

God Stands in the Divine Council

Psalm 82:1 *"A Psalm of Asaph .*

"God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:

² "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?
Selah

³ Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.

⁴ Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

⁵ They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

⁶ I said, "You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you;

⁷ nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince."

⁸ Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!"

Psalm 82

Antisupernaturalism and Mormonism

WHAT DO JOHN 10 AND PSALM 82 HAVE IN COMMON? The answer is that Jesus quotes from Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34. **John 10:34** says, "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in

you Law, 'I said, you are gods?'" Psalm 82:6 says, "I said, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.'"¹

What does the popular view of John 10:34 and **Mormonism** have in common? Both interpret these "gods" (HB: *elohim*; GK: *theoi*) as referring to *human beings*. They appear not only in vs. 6, but also in verse 1, "God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods (*elohim*) he holds judgment" (Ps 82:1). But look at how the NAS translates Psalm 82:1, "God takes His stand in His own congregation; he judges in the midst of the rulers." It translates *elohim* as "rulers," presumably *Israel's* rulers, for God is in the midst of his own earthly congregation.

I find this rather astonishing, really. When Christians have the opportunity to interact with Mormons on this, their apologetic usually turns apoplectic. In other words, we *really* don't like Mormons saying humans will become "gods," and we let them know it in no uncertain terms. "**Mormon, we will not become gods!**" they say as they tell you that, "**Jesus calls the Pharisees 'gods.'**"²

¹ Sometimes the Psalms are categorized as "the law" (i.e. "the law and the prophets" in **Matt 5:17; Luke 24:44; John 1:45**; etc.).

² In my sermon on **John 10:22-42**, I consulted over 50 commentaries. Nearly all of them took this view. Ackerman (n.1) shows that this was also the view of most ancient Jews. It also became the popular view in the early church and the Reformation (Calvin), though some like Origen

There is a difference, of course. Mormons want to use the language of “gods” to deify men and turn them into beings that are exactly like the “god” they worship. As one of their early Presidents so famously put it, “As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become.”³ Or as another says, “[They are] celestial beings who become human (like Adam), fall, and die.”⁴ This is *not* biblical Christianity.

Many Christians on the other hand, want to de-deify the word “gods” so that it becomes just another word for “human judges.” Sound strange? You aren’t alone.

The problem with this is that “god” (i.e. the Hebrew *elohim* and Greek *theos*) never—not even a single time—refers to living, breathing men anywhere else in the entire Bible. Scholarship has conclusively demonstrated this.⁵ Yes,

and Novatian also saw them as angels. It is also the view of James White, James Renihan, and others who show deep confusion about what Evangelicals who take this view actually believe.

³ Lorenzo Snow, *Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, compiled by Clyde J. Williams, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 1–2.

⁴ Dr. William Hamblin (BYU), “A Discussion of Psalm 82 [with James R. White],” *Alpha & Omega Ministries* (April, 1998), <http://vintage.aomin.org/Psalm82.html>.

⁵ See Cyrus H. Gordon, “אלהים in Its Reputed Meaning of Rulers, Judges,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 54 (1935): 139–44. He put that nonsense to rest over 80 years ago. See also Michael Heiser, “Jesus’ Quotation of Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34: A Different View of John’s Theological Strategy,” (2011 SBL regional; Spokane, WA).

<http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/Heiser%20Psa82inJohn10%20RegSBL2011.pdf> and his longer article, “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.

God does tell Moses that he will make him “*as God*” to Pharaoh (**Ex 4:16**). Yes, Satan tells Eve that she will become “like God” (or better, “like gods; **Gen 3:5** KJV). But those are similes.

Psalm 82 does not say that these beings are “like God” or “as God.” It says they *are* gods. Still, this hasn’t stopped most commentators from reading it metaphorically. Why? Because **they have an assumption**. *The other gods do not exist*. In his commentary on Psalm 82, **Warren Wiersbe** is a good representative, “The ‘gods’ (vv. 1, 6) are not the false gods of the heathen, for such nonexistent gods are not Jehovah’s judicial representatives on earth.”⁶

Besides just ignorance, understandable to some degree, because this is not well understood any longer, part of what is going on here, I think, is an unwitting acceptance of *liberal* logic which says that if they did exist, this would mean that Jews could not be monotheistic. There could be no other option. It just isn’t possible. Liberals want this. Conservatives do not. As I will show you later, this is simply

⁶ **Warren W. Wiersbe**, *Be Worshipful*, 1st ed., “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 2004), 267.

not the only option if you believe the “gods” refers to supernatural beings.

