

The Divine Council of Yahweh

The word *monotheism* was first used by Henry More (1614–1687) in the mid-1600s. Monotheism is the belief that there is only one God. But this is not the biblical definition of God. The Bible acknowledges there are many gods but affirms there is one God who is the sovereign creator of all those gods. Therefore, the biblical perspective found in the Bible is that a believer's allegiance and devotion are to the one true God, despite the existence of many gods.

The divine council of Yahweh is an assembly of divine, spiritual beings over which Yahweh, the one true God, presides. These beings participate in making decisions with Yahweh, execute these decisions in creation, and rule over creation on Yahweh's behalf. In the ancient Near East, a king's council was a testament to his authority and power. The greater the authority and power of the king, the greater the staff he had. Thus, as the all-powerful, sovereign ruler over creation, Yahweh has a council to display His glory. A common misconception about Yahweh is that He is an autocrat who demands His way and gives commands without compromise. But as we will see below, this is not the case. Yahweh does not have a council because He needs one but because He is a relational God who desires that His creation join Him in the building, expanding, and redeeming of His creation.

The Meaning of God in the Bible

Before one can discuss the council, one must understand the meaning of the English word *god* and how it is used throughout the First Testament, because it is this word that shapes a big part of what the divine council of Yahweh is. The English word *god* in the First Testament comes from three different Hebrew words: *'elohim*, *'el*, and *'eloah*.

The word *'elohim* is a grammatically plural noun. The *im* ending is a masculine plural ending. It can be singular or plural, determined by the word agreement of the words surrounding it. The word *'el* is the shortened form of *'elohim*. And the word *'eloah* is always a singular noun. The Hebrew words *'elohim*, *'el*, and *'eloah* are words that refer to any disembodied being that is not restricted to the material realm. The word *'elohim* occurs more than 2,500 times in the First Testament, and the overwhelming majority of the usages refer to the one true God, Yahweh. Yet it is also used in other ways. There are five ways *'elohim* is used in the First Testament.

First, *'elohim* is used for the one true God of the Bible, whose name is Yahweh. The word *'elohim* is not the name of God but is a word or title to describe His being. The noun *'elohim* is plural, but it is always used with a singular verb when it speaks of the One true God. In this context, it communicates a being of strength or power. *'El* is usually used in conjunction with other words: *'El Shaddai* is “God Almighty” (Gen. 49:24); *'El Roi* is “God who sees” (Gen. 16:13); and *'El Elyon* is “God most high” (Gen. 14:18).

“In the beginning **God** (*'elohim*) created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1)

“This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created—when Yahweh **God** (*'elohim*) made the earth and heavens.” (Gen. 2:4)

“I am Yahweh your **God** (*'elohim*), who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Deut. 5:6)

“My soul thirsts for **God** (*'elohim*), for the living **God** (*'elohim*). When can I go and meet with **God** (*'elohim*)?” (Ps. 42:2)

“But Yahweh is the true **God** (*'elohim*); He is the living **God** (*'elohim*), the eternal King.” (Jer. 10:10a)

“Tremble, earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the **God** (*'eloah*) of Jacob.” (Ps. 114:7)

Second, *'elohim* is used for angels, who are the heavenly messengers of Yahweh. When used of angels, *'elohim* is usually translated as “angels” (NIV, KJV) or “heavenly beings” (ESV, NET, RSV), depending on the translation.

“You made them [humans] a little less than the **angels/heavenly beings** (*'elohim*).” (Ps. 8:5)

“For who in the skies can compare to Yahweh? Who is like Yahweh among the **angels/heavenly beings** (*'elohim*)?” (Ps. 89:6)

Sometimes in the First Testament, the angels are referred to as the *sons of God* (*bene 'elohim*) (Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). The Hebrew phrase “son(s) of *x*” means the son(s) is the same essence as or is equal to whatever the *x* variable is (son(s)= *x*). This is seen in the titles “son of man” (Job. 25:6; Ezek. 2:1) and “sons of the prophets” (2 Kgs. 2:3, 5; 4:38). It is not saying these are the biological children of God, man, or the prophets but that they are the same thing as God, man, or prophets. Like the modern-day television show *Sons of Anarchy*, they are not the biological children of anarchy but are anarchist. Therefore, in the title “sons of God,” the sons are the same essence as Yahweh God. They are spiritual beings in the spiritual realm. Some translations might translate *bene 'elohim* as angels, but they will also have a footnote that says, “in the Hebrew *Sons of God*.”

