

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ANGELOLOGY

The Doctrine of Angels, Demons, and the Spiritual Realm

UNIT 5: THE NATURE AND WORK OF DEMONS

Lesson 12

The Origin and Nature of Demons

Fallen Angels Who Followed Satan in His Rebellion

*Key Texts: Revelation 12:3–4, 7–9; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Matthew 12:24; Ephesians 6:12;
Genesis 6:1–4*

*“God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to
pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.”*

2 Peter 2:4, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Unit 5 marks another decisive transition in the Angelology series. With the theology of Satan firmly established across three lessons — his origin and fall (Lesson 9), his names and character (Lesson 10), and the limits of his power (Lesson 11), we now turn to the beings who serve under his command: the fallen angels, whom Scripture designates as demons, evil spirits, or unclean spirits. These are the beings whose activity pervades the Gospel narratives, whose opposition to the gospel Paul consistently warns against, and whose reality the modern secular mind finds most immediately dismissible and the ancient superstitious mind most readily inflates. The Reformed approach, as always, charts the narrow path between dismissal and inflation: receiving with full confidence what Scripture teaches about the demonic realm, refusing to speculate beyond what Scripture reveals, and grounding the whole in the Christological supremacy that has governed the series from its beginning.

This lesson focuses on the fundamental questions of demonology: who are demons, where did they come from, what is their nature, and how are they organized? These are not idle theological curiosities. The congregation that does not have a clear understanding of what demons actually are, that confuses them with ghosts, impersonal spiritual forces, psychological projections, or mythological symbols, is not properly equipped to understand the spiritual conflict in which it is engaged or to receive the specific biblical resources that the New Testament provides for that conflict. The armor of God is not put on against an abstraction; it is put on against “the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12, NASB 1995). Clarity about what those spiritual forces are is the prerequisite for the kind of alert, sober, faith-grounded resistance the New Testament consistently commends.

The lesson also engages one of the most exegetically contested passages in the entire Old Testament: Genesis 6:1–4, the account of the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men.” This passage has generated more interpretive debate than almost any other text in the Pentateuch, and its relationship to the demonology of 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 is a genuine question of exegetical importance. The lesson models the kind of careful, hermeneutically informed engagement with contested texts that the Reformed tradition has consistently practiced: identifying the range of responsible interpretations, acknowledging the genuine exegetical difficulties, and drawing the theological conclusions that the passage’s most probable meaning warrants.

Throughout this lesson, the governing pastoral orientation remains what it has been throughout the series: the study of the demonic realm is undertaken not to produce fear but to produce the informed, Christologically grounded vigilance that is the appropriate posture of those who live between the already of the adversary’s defeat at the cross and the not yet of his final judgment. Demons are real; their power is real; their malice is real; and the Christ who disarmed every ruler and authority at Calvary has already accomplished the decisive victory over them all. The student of this lesson will know more about the enemy’s servants; the goal is that knowing more about them will deepen confidence in the One who has already overcome them.

I. Demons Defined: Fallen Angels in the Service of the Adversary

The Biblical Identity of the Beings Scripture Calls Evil Spirits and Unclean Spirits

The term “demons” (Greek: *daimonia*, singular *daimonion*) is the primary New Testament designation for the spiritual beings who oppose God, afflict human beings, and serve under the command of Satan. The word appears more than sixty times in the New Testament, overwhelmingly in the Gospel narratives where Jesus encounters and exorcises demonic beings, and in the Pauline letters where the demonic realm is addressed in the context of idolatry and spiritual warfare. The New Testament also uses the synonymous designations “evil spirits” (Greek: *pneumata ponēra*) and “unclean spirits” (Greek: *pneumata akatharta*), particularly in the Synoptic Gospels where the contrast between the Holy Spirit and the unholy spirits of the demonic realm is a recurrent theme.

What are demons? The most exegetically defensible and theologically coherent answer is that demons are the fallen angels who joined Satan in his primordial rebellion against God, angels who, as Jude 6 describes them, “did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode,” and who are now committed to the opposition of God and the affliction of God’s people. This identification is the majority position of the Christian theological tradition and is supported by the consistent biblical pattern in which demonic activity is portrayed as organized, purposeful, and under the command of Satan, whose fall is described as accompanied by the fall of a significant portion of the angelic host (Revelation 12:4–9).

It is worth noting that the Greek word *daimonion* has a complex linguistic history. In classical Greek culture, *daimonia* referred to intermediate spiritual beings, neither fully divine nor fully human, who were thought to exercise influence over human affairs, sometimes beneficently and sometimes maliciously. Socrates famously claimed to be guided by a *daimonion* that warned him against particular courses of action. The New Testament, writing into and against this cultural background, does not simply adopt the Greek understanding of *daimonia*; it radically redefines the term in light of the revelation of a personal God and a personal adversary. The *daimonia* of the New Testament are not ambiguous intermediate beings; they are unambiguously malicious, personal, spiritual opponents of God and His people, whose activity is consistently destructive and whose ultimate fate is the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10).

II. The Biblical Evidence for the Demonic Fall

The Three Primary Texts That Establish the Origin of the Demonic Realm

A. Revelation 12:4, 7–9: The Dragon and the Stars

Revelation 12:3–9 provides the most dramatic biblical presentation of the fall of the demonic host alongside Satan. The passage describes a great red dragon, explicitly identified in verse 9 as “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan”, whose tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth (12:4). The majority reading of this passage, both in the history of interpretation and in contemporary exegetical scholarship, understands the “stars of heaven” as a symbolic reference to the

angelic beings who fell with Satan. The image of stars as representatives of angelic beings has widespread Old Testament precedent (Job 38:7; Isaiah 14:12–13; Daniel 8:10), and the context of Revelation 12, which proceeds immediately to describe the war in heaven between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels (12:7–9), confirms that the stars swept away by the dragon’s tail are the same beings described as the dragon’s angels in verse 7.

