

Chapter 5 – The Worst of Times

Have you ever wondered why Eve wasn't scared witless when the "serpent" spoke to her in the garden of Eden? If you go back and read the account in Genesis 3, there's simply no indication that she did anything but suppress a yawn—but why would that be the case? And, more to the point, what does that have to do with the unfolding drama the Bible began with the creation of humankind? And why did I put "serpent" in quotation marks? So glad you asked.

Now, you might be thinking, "Well, maybe animals back then could talk." I've read this sort of thing before. I hope you'll pardon me when I say that's absurd. This isn't interpretation of the text; it's evasion of the issue. The only other instance where we have an animal speaking to a human being in the Bible is that of Balaam's donkey in Numbers 22:22-41. In that case the speech was prompted by an appearance of the divine vice regent, the Angel of the Lord, and the text plainly tells us that it was God who enabled the donkey to speak (v. 28). That certainly isn't the case in Genesis 3 with the serpent.

I know calling something absurd might not sound kind, but it's actually nicer than saying, "If you want to take that view, then I hope you can live with contradictions between passages in the Bible," since that's where this view ultimately leads.

There are two other passages in the Old Testament that most scholars would say have something to do with what happened in Eden in Genesis 3: Ezekiel 28:1-19 and Isaiah 14:1-22.¹ In those passages God taunts and pronounces judgment on the kings of Tyre and Babylon, respectively. To drive the point home that these kings deserve judgment, the inspired prophet compares them to the supernatural being (a spectacular "cherub" in Ezekiel 28, and "Lucifer, son of the dawn" in Isaiah 14) whose contemptuous pride resulted in a failed coup against God.

Notice that these passages refer to a divine being, *not* a "serpent." And that gets to the heart of the issue. In both these passages, the primeval enemy of God, the being who causes the fall of humankind into sin, is *not* a snake but some sort of supernatural being. And it is absolutely certain the event referred to in Ezekiel 28 is that of Genesis 3, since Ezekiel 28:13 mentions Eden and the garden.

Those who wish to argue that Lucifer appeared as a snake must cope with the fact that there isn't a single biblical text that says Lucifer (or any other divine being) can change into an animal. At best, this "solution" is simply a convenient escape hatch. And even if there was such biblical evidence, it still doesn't answer why Lucifer would need or choose to speak to Eve as a snake, or why Eve wasn't surprised. Having Lucifer appear or possess a snake actually complicates matters, since this view still means that *prior* to this assumed appearance or possession snakes didn't talk. Put another way, if Lucifer's presence in the snake is the explanation for its speaking ability, then snakes didn't talk

before this happened. Eve still should have been shocked when the alleged snake started the conversation. So the question remains: Who or what spoke to Eve—a literal snake, a member of the animal kingdom, or a supernatural being? You can't have it both ways without being guilty of fabricating an answer that doesn't make sense.

Fortunately, there's a simple answer for all this, but you might want to sit down first. The reason why Eve wasn't shocked that a snake was talking to her is because she wasn't talking to a snake. She was talking to a luminous divine being and not an animal of any kind. That being may have had some sort of serpentine appearance, but he was not a snake from the animal kingdom. To make my case to you we'll need to do two things: (1) look at Genesis 3, Ezekiel 28, and Isaiah 14 very closely; and (2) examine the ancient backdrop for the descriptions of the garden of Eden. We'll tackle the second one of these first since it's critical to understanding what's going on in Genesis 3. Turns out that Eden was the place where the divine council held its meetings.

In the broader non-biblical worldview of people in the ancient Mediterranean and Middle East, the divine council was said to hold its meetings on a "cosmic mountain." This is one of the reasons why certain mountains were considered sacred ground. The cosmic mountain or garden was that location where the gods lived and met, so to speak, where heaven and earth intersected, where divine decrees were given and kingship was exercised. The cosmic mountain was not only described as a mountain, but was also a well-watered place, a garden.ⁱⁱ In biblical terms, this supernatural meeting place was the headquarters or nerve center from which Yahweh administered the earth through his divine council.