But what if, as some very old and modern interpretations of this psalm insist, “gods” means exactly what it says (*though maybe not exactly what you think that might imply*)? What if our modern secular world’s impulse to find a scientific, natural explanation for everything has unwittingly infected the church? What if we have actually become the very thing we despise?

Do we not find it offensive when liberals deny miracles, the deity of Christ, the existence of Satan, and so on while they claim to believe in the Bible? As someone has said of a related passage, “**Why does the theology in which creation, miracles, the miraculous birth and resurrection of Jesus have a place, prefer a rational explanation?**”⁷ This is a point I hope you all think very seriously about as we work your way through Psalm 82.

What we are going to see this morning is that a supernatural interpretation best **fits the context of the**

⁷ **Willem A van Gemenen**, W. A. “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4 (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?),” *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1981): 320 [320-348]. The link between the two passages is the “sons of God” or “sons of the Most High” (Gen 6:2, 4 and Psalm 82:6).

placement of this psalm here in the Psalter, is the *only* explanation that actually makes full sense of Jesus' words in John, and rounds off one of the most enthralling story lines concerning Jesus Christ in the OT. In short, a supernatural interpretation helps us put puzzle pieces together from the Bible that help us to see (sometimes for the first time ever) just how full of Christ the OT actually is, how his rule is over earth *and heaven*, and how in his coming in the flesh Jesus Christ was fulfilling long misunderstood doctrines, to the profound impoverishment of all the peoples that this very song says Christ Jesus will inherit.

It is a subtle and crafty strategy—fit for the “prince (*archon*) of this world” (John 12:31 KJV) as Jesus calls Satan, or “the god of this age” (2Co 4:4) as Paul calls him—to entice people to deny the supernatural here. If you can't beat 'em, then make them totally forget the whole thing. Because if the story is *forgotten*, then it can't be told. And if it isn't *told*, then they can't believe. And if they can't *believe*, then you *win* a great battle, for in keeping men ignorant of his demise, Satan gains a strong foothold.

I do want to say that even though I use strong language, I do not believe that this is a fatal error. Those who take the

human rulers view do have some reasons for doing so (as we will see), and many of those who take this view and so eclipse *Psalm 82's way* of telling the gospel nevertheless do know the gospel as told in other places. In fact, some have even gotten most of Psalm 82's expression of it. So praise God!

The way I consider what we are about to look at is not that if you miss this you are doomed to a life of total theological darkness. I would never call you a heretic. But the antinatural view misses half of the biblical worldview of Holy Scripture. This is [the invisible half](#), the half that talks all about those rulers, thrones, dominions, authorities, princes, stars, angels, sons of God that everyone has heard of but few really know what do to with ... because the worldview is missing from their heads. But when you are finally able to see it, it shines a light upon this world that you never thought was possible. And it makes the work of Christ that much more amazing.

Psalm 82 and Its Placement in the Psalter

Psalm 82 is another of the *Psalms of Asaph*. Its placement here is intentionally related other Asaph songs around it. **First**, along with the previous song, it is concerned with the “true God” in contrast to the “strange” and “foreign” gods (Ps 81:9-10).⁸ This theme has been there throughout this collection of songs. Psalm 77:14 could be translated, “O God, your dominion is over the Holy Ones; What god is greater than you, O God?” (Dahood). Even the first Psalm in the collection (73:9) likens prosperous unbelievers “to the monstrous voracious gods (Dawn and Sunset, the wives of El] who devour everything in sight and yet are not sated.”⁹

Second, Psalm 79:1 (and others: 74:2; 78:55, 62, 71) has used the deliberate word “inheritance” (*nachalah*) for Israel, harkening to Deut 4:20-21 and 32:8-9 where the “sons of God” and “host of heaven” inherit the nations to rule over them, while the LORD’s possession is Israel and he becomes their King and Ruler. These very same sons of God appear

⁸ Lothar, 336.

⁹ Mitchell Dahood S.J., *Psalms II: 51-100: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 17, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 190.

in **Ps 82:6**. As with the previous several songs, Psalm 82 is a song involving the nations.

Third, much has been said about the **wicked** (82:2; cf. 73:3, 12; 75:4, 8, 10), the **afflicted** (82:3; cf. 74:19, 21); and the **needy** (82:4; cf. 74:21) in previous songs. These are major themes that return now in the first part of Psalm 82 as God arises in judgment, which is another idea that has been very important in the previous songs (**Ps 82:1**; cf. 75:2; 7; 76:8-9; etc.).

