

MICHAEL HEISER'S GNOSTIC HERESEY



Written by HEATH HENNING

Michael Heiser's Gnostic Heresy

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Crept In Unawares: Mysticism

*The Unbiblical Realm: Refuting the Divine Council of Michael Heiser's Deuteronomy 32
Worldview*

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Michael Heiser's Gnostic Heresy (Part 1)

While working on a commentary for Psalm 1, I was planning to write an excursus on the how the phrase “counsel” and “sitteth in the seat” carry a conceptual parallel to Psalm 82. Being aware of an “angelic” interpretation of Psalm 82, I planned to study the view to determine whether I could be persuaded that the “human rulers” position was wrong. This turned my attention to the work of Michael Heiser. First, I read his doctoral dissertation on the topic, which presented a polytheistic view of the Bible. I was unsure if what he was stating was his actual opinion or if he was slanting it toward the liberal view since his Ph.D. is from University of Madison, which is a liberal campus, even by secular standards. I perused some of his scholarly articles published in evangelical journals and was shocked to see the same polytheistic opinion published by “conservative” evangelical journals. I finally read his book *The Unseen Realm* which presents his complete theological system convincing me this man is teaching a neo-Gnostic heresy which is being sold to and accepted by evangelicals.

In my book *Crept In Unawares: Mysticism*, I wrote in the preface about Peter Jones' material in distinction to my own position. I stated, “The major difference between our works is that he primarily indicates that liberal theologians are working to revive Gnosticism, while I argue Gnosticism has already infiltrated that which may be considered conservative Christianity. The Bible predicts a growing apostasy in Christianity during the end-time, not unbelieving scholars reviving an ancient heresy.”¹ Dr. Heiser fulfills this prediction in that his education is from the extreme liberal persuasion and his writings are targeting conservative evangelicals. However, after reading his Gnostic theological system as presented in his book *The Unseen Realm*, I was shocked to realize that the apostasy has grown to the degree that evangelicals would accept blatant Gnostic views. A glance at the footnotes of any of his writings will reveal his dependence on rank liberal scholars coming from publishing companies such as Brill and Tübingen.

Heiser's Hermeneutic

The root cause of the issue with Heiser's theology is his interpretation method, which errs on multiple levels. First, he interprets Scripture in light of pagan literature to interject polytheism into the Bible. As Peter Jones suggested of Gnosticism, “Whenever ‘Christian’

¹ Heath Henning, *Crept In Unawares: Mysticism*, Truthwatchers Publications (Truthwatchers.com, 2019), p. 4

theology looks to pagan polytheism for inspiration—as it is doing now and as it did then—it discovers a titillating variety of reading techniques, without which the Scriptures of the one, true God would be strictly unusable.”² Indeed, this hermeneutic method reigns supreme in Heiser’s writings.

One critic of Heiser has similarly commented,

Heiser has a bad hermeneutical methodology because he has a bad hermeneutic philosophy. This bad philosophy has led him to bad conclusions. There have always been Christians who have tried to come up with some unique and revolutionary interpretations. Heiser is not the first to come up with this notion of a council of gods. You can see this in Gnosticism, and Marcionism, and in other adaptations of basic Christian doctrines. I’m sure he won’t be the last.³

Heiser responded to Howe’s criticism, stating, “I assume that the Scripture writers were communicating to people intentionally – people that lived in their day and who shared their same worldview. This assumption is in place because I’m sensitive to imposing a foreign worldview on the writers.”⁴ In other words, he admits his hermeneutics is focused on imposing the pagan worldview on the biblical authors, even though the Bible itself commanded the Israelites to not enquire into the theology of their pagan neighbors (Deuteronomy 12:29-32), and to destroy any Israelite guilty of doing so (Deuteronomy 13:6-18).

One simple example of this is Heiser’s discussion of pagan deities were known to inhabit gardens and mountains, which he formulates an entire theology revolving around this concept imported on the Bible.⁵ However, the Bible condemns this pagan practice as idolatry on “high places” (Leviticus 26:30; Numbers 22:41; 33:52; Deuteronomy 12:2; 33:29; 1 Kings 3:2; 12:31-32; 13:32-33; 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kings 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 33; 16:4; 17:11, 32; 21:3; 23:5; Psalm 78:58; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; 32:25; 48:35) and “groves” (Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:3; Judges 3:7; 1 Kings 14:15; 18:19; 2 Kings 18:4; 23:14; Isaiah 17:8; 27:9) with idols under “every green tree” (Deuteronomy 12:2; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 16:4; 17:10; Isaiah 57:5; Jeremiah 2:20; 3:6, 13; Ezekiel 6:13). God rebukes this idolatry that Heiser thinks is valid biblical theology, “your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the Lord, which have burned incense upon the mountains,

² Peter Jones, *Pagans in the Pews*, Regal (Ventura, CA: 2001), pp. 117-118

³ Dr. Thomas Howe, “The Unseen Assumption,” <https://ses.edu/the-unseen-assumptions/>

⁴ Dr. Michael Heiser, “Response to Dr. Thomas Howe’s Thoughts on the Unseen Realm,” August 6, 2019; <https://drms.com/response-dr-thomas-howes-thoughts-unseen-realm/>

⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 44-48

and blasphemed me upon the hills” (Isaiah 65:7). Where is the logic of building a “biblical theology” by imposing pagan practices which are specifically condemned in the Bible?

One of his foolish arguments for allegorizing his mountain opinion is presented in his citing of Psalm 48:1-2, stating, “As anyone who has been to Jerusalem knows, Mount Zion isn’t much of a mountain. It certainly isn’t located in the geographical north—its actually in the southern part of the country.”⁶ Mount Zion is on the north of the city Zion, also called Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 5:2; Psalm 135:21; 147:12; Isaiah 10:32; 30:19). Heiser contends, “This description would be a familiar one to Israel’s pagan neighbors, particularly at Ugarit. Its actually out of their literature.”⁷

The problems with Heiser’s hermeneutic is he focuses on ambiguous text, plays fast and loose with the Hebrew language whenever he can, and when he cannot twist an interpretation of the existing grammar to fit his presupposition he becomes the textual critic to find some texts to fit or just changes the text itself to justify his position. Other Christian apologists have complained about Heiser’s handling of the Scripture. “Much of Dr. Heiser’s argument with respect to the text relies on a higher critical framework that is repulsive to the traditional evangelical scholar. This makes interacting with Dr. Heiser difficult from the standpoint of finding any common ground upon which to premise discussions.”⁸ Giovanni Filmoramo, an Italian Gnostic scholar indicated the same issue with ancient Gnostics. “Gnostic editors manipulate the sacred text in order to make it suit their purpose... by retouching, adding a phrase or choosing a different translation.”⁹ In all this we find that Heiser’s theology does not come from any biblical text, but is read into it from foreign pagan literature and when it does not fit the grammar, he shifts the biblical text to allow the pagan worldview into the sacred Scripture.

One of the major rules of biblical hermeneutics is to interpret the Bible from passages that are clear and easy to understand, and do not emphasize difficult passages; and definitely do not produce an entire theological system based on a difficult passage. Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe have written in their book *When Critics Ask*, concerning the basic rules of hermeneutic principles, errors are made when “*Neglecting to*

⁶ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 227

⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 227

⁸ TurretinFan, *Die Like Men? A Reponses to Dr. Michael Heiser,* October 19, 2009; <https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/exegesis/die-like-men-a-response-to-dr-michael-heiser/>

⁹ Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, Basil Blackwell (Cambridge, MA: 1990), p. 94

Interpret Difficult Passages in the Light of Clear Ones.”¹⁰ They also reference the mistake of “*Basing a Teaching on an Obscure Passage.*”¹¹ Elaborating on this rule, they write,

First, we should not build a doctrine on an obscure passage. The rule of thumb in Bible interpretation is “the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things.” This is called the perspicuity (clearness) of Scripture. If something is important, it will be clearly taught in Scripture and probably in more than one place. Second, when a given passage is not clear, we should never conclude that it means something that is opposed to another plain teaching of Scripture.¹²

Heiser’s theology is a perfect example of what happens when these fundamental rules are ignored.

He attempts to persuade his readers that “we have layers of tradition that filter the Bible in our thinking.”¹³ Actually we have centuries of Bible scholars that have followed formulated interpretive methods, but he filters the Bible and his theology through ancient pagan Ugaritic theology, not the Israelite religion as we all read in the Bible. He is dependent on circular reasoning to find any nuance to confirm his presupposition of this divine council. He states, “As with everything else in biblical theology, what happens in the unseen world frames the discussion [of eschatology].”¹⁴

Heiser frequently uses allegorical interpretations when the text cannot be interpreted toward his view. Heiser repeatedly uses the terms “symbolic interpretation” or “supernatural interpretation” to express his allegorical hermeneutics, similar to how Origen distinguished between the physical/literal versus the spiritual/allegorical methods. Heiser states, “Literal readings are inadequate to convey the full theological message and the entirety of the worldview context.”¹⁵ Wrong! The literal interpretation is perfectly adequate unless you are attempting to force a foreign worldview into the text like Heiser is doing. He states,

¹⁰ Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties*, Victor Books (Wheaton, IL: 1992), p. 17 (italics in original)

¹¹ Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties*, Victor Books (Wheaton, IL: 1992), p. 18 (italics in original)

¹² Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties*, Victor Books (Wheaton, IL: 1992), p. 19

¹³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 61

¹⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 349

¹⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 90

Biblical writers regularly employ conceptual metaphors in their writings and thinking. *Conceptual metaphor* refers to the way we use a concrete term or idea to communicate abstract ideas. If we marry ourselves to the concrete (“literal”) meaning of words, we’re going to miss the point the writer was angling for in many cases.”¹⁶

There is a validity to this point, such as Christ speaking about eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:53, 54, 56), which He said were spiritual words (John 6:63); but this does not justify the extremes of Dr. Heiser.

Another example is provided about the enemy in the Garden of Eden. “My task in this chapter and the next is to help you think beyond the literalness of the serpent language. If it’s true that the enemy in the garden was a supernatural being, then he wasn’t a snake.”¹⁷ He then spends two chapter to explain why he needs to allegorize away the literal interpretation. But why could it not be both, a supernatural being possessing a snake. What could Genesis 3:14 possibly mean if not taken literally? Why did all the New Testament authors express it in literal terms (2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; Revelations 12:9)? Why did all the early translations such as the Septuagint¹⁸ and the Peshitta¹⁹ translate the word literally as “serpent?”

If allegorical interpretations are not enough to support his theology, Heiser will revert to meddling with the grammar. He writes, “But *n–ch–sh* are also the consonants of a verb. If we changed the vowel to a verbal form (recall that Hebrew originally had no vowels), we would have *nochesh*, which means ‘the diviner.’”²⁰ He also suggests *nachash* “copper, bronze (by implication, shiny)”²¹ but says in a footnote, “I am not arguing that *nachash* should not be translated ‘serpent.’”²² But that is exactly what he is suggesting throughout the whole discussion, that the word should not be understood as a literal serpent.

¹⁶ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 387

¹⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 74

¹⁸ The Septuagint Version, Greek and English, Samuel Bagster and Sons Limited (London), p. 3

¹⁹ The Holy Bible from Ancient Eastern Manuscripts: Containing the Old and New Testaments Translated from the Peshitta, The Authorized Bible of the Church of the East (George M. Lamsa), A. J. Holman Company (Philadelphia, PA: 1933, 1957), p. 9

²⁰ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 87

²¹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 87

²² Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 88, fn. 2

The common claim of scholars that the Hebrew vowels did not exist in the original is not established as fact, and history is strongly against the speculative claims (which is essentially an argument from silence).²³ The mere similarity of consonants in the Hebrew language is no reason to suggest various interpretations that would contradict the context of Genesis 3 which contrasts the subtilty of the serpent against “any beast of the field” (Genesis 3:1). Robert Alden states, “First, the word *nāhāsh* is almost identical to the word for ‘bronze’ or ‘copper,’ Hebrew *nēhōshet* (q.v.). Some scholars think the words are related because of a common color of snakes (cf. our ‘copperheads’), but others think that they are only coincidentally similar.”²⁴ Concerning the similarity of “serpent” and “divination,” Robert Alden states, “some make a connection to snake charming. More contend that there is a similarity of hissing sounds between enchanter and serpents and hence the similarity of words.”²⁵ Of course, this similarity could be just as coincidental, but there are word-plays with these similar words in Scriptures (Ecclesiastes 10:11; Jeremiah 8:17) which would indicate they are different words.

Heiser does not limit his textual criticism to ignoring vowel points, but he goes as far as altering consonants to completely change words in conjunction with his “symbolic” interpretation to fit his agenda. Speaking of Armageddon, he changes M-G-D to M-‘-D making it refer to the “mountain of assembly” [*har mo’ed*] (Isaiah 14:13) and explains away the final *nun* of the spelling in Zechariah 12:11.²⁶ This is all based on his idea that the battle takes place at Jerusalem not Megiddo, but the text only says the armies are gathered to Megiddo (Revelation 16:16) with no mention of a battle waged in the area. Heiser alters the text which reads מִגְדּוֹן (*Megiddon*) and Ἀρμαγεδδών (*Armageddon*) to read הַר-מוֹעֵד (*har-mo’ed*). He claims the Hebrew consonant *ayin* (ע) make the sound of the letter *g*, but *ayin* is a silent consonant (being transliterated above by the ’ because it is silent). He is well aware of the fact that *ayin* and *gimel* are significantly different and the use of these different Hebrew letters reflect a humongous distinction. It would seem he is depending on his readers to be ignorant of Hebrew.

Heiser sees himself as the authority for interpretation, making anyone not him unable to understand God’s word and thus become dependent on his teachings. He writes, “The Hebrew Bible has many examples, but they are obvious only to a reader of Hebrew

²³ see Heath Henning, “Evidence the Hebrew Vowel Points were Inspired,” July 15:2016; <http://truthwatchers.com/evidence-hebrew-vowel-points-inspired/>

²⁴ Robert L. Alden, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke) Moody Press (Chicago, IL 1980), Vol. 2, p. 1347

²⁵ Robert L. Alden, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke) Moody Press (Chicago, IL 1980), Vol. 2, p. 1348

²⁶ see Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), pp. 368-373

who is informed by the ancient worldview of the biblical writers.”²⁷ Apparently that means these “many examples” are only obvious to him since no one other than himself is offering his bazar interpretations. I can read Hebrew and am well acquainted with the ancient worldview of the surrounding pagan nations of Israel, but nothing in Heiser’s theology is apparent to me. To remark on Heiser’s self-boasting, after reading over 1,000 pages of his material, I have not seen him once referenced the most basic scholarly text to be informed by the ancient world, *Ancient Near Eastern Text Relating to the Old Testament (ANET)*.²⁸

He is also very selective in what he is willing to recognize and completely ignores the context that refute his presupposed theological view. He admits he uses “a few selective points of connection and issues relevant to those connection.”²⁹ By ignoring the full counsel of God’s Word in order to select only what fits his presupposed pagan worldview that he wants to force into the Scriptures, he has produced a hybrid religious opinion just as the ancient Gnostic heretics. The Apostle Paul taught the full counsel of God (Acts 20:27) without “handling the word of God deceitfully” (2 Corinthians 4:2), but revealed no clear witness in his writings that confirm Heiser’s ideas. To say the very least, Dr. Michael S. Heiser falls into the category of what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17).

²⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), pp., p. 373

²⁸ *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Third Edition (ed. James B. Pritchard) Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969).

²⁹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 75, fn. 3

Polytheism (Part 2)

Discussing once again the heresies of Michael Heiser, I was originally planning to expound his theology thoroughly as a foundation to this series of articles, but now need to respond to his indignant reply of my earlier post. First, it cannot be called a reply, as he did not even comment on anything I wrote. He only expressed mockery and sarcasm (even called me “illiterate”) as if he should not be classified as a Gnostic and polytheist. Heiser’s argument against being called a Gnostic is simply saying he has lectures on YouTube about Gnosticism, which simply confirms my point. He is knowledgeable of Gnosticism just as he is knowledgeable of ancient Ugaritic literature which he has habitually synchronized into his theology.

As far as his defense from being called a polytheist, he must have forgotten what he has written, or is self-deluded, or is trying to deceive his regular readers. He offered 3 quotes from his own work, but none of these quotes deny polytheism. What they are expressing is what other scholars who interpret ancient Israel’s religion as having evolved out from polytheism into monotheism during the Persian period. This was the thought he refuted in his doctoral dissertation. He wrote, “All the scholarship to date on the divine council has focused on Israel’s religion prior to the sixth century B.C.E., since it is commonly believed that after Israel emerged from exile, the idea of a pantheon of gods headed by Yahweh had been abandoned in favor of an intolerant monotheism.”³⁰ I am well aware of this, but what he did not quote himself as having stated is that his argument is that Judaism continued to express a plurality of deities beyond the Persian period into the Second Temple period. In other words, the way he refuted this other view is by claiming that Judaism continued to be polytheistic. As he quotes himself in his reply to my article:

Many scholars believe that Psalm 82 and other passages demonstrate that the religion of ancient Israel began as a polytheistic system and then evolved into monotheism. I reject that idea, along with any other explanations that seek to hide

³⁰ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 10; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

the plain reading of the text. In all such cases, the thinking is misguided. (Unseen Realm, pp. 29-30)³¹

What he is considering “the plain reading of the text” is his view of polytheism continuing into the Second Temple period.

He rejects that the Bible is monotheistic. “‘Monotheism’ as it is currently understood means that no other gods exist. This term is inadequate for describing Israelite religion, but suggesting it be done away with would no doubt cause considerable consternation among certain parts of the academic community, not to mention the interested laity.”³²

What Heiser stated in the conclusion of his dissertation shows that he does not reject multitudes of gods, he only rejects monotheism:

More specifically, the dissertation demonstrated that Deuteronomy 4 and 32 evince a monolatrous worldview, a conclusion shared by many scholars of Israelite religion. The God of Deuteronomy created the other gods (which are not idols, lest Yahweh be a [*sic*] idol maker) and decreed they be worshipped by the non-elect Gentile nations.³³

When I read his dissertation, I thought he had slanted it towards an acceptable view for the liberal secular university he studied at, so I read his articles published in “conservative evangelical” journals which espoused the same thing. This concerned me so I emailed Heiser with the question:

Im writing a book on Psalm 1 and was planning an excursus on the Divine Counsel. A friend of mine is more familiar with your work and suggested your name. I read your doctorates dissertation on the topic. When I discussed your position with my friend, he implied that he understood your view differently. My specific question is what is your actual view on monolatry in the Bible? Do you take the Divine

³¹ Michael Heiser, “Of Truth Watchers and Inept Readers,” Nov. 28, 2020; <https://drmsb.com/truth-watchers-inept-readers/>

³² Michael Heiser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” Bulletin for Biblical Research, 18.1 (2008), p. 28-29

³³ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 243-244; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

Counsel as a second tier of gods as in the dissertation, or simply as angels with classical monotheism as my friend has understood your material?³⁴

His answer was: “Heath[,] You likely need to read *Unseen Realm*. But I have some journal articles at the link below that I think would answer your question anyway. The divine council = the heavenly host (those loyal to God). There are tiers and functions. Monolatry is a good term, but not an adequate one (it says nothing about Yahweh’s unique ontology). None of the modern terms we use are adequate to express all that needs to be expressed.”³⁵ His doctoral dissertation clearly claimed monolatry was what the Bible taught, but now in a personal correspondence he rejected it and all other currently used terminology as inadequate. Monolatry is the belief of one supreme God without denying the existence of other gods, which is essentially what most polytheistic religions are.

So, I read his book *The Unseen Realm*. In his reply to my article he said I “can’t even get 25 or so pages into my work without screwing up.”³⁶ He writes in his book, “*The God of the Old Testament was part of an assembly – pantheon – of other gods.*”³⁷ Simply stated, polytheism means *poly* = “many,” *theism* = belief in or about god(s). A “*pantheon*—of other gods” is polytheism! He prefers the term “divine plurality,” as a semantic game to avoid being labeled a polytheist. Just define his terms: “divine” means “deity” or “god;” “plurality” means “more than one, many;” hence he is teaching “many gods,” which normal people call “polytheism.”

Heiser argues, “It is not difficult to demonstrate that the Hebrew Bible assumes and affirms the existence of other gods. The textbook passage is Psalm 82.”³⁸ As I commented above, he starts with this “textbook passage” to develop his entire theological system, which is the heart of his hermeneutics and error.

This article will discuss Heiser’s attempt to avoid being labeled a polytheist by: a) redefining the word and utilizing other terms as if they are not synonyms (though he clearly expresses his belief in many gods), and b) his attempt to redefine polytheism by claiming his view is different because he holds to the ontological uniqueness of Jehovah.

³⁴ Personal correspondence, sent June 13, 2020 from Heath Henning to Michael Heiser

³⁵ Personal correspondence, received June 13, 2020 from Michael Heiser, to Heath Henning

³⁶ Michael Heiser, “Of Truth Watchers and Inept Readers,” Nov. 28, 2020; <https://drms.com/truth-watchers-inept-readers/>

³⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 11

³⁸ Michael Heiser, “Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 18.1 (2008), p. 2

Heiser's polytheistic/monolatrous views are clearly explained in his book *The Unseen Realm*, which seems hard for him to say I messed it up. "The denial that other *elohim* [the Hebrew word for "gods"] exist insults the sincerity of biblical writers and the glory of God. How is it coherent to say that verses extolling the superiority of Yahweh above all *elohim* (Ps 97:9) are really telling us Yahweh is greater than beings that don't exist."³⁹ Obviously the Scriptures was written in a culture where pagan neighbors believed in other gods, so the biblical authors assert Jehovah's superiority over the non-existing gods of these pagans because the Israelites frequently turned to them adapting the pagan worldview of magic powers. Similar expression of superiority can be found about Allah in the Quran, but no scholars are questioning if that implies Muhammad was presenting a polytheistic religion.

Heiser's doctoral dissertation revolved around the idea that Israel's religion was originally monolatry, and multitudes of lesser gods remained a part of the religious view throughout the Second Temple period contrary to the liberal scholars that claimed the religion evolved from being polytheistic to become monotheistic after the Babylonian captivity. Philo, a Jewish author from Alexandria, Egypt, writing during the first half of the first century made many comments about "the second deity, who is the Word of the supreme Being[.]"⁴⁰ Historically, this has been understood within a Christian context as some pre-developed Trinitarian perspective being expressed about the *Logos*. Recent scholars have developed the "two Powers in Heaven" expression to explain Philo (which will be discussed later). Heiser wishes to turn Philo into evidence for monolatry but ignoring the fact that Philo rejected the idea, stating, "There is one true God only: but they who are called Gods, by an abuse of language, are numerous[.]"⁴¹ In other words, just because things can be called gods does not mean they are really gods.

Philo expresses the true God is indicated by the use of the article; while false gods are without the article.⁴² Philo's argument would stand firm in the Septuagint of Psalm 82 (Psalm 81 in the LXX); but not grammatical accurate for the Hebrew. "God" has no article in Psalm 82:1a, but "the mighty" does, being a construct form. In Psalm 82:1b, "in the midst of the gods" has no article though the prefix "in" (*bē*) is not infrequently anarthrous (which is when the article is lacking in the original language but translation demands one). Gesenius tells us of the rule that the article is supposed to be missing when following a

³⁹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 35

⁴⁰ Philo, Questions and Answers on Genesis, 2.62; in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), p. 834

⁴¹ Philo, On Dreams, 1.229; in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), p. 385

⁴² Philo, On Dreams, 1.228-232; in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), pp. 385-386

preposition בְּ as is the case in Psalm 82:1b.⁴³ He mentions “Exceptions to this rule occurs almost exclusively in the later books[.]”⁴⁴

Craig Keener expressed, “Jewish people generally treated these spiritual powers as angelic authorities appointed by God, although, in some Jewish sources, God appointed them to lead the nations astray or they had become malevolent powers and would be judged at the end of the age.”⁴⁵ Keener’s reference to the fact that these “powers” are treated as angels needs to be noted as contrast to Heiser who insists on calling them “gods.” Jewish sources emphasize the angelic nature, which Heiser’s opinion is due to his imputing pagan religions into the Bible. Heiser says, “Jub[ilees] 15:30b-32 provides the fullest description of the world view of Duet 4:19-20; 32:8-9; and Daniel 10 [.]”⁴⁶ If Jubilees 15:31-32 is the clearest Jewish text on this idea, let us see what it says:

And he [God] sanctified them [Israel] and gathered them from all the sons of man because (there are) many nations and many people, and they all belong to him, but over all of them he caused spirits to rule so that they might lead them astray from following him. But over Israel he did not cause any angel or spirit to rule because he alone is their ruler and he will protect them and he will seek for them at the hand of his angels and at the hand of his spirits and at the hand of all of his authorities so that he might guard them and bless them and they might be his and he might be theirs henceforth and forever.⁴⁷

This passage clearly says angels are given to rule over the nations. It also mentions “spirits” (Heiser wants them to be “gods”), but cross references in the text of Jubilees indicates these “spirits” are angels. Earlier in this text it is identified that in Jared’s “days the angels of the LORD, who were called Watchers, came down to the earth in order to teach the sons of man, and preform judgement and uprightness upon the earth.”⁴⁸ Again it is confirmed, “against his angels who he had sent to the earth he was very angry. He commanded that

⁴³ E. Kautzsch, ed., Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, Trans. A. E. Cowley (2nd English Ed.) Clarendon Press (Oxford: 1910), p. 112 (§35n).

⁴⁴ E. Kautzsch, ed., Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, Trans. A. E. Cowley (2nd English Ed.) Clarendon Press (Oxford: 1910), p. 417 (§35n).

⁴⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Acts An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 3:1-14:28*, Baker Academic (Grand Rapids, MI: 2014), Vol. 3, p. 2344

⁴⁶ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 161; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

⁴⁷ The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 87

⁴⁸ Jubilees 4:15; O. S. Wintermute, in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 62

they be uprooted from all their dominion.”⁴⁹ So it was angels, who are also called Watchers, that had dominion on earth to judge and teach mankind. The best text Heiser has for his view refutes his designation of “gods” to prove they are understood as angels.

1 Enoch 61:10 mentions “all the angels of governance[.]”⁵⁰ and Philo often uses the term “powers,” but is clearly applying it to “heavenly souls; for the word of prophecy is accustomed to call these souls angels.”⁵¹ Later rabbinic text such as *Pesikta De-Rab Kahana* comments about, “the counterparts in heaven of the princes of the earth’s nations[.]”⁵² Approximately contemporaneous is 3 Enoch which speaks of various beings of the angelic order along with Satan who “sits with Samma’el, Prince of Rome, and with Dubbi’el, Prince of Persia[.]”⁵³ Samma’el is also called “the Prince of the Accusers, who is greater than all the princes of kingdoms[.]”⁵⁴ We do find an expression of angelic rulers over the Gentile nations within ancient Judaism. The emphasis here is that these were angels, not gods!

Craig Keeners asserts that much of this language developed as part of the intellectual Jewish apologetics in a polytheistic culture. Speaking of paganism surrounding the first century, Keener writes:

Some limited monotheistic trends might appear in much earlier eras in Egypt and Syria, but it was Xenocrates the Eleatic philosopher (sixth century B.C.E.) who probably introduced the idea into Greek philosophy. Except in pantheistic forms such as traditional Stoicism (e.g., Sen. Y. *Ben.* 4.8.1-3), this “monotheism” usually did not, in fact, claim only one deity but spoke of “one God” as a supreme deity with many manifestations or powers. Middle Platonists, however, saw one ultimate deity behind the various manifestations of deity.