We're all familiar with the description of Eden in Genesis as a garden with four rivers, and hence a "well-watered" place (Gen. 2:10-14), but it will no doubt be a surprise to many readers that Eden is also described in the Bible as a *mountain*! Ezekiel 28:13-14 explicitly refers to Eden as "the garden of God" *and* "the mountain of God"—attributing both kinds of descriptions of the meeting place of the divine council to the place where Adam and Eve encountered Lucifer! What's more, Ezekiel 28:2 refers to this place as the "seat of the gods" (*moshab elohim*). The word "seat" of course refers to the place of administration, even in our own language ("county seat"). Amazingly, this "seat"—Eden, the garden and mountain of God, the place of divine council government—is described as being "in the midst of the seas" (Ezek. 28:2), again utilizing the well-watered imagery of the council headquarters that would be familiar to ancient people in biblical times.

Understand that I am not saying there was no literal Eden in favor of some metaphorical view. I actually think both ideas are going on. I believe what happened in Eden was an actual event that happened on earth. My point in using the word "metaphorical" is that these descriptions mean *more* than the literalism we often attribute to them. Eden wasn't *only* a garden somewhere on earth that God occasionally visited and in which Lucifer showed up one day. It was the place where God and the lesser gods of the council did business.ⁱⁱⁱ

But what about the vocabulary in Genesis 3? Isn't the chapter crystal clear that the thing talking to Eve was a snake? Actually, the vocabulary is clear, but the meaning tradition has given it is not, and has in fact produced the "snake" problem noted above. The Hebrew word translated "serpent" or "snake" in Genesis 3 is *nachash* (pronounced, *nakash*). More specifically, the word is *ha-nachash*. The prefixed "ha" is the way Hebrew denotes a definite article (the word for "the"). So *ha-nachash* may be said to mean "the *nachash*."

The word *nachash* is a very elastic term in Hebrew. It can function as a noun, a verb, or even as an adjective. When *nachash* functions as a noun it means "snake," and so the traditional translation is possible—but it yields the contradiction with Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 noted above.^{iv} When *nachash* serves as a verb it means "to practice divination."^v That meaning could also be possible in Genesis 3 due to the deception or going on—Lucifer claiming to have the "real" word from God. When a verb receives an article attached to it, the action of the verb is then transformed into a person *doing* the action. Hence the word *ha-nachash* would then best be translated "the diviner."

The third option—the adjectival meaning of *nachash*—is the solution to the contradiction problem. When *nachash* serves as an adjective, it's meaning is "shining bronze" or "polished" (as in "shiny"). By adding the article to the word, *ha-nachash* would then quite easily mean "the shining one." Angelic or divine beings are elsewhere described in the Bible as "shining" or luminous, at times with this very word, *nachash*.^{vi} We often don't think about how common this vocabulary of "shining brilliance" is for angels and other divine beings. The Bible abounds with descriptions of such beings as "flashing" or "as lightning," or uses the brilliance of jewels to describe the blazing appearance of such beings. This has important ramifications for solving the "snake" problem.

What's so significant about translating *ha-nachash* as "shining one" and not "snake" in Genesis 3? Very simply, "shining one" is the literal meaning of "Lucifer." The name "Lucifer" is actually Latin and comes from the Latin Vulgate translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. In Isaiah 14:12, the *Hebrew* name of primeval conspirator against God is "Helel ben-Shachar"—"Shining One, son of the Dawn." Translating *ha-nachash* as "Shining One" removes the contradiction of seeing a snake vs. a supernatural being in Eden since it provides an explicit parallel between the two passages.

We have words like this in English if you think about it. The very same noun / verb / adjective interplay is evident here:

(Noun): "The cleanup is going to take a long time."

(Verb): "We must clean up this oil spill."

(Adjective): "The cleanup procedures need to be followed."

What results from this approach is that Eve was confronted by a member of the divine council "on the way to work," so to speak. She wasn't surprised, because she saw these beings come and go with regularity. We get the flavor of this context in Genesis 3:22. Following Adam and Eve's sin God laments that now the two "have become as one of

us”—the same plural language as in Genesis 1:26. Eden was the place where council was held. It just happened that on this day, one of them had a score to settle.

