

God E2

No Other God

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Jon: Hey, this is Jon at The Bible Project. Last week on the podcast, we began a conversation about the identity of God in the Bible, and we quickly ran into a problem.

Tim: The word God in English is a terribly confusing, unclear word.

Jon: In Hebrew, the word translated as God is the word Elohim.

Tim: Elohim is a word that refers to a type of being, a spiritual being. And it can refer to spiritual beings of all kinds.

Jon: And that's the big takeaway from last week. Elohim, translated in your Bible as God, doesn't strictly mean the all-powerful Creator God. It actually refers to a wide swath of spiritual beings. Lowercase g gods.

These beings exist, they have power and they're referred to in Scripture often.

Tim: According to the biblical authors, there are other Elohim spiritual beings, and those spiritual beings, as Paul the Apostle call them, can be called gods or lords. Like beings that do have power.

Jon: So, the Bible talks about other Elohim, but the Bible also has verses like this. "I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me, there is no Elohim." So which is it? Are there other gods?

Tim: So is monotheism, even a helpful word to describe what ancient Israelites believe about Yahweh among all the other Elohim?

Jon: Why there's apparent contradiction, we'll get into that today on this episode. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

All right. So we're talking about God. So the last hour was really trying to deconstruct what do we mean when we use the word God. And then we talked about the ambiguity of that word in English, or the confusion it can create because most people think when you use the word God, you mean the God of the universe, the monotheistic Jewish Christian God. That's kind of the capital G God.

But we use the word God to refer to like Greek gods.

Tim: With a lowercase g.

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Jon: With a lowercase g. And so there's all that. But I feel like if you just take that to the side and kind of just forget it for a second, and then just come to the Bible and try to think in Hebrew...

Tim: Or Jewish Greek. The new Testament Greek.

Jon: Or yeah, Jewish people speaking Greek, you kind of get a different language that creates little different categories. What I found the most helpful was, in Hebrew the word Elohim, which we translate as God, is probably better translated as spiritual being. Because it can refer to Yahweh Elohim, God of Israel, it can refer to the Gods of Egypt, it can refer to the manifestation of the spirit of Samuel, and it could refer to demons - were all examples that we looked at. So it's this broad category of spiritual beings.

And so where we left off was then in light of that, what did Jewish people mean when they say, "There is no other God but one" because they do believe there are other Elohims? So they don't mean there's no other Elohims. So when they say, "There's no other Elohim, but one," what do they mean?

Tim: Yes, that's the question. And the famous line in the Shema, "Hear O Israel: the LORD is our God, Yahweh is our Elohim," Yahweh is one. Or some translations of it in English go "Yahweh alone." So does that one mean that there is only one Elohim, one God? Well, that's the question.

So here we get into a whole other discussion and it is actually still a raging discussion in biblical academic studies about terminology. What terminology we bring to the Bible is monotheism, even a helpful word to describe what ancient Israelites and Jews believed about Yahweh among all the other Elohim.

Jon: Right.

Tim: If you look up again, the main English dictionaries out there, if you look up the word monotheism, the definition given is the belief or doctrine that there is only one capital G God.

Jon: And that's why they say. "There's no God, but one."

Tim: There is no God. Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Right?

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Tim: So it seems very simple. The problem is the English word "God." And we're not going to repeat everything from the last conversation. But that's so not helpful.

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Jon: Well, okay, but here's the thing. You went to ancient Jewish person and you said, "There is God but one," they will go, "Yes." And then if you said, "So you believe that there's only one God." "No."

Tim: Yes, yeah, good. That's a great way to put it. "No, that's not what I believe."

Jon: "That's not what I believe."

Tim: "Of course, there are other Elohim."

Jon: As so you'll be like, "No, no, no, you just said there's no God but one." Right?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: So what's the confusion here? How is this happening?

Tim: So the meaning of this phrase, "One God," does not mean there are no other Elohim. What it means is, there's only one supreme, all-powerful Elohim that is above all the others and has no rivals among the other Elohim.

Jon: Now, in Dictionary.com, when it says, "The belief or doctrine there's only one God," That's capital G God.

Tim: It is capital G.

Jon: So, I think that's what they mean. They mean, there's one supreme God.

Tim: Ah, okay.