The proportion, a third of the stars, is significant in its own right. It indicates that the angelic fall was not a minor event involving a small number of peripheral beings; it was a catastrophic defection involving a substantial portion of the created angelic host. If the holy angelic host is innumerable, “myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands” (Revelation 5:11), then a third of that host represents an incomprehensible number of fallen spiritual beings, which is consistent with the New Testament’s portrayal of the demonic realm as comprehensive, organized, and pervasive in its opposition to God and His people. The war in heaven described in verses 7–9, in which Michael and his angels overcome the dragon and his angels, and the dragon and his angels “were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven”, confirms the narrative of a decisive angelic conflict that resulted in the expulsion of the fallen host from the heavenly realm.

B. 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6: The Fallen Angels in Bondage

The two most explicit apostolic statements about the fate of the fallen angels are 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, and both deserve careful exegetical attention. Second Peter 2:4 states: “God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment” (NASB 1995). The Greek verb translated “cast them into hell” is *tartaroō*, used only here in the New Testament, a verb derived from *Tartarus*, the deepest abyss in Greek cosmology, below even Hades, the place of the severest confinement. The use of this Greek term by Peter does not imply an endorsement of Greek cosmology; it is an appropriation of familiar cultural vocabulary to convey the severity and the finality of the fallen angels’ confinement. They are not free; they are confined; and they await the judgment that will be the final consummation of the defeat already accomplished at the cross.

Jude 6 provides complementary testimony: “And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (NASB 1995). The phrase “did not keep their own domain” (Greek: *mē tērēasantas tēn heautōn archēn*) is theologically significant: it describes the angelic fall as a refusal to remain within the proper creaturely station, the same fundamental sin of pride and self-assertion that characterized Satan’s primordial rebellion. The fallen angels, like Satan himself, abandoned the “proper abode” (Greek: *oikētērion*) that God had assigned them, refusing to remain within the creaturely domain that was their rightful and God-given station. And like Satan, they were judged: held “in eternal bonds under darkness” for the judgment of the great day.

“And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” Jude 6, NASB 1995

III. The Nature of Demons: What They Are and What They Are Not

Personal, Intelligent, Powerful, Malicious, and Irredeemably Fallen

A. What Demons Are

Having established the origin of the demonic realm, the lesson turns to the nature of the beings who constitute it. Demons share the essential characteristics of the angelic order from which they fell: they are spiritual beings, personal, intelligent, powerful, and capable of purposeful agency. They are not impersonal forces, not abstract spiritual energies, not merely the projection of human psychological states onto the cosmos. They are personal beings with intellect, will, and the capacity for purposeful malicious action directed against God and against human beings. The demonic beings of the New Testament speak (Mark 5:7–9), argue (Luke 4:34), know things (“I know who You are, the Holy One of God!”), fear (James 2:19: “the demons also believe, and shudder”), and exercise strategic purpose in their opposition to the gospel (Ephesians 6:11–12). These are not the behaviors of impersonal forces.

What distinguishes demons from the holy angels is not their essential nature as spiritual beings but their moral condition and moral trajectory. The holy angels were created holy and remain holy, confirmed in righteousness by the electing grace of God (1 Timothy 5:21). The fallen angels were created holy and fell through the free exercise of their own wills, and their fall was not merely a moral lapse but a definitive and irreversible moral corruption. There is no provision of redemption for the fallen angels; the gospel of the grace of God in Christ is not for them but for fallen human beings: “He did not take hold of the angels, but He did take hold of the seed of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:16, NASB 1995). The demonic realm is irredeemably wicked not because God’s grace is insufficient to cover their sin but because God has not chosen to extend redemption to them, and because the character of their fall, without external temptation, without the weakness of the flesh, with full knowledge and full volitional capacity, places their guilt in a different category from the guilt of fallen human beings.

B. What Demons Are Not

Scripture gives us equally clear testimony about what demons are not, and the clarity of the “not” is as pastorally important as the clarity of the “is.” Demons are not the ghosts or spirits of deceased human beings. The popular cultural tendency to conflate the demonic realm with the spirits of the dead, a confusion that pervades everything from Gothic literature to contemporary paranormal entertainment, has no biblical basis. Scripture is consistent and explicit about the destination of human souls at death: the righteous go to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8), the unrighteous go to Hades to await the final judgment (Luke 16:22–23). Neither category includes “ghosts” wandering the earth or returning to afflict the living. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water and supposed Him to be a ghost (Matthew 14:26), Jesus corrected the misperception immediately. When the disciples saw the risen Jesus and supposed Him to be a spirit, He invited them to touch Him and demonstrated that He was not a disembodied spirit (Luke 24:37–39). The biblical category of “ghost” is not a valid theological concept; the spirits that afflict human beings are fallen angels, not the spirits of deceased people.

Demons are also not merely impersonal forces of evil, spiritual energies devoid of personality and purpose, or psychological projections of the human tendency toward self-destructive behavior. The demythologizing tendency of Enlightenment rationalism, which reinterprets the demonic in terms of natural forces or psychological dysfunction, reduces the New Testament's clear testimony to personal spiritual beings to a prescientific mode of expression that the modern mind is called to transcend. This is precisely the kind of accommodation to the spirit of the age that the Reformed tradition's commitment to biblical inerrancy and grammatical-historical exegesis forbids. The demons of the New Testament speak with their own voices, know the identity of Christ, resist the exorcistic authority of unauthorized persons (Acts 19:13–16), and exercise a strategic intelligence in their opposition to the gospel that is simply incompatible with the interpretation of demonic language as mere metaphor for natural or psychological phenomena.