Personally, I think it quite possible that the choice of the word *nachash* in Genesis 3 was designed as a double entendre. The enemy of God was a shining divine being that also had a serpentine appearance. No, I’m not contradicting what I said above. Saying that Eve was speaking to a divine being of serpentine appearance is different than saying she was dealing with a snake from the animal kingdom. Ezekiel 28 supports this notion.

Neither the name “Helel” nor the word *nachash* appear in Ezekiel 28, but we do have a corresponding description of Eden’s villain. Note the underlined portions of Ezekiel 28:13-14:

13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. 14 You were a shining^{vii} guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire^{viii} you walked.

The *point* of the description is the same as Isaiah 14 and Genesis 3. The appearance of the supernatural rebel in the garden of Eden is described with brilliant, shining jewels. The description of this shining being as “shining, guardian cherub” points to a serpentine appearance for this divine being, and therefore another parallel to Genesis 3. It is common among Bible scholars to suppose that the cherubim were sphinx-like creatures, based primarily on some carved depictions of thrones from Egypt and Phoenicia. Certain carvings portray thrones that are, as in Ezekiel 1, supported by creatures with wings and four faces. This perspective, while possible, isn’t terribly coherent in Ezekiel 28. It cannot account for why the being in Eden—and so parallel to the entity in Genesis 3—isn’t described as sphinx-like, or leonine, or having four faces. The reality is that the meaning and derivation of the Hebrew word for “cherub” is uncertain.^{ix} The most likely possibility is that the term refers to a spirit being who guards or blesses (praises), or which serves as the gatekeeper to the divine throne room, *without respect to physical appearance*.

Curiously—and perhaps tellingly—those beings whose station is in God’s throne room and who are portrayed in the Old Testament as praising God in the throne room do have a serpentine appearance (Isaiah 6). These beings are known to us as *seraphim*. Decades ago scholars believed that the word *saraph* (the plural is *seraphim*) meant “burning one” or “fiery one” since there was a Hebrew verb of that spelling with that meaning. However, the common Hebrew noun *saraph* means “serpent.” Numbers 21:8 is but one of the more obvious examples of this word and that meaning. For our purposes, *seraphim* were not mere snakes from the animal kingdom—they had hands, feet, and wings, and could speak (Isa 6:2, 6). They were apparently something both human-like and serpentine.^x If “cherub” is merely a generic term for a being whose appointment was in the throne room of God, this would account for why the adversary of Eve in Eden is described with that term and yet as *nachash* in Genesis 3.

But what about the curses of Genesis 3? Surely those rule out a translation of “Shining One” and help us salvage the traditional view, despite its problems. This approach is a bit misguided, since the curses describe the *nachash* in terms of what he would be *after* he was punished, not before. In fact, the curses make far more sense if they are directed at a fallen divine being than a mere snake. Why? Let me point out a couple of the most apparent reasons.

First, consider the cursing of the *nachash* with respect to Eve. God tells the *nachash* that there will be “enmity” or some sort of adversarial relationship between the offspring of Eve (human beings, not necessarily female) and the offspring of the *nachash*. What are we to make of this if the *nachash* is only a snake from the animal kingdom? Commentators have danced around that issue for millennia. The fact is that all humans do not hate or fear snakes, and snakes do not by nature exist to attack or harass humans.

In Gen. 3:14 we read that God curses the *nachash* to eat dust all the days of his life. Snakes do not eat dirt, and so the curse is not meant to be taken literally. This of course has given rise to the notion that before the Fall snakes were upright animals—an idea for which I have even seen some Christian commentators appeal to evolutionary biology! If this kind of literalism is brought to the passage, then one is pressed to answer questions like: “How do we know which parts of the curse are figurative and which are literal?”; “In what way is it the worst curse to crawl on the ground? (“cursed are you above all livestock”). Other creatures crawl on their belly, and so their “fate” is at least as bad. And there are worse fates in the animal kingdom. Some creatures live only to be eaten by others. I would suggest that snakes were created by God the way we know them today and that their method of propulsion has nothing to do with what happened in Genesis 3.