Hellenistic Jewish apologists such as Philo knew and were able to exploit these tendencies. It appears, however, that only intellectuals [among the pagans], in fact, embraced this trend toward something resembling monotheism; it was not shared by the masses. Moreover, apart from the God-fearers, most thinkers interested in a

⁴⁹ Jubilees 5:6; O. S. Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 64

⁵⁰ E. Isaac, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 42

⁵¹ Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues*, 174-175; *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), Hendrickson Publishers, (Peabody, MA: 1993), p. 250

⁵² *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, (trans. William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein), Jewish Publication Society of America (Philadelphia, PA: 1978), p. 414

⁵³ 3 Enoch 26:12; P. Alexander, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 281

⁵⁴ 3 Enoch 14:2; P. Alexander, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 266

sort of monotheism did not derive it from Judaism, whose one God was often treated by polytheists as simply another manifestation of deity.⁵⁵

Note, the pagan concept of “monotheism” is nearest to Heiser’s idea of monolatry. Hellenistic Jew like Philo capitalize on the erroneous thinking of these pagans, who Heiser enjoys using proof texts from to argue his opinion. It was the philosophy of synchronism from the Alexandrian schools that produced the Gnostic ideas which parallel many of Philo’s expressions. For example, the Gnostic text entitled *The Revelation of Adam* speaks of, “God, the ruler of the realms and the powers[.]”⁵⁶ The eclectic philosophy is how Nicola Denzey Lewis describes Gnosticism. “Greek philosophy, Egyptian, Christian, and Jewish ideas; figures from Greek mythology; and bits of magical traditions all mixed together, evidently coming from a fairly eclectic social environment.”⁵⁷ Lewis further states, “Platonism was the dominate philosophical school of the Roman Empire and had the greatest impact on what some scholars call Gnosticism. Modern scholars have long recognized this relationship between Gnosticism and Platonism[.]”⁵⁸ Philo emphasized a Platonic philosophy for Moses in his attempts to approach the Greeks and even quotes Plato as authoritative (Philo, *On Creation*, 119;⁵⁹ *Every Good Man is Free*, 13;⁶⁰ *On the Contemplative Life* 57;⁶¹ 59).⁶²

Though certain issues became rooted in Rabbinic thought, Jews prohibited Greek learning after the war of A.D. 66-73 to hinder such syncretism. The *Mishnah* reports, “During the war of Titus they forbade the crowns of the brides and that a man should teach his son Greek.”⁶³ Greek philosophy was obviously being taught in Israel prior to the war. Justin Martyr, living in Samaria in the second century came into contact with philosophers and studied under “a certain Stoic,” then “a Peripatetic,” then he went to “a Pythagorean,”

⁵⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Acts An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 3:1-14:28*, Baker Academic (Grand Rapids, MI: 2014), Vol. 3, p. 2588

⁵⁶ Marvin Meyer, in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* (ed. Marvin Meyer), Harper One (New York, NY: 2007), p. 347

⁵⁷ Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to “Gnosticism,”* Oxford University Press (Oxford N.Y.: 2013), p. 133

⁵⁸ Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to “Gnosticism,”* Oxford University Press (Oxford N.Y.: 2013), pp. 246-247

⁵⁹ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), Hendrickson Publishers, (Peabody, MA: 1993), p. 17

⁶⁰ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), Hendrickson Publishers, (Peabody, MA: 1993), p. 683

⁶¹ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), Hendrickson Publishers, (Peabody, MA: 1993), p.703

⁶² *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), Hendrickson Publishers, (Peabody, MA: 1993), p.703

⁶³ m. Sotah 9.14; in *The Mishnah* (Trans. Herbert Danby), Hendrickson Pub. (Peabody, MA: 1933, 2016), p. 305

and then had “a meeting with the Platonists[.]”⁶⁴ The Samaritans were very syncretistic and Simon Magus, who all Patristic sources agree was the first Gnostic, came from Samaria (Acts 8:9). Heiser is either ignoring the cultural context of Second Temple Jewish literature (which his doctoral dissertation was dependent on in order to argue his divine plurality continued beyond the captivity), or he is being deceptive to his readers by his admitted selective method of hermeneutics. He has a presupposition to prove and will manipulate history and the texts he uses (through textual criticism) to prove his polytheistic view is somewhere in the Bible.

In his dissertation Heiser argues that language about stars is to reflect these gods based on Deuteronomy 4:19-20; cf. 29:25; 17:13; Job 38:7-8; 1 Kings 22:19; Jeremiah 8:2; 19:13; Daniel 8:10-11; Nehemiah 9:6; Luke 2:13; Acts 7:42-43; Revelation 1:20; 12:1-4⁶⁵ and he elsewhere adds Isaiah 14:13.⁶⁶ He attempts to refute the clear denial of polytheism which stand in Isaiah (Isaiah 43:10-12; 44:6-8; 45:5-7, 14, 18, 21; 46:9) by his allegorical interpretation of the star language used in Isaiah. He assumes Isaiah 40:26 proves gods exist in the author’s mind since he references stars, which Heiser takes to mean gods, when he argues, “for the same terminology is used by the Deuteronomic writer in Deut 4:19-20, which, when compared to the nearly identical text of Deut. 32:8-9, clearly informs the reader that the starry host of heaven were thought of as deities created and commanded by Yahweh.”⁶⁷

Concerning later development in Christian history, this same idea was hurled in Origen’s face as heresy when he states,

let us see what reason itself can discover respecting sun, moon, and stars...For Job appears to assert that not only may the stars be subject to sin, but even that they are actually not clean from the contagion of it. The following are his words: ‘The stars also are not clean in Your sight.’ [Job 25:5] ... We think, then, that they may be designated as living beings, for this reason, that they are said to receive commandments from God, which is ordinarily the case only with rational beings. ‘I have given a commandment to all the stars,’ [Isaiah 45:12] says the Lord. What,

⁶⁴ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 2; in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Edited by Alexander Roberts, D.D., & James, Donaldson, LL.D., Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), vol. 1, p. 195

⁶⁵ Michale S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 20; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

⁶⁶ Michale S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 49; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

⁶⁷ Michale S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 34; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

now, are these commandments? Those, namely, that each star, in its order and course, should bestow upon the world the amount of splendour which has been entrusted to it.⁶⁸

Peter, a later bishop of Alexandria warned of Origen's heresies, noting that "Origen, that framer of a perverse dogma, laid many temptations, who cast upon the Church a detestable schism, which to this day is throwing it into confusion."⁶⁹ Will such a bold warning go forth against Michael Heiser today? The major difference is that Origen was not so quick to consider the stars "gods" as Heiser does, Origen only expressed they were living rational entities. Heiser's emphasis is that the Bible is polytheistic (though he rejects the term) and in his arguing against any form of a strict monotheistic faith in the Bible, he declares, "at best inconclusive, and very likely speaks only to the continuity of the monolatrous pre-exilic worldview that embraced a divine council."⁷⁰

Other early church fathers rejected such thinking. This is relevant since the early church fathers lived in a pagan world and were familiar with the cultural context of paganism. The early Christians decided to reject paganism contrast to Heiser who is choosing to read paganism into the Bible. Furthermore, the church fathers used the Greek Septuagint which Heiser is dependent on for his view, so they both used the same text but come to different conclusions. Lactantius mocks this idea of the pagans:

Now let us refute those also who regard the elements of the world as gods, that is, the heaven, the sun, and the moon; for being ignorant of the Maker of these things, they admire and adore the works themselves. And this error belongs not to the ignorant only, but also to philosophers; since the Stoics are of opinion that all the heavenly bodies are to be considered as among the number of the gods, since they all have fixed and regular motions, by which they most constantly preserve the vicissitudes of the times which succeed them.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.7.2-3; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson (Peabody, Massachusetts) 1994, fifth edition 2012, Vol. 4, p. 263

⁶⁹ Peter of Alexandria, *The Genuine Acts of Peter*; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson (Peabody, Massachusetts) 1994, fifth edition 2012, Vol. 6, p. 264

⁷⁰ Michael S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 117; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

⁷¹ Lactantius, *The Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 26; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson (Peabody, Massachusetts) 1994, fifth edition 2012, Vol. 7, p. 231; Lactantius longer discussion can be found in *The Divine Institute*, 2.5; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson (Peabody, Massachusetts) 1994, fifth edition 2012, Vol. 7, p. 47-48

Tertullian argued against the thought of stars being gods since they were under the control of the laws of the only true God:

But gods are not slaves; therefore whatever things are servile in character are not gods. Otherwise they should prove to us that, according to the ordinary course of things, liberty is promoted by irregular licence, despotism by liberty, and that by despotism divine power is meant. For if all the (heavenly bodies) overhead forget not to fulfil their courses in certain orbits, in regular seasons, at proper distances, *and* at equal intervals — appointed in the way of a law for the revolutions of time, and for directing the guidance thereof — can it fail to result from the very observance of their conditions and the fidelity of their operations, that you will be convinced both by the recurrence of their orbital courses and the accuracy of their mutations, when you bear in mind how ceaseless is their recurrence, that a governing power presides over them, to which the entire management of the world is obedient, reaching even to the utility and injury of the human race?⁷²

During the middle of the third century, Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage in North Africa, revealed how stars became worshiped as deified men:

That those are no gods whom the common people worship, is known from this. They were formerly kings, who on account of their royal memory subsequently began to be adored by their people even in death. Thence temples were founded to them; thence images were sculptured to retain the countenances of the deceased by the likeness; and men sacrificed victims, and celebrated festal days, by way of giving them honour. Thence to posterity those rites became sacred which at first had been adopted as a consolation.⁷³

Indeed, many authors argued that the gods of the pagan world were kings of an earlier age that had become deified. None of the early church fathers claimed that there were actual gods of some lower tier as Heiser claims. Only the Gnostics made such claims.

Tertullian refutes the pagan deities' existence, saying, "No one of your gods is earlier than Saturn: from him you trace all your deities, even those of higher rank and better

⁷² Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, 2.5; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson (Peabody, Massachusetts) 1994, fifth edition 2012, Vol. 3, p. 134

⁷³ Cyprian, *Treatise 6*; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson (Peabody, Massachusetts) 1994, fifth edition 2012, Vol. 5, p. 465

known. ...nor any writer upon sacred antiquities, have ventured to say that Saturn was any but a man[.]”⁷⁴ Irenaeus states in refuting Gnosticism,

When, however, the Scripture terms them [gods] which are no gods, it does not, as I have already remarked, declare them as gods in every sense, but with a certain addition and signification, by which they are shown to be no gods at all. As with David: The gods of the heathen are idols of demons; and, You shall not follow other gods. For in that he says the gods of the heathen— but the heathen are ignorant of the true God — and calls them other gods, he bars their claim [to be looked upon] as gods at all. But as to what they are in their own person, he speaks concerning them; for they are, he says, the idols of demons. And Esaias: Let them be confounded, all who blaspheme God, and carve useless things; even I am witness, says God [Isaiah 44:9]. He removes them from [the category of] gods, but he makes use of the word alone, for this [purpose], that we may know of whom he speaks. Jeremiah also says the same: The gods that have not made the heavens and earth, let them perish from the earth which is under the heaven [Jeremiah 10:11]. For, from the fact of his having subjoined their destruction, he shows them to be no gods at all.⁷⁵

Justin Martyr rebuttal of the existence of other gods revolved around the name of the true God revealed to Moses at the burning bush:

On this account, then, as I before said, God did not, when He sent Moses to the Hebrews, mention any name, but by a participle He mystically teaches them that He is the one and only God. For, says He; I am the Being; manifestly contrasting Himself, the Being, with those who are not, that those who had hitherto been deceived might see that they were attaching themselves, not to beings, but to those who had no being. Since, therefore, God knew that the first men remembered the old delusion of their forefathers, whereby the misanthropic demon contrived to deceive them when he said to them, If you obey me in transgressing the commandment of God, you shall be as gods, calling those gods which had no being, in order that men, supposing that there were other gods in existence, might believe that they themselves could become gods. On this account He said to Moses, I am the Being, that by the participle being He might teach the difference between God who is and those who are not. Men, therefore, having been duped by the deceiving

⁷⁴ Tertullian, Apology 10; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson (Peabody, Massachusetts) 1994, fifth edition 2012, Vol. 3, p. 26

⁷⁵ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3.6.3; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson (Peabody, Massachusetts) 1994, fifth edition 2012, Vol. 1, p. 419

demon, and having dared to disobey God, were cast out of Paradise, remembering the name of gods, but no longer being taught by God that there are no other gods.⁷⁶

Heiser's position is that the Old Testament existed in its historical context and needs to be interpreted in light of the pagan literature that originated from the pagan cultures that surrounded ancient Israel. Heiser asserts the heavenly host "Is similar to pantheons of ancient Near Eastern cultures."⁷⁷ He offers *Ras Shamra* (discovered in Ugarit in the 1920s) as the clearest example. These are the Ugaritic text⁷⁸ that discuss the pagan gods we read about in the Bible, such as Ashtoreth (1 Kings 11:5, 22; 2 Kings 23:13) and Baal, who is specifically said to not be a real god (Judges 6:31; 1 Kings 18:21). These texts are obviously ridiculous myths which Heiser uses to filter the Bible through. Heiser further argues that polytheism, or his divine plurality (same thing), continued into the Second Temple Jewish literature. 1 Enoch refers to "the stars of heaven which have transgressed the commandments of the Lord[.]"⁷⁹ but these stars are specifically described as angels (1 Enoch 21:10).⁸⁰ 2 Enoch mentions "angels that govern the stars[.]"⁸¹ which is establishing a distinction between angels and the stars as inanimate objects and also provides an understandable expression why angels can be referred to as stars. Similarly, the Testament of Solomon has a demon state, "Our stars in heaven look small, but we are named like gods."⁸² Here the expression of the demon indicates that they have names like the Greek gods who are also named after stars (Mars, Jupiter, etc.). This further connects the rational of angels being called "stars" and "gods," but viewed by the Jews as "demons" or "devils."

The other issue Heiser has with me calling him a polytheist is that he argues Jehovah is ontologically distinct from the other gods. To make this argument he has to redefine "polytheistic thinking"⁸³ to avoid being accused as a polytheist by stating God is

⁷⁶ Justin Martyr, *Horatory Address to the Greeks*, 21; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson (Peabody, Massachusetts) 1994, fifth edition 2012, Vol. 1, p. 281

⁷⁷ Michael Heiser, "The Divine Council and Biblical Theology," p. 1; <http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/DivineCouncilLBD.pdf>

⁷⁸ see "Ugaritic Myths, Epics, and Legends," (Trans. H. L. Ginsberg), in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), pp. 129-155

⁷⁹ 1 Enoch 21:6; E. Isaac, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 24

⁸⁰ 1 Enoch 21:6; E. Isaac, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 24

⁸¹ 2 Enoch 21:6; F. I. Andersen, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 110-111

⁸² Testament of Solomon 8:4; D. C. Duling, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 970

⁸³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 31

unique ontologically with attributes of “omnipresence, omnipotence, sovereignty[,]”⁸⁴ which the lesser gods do not possess. He writes, “Israel was certainly ‘monolatrous,’ but that term comments only on what Israel believed about the proper object of worship, not what it believed about Yahweh’s nature and attributes with respect to other gods.”⁸⁵ However, no polytheistic religion provides these attributes to all their gods, and most ancient pagan religions we call polytheistic would technically fall under to term “monolatry.” Just think of the popular mythology of polytheistic religions which depict the gods warring against each other and killing other gods. None of the pagan gods have attributes of “omnipresence, omnipotence, sovereignty,” not even the father figure of these mythological gods.

Heiser professes, “I still believe in the uniqueness of the God of the Bible. I still embrace the deity of Christ.”⁸⁶ His declaration of Jehovah being ontologically unique seems at times counterintuitive when he expresses how the land of Canaan was “under the dominion of hostile gods”⁸⁷ before the conquest of Joshua. In Heiser’s mind, Jehovah actually lost His inheritance during these “cosmic turf wars[,]”⁸⁸ which makes it hard to believe Heiser is not viewing these gods with the capability to overthrow Jehovah and take His land from Him. This contradiction of thought is central to his view. “Not only had other gods encroached on Yahweh’s portion (Deut 32:9), violating the boundaries of their own allotment, but they had raised up warriors to prevent Yahweh’s children from inheriting his land.”⁸⁹

He reveals his dependence on interpreting the Scriptures through these pagan texts when he wrote, “Of the stories that have survived from Ugarit, one of the most famous describes how Baal became king of the gods. This story is the backdrop for Psalm 74.”⁹⁰ Is he implying that it is necessary for Jehovah to win these “cosmic turf wars” to finally become the king of the gods? He then follows with this being read into the Bible’s creation account. “Genesis 1 and 2 don’t provide the Bible’s only creation story. Psalm 74 describes

⁸⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p 30

⁸⁵ Michael Heiser, “Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 18.1 (2008), p. 29

⁸⁶ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 13

⁸⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 193

⁸⁸ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 122

⁸⁹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 211, fn 13

⁹⁰ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 153

creation as well as Yahweh's victory over the forces of primeval chaos.... The creation act as described in Psalm 74 was theologically crucial for establishing Yahweh's superiority over all other gods. Baal was not king of the gods, as the Ugaritic story proclaimed—Yahweh was.”⁹¹ Did Jehovah have to battle primeval chaos to complete creation? Was that the “turf war” that exalted Jehovah as king of the gods? Why then is there a continuation of such wars? Endless rhetorical questions could be tossed around to show how foolish Heiser's theology is, or one could read the literature that records the pagan myths⁹² that Heiser is alluding to in order to see how foolish he is when interpreting Scripture through his pagan filter.

The late Jewish scholar Umberto Cassuto who was an expert in the ancient Ugaritic and Middle East cultures that surrounded Israel in that time reveals how foolish this line of reasoning is:

When we consider how the Mesopotamia mythologies portray the making of heaven and earth, we cannot but realize the enormous difference... The former relates that after the god Marduk (or a different deity according to other versions) had vanquished Tiamat, the goddess of the world-ocean, depicted as a great and mighty sea-monster, as well as the other monsters and monstrosities that she had created to aid her in her combat, and after he had slain his chief enemy with his weapon, he cut her carcass horizontally, dividing it into two halves, which lay on top of the other, and out of the upper half he formed the heavens and the lower half he made the earth (which includes, of course, the sea, the ‘Deep’). Here is a quotation from the Babylonian account of creation (Tablet iv. 137-140):

He split her like a fish into two parts;
The one half of her he set up and laid therewith the beams of the heavens...
He pulled down a bar and stationed a watch,
He enjoined them not to let her waters go forth.

The last two lines (‘He pulled down a bar,’ etc.) do not refer to the heavens, as they are usually understood, but apply to the earth and the sea. In the Greek summary of the myth by the Babylonian priest Berossus, it is clearly stated that the god Bel, that is Marduk, sliced the body of Thamte (Tiamat, Tamtu) into two, and of the one half he formed the earth, and out of the other half the heavens.⁹³

⁹¹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 154

⁹² E. A. Speiser, “The Creation Epic (Enuma Elish),” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Third Edition (ed. James B. Pritchard) Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969) pp. 60-72

⁹³ Umberto Cassuto (Trans. Israel Abraham), *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part I: From Adam to Noah Genesis 1-V8*, The Magnes Press (Jerusalem, 1944, first English edition 1961), Vol. 1, p. 32

Discussing this opinion that scholars have pointing to this myth, Johnathan Sarfati accurately stated, “But Genesis is nothing like this.”⁹⁴ Simply put, the God of the Bible did not need to battle with chaos, He created everything out of nothing.

Heiser’s polytheistic position inevitably leads to internal contradicting expressions. For example, he refers to Isaiah 43:10-12⁹⁵ but verse 10 would imply no gods were formed before or after Jehovah. If other gods exist, according to this verse, they would have to be equal in their eternal existence with Jehovah. Heiser also references Isaiah 44:6-8 where Jehovah creates the “hosts,” which he claims the “star” symbolism is to be understood as “gods” contradicting the implication of the previous proof text from Isaiah 43:10. How could there be created “gods” if there are none formed after Jehovah? If Heiser rejects this verse to mean monotheism, the next verse (Isaiah 43:11) says there is no other savior besides Jehovah. Does this mean Heiser rejects that only Jehovah can save? How many saviors exist in Heiser’s theology? Are the various gods set over the various Gentile nations as the saviors of those nations?

Surely the Greek term for “savior” is used for the Greek gods in their texts. Furthermore, the parallel passage in Isaiah 45:20-23 clearly calls the gods of the nation’s “wood” and “graven images” which are incomparable to Jehovah Who is the only savior.

This is a serious issue since he believes there is at least 70 gods in the supposed divine council. He states, “In Isa 43:10-12, it is Yahweh’s claim to be alone in his pre-existence, his ability to save, and his national deliverance.”⁹⁶ Note he expresses only national deliverance. Does each nation have their own deliverer/savior? Furthermore, the passage is not limited to Jehovah’s pre-existence but implies a perpetual sense that no gods existed before or after Him. This fact contradicts Heiser’s opinion of it when he says, “the sons of God were created by Yahweh and ordained to rule the nations[.]”⁹⁷ He elaborates, “Moreover, the pre-existent and uncreated Yahweh created the other members of the host of heaven (Neh 9:6; Ps 148:1-5). Their life derives from him, not vice versa.”⁹⁸ Again, the star language (“hosts of heaven”) is used for these “gods” of Heiser’s theology showing his need to allegorize passages such as Nehemiah 9:6 to hold his view.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Sarfati, *The Genesis Account: A Theological, Historical, and Scientific Commentary on Genesis 1-11*, Creation Ministry International (Powder Springs, Georgia: 2015), p. 61

⁹⁵ Michael Heiser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 18.1 (2008), p. 15

⁹⁶ Michael Heiser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 18.1 (2008), p. 18

⁹⁷ Michael Heiser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 18.1 (2008), p. 20

⁹⁸ Michael Heiser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 18.1 (2008), p. 29

In order to ignore all the clear expression in the Bible that other gods do not exist, he twists the Scriptures to turn them into expressions of incomparability instead of the denial of gods existing. Comparing the similar language used in Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 6:4; 32:12, 39, Heiser argues:

The instances where the subjects are not divine are instructive. In Isa 47:8, 10 Babylon says to herself, *אני ואפסי עוֹד* (“I am, and there is none else beside me”). The claim is not that she is the only city in the world but that she has no rival. Nineveh makes the identical claim in Zeph 2:15 (*אני ואפסי עוֹד*). Similarly, where the subject is divine it can coherently be argued that the point of *אין עוֹד* is not to deny the existence of other gods, but to affirm that Yahweh is unique and the only god for Israel. This fits well with the wording of the Shema and the first commandment, where the confession and command imply the existence of other gods.⁹⁹

If this is his view, to stay consistent he will have to admit that Jehovah’s expression of incomparability are only prideful self-impressions such as Babylon and Nineveh boasting, not ontological confessions. Because Heiser speaks of these “turf wars” with other gods sometimes invading Jehovah’s allotted inheritance of the land of Israel, Heiser must view Jehovah being conquered in these turf wars some of the time. As the cities of Babylon and Nineveh make these prideful self-expressions of incomparability to other cities, they were eventually brought to defeat. What in Heiser’s theology can cause him to ignore what he interprets as incomparability language in Jehovah’s speeches mean He cannot be overthrown?

Moreover, it was Sennacherib who compared Jehovah to the gods of other nations that he conquered (2 Chronicles 32:14-19), but Hezekiah considered the gods of other nations, “no gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone” (Isaiah 37:20). Indeed, Heiser’s theology is more similar to Sennacherib of the king of Syria who thought Jehovah was stronger in battle because He was the “gods of the hills” (1 Kings 20:23).

Heiser prefers the term “divine plurality” since it is somehow different from polytheism or monolatry. His rhetorical expression often repeated is: “It is difficult to discern how Yahweh is exalted by being compared to beings that do not exist.”¹⁰⁰ His rational follows, there must really be other gods not just idols. Again, he suggests, “The worldview of the psalmists therefore leaves the reader with the conclusion that these

⁹⁹ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 95; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁰⁰ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 119; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

comparative statements are meant to be true comparisons with other gods.”¹⁰¹ With this he rejects what sound exegetes have interpreted for centuries based on his synchronizing of pagan theology from the surrounding cultures. He mentions Psalm 86:8; 95:3; 96:4; 97:7, 9; 135:5; 138:1;¹⁰² Job 16:19-21;¹⁰³ Job 5:1;¹⁰⁴ Job 15:8; 4:18; 15:15; 25:5-6; 33:23-24¹⁰⁵ as passages that prove Jehovah is being compared with other “gods” that actually exist. Professing other gods truly exist is polytheism! Paul preached a monotheistic gospel (Acts 14:15; 17:24-25, 29-30; 19:26; Romans 1:19-23; 1 Corinthians 8:5-6; Galatians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 4:5).

While Heiser attempts to promote God as an ontologically unique Being beyond these other gods he believes in, his theology is closer to what we find in Egyptian hymns and prayers. All acknowledge ancient Egypt as a polytheistic religion, but Heiser’s view of the Bible presenting a monolatrous belief of ancient Israel impresses nothing beyond the polytheistic faith of Egypt.

Egyptian hymns present Amon-Re as a unique ontological god above other deities of the Egyptian pantheon. Amon-Re is “More distinguished in nature than any (other) god[.]”¹⁰⁶ This hymn further states about Amon-Re, exactly what Heiser believes the Bible teaches, “Jubilation to thee [Amon-Re] who made the gods[.]”¹⁰⁷ Re is further spoken of as “the lord of the gods... Who gave commands, and the gods came into being.”¹⁰⁸ He is moreover called, “Father of the fathers of all the gods... Who made what is and created

¹⁰¹ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 119; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁰² Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 120; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁰³ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 128; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁰⁴ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 129; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁰⁵ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 130; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁰⁶ “A Hymn to Amon-Re,” ii, (trans. John A. Wilson); in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Third Edition (ed. James B. Pritchard) Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969) p. 365

¹⁰⁷ “A Hymn to Amon-Re,” ii, (trans. John A. Wilson); in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Third Edition (ed. James B. Pritchard) Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969) p. 365

¹⁰⁸ “A Hymn to Amon-Re,” ii, (trans. John A. Wilson); in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Third Edition (ed. James B. Pritchard) Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969) p. 366

what exists; Sovereign—life, prosperity, health!—and chief of the gods!”¹⁰⁹ Amon-Re is “The solitary sole one without his peer... the sole king, like the fluid of the gods[.]”¹¹⁰ Re having ontological uniqueness is again represented in such hymns, “Thou who hast constructed thyself, thou didst fashion thy body, a shaper who was (himself) not shaped; unique in his nature, passing eternity, the distant one[.]”¹¹¹ So the Egyptian god Re is said to possess eternality and had created the other gods which is what Heiser says of the God of the Bible being eternal distinguishes Jehovah from these other gods. Since Dr. Heiser has earned an M.A. in Ancient History from the University of Pennsylvania with his major fields in Ancient Israel and Egyptology, it should be assumed he is aware of this Egyptian theology and is purposely imputing it into his biblical theology.

Other scholars have stated, “true deity is, in the fullest sense, eternal, having neither origin in the past nor end in the future. A true deity is unbegotten or ungenerated (*agennetos*)—having no parents—and unoriginated (*agenetos*)—having no other kind of origin—as well as being imperishable forever.”¹¹²

Such views of God are not unique to the Bible, as Heiser is aware of. Polytheistic pagan religions have an eternal supreme god, that, according to their myths, had created various other gods. An early Jewish text of the first or second century similarly defines God with such terms. “Eternal One, Mighty One, Holy El, God autocrat, Self-originate, incorruptible, immaculate, unbegotten, spotless, immortal self-perfected, self-devised, without mother, without father, ungenerated[.]”¹¹³ Hebrews 7:3 describes Melchizedek with these terms: “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.” But if this is the working definition of the word “God,” “Deity,” or “Divine,” being all synonyms, then these beings that Heiser is calling “gods” are not properly identified by such a definition and must be relegated to an angelic nature which our ancient Jewish literature states, though Heiser’s selective hermeneutics avoids telling his readers.

¹⁰⁹ “A Hymn to Amon-Re,” iv, (trans. John A. Wilson); in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Third Edition (ed. James B. Pritchard) Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969) p. 366

¹¹⁰ “A Hymn to Amon-Re,” viii, ix (trans. John A. Wilson); in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Third Edition (ed. James B. Pritchard) Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969) p. 365

¹¹¹ “A Universal Hymn to the Sun” (trans. John A. Wilson); in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Third Edition (ed. James B. Pritchard) Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969) p. 367-368

¹¹² Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 245-246; as cited by Steven Donnelly, *The Divine Rites and Rejection of the Priest King: Melchizedek on the Margins of Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation*, (Ph. D. dissertation) The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2014, p. 28

¹¹³ Apocalypse of Abraham 17:8-10; R. Rubinkiewicz in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 697

Egyptologist J. H. Breasted mentions how Amon-Re was originally a local deity who became exalted at a later date around 1400 B.C..

Amon, the old obscure local god of Thebes, whose name is not to be found in the great religious documents of the earlier age like the Pyramid Texts, had by this time gained the chief place in the state theology, owing to the supreme position held by the ruling family of his native town in the Empire. Theologically, he had long succumbed to the ancient tendency which identified the old local gods with the Sun-god, and he had long been called “Amon-Re.” His old local characteristics, whatever they may have been, had been supplanted by those of the Sun-god, and the ancient local Amon had been completely Solarized. In this way it had been possible to raise him to the supreme place in the pantheon.¹¹⁴

Is this what Heiser thinks of Jehovah? Did Jehovah at some time become an exalted character over the Israelite pantheon excelling His previously held position as a local god? Perhaps when God won the “cosmic turf war” against “primeval chaos” to become King of the gods. Heiser has nowhere as of yet expressed such an opinion publicly (at least as far as I am aware of), but his ideas about the God of the Bible and the Egyptian view of Amon-Re are uncannily similar.

By arguing for polytheism, or monolatry, a plurality of deities, or whatever he wants to call it, Heiser has opened evangelicals to a worldview that is permissive of the antichrist deception—that is, the antichrist will be considered a god above all that is called God (2 Thessalonians 2:4).¹¹⁵ Heiser even teaches that men will become gods, but that will be one of his heresies that will be discussed in a later chapter.

