

***Title: Psalm 82 – Gods or Frauds?***

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**DECLARATION**

I certify that this ASSIGNMENT is my own work. I have acknowledged all material and sources used in it, and that I have not plagiarised in part or whole the work of others without stating the references.

## Introduction – Gods or men?

Psalm 82 is one of many Bible passages that speak about God’s council. However, extra attention is given because Jesus cites it in John 10:34 – spurring much debate over the identity of the ‘gods’ in this Psalm. Are they supernatural beings, or humans like the Jewish opponents that Jesus was addressing?

## Historical & Literary Context – A cry of the exiles

The superscript of Psalms 50 & 73-83 attribute them to Asaph – likely the Levite musician appointed by David (1 Chron 6:31,39 & 16:7) during the 10<sup>th</sup>-century B.C. However, the attribution can also mean anyone from Asaph’s household<sup>1</sup>. Hence, exilic or post-exilic<sup>2</sup> composition is possible (e.g. 500 B.C.<sup>3</sup>) – surely the case if the Temple is destroyed (Psa 74:2-8 & 79:1).

These Psalms carry the theme of ongoing injustice, especially how Israelites are suffering under foreigners. However, YHWH is ultimately sovereign and will avenge the evil. Within this corpus, Psalm 82’s message fits in nicely.

## Textual Analysis – Elohim amidst elohim

Psalm 82 is written in narrative prose<sup>4</sup>, describing an actual event rather than using figurative language to teach a moral lesson. I propose that it possesses an chiasmic structure as follows (ESV):

- A) <sup>1</sup>God has taken his place in the divine council;
- B) in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:
- C) <sup>2</sup>“How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah*
- D) <sup>3</sup>Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.
- D) <sup>4</sup>Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”
- C) <sup>5</sup>They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
- B) <sup>6</sup>I said, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; <sup>7</sup>nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.”
- A) <sup>8</sup>Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!

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<sup>1</sup> Holman Bible Editorial, *Holman Concise Bible Dictionary*, (TN/USA: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2011), Asaph.

<sup>2</sup> Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature” (Ph.D Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004), 10. Available at: [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac\\_dis](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis)

<sup>3</sup> Julian Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 14 (1939): 121, here 93. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23503153>

<sup>4</sup> G. Wiesen, “What Is Narrative Prose?,” *InfoBloom* (accessed 01-Sep-2021): <https://www.infobloom.com/what-is-narrative-prose.htm>

The parallel structures can be described in this manner:

- A) – God’s rightful place over His dominion.
- B) – The gods are judged.
- C) – The criminal charges.
- D) – The correct course of action.

Notably, verse 1 says: *elohim stands in the congregation of el midst elohim*. Because the first occurrence of *elohim* is paired with a singular verb<sup>5</sup>, it should be translated as ‘God’ (that is, YHWH). The second occurrence of *elohim* must be plural ‘gods’ because (by definition) you can’t be in the midst of just one individual. Hence, the verse describes God standing among many ‘gods’.<sup>6</sup>

Many Christians basically define monotheism<sup>7</sup> as ‘only one god exists – the God of the Bible’. Hence, Psalm 82 can be jarring<sup>8</sup> and force them to either rationalize it as poetic non-literalism referring to humans, or to understand the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) worldview of the Old Testament.

### Exegesis – Four layers of context

Psalm 82 seems quite straightforward – God the Most High presides over a meeting where He criticizes and sentences the gods. However, the main point of interpretive disagreement is over the ontology of the accused – *what* are these gods, sons of the Most High? Are they merely humans, or something supernatural? Using four layers of context, I will argue for the latter interpretation.

### Exegesis layer 1 – Die like usual?

**The first layer** is Psalm 82 itself. God in v6 gives a complaint, and in v7 pronounces the punishment – the accused will die like men and fall like any ruler. If the accused are heavenly beings, then the punishment of mortality makes sense – what worse fate for an immortal being than to lose eternity?

Whereas if they are human rulers, then this penalty is highly redundant and describes what would naturally happen to them anyway: “This sounds as awkward as sentencing a child to grow up, or a dog to bark.”<sup>9</sup> Not much of a punishment!