Finally, Psalm 79-81 are concerned with the nations attacking Israel. But the climax of Psalm 82 has “God” “possessing” (*nachal*) the nations. Inheriting them! It is a stunning contrast to these other songs, and a prophetic reversal of the misfortunes of the sinful nations that was foreseen as far back as Abraham who would become the **Father of Many Nations** (that is the meaning of his name). Therefore, Psalm 82 makes great sense in its placement here in the Psalter.

Psalm 82:1

The song begins with a fascinating (yet controversial) opening. It is *a song of Asaph*, who appears to be **the speaker in vs. 1**, prophetically ushering us into the setting. **What is that setting?** It is the place where the Psalm's dialogue occurs. The ESV says, “**God [Elohim] has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods [elohim] he holds judgment**” (Ps 82:1). Before saying anything else, notice that Jeremiah says the content of what is in this verse is the very essence of what gives a prophet (like Asaph here) his authority: “**For who among [the false prophets] has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his Word**” (Jer 23:18). Notice, this word is both heard and *seen*. That will become important as we go along.

But what does that mean, to stand in the council of the LORD? The word *elohim* appears twice Psalm 82:1, but it is always translated in two different ways. This is the most common word for “God” or “gods” in the Bible (over 2,000 times).¹⁰

¹⁰ “Elohim” is plural in form (*-im* in Hebrew is like *-s* or *-es* in English), but its context determines whether it is singular (God) or plural (gods) in meaning.

All translations agree that **the first Elohim** is singular, as the verb it connects to is singular in form. That verb is the word “**stand**” (*natsab*), but the ESV’s “**takes his place**” obscures something important here. Elohim-God is coming and *standing*. Why?

Where is he standing? The ESV reads, “**the divine council.**” But the NAS has, “**His own congregation.**” These are *very* different. The divine council is known throughout all the world (including the Bible) as the place where the gods meet together to pass judgments as they administer the affairs of the cosmos. However, the congregation in the NAS would be an earthly place where human judges get together to render judgments.

Both are courtroom idea, and both are biblical. For example, in a text that is similar to Psalm 82, Isaiah says, “**The LORD has taken his place to contend; he stands to judge peoples. The LORD will enter into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: ‘It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?’ declares the Lord GOD of hosts” (**Isa 3:13-15**). *Standing* is what the prosecuting**

attorney does in the court. The same is true in Psalm 82. As we will see very shortly, the poor and helpless is where Psalm 82 turns immediately as its own judgment begins. But as you can see in Isaiah, the judgment here is against **human rulers**, the leaders of Israel who are crushing them.

But the divine council is also found all over the place. Daniel 7 is a great place to see it. “As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire ... the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened” (Dan 7:9-10). This is a heavenly scene with the host of heaven (i.e. the heavenly beings) sitting in court. They pronounce a judgment on a great evil beast (11-12), and importantly, “one like a son of man came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him” (13). He comes standing before the seated Great God to hear a judgment that will be given to him. That judgment? **He would receive dominion and glory and a kingdom, and all peoples would serve him (14).**

If both ideas are biblical, then how do we decide what is going on in Psalm 82? We have to look at the grammar and the context. The phrase used here (*be-adat-el*) is **unique in all**

the Bible. It is literally rendered not merely the “divine council” or “congregation” but “the council/congregation of El.”

“El” is a very common word for God in the OT. But El was also the high God who ruled over the seventy “sons of El” in Canaanite religion. One of those sons happens to be Baal. El would preside over the sons in a heavenly divine council. Curiously, the language used for El’s council is *identical* to that used in Psalm 82:1:

Psalm 82:1			Ugarit A		Ugarit B	
<i>b’dt-’l (leaving vowels out)</i>			<i>’dt ’lm</i>		<i>’dr ’l</i>	
<i>b = “in”</i>	<i>’dt = “assembly”</i>	<i>’l = of “El”</i>	<i>’dt = “assembly”</i>	<i>’ilim = “the gods”</i>	<i>’dr = “assembly/circle”</i>	<i>’l = “El”</i>

All modern scholars that take this into consideration are in agreement: “Divine council” or the “council of El” is the correct translation.

This is all confirmed in Psalm 89, which is not accidentally so close to Psalm 82. Listen to how it describes the location of the council. “Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones [i.e. the divine council]! For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of God is like the LORD, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the

holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him?” (Ps 89:5-7).

All of this leads to the last part of the verse where we have the second *elohim*. Almost all translations have the second *elohim* as plural, whether it is “gods” or “judges,” because the adjective (“in the midst”) requires more than one. You can’t be in the midst of just one person.