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- Jon: Because if you said, "Well, are there angels? Are there demons? Are there other spiritual entities?" They're like, "Sure, but there's only one God."
- Tim: Yeah. The problem is, therefore, we go into the Bible with that category of capital God. But then we have all these other instances of lowercase "god" or "gods".
- Jon: And then what do you do with that?
- Tim: And then that doesn't help us. So some scholars in this debate have tried to introduce more nuanced vocabulary. So there's a Hebrew Bible nerd named William Horbury and he proposed we use terms, he called it Inclusive Monotheism. Meaning, Yahweh is the supreme deity.
- Here's what monotheism meant to an ancient Jewish person. Yahweh is the supreme deity in association with other divine spirit or powers. So we just say, "Let's teach the word God and just say, 'In relation to other spiritual beings'."
- Jon: That's what I've been saying.
- Tim: Yeah, exactly. He would call that Inclusive Monotheism. I think that's helpful. Then what he would say is, Exclusive Monotheism would be denying even the existence of any other spiritual beings.
- Jon: So I feel like what I grew up with was somewhere right in the middle, where you would go, "Well, there's other spiritual beings, but there's no other gods."
- Tim: Right.
- Jon: Meaning the Canaanite gods weren't real. If they were anything, it was just demonic. There's no pantheon of gods in which God reigns chief among them. There are a bunch of other spiritual beings.
- Tim: Right. Yeah, okay. Totally. Yeah, this gets so muddy so quick because of our vocabulary. Because according to the biblical authors, all across the Bible, there are other Elohim, spiritual being. And those spiritual beings, as Paul the Apostle called them, can be called gods Elohim or lords - like beings that do have power.

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Now, remember what this whole thing in 1 Corinthians 8. Paul says, "The idol is not a god. It's not a pellet. It's a piece of wood." And then he clarifies in 1 Corinthians 8. Now, I'm not saying that there aren't real spiritual beings out there. And he says, "I'm not denying the existence of spiritual beings with power - lords"

Jon: So we need you ask Paul, then, "Okay, you're saying there could be other Lord's Dominion, why can't they also be represented by that piece of wood?"

Tim: They could be. They could be or they could not.

Jon: But he's saying they're not. He's saying that they're just a piece of wood.

Tim: It's just a piece of wood. But that wood could represent a real Elohim that has some authority or sway or power. And if that's true, you don't want to go into that temple. That's bad news.

Jon: But wasn't he saying that you can eat the meat, don't worry about it?

Tim: Yeah, he says if it's in your home, do it.

Jon: Oh, but don't go in the Temple and do it.

Tim: But if other people are gathering in the name of—

Jon: So he didn't think that the dominion of that Elohim, that spiritual being could actually affect the meat in such a way that you would?

Tim: Right. No. He says, "The meat belongs to God." The meat belongs to God.

Jon: There's no like magical mysticism where the meat becomes—

Tim: No. His concern is that when you gather with a group of people in the name of what could be a real spiritual being and get yourself in the presence of that being, it's not good.

Jon: It's interesting because he's trying to be very nuanced and decisive about how he's instructing his fellow Jesus followers to deal with a very difficult cultural reality, which is that there's this practice of sacrificing meat to these idols.

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Jon: And he saying there are other gods and deities and we need to worry about it. So don't go and participate in thi practice and hang out with those people because that world is real.

Tim: There's real spiritual beings.

Jon: But if you're hungry, and you got some of that meat, eat it. That's fine.

Tim: Yeah. Thank the God of Israel for making the heavens in the earth.

Jon: They didn't actually poison the meat.

Tim: Yeah, there's no spiritual poison or curse attached. Yeah, that's right. That's what he's saying. And he's saying this to a community of followers of Jesus, some of whom are ethnically Jewish, and it would be total compromise to go down and get your meat from there.

And then you have others who are not ethnically Jewish, or maybe they are Jewish, but they don't have these scruples or cares. And so they're like, "It's just whatever. It's just a steak."

Jon: Yeah, and so those cultures are crushing in Paul's life.

Tim: Those cultures are crushing within the Christian community. And so that's the dynamic that he's navigating here. But in no case does he ever say, "These other spiritual beings don't exist."

Jon: Right.

Tim: And so all the way back to this Bible nerd, really smart guy, William Horbury, is saying, "Okay, well, let's distinguish them. Inclusive Monotheism is biblical monotheism. The Yahweh is the chief supreme spiritual being in a populated universe of spiritual beings. And let's use the word Exclusive Monotheism to describe that you're denying even the existence of any other powerful spiritual beings."

