion of a class in the training program for pastors is essential to their ministry there is also a large group of people who have finished school or will not be able to attend school who need access to this information. This can be done in the form of extension training.

The potential for holding seminars dealing with key issues of ministry is very good on many fields. There is a great desire for growth and learning, especially when it applies to improving one's ministry. I have been part of many such sessions and see this as a real possibility in presenting the materials and wrestling with the issues that arise from this topic. It would be easy to set up a seminar dealing solely with the area of spiritual powers. The papers suggest a basic outline for the seminars.

1. The reality of spiritual powers
2. God's response to them
3. Our response

The presentations would alternate with discussion times on these key areas. All of this would then lead to a discussion of

the church's stand regarding this area and how to respond when confronted by spiritual powers and practices associated with them.

This opens the door to another type of seminar. In many places they are called round table discussions which focus on a specific area of concern within the church. The purpose of such a meeting being to formulate a statement presenting the church's position regarding that area of concern. This setting can bring together both the missionary and the national Christian together. Each has unique gifts and skills that will make this an effective way to work together. In this setting the papers would be given out, as background information, to all those invited to participate in the round table as background information. There would then be a couple of presentations relating to what the issues are and how they affect the church's ministry. At this point the group would be broken up into smaller groups to work on formulating a statement regarding this area of concern. These groups could be supplied with the resource materials to help them look at what the Bible says about the area they have been assigned.

The groups then spend time looking through the material. They may be given a few hours, a few days to a few months. This is what makes a round table such an effective way to use these materials. Sufficient time may be given to effectively study the materials and then bring back recommendations to the group. These recommendations would then be discussed and brought together by the larger group into a unified statement or a collection of statements on the area being discussed.

The next step is to share this statement with other bodies within the church for interaction and input. This information is then brought back to the round table to use in refining the statement. This cycle can be repeated if necessary until all are satisfied with the result. Now the group can present its



final position to the church for action. In this way a clear understanding of the issue is gained and a real answer or response can be made. It will relate to the culture and be biblically based.

The most effective use of the material would be a combination of all of the above. It is important that each individual have access to resources that relate to their ministry and setting. It is also important that they have a place to receive input from others and to compare what they have learned as relates to these areas of need. Most important is that there be a place where all can interact, share their knowledge and discuss it in light of what the Bible says. If this process is allowed to happen then we will be able to effectively deal with any issue that may arise within the church, including those related to the reality of spiritual powers in the world around us.