But a more serious question is: “How can this curse in Genesis 3:14 be reconciled with the punishment of Eden’s divine rebel described in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28?” A look at the passages below will tell you immediately that there is nothing like what is traditionally imagined in Genesis 3 in these other Eden passages. In Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 the rebel is punished by banishment to “Sheol” (the Hebrew place of the dead and punishment, see below) or being “cast to the earth.” These descriptions are hopelessly irreconcilable with Genesis 3 if one has an animal, a snake, in view. Note the specific underlined punishments:

Isaiah 14:9-15

- 9 “Sheol from beneath is excited over you to meet you when you come;
It arouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the leaders of the earth;
It raises all the kings of the nations from their thrones.
- 10 “They will all respond and say to you,
‘Even you have been made weak as we,
You have become like us.
- 11 ‘Your pomp *and* the music of your harps
Have been brought down to Sheol;

- Maggots are spread out *as your bed* beneath you
 And worms are your covering.’
- 12 “How you have fallen from heaven,
 O Shining One, son of the dawn!
You have been cut down to the earth,
 You who have weakened the nations!
- 13 “But you said in your heart,
 ‘I will ascend to heaven;
 I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
 And I will sit on the mount of assembly
 In the heights of the north.
- 14 ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
 I will make myself like the Most High.’
- 15 “Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol,
To the recesses of the pit.

Ezek 28:2, 8-9, 13-17

- 2 “Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,
 “Because your heart is lifted up
 And you have said, ‘I am a god,
 I sit in the seat of gods
 In the heart of the seas’;
 Yet you are a man and not God,
 Although you make your heart like the heart of God—
- 8 ‘They will bring you down to the pit,
 And you will die the death of those who are slain
 In the heart of the seas.
- 9 ‘Will you still say, “I am a god,”
 In the presence of your slayer,
 Though you are a man and not God,
 In the hands of those who wound you?
- 13 “You were in Eden, the garden of God;
 Every precious stone was your covering:
 The ruby, the topaz and the diamond;
 The beryl, the onyx and the jasper;
 The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald;
 And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets,
 Was in you.
 On the day that you were created
 They were prepared.
- 14 “You were the anointed cherub who covers,
 And I placed you *there*.

- You were on the holy mountain of God;
 You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.
- 15 “You were blameless in your ways
 From the day you were created
 Until unrighteousness was found in you.
- 16 “By the abundance of your trade
 You were internally filled with violence,
 And you sinned;
 Therefore I have cast you as profane
From the mountain of God.
And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the stones of fire.
- 17 “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
 You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.
I cast you to the ground;
 I put you before kings,
 That they may see you.

I take the curses that result from the fall of humankind metaphorically. Again, I do not mean they aren't real and didn't happen. I mean that we are dealing with something cosmic in the curses, not something so mundane as the posture of snakes. As you'll note from the passages above from Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, the rebellion of the Shining One was basically due to pride. What you likely do not realize is that these passages (almost every verse) are crammed with divine council vocabulary and motifs present in the ancient literature of surrounding Near Eastern cultures.

For starters, let's go to Isaiah 14:13-14, noting the underlining:

'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly in the heights of the north. 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'

There's a lot to be gleaned here.^{xi} We've already seen in Chapter 3 that the title “Most High” refers to either the ultimate sovereign of the council (Yahweh) or his vice regent who effectively runs the cosmos for Him (the Son, or Jesus as we discover in the New Testament). We also saw there that “stars of God” is another term for the *bene elohim* of the divine council (cf. Job 38:6-8). Helel, the Shining One, vows to displace God and Jesus from rulership over the council so he can take control of the heavens and the earth. We learn here that the place of this rulership is “above the heights of the clouds.” The phrase “mount of assembly” is a very common reference to the divine assembly, the heavenly council, as its location “in the heights of the north.” Isaiah 14 is explicitly clear that what was going on (in Eden no less, via the parallel text Ezekiel 28) was an attempted coup of the divine council.