But it is the English word that is chosen that is so important. The NAS’s choice of “judges” for *elohim* is common among Jewish translations. But the problem is—again—a thorough study of *elohim* shows that it is simply never used for living humans anywhere else in the Bible. We all know this implicitly, which is why we get so upset with Mormons. I know I’m repeating myself here, but it bears repeating. It is very important to the translation. If the word is never used this way anywhere else, what could possibly justify it this one time other than a theological presupposition? That is not exegesis, but reading into the Bible what you want it to say.¹¹

¹¹ Psalm 58:1 in the ESV is informative here (though it is also questioned by translators): “Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods? Do you judge the children of man uprightly?” (Ps 58:1).

But there's more. The "gods" return again in **vs. 6** and no one that I know of renders *elohim* here as "judges." In fact, Jesus used the word "*theoi*" ("gods"), and this clearly refers to the same beings that are in **vs. 1**. As an aside: Perhaps trying to help the readers who are confused about what "gods" actually are, the second century (Christian) **Syriac translation** called the **Peshitta** renders "gods" here as "**angels**," indeed showing just how old the supernatural view is. You also find Church Fathers of a similar time period like **Novatian**,¹² **Origen**,¹³ and **Clement**¹⁴ explaining that Psalm 82 says the same thing.

I actually find this helpful, because I know that a lot of people bristle (or go ballistic) when you say that the "gods" like Zeus or Thor might be real. But what if we called them "angels?"¹⁵ **Is it so hard to believe** that there are fallen angels roaming around this world, heavenly beings that God gave some measure of authority over the earth to, which is why the NT uses ruling language like "principalities,"

¹² **Notavian**, *Treatise concerning the Trinity* XX.

¹³ **Origen**, *Against Celsus* 4.29.

¹⁴ **Pseudo-Clementine Homilies** 16.6.

¹⁵ See the LXX's translation of **Psalm 8:5; 97:7; 138:1**.

“authorities,” “dominions,” “princes,” “thrones,” and so on for them?

Consider again that Satan is called the “**prince (archon) of this world**” (**John 12:31**; etc.). Some of the Fathers said he is the subject of **Psalm 82:7**.¹⁶ Or consider Daniel who speaks of the “**prince (archon in LXX) of Greece**” and the “**prince of Persia**” (**Dan 10:13, 20**), and Israel’s own “prince” who is **Michael** (**10:21; 12:1**). These are all heavenly beings who are ruling over nations. And believe it or not, **Satan** was considered by some Jews to actually be the “**prince of Rome**,” which could explain why a character seemingly so rarely discussed in the OT, is the prince of the world in the NT—he was prince of the Roman Empire, which ruled the world.¹⁷

Importantly, those conservative Christians who have said that at least some of the gods are real, have *never* viewed them as the pagans (or Mormons) do, where they are on the same level of being as God. Rather, He created them. So calling them “angels” can be a help to the confusion, even

¹⁶ **Novatian**, *Trinity* XX.

¹⁷ See my paper on how Zeus, Satan, and Baal may all be the same heavenly entity.
<http://www.dougvandorn.com/Satan%20Zeus%20and%20Baal.pdf>

though, to be quite honest, the Bible uses the term *elohim* often of these creatures.

The point is, given the identical language of a divine council and the fact that vs. 6 talks about gods, it is unjustifiable to do what the NAS does. The ESV is right. Thus my translation, “*God is standing the Council of El [the Divine Council]; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment.*”

A final question to ask here is, **who is doing the judging?** That is, who will start speaking in the next verses? The immediate answer is obvious: God. That’s what it says. God is judging. Therefore, God is speaking. But look at it more carefully. “God” is standing in the midst of the “council of El.” That would mean El is here. Elohim and El could be the same Person (like God coming late to his own meeting?). But probably not. Daniel shows this more clearly when the Ancient of Days was *sitting*, not standing and the son of man is presented standing to him. In the court, standing is what the **Prosecuting Attorney** does. The prosecuting attorney is not El. It is Elohim. Or, to put it in Christian terminology, **The Son is standing in the midst of the Father’s council, he**

is coming to the gods, and he is judging.¹⁸ This is the person who will be speaking in the next three verses, and it becomes very important as we continue. **Note**, we are not getting this from the NT, but from the Psalm itself.

Psalm 82:2-4

The next question is, **who is he judging?** This answer is not as easy to arrive at. **It could be the gods** in whose midst he is holding judgment. The addresses later in this psalm demonstrate that *this is at least the case*. For notice, because of what they have done, “**All the foundations of the earth are shaken**” (**Ps 82:5**). Since when does that happen from the decisions of human judges? Then there is **vs. 7** which says “**Nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.**” This verse is saying exactly what Jeremiah says, “**Thus shall you say to them: ‘The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens’**” (**Jer 10:11**). So it is *at least* the gods that he is judging.