“...when the morning stars sang in chorus, and all the **sons of God** (*bene 'elohim*) shouted for joy?” (Job 38:7)

“Now the day came when the **sons of God** (*bene 'elohim*) came to present themselves before Yahweh.” (Job 1:6)

“Acknowledge Yahweh, you **sons of God/heavenly beings** (*bene 'elim*), acknowledge Yahweh’s majesty and power.” (Ps. 29:1)

“For who in the skies can compare to Yahweh? Who is like Yahweh among the **sons of God/heavenly beings** (*bene 'elim*).” (Ps. 89:6)

Third, *'elohim* is used for the pagan gods of the nations. The Bible affirms that the pagan gods are real spiritual beings that influence the nations. We would call these spiritual beings demons.

“I will pass through the land of Egypt in the same night, and I will attack all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both of humans and of animals, and on all the **gods** (*'elohim*) of Egypt I will execute judgment. I am Yahweh.” (Ex. 12:12)

“I am taking the kingdom from him because they have abandoned me and worshiped the Sidonian **goddess** (*'elohim*) Astarte, the Moabite **god** (*'elohim*) Chemosh, and the Ammonite **god** (*'elohim*) Milcom. They have not followed my instructions by doing what I approve and obeying my rules and regulations, like Solomon’s father David did.” (1 Kgs. 11:33)

Fourth, *'elohim* is used for the demons. In Deut. 32:17 Yahweh specifically equates the demons with the gods that the people of the nations worship.

“They sacrificed to demons, not **God ('eloah)**, to **gods ('elohim)** they had not known; to new **gods ('elohim)** who had recently come along, **gods ('elohim)** your ancestors had not known about.” (Deut. 32:17)

Fifth, *'elohim* is used for the spirits of the dead. This does not mean that when someone dies, they become a god or an angel; rather, they are a spirit that has no fleshly body, not restricted to the material realm. In that sense, they are an *'elohim*.

“The woman replied, ‘Who is it that I should bring up for you?’ He said, ‘Bring up for me Samuel.’ When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out loudly. The woman said to Saul, ‘Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!’ The king said to her, ‘Don’t be afraid! What have you seen?’ The woman replied to Saul, ‘I have seen one like a **god ('elohim)** coming up from the ground!’ He said to her, ‘What about his appearance?’ She said, ‘An old man is coming up! He is wrapped in a robe!’ Then Saul realized it was Samuel, and he bowed his face toward the ground and kneeled down.” (1 Sam. 28:12-14)

These references show that the word *'elohim* has a much broader meaning than just the one true God of the Bible. What all these uses of *'elohim* have in common is that they are spirit-only beings.

The Divine Council of Yahweh

The sons of God (*bene 'elohim*) are divine spiritual beings who are a part of the divine council of Yahweh. They serve as His council, representatives, and host (army), and they rule on Yahweh’s behalf. It is not that Yahweh needs the sons of God to make decisions, but because He is a relational God, He chooses to invite the sons of God to join him in making decisions—just as a parent would invite a child to help pick where the family is going to eat.¹ Yet He is sovereign over all things and can choose to accept or reject their input.

“The heavens praise your wonders, Yahweh, your faithfulness too, in the **assembly of the holy ones**. For who in the skies above can compare with Yahweh? Who is like Yahweh among the **sons of God**? In the **council of the holy ones** God is greatly feared; He is more awesome than all who surround Him. Who is like you, Yahweh God of the **heavenly host**? You, Yahweh, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.” (Ps. 89:5-7)

In Ps. 82:1 Yahweh presides over the assembly of the sons of God and renders judgment over the gods. We will come back to the entirety of this Psalm later.

“God presides in the **great assembly**; He renders judgment among the **gods**” (Ps. 82:1)

In 1 Kgs. 22:19-22 the prophet is given a vision by Yahweh in which the sons of God are presenting ideas for how to lead King Ahab to his death. Multiple spirits present ideas until Yahweh chooses one to execute their idea.