The punishment meted out in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 seems curious. The text seems to simultaneously suggest that Helel would be sent to Hell as it were, but also the earth. This is no contradiction, since the common word for “earth” in Hebrew (*erets*) is also used to denote the place under the earth where the dead await judgment.^{xii} We’ll say a good deal more about this place in succeeding chapters. For now just realize that there is no contradiction; it’s a double entendre. Helel lost his job in the divine council throne room and was sent to the *erets*, earth—and here is where the curses of Genesis 3 help us to make sense of all this. Helel wanted to be above all created things as their lord, but God punished him to a geographically lower region. By being sent to earth (*erets*), he was lower than heaven—but there’s more. He was also sent to Sheol, the Pit (*erets*), where he would (literally) be under any under creature in the animal kingdom. It’s about as far down as God could put him! Note how Genesis 3, Isaiah 14, and Ezekiel 28 are conceptually unanimous on these ideas:

Genesis 3 – The *nachash* (Shining One) is “put down on the ground” (denoted by the “eating dust” reference in 3:14)

Isaiah 14 – Helel (Shining One) is “brought down to Sheol” (v. 11); “cut down to the earth [*erets*]” (v. 12); “thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit” (v. 15).

Ezekiel 28 – The brilliant shining cherub is “cast from the [cosmic] mountain of God” (v. 16) and “cast to the ground [*erets*]” (v. 17)

What all this means is that there is no contradiction between these passages. The vocabulary and metaphors dovetail. All three have a shining supernatural being in Eden who rebelled against God, who sought to usurp the headship of the divine council, who was cast from God’s presence, and who was placed beneath the created things he vowed to rule, sentenced to the domain of the Underworld. There is no need to posit talking animals, universal fear of snakes, or a literal diet of dirt for those snakes. Everything falls together if the “snake” viewpoint is set aside.

We know the tragedy that occurred in the wake of this rebellion. Eve was deceived and, together with Adam, plunged humanity into a sinful state. But again there is more at play here. While it is true that Helel wanted rulership of the council, there was another goal. He knew it was God’s intention to make humankind his imagers, members of his divine council, and to give them authority over earth, the place where council met. Humans were therefore a threat, pure and simple. The only solution was to eliminate them, but he didn’t dare do that himself. No, God had to make that decision—and he would make that decision if they sinned against him. Or so Helel thought.

Adam and Eve did sin of course, but God reacted in a way Helel did not anticipate. He gave them another chance. While the humans were driven from the garden of Eden, they at least were not killed. Moreover, God instituted a means by which their transgression could be atoned for. One day, some human child of Eve (Gen 3:15) would undo the effects of their fall. And as Paul informs us much later, this seed or offspring was Christ (Gal. 3:15-16). The divine vice regent of Yahweh’s council would one day be born of

human flesh, pay the penalty for our sin, and rise again so that we could regain our status as children of God, rulers with him in his council over all that is his.

Interestingly enough, something like this reconstruction of the Shining One's motives has survived from antiquity. Although I don't consider the book inspired, the Jewish book called *The Life of Adam and Eve*, written prior to the days of Jesus, describes a conversation between Adam and the devil concerning why it was that the latter had come to hate the former so virulently. I think it gives us a bit of insight into what Helel no doubt considered a slight when humankind was given earthly dominion and council status. The conversation is preserved in chapters 12-16 (Charles' translation).^{xiii}

12 ¹ And with a heavy sigh, the devil spake: 'O Adam! all my hostility, envy, and sorrow is for thee, since it is for thee that I have been expelled from my glory, which I possessed in the heavens in the midst of the angels and for thee was I cast out in the earth.' ² Adam answered, 'What dost thou tell me?' ³ What have I done to thee or what is my fault against thee? Seeing that thou hast received no harm or injury from us, why dost thou pursue us?'

13 ¹ The devil replied, 'Adam, what dost thou tell me? It is for thy sake that I have been hurled from that place. ² When thou wast formed, I was hurled out of the presence of God and banished from the company of the angels. When God blew into thee the breath of life and thy face and likeness was made in the image of God, Michael also brought thee and made (us) worship thee in the sight of God; and God the Lord spake: Here is Adam. I have made thee in our image and likeness.'

