

## Angels and Demons



The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus posed the questions now known as the "Epicurean paradox" concerning the existence of evil. It is worth lingering over these lines:

Does God wish to prevent evil, but cannot? Then he is not omnipotent.

Can he prevent it, but does not wish to? Then he is not benevolent.

Is he both able and willing? Whence then comes evil?

Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?

Religions based on the Hebrew Bible claim that a perfect and [exclusively self-loving] God created all things. If so, he would have created demons and witches, and along with heaven (though the Hebrew Bible has no real notion of "heaven" as the afterlife), he would also have created hell. For Yahweh to be truly omniscient and omnipotent, he must have fashioned from the beginning the beings who play the "evil" role, and also prepared the destinations for souls to be judged and sent to after they die under those beings' influence.

Yet if the God we believe in is truly perfect, the more reasonable—and truly loving—choice would have been to exclude the very root of evil from creation. And if God did create evil, then God must possess all the properties and qualities of evil within himself. If evil can arise on its own, God cannot be absolute; if he fashioned evil with his own hand, he cannot be called absolute love. Paradoxically, the deity revered by the religions must be both good **and** evil.

If God could not prevent the emergence of evil, the claim that he is the author of all creation collapses into contradiction. If evil can exist independently, then so can everything else. That is the natural state of affairs, and thus even were God excluded from the picture, beings and phenomena could arise naturally of themselves.

In natural law there is no distinction between good and evil. Without such categories, all beings have long lived in balance. From the standpoint of natural law, there can be no angels, demons, or Satan—nor spirits and ghosts. That clergy spotlight such beings is belied by the fact that most animals in the wild live intact, unmad, and ordinary lives.

By that logic, eliminate humans and the rest of creation would know neither “good” nor “evil” and would live in peace. In other words, “good and evil” arise **because of** humans. When traditional religion speaks of demons and Satan and justifies struggles against them, it is in fact labeling people of other religions or other nations as such. “Demon” and “Satan” are names wielded by clergy, rulers, and entrenched wealth to brand those who would threaten their privileges.

To be sure, humans with demonic dispositions and tendencies have existed—and still exist—among us. They do not appear as incorporeal ghosts; they are simply

people living around us in everyday form.

"It is beyond dispute that the inspiration of the Hebrew prophets came largely through Persian [Zoroastrian] scriptures. But in Jewish myth, demons or devils did not become spiritual beings opposed to humanity until after the return from the Babylonian exile. Earlier, the Absolute ruled the world; there were divine messengers (angels), but no demons. The Satan in Job is merely a messenger performing petty tasks like spotting errors, not a devil. ... And concepts like the afterlife and resurrection for a final judgment were introduced." 1)

The Book of Job uses *Satan* often, with notes that it means "accuser." Here too, *Satan* is not a separate spiritual being but a human agent carrying out Yahweh's orders. In short, *Satan* names either a troubled inner state (of a person—in the Hebrew Bible, of Yahweh) or the plaintiff/prosecutor in court; it does not designate a spirit maliciously tormenting humans. The Satan of the New Testament is something entirely different. In truth, "demon" and "angel" are not bodiless beings dwelling in the afterlife; it is **we humans** who sometimes become demons and sometimes angels.

"Though American law speaks of the separation of religion and politics, in practice strict division is difficult. In theory they are distinct; in reality they are tightly entangled by interests. Religion has already become social, even public. Once religion moves beyond the private sphere of faith and actively intervenes in society, it cannot but be bound up with politics. Today, the more conservative the Christian, the more he believes one must engage in politics to realize God's will in society." 2)

## Trinity and Asherah

"The verse that set the Trinity theory in motion is the so-called Johannine Comma: 'For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one' (1 John 5:7–8, in its longer form). This clause appears in Latin Vulgate manuscripts but in almost none of the Greek manuscripts. It has long been beloved by Christian theologians because it is the only passage in all of Scripture that clearly states the doctrine of the Trinity." 3)

Matthew 28:19 orders baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And 2 Corinthians 13:13 says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Here the three—Son, Father, Spirit—appear together, expressing the Trinity. The Roman Catholic Church adopted the doctrine officially at the First Council of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (381).

