

"The" Christian View of Aliens, Part 3: Angels, Demons, Gods, Aliens: Are These Terms Reconcilable?

Contributed by Administrator
 Wednesday, 27 May 2009
 Last Updated Tuesday, 02 June 2009

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Part 1

Part 2

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I've been hesitant to write about this subject for some time, though I have addressed it a bit in Q&A sessions at conferences. My reticence is rooted in my feeling that it's a lose-lose proposition. I'll try and explain. On one hand, there is a lot of uninformed talk on the "alien believer" side about how aliens are in the Bible and that they are mistaken as angels. What the Bible says about aliens, so the viewpoint goes, can be said about angels. They are really interchangeable. So we shouldn't worry about aliens; they're angels. This thinking is muddled, but it has what I'd call "accidental merit" that will hopefully become clear as we proceed (really, this is for Part 4, yet to come). My risk (and here's one "loss") is that those who want to equate aliens and angels will read this and feel they've won some argument when they haven't. On the other hand, there are Christians who believe aliens are demons and so they'll say aliens are technically found in the Bible. This equation is meant to rule out the reality of a true alien (see Part 1 of this thread). If we're talking about physical life forms that exist in this reality plane (this "universe" so to speak), and I suggest that there may be aliens as a separate category, many Christians won't take that well (see Part 1 again). If we're talking about "interdimensional" non-human life forms that exist in some other reality plane, and I suggest (like I will below) that such a life form overlaps a good deal with entities like demon, angel, and (small g) gods, that will surely bother some Christians as well. Another loss. 0-for-2. Well, my hate mail pile has been low lately, so let's jump in. (This is more interesting than another post on Sitchin's nonsense anyway). First, I don't believe that there are space aliens in the Bible. I think what Barry Downing and those like him do to the text is truly a hermeneutical rape of the text. It's a textbook (and almost farcical) example of reading what you want to see in the text into the text, the text be damned if it gets in the way. Just awful. What I mean by rejecting the idea of aliens in the Bible is that I don't see anything in the biblical text that describes a physical life form that calls this reality plane / dimension home and has these characteristics (all of which are required to have a "true" alien being): 1. It isn't human 2. It is from a different planet than earth within our universe / dimension. 3. It has a determinate life span (it can and will die in this universe / dimension) 4. It has to maintain its existence through some means of nourishment (i.e., it isn't a machine) and through reproduction. 5. It is subject to the laws of physics by which our universe / dimension operates. Now, I've already said I don't believe any of these are in the Bible, so that prompts the question, "why do angels, demons, gods NOT fit these criteria?" Good question. Since we are talking about these terms with the Bible as our frame of reference, the only criterion that fits is #1. We simply are not told by the Bible that angels, demons, gods exhibit characteristics 2-5. None of these entities are placed on other planets by the Bible. Living on another planet is different than the biblical idea (common to all ancient Near Eastern people) that stars and planets must be divine beings. The Bible isn't giving us scientifically reliable information here (nor is it meant to; it isn't the point). The reason this thought pervaded the ancient world was that (1) certain stars and planets appeared to move (moving things must be alive); and (2) stars and planets were "off earth" and so part of the divine realm (the sky / heavens) so they must be divine. This pre-scientific outlook is not the same as having angels, demons, gods be life forms that inhabit other planets. The perspective is completely different. Additionally, the Bible never tells us that angels, demons, or gods have determinate life spans (as in an aging process moving toward death). It never tells us that they need to eat and drink (despite the fact that they can take corporeal form and do those things - the point is that their life is not dependent on these processes). It never tells us that angels, demons, and gods are subject to physical laws like embodied humans are. Even when these beings are embodied they apparently can still do things humans cannot do. I'm thinking here of displays of beyond-human power (Genesis 19:10-11) and appearing and disappearing at will (Luke 1:11; Luke 2:10-15). What this means is that, if there are real space aliens (beings that meet the above criteria), then they cannot be demons, since demons do not conform to these criteria in biblical theology. That said, such aliens could certainly be evil and demonic (using the adjective, not the noun) and unworthy of trust in any way. It would also mean that such beings cannot be angels for the same reason. They would just be aliens, a separate category. But the point is of course moot without proof of actual aliens. If aliens are interdimensional, though, then things change. The demon equation goes back on the table (I'll explain in part 4). One could argue at this point, "Well, maybe the biblical writers saw aliens and just got the description wrong or didn't process the experience of meeting aliens accurately." This could be considered possible but there are significant gaps in the logic that make it very unlikely. One would think that we'd get at least one note from a

biblical author that would fit in one of the four criteria in question. But we have no note about #s 2-5, and no mention of angels in any sort of literal flying machine that could actually fly. In this regard, Elijah's chariot of fire is not a spaceship-unless you know of any spaceship that uses horses (2 Kings 2:11 - and people whose culture was agrarian know what horses looked like - that kind of mistake is out of the question). Elijah wasn't describing a flying disk, either. Ancient Hebrew vocabulary has all the following words: "round"; "disk"; "circular"; "flat"; "metal(lic)"; "silver"; etc., and yet none of them are used in the description. Ezekiel's vision was also not a space craft. We know what he saw because he uses stock iconography for royal thrones and the four beasts around the thrones are the cardinal points of the Babylonian zodiac. The book is written to exiles in Babylon by the captive Ezekiel who is in Babylon (see the first few verses of ch. 1). It makes sense to use Babylonian imagery on two levels. First, it has the effect of "dissing" Marduk, the Babylonian god (he isn't on the throne that is Babylonian in style - Yahweh is). Second, it serves to communicate the message that Yahweh is in control of the cosmos, not Marduk, despite the fact that Jerusalem was destroyed. That's a message the captives needed. I love when people start expounding about how Ezekiel 1 is a spaceship and then I get to ask, "So, what was the message to the captive Jews then?" The deer-in-the-headlights view isn't far behind. The point of Ezekiel's vision is not a flying craft. You can only get there by ignoring the data or inserting your own data (see Barry Downing for that method). Likewise, the basket with the metal lid in Zechariah 5:6-10 isn't a UFO, either. It's a basket (how's that for profound). The Hebrew word is "ephah," one of the most common, well-known words in the Hebrew vocabulary. The writer knows what a basket looks like. Again, he's part of an agrarian society. It would be difficult to go through a day and NOT see a basket in that culture. He knows what a basket looks like, and doesn't use any of the words noted above to describe a flying disk instead of "basket." And the basket isn't in the air until two women with wings (note that they are not called angels) come along and lift it into the sky. Zechariah tells us that the vision represents the removal of wickedness (which is the "name" of the woman in the basket) from the holy land and the returned exiles. It has nothing to do with flying craft and alien occupants. That has to be imported into the text (see Barry). It would seem that angels, demons, gods function more like beings that do not by nature inhabit our reality plane, though they can interact with it, which brings us to the second option . . . for next time.
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