¹¹⁴ J. H. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*, Harper Touchbooks (New York, NY: 1912, 1959), p. 318-319

¹¹⁵ see Heath Henning, “Antichrist will be Gnostic,” Feb 14:2016; <http://truthwatchers.com/antichrist-will-be-gnostic/>

Redefining אֱלֹהִים (Part 3)

As we have seen, Michael Heiser habitually redefines terms to force terminology to fit his presupposed theology. As we saw, he attempts to duck the charge of polytheism by saying Jehovah is ontologically distinct from these other gods he believes in. One core aspect of his theology is how he defines the word “god.” The Hebrew word we are focusing on is אֱלֹהִים *elohim*, being grammatically a masculine plural noun, though it is often applied to Jehovah as a “plural of majesty,” or in some cases perhaps hinting at the Trinitarian nature of the LORD. Gesenius explaining the plural of majesty, states, “The plural is by no means used in Hebrew solely to express a number of individuals or separate objects, but may denote them collectively.... A variety of the plurals described under (b), in which the secondary idea of *intensity* or of an *internal multiplication* of the idea of the stem may be clearly seen, is (c) the *pluralis excellentiae* or *pluralis maiestatis*.”¹¹⁶

The definition Heiser concocts for his theological scheme is presented in an article in which he claims, “In briefest terms, an אֱלֹהִים is a being whose proper ‘habitation’ was considered the ‘spirit world,’ and whose primary existence was a disembodied one.”¹¹⁷ Because Psalm 82 is the central passage of his entire theological system, he emphasizes the word *elohim* cannot mean humans or physical corporeal entities in general. Heiser stresses the actual existence of multiple gods in Psalm 82 against the historically held interpretation that the word אֱלֹהִים in Psalm 82 was used to describe divinely ordained human kings or judges. In *The Unseen Realm* he reiterates his definition: “Humans are also not by nature disembodied. The word *elohim* is a ‘place of residence’ term. Our home is the world of embodiment; *elohim* by nature inhabit the spiritual world.”¹¹⁸

Let us start by questioning whether his definition is accurate? The most commonly used Hebrew lexicon is *BDB* (Brown, Driver, Briggs), which states, “**a** rulers, judges, either as divine representatives at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power: האֱלֹהִים Ex 21:6 ... **b**. *divine ones*, superhuman beings including God and angels ψ [Psalm] 8:6 ... **c**. angels ψ [Psalm] 97:7 (Ö â Cal v; but gods , Hup De Pe Ch e); cf. בְּנֵי (ה)אֱלֹהִים = (the) sons of God , or sons of gods = angels Jb 1:6; 2:1; 38:7 Gn 6: 2, 4 (J ; so Ö [LXX of Lucian] Bks. of Enoch & Jubilees Philo Jude v 6; 2 Pet 2:4 Jos ^{Ant.} i, 3, 1, most ancient

¹¹⁶ E. Kautzsch, ed., Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, Trans. A. E. Cowley (2nd English Ed.) Clarendon Press (Oxford: 1910), p. 396, (§124 a)

¹¹⁷ Michael Hieser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” Bulletin for Biblical Research, 18.1 (2008), p. 30, fn. 63

¹¹⁸ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 29

fathers and modern critics[.]”¹¹⁹ Notably, *BDB* offers human judges or rulers as the first definition, along with angels referencing a multitude of sources such as the books of Enoch, Jubilee, Philo, and Josephus, which Heiser hinges much of his argument being based upon Second Temple Jewish literature supposedly retaining his idea of multiple deities. Heiser needs to segregate both the human the angelic classification far from his tier of lesser gods to argue for his opinion. This is why he redefines the word *elohim*.

Gesenius provides his definition for *elohim* as: “(A) in a plural sense – (1) of *gods* or *deities* in general, whether true or not.... (2) once applied to *kings*, i. q. כְּנִי אֱלֹהִים Ps. 82:1, especially verse 6.”¹²⁰ Gesenius also includes Heiser’s paradigmatic passage as evidence against his position. Psalm 8:5 speaks of man being made a little lower than the angels, with the Hebrew word *elohim* being translated as “angels.” This translation seems obscure as we would expect it to be translated as “lower than God/gods.” However, Scripture clearly presents angels as more powerful than mankind (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chronicles 32:21; Hebrews 2:7, 9; 2 Peter 2:10-11) so it could not possibly be implying that man is directly beneath God/gods in any ranking system. Nor is there a parallel to the idea of mankind being immediately under the gods in the Ugaritic literature. Angels or demigods are always considered as intermediates between God/gods and men in the ancient Near East. Thus, the Septuagint and the New Testament accurately translated this verse as ἀγγέλους (“angels”).

Gesenius reminds us, “Not a few interpreters, both ancient and modern, have regarded אֱלֹהִים as also denoting *angels* (see Psa. 8:6, the LXX. And Ch.; Psa 82:1; 97:7; 138:1), and *judges* (Ex. 21:6; 22:7, 8).”¹²¹ Gesenius again cited Psalm 82 as having in his days been viewed as angels, but he rejected *angels* as a valid translation (although his translator and editor, Samuel Tregelles, adds a very reasonable note, “But Hebrews, chap. 1:6 and 2:7, 9 shew plainly that this word sometimes means *angels*, and the authority of the N.T. decides the matter.”).¹²² Gesenius was aware of and agreed with the idea that Judaism evolved out of polytheism, yet apparently found no evidence for the opinion in Psalm 82 since he defined *elohim* in that passage as “kings.”

Furthermore, Hebrew texts from the Qumran community confirm this appraisal. 4Q401 at length expresses the angels are being called “gods” which are ranked above humans. It states:

¹¹⁹ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, C.A. Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1980, p. 43

¹²⁰ Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament Scriptures, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. (Grand Rapids, MI: 1957), p. 49

¹²¹ Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament Scriptures, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. (Grand Rapids, MI: 1957), p. 49

¹²² Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament Scriptures, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. (Grand Rapids, MI: 1957), p. 49

wonderfully to extol Thy glory among the divine beings of knowledge, and the praises of Thy kingship among the most ho[ly]. More wonderfully than ‘gods’ and men they are glorified amid all the camps of the ‘gods’ and feared by companies of men. They recount his royal majesty according to their knowledge and exalt [his glory in all] his royal heavens. In all the highest heights [they shall sing] marvelous psalms according to all [their understanding, and the glorious splendor] of the King of the ‘gods’ they shall recount on their stations...for what shall we be counted among them? For what shall our priesthood be counted in their dwelling? [How shall our] ho[lines compare with their supreme] holiness? How does the offering of our tongue of dust compare with the knowledge of the divine [beings]...our jubilation. Let us extol the God of knowledge... Holy of Holies and His understanding is above all those who possess knowledge...¹²³

This passage of the Dead Sea Scrolls repeatedly uses divine language to refer to what is obviously being applied to angels (this text will be discussed in detail later). Josephus speaks of when one joins the Essenes he was to swear that he would keep their doctrines secret, especially the names of angels.¹²⁴ Many of the scrolls discovered at Qumran confirm this veneration of angels, such as the Aramaic Testament of Levi 18:5;¹²⁵ Jubilee 1:27, 29;¹²⁶ 2:1;¹²⁷ 1 Enoch 84:4;¹²⁸ 100:10;¹²⁹ 104:1, 4;¹³⁰ etc., and multitudes of Dead Sea Scrolls confirm the angelic perspective opposing Heiser’s classification (see 4Q180 for example).¹³¹ Heiser would like to use this passage quoted above for evidence of his divine plurality, but he ignores parallels in the Dead Sea Corpus, furthermore, his gods are in rebellion against Jehovah, not praising Him with marvelous psalms and being considered to have supreme holiness.

¹²³ The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls In English (Trans. Geza Vermes), Penguin Classics (London, England: 1962, 2004, p. 331

¹²⁴ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 2.142; in The New Complete Works of Josephus (Revised and Expanded) (Trans. William Whiston, Introduction and Commentary by Paul L. Maier), Kregel Publications (Grand Rapids, MI: 1999), p. 737-738

¹²⁵ in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 794

¹²⁶ The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 54

¹²⁷ The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 55

¹²⁸ in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 62

¹²⁹ in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 81-82

¹³⁰ in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 85

¹³¹ The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls In English (Trans. Geza Vermes), Penguin Classics (London, England: 1962, 2004, p. 553

So we can see the lexicographers such as *BDB* and Gesenius disagree on “angels” as being permitted in the definition of אֱלֹהִים (though both produced their works prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls), but it is abundantly clear that it is appropriate as even Heiser’s definition place angels within the residency of the spiritual or disembodied form.

TWOT is more modern and conservative than the two previous lexicons above, which offers the definition for *elohim* as “God, gods, judges, angels”¹³² Jack Scott’s entry for *TWOT* concludes by discussing the difficult passage in Exodus 22:8-9 [verses 7-8 in Hebrew], as how to properly render *elohim* in this ambiguous and debated passage. Scott criticized Cyrus Gordon, who proposed it should be translated as “gods” because “he sees this text as a heathen survival in the Mosaic legislation, one that was obliterated in the later Deuteronomic and priestly recensions.”¹³³ Scott presents his rebuttal, saying:

This is unacceptable from the point of view of the Scripture’s attestation to being God’s Word and its clear doctrine of the existence of only one God. The question of whether “God” or “judges” is to be used here is difficult. If “God” is correct, we understand by the passage that every man is ultimately answerable to God and stand or falls before God no matter what judgment men may make.¹³⁴

Heiser discussing this passage in an article suggested “God” as the accurate rendering against “judges,” which would be obvious from his presupposition denying humans can be called *elohim* since the word supposedly only pertains to “disembodied” beings. He ignores the obvious interpretation identifying that יְרֵשִׁיעַן is a plural predicate expecting אֱלֹהִים to be plural, meaning “whom the judges [not God] shall condemn” (Exodus 22:9). His excuse here is “under a later redaction this phrase was omitted in the wake of Israel’s struggle with idolatry. Only a plural referring to multiple divine beings can coherently explain the deletion. As a result, this passage is also no support for the plural human אֱלֹהִים view.”¹³⁵ So he follows the liberal view that the text was purposely corrupted to avoid appearing polytheistic. Of course, there is no evidence for this redaction beyond the imagination justifying one’s presupposition, so we find his theology not based on what the text actually says. When Scripture says something opposing his view he calls textual criticism to his rescue. The phrase אֲשֶׁר יְרֵשִׁיעַן אֱלֹהִים “whom the judges shall condemn” (Exodus 22:9; verse 8 in Hebrew), should be properly understood as an *independent*

¹³² Jack B. Scott, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke) Moody Press (Chicago, IL 1980), Vol. 1, p. 44

¹³³ Jack B. Scott, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke) Moody Press (Chicago, IL 1980), Vol. 1, p. 45

¹³⁴ Jack B. Scott, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke) Moody Press (Chicago, IL 1980), Vol. 1, p. 45

¹³⁵ Michael S. Heiser, “Jesus’ Quotation of Psalm 92:6 in John 10:34: A Different View of John’s Theological Strategy,” *SBL regional* (2012), p. 7

*relative clause*¹³⁶ confirming the plurality of the word *elohim* as evident being connecting to the plural verb “condemn.”

Heiser argues against Exodus 22:6-8 by referencing 18:13-24, stating “This account of the appointment of judges, then, does not support the אֱלֹהִים (*elohim*) in Psa 82 being human.”¹³⁷ This is because he presumes the necessity of Psalm 82 if interpreted as humans must be understood as Jewish judges, but the context of Psalm 82 would demand it to refer to Gentile kings. Jeremiah 52:9 indicates Gentile kings as judges fitting Psalm 82 as Gentile kings performing injustice and being judged by God which is why they “fall like one of the princes” (Psalm 82:7).

Deuteronomy 1:16-17 declares the judgement of man is of God. “And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear *the causes* between your brethren, and judge righteously between *every* man and his brother, and the stranger *that is* with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; *but* ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment *is* God’s: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring *it* unto me, and I will hear it.” Though men are performing judgement, it is God’s judgment going forth as these men are divinely ordained judges.

In the 1,000 plus pages of Heiser material I have read, never once have I seen him comment on Exodus 22:28, “Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.” The verse clearly shows the parallelism that the “gods” are equated with the “ruler of thy people.” Heiser’s selective hermeneutic method has caused him to avoid this verse for many years as he cannot explain it away. Furthermore, if he were to claim that this verse cannot mean human being, how could it possibly be saying not to revile the “gods” when in the very next chapter the Jews are commanded to overthrow and smash the images in the land of Canaan (Exodus 23:24). This sounds as if they are commanded to revile the gods in the land. The word for “revile” is often used by Moses for cursing men (Genesis 8:21; 12:3; 16:4, 5; Exodus 18:22; 21:17; Leviticus 19:14; 20:9; Deuteronomy 23:4), with the only exception being blasphemy against God in one chapter (Leviticus 24:11, 14-15, 23).

Furthermore, Exodus 22:8-9 has its parallel passage in Deuteronomy 25:1-2 which alters אֱלֹהִים to הַשֹּׁפֵט (the judge) who is clearly judging the case and executing the sentencing. Deuteronomy 16:18-20 commands establishing impartial judges to judge court cases in the gates of every city. Deuteronomy 18:17-18 also acknowledges that it is the judges that are making the judgment in the court case. Moreover, the fact that Exodus 22:8-

¹³⁶ E. Kautzsch, ed., Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, Trans. A. E. Cowley (2nd English Ed.) Clarendon Press (Oxford: 1910), p. 396, (§ 138 e)

¹³⁷ Michael Heiser, “The Divine Council and Biblical Theology,” p. 13; <http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/DivineCouncilLBD.pdf>

9 and 22:28 has verse 22 sandwiched between with its parallel fitting Psalm 82:3, further confirms Exodus 22 and Psalm 82 is referring to the same concept, men judging as divinely ordained rulers.

When looking at the Greek Septuagint, *elohim* is generally translated as *theos*, with very few exceptions. The popular Greek lexicon *BDAG* notes that the word Θεός is used “of persons Θεοι (as אֱלֹהִים) J[ohn] 10:34f (Ps 81:6)[in LXX; Hebrew and English texts Psalm 82.]”¹³⁸

TDOT and its Greek counterpart *TDNT* are the only lexicons justifying Heiser’s position of Psalm 82 that I have viewed, but they are both based on the view of Judaism evolving from polytheism, which Heiser rejects.¹³⁹ However, they both throw curve-balls that make Heiser’s opinion untenable. Against Heiser’s argument that the Bible makes incomparability expressions about Jehovah which does not reject the existence of other gods, discussing the incomparability language in Exodus 15:11 “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods?”, *TDOT* notes, “Such questions have a logical meaning in a polytheistic context like in the Babylonian-Assyrian religion, where even several gods are represented as incomparable.”¹⁴⁰ If other ancient religions could use incomparable language for multiple gods, it really means nothing as for ontological uniqueness as Heiser would argue. With his hermeneutic filter of ancient pagan literature, he cannot claim the Bible presents Jehovah as anything greater than the other gods he believes in.

Heiser, who argues the divine plurality continued into Second Temple period, is refuted by the *TDNT* entry, which states:

Later Judaism a. occasionally used the term for God of men, and even of the Θεοι of the Gentiles, but it was strongly opposed to heathen polytheism. B. It gave a primary place to its confession of one God in formulae, faith and practice. But c. it sees the one God at work through a wealth of intermediary or angelic beings. It sees Him d. in conflict with demonic forces. In this conflict e. the Son of Man or the Messiah plays a decisive role, though without claiming divine dignity. Thus

¹³⁸ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (ed. Walter Bauer and trans. Wm. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. Danker, University of Chicago Press (Chicago, IL: 1979), p. 358

¹³⁹ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (ed. Gerhard Kittel; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley) WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. (Grand Rapids, MI: 1964-1976) Vol. 3, p. 96

¹⁴⁰ Helmer Ringgren, in Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., (Grand Rapids, MI:1974, 1997), Vol. 1, p. 282

apocalyptic by accepting dualistic motifs, develops the basic monotheistic conviction of the OT into a dynamic monotheism.¹⁴¹

It is only through the selective hermeneutic method of Heiser that he finds his divine plurality in Second Temple literature, while the rest of the scholars having studied it are convinced what Heiser claims to be “gods” are actually angels. This factor will be discussed at length in another chapter.

I find no lexicon that offers a premise for Heiser’s definition of *elohim* supposedly meaning a “disembodied nature.” The opposite is true, that the word in question is indeed used of physical, corporeal, tangible objects, including human beings. Clear usages of *elohim* can be seen with expressions towards physical objects such as in Jonah 3:3, “Nineveh was an exceeding great city[.]” Here the word “exceedingly” is translated from לְאֱלֹהִים, that is the word *Elohim* prefixed with a preposition which would literally translate as “to God,” indicating the city was large even “to God’s” perspective. Some have suggested “a divinely great city[.]”¹⁴² We find similar language used in the New Testament, “Moses was born, and was exceeding fair [ἄσπεῖος τῷ Θεῷ]” (Acts 7:20).

The fact that idols are physical objects and are referred to as *elohim* further causes us to reject Heiser’s proposed definition. For example, “Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that *were* with him, Put away the strange gods אֱלֹהִים that *are* among you... And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods אֱלֹהִים which *were* in their hand, and *all their* earrings which *were* in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which *was* by Shechem” (Genesis 35:2, 4). Did they put away disembodied אֱלֹהִים from their hands?

Idols are called אֱלֹהִים, yet are the works of man’s hands, which obviously cannot be disembodied and belonging to the spiritual realm. It is written in Hosea, “neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, *Ye are* our gods אֱלֹהִים” (Hosea 14:3). Notice they call the idols “gods,” not a spirit represented by the image. Jeroboam had “cast out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of *other* lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, *the same* may be a priest of *them that are* no gods” (2 Chronicles 13:9). Exodus 23:24 makes this matter more explicit: “Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images.” What are called “gods” are “images” that are to be thrown down and broken.

¹⁴¹ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (ed. Gerhard Kittel; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley) WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. (Grand Rapids, MI: 1964-1976) Vol. 3, p. 96

¹⁴² Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament Scriptures, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. (Grand Rapids, MI: 1957), p. 50

Again, in the account of the golden calf during the exodus we see the idol being called אֱלֹהִים. Scripture records:

[T]he people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us... And he received *them* at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow *is* a feast to the Lord.... And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*: they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel... And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they *are set* on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for *as for* this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him (Exodus 32:1, 4-5, 7-8, 22-23).

Here we see not only the physical molten image that was fashioned by Aaron's hands being called אֱלֹהִים with the plural form being used for the individual calf they named "the LORD" (Jehovah), and with the worship being given to the idol itself, not a mere representation that was believed to be behind it. Nehemiah also called this molten calf a "god" (Nehemiah 9:18). So the biblical and Jewish view of idols were that they were no gods, which was necessary to express because the surrounding cultures did see the idols as gods אֱלֹהִים.

Discarding the fact that the Bible uses *elohim* to refer to idols, Heiser states, "it cannot be presumed that ancient people considered a humanly fabricated statue or fetish object to be identical with the god in whose likeness it was fashioned."¹⁴³ If this were true we must ask why so much stress was placed on the issue that the idols were vain object and not truly gods? Why are idols constantly called "vain" or "vanities" (Leviticus 17:7 (LXX); 1 Kings 16:2 (LXX), 13, 26; 2 Kings 17:15; 2 Chronicles 11:15 (LXX); Isaiah 2:20 (LXX) 44:9; Jeremiah 2:5; 8:19 (LXX); Jeremiah 10:3, 15; 14:22; 28:18 (LXX=51:18 MT); Ezekiel 8:10 (LXX); Jonah 2:8? Paul said, "an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* none other God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4). He identifies idols are "called gods," so that Paul acknowledges by designation of how the word is used in the pagan thought that "there be gods many, and lords many" (1 Corinthians 8:5). Paul elsewhere indicated these idols were called gods but "by nature are no gods" (Galatians 4:8); and this idea is

¹⁴³ Michael Heiser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible," Bulletin for Biblical Research, 18.1 (2008), p. 8

grounded in the Old Testament confirming the Jewish view that the gods of the heathen are nothing but idols (Psalm 96:4-5).

That the Old Testament consistently considers the gods of the heathens to be but mere idols is true even when the pagan gods are considered graven images appear with incomparable language which Heiser takes as proof for the belief in real existing gods (Psalm 97:7, 9). As idols are called gods, anything that is placed in preeminence can be called god, such as one's belly (Philippians 3:19), which some choose to serve over the true God (Romans 16:18).

Apocryphal text expressed the same thought as in Wisdom of Solomon:

Surely vain are all men by nature, who are ignorant of God, and could not out of the good things that are seen know him that is: neither by considering the works did they acknowledge the workmaster; but deemed either fire, or wind, or the swift air, or the circle of the stars, or the violent water, or the lights of heaven, to be the gods which govern the world.¹⁴⁴

In 3 Maccabees we read, "Let not those who think vain thoughts bless their vain gods for the destruction of your beloved people and say, 'Not even their God could rescue them.'"¹⁴⁵ Obviously, the Jews did not see the idols as having some deity represented behind the carved image but called them vain or vanities to express the idols as empty and destitute of any divine presence or representation.

Considering the diversity and range of how the word "God/gods" can be used in the ancient world it is not surprising that some people may be confused as to what is meant at times. It should be remembered that ancient languages had broader uses of words in general, while our modern languages have developed more precise usages of words and we have a much larger vocabulary to express our precise meanings. However, the biblical worldview always and consistently presented only one true God (Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Kings 5:15; 19:15, 19; Psalm 86:10; Isaiah 37:16, 20; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:4; 1 Timothy 1:17), along with the Second Temple Judaism. Philo taught, "But God is alone, and by himself, being one; and there is nothing like unto God."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Wisdom of Solomon 13:1; in *The Apocrypha* (ed. Manuel Komroff, Barnes & Noble Books (New York, NY: 1992), p. 145

¹⁴⁵ 3 Maccabees 6:11; in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 526

¹⁴⁶ Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.1; in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), p. 38

Man called *Elohim*

Furthermore, while Heiser presents in his popular level writings that *elohim* means disembodied beings, in his technical works he admits that the word can and is used to refer to humans who are obviously not disembodied. He frequently speaks out of both sides of his mouth contradicting himself. In his doctoral dissertation he refutes others attempting to make such orderly differences. He writes, “The point of the observation is that in this passage, the ‘sons of El’ are clearly human and not divine, thereby overturning the tidy distinction for which [Margaret] Barker argues. It is also marred by references to Israel as the son of God (Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1).”¹⁴⁷ He follows closely by stating that “the divine family of the divine council is made to include human beings[.]”¹⁴⁸ Surely he cannot deny that such terminology is used for humans.

In his popular book *The Unseen Realm*, he admits Moses is called “‘as God/a god [*elohim*] to Pharaoh’ and to Moses’ brother Aaron (Exod 4:16-17).”¹⁴⁹ He explains this by stating, “As a leader through whom flowed divine power, he would naturally come to be seen by the Israelites as a quasi-divine figure, though he was just a man.”¹⁵⁰ Yet, divinely ordained judges have this same “divine power” to enable them for the task God has ordained them to accomplish (Exodus 21:6; 22:8-9, 28; 1 Samuel 2:25; Proverbs 16:10; 31:4-5; Acts 23:5; Romans 13:1-2). Why would kings and judges not have the word applied to them according to Heiser’s own expression?

Philo discussed why Moses was called as “a god” offering his conclusion,

Why, that the wise man is called the God of the foolish man, but he is not God in reality, just as a base coin of the apparent value of four drachmas is not a four drachma piece. But when he is compared with the living God, then he will be found to be a man of God; but when he is compared with a foolish man, he is accounted a God to the imagination and in appearance, but he is not so in truth and essence.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 32; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁴⁸ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 32; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁴⁹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 280, fn. 8

¹⁵⁰ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 245-46

¹⁵¹ Philo, *The Worse Attacks the Better* 162; in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), p. 130

Philo also asserts, “he teaches that the man who is wholly possessed with the love of God and who serves the living God alone, is no longer man, but actually God, being indeed the God of men, but not of the parts of nature, in order to leave to the Father of the universe the attributes of being both and God.”¹⁵²

Philo also identifies a true prophet can be called a god (which is most relevant to the discussion of Moses), saying, “one who is really inspired by God, which he who has attained to may reasonably be called God. But also, this same person is God, inasmuch as he is wise, and as on this account he rules over every foolish person[.]”¹⁵³ Elsewhere he says,

By what then were these subordinate parts inspired? beyond all question by the mind; for of the qualities which the mind has received from God, it gives a share to the irrational portion of the soul, so that the mind is vivified by God, and the irrational part of the soul by the mind; for the mind is as it were a god to the irrational part of the soul, for which reason Moses did not hesitate to call it “the god of Pharaoh.”¹⁵⁴

Reiterating this reasoning, Philo again articulates,

And how was it possible for Moses to encounter such men as these unless he had prepared speech, the interpreter of his mind, namely Aaron? who now indeed is called his mouth; but in a subsequent passage we shall find that he is called a prophet, when also the mind, being under the influence of divine inspiration, is called God. “For,” says God, “I give thee as a God to Pharaoh, and Aaron thy brother shall be thy Prophet.”¹⁵⁵

Josephus applies language of “divine man” frequently to express the gift of prophecy. Of Isaiah he writes, “a divine and wonderful man in speaking truth; and out of the assurance that he had never written what was false, he wrote down all his prophecies, and left them behind him in books[.]”¹⁵⁶ Josephus comments about Moses, “our lawgiver

¹⁵² Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, 43; in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), p. 686

¹⁵³ Philo, *On the Change of Names*, 128; in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), p. 352

¹⁵⁴ Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation*, 1.40; in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), p. 29

¹⁵⁵ Philo, *On the Migration of Abraham*, 84; in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), p. 261

¹⁵⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 10.35; in *The New Complete Works of Josephus* (Revised and Expanded) (Trans. William Whiston, Introduction and Commentary by Paul L. Maier), Kregel Publications (Grand Rapids, MI: 1999), p. 336

was a divine man[.]”¹⁵⁷ Josephus’ Jewish background would allow a broad use of calling men “god” as such phrases are present in the Old Testament (Genesis 33:10; Exodus 7:1), as well as the passages disputed by Heiser (Exodus 22:28; Psalm 82:6). Josephus’ expression is used parallel to the biblical phrase “man of God,” meaning a prophet of God who spoke the words of God, (Deuteronomy 33:1; Joshua 14:6; 1 Samuel 2:27; 9:6-8, 10; 1 Kings 12:22; 13:1, 4-8, 11-12, 14, 21, 26, 29, 31; 17:18, 24; 20:28; 2 Kings 1:9-13; 4:7, 9, 16, 21-22, 25, 27, 40, 42; 5:8, 14-15, 20; 6:6, 9-10, 15; 7:2, 17-19; 8:2, 4, 7-8, 11; 13:19; 23:16-17; 1 Chronicles 23:14; 2 Chronicles 8:14; 11:2; 25:7, 9; 30:16; Ezra 3:2; Nehemiah 12:24, 36; Psalm 90:1; Jeremiah 35:4; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:17; 2 Peter 1:21), sometimes applied to angels bring God’s message (Judges 13:6, 8); only Josephus adjusted the term to “divine man” as one who delivered a divine message.

Craig Keener discussing the term “divine man,” after surveying Jewish and pagan sources indicated, “The ancient use of the phrase is too broad to delineate a specific type; it can refer to a literal ‘divine man,’ an ‘inspired man,’ a man somehow related to deity, and an ‘extraordinary man.’”¹⁵⁸ Other expressions could be added to, such as the patriarch Joseph being called the son of God on the basis of his beauty. Aseneth says in a prayer, “that he [Joseph] is your [God’s] son. For who among men will give birth to such beauty and such great wisdom and virtue and power, as (owned by) the all-beautiful Joseph?”¹⁵⁹ Aseneth also calls Jacob “a father to me and a god.”¹⁶⁰ This is explained because Jacob was exceedingly beautiful to look at, and his old age (was) like the youth of a handsome (young) man[.]”¹⁶¹ The Jewish sources are most commonly allocating the expression to inspired prophets, with a few exceptions.

Elaborating on the fact that men are called *elohim*, Heiser says, “As with Moses, the kingship, by virtue of this adoptive language, carried with it a quasi-divine aspect (Psa 45:6-7). Psalm 89:27 casts the throne of David as the ‘most high’ (*elyon*) among the nations.”¹⁶² His conclusion that men can be called *Elohim* is one point he accurately reads the Scripture through the lenses of the ancient Near East (though he takes this too far at

¹⁵⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3.180; in *The New Complete Works of Josephus* (Revised and Expanded) (Trans. William Whiston, Introduction and Commentary by Paul L. Maier), Kregel Publications (Grand Rapids, MI: 1999), p. 126

¹⁵⁸ Craig S. Keener, *Acts An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1-2:47*, Baker Academic (Grand Rapids, MI: 2013), Vol. 1, p. 331

¹⁵⁹ Joseph and Aseneth 13:14, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 224. Brackets added.

¹⁶⁰ Joseph and Aseneth 22:3, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 238

¹⁶¹ Joseph and Aseneth 22:7, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 238

¹⁶² Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 246-247

times). “This was common throughout the ancient Near East—civilizations believed that kingship was instituted by the gods, and therefore the king was a descendant of the gods.”¹⁶³ The Bible does not permit this view of kings of Israel, but it was obviously used by the neighboring cultures and was used by Second Temple Jewish authors. Philo allows the expression of god to be applied to Moses for being in close communion with God and being considered the king of the nation:

What more shall I say? Has he not also enjoyed an even greater communion with the Father and Creator of the universe, being thought unworthy of being called by the same appellation? For he also was called the god and king of the whole nation, and he is said to have entered into the darkness where God was; that is to say, into the invisible, and shapeless, and incorporeal world, the essence, which is the model of all existing things, where he beheld things invisible to mortal nature; for, having brought himself and his own life into the middle, as an excellently wrought picture, he established himself as a most beautiful and Godlike work, to be a model for all those who were inclined to imitate him¹⁶⁴

The fact that pagans viewed kings as “gods” or “sons of gods” is common knowledge not needing to be elaborated on.