¹⁸ Though he takes a very anti-supernatural view, **James Renihan** does a great job seeing this. See Renihan, “Psalm 82,” (12, 13, 2015), <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=24171735210>

But, it *could also* be someone else he is judging while in the midst of the divine council. This happens regularly in divine council scenes in the Bible. One thinks of the Watchers in council decreeing a judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar, only later to come and tell him about it (**Dan 4:17**), or of the spirits in heaven arguing over who will be a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophets as Ahab is judged (**1Kg 22:19-23**).

John 10:22-42 is actually a fascinating (and rather spooky) parallel here where Jesus goes to the temple—the place where God’s presence on earth dwells, and stands in the midst of the Jewish Rulers who are making judgments upon him, and he quotes this psalm.¹⁹ **But we are getting ahead of ourselves.**

You will almost always find this presented as an either/or. But we may not have to choose, because though the Psalm is addressing the gods directly, of necessity it is also addressing human rulers indirectly. Most do not understand that in ancient religion, **heaven and earth are mirrors of one another** with respect to these things. The

¹⁹ These observations come from Renihan’s sermon “Psalm 82 / John 10,” (12, 20, 2015), <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=24171750434>.

kings of old said that the gods gave them laws to carry out on earth. The gods gave them the laws. The kings carried them out. Hammurabi is explicit about this in his law-code, and the Bible couldn't be more clear about it with regard to the rulers and kings he chose to lead Israel. As Jehoshaphat said to those he appointed, “Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the LORD. He is with you in giving judgment” (2Ch 19:6. See also king Lemuel in Prov 31:5-8). So through this mirrored relationship, kings and rulers acted in the place of the gods on earth, carrying out the will of heaven. Therefore, in this way, both human and heavenly rulers could be in view in vv. 2-4.²⁰ What do they say?

“How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah. Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Ps 82:2-4). We have already seen how Isaiah sees God judging the human rulers for not

²⁰ See Lothar, 330-31 for more on how this both/and idea could work. Then see Novatian (*Trinity XX*) on this early Father applies this both/and, seeing Psalm 82:1 and 6 as referring to angels, but then Psalm 82:1-2 to human rulers.

doing these things. But some will say that we never see gods doing these things. How could they?

Yet, do you now know that these are the very things that **Yahweh himself says that he does** throughout the Bible? And if he isn't a God (obviously, "THE God"), I don't know who is. Listen to how it is put in **Deut 10:17-18**. "**For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God...**" Let's stop here. Notice how he is being compared to the gods. The context is what makes this so interesting.

"... who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing." In other words, God does what the gods don't do, not because they don't exist, but because they are evil. We find this kind of stuff everywhere (**Ex 3:7-8; Ps 12:5; 68:4-5; 103:6; 146:5-7, 9; Prov 22:22-23**; etc.). And that is the point of Ps 82:2-4, and if you can see it, just wait until how important it will become for what Jesus has to say.

This leads to an extremely important **moral application**. Look at the nations and their wickedness. Look at our own nation and how the farther along we get in this post-

Christian, postmodern debased experiment we are doing, the more debauched and depraved we become. This is happening exponentially and before your very eyes. Sometimes we see tangible advancements in a single day, so that you can point back to a day here or a day there and say, “Never before in the history of America until today was this accepted socially or legally or whatever.”

Think about gay marriage as just one example. In the long history of America, and in the longer history of planet earth, no people has ever sanctioned gay marriage. But we are a people untethered from history and morality and reality. And so we legislate these things in a single morning and that very afternoon the whole country acts like this is the way it has always been, and how dare anyone speak out against it. This is nothing short of demonic, satanic insanity. It is profoundly related to the works, the evil works of the gods.

As a country advances in crossing over to the other realm through drugs, sexual “crossing” experiments, tattooing, séances and sorcery, perhaps even our very technologies, energies, and weapons, righteousness and those who speak out for it diminish to the same degree.

Then, those in society that are the most venerable: the unborn, the elderly, the poor, the weak, the orphans become increasingly marginalized & cannibalized by wicked people and institutions that prey upon them.

Where are the voices to for protection? Who is calling for the freedom of inner cities from the slavery to systems, ideas, and fatherlessness that are holding them in dark captivity? In countries where Christianity has not reached or has been given up, we see mass genocides, cruelty beyond imagination, barbarianism, utter poverty.

Because. The gods. Don't. Care.