IV. The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4: The Exegetical Question

One of the Most Contested Passages in Biblical Anthropology and Demonology

A. *The Three Interpretive Options*

Genesis 6:1–4 is one of the most exegetically contested passages in the entire Pentateuch, and its relationship to the demonology of 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 has been debated throughout the history of biblical interpretation. The passage describes the “sons of God” (Hebrew: *bene ha-elohim*) taking wives from among “the daughters of men,” producing a race of beings called the Nephilim, who are described as “the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.” Three major interpretive positions have been advanced in the history of the church.

The first and oldest interpretation, associated with much of the early church (Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen) and with many contemporary evangelical scholars, identifies the “sons of God” as fallen angels who engaged in illicit sexual union with human women. This interpretation is supported by the consistent use of *bene ha-elohim* in the Old Testament to refer to angelic beings (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Psalm 29:1; 89:6), by the fact that it provides the most natural reading of the passage in its pre-Flood context, and by its apparent connection to the sin described in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 (the angels who “did not keep their own domain”, who “abandoned their proper abode”). The Nephilim, on this reading, are the hybrid offspring of this illicit union.

The second interpretation, associated with Augustine, Calvin, and much of the Reformed tradition, identifies the “sons of God” as the godly line of Seth and the “daughters of men” as the ungodly line of Cain. The intermarriage of the two lines represents the corruption of the covenant people through spiritual compromise rather than a literal angelic-human union. This interpretation avoids the theological difficulties of the fallen angel interpretation (particularly the question of whether angelic beings can engage in sexual reproduction) and is supported by the contextual flow of Genesis, which has been tracing the two lines of Seth and Cain since chapter 4. The Nephilim, on this reading, are understood as a race of powerful, tyrannical men rather than angelic-human hybrids.

The third interpretation, associated with some Jewish and rabbinic traditions, identifies the “sons of God” as human rulers or kings whose abuse of power and sexual exploitation of women represents the political corruption of the pre-Flood world. This interpretation has fewer modern advocates and less exegetical support, but it has the advantage of avoiding the difficulties of both the fallen angel and the Seth-Cain readings.

B. The Theological Implications and the Reformed Judgment

The theological implications of the three interpretations differ significantly. If the fallen angel interpretation is correct, Genesis 6:1–4 provides additional evidence for a specific instance of demonic rebellion involving the crossing of the human-angelic boundary, which would illuminate the specific nature of the sin described in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. If the Seth-Cain interpretation is correct, the passage’s primary relevance to demonology is indirect at most, it describes human rather than angelic sin, and its connection to the apostolic texts about fallen angels must be established by other means.

The Reformed tradition, following Calvin’s lead, has generally favored the Seth-Cain interpretation while acknowledging the genuine exegetical force of the fallen angel reading. Calvin’s reasons for preferring the Seth-Cain interpretation were primarily theological: he was concerned that the fallen angel interpretation could introduce ideas about angelic-human sexuality that have no warrant in the broader biblical testimony about the nature of angels. Jesus’ statement that the angels in heaven neither marry nor are given in marriage (Matthew 22:30) was, for Calvin, a significant constraint on the fallen angel reading. The prudent theological conclusion is that the passage is genuinely contested, that both the fallen angel and the Seth-Cain interpretations are exegetically defensible, and that the doctrine of the demonic realm does not depend on the resolution of this specific question, since the origin of the demonic realm in the fall of the angelic host is established with clarity from other passages (Revelation 12:4, 7–9; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6) regardless of how Genesis 6:1–4 is read.

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 6:12, NASB 1995

V. The Key Distinction: Real, Personal, Fallen Spiritual Beings

What the Doctrine of Demons Requires the Church to Affirm and to Refuse

The most important practical conclusion from the biblical testimony about the origin and nature of demons is the one stated most directly in the lesson’s outline: demons are not ghosts of dead humans, not impersonal forces, and not mythological symbols. They are real, personal, fallen spiritual beings operating under the authority of Satan in the service of the comprehensive opposition to God and His people that characterizes the demonic realm. This conclusion has both positive and negative theological force: positive in what it requires the church to affirm, negative in what it requires the church to refuse.

Positively, the church is required to affirm that the demonic beings described in the New Testament are genuinely real, genuinely personal, genuinely spiritual, and genuinely capable of the kinds of affliction, temptation, deception, and interference with human life that the biblical testimony consistently describes. The Gospel narratives are not recording mythological stories about metaphors for psychological disturbance; they are recording historical encounters between the incarnate Son of God and real, personal, malicious spiritual beings whose recognition of His identity and submission to His authority are historically factual occurrences in the life of the One who came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). To treat the exorcisms of Jesus as anything other than genuine encounters with genuine demonic beings is to misread the narratives in a way that distorts both Christology and pneumatology.

Negatively, the church is required to refuse several popular misidentifications of the demonic realm. It must refuse the identification of demons with the spirits of the dead, a confusion that is culturally pervasive but biblically groundless and that can lead to theologically harmful practices (such as necromancy, the attempt to communicate with the deceased, which Scripture consistently and severely prohibits: Deuteronomy 18:10–12; Isaiah 8:19–20). It must refuse the demythologizing interpretation that reduces the demonic to a prescientific way of describing psychological or social pathology. And it must refuse the sensationalist overestimation that treats every difficulty, every illness, every sin, and every bad mood as the direct result of specific demonic activity, a spiritual hypervigilance that displaces personal responsibility, undermines the doctrine of the flesh's own inclination toward sin, and produces the anxious preoccupation with the demonic that the New Testament nowhere endorses.