Heiser writes, “As concepts like divine sonship began to appear in the Bible with respect to Yahweh’s people Israel (Exod 4:23), the Israelites (Psa 2:7), and, ultimately, the messiah, the theological message became important.”¹⁶⁵ I would disagree with considering Psalm 2:7 as referring to Israelites; it is clearly referring to the Messiah (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35; Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5). However, he does admit that men can be called *elohim*, though he never says it in his popular books, he does teach men being deified which would imply they can be called gods (he uses the word divine to avoid the obvious implication of contradicting himself). His deification heresy will be discussed in a yet later article.

Referring to Exodus 4:22 and Hosea 11:1, Heiser proclaims, “Adam was Yahweh’s son. Israel was Yahweh’s son.”¹⁶⁶ So he is willing to admit the phrase “sons of God” is used in context of humans as has been traditionally understood in Psalm 82:6 which he rejects as a possible interpretation. Discussing Isaiah 45:11 as it mentions “sons,” Heiser

¹⁶³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 249

¹⁶⁴ Philo, *On the Life of Moses*, 1.158; in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), p. 474

¹⁶⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 69

¹⁶⁶ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 156

notes in his dissertation, “The preceding context informs the reader that human beings as creations of God are in view here, not Yahweh’s divine sons.”¹⁶⁷ In another article, he confesses, “However, there is one passage, Hos 1:10, that uses a similar phrase of humans (‘sons of the living God’), and Israelites on occasion were referred to as Yahweh’s ‘sons’ (Exod 4:22-23).”¹⁶⁸ With all these expression from his own writings, how is it that he can argue men cannot have the word *elohim* attributed to them since they are not disembodied beings? He claims,

The אֱלֹהִים (*elohim*) of Yahweh’s council in Psa 82 are divine beings, not human rulers. This is obvious from the parallel passage in Psa 89:5–8. In Psalm 82:6, the plural אֱלֹהִים (*elohim*) are called ‘sons of the Most High.’ These אֱלֹהִים (*elohim*) are not human since Psa 89:6 (Psa 89:7 in Hebrew) locates their assembly or council in the clouds or heavens (בְּשָׁחַק, *vashshachaq*) not on earth.¹⁶⁹

The issue with this comment is that Psalm 89 cannot accurately be considered a parallel passage to Psalm 82, especially since Psalm 89 has the “sons of the mighty” in heaven but Psalm 82 places the *elohim* (Psalm 82:1), also called “children of the most high” (Psalm 82:6), on “earth” among the “nations” (Psalm 82:8), where they were wicked and unjust judges (Psalm 82:2), afflicting the poor (Psalm 82:3).

One of Heiser’s major failures in defining the term “gods” with his emphasis on interpreting the Scripture through a lens filtered by the ancient Near East pagan thought, is neglecting the fact that much of the pagan views of deity contained mortality; placing them in a bracket closer to humanity than Heiser wants to suggest to his readers. Poems about Baal from Heiser’s beloved Ugaritic text declare, “Puissant Baal is dead, The Prince, Lord of Earth, is perished.”¹⁷⁰ The goddess Anath also kills the god Mot. “She seizes the Godly Mot—With sword she doth cleave him. With fan she doth winnow him—With fire she doth burn him. With hand-mill she doth grinds him—In the field she doth sow him. Birds eat his *remnants*, Consuming his *portions*, *Flitting from remnant to remnant*.”¹⁷¹ Craig

¹⁶⁷ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 110, fn. 438; page numbers from PDF available at:

https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁶⁸ Michael Heiser, “The Divine Council and Biblical Theology,” p. 10;

<http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/DivineCouncilLBD.pdf>

¹⁶⁹ Michael Heiser, “The Divine Council and Biblical Theology,” p. 7-8;

<http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/DivineCouncilLBD.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ Baal Poems, g, I AB, vi. 9-10; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Third Edition (ed. James B. Pritchard) Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969) p. 139

¹⁷¹ Baal Poems, h, I AB, ii 31-39; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Third Edition (ed. James B. Pritchard) Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969) p. 140

Keener, who is much more scholarly in his handling of ancient literature, mentioned that “Mortals could also threaten deities with unbelief if they failed to act.”¹⁷²

Gentiles on occasions thought Paul “was a god” (Acts 14:11-13; 28:6), as was also true for Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:22). Josephus reports this same event of Herod Agrippa’s death when,

[H]e put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theater early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun’s rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, (though not for his good,) that he was a god; and they added, “Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature.” Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery.¹⁷³

The antichrist is said to “exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2:4), and in the future the world will believe this lie (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11; Revelation 13:4, 12). All this proves the ancient world did not interpret the word “God/gods” as disembodied beings as Heiser suggests. The fact that the antichrist will be worship as a god (Revelation 13:12) and will exalted himself above all others called gods (2 Thessalonians 2:4) reveals that in the near future when these things will be fulfilled will still not have Heiser’s definition of “disembodied” for the word “god.” However, Heiser’s theology is priming the evangelical world for the end time apostasy to be deceived by the great apostate they receive as a god above others gods.

¹⁷² Craig S. Keener, *Acts An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 3:1-14:28*, Baker Academic (Grand Rapids, MI: 2013), Vol. 2, p. 2162

¹⁷³ Josephus, *Anitiquities of the Jews*, 19.344-345; in *The New Complete Works of Josephus* (Revised and Expanded) (Trans. William Whiston, Introduction and Commentary by Paul L. Maier), Kregel Publications (Grand Rapids, MI: 1999), p. 638

Gods or Angels? (Part 4)

We have seen in the previous article how Heiser redefines the word “god” to mold his theology into what he finds from pagan literature. While the Bible and ancient Hebrew literature used the word *elohim* in a generic way, he has forced a technical meaning that has no precedence in the Bible. What he has classed as “gods” is consistently considered angels during the Second Temple period, but he diligently attempts to blur this before his readers eyes. He rightly accepts that *elohim* can mean “angels” in Psalm 8:5 (cf. LXX; Hebrews 2:7),¹⁷⁴ however, he rejects the use of “angels” in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 due to “the word choice (‘angels’) comes from the Septuagint. Despite its imprecision, the divine orientation is clear.”¹⁷⁵ So he is rejecting the very word choice that God used because God’s words does not agree with what Heiser’s theological presupposition holds. Heiser needs the “sons of God” from Genesis 6 to be understood as his classified second tier of gods, that is “the divine orientation” spoken of in the quote above, but it is clearly interpreted as angels in the New Testament and Second Temple literature.

Heiser endeavors to wedge a distinction between his “gods” with what all other researchers have understood as angels (but he considers me an “inept reader”).¹⁷⁶ Referring to Daniel 10:6, he states, “that shininess or brilliant luminescence is a stock description for a divine being.”¹⁷⁷ Heiser interprets this shininess to argue it was a god, not an angel, being described (many commentators understand this as the pre-incarnate Christ). What about the New Testament descriptions of angels being shiny (Matthew 28:2-3; Luke 24:4; 2 Corinthians 11:14)? Are all these gods too? Or is this imprecise language similar to 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, since it goes against his imposed theology?

He claims, “Biblical scholars are in unanimous agreement that the ‘princes’ referred to in Daniel 10 are divine beings, not humans.”¹⁷⁸ This comment is a logical fallacy as a sweeping generalization. Anyone who is an avid reader of authors writing about biblical

¹⁷⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 62

¹⁷⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 98. fn 11

¹⁷⁶ Michael Heiser, “Of Truth Watchers and Inept Readers,” Nov. 28, 2020; <https://drmsb.com/truth-watchers-inept-readers/>

¹⁷⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 119

¹⁷⁸ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 119

literature knows there is no such things as “unanimous agreement.” Furthermore, most scholars do not impose a polytheistic worldview on the Bible and therefore there is no consensus on Daniel 10 speaking of “divine beings.” Oliver B. Greene says, “Certainly, this prince of Persia was none other than the devil himself—or one of his top emissaries.”¹⁷⁹ Wiersbe considered the prince “an evil angel[.]”¹⁸⁰ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* also referred the prince as “a satanic adversary.”¹⁸¹ Jamieson, Fausset, Brown denoted the prince as “the angel of darkness[.]”¹⁸² Jesus Christ mentioned “the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41), identifying that Satan has angels as in the book of Revelation 12:9; 2 Corinthians 12:7 and 1 Enoch 54:6.¹⁸³ Heiser is thus calling the devil (or an evil angel) a divine being—a god. It is the rank liberal scholars that Heiser immerses himself in that hold the polytheistic view which he finds unanimous agreement from, and he agrees with these liberals too.

He claims in the New Testament, “Good divine beings are predominantly referred to with *angelos* (‘angels’), whereas the term of choice for evil ones are *daimon* and *daimanion*.”¹⁸⁴ So, instead of admitting that angels are sometimes called *elohim*, he says gods are often called *angels*. Another example of his reversing of biblical language to force his opinion with twisting semantics is seen in Genesis 18-19. Heiser says, “Yahweh himself and two other divine beings[.]” and in the same paragraph he calls them “two angels.”¹⁸⁵ Are these gods or angels? His ambiguity is confusing. His Deuteronomy 32 worldview presents 70 evil “gods” ruling over the Gentile nations, but now he has good “gods” without number.

Heiser explains, “Fundamentally, the terms [*angelos/mal’ak*, i.e. *angel*] describes a task performed by a divine being, not what a divine being *is*.”¹⁸⁶ Here, he is indicating his view that the “divine beings” in his theology is ontologically unique and greater than angels. He neglects the fact that the Bible refers specifically to the “nature of angels” (Hebrews 2:16) which in context is the only ontologically beings between God and man.

¹⁷⁹ Oliver B. Greene, *Daniel Verse by Verse*, The Gospel Hour Inc. (Greenville, SC: 1964, 1973), p. 402

¹⁸⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: An Old Testament Study—Daniel*, Cook Communication Ministries (Colorado Springs, CO: 2000), p. 125

¹⁸¹ J Dwight Pentecost, *Daniel; The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, (ed. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck), Victor Books, p. 1366

¹⁸² Robert Jamieson, A. Fausset and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testament*, Zondervan (Grand Rapids, MI), p. 643

¹⁸³ *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 38

¹⁸⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 164

¹⁸⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 187

¹⁸⁶ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 324

So, the very nature of his “gods” separates them from angels, but the “gods” can be called angels if they are performing the task of giving a message. He calls Carol Newsom’s expression “angelic *elim*” being translated as “angelic gods,” an “oxymoronic term[.]”¹⁸⁷ clearly rejecting the angelic view with a strong derogatory attack against the many scholars that accept it. But, once again we find his own words contradicting. Heiser’s “gods” can perform the task of a messenger and even be called an angel, but other scholars are accused of utilizing oxymoronic terms when referring to angelic gods. Where exactly is he differing from what they are saying?

Using his Ugaritic text to interpret the Bible, he writes,

The divine assembly at Ugarit also included ‘messenger gods’ (*ml’km*), but contrary to the conclusions of scholars who have studied the divine council to this point, I do not consider the *ml’km* to be members of the divine council. The *ml’km* were present in council because they rendered service to the high god and the other gods who ranked above them, but the ruling council was composed entirely of El and his spouse and offspring.¹⁸⁸

Now he is trying to create a tidy distinction which he has argued against others for doing. As he says, the texts refer to “messenger gods” which by all means would literally translate to “angelic gods” which he says is an oxymoron. The text says what it says, but apparently not what he wants it to say. Furthermore, if *ml’km* is to mean a task that is performed, why cannot the Ugaritic gods be classified with both as he admits the Bible can use the words interchangeably when he wants it to.

Heiser is guilty of a false dichotomy and we have seen elsewhere he contradicts his own established dichotomy. His dichotomy is seen more blatant when he says, “At no time in Ugaritic literature or the Hebrew Bible are the מלאכים [*angels*] said to govern territory, nor are they ever referred to in royal terms.”¹⁸⁹ But he can admit that we do see both men and angels being called gods, and his whole theological system is riding on Psalm 82 which says the “gods” are judged for their injustice over the nations. As we have seen, men being called “gods” do rule over nations, and many scholars understand “prince or Persia” from

¹⁸⁷ Michael Heiser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 18.1 (2008), p. 3; citing Carol A. Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath: A Critical Edition* (HSM 27; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 23-24

¹⁸⁸ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 45; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁸⁹ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 58; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

Daniel 10 to refer to an “evil angel” which is against his claim nowhere in the Bible are angels given to rule over nations or given royal terms.

The phrase “anointed cherub” (Ezekiel 28:14) is likely a royal term for an angelic being. Cherubim are always placed close to God whether on the Mercy Seat (Exodus 25:18) or during the *merkabah* vision in Ezekiel 1 and 10 (cf. Revelation 4). The fact that the cherub in Ezekiel 28 is anointed is likely speaking of his royal position since he is a fallen sinful being (Ezekiel 28:15-16), making him unfit to be a priest or prophet.

Heiser offers his artificial classification of these spiritual beings.

Third, I propose that the category of archangel is synonymous with the categories “Watcher,” “blessed ones” (Greek, μακαρες), “archon,” “principality,” and “dominion.” All the beings designated in these ways exercise earthly geographical sovereignty, a function that coincides with the sons of God in Deut 32:8-9 and the gods / sons of the Most High in Psalm 82.¹⁹⁰

I perceive this proposal is a weak one according to his own system of thought. First, if his system is emphatic on structuring a tier system of spiritual beings, and this tiered structure is based on the various terms used, why does he not differentiate these all as various categories of spiritual beings? Secondly, if he is willing to say all these terms are essentially synonymous for a single tier, why can he not be willing to view the “gods” as synonymous with a lower tier, or as traditional Christian exegetes have viewed them as angels. Third, we would question where exactly would he place the cherubim, seraphim (or Second Temple literature references to ophanim etc.). The anointed cherub in Ezekiel 28:11 is called the king of Tyrus. Why does he not include the cherubim as having geographical sovereignty when there would be clear biblical warrant to do so? The very classifications that he groups together seems to be divided in Ephesians 6:12. In one Gnostic text believed to be Valentinian, a twist of Isaiah 64:4 and 1 Corinthians 2:9 is stated in a prayer. “Grant what eyes of angels have not seen, what ears of ruler [*archon*] have not heard[.]”¹⁹¹ In this Gnostic text angels seem to parallel *archons*, and Heiser classifies them as gods making him more Gnostic than the Valentinian heretics. If this Gnostic text is separating these as two classes of spiritual beings, we see a commonality of Heiser’s view with Gnosticism.

While Heiser has broadened the term “god” to expand many other terms, he generalizes “angel” to allow it to cover the terms for his “gods”. “The first proposal is that

¹⁹⁰ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 216; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁹¹ The Prayer of the Apostle Paul (trans. Marvin Meyer); in The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition (ed. Marvin Meyer), Harper One (New York, NY: 2007), p. 18

the term ‘angel’ in Second Temple texts (regardless of the language) became a generic designation for any member of the heavenly host during that period and was not restricted to members of the bottom tier of the pre-exilic council.”¹⁹² This is easily disproved in the fact that the Old Testament (much of which is pre-exilic) frequently applies the term “angel of the LORD” to theophanies (Exodus 23:20, 23, 34). If such a term could be used to identify Jehovah Himself in the Old Testament, the word “angel” obviously did not develop in the Second Temple period to be designated to bottom tier spiritual beings.

Contrary to Heiser’s bizarre classification of spiritual beings, the Second Temple literature does not agree with Heiser’s position. The Heavenly Prince Melchizedek scroll (11Q13) found at Qumran indicates Psalm 82 is referring to men:

For this is the moment of the Year of Grace for Melchizedek. [And h]e will, by his strength, judge the holy ones of God, executing judgement as it is written concerning him in the Songs of David, who said, ELOHIM *has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgement* (Psalm 82:1). And it was concerning him that he said, (Let the assembly of the peoples) *return to the height above them; EL (god) will judge the peoples* (Psalm 7:7-8).¹⁹³

By connecting the judgement of the “gods” of Psalm 82 with God judging “the peoples” of Psalm 7, it is evident that they understood the “gods” of Psalm 82 to be referring to human people. Referencing the Dead Sea Scrolls, Heiser quotes, 4Q405, which is here being cited in context, though, he only cites lines 6-7:

The figures of the ‘gods’ shall praise Him, [the most] h[oly] spirits...of glory; the floor of the marvelous innermost chambers, the spirits of the eternal gods, all...fi[gures of the innermost] chamber of the King, the spiritual works of the marvelous firmament are purified with salt, [spi]rits of knowledge, truth [and] righteousness in the holy of [hol]ies, [f]orms of the living ‘gods’, forms of the illuminating spirits. All their [works (of art)] are marvelously linked, many-colored [spirits], artistic figures of the ‘gods’, engraved all around their glorious bricks, glorious figures on b[ri]cks of splendor and majes[ty]. All their works (of art) are living ‘gods’, and their artistic figures are holy angles. From beneath the marvelous

¹⁹² Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 215; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁹³ The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls In English (Trans. Geza Vermes), Penguin Classics (London, England: 1962, 2004, p. 533

inner[most chambers] comes a sound of quiet silence: the ‘gods’ bless...the King...¹⁹⁴

This is believed to be referring to the art in the Temple depicting cherubim (1 Kings 6:27-35; 7:29, 36). Heiser comments on this passage, “This may mean that in the Shabbat Shirot cherubim are considered אֱלֹהִים, which would in turn mean that both the terms אֱלֹהִים and מַלְאָכִים would be used in a way foreign to the Hebrew Bible, where cherubim are not referred to by either term.”¹⁹⁵ Odd, his whole classification is based on Second Temple literature, even his Deuteronomy 32 worldview is based on textual criticism when the Masoretic text has “sons of Israel,” but the Second Temple period production of the Septuagint and the minority of manuscripts of Deuteronomy from the Dead Sea Scrolls have “sons of God.” This is his selective hermeneutic method, nit-picking through what conforms to his opinion that is adapted from pagan Ugaritic text.

Other Dead Sea Scroll text express synonymous usage of the term “gods” with what the biblical authors viewed as angels. For example, 4Q402, fr. 4, 9-10 mentions, “‘gods’ run to his visitation of a crowd...of ‘gods’ in the war of heaven.”¹⁹⁶ Other Second Temple Jewish texts speak of this war in heaven involving beings described with star language (Sibylline Oracles 2.200-203;¹⁹⁷ 5.514).¹⁹⁸ Heiser forces the star language into his class of divine beings but we see this allusion to the biblical scene of the war in heaven expressed in Revelation 12:7-8 which speaks of angels involved with this war likely paralleling star language in Revelation 12:4. The term “angel” in Revelation must be an ontological classification since they are fighting in a war, not carrying a message. The Apocalypse of Zephaniah even goes as far as claiming Zephaniah was lifted up into the fifth heaven and “saw angels who are called ‘lords,’ and the diadem was set upon them in the Holy Spirit, and the throne of each of them was sevenfold more (brilliant) than the light of the rising sun.”¹⁹⁹ Here we find “angels” with royal designations being described as more luminescent than the sun. There is no messenger office being expressed for these angels so

¹⁹⁴ The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls In English (Trans. Geza Vermes), Penguin Classics (London, England: 1962, 2004, p. 337

¹⁹⁵ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 188; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

¹⁹⁶ The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls In English (Trans. Geza Vermes), Penguin Classics (London, England: 1962, 2004, p. 331

¹⁹⁷ The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 350

¹⁹⁸ The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 405

¹⁹⁹ Apocalypse of Zephaniah A, O. S. Wintermute, in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 508

it must be an ontological classification which contradicts Heiser explanation of “gods,” and his claims about Second Temple Jewish literature.

Heiser suggests, “Jub. 15:30b-32 provides the fullest description of the worldview of Deut 4:19-20; 32:8-9, and Daniel 10[.]”²⁰⁰ He is surely accurate in this proposition as it is the closest representation of his worldview with a few exceptions; one particularly that Jubilees does not allow the spiritual entities that rule over the Gentile nation to be called “gods” as Heiser insists on calling them. Jubilees calls them simply “angels” or “spirits.” The very text Heiser mentions says as much:

But he chose Israel that they might be a people for himself. And he sanctified them and gathered them from all of the sons of man because (there are) many nations and many people, and they all belong to him, but over all of them he caused spirits to rule so that they might lead them astray from following him. But over Israel he did not cause any angel or spirit to rule because he alone is their ruler and he will protect them and he will seek for them at the hand of his angels and at the hand of his spirits and at the hand of all of his authorities so that he might guard them and bless them and they might be his and he might be theirs henceforth and forever.²⁰¹

By blurring what these texts actually state Heiser is attempting to make his reading of the Bible and Second Temple Jewish literature conform to his Ugaritic paganism. This is exactly what the Gnostic did to the Bible by forcing it to read like their presupposed pagan mystery religions, either through allegorical interpretations or textual critical methods. Heiser exalts his “gods” stating, “The biblical answer is that the heavenly host was with God before the creation.”²⁰² He cites Job 38:4-7 as “clear on that point[.]” but the foundation of the earth is clearly dry ground contrasted with the sea Job 38:8, and the dry ground was created on the third day (Genesis 1:9, 13), not before creation. He is attempting to exalt the “sons of God” to divine status, not mere angels. He says, “Right from the start, then, God has company – other divine beings, the sons of God.”²⁰³ He places these gods

²⁰⁰ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 231; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

²⁰¹ Jubilees, 15:30-32; O. S. Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 87; also cited by Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 231; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

²⁰² Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 23

²⁰³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 24

with God “before the creation” and “right from the start,” which would imply they are eternal since creation occurred “in the beginning” of the time dimension (Genesis 1:1).

Do Heiser’s gods precede the creation of the time dimension itself? If so, that makes them eternal. He rescues himself by saying, “God created a host of nonhuman divine beings whose domain is (to human eyes) an unseen realm.”²⁰⁴ So, according to Heiser, they are not eternal since they were created even if that creation was before time itself. But how does he conclude that they were created? The creation of divine beings is nowhere adduced from Scriptures, so if his divine counsel was biblical, we would have to infer that these divine beings are eternal with God. Biblically speaking we would infer angels were created sometime between the first and third day, not before “the beginning,” which is when the time dimension was created.

Heiser’s discussion of “gods,” “sons of God,” and “divine beings,” also causes us to question how exactly he understands the Trinity. In his dissertation he wrote, “In general terms, Second Temple Jewish literature reveals several interesting phenomena related to the discussion at hand.... Third, and perhaps most interesting, as the number of explicit references to the אֱלֹהִים / בְּנֵי-הָאֱלֹהִים [gods/sons of God] decrease (relative to the sectarian Qumran texts, at least), the fascination with divine vice-regency increases.”²⁰⁵ These references to a divine vice-regency is how he understands the Lord Jesus Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity, as the Son of God. Is the Son of God just one of these other divine beings which Heiser calls gods/sons of God? Classic Trinitarian passages of the Old Testament are corrupted by Heiser’s deviant exegesis. He says,

Seeing the Trinity in Gen 1:26 is reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament, something that isn’t a sound interpretive method for discerning what an Old Testament writer was thinking. Unlike the New Testament, the Old Testament has no Trinitarian phrases (e.g., ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’; cf. Matt 28:19-20).²⁰⁶

There are a few hermeneutic problems with not reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament.

First, by believing the Scripture is inspired of God (2 Timothy 3:16), Who is omniscient, God’s foreknowledge knew what He would reveal in the New Testament when

²⁰⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 28

²⁰⁵ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 214; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis [Brackets added.]

²⁰⁶ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 39, fn. 1

He revealed His words to the Old Testament prophets. Thus, reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament as God's divine interpretation of the Old Testament should be accepted. Secondly, the principle of progressive revelation is necessary for properly understanding the Scripture. Not everything is laid out in chapter one, so reading things back into it to make sense of it is needed. Thirdly, this argument contradicts his own discussion about Jesus Christ present in the Old Testament so reading the Trinity in the Old Testament is not reading the New Testament into it. He admits this himself tucked away in a footnote. "We will see in later chapters that Yahweh too has a coregent or vizier, just as the council at Ugarit. But that figure is not another created *Elohim* – it is Yahweh himself in a second personage. This is the backdrop to the idea of a Godhead that Christians often only associate with the New Testament."²⁰⁷ However, he also rejects Trinitarian passages when he claims "Yahweh said to his council... (Gen 11:7) [,]"²⁰⁸ as well as Isaiah 6:2 where he claims God is speaking to the divine council and not the Trinity.

Note how he reads Trinitarianism by pagan texts.

The Israelite binitarian godhead is also indicated by the 'rider on the clouds' motif in the Hebrew Bible. This epithet was a well-known title for Baal. For orthodox Yawists, Baal's attributes were taken over by Yahweh, their rightful bearer. The Hebrew Bible consistently refers to Yahweh as the one who rides the clouds (Psa 68:4; 68:5, in Hebrew; 69:33, Ps 68:34 in Hebrew; 104:3 Deut 33:26; Isa 19:1) with one exception; the 'son of man' in Dan 7:13. This character in Dan 7 is distinct from the enthroned deity, the ancient of days, who was expected to bear this Yaweh-title of the Hebrew Bible. This passage, along with the 'man of war' (the angel) formed the basis for Judaism's doctrine of two powers in heaven, a point of orthodoxy until the second century AD.²⁰⁹

Baal does frequently have this epithet attributed to him, but he is also called the son of El. Ras Shamra-Ugarit refers to Baal as "Prince Baal... Rider of the Clouds."²¹⁰ El is described as "Bull El his father... the King his begetter[.]"²¹¹ But we also find "Lady Asherah of [the

²⁰⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 46, fn. 2

²⁰⁸ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 350

²⁰⁹ Michael Heiser, "The Divine Council and Biblical Theology," p. 4;
<http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/DivineCouncilLBD.pdf>

²¹⁰ Poems of Baal and Anath (2) III AB A; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 130

²¹¹ Poems of Baal and Anath (e.) II AB iv-v; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 133

Sea]... the Progenitress of the Gods,”²¹² who is said to have “seventy children.”²¹³ This is the structure of the Divine Assembly which Heiser reads into the Bible, with El as King, Asherah as Queen, and Baal the eldest of their 70 sons being the vice regent. But El and Baal are two separate individual gods, nothing like biblical Trinitarianism. Heiser generally discusses the binitarianism of the “Two-Powers in heaven” from Second Temple Judaism, but how does he squeeze the Holy Spirit into his El/Baal backdrop for interpreting the Trinity? Would he suggest Asherah synonymous with the Holy Spirit? Gnostics presented the Holy Spirit often in a feminine goddess form. Personally, I have not read much on his view of the Trinity or what he has said about the Holy Spirit, but these questions must be asked because the trends of synchronizing pagan thought found throughout his writings. One cannot simply synchronize paganism into the Bible without struggling to explain how and where the distinctions exist.

While discussing Genesis 1, Heiser said, “The text of Genesis 1:26 does *not* inform us that divine image bearing make us distinct from heavenly beings, those sons of God who were already in existence at the time of creation. The plurals in Genesis 1:26 means that, in some way, we share something with them when it comes to bearing God’s image.”²¹⁴ This is defective in his reading the expression of God speaking to his other gods in contrast to the traditional Trinitarian reading. But nowhere in the Bible does it say “sons of God,” “gods” or even “angel” bear God’s image, so his point is an argument from silence to sustain his rejection of the Trinity creating man. He properly understands the “image of God” means “to oversee the earth[.]”²¹⁵ so he has to assumed the *elohim* bear God’s image to permit his presupposition that *elohim* rule over the nations?

Heiser’s theological system is presented in a nutshell in his dissertation:

This evidence is presented in three areas: (1) The presence of multiple deity-class second tier beings, either in the form of a group or a deified figure above the other members of the heavenly host yet below God; (2) a religious worldview articulated along the lines of Deuteronomy 32 and Daniel 10, where the nations of the earth

²¹² Poems of Baal and Anath (d) Fragment B; in Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 131

²¹³ Poems of Baal and Anath (e) II AB vi; in Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 134

²¹⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 41

²¹⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 43

are ruled by divine heavenly princes; and (3) speculations in the literature about the identity of an exalted, deified vice-regent.²¹⁶

Heiser presents the idea that these “gods” rule over the nations, while Jehovah retains the land of Israel for Himself and His Divine vice-regent. This vice-regent is continually being equivocated by terms with the second-class deities, though he calls him Jehovah without elaborating what this means in his view. His thinking is in line with the pagans of the times but contradicts the Jewish religious view of the Bible. For example, the pagans of Syria thought that Jehovah had only regional authority, stating, “And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods *are* gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they” (1 Kings 20:23). Jehovah rebuked such pagan ideology by sending a prophet to proclaim to the king of Israel, “Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord *is* God of the hills, but he *is* not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I *am* the Lord” (1 Kings 20:28). Jehovah’s authority is over all the earth, not merely regional limits as Heiser’s theology portrays.