“Micaiiah said, ‘That being the case, hear the word of Yahweh. I saw Yahweh sitting on his throne, with all the **heavenly host** standing on his right and on his left. Yahweh said, “Who will deceive Ahab, so he will attack Ramoth Gilead and die there?” One said this and another

¹ See Samuel A. Meier. *Themes and Transformations in Old Testament Prophecy*, pp. 19-20.

that. Then a spirit stepped forward and stood before Yahweh. He said, “I will deceive him.” Yahweh asked him, “How?” He replied, “I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets.” Yahweh said, “Deceive and overpower him. Go out and do as you have proposed.” So now, look, Yahweh has placed a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours, but Yahweh has decreed disaster for you.” (1 Kgs. 22:19-22)

Job 1:6-12 is another example of the sons of God presenting themselves before Yahweh. One of these sons of God, called the *adversary*, presents a question to Yahweh. This Hebrew word has been commonly translated as *Satan* but should be understood as an adversary.

“Now the day came when the **sons of God (*bene ’elohim*)** came to present themselves before Yahweh—and an adversary also arrived among them. Yahweh said to the adversary, ‘Where have you come from?’ And the adversary answered Yahweh, ‘From roving about on the earth, and from walking back and forth across it.’ So, Yahweh said to the adversary, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a pure and upright man, one who fears God and turns away from evil.’ Then the adversary answered Yahweh, ‘Is it for nothing that Job fears God? Have you not made a hedge around him and his household and all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his livestock have increased in the land. But extend your hand and strike everything he has, and he will no doubt curse you to your face!’ So, Yahweh said to the adversary, ‘All right then, everything he has is in your power. Only do not extend your hand against the man himself!’ So, the adversary went out from the presence of Yahweh.” (Job. 1:6-12)

This is not Satan for many reasons.² First, in the Hebrew the word *satan* is preceded by the definite article *the*. In Hebrew, like in English, proper names are never preceded by the definite article. It is not *the* David or *the* Mary. Thus, this word *satan* cannot be understood as the proper name of a being.

Second, the Hebrew word *the satan* means “adversary” and is always translated as “adversary” except in three places (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; 1 Chr. 21:1; Zech. 3:1-2) with no real contextual or theological evidence for why translators have interpreted as Satan. All other times the Hebrew word *the satan* appears, it is translated as the noun “adversary” (Num. 22:22, 32; 1 Sam. 29:4; 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kgs. 5:4; 1 Kgs. 11:14, 23; 1 Chr. 21:1; Ps. 109:6) or the verb “accuser” (Ps. 38:20; Ps. 71:13; Ps. 109:4; Ps. 109:20; Ps. 109:29; Zech. 3:1). The word *the satan* (“adversary”) is not always used in a negative way, such as when the angel of Yahweh (Num. 22:22, 32) and Yahweh (1 Chr. 21:1) are both called *the satan* (“adversary”). In Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7 and Zech. 3:1-2, there is nothing in the context to suggest that these *satans* (“adversary”) should be seen as diabolical beings, as will be discussed in the following points. And in the case of 1 Chr. 21:1, the parallel passage of 2 Sam. 19:22 makes it clear that *the satan* (“adversary”) of that passage is Yahweh.

Third, *the satan* (“adversary”) in Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7 and Zech. 3:1-2 does not function as a diabolical being. In Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-7, he merely questions Job’s motives, and in Zech. 3:1-2 he questions whether Joshua is righteous enough to be priest. Both of these are legitimate questions to ask. In Job it is Yahweh who commands that *the satan* (“adversary”) strike Job’s family, belongings, and eventually his health (Job 1:12; 2:6). So, in both of these cases *the satan* (“adversary”) submits to the authority of Yahweh. In the Second Testament, Satan, the devil, is

² See John H. Walton and Tremper Longman. *How to Read Job*, pp. 50-56.

portrayed as a diabolical being who does not submit to Yahweh, opposing and seeking to destroy His kingdom and His people. By the Second Testament, the devil was seen as the most ultimate *the satan* (“adversary”) so that it was used of him as a proper name. There is no definite article before Satan in the Greek Second Testament.

Fourth, the only way any being can enter the righteous and holy presence of Yahweh is if they are without sin or are saved through sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Satan/Devil has neither, so he cannot enter the presence of Yahweh. It took Jesus dying on the cross to enable sinful humans to enter Yahweh’s presence so there is no way that Satan/Devil is going to be able to. Yet *the satan* (“adversary”) in Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7 and Zech. 3:1-2 is standing in the presence of Yahweh. These points make it clear that *the satan* (“adversary”) in the book of Job is merely an angelic being on the divine council of Yahweh who at this moment has questions about how Yahweh is running the world and about the motives of Job.

