

**SUPER  
NATURAL**



What the Bible teaches  
about the unseen world—  
and why it matters

# SUPER NATURAL

Michael S. Heiser

*Supernatural*

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*To my mom and dad,  
Ed and Jan Speraw.*

*Who would have seen this coming?  
I think we know.*

1 SAMUEL 1:1-28

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# Acknowledgments

Since *Supernatural* is based on my book *The Unseen Realm*, the thoughts expressed in the acknowledgements to that book are fitting here, albeit in abbreviated form.

Thanks are due to the online discussion group created soon after I decided that the divine council and the unseen world of biblical theology would be the focal points of my academic career. Not surprisingly, I called it the Divine Council Study Group. The DCSG disbanded in 2004 after I graduated from my doctoral program and started work at Logos Bible Software, but the exercise helped prepare me for writing both books.

*The Unseen Realm* began as a manuscript entitled *The Myth That is True* that I produced for interested followers of website content and my novel, *The Façade*. Much of that material appeared first in a newsletter and later a blog, the idea being to make myself accountable to produce something each month. The first full draft of “the Myth book,” as it came to be called, was finished in 2012. The manuscript improved in the wake of reader

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feedback. Specific contributors are listed in the acknowledgements to *The Unseen Realm*.

The major forces behind the publication of *The Unseen Realm*—and, therefore, *Supernatural*—were three executives at Faithlife Corporation/Logos Bible Software: Bob Pritchett, Dale Pritchett, and Bill Nienhuis. Not only did they succeed in taking my manuscript to the next level, but they foresaw the need for a distilled version of its content. *Supernatural* is therefore a product of their vision.

Dave Lambert, my editor for *The Unseen Realm*, also edited *Supernatural*. The benefit of his expertise and experience can be found on every page. He kept the person in the pew in my head.

Finally, I'm grateful to my wife, Drenna. She makes everything I do possible.

# Believing the Bible

**D**o you really believe what the Bible says? To some, that may seem like an odd question to ask in a book likely to be read mostly by Christians. But I don't think it's so odd. The Bible has some pretty strange things in it—things that are hard to believe, especially in the modern world.

I'm not talking about the big stuff, such as whether Jesus was God come to earth, who then died on the cross and rose from the dead. I'm not even thinking of miracle stories like the exodus, when God rescued Israel from Egypt by making a way for them through the Red Sea. Most Christians would say they believe those things. After all, if you don't believe in God and Jesus, or that they could do miraculous things, what's the point of saying you're a Christian?

I'm talking about the little-known supernatural stuff you run into occasionally when reading the Bible but rarely hear about in church.

Here's an example. In 1 Kings 22, there's a story

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about a wicked king of Israel, Ahab. He wants to join forces with the king of Judah to attack an enemy at a place called Ramoth-gilead. Judah's king wants a glimpse into the future—he wants to know what's going to happen if they attack. So the two kings ask Ahab's prophets and get thumbs up all around. But those prophets are just telling Ahab what he wants to hear, and both kings know it. So they decide to ask God's prophet, a fellow named Micah. What he says isn't good news for Ahab:

Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the LORD said, "Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, "I will entice him." And the LORD said to him, "By what means?" And he said, "I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." And he said, "You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so." Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you. (1 Kings 22:19–23)

Did you catch what the Bible's asking you to believe? That God meets with a group of spirit beings to decide what happens on earth? Is that for real?

Here's another example, courtesy of Jude:

And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.  
(Jude 1:6)

God sent a bunch of angels to an underground prison? Really?

As I said, the Bible has a lot of strange things in it, especially about the unseen, spiritual world. I've met many Christians who have no trouble with the Bible's less controversial (at least among Christians) teachings about the supernatural, such as who Jesus was and what he did, but passages like this tend to make them more than a little uneasy, so they ignore them. I've seen that tendency up close. My wife and I once visited a church where the pastor was preaching a series based on 1 Peter. The morning he hit 1 Peter 3:18–22, the first thing he said after getting behind the pulpit was, "We're going to skip these verses. They're just too weird." What he meant by *weird* was that those verses contained supernatural elements that just didn't fit into his theology. Such as:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and

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made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. (1 Pet. 3:18–20 NIV)

Who—and where—were these imprisoned spirits? That pastor either didn't know or didn't like the answer, so he simply chose to ignore these verses.

As a Bible scholar, I've learned that strange passages (and lots of other little-known and little-understood parts of Scripture) are actually very important. They teach specific ideas about God, the unseen world, and our own lives. Believe it or not, if we were aware of them and understood what they meant, as difficult and puzzling as they are, it would change the way we think about God, each other, why we're here, and our ultimate destiny.

In the first letter the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, Paul got upset at how believers in that church were taking each other to court to settle disputes. It was a waste of time and emotional energy, he felt, as well as a negative reflection on the faith. He gasped, “Don't you people know you're going to judge the world? Don't you know you're going to rule over angels!” (1 Cor. 6:3, my paraphrase).

Judge the world? *Rule over angels?*

What Paul's talking about in that puzzling verse is both mind-blowing and life-changing. The Bible connects the activities of supernatural beings with our lives

and destinies. We *will* someday judge the world. We *will* rule over angels, just as Paul said. More about that later.

The reason Paul can say what he said to the Corinthians—and to us—is that the story of the Bible is about how God created us and desires that we be part of his heavenly family. It's no accident that the Bible uses terms drawn from family relationships—such as sharing a home and working together—to collectively describe God, Jesus, the beings of the unseen world, and believers, *you and me*. God wants humanity to be part of his family and of his rule over creation.

We all know the concept *as in heaven, so on earth*. It's drawn from ideas and even phrasing found in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:10). From the very beginning, God wanted his human family to live with him in a perfect world—along with the family he already had in the unseen world, his heavenly host. That story—God's goal, its opposition by the powers of darkness, its failure, and its ultimate future success—is what this book is about, just as it's what the Bible is about. And we can't appreciate the drama of the Bible's story if we don't include *all* the actors—including the supernatural characters who are part of the epic but who are ignored by many Bible teachers.

The members of God's heavenly host are not peripheral or insignificant or unrelated to our story, the human

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story, in the Bible. They play a central role. But modern Bible readers too often read right past, without grasping them, the fascinating ways the supernatural world is present in dozens of the most familiar episodes in the Bible. It took me decades to see what I now see in the Bible—and I want to share with you the fruit of those years of study.

But let's not lose track of the question I asked at the beginning. *Do you really believe what the Bible says?* That's where the rubber meets the road. It won't do you any good to learn what the Bible really says about the unseen world and how it intersects with your life if you don't believe it.

In 2 Kings 6:8–23, the prophet Elisha is in trouble (again). An angry king sends troops to surround his house. When his servant panics, Elisha tells him, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Before the servant can object, Elisha prays, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he might see.” God answers on the spot: “So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

Elisha's prayer is my prayer for you. May God open your eyes to see, so that you'll never be able to think about the Bible the same way again.