In fact, they feed off this kind of wickedness among humans one toward another. But our God does. [And you won't believe how he proves it.](#)

Psalm 82:5-7

As we make our way to this most transformative of gospel messages, we come to the next three verses. We have already noticed how something of great cosmic significance

is taking place here. What we want to try to understand now is who is speaking. If **Asaph spoke in vs. 1**, and the next three verses (which are set off by quotation marks) are the words of **Elohim** who stands, **what about now?**

Notice that in vs. 5, the quotation marks in your Bible end. This is because translators rightly see a shift here. We have moved from a prosecutor's **accusation (2-4)** to a judge's **evaluation (5)**. *They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.* Dr. Renihan suggests that this evaluation is not coming from the Attorney, but from the One seated on the council—the Father. On the general point, I think this is correct.²¹

What is the verse saying? First, **they have no knowledge**. This does not mean that they literally don't know anything. What sense would that even make, be they Satan or human rulers? Rather, in the Bible, **knowledge is the fear of the LORD**. Because they do not fear God, they do not rule and preside over the people well. Instead, they sympathize with the wicked while they oppress the poor. This is exactly what

²¹ It could be that Asaph is speaking as a prophet for the Father, as God evaluates what these beings have done. I'm of the opinion that the Father speaks all the way through vs. 7, though it is possible that the Son is speaking on his behalf as his vice-regent.

the nations had been doing to Israel and others in the preceding psalms (which is one more reason why Israel's judges are not first in view, because they never ruled over the nations).

Second, **they walk about in darkness**. This is exactly what the Scripture says about Satan, calling him the prince of the power of the air (**Eph 2:2**), the cosmic power over this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (**6:12**). **Luther** calls him **the Prince of Darkness grim**. The image is one that is the opposite of light, which is the opposite of illumination, which is the opposite of knowledge of good and evil—the ability to judge right from wrong. They simply don't have it. It is erased from their being.

Finally, **all of the foundations of the earth are shaken** because of them. Isaiah says, “**The earth is utterly broken, the earth is split apart, the earth is violently shaken**” (**Isa 24:19**). Therefore, “**On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth**” (**22**). “**In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent,**

Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea” (Isa 27:1).

What does this mean? It means that **the immortal dies**. This is what **vs. 7** says. It is without question that to tell someone that they are going to die like men means that they aren't men. I mean, what else could that possibly mean? That they *were* going to die like cowards *but now* they will pick up their six-shooter, walk ten paces, turn around, and die like real men? Is this some kind of a Spaghetti Western line? Is John Wayne speaking? Of course not.

What gets people here is that it says you will *fall like any prince*. But, they think, only humans are princes. We've already seen several supernatural beings that the Bible calls princes (this is *archon* in the LXX, just like before). The point is, “**You guys think that because you are heavenly royalty that nothing can happen to you? Think again.**” Some will argue that angels don't die. Nonsense. Some most certainly do. **The eternal fire was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41)**. Revelation tells us that Satan, who is also called there the dragon, the serpent, and the devil, will be **thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10)**.

This takes us to the middle verse (**Ps 82:6**) where title “**sons of the Most High**” is related to these “princes.” The Most High (Elyon) is God the Father-King, and his sons would therefore be “**princes.**” This verse is one of ten instances (including the LXX) where the technical phrase (found also with the divine council at Ugarit) “sons of God” of some variety (*beney-Elyon*, *beney-Elohim*, *beney-Elim*, it is basically all the same thing) is used in the OT:

“SONS OF GOD” PASSAGE	HEBREW PHRASE
Genesis 6:2 Genesis 6:4 Job 1:6 Job 2:1 Job 38:7	<i>beney ha-'elohim</i>
Psalm 29:1 Psalm 89:6	<i>beney 'elim</i>
Psalm 82:6	<i>beney 'elyon</i>
Deut 32:8	<i>aggelôn theou*</i>
Deut 32:43	<i>uioi theou*</i>

* found in LXX²²

None of these necessitate that they are humans. Most of them must be heavenly beings. This includes Psalm 89, and its parallel council scene where “the sons of God” are presiding.

This now brings us to Jesus, for he quotes the beginning of this verse in John. “**Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said ‘you are gods’**” (**John 10:34**). We know that this is a quote

²² The LXX reading is almost certainly the original. See **Michael S. Heiser**, “Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*: 158:629 (Jan-Mar, 2001): 52-74.

from the Psalm. But let's look at the context of John 10 a little. As we have seen, Jesus is in the **temple** (**John 10:23**), **standing in the midst** of “the Jews” (**24**), who are clearly the ruling elite—the Pharisees and others. The scene quickly becomes a **court-room trial**, just like Psalm 82.