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This passage shows that the sons of God do not always understand what Yahweh is doing, and Yahweh allows them to dialogue with Him and ask questions about why He is doing what He is doing.

Though the Bible clearly teaches that other gods do exist, it also makes clear that Yahweh is absolutely sovereign over these gods—unique and incomparable to all others.

“All who worship idols are ashamed, those who boast about worthless idols. All the **gods** (*'elohim*) bow down before Him [Yahweh]. Zion hears and rejoices, the towns of Judah are happy because of your judgments, O Yahweh. For you, O Yahweh, are the sovereign king over the whole earth; you are elevated high above all **gods** (*'elohim*).” (Ps. 97:7-9)

“Who is like you, O Yahweh, among the **gods** (*'elohim*)? Who is like you?—majestic in holiness, fearful in praises, working wonders?” (Ex. 15:11)

“None can compare to you among the **gods** (*'elohim*), O Yahweh! Your exploits are incomparable!” (Ps. 86:8)

“For Yahweh is a great God, a great king who is superior to all **gods** (*'elohim*).” (Ps. 95:3)

“For Yahweh your God is God of **gods** (*'elohim*) and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God who is unbiased and takes no bribe.” (Deut. 10:17)

The great commandment to love God (Deut. 6:4-5) commands us to acknowledge God as *one*. Yahweh is not saying He is the only God, for He has already acknowledged the existence of many gods. Rather, He is commanding singular devotion to Him and Him alone. The only other time in the Bible there is a subject followed by the phrase “is one” appears in Song of Songs 6:7-8. Here Solomon acknowledges there are many other women, but for him, “she is one.” This means she is the only one to whom he is devoted.

“Listen, Israel: Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one! You must love Yahweh your God with your whole mind, your whole being, and all your strength.” (Deut. 6:4-5)

“You have been taught that Yahweh alone is God—there is no other besides Him.” (Deut. 4:35)

“Today realize and carefully consider that Yahweh is God in heaven above and on earth below—there is no other!” (Deut. 4:39)

The divine council of Yahweh can also be seen when Yahweh uses the plural of Himself and those around Him. The people of the ancient Near East understood that when Yahweh said, “let us” (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8), He was referring to the divine council of Yahweh, not to Himself as triune.

“Then God said, “**Let us** make humankind in our image, after our likeness.” (Gen. 1:26)

“And Yahweh God said, ‘Now that the man has become like one of **us**, knowing good and evil, he must not be allowed to stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.’” (Gen. 3:22)

“Come, **let us** go down and confuse their language so they will not be able to understand each other.” (Gen. 11:7)

“I heard the voice of the sovereign master say, ‘Whom will I send? Who will go on **our** behalf?’ I answered, ‘Here I am, send me!’” (Isa. 6:8)

Some have said that because the word *'elohim* is a plural noun, it refers to the trinity. But as mentioned above, *'elohim* is used of the pagan gods as well, and they are not triune in nature. The Israelites had no concept of a trinity, and Yahweh would have never spoken in a way that would require later revelation to understand what He was saying. The “let us” most certainly includes the trinity, however, since Yahweh is the head of the divine council and is triune, but it is not exclusive to the trinity. These passages are more examples of Yahweh including the sons of God in His activities.

The sons of God who were on the divine council of Yahweh also function as messengers communicating the word of Yahweh to humans on earth. Today the sons of God are commonly understood as angels, but the word *angels* in the First Testament was not used to describe what the sons of God *are* but what some of them *did*. The English word *angels* comes from the Hebrew word *malakim*, which means “messengers.” The word *malakim* can be used of both supernatural messengers (Gen. 16:7; 19:1; 24:7) and human messengers (Gen. 32:3; Num. 21:21; Deut. 2:26; Jdg. 11:14; 1 Sam. 23:27; 2 Kgs. 1:5; Ex. 14:19; Jdg. 2:1; 1 Sam. 29:9; 1 Kgs. 13:18). The context defines whether this is a heavenly son of God or a human functioning as a messenger. The title “sons of God” is used of rank within the council of Yahweh, whereas the word *angel* is a job description. By the time of the Second Testament, the sons of God had been so closely associated with the function of being messengers that they became known as angels. The Greek translation of the Bible translated the Hebrew word *malakim* to the Greek word *ángelos*, which also means “messenger.” This is where the English word “angel” comes from. What has been commonly understood as angels is really a more complex hierarchy of beings that serve as Yahweh’s council and army and sometimes serve as messengers.