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<sup>5</sup> Michael S. Heiser, “What About Genesis 1:26-27 (let US make mankind in OUR image)? Did “gods” create humankind? Does Elohim, since it is structurally plural in Hebrew, always MEAN “gods” (plural)?” *SITCHIN IS WRONG.COM*, 2. Available at: <http://sitchiniswrong.com/Elohim.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Michael S. Heiser, “Should the Plural אלהים of Psalm 82 Be Understood as Men or Divine Beings?” *Annual Meeting, Evangelical Theological Society (2010)*, 1. Available at: <http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/ETS2010Psalm82.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Theodorus P. van Baaren, “Monotheism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* (accessed 06-Sep-2021): <https://www.britannica.com/topic/monotheism>

<sup>8</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham/USA: Lexham Press, 2015), 11-13.

<sup>9</sup> Michael S. Heiser, “Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” *LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations (2008)*, 17. Available at: [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1276&context=lts\\_fac\\_pubs](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1276&context=lts_fac_pubs)

## Exegesis layer 2 – Sons by the tons

**The second layer** is the wider Old Testament corpus, where comparable scenes demonstrate a clearly supernatural setting.

Similar to Psalm 82's 'Sons of the Most High' [*bene elyon*] gathering in the Council of God, in Job 1:6 & 2:1 'Sons of God' [*bene elohim*] present themselves before YHWH – and if that isn't otherworldly enough, *ha-satan* shows up to make his challenges. In Job 38:4-7 *bene elohim* witnessed the creation of the earth, fully excluding that they can be human. Psalm 89:5-7 (which parallels the Baal Cycle<sup>10</sup> – see next layer) describes an assembly of 'Sons of the Mighty' [*bene elim*] in the skies.

Other passages describe unearthly councils, though not called 'sons'. In 1 Kings 22:19-23 they are the host of heaven and include a spirit. Daniel 4 has 'watchers' come down from heaven (Aramaic *iyrin*, used in the pseudepigraphical 1 Enoch for angels<sup>11</sup> and equivalent to Babylonian *apkallu*<sup>12</sup>). There are also passages that describe punishment of heavenly beings (Exo 12:12, Isa 24:21-23 & 34:2-4, Jer 46:25).

As for the human interpretation, by comparison: "There is no reference in Scripture to a council of human beings serving Yahweh in the skies (Jews or otherwise)."<sup>13</sup> The general response to encountering YHWH's real presence is expecting to die (Gen 32:30, Exo 33:20, Judg 6:22-23 & 13:22-23). If Psalm 82's *elohim* are humans, then the sentencing of v7 is unnecessary – they would already have dropped dead from proximity (2 Sam 6:6-7)!

Proponents of the human interpretation appeal to passages such as Exodus 21:6, 22:8-9 & 22:28 and 1 Samuel 2:25 where *elohim* is rendered 'judges' in some translations<sup>14</sup> – in each case however, translating *elohim* as 'God' fits the context better.<sup>15</sup>

## Exegesis layer 3 – Divine 'diss track'

**The third layer** is the surrounding ANE religious milieu. In particular, the Ugarit kingdom in northern Syria lasted until 1200 B.C.<sup>16</sup> – geographically and temporally close to the Israelite kingdom and religion. The Ugaritic Baal Cycle tablets dating from the end of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century B.C. (but possibly reflecting an older tradition<sup>17</sup>) contain many parallels to Old Testament concepts.

Relevant to this essay is the Baal Cycle's divine council, where El (father and supreme deity) together with Baal (son and co-regent) preside over an assembly of other gods. The similarity to Psalm 82 is evident: "it is the consensus of scholars that the Ugaritic (and larger Canaanite) council was the conceptual precursor to the Israelite version of the divine council"<sup>18</sup> and "... the most explicit

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<sup>10</sup> Heiser, *The Divine Council*, 152.

<sup>11</sup> Alexandria Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire in Second Temple Literature (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism)*, (N/p.: Brill, 2016), 60, footnote 29.