Jon: I just think that our understanding of the population of spiritual beings is pretty limited.

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- Tim: Well, when you say limited, what do you mean?
- Jon: Well, as soon as you start talking about spiritual beings with dominion and stuff, I just don't know...
- Tim: Yeah, I got it.
- Jon: ...where are we. But you if say angels or demons, I kind of a bit of—
- Tim: Categories.
- Jon: Yeah. And so what I wouldn't call those are gods. I just wouldn't use that word.
- Tim: You wouldn't use the English word.
- Jon: Yeah, I wouldn't use English word.
- Tim: Even though that is the word used in the Bible.
- Jon: No, the word is Elohim.
- Tim: But in your English Bible...
- Jon: In my English Bible, the Word of is God.
- Tim: ...the word lowercase gods is used to refer to those beings.
- Jon: Yeah. I think I've always understood it was like God's with an asterisk. You know. Like when I read that, it always...Because kind of like, there's only one God, so they don't mean actually, God. They must mean something else. So it's like built into the way that I was told to read the Bible was this understanding that that was the wrong translation.
- Tim: So fascinating. So let's live in that world for a second. I gave an example right here of why I actually don't think William Horbury's suggestion is very helpful.
- Jon: I liked it.
- Tim: Read Psalm 97:9. You read it for me.
- Jon: Okay. Psalm 97:9. "You Yahweh, are Most High over all the land." Why is it parentheses Elyon?

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- Tim: Oh, that's the Hebrew word.
- Jon: For Most High?
- Tim: For Most High. Elyon.
- Jon: Elyon. "You Yahweh, are Most High over all the land; you are exalted above all Elohim."
- Tim: So what you're saying is, the normal translation of that and all the English translations is gods. You are exalted above all gods. And what you're saying is, before sitting down today, you would just have a little asterisk to say—
- Jon: I would do one of two things. Yeah, there's an asterisk there. And I would do one of two things. I would go, "Okay. All these so-called gods, all these cultural ideas of gods, He's above all of them." And/or that word "gods" is not referring to a supreme being like God.
- I guess, I don't know if I would have said it this way and able to elucidate it like this, but I think my tendency would be to kind of downplay and be like, "It's not really a god." Because anytime that kind of stuff came up in Sunday school, church youth groups, that was kind of the answer.
- Tim: Yeah, whatever these—
- Jon: It's not really God. And then why does it say God? Well, because I don't know what the answers were.
- Tim: So this is in a song of praise. This is a song whose whole purpose—
- Jon: I didn't grow up with any songs like that.
- Tim: Well, okay. I'm just saying this is an ancient Hebrew song.
- Jon: Right. You wouldn't get away with the hell song that says "You are god of other gods."
- Tim: Yeah, I don't know. I don't know. I'm saying this is ancient Israelite song increasing the honor and the status of Yahweh the God of Israel. And one thing you could say to increase the honor of the God of Israel is to say, "You are exalted above all the other Elohim."

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It seems to me that for that line to be a statement of honor and praise, by definition, means that these other Elohim are real and that Yahweh is just more powerful than them. Otherwise, it's empty praise.

Jon: Right.

Tim: Like he would never go to like a horse race. I've never actually been to a horse race, but you wouldn't go to a horse race and be like, "Oh, yeah, number 10, he's faster than any unicorn." You'll never do that. Right? Because this is like, "Well, unicorns are real. So what? Why wouldn't you compare them? There's no other horse on this track faster than number 10. That would be real praise.

Jon: But all horses come from the same...it's like they're the same taxonomy.

Tim: Exactly. That's exactly my point.

Jon: But if you came and you said there's no other...I always have as difficulties with horses. But let's say with like cats. If you went to a zoo and you saw lion, and you said, "There's no other feline like this lion," you have this massive category of feline...

Tim: Yeah, yeah, sure. Sure, sure, sure.

Jon: ...to refer to cougars and house cats and little critters that live in the desert.

Tim: Yeah, good.

Jon: But this one is different. And there's no other one. That's the only one. Let's just pretend it's the only on the planet.

Tim: Yeah. Let's actually use the lion, like the Saharan lions.

Jon: The lion.

Tim: The lion.