Yahweh Places the Sons of God to Rule over the Nations

After the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3), humanity continued to rebel against Yahweh on a corporate level (Gen. 6:5) and eventually built a rival government of law in opposition to Yahweh's kingdom when they built the Tower of Babylon (Gen. 11:1-9). Up to this point, Yahweh had been actively involved in speaking to and guiding humanity, but as a result of humanity's corporate rebellion and sinful desire to become gods, Yahweh disinherited them, meaning He no longer would be directly involved in ruling over humanity.

So Yahweh assigned different sons of God from His divine council to rule over the different nations (Gen. 11:5, 20, 31). Yahweh divided humanity into seventy nations and placed a son of God over each nation as ruler.

“When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided up humankind, He set the boundaries of the peoples, according to the number of the **sons of God** (*bene 'elohim*). For Yahweh's allotment is His people, Jacob is His special possession.” (Deut. 32:8-9)

“When you look up to the sky and see the sun, moon, and stars—the whole heavenly creation—you must not be seduced to worship and serve them, for Yahweh your God has assigned them to all the people of the world. You, however, Yahweh has selected and brought from Egypt, that iron-smelting furnace, to be his special people as you are today.” (Deut. 4:19-20)

The NIV translates Deut. 32:8 as the “sons of Israel.” This is because there is a Hebrew manuscript that says the “sons of Israel.” It assumed that the sons of God referred to Israel since it was central to Yahweh's purpose. But this does not make sense, since Israel did not exist yet when the nations came into existence (Gen. 10-11) and nowhere does the Bible state that the number of nations equals the number of Israelites—especially when this is not even true. Deut. 4:19-20 confirms that this should be seen as the sons of God for it states that the sun, moon, and stars (a metaphor for the sons of God) were assigned by Yahweh to rule over the nations. As a result, the sons of God ruled directly over the nations on Yahweh's behalf and reported to Him in the divine council (Job 1:6).

The Sons of God Rebel

Just as the humans rebelled against Yahweh on different occasions, so did the sons of God. The first rebellion recorded in the Bible is when the sons of God abandoned their appointed domain and decided to join with humans in rebellion against Yahweh by marrying human women (Gen. 6:1-6).

“When humankind began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, the **sons of God** (*bene 'elohim*) saw that the daughters of humankind were beautiful. Thus, they took wives for themselves from any they chose. So, Yahweh said, ‘My spirit will not remain in humankind indefinitely, since they are mortal. They will remain for 120 more years.’” (Gen. 6:1-3)

This may seem impossible—because it is strange and vile—but this is what the text says. This understanding of Genesis 6:1-3 is supported by 2 Pet. 2:4-5 and Jude 6-7. These passages describe a group of angels (sons of God) being thrown into the abyss as a judgment for their sin against Yahweh. 2 Pet. 2:4-5 puts their sin in the time of Noah and before the judgment of

Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude 1:6-7 states that these angels were punished for sexual perversion just like Sodom and Gomorrah were judged for sexual perversion.

The second rebellion of the sons of God recorded in the Bible is after the Tower of Babylon, when Yahweh appointed them to rule over the nations. The sons of God over these nations led the nations away from Him and established themselves as false gods over the nations (Deut. 4:19; 32:17).

“They made him jealous with other gods, they enraged him with abhorrent idols. They sacrificed to demons, not God, to gods they had not known; to new gods who had recently come along, gods your ancestors had not known about.” (Deut. 32:16-17)

This idea is echoed by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:19-20 where he equates the pagan gods of the Romans with the demons or fallen sons of God of the First Testament.

“Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.” (1 Cor. 10:19-20)

As a result, Yahweh entered into their assembly, judged them for their rebellion, and announced that one day they would be destroyed like rebellious men are destroyed (Isa. 24:21-22).