<sup>12</sup> Amar Annus, "On the Origin of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions," *Journal for the study of the Pseudepigrapha* (2010): 283. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/4570714/On\\_the\\_Origin\\_of\\_Watchers\\_A\\_Comparative\\_Study\\_of\\_the\\_Antediluvian\\_Wisdom\\_in\\_Mesopotamian\\_and\\_Jewish\\_Traditions](https://www.academia.edu/4570714/On_the_Origin_of_Watchers_A_Comparative_Study_of_the_Antediluvian_Wisdom_in_Mesopotamian_and_Jewish_Traditions)

<sup>13</sup> Michael S. Heiser, "Who Are the Elohim? The Answer Might Rattle Your Theology," *Logos.com* (accessed 13-Aug-2021): <https://blog.logos.com/who-are-elohim/>

<sup>14</sup> TurretinFan, "Die Like Men? A Response to Dr. Michael Heiser," *Alpha & Omega Ministries* (accessed 17-Aug-2021): <https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/exegesis/die-like-men-a-response-to-dr-michael-heiser/>

<sup>15</sup> Heiser, *Should the Plural אלהים of Psalm 82*, 7-11.

<sup>16</sup> Claude Frédéric Armand, "Ugarit," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (accessed 02-Sep-2021): <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ugarit>

<sup>17</sup> Aaron Tugendhaft, *Baal and the Politics of Poetry (The Ancient Word)* (Routledge, 2018) Perlego Edition, Chapter 2.

<sup>18</sup> Heiser, *The Divine Council*, 7.

references to a divine assembly in the Hebrew Bible are found in late canonical texts such as Psalm 82 ... also regarded as the most transparent parallels to the Ugaritic council.”<sup>19</sup> The council members comprise divine family<sup>20</sup> who are addressed royally<sup>21</sup>, much like Psalm 82’s *bene elyon*.

Another neighbour also shows parallels – the Mesopotamians<sup>22</sup> whose ‘myth of the elevation of Inanna’ (2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C.) has the gods addressing the supreme god An: “O father of the gods, thy command, **the very foundations of heaven and earth**, what god could spurn it?”<sup>23</sup> By contrast, Psalm 82 instead shows the true father of *bene elyon* lambasting their unjust commands which shake *all the foundations of the earth* (v5).

Affirming the existence of other *elohim* does not equal polytheism or henotheism. YHWH created all others (Psalm 145:1-6, Neh 9:6) to worship Him (Psa 29:1-2), and there is no *elohim* on par with YHWH (Exo 15:11, Deut 4:35, Psa 89:5-8, Isa 44:6-8 & 45:5-6): “The Old Testament writers understood that Yahweh was an *elohim*—but no other *elohim* was Yahweh. He was species-unique among all residents of the spiritual world.”<sup>24</sup>

Hence while the Ugaritic model has El & Baal as co-regents, in the Israelite religion both ruling positions are occupied by YHWH. **The regent is YHWH, and the co-regent is also YHWH** – the Two Powers in Heaven<sup>25</sup> doctrine held by many Second Temple Jews<sup>26</sup>, deriving from passages like Genesis 19:24<sup>27</sup>, Daniel 7<sup>28</sup> (yet another Biblical parallel to the Baal Cycle<sup>29</sup>) and various Angel of YHWH passages<sup>30</sup>. “... Israel adapted the role of a vice-regent in the divine council so that it was allowable in a monolatrous context and did not violate the Shema. ... The vice-regent in Israelite religion was a divine being considered an extension of Yahweh himself. That is, the vice-regent is Yahweh’s hypostasis.”<sup>31</sup>

This isn’t borrowing from polytheistic paganism: “Rather, it is employed to picture the God of Israel assaulting the pagan pantheon”<sup>32</sup>. Such polemical appropriation is common throughout the Bible: Genesis & Exodus as ‘polemical theology’<sup>33</sup>; Genesis 6 discrediting Babylonian *apkallu*<sup>34</sup>; Psalm 29’s one-upmanship over Baal<sup>35</sup>; YHWH taking epithets ascribed to Baal<sup>36</sup>; Elijah’s defeat of Baal’s prophets<sup>37</sup>; Revelation giving Jesus appellations of Zeus<sup>38</sup> and Hekate<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Heiser, *The Divine Council*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Heiser, *The Divine Council*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> Heiser, *The Divine Council*, 48.