Furthermore, there are multitudes of logical issues that throw his theology in disarray. When Jeroboam crafts the golden calf based on Egyptian idols (2 Kings 10:29), does that mean the regional “god” over Egypt overpowered Jehovah? Or how about when king Ahaz sent the pattern of the altar he saw in Damascus to his priest Urijah to build one in Jerusalem to make offerings (2 Kings 16:10-16)? Should we think this is meant that the “god” represented in the Syrian altar has become the ruling spiritual entity over Judah, usurping Jehovah? Or perhaps this “god” has become omnipresent all-of-a-sudden, since there are two altars representing his presence? Is this “god” suddenly on an ontological pedestal equal to Jehovah Who only exist with omni-attributes prior to this altar being made? Or what about when the Assyrian king moved the Israelites out of their land and placed multitudes of pagan nations and peoples as new settlers in the land of Israel? These peoples brought with them their own heathen “gods” (2 Kings 17:29-33), which, according to Heiser’s theology of the Bible portraying a “cosmic turf war” would mean these spiritual entities have conquered Jehovah and took over His portion.

Hezekiah’s prayer presents the Jewish view of God as the only God in all the earth. “And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said, O Lord God of Israel, which dwellest *between* the cherubims, thou art the God, *even* thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth” (2 Kings 19:15). This allows no regional “gods” over other gentile nations in all the earth as Heiser would like to teach. Hezekiah further says in

²¹⁶ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 217; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

this prayer, “Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire: for they *were* no gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them” (2 Kings 19:17-18). Here we see the “gods” of other nations were nothing but idols made by men. Perhaps Heiser would intend to say only Assyria’s “god” was an actual spiritual entity, as his theology only demands 70 “gods.” But here lies a problem for his hermeneutic method, the word “god” is being used in the Bible in a way proving Heiser’s definition to be wrong.

1 Chronicles 16:25-26 says, “For great *is* the Lord, and greatly to be praised: he also *is* to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people *are* idols: but the Lord made the heavens.” According to Heiser, the first verse would be implying incomparability of Jehovah to other “gods.” His position would render the passage completely meaningless if the first comment means there are other “gods” in existence and follows directly by saying they are nothing but idols.

The claims Heiser makes about the traditionally understood monotheistic passages being incomparability passages show his selectiveness of Scriptures and avoiding others that refute his worldview. For example, Jeremiah 10 is full of comments that sound just like the ones he cites as incomparability passages:

Jeremiah 10:7: “*there is* none like unto thee.”

Jeremiah 10:10: “But the Lord *is* the true God, he *is* the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.”

Jeremiah 10:12: “He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion.”

Jeremiah 10:16: “The portion of Jacob *is* not like them: for he *is* the former of all *things*; and Israel *is* the rod of his inheritance: The Lord of hosts *is* his name.”

In Heiser’s theological system, these passages should be showing that Jehovah is the God over the portion of land he gave to Israel and is incomparable to the other gods He set over the Gentile nations. However, the context is dealing with idols which are nothing.

Jeremiah 10:5: “They *are* upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also *is it* in them to do good.”

Jeremiah 10:8: “But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock *is* a doctrine of vanities.”

Jeremiah 10:11: “Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, *even* they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.”

Jeremiah 10:14-15: “Every man is brutish in *his* knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image *is* falsehood, and *there is* no breath in them. They *are* vanity, *and* the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish.”

According to Heiser’s redefinition of the word “gods” (אֱלֹהִים in verse 11), it could not mean the physical idol but only a spiritual entity, at very least a spiritual entity behind the idol. The context demands that the gods are mere idols which are absolutely nothing but vain stocks of wood or stone, yet Jehovah is being compared to them as the True Living God which nothing can be likened too.

Jeremiah continues to declare that the Gentile nations inherited false gods which are not gods at all. Jeremiah 10:19-20 “O Lord, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and *things* wherein *there is* no profit. Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they *are* no gods?” Note here the word for “inherited” is נָחֲלוּ, the same word that Heiser’s worldview hinges on from Deuteronomy 32:8. Jehovah did not give the Gentile nations an inheritance of second tier “gods,” they inherited lies and vanities from the fathers who “changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things....who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Romans 1:23, 25).

Furthermore, the Bible reveals a world that does not fit the depiction of Heiser’s Divine Council worldview of seventy gods ruling over the Gentile nations. Surely this was not the Jewish religion as those Jews that were involved with idolatry never believed in a mere seventy gods over nations. Jeremiah rebukes these apostates, “For *according to* the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and *according to* the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to *that* shameful thing, *even* altars to burn incense unto Baal” (Jeremiah 11:13). This is further depicted as the pagan worldview in the New Testament. Paul was stirred up in Athens because it was so immersed in idolatry in Acts 17:16. Paul preached to the Athenians “*Ye* men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:22-23). Craig Keener states, “God had the right to judge the nations as he decided, since (from a Jewish perspective) God ruled all the nations (Deut 32:8; Ps 145:9; Wis 11:22-24; 1 En. 84:2).”²¹⁷ Surely the Jews did not think like Heiser that actual “gods” ruled the Gentile nations.

²¹⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Acts An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 3:1-14:28*, Baker Academic (Grand Rapids, MI: 2013), Vol. 2, p. 2168

Deification (Part 5)

In the preceding articles about Michael Heiser's theological ideas, I primarily assessed his polytheistic tendencies. In this chapter the discussion will be more specifically why I consider him a Gnostic (personally I would consider anyone claiming to be a Christian but believing in a plurality of gods a Gnostic). This is not meant to be some vilification of his character, but rather a simplified description of his theology which holds in common with Gnosticism the inclination to interpret Scripture as mythology, through the filter of pagan philosophy, as well as promoting the heresy of man becoming gods.

Chas Clifton says,

Various persons and groups have been labeled Gnostic over the centuries, and most have shared ideas. The most basic of these is that all people carry within them a spark of divinity, but that they have lost knowledge of this divinity and of their true spiritual origin outside the material world. Rather than seeing a spiritual struggle between God and the devil taking place, Gnostics describe a conflict between the true, unknowable high God and a lesser god who rules the world.²¹⁸

Considering this comment, Heiser follows the basic premise with a little variation. He defines "*elohim/gods*" as having a disembodied nature, thus his claim that men become gods follows the Gnostic notion of "a spark of divinity" in man as their "spiritual origin outside the material world," moving this deification from the origin to his eschatological destiny (unless his discussion of the divine council in the Garden of Eden is setting deification back to the origin, or even Adam being called the "son of God" in Luke 3:38 which Heiser interprets to be language for gods). His variation of the Gnostic concept alters from a dualistic form of two battling gods, to an army of lesser gods involved in a "cosmic turf war" against the true God he defines as ontologically unique.

The Gnostic text *On the Origin of the World* relates something very similar to what we find in Heiser's theology. "Seven Archangels stand before the throne. Sabaoth is the eighth, and he has authority, and so there are seventy-two figures in all. From this chariot the seventy-two gods took shape, so that they might rule over the languages of the seventy-

²¹⁸ Chas S. Clifton, *Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics*, Barnes and Nobles Books (New York, NY:1992), p. 50

two nations.”²¹⁹ With Heiser’s discussion of Jehovah and His vice-regent, plus the seventy gods of his divine council, we find exactly seventy-two gods in Heiser’s theology.

Chas Clifton introduces his entry on Gnosticism in *Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics*, stating, “A movement influenced by Greek philosophy, Asian and Middle Eastern mysticism and alternative interpretations of Jewish and Christian teachings, Gnosticism early on became the chief rival of orthodox Eastern and Western Christianity.”²²⁰ Nicola Denzey, who produced the first text book on Gnosticism, wrote, “Although Irenaeus reproduces quite a bit of Gnostic cosmology and mythology, we did not know how accurately he was doing this until we found some of the texts he was apparently using.”²²¹ With the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library, we learned how accurate Irenaeus’ detailed analysis of Gnosticism was. Speaking of this collection of books which came to be known as the Nag Hammadi library, Robin Lane Fox write:

The collection is not a single library, nor is it uniformly heretical, nor even entirely Christian. It includes a poor translation of a section of Plato’s *Republic* and a pagan letter of “Eugnostis the Blessed”: the letter was then given a Christian preface and conclusion and presented in another copy as the “wisdom” which Jesus revealed to his Apostles after his death. The “Library” also includes three texts which are known in a pagan setting: a prayer and two discourses of Thrice-great Hermes, the pagan god....

Barely five and a half miles from the discovery of these books lay a major monastic community, founded by the great Pachomius, father of this type of monasticism in Egypt: his own first monastery was only three miles distant. In theory, the filling of the bindings could have derived from any rubbish heap elsewhere, but the brilliant conjecture that the books, too, belonged to monks is still the most economical. There were no “Gnostics” at Nag Hammadi in the mid-fourth century and certainly no study of Coptic-speaking “Hermeticist,” pagans who wished to own so many Christian books beside their own. Coptic, however, was the language of the majority in the early Pachomian monasteries: after c. 350, we know that rumours of rampant unorthodoxy caused their members’ opinion to be checked.²²²

Pagans followed religions structured around mythologies which is contrasted to the Jews and Christians who were grounded in revelation from God which expounded the true

²¹⁹ On the Origin of the World (trans. Marvin Meyer); in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts*, ed. Marvin Meyer, HarperOne (New York, NY) 2008, p. 207

²²⁰ Chas S. Clifton, *Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics*, Barnes and Nobles Books (New York, NY:1992), p. 49

²²¹ Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to “Gnosticism,”* Oxford University Press (Oxford N.Y.: 2013), p. 25

²²² Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Alfred A. Knopf (New York, NY: 1987), pp. 414-415

history of His interacting in the world. “Where the Bacchic societies offered a myth of their god, Jews and Christians offered history; the pagan mysteries conveyed a secret experience, whereas the Jew and Christians offered a ‘revelation’ based on texts. They also united cult and religious philosophy, and here, too, they could capitalize on common ground.”²²³

Gnosticism carried the Hegelian dialectic method of producing a synthesis of two opposing options.²²⁴ Historian Robin Lane Fox related, “this tendency was exemplified in the writings of ‘knowing’ Christian Gnostics, who dissolved history and the Gospels into a complex myth of Creation and the human predicament.”²²⁵ Pagan myths are loaded with the gods battling for preeminence over each other, which Heiser has capitalized on in his synchronizing to the Bible of some complex mythological war of the gods, and he is the only one able to expound this greater knowledge of Scripture to us.

To be sure, I am not suggesting that one should avoid studying the literature of the ancient cultures that surrounded the nation of Israel to get an insight to the historical setting. As Merrill Unger has written, “Moreover, some Old Testament writers were acquainted with the literature of surrounding nations and modeled some of their inspired compositions after their literary masterpieces. This fact is clearly shown, for instance, by striking parallels between some of the earlier psalms and the epic literature discovered as Ras Shamra.”²²⁶ Note that Unger expresses it was early psalms that parallel Ras Shamra, not late psalms which Heiser would admit Psalm 82 is of the Persian period. Thus Unger interprets the gods in Psalm 82 as being “used of magistrates who represent God, Ex 21:6; Ps 58:1; Jn 10:34-36.”²²⁷ Unger warns against the hermeneutic methods of men like Heiser, saying, “It seems inconceivable that the Holy Spirit would have used an epic so contaminated with heathen philosophy as a *source of spiritual truth*. The employment of a poetical form or a certain type of meter as a vehicle for the expression of spiritual truth, of which there are clear Old Testament examples taken from contemporary literature, is an entirely different matter.”²²⁸ He also identifies, “The Baal cult included worship and gay licentious dances on wooded hilltops called ‘highplaces.’ ... Asherah, as is now well-known from the Ras-Shamra epic literature of the fourteenth century B.C., was the consort of the chief Canaanite deity El. But by the ninth century and later in Palestine she was regarded

²²³ Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Alfred A. Knopf (New York, NY: 1987), p. 94

²²⁴ see Heath Henning, “Hegelian Dialectics,” July 1, 2016; <http://truthwatchers.com/hegelain-dialectics/>

²²⁵ Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Alfred A. Knopf (New York, NY: 1987), p. 332

²²⁶ Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, Zondervan Publishing House (Grand Rapids, MI: 1954), p. 36

²²⁷ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Handbook: An Essential Guide to Understanding the Bible*, Moody Press (Chicago, IL: 1966, 1977), p. 284

²²⁸ Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, Zondervan Publishing House (Grand Rapids, MI: 1954), p. 36

as the wife of Baal.”²²⁹ Heiser structures these myths that were the foundation of this pagan licentiousness into his theology to interpret the Bible.²³⁰

In fact, Heiser is very committed to viewing the Bible through the mythological pagan perspective to the point of even considering portions of the Bible mythological and thus denying inerrancy. He teaches Noah’s flood was local²³¹ against what the text clearly teaches (as well as science).²³² Heiser rejects the Masoretic Text description of Goliath, citing the Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint on 1 Samuel 17:4.²³³ However, the variant has been appropriately explained by the fact that the LXX is based on the measurements of the Royal Egyptian cubit while the MT text likely used the Hebrew common cubit and are therefore both correct.²³⁴

When the text opposes Heiser’s presupposition, he seeks “evidence that the redactor scribe” manipulated the text.²³⁵ He becomes a redactor scribe manipulating the texts whenever he needs to for his theory to look stronger. In translating the Septuagint version of Isaiah 9:6, Heiser offers the rendering, “angel of [the] great council[.]”²³⁶ The issue is over his addition of the article which he placed within brackets. There is clearly no article in the Greek, *μεγάλης βουλῆς ἁγγελός*, and Heiser is aware of this fact since he could only insert it with brackets. The difference would be: a) the “angel” would be bringing a message “of great council,” contrast to an angel that reside in or over “[the] great council;” and b) this textual manipulation is self-refuting to Heiser own system since he does not include “angels” in the “council” since they are of a lower tier, only his “gods” reside in the council

We have seen how he is guilty of redefining words when he needs to in earlier chapters. But he does not limit his corrupting of texts to the Bible. He includes corruptions of Second Temple literature to present his view. In his dissertation Heiser admits, “English

²²⁹ Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, Zondervan Publishing House (Grand Rapids, MI: 1954), p. 278

²³⁰ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 44-48

²³¹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 190, fn 14; p. 210, fn 12

²³² see Heat Henning, “Evidence of a Worldwide Flood,” Jan. 3, 2018; <http://truthwatchers.com/evidence-world-wide-flood/>

²³³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 211, also fn 17 on 211-212

²³⁴ Clyde Billington, “Goliath and the Exodus Giants: How Tall were They?” *Journal of Evangelical Society*, 50:3 (Sep. 2007): 489-508

²³⁵ Michael Heiser, “The Divine Council and Biblical Theology,” p. 14; <http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/DivineCouncilLBD.pdf>

²³⁶ Michale S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 219; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

translations of pseudepigraphic texts are taken from the respective translations in Charlesworth, ed., OTP, vols. 1-2, but occasionally made more literal to bring out the council vocabulary.”²³⁷ If the “council vocabulary” was literally in the texts, he would not need to bring it out.

The problem is that Heiser is more committed to his mythology than he is to being honest with the Bible and other ancient literature he needs to justify his Gnostic interpretation. He writes in his dissertation, “The reference to the ‘waters above the heavens’ is also important, for it points to the pre-scientific mythological worldview that there were waters above a solid vault of the earth, atop which Yahweh’s throne was placed.”²³⁸ Heiser is revealing his liberal leanings as he offers the foolish definition from the BDB Hebrew lexicon as if it were accurate. This lexicon defines the Hebrew word *raqia*’ as, “the vault of heaven, or ‘firmament,’ regarded by Hebrews as solid, and supporting ‘waters’ above it[.]”²³⁹ Other more modern scholars have rejected this definition, expressing:

The basic concept in *raqia*’ is stamping, as with the foot, and what results, i.e. a spreading out or stretching forth....In pre-Christin Egypt confusion was introduced into biblical cosmology when the LXX perhaps under the influence of Alexandrian theories of a ‘stone vault’ of heaven, rendered *raqia*’ by *stereoma*, suggesting some firm, solid structure. This Greek concept was then reflected by the Latin *firmentum*, hence KJV ‘firmament.’ To this day negative criticism speaks of the ‘vault, or firmament,’ regarded by Hebrews as solid[.]²⁴⁰

However, it is not difficult to study what the Bible say for itself of this “firmament” and “waters” above it. As the lexicographer above conveyed the root meaning was to stamp out, spreading or stretching, we must ask how such a solid vault is stretched as Scripture identifies (Job 37:18; Isaiah 44:24; Ezekiel 1:22)?

Jonathan Sarfati exposed those authors who hold such a view of some solid vault that “the premise that the Hebrew writers of Scripture shared the limitations of their surrounding cultures is faulty. Since God is the divine author of the Hebrew Bible, it should

²³⁷ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 217, fn. 786; page numbers from PDF available at:

https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

²³⁸ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 36; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

²³⁹ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, C.A. Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1980, p. 956

²⁴⁰ J. Barton Payne, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke) Moody Press (Chicago, IL 1980), Vol. 2, p. 862

not be surprising that it has some scientific insight.”²⁴¹ Genesis 1:20 clearly expresses that the birds are said to fly “in the open firmament of heaven.” How often are birds seen flying *in* a solid vault? Maybe in Heiser’s mythology magical birds can do such things, but that is not based on scientifically inerrant Scripture authored by the one and only God.

Deification

The second major correlation of Heiser’s theology and Gnosticism is man becoming gods. Heiser writes, “God created humankind to extend Eden over all the earth. That’s what the command of Genesis 1:28 collectively referred to by theologians as the dominion mandate, are about.”²⁴² The dominion mandate has nothing to do with spreading Eden over the earth as anyone can see from reading his faulty proof text. In fact, the dominion mandate was reiterated after the Eden was lost and after the worldwide flood of Noah’s day (Genesis 9:3-4; Psalm 8), so how can the command be to extend Eden? The orthodox understanding of the Dominion Mandate is what gave mankind the reasoning to produce the scientific method and was the foundation of the scientific revolution.²⁴³ Heiser, tells us, “An ancient Israelite would have thought of Eden as the dwelling of God and the place from which God and his council directed the affairs of humanity... Eden is described in Ezekiel 28:2 as the ‘seat of the gods.’”²⁴⁴ His idea is that gods ruled the earth from Eden, and this rulership from these gods in Eden was to extend over the earth. But the Dominion Mandate was given to man, not the gods, so if he claims man was to spread Eden his indication is man is a god.

His proof text of Ezekiel is clearly speaking of Tyrus. In fact, Ezekiel 28 is a perfect case of how Heiser’s hermeneutics is self-defeating. Ezekiel 28:2 clearly reveals that the biblical authors were familiar with the fact that their surrounding pagan neighbors referred to their kings and princes as “gods.” When Ezekiel switches his terminology from the “prince of Tyrus” (Ezekiel 28:2) to “the king of Tyrus” (Ezekiel 28:12), Heiser interpretation is “Ezekiel [is] drawing on a tale about the rebellion of a *divine* being against God[.]”²⁴⁵ Is this just a “tale” that comes from pagan mythology the biblical authors are using, or was its actual history recorded in the inerrant Word of God? He views the

²⁴¹ Johnathan Sarfati, *The Genesis Account: A Theological, Historical, and Scientific Commentary on Genesis 1-11*, Creation Ministry International (Powder Springs, Georgia: 2015), p. 151

²⁴² Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 58-59

²⁴³ Heath Henning, *The Image of God*, November 5, 2016; <https://truthwatchers.com/the-image-of-god/>; Henry Morris, *Dominion Mandate*, <http://www.icr.org/article/dominion-mandate/>

²⁴⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 47-48

²⁴⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 78

“anointed cherub” as a “divine cherub”²⁴⁶ instead of an angelic being like most traditional conservative commentators. But if Heiser’s entire system is supposedly imposing Ancient Near Eastern cultural context into the text why is he selectively ignoring the abundance of such literature that refer to kings as gods proving the men can be called gods (*elohim*) as is evident in Ezekiel 28:2? Ancient Near Eastern literature is only relevant to his argument when he can use it to argue for the divine council but must be ignored when it refutes his presupposed theology.

Ancient Near Eastern paganism was full of references of men being called and or worshiped as gods. Gnosticism adapted this thinking into biblical terminology to produce their theological heresies, as does Heiser. From Akkadian literature, *The Gilgamesh Epic* proclaims “Thou art wise, Enkidu, art become like a god!”²⁴⁷ In Egyptian text, one Pharaoh can speak of his father’s death as deification, “When my father became a god and I seated myself on the throne of my father[.]”²⁴⁸ A Pharaoh could also call himself a god while alive, “The majesty of this god[.]”²⁴⁹ or as Ramses II referred to himself as “every foreign country was in humility under the feet of this good god... I rise like the sun disc and shine like Re[.]”²⁵⁰ calling himself “the great living god[.]”²⁵¹ and making a goddess out of woman he married: “Then [his] majesty saw that she was fair of face [*like*] a goddess.... Then his majesty caused her name to be: the King’s Wife Maat-nefru-Re[.]”²⁵² Even expressing similarity to Jehovah’s famous self-revelation in Exodus 3:14, one Pharaoh states, “But as I live! I AM While I Am!”²⁵³ Ugaritic literature such as the Keret Epic calls the king Keret “a son of El”²⁵⁴ and is questioned whether he would die “like the mortals,

²⁴⁶ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 79

²⁴⁷ *The Gilgamesh Epic*, Tablet 1.iv.34; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 75, similarly in Tablet 2.ii.11, p. 77

²⁴⁸ Treaty Between Mursilis and Duppi-Tessub of Amurru; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 203; also see A Dispute Over Suicide, p. 405, 407; The Instruction for King Meri-Ka-Re, p. 415

²⁴⁹ The Egyptian Mines in Sinai; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 229

²⁵⁰ Peace between Egypt and Hatti; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 257

²⁵¹ Peace between Egypt and Hatti; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 257

²⁵² Peace Between Egypt and Hatti; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 258

²⁵³ The Instruction for King Meri-Ka-Re, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 416

²⁵⁴ The Keret Epic, C.i.10, 20; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 147

... Shall, then, a god die, An offspring of the Kindly One not live?"²⁵⁵ Heiser is educated in Egyptian and Ugaritic literature and has apparently synchronized this pagan ideology into the Bible.

Concerning man becoming gods, Heiser writes, "When we are made divine (glorified) on the new earth *we all outrank angels*."²⁵⁶ He, of course, teaches this second tier of gods are above the mere angels in rank. He says, "Our inheritance of the nations with Jesus at the end of days (Rev 3:21) is in a glorified, resurrected—divine—state."²⁵⁷ So it is only when men become divine that the Dominion Mandate is fulfilled, according to Heiser, since that is when Eden is actual spread over the earth. This would seem to imply that he views man's origin as divine, as we saw was preeminent to Gnostic thought.

He further complicates his theology by stating, "Both Jeremiah and Isaiah describe kingdom living as a transformed society, one that cannot be accompanied without the presence of the Spirit and the divine messiah, as well as humans made divine."²⁵⁸ Notice in this quote the confusion produces the logical fallacy of equivocation. Heiser refers to the "divine messiah" as well as "humans made divine[.]" which being stated within immediate context, the term "divine" seems to place deified man on ontological par with the divine Messiah. This may be an accident in his writing as he elsewhere says the Messiah is Jehovah on a distinct ontological level from his created gods, which here man is taking the place of these gods. But I question how orthodox his understanding of the Trinity and Christology is, and deification is clearly not orthodox.

Heiser's concept projects the thought that when Christ returns He will overthrow the corrupt gods of Psalm 82 and deify men to take their places over the nations. "The corrupt divine sons of God of Deuteronomy 32:8 would be displaced by new divine sons of God—glorified believers."²⁵⁹ He reiterates, "when the nations of the earth are taken back by Yahweh, the lesser *elohim* of those nations will be displaced by Yahweh's reconstituted council, his earthly sons and daughters made divine and set over the nations."²⁶⁰ Thus men will be above the angels as well as the gods that are cast down. We also see similar thoughts

²⁵⁵ The Keret Epic, C.ii102-106; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 147-148

²⁵⁶ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 158

²⁵⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 159

²⁵⁸ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 353, fn 11

²⁵⁹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 160

²⁶⁰ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 352

from *The Corpus Hermeticum*: “for man is a divine being and is not to be counted amongst the other creatures on earth but amongst those in heaven called gods. Indeed, if we have to speak the truth boldly, the true man is above the gods, or at least fully their equal in power.”²⁶¹

We find Hermeticism and Gnosticism close kin, even a line from the *Hermetica* is quoted in the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*. Gnosticism has been suggested to be divided into four schools for easy classification: 1) Thomas School, 2) Sethian School, 3) Valentinian School, and 4) Hermetic School.²⁶² Hermeticism teaches, “The human souls which gain immortality are transformed into spirits and thence to the choruses of the gods.”²⁶³ Thus the deification doctrine is like Heiser’s, when immortality is given and individuals are transformed at the end times.

Heiser even agrees with the Hermetic Gnostic text, *Excerpt from the Perfect Discourse* which expresses the Egyptian theory that statues are empowered by the souls of these gods to defend his redefinition of *elohim*. “For just as the Father, the Lord of the universe, creates gods, so too people—mortal, earthly, living things, who are not like God—create gods. People give and receive power. People become divine and create gods.”²⁶⁴ Men can make idols and through divine rights of a ritual, breath spiritual entities into the statues.

The hermetic doctrine teaches:

The human soul, that is not every human soul, but a pious one, is spiritual and divine. When such a soul has freed itself from the body and passed the test of piety, which is to know God and to harm no man, it becomes pure *Nous* [*Mind*]...when the *Nous* becomes a divine power, it is oblige to receive a fiery body to serve God[.]²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ The Corpus Hermeticum, book 10; in *The Way of Hermes: New Translation of The Corpus Hermeticum and the Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*, Tran. By Clement Salaman, Dorine Van Oven, William D. Wharton, and Jean-Pierre Mahe, Inner Traditions International, 2000, p. 51

²⁶² *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts*, ed. Marvin Meyer, HarperOne (New York, NY) 2008, p. 777-798

²⁶³ The Corpus Hermeticum, book 10; in *The Way of Hermes: New Translation of The Corpus Hermeticum and the Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*, Tran. By Clement Salaman, Dorine Van Oven, William D. Wharton, and Jean-Pierre Mahe, Inner Traditions International, 2000, p. 47

²⁶⁴ Excerpts from the Perfect Discourse (trans. Marvin Meyer); in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts*, ed. Marvin Meyer, HarperOne (New York, NY) 2008, p. 431 also see p. 432

²⁶⁵ The Corpus Hermeticum, book 10; in *The Way of Hermes: New Translation of The Corpus Hermeticum and the Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*, Tran. By Clement Salaman, Dorine Van Oven, William D. Wharton, and Jean-Pierre Mahe, Inner Traditions International, 2000, p. 50

Note how similar this is to Heiser's thought. First, it is the divine soul being disembodied which is divine, hence a god, as Heiser defines *elohim*. Secondly, the divine soul receives a fiery body, which the luminescent imagery is again Heiser's understanding of identifying a god, and yet it is a "fiery body," not completely disembodied, which connects to Heiser's deification since he attaches deification to the resurrected body (assuming he actually believes in a physical, tangible bodily resurrection—which seems questionable and will be discussed below).

Hermeticism also broke down classifications of the spiritual realm as Heiser does. "His spiritual substance governs the heavens, the heavens govern the gods, and the powers, which are appointed by the gods, govern men. This is the host of gods and powers."²⁶⁶ There is one God above all, with "heavens" personified which Heiser does also. Referring to Daniel 4:25-26 (in Hebrew verses 22-23), he states, "Verse 25 says very plainly that the Most High is sovereign. It is clearly singular. The phrase 'heaven is sovereign' is interesting because the Aramaic word translated heaven (*shamayin*) is plural and is accompanied by a plural verb. The plurality of *shamayin* can point to either the members of the council or the council as a collective."²⁶⁷ This is Heiser twisting the texts again as most Bible scholars would consider this a periphrasis or circumlocution by using the word "heaven" in the place as a name identifying God, not Heiser's council of gods. Below the "heavens" of Hermeticism are the gods, then the powers governing over men. When men become gods in Heiser's view, we are over the angels/powers like Hermeticism.

Gnostic text discovered at Nag Hammadi express, "[When I was] baptized the fifth [time] in the name of the Self-Generated One by these same powers, I became divine."²⁶⁸ So it is not necessary to wait to the end times to become divine. Another Gnostic text says, "And [I] turned to myself and saw the light that [surrounded] me and the good that was in me, and I became divine."²⁶⁹

The popular maxim from the Delphi Oracles, "know yourself" was frequently repeated in Gnosticism to express knowing yourself was to know God through the inner divine spark. Heiser expresses not just that we become gods, but that we already are, just waiting to complete the process. "We are in the process of becoming what we are—the

²⁶⁶ The Corpus Hermeticum, book 17; in *The Way of Hermes: New Translation of The Corpus Hermeticum and The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*, Tran. By Clement Salaman, Dorine Van Oven, William D. Wharton, and Jean-Pierre Mahe, Inner Traditions International, 2000, p. 78

²⁶⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 54

²⁶⁸ Zostianos (trans. John D. Turner); in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts*, ed. Marvin Meyer, HarperOne (New York, NY) 2008, p. 564

²⁶⁹ Allogenes the Stranger (trans. John D. Turner); in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts*, ed. Marvin Meyer, HarperOne (New York, NY) 2008, p. 690

divine-human children and household of Yahweh.”²⁷⁰ Notice, the tense “what we are” is present tense, while awaiting the process of becoming “divine-human.” Heiser’s emphasis on his doctrine of deification is to help us know what we are, that we would know ourselves as gods.