VI. The Hierarchy of the Demonic Realm: Organized, Purposeful, and Directed

Satan as the Prince of Demons and the Structured Nature of the Demonic Opposition

A. Satan as the Prince of Demons

The New Testament makes clear that the demonic realm is not a random collection of malicious spiritual beings operating independently according to their individual inclinations. It is a structured, organized hierarchy under the command of Satan. The most explicit statement of this hierarchical structure comes in Matthew 12:24–26, where the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons “by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons” (NASB 1995) and Jesus responds by pointing out the self-defeating logic of the accusation: “If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?” (12:26, NASB 1995). Jesus’ response explicitly identifies Beelzebul (a designation for Satan) as the “ruler of the demons”, not merely a powerful demon among other demons of similar status, but the governing authority over the entire demonic realm.

The Pauline description of the demonic hierarchy uses the same vocabulary of ranked authority that Paul applies to the angelic hierarchy: rulers, powers, world forces of darkness, spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). The parallel between the angelic and the demonic hierarchical structures, discussed in Lesson 8 in relation to the Pauline terminology of thrones, dominions, rulers, and

authorities, suggests that the fallen angelic realm retained something of the structural order of the unfallen realm from which it fell: a hierarchy of personal beings with different ranks, different degrees of authority, and different specific assignments in the comprehensive project of opposing God and afflicting His people. This structural sophistication is what Paul has in mind when he speaks of the “schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11), the Greek word *methodeia* suggests a deliberate, systematic, strategic approach rather than random opportunistic attacks.

B. *The Purposeful and Strategic Character of Demonic Opposition*

The strategic, purposeful character of demonic opposition is a theme that runs through the entire New Testament’s engagement with the demonic realm. The demonic beings of the Gospel narratives do not merely afflict randomly; they inhabit specific people, produce specific effects, and resist specific forms of authoritative intervention. The demons who confronted Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum immediately recognized His identity and His authority: “What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are, the Holy One of God!” (Mark 1:24, NASB 1995). The recognition of Jesus’ identity and the anticipation of the demonic realm’s destruction at His hands is not the behavior of random malicious spiritual forces; it is the behavior of beings who are aware of the redemptive-historical stakes of the Messianic mission and who understand, at least in part, what the arrival of the Son of God in the world means for their own ultimate fate.

Paul’s description of the church’s spiritual conflict in Ephesians 6:10–18 consistently portrays the demonic opposition as structured and strategic. The “schemes of the devil” (v. 11), the “world forces of this darkness” (v. 12), the “spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (v. 12), the entire vocabulary suggests an organized, coordinated, purposeful opposition that requires the full armor of God rather than mere moral effort or personal spiritual discipline. The full armor, truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God, prayer, is the comprehensive provision of the God who governs the hierarchy the armor is designed to resist: a provision calibrated to the specific strategic character of the opposition it is designed to overcome.

“If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?”

Matthew 12:26, NASB 1995

VII. The Present Condition of the Demonic Realm: Already Condemned, Still Active

The Theological Tension Between Bondage and Activity in the Demonic Realm

The picture of the demonic realm that emerges from 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, fallen angels committed to pits of darkness, held in eternal bonds, reserved for judgment, creates an immediate theological question: if the demonic realm is already bound and condemned, how do we account for the pervasive demonic activity described in the Gospels, in the Pauline letters, and in the experience of the church throughout

its history? The answer requires a careful theological distinction between two different aspects of the demonic realm's present condition: the judicial bondage that is already a fact, and the limited operational activity that God sovereignly permits within the period between the fall and the final judgment.

The "pits of darkness" and "eternal bonds" of 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 describe the legal and eschatological condition of the fallen angels: they are already condemned, already sentenced, already reserved for the judgment that will consummate the proleptic defeat accomplished at the cross. They are not free in the ultimate sense; they operate within the space of divinely permitted activity that will be terminated when the sovereign God determines to execute the final judgment. This is the same theological structure that governs the activity of Satan himself: he is a condemned criminal operating on a leash, not a free agent pursuing his own agenda in an ungoverned universe. The demonic realm's "bondage" is not the bondage of beings who cannot act but of beings whose acting is circumscribed by a judicial sentence already rendered and a final judgment already determined.

The practical implication of this theological structure for the church's engagement with the demonic realm is the same implication that the doctrine of Satan's proleptic defeat produced in Lesson 11: the believer engages a condemned enemy, not an uncondemned rival. The armor is worn, the resistance is exercised, the prayer is offered, the faith is maintained, but all of it is done from the posture of those who know that the war has already been won, that the enemy's days are numbered, and that the sentence already rendered will be finally executed at the appointed time. This is not complacency; it is the settled confidence of those who know whose side has won and who are called to live accordingly in the time between the verdict and its execution.

VIII. The Pastoral Orientation: Sober, Alert, and Christologically Confident

How the Doctrine of the Demonic Realm Should Shape the Church's Life and Ministry

The doctrine of the origin and nature of demons, carefully established from the biblical testimony, should produce in the church a specific posture that is simultaneously more serious and more confident than either the dismissal of secular naturalism or the preoccupation of sensationalist demonology. More serious, because the demonic realm is real, personal, intelligent, organized, and specifically hostile to the gospel and to those who proclaim it. The spiritual conflict described in Ephesians 6:12 is a real conflict against real personal beings with real strategic purposes, and the congregation that dismisses this conflict as culturally conditioned religious language is unarmed for a battle it is nonetheless engaged in. More confident, because the Christ who disarmed every ruler and authority at Calvary (Colossians 2:15), the Christ who cast out demons as the sign of the kingdom's arrival (Matthew 12:28), the Christ who told His disciples that He has given them authority over all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19), this Christ is the Lord of every demonic being in the condemned and still-active realm the church is called to resist.