<sup>22</sup> Michael S. Heiser, “Divine Council 101: Lesson 2: The *elohim* of Psalm 82 – gods or men?” *The Divine Council.com* (accessed 25-Aug-2021): [http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/Psalm\\_82\\_overview.pdf](http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/Psalm_82_overview.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, (CT/USA: Yale University Press, 1978), 97.

<sup>24</sup> Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 30-32.

<sup>25</sup> Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (N.p.: Brill, 1977), ix, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Heiser, *The Divine Council*, 54-55.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (IL/USA: Crossway Books, 2013), 116-118.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Rogers, “THE “HEAVENLY” & “EARTHLY” YAHWEH: A PROTO-TRINITARIAN INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 19:24 Part I,” in *Our God is Triune: Essays in Biblical Theology*, edited by Michael R. Burgos Jr (N.p.: Church Militant Publications, 2018), 34-76.

<sup>29</sup> Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 35-36.

<sup>30</sup> Heiser, *The Divine Council*, 141-154.

<sup>31</sup> Michael R. Burgos Jr, “JEWISH PROTO-TRINITARIANISM,” in *Our God is Triune: Essays in Biblical Theology* (N.p.: Church Militant Publications, 2018), 106-120.

<sup>32</sup> Heiser, *The Divine Council*, 54-55.

<sup>33</sup> John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (IL/USA: Crossway Books, 2013) Perlego Edition, Chapter 11.

<sup>34</sup> Currid, *Against the Gods*, Chapters 3-10.

<sup>35</sup> Annus, *On the Origin of Watchers*, 280-281 & 315-316.

<sup>36</sup> Jed Ostoich, “Yahweh vs. Baal: The Psalms as Apologetic,” *Discovery Series* (accessed 17-Aug-2021): <https://discoveryseries.org/courses/yahweh-vs-baal-the-psalms-as-apologetic/>

By contrast, if the correct interpretation of Psalm 82 is that mortal humans are in the ‘council of *El*’, it loses its polemical value against the pagan supernatural councils: “... it requires turning a blind eye to psalm’s own historical and linguistic context.”<sup>40</sup>

#### **Exegesis layer 4 – The true Son who co-rules**

Finally, **the fourth and final layer** is the New Testament’s “inspired interpretation of the Old Testament.”<sup>41</sup> In John 10:34, Jesus clearly cites<sup>42</sup> Psalm 82:6’s “*I said, you are gods*”<sup>43</sup>. What is less clear is whether Jesus assumed these ‘gods’ are mere humans.

The context doesn’t support the human view. In v30, Jesus boldly claims “*I and the Father are one*” which causes the Jews to accuse Jesus of claiming divinity. The human view means Jesus attempts de-escalation in v34, basically saying: “I have every right to call myself divine—you guys can do it as well on the basis of Psalm 82:6.”<sup>44</sup> However, it then becomes schizophrenic when in v38, Jesus re-escalates by declaring “*the Father is in me and I am in the Father.*”

Whereas if Jesus held the supernatural view, then v34 is an appeal to the Old Testament’s testimony of *elohim* other than YHWH – if those exist, why so surprised if The Son is an *elohim* too? Furthermore, vv30-34-38 become a powerful declaration of Jesus’ status as not merely any *elohim* – but as the Most High Himself! “Because he calls himself the son of God and has in fact just claimed to be one with Yahweh, not only puts himself in the class of the sons of the Most High of Psalm 82:6—divine אלהים—but implies that he is Lord of the council. This particular son of the Most High is one with the Father.”<sup>45</sup>

Jesus brings up the divine council of Psalm 82 and essentially reiterates that **the co-regents are The Father and The Son**. Jesus is the fulfilment of Psalm 82:8 – He is God incarnate who will judge all (John 5:22&27, Acts 10:42 & 17:31), yet also the Son who inherits the nations (Psalm 2:7-9). No wonder the Jews get so upset!

<b>The Co-regents Presiding Over the Divine Council</b>		
<b>Ugaritic Baal Cycle</b>	<b>Old Testament</b>	<b>New Testament</b>
El & Baal (father & son)	YHWH & <i>also</i> YHWH (Two Powers in Heaven)	The Father & Jesus the Son (YHWH & <i>also</i> YHWH)

<sup>36</sup> James S. Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal* (Edinburgh/UK: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2018), 63-97.