“God presides in the **great assembly**; He renders judgment among the **gods**: He says, ‘How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. The **gods** know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I thought, ‘you are **gods**; you are all sons of the Most High.’ Yet you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler.’ Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.” (Ps. 82)

This is the basis for the spiritual warfare between the holy sons of God (angels) and the rebellious sons of God (demons). This can be seen in Dan. 10:2-21, where Daniel is praying to Yahweh to reveal the meaning of a vision Yahweh had given him. He received no response until twenty-one days later, when a heavenly being appeared and spoke to him.

“Then he [the heavenly being] continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.’” (Dan. 10:12-14)

The fact that the prince/ruler/god/demon of Persia was held at bay by a heavenly being shows that this is one of the sons of God/fallen angels who rules over Persia and was resisting the message sent by Yahweh from His council to Daniel. This is confirmed by the fact that the angel Michael is also called a prince/ruler. The heavenly being then states that he needs to get back to Michael, for the prince/ruler of Greece is growing in power and needs to be resisted.

“So, he said, ‘Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. There is no one who strengthens me against these princes, except Michael your prince.’” (Dan. 10:20-21)

The Prophets of Yahweh

In addition to the sons of God, humans were created to be a part of this divine council of Yahweh. This is seen in the fact that Yahweh created humanity to dwell in the Garden of Eden with Him and to represent Him by ruling over creation on His behalf and expanding the garden (Gen. 1:26-28). Sharing the Garden of Eden with Yahweh made them a part of His council. Thus, humanity was meant, along with the sons of God, to join Yahweh in making decisions for creation and executing His will on earth as it is heaven.

“Of what importance is the human race, that you should notice them? Of what importance is mankind, that you should pay attention to them, and make them a little less than the **heavenly beings** (*'elohim*)? You grant mankind honor and majesty; you appoint them to rule over your creation; you have placed everything under their authority.” (Ps. 8:4-6)

However, humanity chose to go contrary to the will of Yahweh and sin by choosing the fruit of the tree rather than Yahweh as their source of knowledge (Gen. 3:6-7). As a result, humans wounded their relationship with Yahweh and were no longer able to dwell with Him in the garden (Gen. 3:22-24). Thus, the image of God was marred, and humans no longer were a part of the divine council, losing the right to rule and subdue creation.

After Yahweh disinherited the nations (Gen. 11; Deut. 4:19-20; 32:8-9), He chose Abraham, a man without a nation, to become the father of Israel, His new chosen nation. Israel is never mentioned in the genealogies of Gen. 10, after the Tower of Babylon, because they did not exist yet. Yahweh called a Babylonian, Abraham, to leave his nation, gods, and family and follow Him (Gen. 12:1-3). Israel would become Yahweh’s inheritance, whom He would directly rule over, in order to represent Him before the pagan nations and be a blessing to them by redeeming them (Ex. 4:22; 19:3-6).

“When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He divided up humankind, He set the boundaries of the peoples, according to the number of the sons of God. For Yahweh’s allotment is His people Jacob is His special possession.” (Deut. 32:8-9)

“Yahweh alone was guiding him [Jacob], no foreign god was with him.” (Deut. 32:12)

In Yahweh’s desire to restore the image of God, He chose uniquely gifted men and women of God to join Him on His divine council. Abraham (Gen. 18:16-33) and Moses (Ex. 19:20-25; 32:7-14; 33:12–34:9, 29-35) were both invited into the divine council of Yahweh, where they saw Yahweh and joined Him in making decisions. Later, in the books of Samuel and Kings, a whole guild of prophets was established. The Bible tells of Micaiah (1 Kgs. 22:19-22) and Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-8) being brought up into the divine council through visions. The prophet was the only human who was a part of the divine council of Yahweh. Therefore, the prophet was the only human who knew the will of Yahweh and could speak it to the people of Israel. Yahweh allowed the prophet, like the sons of God, to contribute to making decisions, affecting the choices Yahweh made (Ex. 32:7-14; Amos 7:1-6).