The specific form of pastoral preparation this lesson calls for has three dimensions. First, theological clarity: the congregation needs a clear, scripturally grounded understanding of what demons actually are,

real personal fallen spiritual beings, not ghosts or forces or symbols, so that its engagement with the demonic realm is based on the reality Scripture describes rather than the distortions of popular culture or the reductions of secular rationalism. Second, Christological grounding: every dimension of the demonic doctrine, the fallen angels' condemnation, the hierarchical organization of the demonic realm, the strategic character of its opposition, must be received within the governing Christological framework of the series: all things were created through Christ and for Christ, all things are sustained by Christ, and the entire demonic realm in all its ranks and orders has been comprehensively defeated at the cross and remains under Christ's comprehensive lordship even in its condemned activity. Third, sober vigilance: the congregation is called to put on the whole armor of God, to resist the devil firm in faith, to be alert and sober-minded, the posture not of those who are frightened by the demonic realm but of those who know what it is, who governs it, and what its ultimate end will be.

Unit 5 continues in Lesson 13 with the specific forms of demonic activity in the world: how the demonic realm operates in the present age through temptation, deception, false religion, physical affliction, oppression, and the phenomenon of demonization that the Gospel narratives so extensively document. The theological foundation established in this lesson, what demons are, where they came from, what they are not, and how they are organized, is the necessary preparation for the more specifically pastoral engagement of Lesson 13 with the question of how the demonic realm actually works and how the church is equipped to resist it.

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Daimonion	Greek: demon (plural: daimonia). The primary New Testament designation for the fallen spiritual beings who oppose God and afflict human beings. The word appears more than sixty times in the New Testament, overwhelmingly in the Gospel narratives (exorcism accounts) and Pauline letters (spiritual warfare and idolatry contexts). In classical Greek, daimonia referred to intermediate spiritual beings neither fully divine nor fully human; the New Testament radically redefines the term to designate unambiguously malicious, personal, spiritual opponents of God and His people who serve under Satan's command.
Pneumata Akatharta	Greek: unclean spirits (singular: pneuma akatharton). A synonym for demons used extensively in the Synoptic Gospels, particularly in the exorcism narratives. The designation "unclean" (akathartos) carries its full Old Testament covenantal weight: the demonic beings are unclean in the sense of being radically incompatible with the holiness of God, categorically excluded from the holy presence that the covenant community was called to inhabit, and constitutionally opposed to the purity that the Holy Spirit produces in those He indwells. The contrast between the "unclean spirit" and the "Holy Spirit" is one of the governing themes of the Synoptic presentation of Jesus' ministry.
Tartaroō	Greek: to cast into Tartarus. The verb used in 2 Peter 2:4 for the confinement of the fallen angels: "God cast them into hell." Tartarus in Greek cosmology designated the deepest abyss of the underworld, below Hades, the place of the most severe and final confinement. Peter's use of this term does not import Greek cosmology into his theology; it appropriates a culturally familiar concept of extreme confinement to communicate the severity and finality of the fallen angels' condition. Their bondage is not the bondage of beings who cannot act but of beings whose ultimate destiny is irrevocably fixed in the divine judicial sentence already rendered.
Archēn (Abandoned Domain)	Greek: archē, beginning, domain, first principle. The word used in Jude 6 to describe what the fallen angels "did not keep": "angels who did not keep their own domain (archēn)." The term designates the proper creaturely station, the domain, position, and authority, that God assigned to each angelic being and within which each was called to serve. The fallen angels' sin was precisely the refusal to remain within that divinely assigned domain: the same fundamental movement of self-assertion against creaturely limits that characterized Satan's primordial "I will ascend."
Nephilim	Hebrew: Nephilim (meaning uncertain; possibly "the fallen ones" or "the giants"). The beings described in Genesis 6:4 as the offspring of the union

Term	Definition
	between the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men.” The Nephilim are described as “mighty men who were of old, men of renown.” Their identity depends on the interpretation of the “sons of God”: if the fallen angel interpretation is correct, the Nephilim are angelic-human hybrids of extraordinary power; if the Seth-Cain or ruler-class interpretations are correct, they are powerful human beings of exceptional size or status. The Nephilim reappear in Numbers 13:33 as the giants that the Israelite spies encountered in Canaan.
Bene Ha-Elohim	Hebrew: sons of God. The phrase used in Genesis 6:2, 4 to designate the beings who took wives from among the daughters of men, and used elsewhere in the Old Testament (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Psalm 29:1; 89:6) to designate the angelic beings who stand in the divine assembly. The use of bene ha-elohim as an angelic designation in the Job and Psalm texts provides the primary exegetical support for the fallen angel interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4. The Seth-Cain interpretation requires reading bene ha-elohim as a designation for the godly descendants of Seth rather than angelic beings, a reading that lacks the specific contextual support of the Job and Psalm usages.
Proleptic Condemnation	The theological concept describing the present judicial condition of the demonic realm: already condemned, already sentenced, already reserved for the final judgment that will consummate the defeat accomplished at the cross, but still operationally active within the divinely permitted limits of the period between the fall and the final judgment. The “pits of darkness” and “eternal bonds” of 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 describe the judicial dimension of the demonic realm’s present condition; the activity of demons in the Gospel narratives and in the Pauline spiritual warfare texts describes the operational dimension. Both are real; neither negates the other; the theological framework that holds them together is divine sovereignty over the period between the cross and the consummation.
Beelzebul	A name applied to Satan in the New Testament (Matthew 10:25; 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 18–19), particularly in the controversy over the source of Jesus’ exorcistic authority. The Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul “the ruler of the demons,” and Jesus’ response explicitly identifies Beelzebul as Satan and describes the demonic realm as Satan’s kingdom. The etymology of the name is debated (possibly related to the Philistine deity Baal-Zebub of 2 Kings 1:2–6, or to a Hebrew word meaning “lord of the heavenly dwelling”), but its New Testament meaning is unambiguous: the ruling authority over the organized demonic realm.