He assures us, “We do not become deities on ontological par with Yahweh.... Rather, we are made like him, receiving a glorified body[.]”²⁷¹ Here we find reason to question exactly what he thinks about a resurrected glorified body is. If “Yahweh” is God, can He have a body or must He be disembodied? Christ took on a body, but what is Heiser’s understanding of His resurrected body? Heiser points to David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed*, who is from the Australian Catholic University in Melbourn, whose purpose of the book is to describe Paul’s salvation experience with analogies from Greco-Roman philosophy.²⁷² So Heiser is dependent upon a Catholic scholar who interprets Paul in light of pagan authors. But that is exactly how he handles the Old Testament. That is also how the Gnostics developed their heresies.

However, as N. T. Wright has revealed in the research, “Nobody in the pagan world of Jesus’ day and thereafter claimed that somebody had been truly dead and then come to be truly, and bodily, alive once more.”²⁷³ Wright concludes his lengthy discussion about the pagan view of resurrection by saying, “Third, Paul’s views on resurrection remain rooted firmly in Judaism – which is hardly surprising, because no pagans known to us ever imagined that resurrection could or would really take place, let alone offered any developed framework o thought on the subject.”²⁷⁴

Heiser is thoroughly explicit with references to man become gods, so much so it seems odd I have not seen others criticizing him over this topic. Heiser writes, “what the Church really is—the reconstructed divine-human family of God.”²⁷⁵ He refers to the “(divinization) of believers[.]”²⁷⁶ with a citation from Crispin Fletcher-Louis who

²⁷⁰ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 353

²⁷¹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 319, fn. 6

²⁷² see M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul’s Soteriology* (Berlin Walter de Gruyter, 2012), p. 31

²⁷³ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, Fortress Press (Minneapolis, MN: 2003), p. 76

²⁷⁴ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, Fortress Press (Minneapolis, MN: 2003), p. 272

²⁷⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 308

²⁷⁶ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 308, fn. 2

comments that humanity ought to be considered “both angelomorphic and divine.”²⁷⁷ He displays the “star” vocabulary as evidence for man becoming gods. “The ‘morning star’ phrase takes back once more to the Old Testament which at times uses astral terminology to describe divine beings.”²⁷⁸ This comment presented in context of Revelation 2:28 is one of his proof text of teaching deification. Oddly, he also references Numbers 24:17, but offers no explanation why it was never interpreted as implying a divine Messiah by ancient Judaism; or worse, how his proof text of this messianic prophecy does not put man’s divine nature on ontological par with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Corpus Hermeticum also has divine astral language, stating, “and the gods appeared in the form of stars with all their constellations, and heaven with the gods was complete in every detail.”²⁷⁹ Presenting a monolatry theology, like Heiser prefers to polytheism, the *Hermetica* says, “The sun is the greatest god of the gods in heaven, for whom all heavenly gods gave way as to a king and master.”²⁸⁰ Herodotus spoke of the Massagetae, saying “The only god they worship is the sun, and to him they offer the horse in sacrifice; under the notion of giving to the swiftest of the gods the swiftest of all mortal creatures.”²⁸¹ Obviously these were a polytheistic people since they acknowledged other gods, but only sacrificed to the sun. The sacrifices of horses to the sun was a condemned practice in Israel (2 Kings 23:11).

Heiser continues his deification doctrine. He defines *theosis* with synonyms as “divinization, glorification, and deification.”²⁸² He says, “Humanity will become divine and displace the lesser *elohim* over the nations under authority of the unique divine son, the resurrected Jesus.”²⁸³ Heiser shares some proof text for his heresy. “We will be made

²⁷⁷ Crispin Fletcher-Louis, “The Worship of Divine Humanity as God’s Image and the Worship of Jesus,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrew Conference on the Historical Origin of the Worship of Jesus* (ed. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila, Gladys S. Lewis) (Leiden-Brill: 1999), pp. 112-128 (esp. 113-120); as cited by Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 308-309, fn. 2

²⁷⁸ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 312

²⁷⁹ *The Corpus Hermeticum*, book 4; in *The Way of Hermes: New Translation of The Corpus Hermeticum and the Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*, Tran. By Clement Salaman, Dorine Van Oven, William D. Wharton, and Jean-Pierre Mahe, Inner Traditions International, 2000, p. 30

²⁸⁰ *The Corpus Hermeticum*, book 5; in *The Way of Hermes: New Translation of The Corpus Hermeticum and the Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*, Tran. By Clement Salaman, Dorine Van Oven, William D. Wharton, and Jean-Pierre Mahe, Inner Traditions International, 2000, p. 34-35

²⁸¹ Herodotus, *Histories* 1.216; in Herodotus, *Histories* (Trans. George Rawlinson), Alfred A. Knopf (New York, NY: 1997), p. 117

²⁸² Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 319, fn. 5

²⁸³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 353

like him (1 John 3:1-3). We will become divine.”²⁸⁴ Heiser references this text based on his assumption that the term “sons of God” means gods. The context of this passage is clearly dealing with resurrected bodies as Paul mentions, “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.... even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:19, 23). Heiser writes, “He became as we are so that we might become as he is.”²⁸⁵ This is actually a rough quote from the early church fathers which I have written on elsewhere.²⁸⁶ I commented in a post some years ago:

Early Christians made similar statements, such as Irenaeus, who writes: “how will man pass into God, unless God had first passed into man?”²⁸⁷ Hippolytus asked, “But if thou art desirous of becoming a god...”²⁸⁸ Cyran²⁸⁹ Clement of Alexandria²⁹⁰ and Novatian made similar comments, such as Christ “offering divinity” to man.²⁹¹ Christians also had divinely ordained right to judge—even angels (1 Corinthians 6:2-3)—but understood even more in applying this terminology of deification, such as having holiness and immortality imputed to the Christian believer (either present tense judicially or future tense in glorification).²⁹²

Hence, this terminology was meant not as becoming gods with a new nature, but rather having authority, holiness, and specifically immortality imputed to a saint, which are attributes of God (1 Timothy 6:16). Heiser is obviously interpreting his gods as ontologically distinct from angels and men, so he views mankind being deified as an ontological factor, even if it remains as lesser gods than Jehovah.

²⁸⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 314

²⁸⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 318

²⁸⁶ see Heath Henning, *Crept in Unawares: Mysticism*, Truthwatchers Publications (Truthwatchers.com, 2019), p. 157-158

²⁸⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies, Book IV, Chap. XXXIII The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 507

²⁸⁸ Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, Book X, chap. XXIX; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson, 1994, Vol. 5, p. 151

²⁸⁹ Cyprian, *Treatise VI:11; The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson, 1994, Vol. 5, p. 468

²⁹⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, chap. I; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson, 1994, Vol. 2, p. 17

²⁹¹ Novatian, *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, chap. XV; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson, 1994, Vol. 5, p. 624

²⁹² Heath Henning, *Josephus’ Testimony of Christ: Evidence of Authenticity*, Aug. 10, 2018; <https://truthwatchers.com/josephus-testimony-of-christ-is-it-reliable/>

Angels do not have authority to rule in this world or the world to come, but man does (Hebrews 2:5-6 cf. 1 Corinthians 6:3), which is why Jesus Christ had to take human nature to properly rule over the world (Hebrew 2:9, 16), since man was given dominion (Genesis 1:26-28). It should be remembered that Christ remains in His human form, resurrected and glorified, but never removed from His human nature. Heiser must have a misconstrued idea of the hypostatic nature of Christ, since Christ remains fully God (Heiser defining “god” as disembodied) and fully man. How does Heiser understand the *kenosis* (Philippians 2:6-7)?

Did Christ have to cease being God to become incarnate? Or if Heiser thinks Jesus Christ remained as God on earth then by his definition of “god” Christ would have to be disembodied. Hence, Heiser would in such a case be docetic like some ancient Gnostics. Somewhere he has to have major theological issues to hold to his disembodied definition of the word “god(s).” If he views Christ remaining as God, then He does not have a physical glorified resurrected body. Thus, Heiser would be denying an actual resurrection for a spiritual resurrection like many liberals and cults. Norman Geisler accurately stated decades ago, “There are serious *salvation* problems in denying the physical nature of the resurrection of Christ. As pointed out earlier, the New Testament teaches that belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ is a condition for salvation (Rom. 10:9, 10; 1 Cor. 15:1-5).”²⁹³ Since the saints are said to be like Christ at the resurrection (1 John 3:2), Heiser deification doctrine with his definition of “gods” implies we become disembodied spiritual beings in heaven. His definition of “god” has to reflect on his understanding of the resurrection being physical and bodily. His whole theological system falls apart and is self-defeating. He necessarily falls under a category of heretical and grouped with the theological perspectives of ancient Gnostics.

It was the pagan world that rejected and mocked at the idea of a physical and bodily resurrection (Acts 17:32). Tertullian spoke of his view of the resurrection when he was a pagan as “the theme of ridicule.”²⁹⁴ Theologian Rolland McCune wrote, “Biblical immortality for human beings affects the body. Soul immortality is more Platonic than Pauline.”²⁹⁵ When Gnosticism attached itself to Christian terminology, it redefined resurrection to a pagan thinking and denied the physical bodily aspect of this biblical doctrine, just as Michael Heiser appears to be doing. The Gnostic text *The Gospel of Thomas* claims Jesus said, “I shall destroy [this] house, and no one will be able to build it

²⁹³ Norman Geisler, *The Battle for the Resurrection*, Thomas Nelson Publishers (Nashville, TN: 1989), p. 33

²⁹⁴ Tertullian, Apology 18; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson, 1994, Vol. 3, p. 32

²⁹⁵ Rolland McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled: The Failed Strategy of Modern Evangelicalism*, Ambassador International (Greenville, NC: 2004), p. 295

[again].”²⁹⁶ This plays on John 2:19-21 in which Christ spoke of raising bodily from the dead, but the Gnostics altered it to say He would never be restored bodily in a physical resurrection.

In the Gnostic text titled *The Treatise on Resurrection (The Letter to Rheginus)*, the editors introduction states, “This idea is related to another important theme in the text: spiritual existence is fundamentally the only real form of existence.”²⁹⁷ The text says: “He [Christ] arose and swallowed the visible through the invisible, and thus he granted us the way to our immortality.”²⁹⁸ Hence our “immortality” is “invisible” not physical as in a true resurrection. Again, it says, “Rheginus, do not get lost in details, nor live according to the flesh for the sake of harmony. Flee from divisions and bonds, and then you already have resurrection.”²⁹⁹ Pagans and Gnostics viewed the body as a prison keeping one trapped in a decaying and corrupting world which was undesirable to remain in. Death, or the afterlife, was intended to be a liberation from a perishing existence, not being transformed into an imperishable physical body as Paul taught (1 Corinthians 15:50-55).

Furthermore, we find a self-defeating premise due to his definition of “god” being disembodied. If we ignore his foolish redefinition of “god” which is a heretical denial of a basic Christian doctrine of a physical bodily resurrection, then we can only find one other definition of his “gods” in Psalm 82. Since he teaches these gods are ruling over the nations, and men become gods to replace the rebellious gods currently ruling over the nations, the only commonality we can identify from this use of the word “gods” is the fact that they are ruling over the nations. Hence, the classic interpretation of Psalm 82 being rulers over the nations is obvious once Heiser’s fake definition is exposed.

In Pseudo-Phocylides, the discussion of resurrection appears as deification. “It is not good to dissolve the human frame; for we hope that the remains of the departed will soon come to the light (again) out of the earth; and afterward they will become gods.”³⁰⁰ Notice here the expression is clearly describing the word “god” as bodily resurrection contrast to Heiser. The comment connected to this passage states, “On the basis of this half line [104] some scholars have asserted that Ps-Phoc was not a Jew but rather a pagan or a Christian. One should bear in mind, however, that the resurrected were often regarded as

²⁹⁶ Gospel of Thomas, 71; *The Nag Hammadi Scripture: The International Edition*, edited by Marvin Meyer, Harper Collins (New York, NY: 2007), p. 149

²⁹⁷ *The Nag Hammadi Scripture: The International Edition*, edited by Marvin Meyer, Harper Collins (New York, NY: 2007), p. 50

²⁹⁸ *The Treatise on Resurrection* 45,23; *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition*, edited by Marvin Meyer, Harper Collins (New York, NY: 2007), p. 53

²⁹⁹ *The Treatise on Resurrection* 49,9; *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition*, edited by Marvin Meyer, Harper Collins (New York, NY: 2007), p. 55

³⁰⁰ Pseudo-Phocylides, 102-104; P. W. Van Der Horst, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 579

angels, and angels are often called ‘gods’ in Jewish text.”³⁰¹ Again, this is contrary to Heiser. The facts of ancient languages, properly understood reading of ancient literature (whether pagan, Jewish or Christian), and sound theological reading of the Bible is all contrary to Heiser!

As I have expressed in the previous chapters about my concern of Heiser’s theology, not only being Gnostic and heretical, but also that what he is advancing is very similar to the depiction of the antichrist religion portrayed in the Bible. The fact that the antichrist will be worship as a god (Revelations 13:12) and will exalt himself above all others called gods (2 Thessalonians 2:4) has a major implication with his “divine plurality” as well as his doctrine of men becoming gods. Interestingly, my book *Crept In Unawares: Mysticism*, which documented from the Bible and ancient belief of the church father’s understanding that the antichrist would be Gnostic with modern trends of apostasy, ended with the last two chapters on the topics of “Deification” (Chapter 8),³⁰² and “Kingdom Now—Dominionism” (Chapter 9).³⁰³ Within Heiser’s theology we find this same recipe of apostasy leading people to be receptive of the deception of the antichrist.

He mentions that Genesis 3:15 is alluded to in Romans 16:20, which he says, “the crushing isn’t performed by Jesus, the son of Eve and risen messiah. Rather, Paul has *God* crushing the serpent under the feet of *believers*!”³⁰⁴ One must wonder if he is hinting at dominion theology here. Romans 16:20 has the verb “shall bruise Satan” as a future tense acted by the singular noun “God”. Heiser makes Christians into aggressor to advance their deified rulership. “The kingdom of God is the aggressor.... *It is the gates of hell that are under assault*—and they will *not* hold up against the Church.”³⁰⁵ If he is equating the fallen divine council that rules over the nations of the world, then he is expressing that Christians are to assault these rulers to take over the nations.

Heiser writes, “Being ‘the sons of God’ also means being members of God’s governing rule—his council. Believers have a divinely appointed purpose. Adam and Eve were supposed to make all the world Eden—to spread the kingdom of God so that we could

³⁰¹ P. W. Van Der Horst, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 579, fn. g.

³⁰² Heath Henning, *Crept In Unawares: Mysticism*, Truthwatchers Publications (Truthwatchers.com, 2019), pp. 157-178

³⁰³ Heath Henning, *Crept In Unawares: Mysticism*, Truthwatchers Publications (Truthwatchers.com, 2019), pp. 180-192

³⁰⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 243

³⁰⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 285

enjoy the love of God, our Father.”³⁰⁶ So he believes the job of Christians is to spread the kingdom of God across the world to rule over the world. He confirms this stating, “Once the nations are restored to Yahweh through the gospel, believers will displace the divine beings who presently dominate the nations and rule in their places as Yahweh’s children and corulers.”³⁰⁷

He further relates, “The armies of heaven who witness the final demise of the antichrist and his hordes are a combination of Yahweh’s *elohim* and humans made divine.”³⁰⁸ Consequently, he depicts an army of his fallen divine plurality on one side and an army of “Yahweh’s *elohim* and humans made divine” on the other side, battling amongst each other ending with “*God* crushing the serpent under the feet of *believers*!” If this does not sound like pagan mythology, I don’t know what does!

³⁰⁶ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 310

³⁰⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 311

³⁰⁸ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 374

Paradigm Passages (Part 6)

To understand Michael Heiser's theology and how he has veered far from sound doctrine, it is important to discuss his error of interpreting his paradigmatic biblical passages. His entire theological system is dependent on paralleling Psalm 82 with Psalm 89; as well as his interpretation of Deuteronomy 32 being paralleled with Deuteronomy 4. He says of his own theological system, "The key passages are Deut 32:8-9 and its parallel, Deut 4:19-20:"³⁰⁹

Deuteronomy 32:8-9

Deuteronomy 32:8-9 states, "When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion *is* his people; Jacob *is* the lot of his inheritance." Heiser explains his theological position in a nutshell:

The aftermath of the Babel incident shows that Yahweh expected that council beings use their own free decision making capacity. In Deuteronomy 4:19-20 and 32:8-9, Yahweh divided and assigned the nations to lesser gods (Heiser, "Sons of God"). Yahweh delegated authority—He rejected the nations as His own people and took Israel as His portion. While Yahweh is ultimately sovereign, He does not unilaterally govern the other nations. He leaves that to subordinates, who should rule according to His will. When they don't, they are judged. This is precisely the point of Ps 82, where Yahweh judges the gods of his council who are responsible for corrupt rule over the nations of the earth.³¹⁰

First, his premise is structured on textual critical considerations of Deuteronomy 32:8, rejecting the Masoretic Text for various others that read "sons of God" in place of "sons of Israel." Heiser understands that the dispersion of the Tower of Babel resulted in 70 nations which God has placed the 70 created second tier gods to rule over. This is contrasted to the traditional Jewish and Christian position, that the 70 is based on the number of the children of Israel/Jacob when they entered Egypt (Genesis 46:27; Exodus 1:5); which is more

³⁰⁹ Michael Heiser, "The Divine Council and Biblical Theology," p. 11;
<http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/DivineCouncilLBD.pdf>

³¹⁰ Michael Heiser, "The Divine Council and Biblical Theology," p. 4;
<http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/DivineCouncilLBD.pdf>

specific to the context of the Jewish nation beginning their time out of Canaan and being reminded of this fact by Moses in Deuteronomy 32 just before entering Canaan again.

A number of Septuagint version has “angels of God” in Deuteronomy 32:8, which is obviously erroneous since nowhere do we find a premise for angels numbering only 70, but always innumerable (Psalm 68:17; Matthew 26:53; Hebrew 12:22; Revelation 5:11). Nowhere are angels numbered as 70, nor the nations numbered as innumerable. Heiser recognizes, “The MT reading is also reflected in several later revisions of the LXX: a manuscript of Aquila (Codex X), Symmachus (also Codex X), and Theodotion”³¹¹ The *Peshitta* could be added to this as well. However, most Septuagint version reflect the reading “angels of God” are clearly indicating that if they were familiar with “sons of God” in the text, the translators were understanding it to mean angels which refutes Heiser’s idea of a “divine plurality.” Surely the textual deviation originated rather early in the textual history, but the logic is either identifying that the Gentile nations divided in Genesis 11:1-9 (being identified in Genesis 10) are equal to the sons of Israel when they entered Egypt (Genesis 46:27; Exodus 1:5; Deuteronomy 10:22); or, as Heiser would understand it, these gods which are distinct from angels as a higher class of spiritual beings are only 70 in number.

However, Heiser has an inconsistency arising as he also acknowledge the 70 “gods” are in rebellion against Jehovah, but he also recognizes a nonspecific number of gods that have remained faithful to Jehovah, which further refutes his number of 70 gods. Heiser emphasis on the “sons of God” reading is primarily based upon the Dead Sea Scrolls, of which 33 manuscripts of Deuteronomy were discovered, only 2 of which portray the preferred reading of Heiser (4QDtⁱ and 4QDt^q), both of which were discovered in Cave 4 which contained 22 text of Deuteronomy with the other 11 text being scattered between 5 other caves (caves 1, 2, 5, 6, 11) and three other sites farther south (Masada, Nahal Hever, and Murabba‘at).³¹²

From an exegetical perspective, since Moses clearly identified the number 70 with the nation of Israel, it should be clear that this is what Moses meant. The issue with Heiser is that he does not believe in the Mosaic authorship, so he does not intend to see the Torah, or the book of Deuteronomy as being written by a single author. Heiser writes, “That the text of LXX and the Dead Sea Scrolls is superior to MT in Deut 32:8-9 is not in dispute.”³¹³

³¹¹ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 15, fn 41; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

³¹² The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English (trans. Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint & Eugene Ulrich, HarperCollins Publishers (New York, NY: 1999), p. 145

³¹³ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 83; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

I would dispute that claim, and so would many others that do not assume his heretical views are valid. In fact, from a textual critical position, we would ask why he picks a few LXX texts and two out of 33 Dead Sea Scrolls copies of Deuteronomy? He surely does not have the majority of evidence on his side.

Actually, the LXX has 72 nations mentioned in Genesis 10, which Heiser is aware of.³¹⁴ This fact reveals the “sons of Israel” as the division of nations proving the “sons of God” rendering Deuteronomy 32 inconsistent. This would imply that the first version expressing “sons of God” in Deuteronomy was intending to identify the nation Israel as the sons of God (Exodus 4:22), and it was later scribes altering the phrase to “angels of God” as their dynamic equivalent interpretive rendering. In fact, the immediate context proves this as Deuteronomy 32:5 refers to the nation as “his children” and Deuteronomy 32:6 calls God “thy father” of Israel collectively.

Since Deuteronomy 32:29 says “there is no god with me,” the reference of Deuteronomy 32:17 stating they “sacrifice unto devils” is paralleled with “to new gods that came newly up” obviously speaking of the golden calf idol made by Aaron (Exodus 32:2-6). This is further expressed in Deuteronomy 32:21 with Moses’ song again revealing the parallel of those which are not God are vanities. “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities[.]”

Philo references Deuteronomy 32 a couple of times, always citing it as “angels of God” (The Posterity and Exile of Cain, 89-93;³¹⁵ Noah’s Work as a Planter, 59),³¹⁶ showing that it was not interpreted as Heiser’s “gods.” Heiser mentions in his doctoral dissertation,

Mention should also be made of seventy angelic shepherds of 1 Enoch 89-90, the Animal Apocalypse. While it is tempting to see these shepherds as a direct parallel to the sons of God of Deut 32:8-9 (cf. the seventy nations of the Table of Nations), Nickelsburg correctly notes that the source of the seventy shepherds in Enoch is more likely Ezekiel 34 and Zechariah 11. The seventy shepherds of 1 Enoch 89-90 are human, not angelic. They are not over the Gentile nations, but over Israel, and the number seventy is associated with seventy time periods, not the number of the

³¹⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 280, fn. 8

³¹⁵ in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), p. 140-141

³¹⁶ in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged New Updated Version* (Trans. C. D. Yonge), (Peabody, MA: 1997), p. 196

nations created by the division of the nations in Genesis 11 referenced in Deut 32:8-9.”³¹⁷

It is odd that in the quote above, that he first refers to them as “seventy angelic shepherds” when admitting that they are humans after all. Seventy shepherds would be just as suitable to depict the patriarchs of Israel, being seventy in number representing the family divisions of the nation beyond the twelve tribes, since they were shepherds when entering Egypt (Genesis 46:31-34). The patriarchs are not intended in 1 Enoch, but the pattern of 70 shepherds likely stems to the patriarchs further representing the Jewish thought of Second Temple period connecting the number 70 to the children of Israel linking the division after Babel. Note also that Heiser’s own words can express the validity of interpreting the LXX rendering of “angels” to mean humans.

Heiser further argues, “It would make no sense for God to divided up the nations of the earth ‘according to the number of the sons of Israel’ if there was no Israel. This point is also brought home in another way, namely by the fact that Israel is not listed in the Table of Nations.”³¹⁸ This is an obscene argument for one who believes in a postexilic authorship of the Torah. He argues that the word *nephilim* is derived from Aramaic *naphiyla*, which Jewish scribes picked up during the Babylonian captivity.³¹⁹ This implies that Heiser believes the Torah was written (or at very least redacted) after the captivity, not by Moses. At very least he is indicated these scribes returned to Judah and corrupted the Hebrew Scriptures by inserting this new word which was importing Mesopotamian myths into the text. The thought that Hebrew and Aramaic are cognate languages and the fact that Abraham came to Canaan from Chaldea never crossed his mind (Acts 7:2-4). Isaac could speak with Laban the Syrian (Genesis 25:20), but centuries later Hebrew and Syriac were distinct unintelligible languages 2 Kings 18:26).

Heiser assumes a later date for Genesis because his insistence on importing pagan cultures onto the Scripture, claiming, “Because literary content of Genesis 1-11 has so many deep, specific touchpoints with Mesopotamian literary works, many scholars believe that these chapters either were written during the exile in Babylon or were edited at that time.”³²⁰ Obviously, he means only liberal scholars. Perhaps if he read scholars that

³¹⁷ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 230; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

³¹⁸ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 113

³¹⁹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 107

³²⁰ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 107

actually believe the Bible, like Jonathan Safarti's *The Genesis Account: a Theological, historical, and scientific commentary on Genesis 1:11*, he would see his errors in interpreting God's word through the filter of pagan literature or unbelieving "scholars."

Again, we find Heiser's own argument self-refuting, since his late date for the Torah would also allow the author(s)/redactor(s) to write with retrospect when presenting the Babel account. In sound doctrinal reading of Scripture, we would see God's providence and foreknowledge in orchestrating the Babel event, and Moses as the true author of Genesis would still be recording the event in retrospect during the wandering period of the exodus.

The second issue with Heiser's view of this passage is that he believes his authoritative reading from the LXX as "sons of God" is to be understood as a second class of divine beings. Commenting on the passage and expounding his theological view, Heiser writes,

The correspondences are deliberate. The seventy nations were placed under the dominion of lesser gods in the wake of Yahweh's judgment of the nations at the Tower of Babel. Yahweh's own kingdom is structured with a single leader (Moses for now), with whom he speaks directly, and a council of seventy. Historically, this leadership structure would continue into Jesus' day as the Jewish Sanhedrin, led by the high priest, numbered seventy.³²¹

This comment is completely false, especially because it is following Exodus 24:1-2, 9-10 as his proof text. The text itself has Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, which equals 74; not Heiser's magic number of 70. Furthermore, the Sanhedrin never consisted of 70 persons as a council. The *Mishna* tells us, "The greater Sanhedrin was made up of one and seventy [judges] and the lesser [Sanhedrin] of three and twenty."³²² The number seventy-one was deduced from Numbers 11:16 which has 70 elders plus Moses making 71 members total. It was also advised, "The court must not be divisible equally,"³²³ so judgment could not end in a stalemate. "The Sanhedrin included the high priest, who according to tradition could break ties in voting."³²⁴ Heiser boasts himself as a scholar who knows more than others because his study in the historical and

³²¹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 157

³²² Sanhedrin 1.6; *The Mishna* (Trans. Herbert Danby), Hendrickson Pub. (Peabody, MA: 1933, 2016), p. 383

³²³ Sanhedrin 1.6; *The Mishna* (Trans. Herbert Danby), Hendrickson Pub. (Peabody, MA: 1933, 2016), p. 383

³²⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Acts An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 3:1-14:28*, Baker Academic (Grand Rapids, MI: 2013), Vol. 2, p. 1139

cultural background, but he cannot get his facts straight. When he is unable to twist the grammar, and cannot allegorize a text into what he wants it to say, he makes up history to force it into his view.

The early church fathers were dependent upon the Greek reading of the Septuagint text and were aware of the textual edition that Heiser hangs his interpretation on, but never viewed the Bible to imply polytheism. Clement of Rome implied that it was Christians which have become God's portion³²⁵ with no expression of Heiser's view. Irenaeus citation of the passage was in connection with Paul's preaching at Areopagus (Acts 17:24-31), simply stating, "but that people which believe in God is not now under the power of angels, but under the Lord's [rule]."³²⁶ He associated these angels with the pagan deities of the Gentiles. Irenaeus did not think the gods referred to in the Old Testament were actually gods as Heiser expresses, but stated, "these gods which were reputed so among those men, are no gods at all."³²⁷

Clement of Alexandria, who held the opinion that the Greek philosophy was a precursor for the gospel, preparing the Greek mind to receive it as truth, alluded to this text that God placed angels over the nations to teach such philosophy. "It is He who also gave philosophy to the Greeks by means of the inferior angels. For by an ancient and divine order the angels are distributed among the nations."³²⁸ Notable here is the fact that these are not "gods" as Heiser wishes to express, but "inferior angels," nor are they rebellious rulers of Gentile nations, but rather, God's messengers as teachers of philosophy in preparation for the gospel, and are therefore obedient to God's will and purpose without the expectation of being judged as in Psalm 82. Elsewhere he states, "For regiments of angels are distributed over the nations and cities. And, perchance, some are assigned to individuals."³²⁹ This is also in context of God producing "the thoughts of virtuous men[.]"³³⁰ thus teaching philosophy. However, if the angels that are over individual men, he likely viewed more than 70 in total.