But *Jesus* is the one on trial. “**If you are the Christ, tell us plainly**” (**24**). Jesus told them, “**I told you, and you do not believe**” (**25**). He then starts talking about “**the works that I do in my Father's name**” that “**bear witness about me**” (**25**). Hmm. Jesus is now defending himself in a legal sense, for that is what witnesses are for. They testify in a court of law.

He says they do not listen, because they are not his sheep (**26**). He gives his sheep eternal life, and **no one snatches them out of my hand** (**28**). He returns to the Father, “**who has given them to me**” who is “**greater than all**” (**29**). But then he says **no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand** (**29**), implying that he and the Father have the same hand, which he puts rather bluntly by saying, “**I and the Father are one**” (**30**).

The Jews picked up stones again to stone him (**31**).

Jesus stays with the “**good works**” theme, asking them for which one of these they are going to stone him (**32**).

They say that it isn't for a good work, but because of blasphemy, "Because you, being man, make yourself God" (33). They are perceptive enough to at least get that!

Then Jesus quotes this verse. What all commentators who adopt the non-supernatural view believe here is that Jesus is saying, in one way or another, that the OT in this place calls the predecessors of the Pharisees "gods." This, as we have seen, is exegetically unjustifiable. *And, it makes no sense of the argument.* For, what good would it do for Jesus to say, "Look, guys. The Bible says you are gods too. Therefore, why can't I call myself a God? I'm a god, you're a god, we're all gods, so let's just get along." People just don't stop to think about the implications of their felt-need to "protect" a God who does not need us to protect him. Let's let the Scripture say what it says and try to conform ourselves to it rather than it to what we think it should say.

Notice also that if this is in fact what he is doing, this doesn't actually help his cause. For at the end of his argument what do they want to do? "Arrest him" (39). Why? Because they obviously thought he was still *blaspheming*. His argument didn't get him off the hook, like the human judges view logically necessitates. It makes it

worse for him. But we have skipped some very important things after the quote.

I have to confess that I've thought about these next two verses for many years, and I have always felt like their meaning has eluded me. I think I finally understand. They say, “If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’” (John 10:35-36). Let me give you what I believe is the meaning.²³

“*If he called them gods...*” Rather than calling the Jews gods, this refers to the Father/Son calling the heavenly created sons of God “gods.” It was a pronouncement sometime long ago which preceded those he makes when he calls Israel or Christians “sons of God” (but never “gods”). What a glorious blessing and gift he gave to Satan and Baal and the others, that they should be adopted into the very family of the Uncreated God himself. We think of them

²³ Thank you to Matt Foreman for the discussion on this. Also, Renihan's sermon was confirmatory of much of this.

only as evil, and they are now. But once upon a time, they had not sinned.

“*To whom the word of God came...*” This is actually the most important line perhaps in the entire section. Most think this “word” here refers to the time when God made this announcement to the Jews, presumably back in Exodus.²⁴ But “the word” here is “*logos*.” And this is John’s Gospel. He opens his Gospel with the *logos* whom the entire burden of his whole book is to prove is Jesus Christ. The verse says, “*To whom the Logos of God came...*” This does not refer to when they were called “gods,” but when the Logos came to them in the council. Remember how Jeremiah says the prophets see the word in the LORD’s council?

Jesus means exactly what Psalm 82:1 says. Elohim stood in the divine council and rendered judgment among the gods. In other words, the Logos came to the divine council and therefore came to judge the gods. Jesus is doing nothing more than saying exactly what the Psalm says. Except that he is saying that *HE* is the one who came to the gods. You

²⁴ The Jews said it took place at Sinai. See James Ackerman, “The Rabbinic Interpretation of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John,” *HTR* 59.2 (1966): 186-87 [186-91].

think that will help him get off the charges of blasphemy? No. And he doesn't want to, because he actually is God! That's his point in all of this. Not that they are all gods, but that He is the God who judged the gods!

“And the scripture cannot be broken...” This strange line seems almost like a redundant throw-away, especially if “the word” was the Scripture. It makes very little sense. But if you understand that he is talking about the judgment that was pronounced against the gods throughout the Psalm, it makes perfect sense. That judgment is firm. They will die. It cannot be broken. The Logos has spoken.

This is the only intelligible way to make sense of **vs. 36-38**. *“Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’”* (36). Then Jesus turns back to his works suddenly (37-38). *He is not changing the subject*. Instead, he is proving that the Judgment that HE made against the gods (and by proxy against the Pharisees if they do not repent) is just. How? Because unlike the gods, who are cruel, who exalt the wicked, and who trample on the poor and needy, Jesus has been doing the very opposite for the 2-3 years. Friend, do you see it? Do you see the glory?

