

A Lesson in Bible Study: Did Pagan Gods Really Exist?

When the Most High allotted each nation its heritage, when he separated out human beings, He set up the boundaries of the peoples after the number of the divine beings; But the LORD's portion was his people; his allotted share was Jacob.

-Deuteronomy 32: 8-9

Many people have provided "Bible Studies" to help others understand their faith more. While many are good, I find horrible and often obvious flaws in many others. I hope to provide the gentle reader assistance in identifying which studies are good and which are flawed. Hopefully, my tips will even allow some to do their own Bible Study confidently. For this lesson, I want to provide practical advice in Bible Study and apply it to the question of the existence of Pagan Gods.

Fortunately for us, most passages in the Bible are straight forward and easy to understand. But there are many passages that appear to speak against the very heart of our faith. Hostile Atheists love to point these factoids out as proof that our faith contradicts itself. In many ways, they do a better job researching the Bible than many professed Christians. In debate (or outright attack), all they need to do is trick the Christian into saying "yes" to the question "do you believe the Bible literally?" This is "game over." One such contradiction will be presented and leave the Christian stumped and, if there is an audience, embarrassed. Of course, if the response is "no," then they can claim we are foolish for believing a book we admit is flawed. This is called a "set up question".

The gospels are full of examples of Jesus Himself being tested with "yes/no" questions. If Satan has the nerve to propose such questions to Jesus, then we are fools to believe he won't try them on us. And here is where we can follow the example of Jesus: never answer "yes" or "no" to these trick questions, but rather address the question behind the question.

For the lessons here, I want to address the "literal" interpretation of the Bible. The Bible is not a "book" in the literal sense, it is a collection of books. The word "Bible" comes from Greek "biblia", which was the *plural* of "biblion" (book). Biblia, if translated to Latin, is "libraius", which is where we get the word "library" from. The Bible is a library. Just like a town library has all different types of books in it, so too does the Bible. The book types are: Pentateuch (or Law), Historical, Wisdom, Prophetic, Gospel, Epistle and Revelation. And just like different types of books in a library can cover the same topic (say, an important game in the Sports History section and a player's perspective on the same game in the Bibliography section), we find all the books of the Bible cover the same topic: the revelation of God's presence and His plan for salvation. One would not expect the description of the game from the player's perspective to be the same as the sport reporter's, but neither would we call either version of the game as being "false." One would expect the sport's reporter to do a better job of detailing batting averages, which innings runs were made, etc., but the player as to what he and his teammates were thinking and feeling as the game progressed. The same is true for the Bible: to really understand what a topic is about, we need to find all relevant information from within and from without the Bible and paint a picture of our own as to what it means. As the Bible is believed to be "inspired" by God, it cannot contradict itself. This means all apparent contradictory facts need to be reconciled with each other in some way. If we cannot do this, then it behooves us to search for more observations and come up with a new picture. This is the scientific process in spirit: to do research, make a hypothesis and then test the hypothesis to verify it.

Now for the practical application of this. We see scattered throughout the Old Testament hints that God was not in heaven alone. Even if we account for the Triune God being spoken of in the plural (such as in Genesis 3:22), this does not account for obvious assemblies in heaven that also pop up (the book of Job has at least three such references: 1:6, 2:1 and 38:7). To make matters worse, how about Psalm 58:1-3, the entirety of Psalm 82 and Psalm 89:6-7 where these beings are specifically called gods? Finally, if there are many gods in heaven, then why are there no less than 28 passages that explicitly claim there is only one (triune) God?

I will let the gentle reader research the Old Testament passages I mentioned and work out the minor details himself and give the following explanation: The assembly in heaven was made of the Triune God and the angels. Some of these angels were given special duties to look after humans other than the Hebrews. At least some of these angels were tasked with shepherding humans other than the Hebrews (which was for Jehovah alone) and were called "gods" by both Jehovah and the people they shepherded. This much is merely looking at the different pieces and making a coherent whole. They, without exception, all failed in this mission and therefore are fallen angels. We see no conflict at all when presented this way as the god-angels are gods by title and not by divinity, of which Jehovah alone is. But we can also make the hypothesis that the god-angels (my phrase) formed the foundation for the Pagan mythologies throughout the world. Is it verifiable? Can we test it?

I think yes. We find Jesus Himself referring to the mentioned Psalms in John 10:33-36: The Jews answered him, "We are not stoning you for a good work but for blasphemy. You, a man, are making yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"?' If it calls them gods to whom the word of God came, and scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?" This suggests that the god-angels were allowed to make their Jehovah given title known to humans as well. There is also St. Paul. In 1 Corinthians 8:5, he clearly has no problem referring to "god" as a title of lordship, as opposed to being an equal of Jehovah: Indeed, even though there are so-called gods in heaven and on earth (there are, to be sure, many "gods" and many "lords". Also, let's not forget how he first won the Greeks over in Acts 17:23: For as I walked around looking carefully at your shrines, I even discovered an altar inscribed, 'To an Unknown God.' What therefore you unknowingly worship, I proclaim to you. Furthermore, we see, without exception, that all Pagan Gods ultimately had a master-slave relationship with humans (check any myth from any Pantheon, while some were more benevolent towards humans than others, none were to be trusted by humans). My hypothesis concerning Old Testament scripture passed at least three tests from the New Testament as well as every Pagan myth from around the world. Of course, there is always the possibility that I missed something that proves my hypothesis wrong. In this case I simply incorporate the new facts into a new hypothesis that can pass new testing.

Many questions remain unanswered. Were these gods angels that had fallen before the Earth was created, or fell while performing their duties? How much influence did they really have in the mythologies that were built up around them? It's fun to speculate, but we cannot dwell too deeply in this line of thought lest we fall into the trap of "historical perspective." The Bible is about the revelation of God and His plan of salvation for us, these questions are outside this and therefore are not expected to be found in the Bible. We must know our place, and in this case our place is to know how to address this apparent "contradiction" and to gain insight as to how God still looked over the Gentiles before the Word came to them.

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