<sup>37</sup> Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal*, 68-70.

<sup>38</sup> Michael S. Heiser, “Naked Bible 353: Revelation 1:4,” *The Naked Bible Podcast* (accessed 17-Aug-2021): <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/podcast/naked-bible-353-revelation-14/> [pp.5-7 of transcript]

<sup>39</sup> Michael S. Heiser, “Naked Bible 363: Revelation 3 Part 2,” *The Naked Bible Podcast* (accessed 17-Aug-2021): <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/podcast/naked-bible-363-revelation-3-part-2/> [pp.12-13 of transcript]

<sup>40</sup> Heiser, *Should the Plural אלהים of Psalm 82*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *Twitter* (accessed 17-Aug-2021): <https://mobile.twitter.com/DRMSHPHD/status/1380973864868487168>

<sup>42</sup> Bible Hub, “Interlinear John 10:34,” *Bible Hub* (accessed 13-Aug-2021): <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/john/10-34.htm>

<sup>43</sup> Study Bible, “Interlinear Psalm 82:6,” *Study Bible* (accessed 13-Aug-2021): <https://studybible.info/interlinear/Psalms%2082:6>

<sup>44</sup> Heiser, *Should the Plural אלהים of Psalm 82*, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Heiser, *Should the Plural אלהים of Psalm 82*, 13-14.

## Exegesis overall – The supernatural view is the most natural explanation

Now it's been firmly established that Psalm 82's *elohim* and *bene elyon* refer to supernatural beings, an exegesis of the whole passage follows.

YHWH the Most High is holding a council session (v1) to condemn gods for wrongdoings (vv2-5) and pronounce the sentence of de-divinization (vv6-7), ending with the declaration that YHWH Himself shall judge the earth and inherit the nations (v8).

Psalm 82 is a polemic against the rival ANE pantheons – they are subordinate to YHWH and stripped of their *elohim* ontology<sup>46</sup>. As an exilic or post-exilic composition, the passage is an answer to the theological question of how Jerusalem and its Temple could be destroyed. Almighty YHWH – king over all the earth – wasn't defeated by some foreign god (2 Kings 18:33-35). No, the Most High would judge this and all other transgressions committed by His failed sons!

What exactly are those wrongdoings? One possibility is the cohabitation with mortals by *bene elohim* in Genesis 6:1-4<sup>47</sup>. However, a better proposal which links to the complaint of Psalm 82:2-5 is Deuteronomy 32:8-9<sup>48</sup> (ESV): “When *elyon* gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of *bene elohim*. But YHWH's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.” A clue that the passages are linked is Psalm 82:8's ‘inherit’ [root word ‘*nachal*’] also being used in Deuteronomy 32:8-9 (inheritance, heritage).<sup>49</sup>

Psalm 82 thus explains that human nations are mismanaged by *bene elyon* (vv2-5). This results in YHWH stripping them of their position and taking matters into His own hands (vv6-8). Whereas formerly only Jacob was YHWH's *nachal* (Deut 32:9), eventually all nations will be YHWH's *nachal* (Psalm 82:8) – as per the Messianic promise given to Abraham (Gen 12:3 & 22:18). The link between the divine council and human rulers is also a Mesopotamian belief<sup>50</sup>, giving further polemical power to Psalm 82.

## Humanistic Reading & Conclusion

Proponents of the human judges interpretation of Psalm 82 apply the hermeneutic that although injustices may be perpetrated by leaders, God holds the ultimate authority to judge them.<sup>51</sup> The supernatural view can also apply this (e.g. John Piper in 1994A.D.<sup>52</sup> and 2020A.D.<sup>53</sup>) – since the Old Testament links human kingdoms with spiritual powers<sup>54</sup> (Exo 12:12, Isa 24:21-23 & 34:2, Jer 46:25, Dan 10:13&20). The *bene elyon* misruling the world will not go unanswered – their influence over humanity will disappear as God Himself takes back the earth.

The Psalm 82 / Deuteronomy 32:8-9 link has additional applications for Christian believers. It provides the Old Testament basis for many New Testament concepts – especially Paul's usage of

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<sup>46</sup> Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal*, 2, 40.