³²⁵ Clement of Rome, First Epistle of Clement, chaps. 29-30; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 1, p. 13

³²⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 3, chap. 12, para. 9; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 1, p. 433-434

³²⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 3, chap. 6, para 3; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 1, p. 419

³²⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, book 7, chap. 2; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 2, p. 524

³²⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, book 6, chap. 17; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 2, p. 517

³³⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, book 6, chap. 17; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 2, p. 517

Origen's references this passage most frequently, acknowledging "Other nations, moreover, are called a part of the angels;"³³¹ but offer this in context of rational natures in contrast to non-rational nature of animals. This may be in adoption of his teacher Clement's view of angel's teaching philosophy. Origen's second reference to the passage connects it to the Tower of Babel, but expresses the need to interpret Moses' "style of a historical narrative" to be understood as "a mystical kind" as if it was "intended to convey a secret meaning[.]"³³² The best one can understand his mystical meaning to present a literal historical event of the Babel dispersion is in his expression that "each one was handed over... to angels of character more or less severe, and of a nature more or less stern, until they had paid the penalty of their daring deeds; and they were conducted by those angels, who imprinted on each his native language, to the different parts of the earth according to their deserts[.]"³³³

At best, this only implies Origen understood the angels caused the dispersion and gave languages to the people being scattered across the earth. These angels led the different people groups to various parts of the earth with varying temperature pattern according to the severity of punishment they deserved. He is not indicating that the angels continued to rule over them, but only that the people received their just deserts from the hands of the angels which makes Heiser's opinion of connecting these angels in Origen difficult since their punishment was justly exercised upon the people, contrast to Heiser's idea of God judging these "gods."

Therefore, Origen did not connect the thought of Deuteronomy 32 and the Tower of Babel event with the wicked "gods" of Psalm 82. The only other reference of interest by Origen is questioning why each individual was born "within each particular boundary," which is answered with each person location of birth is related to the "bearing upon the different treatment of human souls, which are difficult to state and to investigate."³³⁴ Associated with his former comments this is merely indicating that the location has varying temperatures or wild animal which is pertaining to the punishment they have.

Novatian discussed the passage in connection with the Tower of Babel in his *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, to determine it was not the Father Who descended at the Tower, "nor did an angel command these things, as the facts show. ...but the Son of God,

³³¹ Origen, *De Principiis*, book 1, chapt. 5, para. 2; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 4, p. 257

³³² Origen, *Against Celsus*, book 5, chapt. 29; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 4, p. 555-556

³³³ Origen, *Against Celsus*, book 5, chapt. 30; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 4, p. 556

³³⁴ Origen, *Against Celsus*, book 4, chapt. 8; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 4, p. 500

the Word of God.”³³⁵ This refutes Heiser who denies the Trinity speaking in Genesis 11:7, but believes God is speaking to the Divine Council. Victorinus mentions the passage in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* linking it to the four angels bound in the Euphrates river (Revelation 9:14). He understood this as four nations, “because to every nation is sent an angel... until the number of the saints should be filled up. They do not overpass their bounds, because at the last they shall come with Antichrist.”³³⁶ This would refute Heiser’s idea of a “cosmic turf war.”

This review of Patristic sources shows that those who have been dependent on the LXX for their Old Testament theology, did see Deuteronomy 32 as expressing angels dispersed over the nations; Irenaeus perceived that the angels were the idols worshiped by pagans which cannot be pressed as ruling over nations, but at best ruling over people through idolatrous religious deception. Clement of Alexandria thought the Greek philosophies were given from God to Gentiles by angels, indicating his view was that these angels were benevolent.

Origen and Novatian joined Deuteronomy 32 to the dispersion from the Tower of Babel event, but neither offer any evidence for Heiser’s opinion. Victorinus is perhaps the closest in presenting every nation, having an angel sent to be over it and their affiliation with the Antichrist is the only indicator of the angels being wicked (though Irenaeus viewing them as pagan idols would prove his opinion was they were wicked). None are willing to call them “gods” as Heiser insists on, nor do any find an intertextual relation between Deuteronomy 32 with Deuteronomy 4 or Psalm 82. For Heiser to pretend to present his readers with the accurate way the ancient readers would have understood the text in their original cultural context, it is extremely odd that there is not one ancient author that taught what he claims was the prevailing view of the text in the ancient world. As we have seen throughout the previous chapters in this book that the Second Temple Jewish text Heiser identifies are unanimously conveying the angel view, not Heiser’s “divine plurality.”

Deut 4:19-20

Heiser’s theological idea also hinges on connecting Deuteronomy 32 with 4:19-20, which states, “and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, *even* all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the

³³⁵ Novatian, *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, chapt. 17; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 5, p. 627

³³⁶ Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*; in *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson), Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 2012), Vol. 7, p. 352

whole heaven. But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, *even* out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as *ye are* this day.” Heiser interprets the heavenly hosts or astrological language as references to “gods.” Deuteronomy 4:34-35 expresses that the passage is dealing with the fact that Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt to show His people Israel there are no other gods by judging the false non-existing gods of the Egyptians (Numbers 33:4). Deuteronomy 4:34-35 being in immediate context would imply that Heiser’s error is in viewing the astrological language as to be implying actual “gods.”

Heiser writes, “God decreed, in the wake of Babel, that the other nations he had fashioned would have other gods besides himself to worship.”³³⁷ But the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, with 70 nations, only existed for a brief time. The number of nations multiplied with the population, and throughout history has had an ebb and flow due to wars and conquering of each other.

Of course, Heiser’s view is dependent on his allegorical interpretation of stars to mean gods in Deuteronomy 4:19-20. Deuteronomy 4 is locating these stars and heavenly hosts in the sky. The expression “lift up thine eyes unto heaven” tells us these are visible things, not Heiser’s definition of gods as being disembodied. The fact that not just Israel, but all the nations of the whole earth are able to “seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, *even* all the host of heaven,” suggests that this is not individual divine beings ruling over separated nations as Heiser expresses. The fact that the ancient world worshipped the stars and planets is well known fact not needing to be expounded or proven and is obviously the literal interpretation of this passage, but that does not mean these heavenly hosts are actual gods according to the Bible.

Furthermore, the sun, moon, and stars cannot identify with Heiser’s magic number 70 since they are frequently expressed as innumerable (Genesis 15:5; 22:17; Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 1:10; 10:22; 1 Chronicles 27:23; Psalm 147:4; Jeremiah 33:22; Hebrew 11:12). Heiser’s belief in the gods of Psalm 82 is in contrast to Deuteronomy 4 being judged on the earth (Psalm 82:8) because their injustice to people on earth (Psalm 82:2-4) with their actions of injustice disrupting the foundations of the earth (Psalm 82:5). There is no relevant parallel of Deuteronomy 4 with chapter 32, Genesis 10-11 or Psalm 82. Deuteronomy 4 is more accurately paralleled with Deuteronomy 17:3; 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3; 23:4-5, 11 Jeremiah 8:2; Ezekiel 8:16; Amos 5:25-26. The fact that the host of heaven were worshipped from the housetops shows the idolatrous action of looking up into the sky to see the stars (Zephaniah 1:5).

³³⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 114

The immediate context preceding Heiser's paradigm passage of Deuteronomy 4:19-20 shows an unbroken sentence flowing into this passage that refutes his opinion. In Deuteronomy 4:12-13 Moses is reminding the Israelites of when they accepted the covenant with Jehovah on Mount Sinai, hearing His voice but not seeing any similitude as He appeared in a fire. Deuteronomy 4:14-18 expresses because they saw no similitude when they received this covenant they should not make any images in the likeness of anything on earth (male, female, beast, fowl, creeping thing, or fish), and without braking the sentence this context flows into discussing looking into the heavens to indicate they were not to make images of the sun, moon, or stars to worship.

This is further confirmed later in the chapter when the thought is reiterated, stating that if they brake this covenant by worshipping idols they would be removed from the promise land, scattered among the nations where they would worship other gods made by man's hands (Deuteronomy 4:25-28). When this premise is repeated elsewhere in Deuteronomy, it does not mention the false gods as idols, but simply says if the Jew would worship other gods they would perish from the land (Deuteronomy 8:19). This is all explained by expressing that there are no other gods that actually exist in heaven or on earth: "Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else" (Deuteronomy 4:39). So the command to not make images according to the appearance of anything on earth or in heaven is what Deuteronomy 4 is discussing with its parallel found in second of the Ten Commandments being reiterated in Deuteronomy 5:8 (cf. Exodus 20:4).

Heiser says, "This is precisely the number [70] of the sons of El in the divine council at Ugarit."³³⁸ So he again switches from Babylonian exilic influences to Ugaritic influences ignoring the time of history and space of geography that separates these 2 cultures. Psalm 82 would be exilic while the Torah would be influenced by Ugarit, a good 900 years and thousands of miles separated. The Torah is more polemic against Egypt (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.240;³³⁹ *Antiquities of the Jews* 3.212-213)³⁴⁰ though many incest laws are polemic against Ugarit (Leviticus 18). Leviticus 18:3 expressly warns the Israelites to not follow after the activities of the Egyptians and Canaanites.

Heiser conveniently sweeps such technicalities under the rug to present his phony cultural context. Ancient Egyptian literature speaks of Asiatics and sand-dweller showing

³³⁸ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 114, fn 7

³³⁹ *Against Apion*, book 1, para 26; in *The New Complete Works of Josephus (Revised and Expanded)* (Trans. William Whiston, Introduction and Commentary by Paul L. Maier), Kregel Publications (Grand Rapids, MI: 1999), p. 951

³⁴⁰ *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 3, chap. 8, para. 8; in *The New Complete Works of Josephus (Revised and Expanded)* (Trans. William Whiston, Introduction and Commentary by Paul L. Maier), Kregel Publications (Grand Rapids, MI: 1999), p. 129

there was cross-cultural influences between Egypt and Ugarit which would have influenced the writings of Moses, but Heiser rejects biblical dates and the Mosaic authorship of the Torah. In fact, his theology is utterly dependent on upholding a late date. He mentions, “those who put the finishing touches on the Old Testament during the exile in Babylon[,]”³⁴¹ and elsewhere speaking of the book of Numbers: “this work was finished in exile in Babylon.”³⁴² He clearly rejects Joshua as the author of the book named after him since Heiser says it “very obviously was written after the event it describes.”³⁴³ He further rejects the biblical flood as a local flood³⁴⁴ and seemingly accepts the late date for the exodus.³⁴⁵ Once again we see inconsistency in Heiser’s theological view which makes his doctrine self-refuting. These theological errors are not in God’s Word, but Heiser’s interpretation of it.

Ps. 82 exegesis

Psalm 82 is the heart of Heiser’s theological perspective. Exegeting it is therefore important to grasp its intended meaning. Willem VanGemeren revealed the literary structure of Psalm 82 as chiasmic parallelism:

- A. God’s Judgment Over the Gods (v. 1)
- B. Judicial Questioning (v. 2)
- C. God’s Expectation of Justice (vv. 3-4)
- C’. God’s Condemnation of Evil (v. 5)
- B’. Judicial Sentence (vv. 6-7)
- A’. God’s Judgment Over the Earth (v. 8)³⁴⁶

From this structuring of the Psalm it is evident that God judging the gods in verse 1 is parallel to God judging the earth in verse 8, hence the gods are located on earth contrary to Heiser’s assertions erroneously paralleling it with Psalm 89.

My independent assessment determined a similar chiasm but has an antithetical climax:

³⁴¹ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 199

³⁴² Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 192

³⁴³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 209

³⁴⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 190, fn. 14 cf p. 210, fn 12

³⁴⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 210, fn 12

³⁴⁶ Willem A VanGemeren, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalm, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Song* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein), Zondervan (Grand Rapids, MI: 1991), Vol. 5, p. 533

- A. God stands—judges the gods (v. 1)
- B. the gods judge unjustly with partiality (v. 2)
- C. describes just judgement (v. 3-4)
- B'. the gods have no understanding and are in darkness (v. 5)
- A'. the gods fall—God judges (v. 6-8)

In my literary structure, A and A' are antithetical with God standing while the gods are judged contrasted to the gods falling while God is judging. B and B' are describing the fact that the gods are judging unjustly due to the fact that they have no understanding and their minds are in darkness of the law they should be judging with. C is sandwiched in the middle as the meat of the Psalm identifying its didactic purpose is what proper judgment would look like. After C described proper judgement, B' logically follows by expressing the corrupt judges are in darkness to understanding the law as it should be and A' is presenting the gods as being judged as the climax.

The major theme of the Psalm is unquestionably the idea of judgment, with the root שָׁפַט (judge) as a verb appears frequently (Qal imperfect in verses 1, 2; and Qal imperative in verses 3, 8). The title “A Psalm of Asaph” demands a date of its composition after the Babylonian captivity (cf. Psalm 74:1-10; 79:1-7, 10) which would identify the proper historical backdrop should be Babylonian and Medio-Persia, not Ugarit as Heiser depicts. Our major interest is to identify who are these gods in verse 1 and will then follow with indirect evidence throughout the rest of the Psalm for confirmation of an accurate identification. I will argue below that the “gods” are Gentile rulers of the nations; not gods (as Heiser and his followers), angels (as Derek Kinder),³⁴⁷ Jewish judges (as Gleason Archer),³⁴⁸ or Jews in the designated times of prayer (as common in ancient rabbinic literature).³⁴⁹

Heiser promotes the idea that these “gods” are a second tier of gods being under Jehovah and over the angels, all being spiritual entities with distinct ontological qualities (though he considers angels not of a particular ontological order but simply as a messenger office). The conclusions he comes to are so backwards because his hermeneutic methods are backwards. Commenting on Isaiah 40:23, he writes,

³⁴⁷ Derek Kinder, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Psalms 73-150*, Intervarsity Press (Downers Grove, IL: 1975), pp. 296-299

³⁴⁸ Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, Zondervan Publishing House (Grand Rapids, MI: 1982), p. 374

³⁴⁹ Piska 5.8 in Pesikta de-Rab Kahana, (trans. William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein), Jewish Publication Society of America (Philadelphia, PA: 1978), p. 103; and Piska 15:9; in Pesikta Rabbati, (trans. William G. Braude), Yale University Press (Dallas TX: 1968), Vol. 1, p. 318-319

The word for ‘princes’ here is not the familiar and expected שָׁרִים, but רוֹזְנִים, a word that is certainly within the semantic range of *royal sons*.³⁵⁰ This becomes note worthy once it is recalled that in Ugaritic religion *divine* royal sons bore the title *tp̄t*, the philological equivalent to שַׁפֵּט, the same term used in Psalm 82 for the gods who were judging (עַד-מָתִי אֶת־שֹׁפְטֵי-עוֹלָם) the nations unjustly (cf. Deut 4:19-20 and 32:8-9).³⁵¹

To mention the semantic range of a word says nothing of its specific use in the verse, which in Isaiah 40:23 is clearly dealing with humans, which is what Heiser acknowledges about the semantic range being “*royal sons*” followed by connecting it to the judges of Psalm 82. His quote above inadvertently would be evidence for the traditional interpretation and against his. This same linguistic assessment is why the traditional view has held the word אֱלֹהִים to refer to human judges in Psalm 82.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary introduces comments on Psalm 82, stating:

The proper interpretation of the entire psalm rest on the identity of the second *’Elôhîm* in verse 1. Some commentators translate it literally as gods and relate it to a concept of subordinate gods in a heavenly council. Others translate it *angels* and connect it with a less polytheistic concept. Still other interpreters translate it as *judges* and make it refer to the unjust men in authority. The last interpretation seems preferable.³⁵²

The fact that Heiser is heavily influenced by liberal theologians is evident in the fact that he calls the “consensus view” of Psalm 82 is that Judaism had evolved from a polytheistic religion into a monotheistic religion, and he considers the “traditional view” to be that the word אֱלֹהִים (*elohim*) can refer to humans in certain contexts.³⁵³ If he perceives the consensus view is Judaism evolving out of polytheism then he is obviously immersed in liberal authors. But the inconsistency of the liberals is that they would agree that Psalm 82 was written during the Persian period by which time they would claim Judaism has already evolved out of polytheism. So why would this Psalm being composed after the supposed evolution took place provide evidence for what they no longer believed?

³⁵⁰ he references Judg. 5:3; Ps. 2:2; Pro 8:15; 31:4; Hab 1:10 in Michael Heiser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” Bulletin for Biblical Research, 18.1 (2008), p. 14 fn. 35

³⁵¹ Michael Heiser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” Bulletin for Biblical Research, 18.1 (2008), p. 14-15

³⁵² Kyle Yates; in The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer), Moody Press (Chicago, IL: 1962), p. 525

³⁵³ Michael Heiser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” Bulletin for Biblical Research, 18.1 (2008), p. 2

Psalm 82:1

Verse one gives the phrase “congregation of the mighty” as a parallel to “among the gods.” The word “congregation” (root קָהַל ‘*ēdāh*) is used 140 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, 50 times in the construct form, all of which are referring to the congregation of Israel with the exception of 8 times (9 time if including Psalm 82:1). Out of these few times it is used referring to Gentiles, 5 times are construct form (6 if including Psalm 82:1). In the book of Psalms, it is used 5 times for Israel, and 4 times for Gentiles (5 if counting Psalm 82:1). Through the whole Hebrew Bible, *it always refers to humans!* Leviticus 4:15 and Judges 21:16 mention “the elders of the congregation” which is likely referring to the 70 elders in Numbers 11:16-17, 24-30, but there is no need to interpret the number 70 into Psalm 82. There is a “evil congregation” in Numbers 14:35 which the Lord judge that “they shall die” as the gods in Psalm 82:7, being explained in Deuteronomy 2:14 as “the generation of the men of war” that died wandering in the wilderness. Psalm 86:14 mentions an “assemblies of violent *men*” which presents a gathering of warriors of age to battle similar to those judged during the wandering. There is definitely no valid expression in the Bible itself to interpret the “congregation” (‘*ēdāh*) as an assembly of divine (disembodied) beings.

The phrase “in the congregation of the mighty,” בְּעֵדֹת־אֱלֹהִים shows the אֱלֹהִים (*ēl* = mighty) is parallel to “gods,” אֱלֹהִים which causes issues for Heiser’s use of Ugaritic parallels since “El” is the supreme father god in early Ugaritic paganism. However, in the Ugarit El was replaced by Baal as the head deity by the ninth century B.C., which makes it questionable that a Psalmist from the Persian period would expect the readers to understand such an archaic foreign religious portrait. The “El” here is intended as plural since there is a congregation of “*El*,” which Jehovah stands in their midst. *BDB Hebrew Lexicon* gives the first definition of אֱלֹהִים (El) as “Applied to *men of might and rank*[.]”³⁵⁴

This also is used of for Gentile authorities (Ezekiel 32:11). Jeremiah 6:18 parallels ‘*ēdāh* with “nations” expressing Gentiles are intended just as the chiasmic form of Psalm 82 would parallel “congregation of the mighty” in verse 1 as those being judged in verses 7-8 referred to as “princes” and “the nations” when God judges the “earth.”

Jehovah is said to judge “among the gods,” which are located on “earth” (Psalm 82:5, 8) as they are unjustly judging other humans (Psalm 82:2-4). Therefore, Heiser’s presenting Psalm 89:5-7 as a parallel to Psalm 82:6 is not accurate as has been mentioned

³⁵⁴ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, C.A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1980, p. 42

previously. Allen P. Ross agrees, “the remainder of the psalm clarifies that these are God’s representative who are in authority on earth.”³⁵⁵

The Mishnah makes clear the understanding of this verse is referring to men: “R. Halafta b. Dosa of Kefer Hanania said: If ten men sit together and occupy themselves in the Law, the Divine Presence rests among them, for it is written, *God standeth in the congregation of God.*”³⁵⁶ The definition of “congregation” is a minimum of ten according to Sanhedrin 1.6, “And whence do we learn that a congregation is made up of ten? It is written, *How long shall I bear with this evil congregation!* [which was the twelve spies] but Joshua and Caleb were not included.”³⁵⁷ The Mishnah further relates, “This was the Psalm which the Levites use to sing in the Temple.... On the third day they sang *God standeth in the congregation of God, he is a judge among the gods*[.]”³⁵⁸

This being a song of praise in the Temple obviously implies they perceived it was referring to themselves in the service of the Temple where God’s presence was understood to be. Being sung in the Temple also places this tradition in Second Temple period which Heiser wishes to inaccurately apply other literature from that period. Thus, Second Temple literature cannot be pressed to his divine plurality with Psalm 82:1 as a proof text.

TDOT states, “The LXX usually translates ‘*ēda* as *synagōgē*... The rabbis narrowed the definition even further by understanding ‘*ēda* as referring only to the local assembly in the synagogue, while the congregation in its entirety was now known as the *kēništā*.”³⁵⁹ This would explain why the later rabbis viewed Psalm 82:1 as the Jewish congregation which studied the law, but also reveals the unreliability of Heiser expecting us to believe the Second Temple Jews would have interpreted Psalm 82 as a plurality of gods in some heavenly council, especially since it is of a later date in the Persian period when Ugaritic text would not be the influence to present the El or Baal as a backdrop.

Psalm 82:2

Verse two describes the unjust judgement is performed with partiality, they “accept the persons of the wicked” with respect of persons. We have seen that men are called *elohim* in the context of judging as divinely ordained judges (Exodus 22:8-9, 28), which in

³⁵⁵ Allen P. Ross, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (ed. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck), SP Publications (1987), Vol. 1, p. 854

³⁵⁶ Aboth 3.6; in *The Mishna* (Trans. Herbert Danby), Hendrickson Pub. (Peabody, MA: 1933, 2016), p. 450

³⁵⁷ *The Mishna* (Trans. Herbert Danby), Hendrickson Pub. (Peabody, MA: 1933, 2016), p. 383

³⁵⁸ *Kodashim* 7.4; *The Mishna* (Trans. Herbert Danby), Hendrickson Pub. (Peabody, MA: 1933, 2016), p. 589

³⁵⁹ Levy, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., (Grand Rapids, MI:1974, 1999), Vol. 10, p. 469

this context also commends men to judge justly (Exodus 22:22-24), specifically mentioning widows and fatherless children which parallels Psalm 82:3-4 mention of the afflicted, poor and fatherless. Exodus 22:24 also warns if these judges unjustly judge with partiality God would slay them with the sword leaving the wife a widow and children fatherless paralleling God's promise to judge the wicked judges in Psalm 82:7-8 with death. The unjust judgement in Psalm 82:2 is "accept the persons of the wicked," is a parallel to Leviticus 19:15, which warns against the judge exercising "unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty[.]"

King Jehoshaphat commanded the judges he established, "Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who *is* with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do *it*: for *there is* no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts" (2 Chronicles 19:6-7). Here we find righteous judgement defined as judging for God without partiality. In the ancient Near East culture, there were judges set to judge over the people, as well as kings who personally participated in difficult cases.

Psalm 82:3-4

These verses describe how proper and righteous judgment appears. God warns against unjust judging of Israelites and foreigners (Deuteronomy 24:14). This plea for justice is repeated often (Isaiah 1:17), followed by the fact that human rulers have corrupted God's command (Isaiah 1:23). We are told it is the men of earth that judged unjustly (Psalm 10:18), not gods in some heavenly council. Psalm 10 parallels the thought of the wicked persecuting the poor (Psalm 10:2) with the call for God to "arise, O God" (Psalm 10:12), the same as in Psalm 82:8. This is found in many passages that obviously are applied to humans Psalm 7:6; 12:5; 96:13; Zephaniah 3:8). Jeremiah 5:28-29 also offers clear conceptual parallelism.

Ancient Near Eastern culture further presents parallels. Mesopotamian documents mention court cases held before "the Assembly of Nippur"³⁶⁰ which were human elders of the city. The vizier of Egypt was considered "to be a Prophet of Maat" and was expected to rescue "the timid from the violent" as he would "sit upon a *judgment-chair*["³⁶¹ An interesting Egyptian prayer records:

O Amon, give thy ear to one who is alone in the law court, who is poor; *he is [not]* rich. The court cheats him (of) silver and gold for the scribes of the mat and clothing

³⁶⁰ Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 542

³⁶¹ The Vizier of Egypt; in Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 213

for the attendants. May it be found that Amon assumes his form as the vizier, in order to permit [the] poor man to get off. May it be found that the poor man is vindicated. May the poor man surpass the rich.³⁶²

Psalm 82:5

Verse five describes why these “gods” judge unjustly—their understanding is darkened (cf. Psalm 53:4; Romans 1:21, 28; Ephesians 4:17-19). These cross references in their context would indicate that these are Gentiles who are without the knowledge of God or His law. Heiser’s view would consider the “anointer cherub” of Ezekiel 28 a “divine cherub,”³⁶³ but if this is the description of one of his gods the acknowledgement of its sins (Ezekiel 28:15-16) are specifically said to be because “thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness” (Ezekiel 28:17); not because he has no knowledge, understanding and walks in darkness (Psalm 82:5). Heiser’s idea of gods in Psalm 82 does not fit. Those who walk in darkness have no fear of the Lord in Isaiah 50:10. This passage follows on the heels of a Suffering Servant prophecy (Isaiah 50:6) which plays a major significance of why Christ would quote Psalm 82 in John 10 if He was practicing the Rabbinic hermeneutic of *gezera shewa* to view it with an intertextual relationship to Isaiah 50 (though the expression is not uncommon, Psalm 91:6; Proverbs 2:13; Ecclesiastes 2:14; Isaiah 9:2; 59:9; John 8:12; 12:35; 1 John 1:6; 2:11).

The phrase “all the foundations of the earth are out of course,” with the word מִזִּנִּי in the niphal imperfect form, likely describes the whole earth in corruption—“out of course”—from the wicked judgment of these “gods” (Psalm 13:4 [Hebrew v. 5]; cf. 140:11). Leviticus 25:35 connects the word מִזִּנִּי with the poor needing to be relieved, which the wicked judges of Psalm 82 have refused to do (Psalm 82:2-3).

Psalm 82:6

This is the verse the Lord Jesus Christ quotes to His opponents in John 10:34-36. Clearly, He spoke this passage to humans which identifies how He understood the passage. Israel is frequently called God’s son (Exodus 4:22-23; Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:5; Isaiah 1:2, 4; 30:1, 9; Jeremiah 3:13, 22; 4:22; 31:20; Hosea 1:10; 11:1, etc.), which gives further justification for Christ to quote this passage to the Jewish authorities. Ancient Jewish texts understood other passages referring to the “sons of God” as angels (Genesis 6:1-4; Job 1:6;

³⁶² A Prayer for Help in the Law Court; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 380

³⁶³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 79

2:1; 32:2); not gods!³⁶⁴ None of the Second Temple Jewish or early Christian sources viewed them as gods. Heiser's convoluted theology plays semantic games claiming the word "angel" was expanded to mean his supposed second tier gods during Second Temple period to justify his claims since all that literature only speaks of angels. As we have seen, the opposite is true, that the word "god" contained the semantic range for men and angels.

If Heiser's definition of *elohim* was correct, consider the nonsense of his premise would bring to 1 Kings 18:21 where Elijah challenges the Israelites, "if the Lord *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him." Is Elijah saying follow whichever one is a disembodied being? According to Heiser other entities actually were disembodied and properly considered "gods," but the text has no comment indicating that Israel was of Jehovah's inheritance so they must accept Him. The question is simply, "Who is God?"

Concerning the expression "children of the most High[.]" Heiser cites *Joseph and Aseneth* to argue the phrase cannot mean humans. Heiser quotes *Joseph and Aseneth* as, "all the angels of God eat of it and all the chosen of God, and all the sons of the Most High."³⁶⁵ Heiser follows with the comment "The latter phrase matches the LXX reading υἱοὶ Ὑψίστου πάντες in Ps 82:6 for בני עליון."³⁶⁶ There are a few problems with Heiser reasoning for this text needing to be understood as "the 'sons of the Most High' are a separate class of heavenly being and not angels."³⁶⁷ His failure to quote the text in full, and even placing a period at the end of his quotation without brackets where the original text has a comma, show his manipulation of the text to make it state what he wants it to in order to fit his presupposition. In the text an angel offers Aseneth to eat of a honeycomb. The text itself states, "And all the angels of God eat of it and all the chosen of God, and all the sons of the Most High, because this is a comb of life, and everyone who eats of it will not die for ever (and) ever."³⁶⁸ It appears from the full statement that the "chosen of God" are

³⁶⁴ The only exception of these sources expressed as a generalization is a 3rd century Alexandrian theologian Julius Africanus; see *The Extant Writings of Julius Africanus*, Fragment II; *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; 1885-1887, Hendrickson (Peabody, Massachusetts) 1994, fifth edition 2012, Vol. 6, p. 131

³⁶⁵ *Joseph and Aseneth* 16:14; in C. Burchard *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 229; as cited in Michael S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 220; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

³⁶⁶ Michael S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 220; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

³⁶⁷ Michael S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 220; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

³⁶⁸ *Joseph and Aseneth* 16:14; in C. Burchard *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 229

the same as “the sons of the Most High,” being contrasted to the angels. Since they are given eternal life, presumably they do not have it, revealing that they are mortals to begin with.