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- Jon: But there's only one.
- Tim: There's only one, yeah.
- Jon: There's only one lion like a lion.
- Tim: There's no other feline like this lion. "You are exalted above all other felines."
- Jon: Yes.
- Tim: This is a way better example than the horse. Yeah. Actually, thank you for this. It's very helpful. I'm going to use this in classroom.
- Jon: Oh, nice.
- Tim: Yeah. No, that's actually exactly right. Elohim is a word that refers to a type of being, a spiritual being. And it can refer to spiritual beings of all kinds. Just like feline is a class of animal of which there are many different species, one of those species is the supreme - the kings and queens of the species. Yeah, whatever. Yeah, that's exactly what's going on.
- Tim: So here's why I don't think Exclusive Monotheism is helpful then because this term Inclusive Monotheism, monotheism that acknowledges the existence of other spiritual beings. But that's not what the word monotheism means. In modern English, monotheism means the belief that there's only one God.
- Jon: Capital G God.
- Tim: Sure. But that's just so unhelpful to me.
- Jon: Yeah, it is unhelpful. But think about this way, right? Can you say, "Inclusive Monotheism is saying - let's take the feline example again - the lion is the supreme, feline in association with all other felines of any type." Cool, got it. Exclusive Monotheism: There's no existence of other felines other than the lion. Yeah, that doesn't make any sense.
- Tim: Because no ancient Jewish person or Israelite ever believed that. So why do we even need it as a category?
- Jon: Got it.

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Tim: Exclusive Monotheism.

Jon: Right.

Tim: That's a total modern enlightenment.

Jon: Because our word God doesn't do the same thing as the word Elohim does.

Tim: Got it. That would be the same. So it's a service—

Jon: It's a translation problem.

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: So in English, it makes sense, but the problem is, is now when you're translating Hebrew text and Greek texts from Hebrew thought, it stops making sense.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah, you got it. So with that category—

Jon: Let me tell you something. Exclusive Monotheism denies the existence of any other lion except for Yahweh. Right?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: There's no other lion—

Tim: There's no other capital G God.

Jon: The thought experiment would be, there's only one lion on the planet. It's Harry the lion at the Portland zoo. Is the only one that exists.

Tim: Yeah. So it's about to go extinct.

Jon: Yeah, it's about to go extinct. Although this one lives forever.

Tim: Okay, fair enough. Fair enough.

Jon: And so you would say, "There is no other lion but Harry the lion at the Portland Zoo."

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Tim: There's other felines.

Jon: There's other feline.

Tim: Tigers, cougars.

Jon: And so that's like saying, "There's no other God but there are other spiritual beings." It just depends on how you're using the word God.

Tim: Yeah, in English.

When someone's saying Exclusive Monotheism, I think what they mean is there's no other lion, even though—

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Tim: Right. Well, in which case there's no difference between inclusive monotheism.

Jon: Exactly. I think that's what I'm trying to—

Tim: Yes. So in which case let's just use the word monotheism or...again I'm trying to summarize an academic debate that's been going for decades. There's even more nerdy terms that have been thrown around like monolatry.

Jon: Monolatry?

Tim: Yeah. So if idolatry is worshiping idol, monolatry means the worship of one. So some people use that to describe what's going on in the Bible.

Jon: Monolatry.

Tim: Yes. There are many Elohim, we worship one Elohim. Some people have proposed the word henotheism.

Jon: Heno?

Tim: Heno, which is the Greek word, one.

Jon: Heno mean one?

Tim: Henos.

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Jon: Henos. One...?

Tim: So one theism.

Jon: One theism.

Tim: Which is the belief in...It's not about belief, it's about...

Jon: It's about one supreme.

Tim: It's about allegiance to one. Yeah. And these all just arise just from—

Jon: And it's not just allegiance to one. It's the belief that there's only one that has supreme power. There's one above all.

Tim: Which is why we give our allegiance to Him.

Jon: And why we give our allegiance.

Tim: Correct, yeah. But the point is, of course, in the ancient world that was a contested claim. That's what the Israelites believe about Yahweh, but that's what the Moabites say about Chemosh. And that's what the Sidonians up north say about baal. And that's what the Babylonians claim about Marduk, right?

Jon: That they are the supreme.

Tim: Yeah. Each people group believe that it's God was the Supreme God.

Jon: There's a debate going on.