Term	Definition
Methodeia	Greek: scheme, method, deliberate strategy (plural: methodeiai). Used in Ephesians 6:11 for the “schemes of the devil” (tas methodeias tou diabolou) against which the full armor of God is the provision. The word suggests a deliberate, systematic, strategic approach, the demonic opposition to the church is not random or opportunistic but planned, coordinated, and calibrated to specific vulnerabilities. The use of methodeia implies an adversary with intelligence, patience, and the capacity for strategic planning: qualities that make the need for the full armor of God both urgent and comprehensive.
Necromancy	The attempt to communicate with or consult the spirits of the deceased. Strictly and repeatedly prohibited in Scripture (Deuteronomy 18:10–12; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6; Isaiah 8:19–20; 1 Chronicles 10:13–14) as an abomination incompatible with covenant faithfulness. The prohibition of necromancy is theologically grounded in the doctrine that the dead do not return to the living realm as spirits, making any apparent necromantic communication a deceptive demonic counterfeit rather than a genuine contact with the deceased. The demonic capacity to imitate the voices and appearances of the dead is one of the most dangerous expressions of the angel-of-light deception and the primary mechanism through which necromantic practices cause spiritual harm.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the demonic realm is real, personal, intelligent, organized, and specifically hostile to the gospel and to those who proclaim and live it. This is not a belief that requires intellectual credulity or the abandonment of sophisticated thinking; it is a belief that requires the intellectual humility to receive what Scripture teaches about the invisible world rather than allowing the epistemological assumptions of the Enlightenment to determine in advance what kinds of beings can and cannot exist. The demonic beings of the New Testament are real in exactly the same sense in which the holy angels are real: as personal spiritual beings whose existence and activity Scripture consistently and specifically describes. To accept the one and dismiss the other on grounds of cultural plausibility is to allow the culture rather than the Scripture to determine the boundaries of the credible.

We must also believe, with equal theological clarity, that the demonic realm is condemned, constrained, and comprehensively under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The demons who confronted Jesus recognized His authority and submitted to it; the demonic realm as a whole was disarmed and publicly displayed at the cross (Colossians 2:15); and the final judgment of the entire demonic host, the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41), is the certain and approaching consummation of a defeat already accomplished. The church that knows what demons are also knows who has already overcome them, and the confidence that knowledge produces is one of the most specifically pastoral gifts of a properly grounded demonology.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

Let the study of the demonic realm's origin produce a deepened sense of gratitude for the gospel's scope and specificity. The fallen angels are irredeemable: "He did not take hold of the angels, but He did take hold of the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16). The redemption that the demonic realm cannot access is the redemption that has been freely extended to fallen human beings who were no more deserving of it than the angels who fell alongside Satan. The grace that reached you in the gospel, the grace that took hold of the seed of Abraham rather than the angels, is not grace you earned or deserved; it is the free, sovereign, specific grace of a God who chose to redeem fallen human beings in a way He did not choose to redeem fallen angels. Let that truth produce gratitude, astonishment, and the kind of motivated obedience that recognizes how great a salvation has been received.

Desire the specific form of Christological confidence that the doctrine of the demonic realm is designed to produce. The demons are condemned; the Christ who condemned them is your Lord; the armor He has provided is your equipment for the conflict with a defeated but still-active enemy. You do not enter the spiritual conflict as someone who does not know the outcome; you enter as someone who knows that the war has been won and is called to live accordingly in the time between the victory and its final consummation.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- **Read Revelation 12:1–12 as a devotional text on the origin and present condition of the demonic realm.** Note the sequence: the dragon's fall (vv. 3–4), the protection of the woman's offspring (vv. 1–6), the war in heaven and the expulsion of the dragon (vv. 7–9), and then the voice from heaven declaring the victory and its basis (vv. 10–12). Spend particular attention on verse 12: "Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time." The adversary's "great wrath" and his "short time" are both real; both are consistent with the doctrine of the proleptic condemnation of the demonic realm. He is furious because he is defeated; his time is short because his judgment is certain.
- **Engage the Genesis 6:1–4 exegetical question with primary sources.** Read Calvin's commentary on Genesis 6:1–4 for the Seth-Cain interpretation (available in the Calvin Commentaries series), and then read John Sailhamer's treatment of the same passage in *The Pentateuch as Narrative* for a more recent evangelical engagement with the exegetical options. The goal is not to settle the question to your own satisfaction, responsible exegetes disagree, but to understand the genuine exegetical issues, the range of responsible interpretive options, and the model of how to handle a contested passage with appropriate confidence in what is clear and appropriate humility about what is contested.
- **Teach your congregation the key distinction of this lesson: what demons are and what they are not.** Specifically address the three misidentifications that the lesson names: demons as ghosts of deceased humans (culturally pervasive, biblically groundless, pastorally harmful), demons as impersonal spiritual forces (intellectually accommodating but exegetically indefensible), and demons as mythological symbols for psychological or social pathology (rationalist reductionism that contradicts the straightforward reading of the Gospel narratives). Equip your congregation to navigate the cultural confusion on these questions with the clarity that comes from a well-grounded biblical theology of the demonic realm.
- **Read Ephesians 6:10–18 as the apostolic response to the doctrine this lesson has established.** Notice that Paul's description of the spiritual conflict in verses 11–12, the rulers, the powers, the world forces of darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places, immediately precedes and grounds the command to put on the full armor of God. The armor is calibrated to the specific character of the opposition: it is not generic moral equipment but specific spiritual provision for a specific spiritual conflict against specific spiritual beings. Identify each piece of the armor and its specific relevance to the demonic opposition described in verses 11–12.
- **Establish clear pastoral boundaries in your congregation around practices associated with the demonic realm.** The Deuteronomy 18:9–14 list of prohibited practices, divination, sorcery, augury, witchcraft, spell-casting, mediums, spiritists, and consultation of the dead, is not a historical curiosity but a perennially relevant pastoral boundary for the people of God. These practices, which the surrounding culture presents as entertainment, therapeutic, or spiritually enlightening, represent forms of engagement with the demonic realm that Scripture consistently and severely prohibits. Teach the prohibition, explain its theological grounding, and