Furthermore, this same text uses the phrase “sons of the living God will dwell in your City of Refuge,”³⁶⁹ which being compared to seven virgins who were earlier promised to be “seven pillars of the City of Refuge,”³⁷⁰ assumes this City of Refuge is being offered to mortals. Hence the “sons of the living God” are the same as the “sons of the Most High,” being mortals receiving eternal life in the City of Refuge. The editor of the text discusses the ambiguity of the phrase in a footnote to simply say it could be understood as either angels or men.³⁷¹ Furthermore, Joseph and Aseneth uses the word “god” to describe an angel,³⁷² Jacob,³⁷³ and Joseph, who is specifically called “the son of God” in various ways many times (Joseph and Aseneth 6:3, 5;³⁷⁴ 13:13;³⁷⁵ 21:20;³⁷⁶ 23:10).³⁷⁷

Psalm 82:7

Heiser makes a big deal out of his faulty logic based on the term “ye shall die like men.” He contends,

First, if the אֱלֹהִים in Psalm 82 are humans, why are they sentenced to die ‘like humans’?... The point of v. 6 is that, in response to their corruption, the אֱלֹהִים will be stripped of their immortality at God’s discretion and die as humans die. A clear

³⁶⁹ Joseph and Aseneth 19:8; in C. Burchard *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 233

³⁷⁰ Joseph and Aseneth 17:6; in C. Burchard *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 231

³⁷¹ C. Burchard *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 229, fn o.

³⁷² Joseph and Aseneth 17:9; in C. Burchard *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 231

³⁷³ Joseph and Aseneth 22:3; in C. Burchard *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 238

³⁷⁴ in C. Burchard *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 209

³⁷⁵ in C. Burchard *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 223-224

³⁷⁶ in C. Burchard *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 237

³⁷⁷ in C. Burchard *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1985), Vol. 2, p. 240

contrast is intended by both the grammar and structure of the Hebrew text, saving us from such logic.³⁷⁸

Remarking on the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), he asserts, “It reminded them [the gods] that they were under judgement, sentenced to die like men (Psa 82:6-7; see also ch. 30), and forever banished from the presence of the true God. That is what frightens them, not the reality of God’s existence.”³⁷⁹ This definition of death shows his error. Men go to hell like Satan and his angels, not vice versa (Matthew 25:41). James Montgomery Boice uses this same line to argue the opposite:

Yet that is an argument that cuts two ways. For isn’t it true that the demons (and angels) are spirits, who have no bodies and who therefore cannot die? The demons will be punished. They will be punished in hell forever, but they will not die. On the other hand, if these “gods” are human judges, then the words are appropriate. For they mean that in spirit of the fact that these wicked men have considered themselves to be virtually invincible because of their high office, they will die just like anybody else. They will fall just like any other ruler.³⁸⁰

The Hebrew term in question is אֲדָמִים the word “men” *ādām* prefixed with a preposition אֶל, which, against Heiser’s claiming is not to present a “contrast” between humans and gods. Rather it is actually showing the likeness. BDB states of this common preposition, “to compare an object with the *class* to which it belongs, and express its correspondence with the idea which it ought to realize.”³⁸¹ In other words, the comparison is not between gods and humans, but expressing the similarity “just like other men” these men will also die, being that they are the same class as mortals. Similar expressions are found in Psalm 49:10, 12: “For he seeth *that* wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish ... Nevertheless man *being* in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts *that* perish.”

Here, the honorable person is not being contrasted to the beast, but the expressed correspondence with the idea of its mortality is warned which the honorable man ought to realize. Our Psalmist, Asaph, used this same preposition to compare similarity of armies that were destroyed in Psalm 83:8-11. This being written by the same author following in immediate context of Psalm 82 should be proof enough how the phrase is meant to be

³⁷⁸ Michael Heiser, Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” Bulletin for Biblical Research, 18.1 (2008), p. 19

³⁷⁹ Michael S. Heiser, The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 340, fn. 9

³⁸⁰ James Montgomery Boice, Psalms Volume 2: Psalm 42-106, Baker Books (Grand Rapid, MI: 2005), p. 676

³⁸¹ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, C.A. Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1980, p. 454

understood. More specifically being prefixed to the Hebrew word *ādām* in Hosea 6:7, which obviously is not contrasting gods and humans. “But they like men אֲדָמִים have transgressed the covenant, there have they dealt treacherously against me.” Heiser’s argument is neither sound logically nor accurate grammatically.

Furthermore, the expression “die like men” is likely a rhetorical technique of irony since Gentile kings deified themselves. As noted, Asaph wrote this Psalm during the Babylonian captivity or after in the Persian period. It was the Israelites who felt oppressed during the Babylonian captivity and viewed their captor as evil enemies (see Psalm 137:1, 9 as an example of the exiled Jews hatred of Babylon). Yet the deified kings were greeted with the phrase, “O king, live forever” (Daniel 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:6, 21; Nehemiah 2:3). In Psalm 82:7 God is informing these pagan kings who are believed to be and self-deceived about their assumed divinity, they are not gods and they will not live forever because they will “die like men.” This is especially true for those oppressing God’s son Israel. The parallel “fall like one of the princes” confirms in this verse that the reference is to royalty. Kings act as judges over their nation (1 Samuel 8:20; 2 Samuel 14; 1 Kings 3:16-28; 1 Chronicles 29:22-23; Proverbs 31:4-9). Edward Young comments on Psalm 82, “The Sovereign One, who is Judah’s God, the LORD of hosts, is uttering the condemnation against the officials and consequently there can be no doubt as to the certainty of the judgment to come.”³⁸²

If Heiser insists on placing an Ugaritic backdrop to this Psalm, he is still wrong. Actually, he deceives his readers and hides the true Ugaritic parallel from them. In his book he references Hugh R. Page, *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A study of It Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 65; Leiden: Brill, 199), who “prefers the Keret Epic (which involves a human king) as the backdrop to Ezek 28.”³⁸³ This is the only acknowledgment of the Keret Epic in Heiser’s book tucked away in a footnote which most people do not bother reading. Heiser quotes the Keret Epic in his doctoral dissertation, but ignores the relevance of the passage that more closely resembles Psalm 82. He cites, “Is then Keret the son of El, the offspring of *Ltpn* and the Holy One? . . . Shall you then die, father, as men? . . . How can it be said that Keret is the son of El, the offspring of *Ltpn* and the Holy One? Shall gods die?”³⁸⁴

³⁸² Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Volume 1, Chapters 1-18*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (Grand Rapids, MI: 1965), Vol. 1, p. 160

³⁸³ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 84, fn. 1

³⁸⁴ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 161; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis; citing Keret Epic as *KTU* 1.16.i.10-25; or in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 147

In the Keret Epic, the human king Keret is called the “son of El,”³⁸⁵ with a mention of “seventy peers[.]”³⁸⁶ When king Keret falls sick it is questioned if he would “die like mortals”³⁸⁷ and finally: “Shall, then, a god die, an offspring of the Kindly One [an epithet for El] not live?”³⁸⁸ El requests his council of gods who would heal Keret, but after seven times no gods would grant an answer so El heals Keret himself by working magic.³⁸⁹ Then “Keret returns to his former estate; he sits upon his throne of kingship; upon the dais, the seat of authority.”³⁹⁰ In this Ugaritic text we see a king perceived to be a god, the son of El, who when fallen sick is expected to die like all other mortals. We also find that this king sits apart from the divine council of the Ugaritic mythological gods, which are in heaven, while Keret is on earth. Surely this matches the text of Psalm 82 more than any other text since discovered.

Heiser comments in his dissertation prior to providing his quote from the Keret Epic, “The king was also considered a god prior to death.”³⁹¹ He further expresses, “The famous passage in Isaiah 9 also comes to mind, where the titles אֱלֹהֵי גִבּוֹר and אֱבִי-עַד occur with respect to the child who was most likely Hezekiah.”³⁹² If Isaiah 9:6 could be calling Hezekiah, according to Heiser, “the mighty God” and “everlasting Father,” Heiser is admitting that men are being called “gods” with the multitudes of epithets that convey the title. Why must he insist that Psalm 82 must mean “gods” as if the terms could not be applied to men?

Again, ignoring the parallels from the Keret Epic, Heiser suggests, “This evidence notwithstanding, Psalm 89 should be viewed against the Baal Cycle, not the Keret Epic, for the biblical author follows the former, not the latter. A Baal Cycle backdrop would

³⁸⁵ Keret Epic; KRT C.i.10, 20; ii.110; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 147

³⁸⁶ Keret Epic, KRT B. iv.6; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 146

³⁸⁷ Keret Epic, KRT C, i.3, 17, ii.102; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 147

³⁸⁸ Keret Epic, KRT C, ii.5; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 147-148

³⁸⁹ Keret Epic, KRT C, v; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 148

³⁹⁰ Keret Epic, KRT C, vi.3-5; in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ed. James B. Pritchard) 3rd Edition, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1969), p. 149

³⁹¹ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 161; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

³⁹² Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Cannical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 161; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

argue for sonship in adoptive terms.”³⁹³ But we have seen exegetical reason from Psalm 82 why it should not be connected to Psalm 89. We have also found that Psalm 82 should be understood in a Persian backdrop; not an Ugaritic Baal cycle backdrop. Furthermore, we have now seen a better Ugaritic parallel that fits the thought of Psalm 82 much closer than any Baal cycle.

Psalm 82:8

Verse eight is a call for God to complete His judgement of the rulers on earth. Psalm 2:10 specifically places the kings that judge on earth as does Psalm 82:1-2. The call for God to “arise” is frequent in the Psalms (Psalm 7:6; 9:19; 10:12; 12:5; 17:13; 44:26; 68:1; 74:22; 96:13; 102:13), as well as others book (Numbers 10:35; Isaiah 14:22; 28:21; 33:10; 60:2), and the expectation for Him to take dominion over the nations of the earth is part of the Messianic hope (Psalm 2:8; 22:28).

John 10:34-36

John 10:34-36 has context of the Lord Jesus Christ having recently made His Trinitarian confession, “I and *my* Father are one” (John 10:30). These words aroused anger in His Jewish opponent, who raised the charge of blasphemy and attempted to stone Him (John 10:31). Their actions caused Christ to raise the argument from the Old Testament: “Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” (John 10:34-36) Heiser interprets this statement of the Lord to confirm a council of gods being the express belief by the Lord Himself. His arguments follows: “First, how is it a coherent defense of John’s well-known high Christology be essentially having Jesus use Psalm 82:6 to say, in effect, that he can call himself the son of God when other Jews can, too?”³⁹⁴ It should be noted that Jesus frequently clouded His expressions of deity with ambiguity for the Jewish leaders, and much of what He taught was parables for those who would not listen (Matthew 3:13, 34-35), and in John’s Gospel citations of the Old Testament are concentrated in passages that include disputes with the adversaries over Who Christ truly is (John 6:31; 7:42; 8:17; 10:34). David Aune suggested

³⁹³ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 161; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

³⁹⁴ Michael S. Heiser, “Jesus’ Quotation of Psalm 92:6 in John 10:34: A Different View of John’s Theological Strategy,” SBL regional (2012), p. 1

that Christ quotation of Psalm 82:6 was a riddle “posed by Jesus to save himself or his reputation (John 4:20; 7:23; 8:4-5; 9:2; 10:34-36)[.]”³⁹⁵

Most commentators would reference Jewish rhetorical methods common in the time of Christ. The seven exegetical rules practiced by Jews were traditionally held to have been expounded by the great teacher Hillel. The first Rule is one of “an inference drawn from a minor premise to a major and vice versa (*Kal wa-homer* ‘light and heavy’).”³⁹⁶ Ellis elaborates a number of occasions in the New Testament when this principle is evident.

The ravens neither sow nor reap, and God feeds them (Ps 147:9); of how much more value are you (Luke 12:24). If the scripture calls ‘gods’ those whom God addressed (Ps 82 :6), how much more may he whom God sent into the world be call ‘son of God; (John 10:34ff.). If the covenant at Sinai came with glory (Exod 34:30), how much more does the new covenant (Jer 31:31ff.) abound in glory (2 Cor 3:6-11). If in the old covenant the blood of animals could effect a ceremonial, external cleansing (Lev 16; Num 19), how much more shall the blood of (the sacrificed) Messiah cleanse our conscience (Heb 9:13f.).³⁹⁷

This principle continued to be used well beyond the time of Christ. For example, in *Pirqe Masiah*, which “appears to date from the late seventh century [A.D.,]”³⁹⁸ utilizes the principle: “Does this not signal a *qal wa-homer* argument? If the altar, which is only one of the ornaments of a temple, was fashioned using twelve stones, how much more so should the (future) Temple (be so built), which will be the pride of Israel and the glory of the upper and lower beings and the adornment of the Holy One, blessed be He!”³⁹⁹ This would be clearly understood by Christ’s Jewish hearers in the first century.

Heiser further argues, “Second, how does the mortal view coherently explain their reaction of the Jewish audience in John’s story?”⁴⁰⁰ How His Jewish audience would have understood Him was just explained. In an earlier part of this book was discussed how

³⁹⁵ David Aune, *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric*, Westminster John Knox Press (Louisville, KY: 2003), p. 427

³⁹⁶ E. Earle Ellis, “Biblical Interpretation in the New Testament Church,” *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading & Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity* (ed. Martin Jan Mulder, Harry Sysling), Baker Academic (Grand Rapid, MI: 2004), p. 699

³⁹⁷ E. Earle Ellis, “Biblical Interpretation in the New Testament Church,” *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading & Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity* (ed. Martin Jan Mulder, Harry Sysling), Baker Academic (Grand Rapid, MI: 2004), p. 700

³⁹⁸ David C. Mitchell, *Messiah Ben Joseph*, Campbell Publications (Newton Mearns, Scotland: 2016), p. 190

³⁹⁹ *Pirqe Masiah*, in John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in ear Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader*, Society of Biblical Literature (Atlanta, GA: 2005), p. 152

⁴⁰⁰ Michael S. Heiser, “Jesus’ Quotation of Psalm 92:6 in John 10:34: A Different View of John’s Theological Strategy,” *SBL regional* (2012), p. 1

Second Temple Jewish literature applied the word “god/divine” to men, with the most common expression was to identify prophets biblically referred to as “a man of God” or “men of God,” which was adapted for Greek readers to “divine man” speaking God’s divine words. Christ’s words following the quotation, “If he [God] called them gods, unto whom the word of God came,” would suggest this is meant. This concept would pertain to the Old Testament history to Christ current context of being threatened with death.

In Jeremiah 26:10-16 the people wanted to kill Jeremiah for prophesying to them the word of the LORD. Micah the Morasthite was protected by King Hezekiah when he prophesied against Jerusalem (Jeremiah 26:18-19), but Urijah the son of Shemaiah prophesied and fled to Egypt being hunted down and killed by the commandment of king Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 26:20-23). This discussion takes place amongst a human council of Jewish judges to determine Jeremiah’s fate. Stephen is stoned by the Jews after preaching in Acts 7, being filled with the Spirit “by which he spake” (Acts 6:10, 5). Many of the prophetic utterances throughout biblical history were God’s pronounced judgement which the people rejected. More particularly, Psalm 82 is suggestive of rulers with the divine prerogative to judge over people which was discussed previously with reference to Mathew 18:20.

Heiser’s third argument consists of rejecting the mortal view of Psalm 82:6, so he cannot permit it being inserted into the New Testament quotation. All his arguments assume “gods” is intended to be meant only for Jews particularly, not judges in a general sense that could include Gentile kings. Heiser writes, “Additionally, there is no text in the Hebrew Bible that has a council of human Israelite judges who are assigned to judge the nations of the earth.”⁴⁰¹ His error is in the fact that the Jewish perspective was the Messiah would be king over the Gentile nations, which assumed the Sanhedrin would retain authority under the Messiah. Again, Heiser’s straw-man argument is evident in his comment, “Every Jew was not a king and did not bear this description.”⁴⁰² No, those who acted in God’s stead on earth did, whether prophets, kings, rulers or judges. It is clear from Psalm 82:8 that these gods are over the nations which are being judged, so the mortal view would demand from the context to not be referring to Jews.

Notice, Heiser further argues with his straw-man, but adds a sweeping generalization. “Jesus’ response is usually interpreted as a concession. That is, He was only saying of Himself what the Jews could say of themselves, and used Ps 82:6 to show that humans can be called אֱלֹהִים (*elohim*). This view both ignores the Old Testament context of

⁴⁰¹ Michael S. Heiser, “Jesus’ Quotation of Psalm 92:6 in John 10:34: A Different View of John’s Theological Strategy,” SBL regional (2012), p. 2

⁴⁰² Michael S. Heiser, “Jesus’ Quotation of Psalm 92:6 in John 10:34: A Different View of John’s Theological Strategy,” SBL regional (2012), p. 3

the divine council and undermines John's presentation of the deity of Jesus in his gospel[.]”⁴⁰³

First, one must assume Heiser's divine council actually exists in the Old Testament, whereby Heiser is arguing with circular reasoning. Secondly, how does this fit Heiser's divine council concept which defines the word “god” as disembodied. Is Christ saying He is disembodied. If so Heiser would be a docetic Gnostic heretic. Nor would the Jews find Him threatening but would assume He is some sort of lunatic if they understood the word “god” as disembodied since they would be looking at Him standing bodily in front of them. Thirdly, nowhere is it expressed that any and every Jew could be called “gods” in the Old Testament, only the nation collectively was given the expression as God's son. A few centuries after the New Testament, this view was presented in *Pesikta Rabbati* (though it is debatable whether this tradition can be forced back to the first century, but identifying Israel collectively as God's son is from the Old Testament):

Another comment: *My soul thirsteth for God [Elohim]*—thirsts for the time when Thou wilt execute judgement upon the heathen; [the term *Elohim* being used in the sense of meting out justice, as in the verse] *Thou shalt not revile Elohim*, [that is, the judges] (Exod. 22:27).

Another comment: *For God*—that is, [*my soul thirsteth*] for the time when that godlike quality which Thou didst bestow on me at Sinai will return, the time referred to in the verse *I have said: Ye are godlike* (Ps. 82:6).

Another comment: *For God [Elohim]*—that Thou clothe [the children of Israel] with Divine Power as Thou didst clothe them at Sinai. Bring near the time of redemption that thereby the oneness of Thy Divine Power be acknowledged throughout Thy world, *When the Lord shall be king over all the earth* (Zech 14:9). [Thus the Psalm is using the term *Elohim* in the special sense] that it has in the passage where Jacob is told *So give thee Divine Power, and do thou take it* (Gen 27:28), the passage here referring to the time when [the progeny of] Jacob will [at long last] take on Divine Power. [all brackets in original]⁴⁰⁴

In *Pesikta Rabbati*, Peska 14.10 the comparison of Adam being created to outshine the orb of the sun, but it was taken from him for his sin is presented as analogous to the nation of Israel which willingly received God's law on Mount Sinai were called “godlike being”

⁴⁰³ Michael Heiser, “The Divine Council and Biblical Theology,” p. 17;
<http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/DivineCouncilLBD.pdf>

⁴⁰⁴ Peska 1.2; in *Pesikta Rabbati*, (trans. William G. Braude), Yale University Press (Dallas TX: 1968), Vol. 1, p. 37-38

(Psalm 82:7a), but such splendor was taken from them when they made the golden calf causing them to “die like men” (Psalm 82:7b).⁴⁰⁵

Actually, in John 10 Christ is expressing that the Jewish authorities unjustly judging Him are those of Psalm 82 who will die for their wicked judgment. In John 8:41 these unjust authorities claimed to be God’s children. The irony of the passage is that their council desiring to kill Him was preordained in heaven (Acts 2:23) by God (not a divine council), and these earthy judges are unwittingly losing their authority (John 11:50) for unjustly judging Christ’s good works (John 10:32-33).

Christ’s points His defense to His miracles, which, in their rejection of Him are blaspheming the Holy Spirit and committing the unpardonable sin (Mark 3:20-29), and are therefore losing their nation among the nations (John 11:48). Craig Keener comments on Christ’s use of Psalm 82, stating, “in context the psalmist uses the image of the divine court but actually addresses Gentile rulers who saw themselves as divine kings (Ps 82:1-2, 6-7) but who failed to execute justice (82:3-4) and would die like mortals (Ps 92:7). The sarcastic claim of 82:6 might then apply well ironically to ‘rulers’ of the Jews (though Jesus’ interlocutors here are called only ‘Jews’).”⁴⁰⁶ Heiser simply does not understand Second Temple Judaism, their hermeneutic methods or rhetorical styles because he quote-mines Second Temple literature for anything that would give the slightest resemblance to his presupposition of a divine council with the willingness to redefine words and manipulate the texts he cites in order to bring it into conformity with what he wants it to say.

Matthew 18:20

Matthew 18:20 has a significant bearing on this discussion, though it is commonly misunderstood because it is often quoted out of context. Heiser’s only reference to Matthew 18:20 places an inaccurate interpretation of the church being sacred space taking “imagery of the tabernacle and temple[.]”⁴⁰⁷ The context is of church discipline (Matthew 18:15-19) with two or three witnesses summoned before the church elders if the matter cannot be settled individually. This was the biblical command (Deuteronomy 17:6-7; 19:15) still practiced in the New Testament (John 8:17). The Dead Sea Scrolls depicts the witnesses “stand before me and before the priests and the Levites and before the judges then in

⁴⁰⁵ Peska 14:10; in *Pesikta Rabbati*, (trans. William G. Braude), Yale University Press (Dallas TX: 1968), Vol. 1, p. 279-282

⁴⁰⁶ Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Baker Academics (Grand Rapids, MI: 2003), p. 829

⁴⁰⁷ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the supernatural worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press (Bellingham, WA: 2015), p. 333

office[.]”⁴⁰⁸ The *Mishna* discussed the husband suspicious of his wife committing adultery (Numbers 5:11-31) was to warn her before two witnesses prior to taking her to the authorities (Numbers 5:11-31).⁴⁰⁹ Christ’s words about being taken before the “church” is likely meant to depict the sense of a “political body”⁴¹⁰ assembled for legislative purposes as used by Josephus,⁴¹¹ or in Acts 19:39 (though in Matthew 18, it is obviously a local assembly of Christians). The Jewish/Christian audience of Matthew’s gospel would view the backdrop of the lesser Sanhedrin⁴¹² of the local synagogues. The synagogues had multiple functions, from religious service, teaching and studying the Torah, teaching as schools for children, acting as court houses and performing physical beatings on guilty parties (Deuteronomy 25:1-3; 2 Corinthians 11:24). Applied to local churches, the elders are summoned to listen to the case with witnesses present and make the judgement.

The “binding and loosing” (Matthew 18:18) is an expression of the authoritative judgment taking place during these hearings. “On the other hand, ‘binding and loosing’ referred simply to things or acts prohibiting or else permitting them, declaring them lawful or unlawful.”⁴¹³ The verb tense of Matthew 18:18 indicates the decreed judgement was first declared in heaven and the judges on earth are confirming this heavenly decree as the judges are representatives of God, fulfilling His will on earth (Matthew 6:10). Deuteronomy 1:16-17 declares the judgement of man is of God. Numbers 11:24-25 depicts the Sanhedrin prophesying with authority from heaven in order to judge the nation. The New Testament confirms the idea of the Old Testament, that divine authority is properly displayed in this judgement (Acts 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:1-3). The two that agree in Matthew 18:19 are the two witnesses from verse 16. The witnesses are the first to identify with the responsibility for the outcome of the sentencing (Deuteronomy 17:6-7). Similarly, a hypothetical case of church discipline on a member who has sinned unto death in 1 John 5:16 has the witness when a “man see his brother sin,” provides confidence to those judging the matter if they petition God (1 John 5:14-15).

⁴⁰⁸ The Temple Scroll, LXI; in *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls In English* (Trans. Geza Vermes), Penguin Classics (London, England: 1962, 2004, p. 216-217

⁴⁰⁹ Sotah 1.1; in *The Mishnah* (Trans. Herbert Danby), Hendrickson Pub. (Peabody, MA: 1933, 2016), p. 293

⁴¹⁰ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (ed. Walter Bauer and trans. Wm. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. Danker, University of Chicago Press (Chicago, IL: 1979), p. 240

⁴¹¹ Antiquities of the Jews, 19.332; in *The New Complete Works of Josephus* (Revised and Expanded) (Trans. William Whiston, Introduction and Commentary by Paul L. Maier), Kregel Publications (Grand Rapids, MI: 1999), p. 637

⁴¹² Makkoth 1.9; in *The Mishnah* (Trans. Herbert Danby), Hendrickson Pub. (Peabody, MA: 1933, 2016), p. 402-403

⁴¹³ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, Macdonald Publishing Company (McLean, VA: 1970), Vol 2, p. 85

Matthew 18:20 shows that through the council of church leaders (i.e. the pastor(s) and/or deacons) the sentence is excommunication from the religious community (cf. Matthew 18:17; John 9:22; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13) with Christ being present making the conclusion established as if He personally presided as judge (2 Chronicles 19:6; Matthew 28:20). The *Mishnah* confirms that the “Divine Presence” was with those who occupied themselves with the Law (Aboth, 3.2, 6).⁴¹⁴ Since the Christian faith spread to Gentiles, this obviously would expand such authority to Gentile authorities in a church’s leadership. Jeremiah 52:9 indicates Gentile kings as judges, which makes them divinely ordained by God to be obeyed or it is considered resisting God Himself (Romans 13:1-2).

Heiser makes erroneous ado from the Dead Sea Scrolls. “The sectarian community by the Dead Sea was obsessed with the divine assembly, merkabah exegesis, heavenly liturgies, and the belief that members of the sect were earthly members of the divine council. As in heaven, so on earth.”⁴¹⁵ As the next chapter’s discussion will reveal, Second Temple Judaism is not presenting Heiser’s divine council, but angels. Later rabbinic literature developed an expression of the heavenly court being subservient to the Israeli’s court on earth. *Pesikta De-Rab Kahana* describes this with haughty language, exalting men to decree for God:

R. Hoshia taught: When a court on earth decrees and says, “New Year’s Day is today,” the Holy One tells the ministering angels: “Raise up the dais, Summon the advocates. Summon the clerks. For the court on earth has decreed and said: New Year’s Day is today.”

But if the witnesses are delayed in coming, or if, for any reason, the court decides to put off the beginning of the year by one day, the Holy One tells the ministering angels: “Remove the dais, dismiss the advocates, dismiss the clerks, since the court on earth has decreed that the New Years will not begin till tomorrow.” And the proof from Scripture? *When it is a decree of Israel it is an ordinance for the God of Jacob* (Ps. 81:5): therefore what is not a statute for Israel is not—if one be permitted to speak thus—an ordinance for the God of Jacob.

R. Phinehas and R. Hilkiah taught in the name of R. Simon: When all the ministering angels gather before the Holy One and ask Him, “Master of the universe, when does the New Year begin?” He replies: “Are you asking Me? Let us, you and I, ask the court on earth.” And the proof? The verse *The Lord our God is [near] whensoever we on His behalf proclaim* (Deut. 4:7)—proclaim, that is, the set feasts on His behalf. Here the word “proclaim” refers to set feasts, as in the

⁴¹⁴ in The *Mishnah* (Trans. Herbert Danby), Hendrickson Pub. (Peabody, MA: 1933, 2016), p. 450

⁴¹⁵ Michael S. Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, p. 174; page numbers from PDF available at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=fac_dis

phrase *holy proclamation* (Exod. 12:16). Such feasts, according to R. Krispa, citing R. Johannan, were in times gone by proclaimed by God Himself, as shown by the verse *These are the feasts set by the Lord, even holy proclamations* (Lev. 23:4). Now and hereafter they shall be the ones *which YE shall proclaim (ibid.)*. Hence, If you proclaim them, they will be considered *feasts set by the Lord*. But if you do not proclaim them, they will not be considered *feasts set by the Lord*.⁴¹⁶

Other later Jewish texts express the thought of the heavenly court, such as 3 Enoch 18:19-21;⁴¹⁷ 26:12;⁴¹⁸ 28:7-10;⁴¹⁹ and 30:1-33:2.⁴²⁰ But these references are depicted as angels, not gods as Heiser wishes to present. However, Edersheim accurately depicts the New Testament proposition,

That the 'binding' and 'loosing' included all the legislative functions for the New Church.... But the words of Christ, as they avoided the foolish conceit of His contemporaries, left it not doubtful, but conveyed the assurance that, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, whatsoever they bound or loosed on earth would be bound or loosed in heaven.⁴²¹

Therefore, whether one views this heavenly authority as a divine council or angelic Sanhedrin, it would remain false. Christ taught it was the authority of the Holy Spirit communicating the Lord's will to His representatives on earth.

⁴¹⁶ Piska 5.13; in Piesikta De-Rab Kohana,; R. Kahana's Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days (Trans. William G. Braud and Israel J. Kapstein), Jewish Publication Society of America (Philadelphia, PA: 1975, 1978), p. 115

⁴¹⁷ The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 273

⁴¹⁸ The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 281

⁴¹⁹ The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 283

⁴²⁰ The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Ed. James H. Charlesworth) Doubleday (New York, NY: 1983), Vol. 1, p. 285-286

⁴²¹ Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah, Macdonald Publishing Company (McLean, VA: 1970), Vol 2, p. 85