

PSALM 82

THE DIVINE COUNCIL

AUTHOR: Asaph

INTRODUCTION: Psalm 82 is an extremely difficult psalm to interpret properly, and attempts to do so are hampered by the fact that most translations of it have seriously obfuscated what the Hebrew text plainly says (probably because the implications of it are considered so disturbing). Despite the fact that commentators have avoided honestly grappling with this psalm, the Lord Jesus directly quoted from it in support of His claim of equality with God the Father (v6; cf. Jn10:34). This psalm provides a brief glimpse into what has been termed the divine council, that assembly of spirit creatures¹ who participate with "God" (v1), "the Most High" (v6), in the administration of His creation.

The inspired superscription of the psalm indicates that its human author was Asaph, which the Bible designates as a "seer" (2Chr29:30), which is a prophet (cf. 1Sam9:9).

GOD'S SPIRIT ADMINISTRATORS WILL BE JUDGED

- [1] The Hebrew word *elohim* appears twice in this verse. *Elohim* is a noun that can be either singular or plural, depending on context. When used of the Most High God it is always associated with a singular verb and is translated as a singular (i.e., God); when used with plural verbs or in prepositional phrases that imply plurality, it is translated as a plural (i.e., gods).

Here, "God" (i.e., the Most High; v6) is presented as part of a "congregation", assembly, or even an official council. The description of the council as "mighty" (KJV) obscures its real meaning; the Hebrew word is *el* and means 'god-like' or 'divine'. Thus, the assembly in which God appears is a divine council. Furthermore, God's presence in this divine council is for the purpose of "judg[ing] among the gods".

The Meaning of Elohim. Because the Hebrew *elohim* is a title most often applied to JEHOVAH, the Most High God, many/most unconsciously think of it as a designation that is unique to Him. However, the Hebrew scriptures use *elohim* to characterize at least six different entities: 1) JEHOVAH, the God of Israel (Exod5:1), 2) members of JEHOVAH's divine council (Ps82:1,6), 3) gods and goddesses of the heathen nations (Judg11:24; 1Kgs11:33), 4) angels (Ps8:5), 5) demons (Deut32:17), and 6) the disembodied spirit of Samuel after his death (1Sam28:13). Thus, *elohim* is simply a designation for entities that inhabit the spiritual realm.

¹ The broad characterization of all of God's spirit creations (i.e., the host of heaven) as "angels" is much too imprecise. At a minimum, the Bible (both in the original languages and in translations) distinguishes between angels (and the archangel), demons, cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, etc.; Satan, for example, is a cherub (Ezek28:14).

God has chosen to administer His creation in concert with a council of other "gods" (cf. 1Kgs22:19-22), and He will "judge" the performance of the other "gods". While this certainly has an eschatological application (cf. Isa24:21-22; Matt25:41; Rev20:1-3), it also has applications in history (cf. Exod12:12; Num33:4).

- [2] The other "gods" (v1) that comprise the divine council are not free to "judge" (i.e., administer on God's behalf) as they wish. God expects them to rule "justly", and they are accountable to Him to do so.
- [3] Of particular concern to God is "justice" for the "poor", "fatherless", "afflicted", and "needy" (cf. Jas1:27).
- [4] God expects the "gods" of the nations to "deliver the poor and needy" from their "wicked" human rulers (Cp., Amos4:1-2).
- [5] The administration of the nations by Satan and the other "gods" has been characterized by deception (cf. 2Cor2:11; 11:3,13-15; 2Tim3:13; Rev12:9; 20:3). As a result, the nations do not "understand" (Prov9:10), rather they "walk in darkness" (cf. Act26:17-18). By "all the foundations of the earth are out of course" is meant that the deception of the nations is "foundation[al]"; that is, there is no area of intellectual or spiritual thought that has not been corrupted by Satanic deception at the foundational level (Cp., Ps11:3; Rom12:2; 2Cor10:3-5).
- [6] The "gods" are also called "children² of the Most High [God]" (i.e., sons of God; cf. Gen6:2,4; Job1:6; 2:1; 38:7). God's spiritual creatures who assist Him in administering His creation are designated as "sons of God" in two ways: 1) literally, since they are a direct creation of God (Cp., Luk3:38), and 2) metaphorically/analogously, since the most eminent administrators associated with the royal courts of the ancient world (including Israel) were generally chosen from the king's own family (i.e., children/sons).

Note, Jesus quotes the first half of this verse in support of His claim to be one with God His Father (Jn10:34).

- [7] When God judges the "gods" for their performance in the administration of the (Gentile) nations, they will "die like men". Here, the Hebrew word rendered "men" is actually *adam* (singular). Just as Adam originally had conditional immortality that depended upon his performance as God's representative regent on earth (cf. Gen1:26-27; 2:15-17), so the "gods" have conditional immortality based upon their performance as God's representative regents in heaven. In the parallel clause, they are specifically likened to "princes" (i.e., members of the royal family authorized to act on behalf of the king—which is God).
- [8] In the eschaton (i.e., the millennial kingdom), "God" will take the responsibility to "judge" the (Gentile) "nations" from the "gods", and it will be given to the Messiah, who "shall inherit all

² The Hebrew word rendered "children" is the plural of *ben*, usually translated "sons" (Cp., Ps2:7).

nations" and reign over them with His consort Bride (cf. Ps2:8; Rev1:6; 2:26; 5:9-10; 19:15).

APPENDIX

THE UNIQUENESS OF JEHOVAH VS. THE GODS OF THE NATIONS

The conception of a pantheon of gods intrinsic to the mythologies of all ancient peoples (excepting Israel) is a pagan perversion of the divine council as revealed in the Bible. The divine council is not a pantheon of comparatively equal "gods" vying for control of the universe, but a communion of JEHOVAH with His subordinate spirit creatures He allows to participate in the administration of the creation (cf. 1Kgs22:19-22). The spirit creatures that comprise the divine council were undoubtedly intended to act righteously on behalf of JEHOVAH in the heavenly realm, just as man was created to righteously represent JEHOVAH on earth (Gen1:26-27); however, a rebellion of spirit creatures against JEHOVAH took place in heaven (Isa14:12-14; Rev12:4), as did a human rebellion on earth (Gen3:1-6).

Nonetheless, these spirit creatures are the "gods" of the pagan, Gentile nations (cf. Deut32:17; 1Kgs11:33; 1Cor10:20), "gods" which the nation of Israel was forbidden to worship (Exod20:3), and "gods" that will be judged for their unjust administration of the nations (cf. Ps82:1-7; Jn12:31; 16:11). JEHOVAH is distinguished from all other "gods" in that He is "the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen14:9), the self-existent (Exod3:14) Creator of all things (Gen2:4), who alone possesses infinite attributes (e.g., eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, etc.). Scripture is clear that there is none among the "gods" that is comparable to JEHOVAH (cf. Exod15:11; Ps86:8; 95:3; 96:4-5; 97:7,9; 136:2).