Tim: Yeah. So what we have in the Bible is the Israelite claim that Yahweh is the Elohim of all Elohim.

Jon: Some people are like, "No, the leopard is the best feline."

Tim: That's right.

Jon: "No, it's the panther."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. It's a contested claim.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I think we're achieving clarity with how we're talking here.

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- Jon: Got it.
- Tim: So there's other possible objections.
- Jon: Picking up what you put down.
- Tim: Let's say you're reading a passage in Deuteronomy, where God says something like this. God says, "Hey, I showed up and cloud and smoke on Mount Sinai and you were shown these things so that you might know Yahweh is God; besides Him, there is no other. It's only Him."
- Jon: I think it's those kind of verses where Christians will say, "Yeah, there's no other God."
- Tim: Exactly. No other gods.
- Jon: Monotheism.
- Tim: Yeah, other gods don't exist.
- Jon: Don't exist.
- Tim: And just a few sentences later Moses says, "No one take to heart today the Lord Yahweh is God. In heaven, above earth below, there is no other." So I'm going to translate it again using Elohim, and you'll see what's happening.
- In both of these cases, in Hebrew, the word "the" is put in front of Elohim. In Hebrew "Ha Elohim." Deuteronomy 4:35. "So that you might know that Yahweh He is the Elohim. There is not another besides Him." Meaning there's not another "the Elohim." There's no other "the Elohim."
- Jon: But putting a "the" it means "Supreme."
- Tim: Yes, He's Elohim of Elohim.
- Jon: So Exclusive Monotheism is just putting an article in front of Elohim.
- Tim: Yeah. What this passage isn't doing is denying the existence of other Elohim. It's saying, "Yahweh is the chief Elohim. There is no other chief Elohim."
- Jon: Got it.

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- Tim: Like what you're doing with the lion.
- Jon: Yeah.
- Tim: So when you come across these phrases, "there is no other" it's not denying the existence of these other spiritual beings. It's denying that those other spiritual beings are the chief God, the chief Elohim.
- Jon: Yeah. I mean, that makes sense because, you know, it's very clear then that in Hebrew thought there is other Elohim. So it has to mean something else.
- Tim: Yeah, yeah.
- Jon: So you're saying by putting the article "ha" is implying that a specific supreme Elohim?
- Tim: Yeah. It's one feline, the chief feline among all of us.
- Jon: He is the lion, there's no other lion beside him.
- Tim: That's right. The other way you can help understand these passages—
- Jon: That's feline. Yeah, the feline.
- Tim: The feline. Yeah.
- Jon: Which we wouldn't really do in English, right? I mean, it'd be kind of to poetic in a way. I mean, it would work but it's not a typical way of talking.
- Tim: The lion is the feline of all felines.
- Jon: Yeah.
- Tim: Yeah, I guess that works.
- Jon: That works a little bit.
- Tim: Yeah.
- Jon: But you wouldn't say the lion is the feline. There is not another beside the lion.

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Tim: Sure, if you're really pumping up the rhetoric. Which is what these passages are doing. They are making a claim.

Jon: I think it's way more confusing in English than in Hebrew probably.

Tim: Oh, I see. I see.

Jon: I don't think our article "the" does the same work as a Hebrew article is doing.

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Tim: I understand? Yeah, go it.

Jon: It could, but it doesn't naturally.

Tim: You are "the" fast runner. There is no other.

Jon: If you come into a building, you're like, "Who's the boss?" No, because there's always just one boss.

Tim: There's always just one boss. Yeah. You need to go in a place where there's many bosses.

Jon: No, you go into a place and you want to know like, "Who's the person here who can get something done? Who's the guy I need to talk to who makes things happen?"

Tim: Or gal.

Jon: Or gal. Who's the person?

Tim: Who's the person.

Jon: So you'd walk into a place and you'd say, like, "Who's the dude? Who do I need? Who's my man or woman?" When I say man, it's gender neutral.

Tim: Yeah, you mean the human.

Jon: The human. Right? It's English. That's how we roll.

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Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I would sound weird if I'm walking around being like, "Who's the human?"

Tim: It's not a phrase you will use. Let me bring it back in then we can land this particular plane. The other helpful way to understand there is no other passages in the Old Testament is to look at other times that phrase is used but not talking about God.