14 ¹ And Michael went out and called all the angels saying: 'Worship the image of God as the Lord God hath commanded.' ² And Michael himself worshipped first; then he called me and said: 'Worship the image of God the Lord.' ³ And I answered, 'I have no (need) to worship Adam.' And since Michael kept urging me to worship, I said to him, 'Why dost thou urge me? I will not worship an inferior and younger being (than I). I am his senior in the Creation, before he was made was I already made. It is his duty to worship me.'

15 ¹ When the angels, who were under me, heard this, they refused to worship him. ² And Michael saith, 'Worship the image of God, but if thou wilt not worship him, the Lord God will be wrath with thee.' ³ And I said, 'If He be wrath with me, I will set my seat above the stars of heaven and will be like the Highest.'

16 ¹ And God the Lord was wrath with me and banished me and my angels from our glory; and on thy account were we expelled from our abodes into this world and hurled on the earth. ² And straightway we were overcome with grief, since we had been spoiled of so great glory. ³ And we were grieved when we saw thee in such joy and luxury. ⁴ And with guile I cheated thy wife and caused thee to be expelled through her (doing) from thy joy and luxury, as I have been driven out of my glory.'

The basic reason for Helel's hostility was that he refused to worship the human imager of God. And why should he, in light of Psalm 8:5? That verse tells us that humanity was created "a little lower than the *elohim*." Your translation probably says "a little lower than the angels," but the word translated angels there is actually *elohim*—just like in Psalm 82. The picture that emerges is that humans were by nature inferior to the plural *elohim* rulers of Yahweh's council, and yet God held his human imagers in such high esteem that he not only desired them to be his spiritual children, but wanted the non-human members of the council to acknowledge an inferior status to them!

You may be thinking that the *elohim* of Psalm 8 might be singular; that is, the verse might mean that humans were created “a little lower than God.” That’s certainly possible, but it isn’t the way the inspired author of the book of Hebrews took it. Hebrews 2:5-8 (ESV) reads:

⁵ Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere, “What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?” ⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, ⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.” Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

The author of Hebrews is quoting a translation we’ve already bumped into in this book: the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that was available in Jesus’ day, the Septuagint. It is clear from the quotation that the translator considered the *elohim* of Psalm 8:5 to be a plural. Amazingly, he makes the point that the deity vice regent himself, when he became a human being, was “for a little while” lower in status than the other members of the divine council. And yet we know that his essence was unchanged, since he is referred to as the *monogenes* during his time on earth.^{xiv}

There was one more loss for Adam and Eve that deserves attention. Prior to their fall from grace Adam and Eve had what I’d call contingent immortality. That is, they were not eternal (they had a beginning), but they would live on indefinitely given certain conditions. The conditions were pretty simple: don’t sin; eat of the Tree of Life; and don’t do something stupid that’ll get you killed. The first of those conditions probably sound familiar to you and are quite apparent from the text. If Adam and Eve sinned, God had told them, they would “surely die.” After their sin we find that God’s warning did not mean instant death, but separation from God and the inexorable aging of their bodies toward death. I’m also guessing that most readers would have no objection to my contention that this dying process was linked to separation from Eden and the tree of life. If it had no connection to their life continuing, and if it was “normal” food, why call it the Tree of Life?

My own view goes beyond this, however. I believe that it was necessary for Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of Life to remain immortal. In other words, eating of that tree was part of how they could avoid aging and dying—which means they *could* have died before the fall. And that brings me to the third condition. We’re all used to believing that Adam and Eve were fully human, but we often don’t think about what that means. If Adam and Eve were genuine humans, they had to eat, drink, and breathe. If they *had* to do those things, that means they could die. If Adam and Eve would have bled if they cut themselves (and on what grounds would we presume they wouldn’t have?), then they could have injured themselves badly enough to die.