provide pastoral counsel for those who have been involved in these practices and need guidance toward genuine repentance and spiritual freedom.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before engaging the discussion questions, identify the specific form of confusion about the nature of demons that has been most prevalent in your ministry context or personal experience: the identification of demons with ghosts, the reduction of demonic activity to psychological phenomena, the sensationalist overestimation of demonic activity, or something else. How has this lesson's biblical theology of the demonic realm's origin and nature begun to address that specific confusion?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Revelation 12:1–12 carefully. Identify the sequence of events: the woman (vv. 1–2), the dragon (v. 3), the sweeping of the stars (v. 4), the birth of the child (vv. 4–5), the war in heaven (vv. 7–8), the expulsion of the dragon (v. 9), and the voice from heaven (vv. 10–12). What specific identification does verse 9 give for the dragon? What does verse 4's reference to "a third of the stars of heaven" contribute to the theology of the demonic realm's origin? How does the contrast between the joyful response of heaven (v. 12a) and the woe to the earth (v. 12b) illuminate the present condition of the expelled demonic host?
- Read 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 side by side. What specific information does each text provide about the fallen angels' sin and their present condition? What is the significance of the verb *tartaroō* in 2 Peter 2:4? What does the phrase "did not keep their own domain" (Jude 6) reveal about the nature of the angelic fall? How do the two texts relate to each other, do they describe the same event, or are they addressing different aspects of the fallen angelic condition?
- Read Genesis 6:1–4 carefully. Identify the specific terms used: "sons of God," "daughters of men," "Nephilim." What does the context of the passage, the genealogies of Seth and Cain in chapters 4–5, the wickedness of humanity leading to the Flood in 6:5–7, suggest about the function of the passage in the narrative? What are the specific exegetical arguments for and against the fallen angel interpretation? And what are the specific theological difficulties that each interpretation presents?
- Read Matthew 12:22–30. What specific accusation do the Pharisees make about Jesus' exorcistic authority (v. 24)? What is Jesus' logical response to the accusation (vv. 25–26)? What does verse 26's reference to Satan's "kingdom" reveal about the organized, hierarchical character of the demonic realm? And how does verse 28's identification of the exorcisms as evidence of the kingdom's arrival illuminate the relationship between the demonic realm and the advance of the gospel?
- Read Ephesians 6:10–18 as a unit. Identify every reference to the demonic opposition in verses 11–12. What specific aspects of the demonic opposition does the vocabulary suggest: "schemes" (*methodeia*), "rulers" (*archas*), "powers" (*exousias*), "world forces" (*kosmokratoras*), "spiritual forces of wickedness"? How does the specific vocabulary of the demonic opposition

shape the specific provision of the armor in verses 14–17? And how does the final command to prayer in verses 18–19 relate to the preceding armor imagery?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that demons are the fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellion, rather than ghosts of the dead or impersonal spiritual forces. What are the strongest exegetical arguments for this identification? What is the primary alternative view about the origin of demons (particularly prominent in some strands of intertestamental Judaism and early Christian thought), and why does the Reformed tradition not find it convincing?
- The lesson describes the fallen angels of 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 as being in a condition of “proleptic condemnation”: already judged and reserved for the final judgment, but still operationally active within divinely permitted limits. How does this theological concept resolve the apparent tension between the “pits of darkness” and “eternal bonds” of the apostolic texts and the evident activity of the demonic realm in the Gospel narratives and in the church’s experience? Is the resolution fully satisfying, or does a residual tension remain?
- The lesson identifies the absence of redemption for the demonic realm as grounded in Hebrews 2:16’s statement that Christ took hold of the seed of Abraham rather than angels. What does this text specifically establish about the scope of the incarnation and atonement? What does it not establish about why God chose to redeem fallen humanity rather than the fallen angels? And how does the absence of angelic redemption deepen the believer’s appreciation for the gospel of which they are the beneficiaries?
- The lesson’s treatment of Genesis 6:1–4 presents the Seth-Cain and fallen angel interpretations as both exegetically defensible while arguing that the doctrine of the demonic realm does not depend on the resolution of this specific question. Do you agree that the doctrine is independent of the Genesis 6 question? Are there specific theological implications that would differ depending on which interpretation is correct? And how does the lesson’s handling of this contested passage model the kind of interpretive humility the Reformed tradition commends?
- The lesson argues that the demonic realm retained the hierarchical structure of the unfallen angelic realm in its fallen condition. What is the biblical evidence for this claim? And what are the pastoral implications of the demonic realm’s organized, hierarchical character, specifically, how does the recognition of demonic strategic organization shape the church’s approach to spiritual warfare, evangelism, and pastoral care?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the congregation that confuses demons with ghosts is not only theologically mistaken but pastorally harmed by that confusion, because it may seek communication with deceased loved ones in ways that expose it to the deceptive activity of the demonic realm. Have you encountered this confusion in your pastoral ministry? What specific biblical teaching, about the destination of souls at death, about the prohibition of necromancy, about the demonic capacity for imitation, would most directly and most compassionately