There's a really helpful example in the Book of Isaiah where Isaiah is mocking the propaganda of Babylon. He quotes from this propaganda of Babylon and so he says, "Here's what the king and queen of Babylon say of themselves. You Babylon say to yourself I am and there is no one besides me." So it's the same exact phrase as in Hebrew "Yahweh is God; there is no one beside Him."

So what the king and queen of Babylon are not saying is "I am king there are no other kings in the world."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's actually pretty intuitive to—

Jon: Got it. So if there was so like "Game of Thrones," the whole thing is about who's really the king. Like who rules the Iron Throne? That's what the whole thing's about. It's a game of thrones. Who's the actual King? Who's the rightful heir.

And so if like Queen Cersei, I don't remember all the names, but if she was like, "I am the one who rules Iron Throne and there's no one beside me," well, there's lots of other people claiming.

Tim: Exactly, yes.

Jon: But she's just saying like—

Tim: It's rhetoric.

Jon: It's rhetoric.

Tim: It's rhetoric. Again Michael Heiser. This from a different work. Actually from a dictionary entry. But he has put on this thing about other

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Elohim. He says, "A close reading of these passages in Deuteronomy - that we looked at - and Isaiah shows that these denials are not claiming that other Elohim don't exist. Rather that Yahweh has unique and incomparable qualities comparison to other gods.

Yahweh is preexistent. He's not created, he's uncreated creator." At least that's the claim. His role is Creator of all things, including the other Elohim. He can save like in Exodus, right?"

The focus is on Yahweh's comparable status and the powerlessness of the other Elohim. It would be empty praise to compare Yahweh to beings that don't exist. The biblical authors assume that they do exist but compared to Yahweh, they are no thing. They are nothing.

And I think that's exactly what's happening in these "no other God" passages. Which helps us go back to when Paul said that idols are no thing in the world. There's something similar going on here. Those idols might actually represent a real spiritual being. They might not. But in comparison to the One God, they are no thing.

Oh, yeah. Actually, this is where all the logic of making fun of idols in the Bible. There's actually many poems making fun of idols. I have just one example from Psalm 115. It's the most elaborate. It goes on to say, Psalm 150, "Our Elohim, He's in the heavens - meaning, he rules overall, he does what He wants - but the idols they're just silver and gold - People make them - They have mouths but they don't talk, they have eyes they don't see, they have ears they don't hear."

This is not an argument saying, "There are no other spiritual beings." This is an argument lampooning idols. People who have convinced themselves that these pieces of wood and stone are embodiments of divine being, and that they have power, so we'll kiss them and bow down to them, and make little close for them." It's saying...Yeah, there you go.

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- Jon: So, in Jewish thought then, are there other Elohim? There's other Elohim with dominion. In which case, what if you did make an idol to celebrate and represent that Elohim?
- Tim: Sure.
- Jon: Sure, the idol can't speak, but that Elohim is real, and if you're trying to connect to him, that's—
- Tim: Yeah. And I think that's ultimately why Paul says, "Don't go into the Temple of Zeus, and call upon the name of Zeus with other people, and eat the sacrificial meal to Zeus." Because what he says is, "Listen, you could be at the table," and then he uses a Greek word to refer to a lesser spiritual being. The Greek word daimonion, which gets translated as demon, which is another very unhelpful English word because we think of little gargoyle, right? Little horned reptilian creatures with wings and pitchforks.
- Jon: Oh, I actually usually think of—
- Tim: You don't think of that?
- Jon: No, I don't.
- Tim: Oh, good. Oh, that's good.
- Jon: Yeah. I think of...I don't know what I think of. I just think of when people cast out demons and stuff...
- Tim: Oh, that kind of thing.
- Jon: ...it must be something much more inferior.
- Tim: Okay, yeah. A spiritual being that has a destructive influence on human behavior.
- Jon: Yeah. But I wouldn't call it God.
- Tim: You wouldn't call it Elohim. But the biblical authors call it Elohim.
- Jon: I didn't say I wouldn't call it Elohim. I said I wouldn't call it a God.
- Tim: Well, you speak English. So what are you going to...Yeah, spiritual being. That's, what you'd call it.

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Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I think what Paul is navigating is some idols are just pieces of wood. They don't represent any real spiritual being. And it's so ridiculous that people bow down to it and are afraid of these things. But some of them might actually correspond to a real Elohim. In which case just swear off going to those buildings at all. That's Paul's advice.