I hope you get the point, especially since it helps explain things like the Tree of Life and why it was so necessary to remove them from Eden once they had sinned. Once God

decide not to kill them on the spot for their sin, if Adam and Eve had been allowed to remain in the garden of Eden with access to the Tree of Life, God's initial declaration that they would die would have been jeopardized. They could have lived on and suspended their own judgment indefinitely. They had to be removed so their punishment could begin. And to compound the penalty, sustaining themselves physically would now be exponentially harder outside of Eden.

What questions must have gone through the minds of Adam and Eve as they looked back at Eden, now forbidden re-entry by the divine sentry! As they trudged off to start over outside God's paradise, having lost the birthright of immediate, experiential rulership in God's council, a million thoughts must have plagued them. What did Yahweh mean that there would be an ongoing, adversarial relationship between our offspring and the offspring ("seed") of the *nachash*? What did the *nachash* think when he heard that? He was right there—did he understand what it meant? If he did and didn't like the news was he still a threat?

Eve couldn't possibly have understood what the answers to these questions would be, and neither did her immediate children. We have the benefit of looking back at how it all played out. To appreciate the rest of the Old Testament we must walk the path humanity took just after being driven from Eden. It is no understatement to say that the events of Genesis 3-11, recast against the backdrop of the divine council and the person of the *nachash*, define and lay bare what's going on in the rest of the Old Testament. Helel did indeed understand the words of Yahweh. It didn't take him long to act on that knowledge, either.

ⁱ I am well aware of the scholarly skepticism (even on the part of evangelicals) who would argue that these passages have nothing to do with Genesis 3 and the serpent. In my view, this is an excellent example of how evangelicals have dismissed the supernatural and neglected comparative ancient material in their treatment of these passages. In Appendix ____ I will lay out in lengthy, technical detail the reasons that this skepticism is unwarranted and incorrect.

ⁱⁱ See Appendix _____. For example, in the religion of ancient Syria (called Ugarit in antiquity), a country that borders Israel to the north, the high god El and his council met to govern the cosmos at the "source of the two rivers" in the "midst of the fountains of the double-deep."

ⁱⁱⁱ Incidentally, all this descriptive language and more is used later in the Old Testament to describe the more familiar cosmic mountains where God "lived" or could be found: Sinai and Zion. We'll get to those remarkable descriptions and their relationship to the divine council later in the book.

^{iv} Examples of "snake" as the obvious translation in context are Number 21:6, 9.

^v Examples would be II Kings 21:6; Gen 30:27; Gen 44:5.

^{vi} See Dan. 10:6; Ezek 1:14-16, 21ff.; 10:9; Rev. 1:14-15.

^{vii} The word I translate here as "shining" is typically translated "anointed." That translation is based on the assumption that the Hebrew word (*mimshach*) comes from the root *mashach* (the common word for "anointed one" or "messiah"). This is not the only possible root word. Given the rest of the description in 28:13 (the jewels) the word more likely comes from an Akkadian term which means "to shine" or "to sparkle" (hence, "You were the *shining* guardian cherub...").

^{viii} The phrase "stones of fire" is enigmatic to commentators. They are considered by many to be personified precious stones (hence "stones of fire" would refer to other shining divine beings among whom "the shining cherub" worked or held council). A similar description of the divine council meeting place is found in the book of 1 Enoch (1 Enoch 14-18; cf. 17:1-3; 18:6-9).

^{ix} See Appendix ____ for a detailed discussion of the word "cherub" and this issue.

^x The word usually translated “signet ring” or “signet of perfection” (ESV) in Ezek. 28:11 may actually come from a Semitic word for “serpent.” Genesis 3 (and Ezekiel) may thus have a double entendre in view: a shining being of serpentine appearance.

^{xi} See Appendix ____ for the detailed evidence and explanation.

^{xii} For example, the underworld was considered the “land” of the dead (cf. Job 10:21-22; Jer 17:13; Jonah 2:7; Psa 71:20; Isa. 63:10).

^{xiii} *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, (ed. Robert Henry Charles; Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), 2:136.

^{xiv} Jesus is also referred to with other vice regent terms during his life, making his deity clear. We’ll hit the other terms in later chapters.