

# RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

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## A STUDY OF THE TERM “DIVINE COUNCIL”

### INTRODUCTION

The term “divine council” comes from the ESV translation of Ps. 82:1 which reads, “God has taken His place in the **divine council**; in the midst of the gods He holds judgment”. Many interpret the term “divine council” to describe a council composed of God and those spirit beings that He had created to reign over the nations. I **do believe** that God set spirit beings over the nations as they were scattered, which is recorded in Deut. 32 (please see the paper on [spiritual warfare](#) for a more complete explanation of that view). However, I **do not believe** that Ps. 82 speaks of those spirit beings, nor do I believe that it speak of a “divine council”. The English word “council” is defined in Webster’s Dictionary as, “An assembly summoned for **consultation, advice** etc.”. I do not believe that God summons anyone for consultation and/or advice. Neither do I believe that Scripture will support the translation of that term. Those views will be discussed in this study.

### A Consideration of Psalm 82

Let us begin with a consideration of both the KJV and the NSV translation of Ps. 82:1. The KJV reads, “God standeth in the **congregation of the mighty**: He judgeth among the gods”. And the ESV translation of Ps. 82:1 reads, “God has taken His place in the **divine council**: in the midst of the gods he holds judgment”. The main difference between the two translations is that where the KJV has “in the congregation of the mighty” the ESV has “in the divine council”.

We must therefore consider the Hebrew word “el” translated “mighty” in the KJV and “divine” in the ESV, and also the Hebrew word translated “congregation” in the KJV and “council” in the ESV.

Let us begin with a study of the Hebrew word “el”. In the majority of the occurrences of “El” it is translated “God”. In other words, “El” is one of the many titles of Jehovah (see for example, Gen. 14:18 and 19). As is true of all the titles of Jehovah, the title “El” has a **specific significance**. Consider for example, Job 36:22 which reads, “Behold, God (Heb. “El”) exalteth by His **power**”, And in Ps. 50:1 we read, “The **mighty** (Heb. “el”) God (Heb. “Elohim”), even the Lord (Heb. “Jehovah”) hath spoken”. My point is that the title “El”, when used of Jehovah, is used to make the point of **His power**, thus His authority.

A further study of the Hebrew word “el” will support the suggestion that it means “power” and “authority”. Consider for example Gen. 31:29, “It is in the **power** (Heb. “el”) of my (Laban’s) hand to do you (Jacob) hurt”. Consider also Deut. 28:32 which reads, “Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people,....and there shall be no **might** (Heb. “el”) in thine hand”. In short, the **core meaning of the Hebrew word “el” is “might”**. That is to say, even though “El” is one of the many titles of God, the **meaning of the word is not “God”, nor is it “divine”, it is “might”**. Let us continue with a short study of the Hebrew word “el” to prove this very important point.

Ps. 36:6, “Thy righteousness is like the **great** ((Heb. “el”) mountains...”.

Prov. 3:27, “Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the **power** (Heb. “el”) of thine hand to do it”.

Mic. 2:1, “Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! When the morning is light they practice it, because it is in the **power** (Heb. “el”) of their hand”. See also Job 36:5, Ps. 29:1, Ps. 56:1, Is. 10:21, and Ezek. 31:11.

The point is that while it is true that “El” is one of the many titles of God and is often translated “God”, that does not mean that every time the word is used it refers to deity. So when we read that “God stands in the congregation of el”, we may understand it to say that God stands in the congregation of the mighty, just as it is translated in the KJV. (The question of to whom the term “el” i.e. “mighty”, refers in Ps. 82 will be discussed below).

Now let us consider the word “congregation” in the KJV and “council” in the ESV. To begin, of the **26 translations** I could find on the inter-net, **only one, i.e. the ESV**, had “council”. The Hebrew word translated “council” in the ESV in the phrase “divine council” is “**gehdah**”. “Gehdah” is used well over 100 times in the Old Testament and is **never translated “council”** in the KJV. It is translated “congregation”, “assembly” “people”, etc.. The English word “council” is found only one time in the KJV of the Old Testament, i.e. in Ps. 68:27 which

reads, "There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their **council**...". . The Hebrew word translated "council" in that verse is "**rigmah**". It is obvious that the two Hebrew words are **in no way connected**. In short, I see **no reason for the ESV translation of "council"**.

So there is no reason to translate the Hebrew word "gehдах" as "council", and, as proved above, the Hebrew word "el" does not always indicate deity, and in point of fact, its basic meaning is not "divine", but rather "mighty".

With that said, let us come back to the question of to whom the term "the mighty" refers in the phrase, "**standeth in** the congregation of the mighty". Let us consider the next phrase, i.e. "He judgeth **among** the gods (Heb. "elohim)". As is often the case with the Hebrew poetry of the Old Testament, it is written in couplets, each part of the couplet clarifying the other. So in this case we have God standing **in the congregation** of the mighty, judging among, or **in the midst of**, the gods. As we picture God standing in the congregation of the mighty ("el") to judge in the midst of the elohim, we see how **the couplet equates the mighty (Heb. "el") with the gods (Heb. "elohim")**. And the Hebrew words themselves translated "mighty" and "gods" in the couplet are also connected. That is to say, the Hebrew word translated "mighty" is "**el**", and the Hebrew word translated "gods" is "**elohim**", which is **the plural of "el"**. In other words, **the term "mighty" and the term "gods" as used in Ps. 82:1 refer to the same beings**.