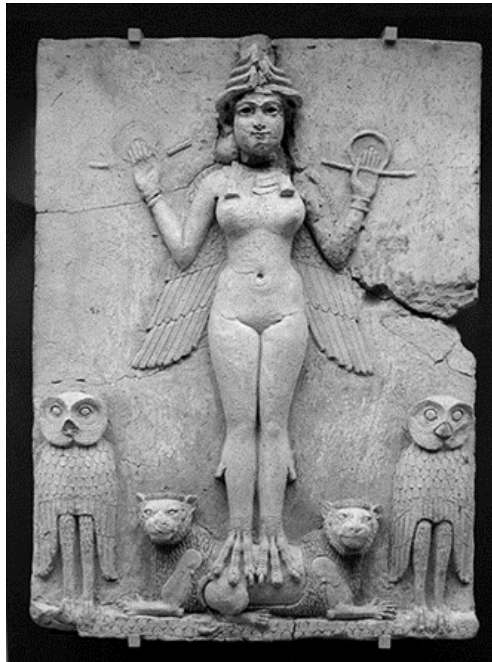


Second Corinthians divides the roles: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship (*koinonia*, communal bond) of the Holy Spirit. Each does its own distinct work. If so, rather than a tri-**unity**, we have three **persons** and three **operations**. And since Catholicism has added Mary into the mix, one wonders what role is assigned to her.

Meanwhile 1 Thessalonians 4:8 ("God who gives you his Holy Spirit") can be read to mean that the Holy Spirit indwells every human—no different from the Hebrew Bible's use of *spirit* as breath or wind. Apart from the Paraclete in John, *spirit* may function as a common noun—breath or life—and all living beings possess it.

Christianity, to enthrone Jesus securely as divine, asserted a triune deity—Father, Son, and Spirit—and succeeded. Catholicism goes further, effectively constructing a divine household of Father, Mother, and Son, a harmonious celestial family modeled on domestic bliss—and the project seems nearly complete. Yet Christianity still has not defined the Spirit with precision. In truth, *spirit* may mean the universal life present in all living things—the *Nosome*, the common essence.

Just as Catholicism elevates Mary to a divine rank, the Hebrew Bible contains a similar case. Yahweh's spouse is the goddess **Asherah**, regularly denounced alongside idols as arousing Yahweh's wrath. Archaeological finds of figurines suggest many Judeans once possessed images of this goddess embracing Yahweh; she would then be the principal wife who bore Yahweh's "sons," the beings later called angels. *Asherah* is also said to be the plural of *ese/*, and her name can denote both the goddess and the cult site. Yahweh's wives were not one but many. Jeremiah calls the goddess the "Queen of Heaven"—a phrase found only in Jeremiah.



Intriguingly, if *Asherah* is the plural of *eset*, and *Elohim* is the plural of *El*, ancient Israel originally served multiple gods and goddesses; later, needing a single god, they selected Yahweh and exalted him alone. In the first creation account, "Let **us** make man in **our** image ... male and female he created them" reads like the *Elohim* and Asherah serving as models for Adam and Eve; in the later account, where Yahweh alone creates, Adam is made first and Eve from his rib.

Even so, many passages undermine the Trinity. When a scribe asks Jesus the greatest commandment, he answers, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is **one**" (Mark 12:29). And: "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, **nor the Son**, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). Jesus distinguishes himself from God. Setting such testimony aside, theologians fashioned the Trinity and made it dogma; by that measure, today's Christianity cannot honestly be called the religion that transmits Jesus' teaching.

Note, too, that the Father–Son–Spirit formulas in Matthew and 2 Corinthians occur at each book's very end. Matthew 28:16–20 ("the Great Commission") comes awkwardly after the narrative has already reached closure at verse 15. Second Corinthians adds its triune benediction only in 13:11–13 under the heading of "final greetings," though the letter ends coherently at 13:12. Matthew cross-references the "Great Commission" to Mark, Luke, John, and Acts as if they contained the same material, but how that relates to a triune formula is far from clear. Scripture itself thereby hints that these lines were later insertions.

If God truly embraces all, he would have no need to police people's faith in other gods. Indeed, it would be more becoming of an Absolute to suggest that people explore other religions. To command, "Believe only in me and no other," is to betray one's own incompleteness and lack of omnipotence.

## Sources

1. **Life and Teachings of Zoroaster, the Great Persian**, Loren H. Whitney, BiblioBazaar, 2009: 11
2. **Everyday Violence, Violent Religion**, Lee Jong-Rok, Kumran Publishing, 2017: 438–439
3. **Misquoting Jesus** (Korean trans.: *성경 왜곡의 역사*), Bart D. Ehrman, Sunghlim, trans. Min Kyung-sik