But after the nation of Israel as a whole had fallen so far away from Yahweh, the quality of humans whom Yahweh could call up into His divine council began to dwindle. Not only that, but after the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles, Yahweh would begin to fade out the official office of prophet in Israel.³

First, over time the prophets began to understand less and less of what Yahweh was trying to accomplish and communicate to Israel. After Samuel had just told Saul that Yahweh had rejected him as king of Israel (1 Sam. 15:27), Saul begged Samuel not to leave him and tore (*wayyiqqara*) Samuel's robe. Samuel immediately saw the significance of this and told Saul that Yahweh had "torn" (*qara*) the kingdom of Israel from him. When Amos stood in the divine council (Amos 8:1-2), he was shown a basket of summer fruit. Yahweh asked him "What do you see, Amos?" Amos could have noticed anything, like the basket of fruit, the types of fruit, the colors, the freshness, and so on, which would have totally missed the point. But he picked up on what Yahweh was trying to communicate and said he saw "summer fruit" (*qayis*), which sounds like the word *end* (*qes*). This is the point Yahweh was making—that the end for Israel was coming and that Amos was to speak this message. Yahweh asked Jeremiah what he saw (Jer. 1:11-12). Jeremiah said he saw an "almond (*saqed*) branch." Yahweh said that he had seen well, for He was "watching" (*soqed*) over His word to perform it. If Jeremiah had said stick, piece of wood, or staff, he would have missed the pun and the point Yahweh was making.

Later, when Ezekiel was shown the valley of dry bones and was asked what he saw, he did not know the answer to Yahweh's question (Ezek. 37:3-4). Frequently Ezekiel asked Yahweh questions about what was happening around him (Ezek. 4:14; 9:8; 11:13). Likewise, when Yahweh asked Zechariah what he saw, Zechariah had no idea and had to ask Yahweh for the answer (Zech. 4:2-6). He also asked a lot of questions about what he was seeing (Zech. 1:9, 21; 2:2; 4:11-14; 5:6, 10; 6:4). Haggai had to ask the priests about ritual cleansing twice before he understood how it worked (Hag. 2:12-13). What is remarkable is that Haggai—as the prophet—did not know the answer. By the time of Daniel, Yahweh and the angels no longer asked questions, for Daniel did not understand anything he saw in the visions of Yahweh (Dan. 7:15-17; 8:16-17, 19-23, 27; 9:1-4, 20-23; 12:8-9).

Second, they were asked less and less what should be done and were instead told by Yahweh what was going to be done. As mentioned above, Abraham (Gen. 18:16-33), Moses (Ex. 32:7-14), and Amos (Amos 7:1-6) are all examples of Yahweh's asking for input on what should be done concerning the events of history. The later passages show that because the prophets who came after them did not even understand what Yahweh was trying to show them and were asking Yahweh so many questions, they no longer were contributing to the decision-making process of Yahweh's divine council.

Third, in the end, angels, instead of Yahweh, spoke to the prophets, and then they were no longer brought into the divine council of Yahweh. Ezekiel was never brought up into the divine council but was given only visions. Yes, he saw a vision of Yahweh on His chariot in the temple (Ezek. 1:25-2:2), but he never interacted with Yahweh in the way Isaiah had. Zechariah spoke mostly through angels. There is no mention of Joel or Malachi being brought into the divine council of Yahweh; they were merely told by Yahweh what to speak to the people. Daniel is never called to

³ See Samuel A. Meier. *Themes and Transformations in Old Testament Prophecy*, pp. 39-51.

be a prophet or even called a prophet. He merely received visions that he did not understand, but he never spoke Yahweh's message to the people.

Yahweh eventually phased out the office of the prophet after Malachi, and for about four hundred years, no prophet would be called by Yahweh or sent to the people.

However, despite the decline of the office of prophet, Yahweh, through Moses, had promised to send a prophet like Moses, who would again speak Yahweh's will to the people. This prophet would be the long-awaited Messiah whom the prophets had foretold (Gen. 49:8-12; Num. 24:17-19; Mic. 5:1-5; Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5, 10; 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12; 61:1-3; Jer. 33:14-22; Ezek. 37:24-28; Zech. 9:9-13).

“Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you—from your fellow Israelites; you must listen to him.” (Deut. 18:15)

Jesus the Son of God

After four hundred years of giving no word through the prophets, Yahweh sent Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah and Prophet. The Second Testament writers were dedicated to presenting Jesus Christ (the Greek equivalent of the Messiah) not only as this promised prophet but also as the unique and ultimate Son of God (Matt. 14:31; 16:16-17; Mark 1:1; Lk. 1:35; 3:38; 4:41; Jn. 3:16-18; 11:27; 19:7; 20:31; Acts 9:20; Rom. 1:1-4, 9; 5:10; 8:3; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20; 4:4; Heb. 4:14; 5:5; 7:3; 1 Jn. 5:9-10; 5:13). However, unlike the previous sons of God, Jesus was not just an *'elohim*, but He was Yahweh Himself who took on a human body (Col. 1:15; 2:9; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:1-4).