<sup>47</sup> Morgenstern, *The Mythological Background of Psalm 82*, 114-118, here 86-90.

<sup>48</sup> Heiser, *The Divine Council*, 75-81.

<sup>49</sup> Heiser, *Should the Plural אלהים of Psalm 82*, 4-5.

<sup>50</sup> Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, 97-98.

<sup>51</sup> Robert L. Deffinbaugh, “7. Psalm 82: The Judgment of the 'Gods' – Conclusion,” *Bible.org* (accessed 01-Sep-2021): <https://bible.org/seriespage/7-psalm-82-judgment-gods>

<sup>52</sup> John Piper, “Putting the Gods in Their Place,” *Desiring God* (accessed 27-Aug-2021):

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/putting-the-gods-in-their-place>

<sup>53</sup> John Piper, “Did Jesus Say We Are gods?” *Desiring God* (accessed 27-Aug-2021):

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/did-jesus-say-we-are-gods>

<sup>54</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, *God's Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions? Insights from the Bible and the Early Church* (UK: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 64.

“*geographical domain rulership*”<sup>55</sup> terms like ‘powers and principalities’ (Eph 6:12, etc.), and how spiritual rebels fear punishment linked to the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:23-24, Matt 8:28-29, Luke 8:26-29’s ‘the Most High God’, Luke 10:1-24 & 11:20).<sup>56</sup>

It also bolsters apologetics, evangelism and polemics in this age of religious plurality and scepticism – with coherent responses to modern paganism<sup>57</sup>, Mormon theology<sup>58</sup>, evolutionary monotheism<sup>59</sup>, and even spiritual warfare.<sup>60</sup> It is not contradicted by the existence of other religions – instead, these correspond<sup>61</sup> to YHWH dividing the post-Babel nations among *bene elohim* (Deut 32:8, Acts 17:26-27). Now, YHWH has indicted their misrule (Psa 82:2-7) and replaced the system with loyalty to Jesus Christ (Psa 82:8, Acts 17:30-31).

Instead of denying that other gods exist, evangelists can re-cast them as part of the Bible’s fuller picture: “... if you're widening this out to a world religions question, if we believe in a spiritual world - again, we have these multiple entities ... Only the Biblical description actually makes sense of all this. It affirms one creator deity, not only just the creator of the physical world but the creator of the spiritual world and everything in it.”<sup>62</sup>

So Psalm 82 really is speaking about supernatural **gods** – but also condemns them as **frauds** who lead the world astray. With this interpretation and corresponding worldview in mind, we’re now ready to take back the whole earth for God as ministers of the Gospel.

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<sup>55</sup> Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 121-123.

<sup>56</sup> I provide a brief overview in my 2021 essay submitted to Rev. Dr. Tan Jin Huat: “Discuss the significance of a high Christology in Paul’s letter to the Colossians in the light of its purpose.” For a thorough treatment, see the major influential work: Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*.

<sup>57</sup> Hercules Invictus and Michael S. Heiser, “Voice of Olympus”, *BlogTalkRadio* (accessed 02-Sep-2021): <https://www.blogtalkradio.com/surn/2017/01/31/voice-of-olympus> [1:11:21 to 1:22:24, 1:24:47 to 1:26:46]

<sup>58</sup> Michael S. Heiser, “You’ve Seen one Elohim, You’ve Seen Them All? A Critique of Mormonism’s Use of Psalm 82,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 221-266.

<sup>59</sup> Heiser, *Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism?* 1-3.

<sup>60</sup> Michael S. Heiser, “What Is Spiritual Warfare? Mike’s (Brief) Take”, *DR. MICHAEL S. HEISER* (accessed 01-Sep-2021): <https://drms.com/spiritual-warfare-mikes-brief-take/>

<sup>61</sup> McDermott, *God’s Rivals*, 51-65.

<sup>62</sup> Michael S. Heiser, “Questions Aloud w/ Dr. Heiser | Who is God? Is it Allah, Buddha or Jesus?”, *AWKNG TV* (accessed 26-Aug-2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2n-RYzSze0> [08:54 to 11:00]



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