address someone who is grieving a loved one and is drawn toward seeking communication with them?

- The lesson identifies three forms of the “what demons are not” distinction: not ghosts, not impersonal forces, not mythological symbols. Identify which of these three misidentifications is most present in the specific cultural context of your congregation. What specific cultural or media influences most reinforce that misidentification? And what specific teaching, from the biblical testimony, from the theological tradition, from the pastoral practice of the church, would most effectively counter it without dismissing the genuine spiritual concerns that make the misidentification attractive?
- The lesson argues that the church is called to engage the demonic realm with the specific posture of “sober, alert, and Christologically confident” resistance. Evaluate the posture of your congregation against these three elements. In which element is your congregation strongest? In which is it weakest? And what specific teaching, practice, or community formation would most strengthen the weakest element?
- The lesson suggests that the doctrine of demons’ irredeemability should produce in believers a deepened gratitude for the scope and specificity of the gospel’s grace: “He did not take hold of the angels, but He did take hold of the seed of Abraham”. When did you last preach or teach on the specific grace of God that chose to redeem fallen human beings rather than fallen angels? How would a more regular engagement with this truth shape the congregation’s experience of gratitude, motivation for holiness, and confidence in the gospel?
- This lesson opens Unit 5 of the Angelology series. Looking ahead to Lesson 13’s treatment of the specific forms of demonic activity, temptation, deception, false religion, physical affliction, oppression, and demonization, what questions does this lesson’s foundational doctrine most urgently leave you wanting Lesson 13 to address? And how has the biblical theology of the demonic realm’s origin and nature established in this lesson prepared you to engage those more specific and pastorally charged questions?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time with a reading of Matthew 12:22–30, the controversy over Jesus' exorcistic authority and the kingdom declaration that accompanies it. Read verses 28–29 with particular attention: "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house" (NASB 1995). Jesus' exorcisms are not merely acts of compassion for those who suffer from demonic affliction; they are declarations that the kingdom of God has arrived and is already plundering the domain of the strong man. The binding of the strong man at the cross, the disarming of the rulers and authorities (Colossians 2:15), is the fulfillment and the guarantee of the kingdom declaration Jesus made in Matthew 12:28. Begin your prayer in the awareness that the strong man has been bound.

Give thanks for the specific grace of the gospel that Hebrews 2:16 identifies with such theological precision: "He did not take hold of the angels, but He did take hold of the seed of Abraham." Give thanks that the incarnation of the Son of God was not for the redemption of the fallen angelic host, a redemption that would have been incompatible with the nature of their fall and the justice of their judgment, but for the redemption of fallen human beings who deserved no better than the angels they fell alongside in the moral solidarity of creaturely rebellion. Give thanks that the God who could have left the human race in the same condition He justly left the fallen angels chose instead to send His Son to take hold of the seed of Abraham, to take hold of you, specifically, by name, in the eternal counsel of His grace.

Pray for theological clarity in your congregation's engagement with the demonic realm. Pray that God would deliver your people from the specific forms of confusion about the nature of the demonic that are most prevalent in your cultural context: the ghost confusion that opens the door to necromantic practices, the rationalist dismissal that leaves the congregation unarmed for a real spiritual conflict, the sensationalist overestimation that produces anxious preoccupation with the demonic rather than confident fixation on Christ. Pray for the specific combination of sober recognition and Christological confidence that the biblical doctrine of the demonic realm is designed to produce: the knowledge of what the enemy is and the settled certainty of who has already overcome him.

Pray specifically for those in your congregation who are most vulnerable to the specific forms of demonic influence that Lesson 13 will address: those who are under the temptation of specific patterns of sin, those who are in danger of doctrinal deception, those who are involved in false religious practices that have a demonic dimension, and those who are experiencing forms of spiritual oppression or affliction. Pray for them not with the anxiety of those who are uncertain of the outcome but with the confidence of those who know that the Christ who binds the strong man is the Christ in whom every believer is complete (Colossians 2:10) and who always lives to make intercession for those who draw near to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25).

Close with a declaration from Colossians 1:13–14: “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (NASB 1995). This is the gospel in its demonological register: a rescue from a domain, a transfer to a kingdom, a redemption accomplished in the Son. The demonic realm that constitutes the “domain of darkness” is real; the rescue accomplished at the cross is equally real; and the transfer to the kingdom of the Son is the present, objective, irreversible reality of every believer’s standing before God. Declare it as the theological ground of the entire lesson’s study and the theological framework within which every subsequent lesson in Unit 5 will be received.

“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Matthew 12:28, NASB 1995

Key Texts: *Revelation 12:1–12; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Genesis 6:1–4; Matthew 12:22–30; Mark 1:21–28; Ephesians 6:10–18; Hebrews 2:14–16; Colossians 1:13–15; 2:15; Deuteronomy 18:9–14*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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