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the **Son of God**.” (Mark 1:1)

“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the **Son of God**.’” (Lk. 1:35)

“After God spoke long ago in various portions and in various ways to our ancestors through the prophets, in these last days He has spoken to us in a **son**, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He created the world. The **Son** is the radiance of his glory and the representation of His essence, and He sustains all things by His powerful word, and so when He had accomplished cleansing for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Thus, He became so far better than the angels as He has inherited a name superior to theirs. (Heb. 1:1-4)

When the Pharisees had a hard time accepting this claim, Jesus pointed them to Ps. 82 (Jn. 10:33-39). Jesus made the point that they had no problem accepting from the Scriptures that other gods existed; therefore, they should be willing to accept that He was a god. Then all they had to accept was that He was the unique Son of God, chosen and sent by Yahweh. Therefore, He is greater than any of the sons of God/angels (Eph. 1:19b-23; Heb. 1; 2:5-9).

“‘We are not stoning you for any good work,’ they replied, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, “I have said you are ‘gods’?” If he called them “gods,” to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, “I am God’s Son”? Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even

though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.’ Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.” (Jn. 10:33-39)

Now through Jesus Christ, humans no longer have to be taken up into the divine council of Yahweh but rather the divine council has come down to humans since Jesus Himself is God (Matt. 6:9-10) and He speaks the will of Yahweh (Jn. 3:34; 8:26; 12:49-50; 14:10).

Every Believer Is a Part of the Divine Council of Yahweh

Through the atonement of Jesus Christ believers are now able to receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of Yahweh (Joel 2:28-29; Jn. 14:16; Acts 2:1-4; Rom. 8:9-12; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Eph. 2:22). This indwelling allows us to be transformed/restored (Rom. 12:1-2; Titus 3:5) into the image of God so that we become sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:4-7; 1 Jn. 3:2; 4:15). This indwelling of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for God the Father and Jesus to also indwell the believers (Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 1 Jn. 4:15). Thus, the head of the divine council of Yahweh lives in the believer, making the believer a part of the divine council.

This is the point of Jer. 31:31-34, when Yahweh declared that a day was coming when He would write His Law/Spirit (Joel 2:28-29) on people’s hearts in a New Covenant so that all believers will know Yahweh. In the First Testament, only the prophet knew the will of Yahweh because only he was on the divine council. But the New Covenant in Christ (Matt. 26:26-29; Lk. 22:17-20) allows the Holy Spirit to indwell the believers, write His law on their hearts, and know Yahweh intimately. No longer are the believers dependent on one or a few people who know Yahweh’s will, for all can now know His will for their lives.

“‘Indeed, a time is coming,’ says Yahweh, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I delivered them from Egypt. For they violated that covenant, even though I was like a faithful husband to them,’ says Yahweh. ‘But I will make a new covenant with the whole nation of Israel after I plant them back in the land,’ says Yahweh. ‘I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts and minds. I will be their God and they will be my people. People will no longer need to teach their neighbors and relatives to know me. For all of them, from the least important to the most important, will know me,’ says Yahweh. ‘For I will forgive their sin and will no longer call to mind the wrong they have done.’” (Jer. 31:31-34)

The office of prophet—where a few people had exclusive access to Yahweh and therefore authority over the believers—no longer exists, but some believers have the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10; 14:1, 6, 22) in that they have been gifted by Yahweh with the ability to have special insight into people and events, as given to them by the Spirit to benefit the body of Christ.

When Jesus Christ returns (Rev. 19:11-16) and brings the Kingdom of Yahweh to earth (Rev. 21-22), then the image of God in the believers and Garden of Eden on earth will be fully restored with all evil and sin eradicated. On that day, the divine council of Yahweh will be fully present and the will of Yahweh will be fully implemented on earth (Matt. 6:9-10). Because the believers are now made co-rulers with Christ (Dan. 7:27; Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10), they will rule over angels in the restored Kingdom of Yahweh on earth (1 Cor. 6:2-3; see also Matt. 19:28; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4).

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