What are the works he has been doing? **Forgiving** sinners. **Healing** the lame. Causing the blind to see. **Loving** the poor. **Caring** for the widows and orphans. **Exorcizing** demons. **Judging** the wicked. **Defending** the weak and needy. His works demonstrate that he is Yahweh who says that this is what Yahweh does, unlike the gods. Do you see it?

Beloved, there are things that a man who walked this earth said that are so astonishing he is either certifiably insane, or he is the Son of God. *The works that I'm doing, believe those.* See what kind of a man this is. See what kind of a God he is! The gods didn't do these things that as sons of God they were supposed to do, so they will die like men. Jesus becomes a man (who will die) and starts doing the things gods and men are supposed to do, and proves that he is God. His whole argument is that if they were called gods and sons of God and did not do those things, *how much more* do I have the right to be called the Son of God when I'm doing the very things the Father sent me into the world to do? This is much more extraordinary than simply saying, **“We're all gods, so what's your problem.”**

Psalm 82:8

We are left then with only **vs. 8**. But oh, what a verse it is! “**Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations.**” First, **who is speaking?** It could be Asaph again speaking as a prophet. But if it is, he is doing nothing more than overhearing the words of the Father to the Son. Notice, Elohim returns. “**Arise, O God (Elohim).**” In the Psalm, Elohim is the Son, El is the Father. “Arise, my Son.”

This is parallel to Ps 2. “**I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you...**” (Ps 2:7). The Father speaks to Christ the Son. A moment ago we heard Jesus say that the Father “**who consecrated him**” and sent him into the world. When did he consecrate him? *Before* he sent him to the world.

Psalm 2:7 calls it **a decree**, but it does not say when it was made. The unknown psalmist of Psalm 2 overheard it at some point in his life. As did David in Psalm 110 when he heard “**The LORD says to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’**” (Ps 110:1).²⁵

²⁵ **Going Deeper:** Curiously, that Psalm goes on to speak about the Father swearing to the Son that he is a priest in the order of Melchizedek (4). Why is that curious? Because perhaps the oldest interpretation of Psalm 82 that we have comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls and in those

Psalm 2 finishes the decree this way. The Father says to the Son, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps 2:8). This is in direct relationship to Deuteronomy 32:8-9, where the sons of God receive the nations as their inheritance, but Yahweh (that is the Son of God, the Angel of the LORD) receives as his inheritance the nation of Israel.

But now, in Psalm 82, the gods must die (by the way, they aren't gone yet). And what will happen to the nations? The decree is, “No. I won't leave the nations in darkness forever. I will save a remnant from all of them. Ask me and I'll give them all to you!”

Psalm 82 tells you how we get there. The sons of God were wicked and did not rule well. So they were disinherited and sentenced to die. But in their place, one other Son does get their inheritance. And because his works are perfect and just, because he cares for the poor and needy and judges the wicked and godless, he is commanded by his Father to Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations.

scrolls, Melchizedek is said to be the Elohim of Psalm 82:1. “He is the heavenly figure who executes divine judgment on Satan and all evil peoples” (notice the both/and).²⁵ Even more interesting, in the Scrolls, Melchizedek is sometimes equated with the Messiah, that is with Christ himself, which is something I think Hebrews actually does.

This was in accordance with the Daniel 7 divine council prophecy of the son of man. He is given a dominion that all peoples should worship him. It's the same thing. One looks at him as a man. The other as God. And still another, Psalm 2, as the Son. Through his own death, he has conquered the gods. Following his death, he was raised from the dead, proving himself to be God of gods. Paul, alluding to all of this says that it began when Christ was raised from the dead. This is when he was “declared to be the Son of God in power” (Rom 1:4).

Like the Pharisees who sought to put Christ on trial, you also are in a similar spot. Everyone has to make a judgment whether they will believe Christ or call him a blasphemer. There is no middle ground here. You cannot sit on the fence.

What judgment will you render? Where is your allegiance? In whom do you put your faith? What God will you trust? What kingdom will you be loyal to? Do you have eyes to see that there are things going on in invisible places that pertain directly to your freedom in Christ? This is the fork in the road that lay before you now. Which direction will you go?

One kingdom exalts wickedness, shows partiality, and is full of injustice. This extends from the fallen heavens to the wicked earth below. Those in it are slaves to its will. This includes all of its leaders at any level or authority: religion, state, family. The other rescues and delivers and maintains the poor, the orphan, the weak, needy, and destitute? This extends from Heaven to earth through the glorious reign of Jesus Christ. Those in it are set free by God himself to serve and love and carry out dominion on earth as God intended.