With that in mind we are prepared to address the question of to whom the terms "mighty" and "gods" refer in Ps. 82:1. Are they spirit beings, i.e. gods who judge, or are they men who had received their authority from God to judge other men? Because **there is not one scripture** that speaks of the elohim **as spirit beings**, or in fact of any spirit beings **who judge**, but there are a few scriptures quoted below that do speak of **men as elohim judging** other men, I believe that God stands in the congregation of **men who judge other men**..

Let us consider a few passages in which "elohim" is used of men. Consider for example, Ex. 7:1 which reads, "And the Lord said unto Moses, 'See, I have made thee a **god** (Heb. "elohim") to Pharaoh". Moses was not turned into a spirit being at that moment, so how was he made a god to Pharaoh? The Hebrew word "el" which is the singular form of "elohim" and, as has been proved above, has the basic meaning of "**might/power**" and "authority". So we learn from Ex. 7:1 that God made Moses as a power, i.e. a god to Pharaoh.

Let us also consider Ex. 22:28 which reads, "Thou shalt not revile the **gods** (Heb. "elohim"), nor curse **the ruler** of thy People". Is Moses speaking of spirit beings, and the "ruler of thy People", or is he speaking of those men who are in authority and the ruler of Israel? In my opinion, the most likely reading and the context will show that he is speaking of those **men**

who are in authority and the ruler of Israel. These passages do not speak of judging, but my point in quoting them is that they do refer to **man as "elohim"** having power.

Let us consider those passages which speak of **men as "elohim" who judge**. For example, we read in Ex. 22:8-9, "If the thief be not found, then the master of the house shall **be brought unto** the judges (Heb. "elohim"), to see whether he have put his hand unto his neighbour's goods. For all manner of trespass whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties **shall come before the judges** (Heb. "elohim").....". It seems to me that the fact that some will be "brought unto" the elohim, and "come before" them" suggests that in this context, the elohim were men.

And we read in I Sam. 2:25, "If one **man** sins against **another**, the judge (Heb. "elohim") shall judge him; but if a man sin against the **Lord**, who shall intreat for him?.....". In my opinion, the point of this verse is to contrast that which the elohim will judge, with that which God will judge. That is to say, **elohim will judge a man** who has sinned against another man, but who will intreat for a man who sins against God. Spirit beings are not part of this context, and the contrast is not in evidence if we assume that the judges are spirit beings. But if we see these elohim as men, then the contrast is preserved. In short, I believe that the elohim who are spoken of in Ps. 82 are men, not spirit beings.

So we have determined from how the Hebrew word is used that "congregation" is the correct translation, not "council". And we have also determined that "el" is equated in the Ps. 82:1 with the gods, i.e. "elohim". By comparing scripture with scripture we have learned that the term "elohim" is **used of men who judge**, but **never of spirit beings who judge**, and that "el" does not mean "divine", but rather "might" and "power". In short there is no reason for the ESV translation of "divine council".

But the argument is made that it is the "divine council" that is implied when we read, for example in Gen. 11:7, "Let **Us** go down and there confound their language....". It is argued that the pronoun "Us" must refer to God and His divine council. Because, as proved above, the Word of God does not speak of a "divine council", I would like to suggest an alternative to that presumption.

We read in Gen. 1:26-27, "And Elohim said, 'Let **Us** make man in Our own image..... .So **Elohim created** man in His own image....". But we read in Deut. 32:15 of Jeshurun, "he forsook **Eloah** which **made him**". This verse tells us that Eloah created man. ("Eloah" is another title of Jehovah). And in Deut. 32:18, we read, "...And hast **EI** (yet another title of Jehovah) that **formed thee**...". This verse tells us that EI created man.

These are all titles of **one God**. So when we read in Gen. 11:7, "Let Us go down..." there is no reason to assume a divine council when the first occurrence of the pronoun "Us" when used

of God is used of **One Person with several titles**. So too in Gen.11 the pronoun "Us" refers to God in several offices or titles.

It has also been suggested that I Kings 22 speaks of a supposed "divine council". We read in I Kings 22:19-22, "...Hear therefore the word of the Lord; 'I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left. And the Lord said, 'Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said; 'I will persuade him'. And the Lord said unto him, 'Wherewith?' And he said, 'I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And He said, 'Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so'".

There are several reasons for my disagreement with the suggestion that this scene is one of a "divine council". 1) There is **no mention of a "council"**. 2) It is clear that God did not seek **"consultation" or "advice"** which is how the word "council" is defined in Webster's Dictionary. God's only question was, "who shall persuade Ahab?". That is not asking for advice, it is asking who will do His will. 3) The spirits in this context are not referred to as "gods", or as "divine". In short, I Kings 22 does not speak of a council and it does not speak of any who are divine.

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