Because you could be in touch with a daimonian, which is a Greek word meaning lesser spiritual being. The point here is just to say, these biblical passages that say there's no other Elohim besides the One God doesn't mean that these Elohim don't exist. It means they're powerless compared to Yahweh.

Passages that make fun of idols as being not real, once again, isn't denying the existence of other Elohim. It's just saying those idols, sure, aren't the Elohim.

Jon: Yeah, cool.

Tim: There we go.

Jon: That makes sense. I didn't get to land the plane with my other thought experiment with if went into a business.

Tim: Oh, okay. All right. Let's play that out.

Jon: Let's say you want to buy a car.

Tim: Okay. You want to buy a car?

Jon: Yeah. So you walk into the car lot, and there's a bunch of people standing around, and you're like, "Who do I need to talk to to buy a car?" And they go, "Oh, go talk to that guy. There's no other guy but that guy that you need to talk to?"

Tim: Yeah. No, that can work in English. There's nobody else.

Jon: There's no one else, but that guy.

Tim: No one else but that guy.

Jon: Yeah. "Go talk to Rick. There's no one else but Rick."

No Other God

Tim: Yeah, that's right. And you're not saying no other humans exist.

Jon: You are not saying "no other human." You're not even saying there's no other car salesman there. You're just saying like, "Oh,...

Tim: Rick's the guy.

Jon: ...Rick's the guy. Talk with Rick. Rick will hook you up."

Tim: There's nobody but Rick.

Jon: He'll get you a Suede.

Tim: Yeah. I feel like that's normal English.

Jon: That's normally English.

Tim: Nobody but Rick.

Jon: I mean, you probably wouldn't say it that way, but you could.

Tim: You'll probably say, "There's nobody like Rick. Nobody can get you a car like Rick."

Jon: Yeah, yeah. "Don't deal with anyone else, but Rick." But you could say, "There's no one but Rick." You could and you would follow, but you'd be like, "There's other people here."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. It's a weird way to put that.

Jon: It's a weird way to put that. But you'd be like, "Okay, I get it." But since we come with the category of there's no other gods to say that you would look around and you'd be like, "Well, yeah, no, duh. There's no other car salesman here. Rick is the only guy." So yeah.

Tim: Yeah. All right. So having made that that just raises another question. So the Bible doesn't deny the existence of other Elohim than Yahweh. Yahweh is an Elohim. No other Elohim is Yahweh, but Yahweh isn't Elohim. And there are other Elohim.

So who are they? And what's their relationship to Yahweh. They're not as powerful as Yahweh, but do they have any power? What role do they play in the biblical story? What role do they play in the world in the past, today? Let's talk about that. Then that's the natural question.

No Other God

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The biblical authors actually have a storyline. There is a biblical narrative arc that spans from Genesis to Revelation about these other Elohim. So that's what we should talk about next.

Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Bible Project podcast. Next week, we continue our conversation on God and how he isn't alone. God has a crew.

Tim: Bible nerds, biblical scholars have come to refer to this category or this idea, this theme as the divine council. It's language and imagery depicting God as like a commander-in-chief of a staff of Elohim.

Psalm 89. "The heavens proclaim Your wonders, Yahweh: Even your faithfulness, in the assembly of the holy ones. Who in the skies is similar to Yahweh? Who among the sons of Elin is compared to Yahweh? He is the great God, - which is the Hebrew word El, not Elohim - He is the great El feared among the Council of holy ones. He's revered among all those surrounding him."

So the question is, does God actually seem to interact with the world through some kinds of mediators or delegated authority figures?

Jon: Today's episode was produced by Dan Gummel, and today's music was made special by Tae The Producer. The Bible Project is a nonprofit organization. We're in Portland, Oregon. You can watch all the videos we make, listen to our podcasts, download other resources. It's all for free at thebibleproject.com. Thanks for being a part of this with us.

Ashley: Ashley Song and I currently live in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We recently used The Bible Project when we were going over the Book of Philippians. To introduce our daily devotions in Philippians, we showed that video to the students, hopefully, encourage them to start daily devotions. These are students who are kind of new to Christianity, new to the concept of daily devotions, and I hope that it kind of help them see that the Bible isn't something that we can understand. They can go ahead and try and read and kind of learn something from.

We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. We are a crowdfunded project by people like me. Find free videos, study notes, and more at thebibleproject.com.

No Other God

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