

# THE HEAVENLY DIVINE COUNCIL

For nearly the past two millennia, there has been a general misunderstanding of the way God governs the earth. As this study will establish, there is a heavenly council of spirit beings that currently rules over our world. Paul referred to this group of spiritual entities in the sixth chapter of Ephesians:

EPHESIANS 6:12 For **we do not wrestle against flesh and blood**, but against **principalities**, against **powers**, against the **rulers** of the darkness of this age, against **spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places**. (*NKJV*)

This Scripture clearly tells us that there are evil spiritual powers in the heavens that rule over mankind and oppose God's people. This is a fact verified in many other biblical passages. However, due to scribal changes in the text and the doctrinal leanings of translators, this truth is generally not well understood by most believers. In this article, we're going to examine this vital information about the spiritual realm.

Let's start by looking at a controversial passage of Scripture from the farewell song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. First, we'll examine the passage as it appears in most translations based on the traditional Hebrew text (the Masoretic Text, which was finalized between the 8th and 10th centuries C.E.):

DEUTERONOMY 32:7 "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you: 8 **When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the CHILDREN OF ISRAEL**. 9 For the LORD's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance. (*NKJV*)

However, there is a variant rendering of this passage. It's based on the third-century B.C.E. translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, the **Septuagint**, as well as Hebrew manuscripts of Deuteronomy found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran:

DEUTERONOMY 32:7 Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you. 8 **When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of men, He fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the SONS OF GOD**. 9 For the LORD's portion is His people, Jacob His allotted heritage. (*RSV*)

Here is this same passage as it was rendered by Sir Lancelot C.L. Brenton in his 1851 translation of the **Septuagint** into English:

DEUTERONOMY 32:7 Remember the days of old, consider the years for past ages: ask thy father, and he shall relate to thee, thine elders, and they shall tell thee. 8 When the Most High divided the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the **angels of God**. 9 And His people Jacob became the portion of the Lord, Israel was the line of His inheritance. (*Brenton's LXX*)

The Greek phrase translated "angels of God" is **aggelon theou**; this interpretive phrase is found in nearly all the extant **Septuagint** manuscripts. However, several earlier manuscripts have instead **huion theou**, or "sons of God." This is a literal rendering of the Hebrew phrase **beney 'elohim** found among the Dead Sea Scroll copies of Deuteronomy 32:8.

The **Septuagint** translators plainly understood that the "sons of God" (**beney 'elohim**) spoken of in Deuteronomy 32:8 and elsewhere were spirit beings ("angels"), and rendered it that way several times (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) in order to clarify the meaning. Thus the textual change from **huion theou** to **aggelon theou**.

The idea that the separation of mankind into 70 nations at the Tower of Babel was by and for the angelic "sons of God" is supported by the ancient Book of Jasher (Jos. 10:13; II Sam. 1:18):

JASHER 9:31 And they built the tower and the city, and they did this thing daily until many days and years were elapsed. 32 And God said to **the seventy angels who stood foremost before him**, to those who were near to him, saying, Come let us descend and confuse their tongues, that one man shall not understand the language of his neighbor, and they did so unto them. (pub. 1887, J.H. Parry & Company, Salt Lake City, Utah)

The paraphrased Aramaic translation of Deuteronomy 32:8-9 found in the ancient Targum called Pseudo-Jonathan supports the **Septuagint** rendering of verse 8, but also hints at the origin of the later alternate reading ("sons of Israel"):

DEUTERONOMY 32:8 When the Most High made allotment of the world unto the nations which proceeded from the sons of Noach, in the separation of the writings and languages of the children of men at the time of the division, He cast the lot among **the seventy angels, the princes of the nations** with whom is the revelation to oversee the city, even at that time He established the limits of the nations **according to the sum of the number of the seventy souls of Israel who went down into Mizraim** [Egypt]. (*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, translated by J.W. Etheridge)

The dispute over whether the Masoretic Text or the **Septuagint** represents the original is more than a scholarly argument among biblical text experts. The implication of the latter rendering of verse 8 is significant with regard to understanding how God governs the earth.

As the Targum explicitly brings out, Moses' mention of the separation of "the sons of men" refers back to God's division of Noah's descendants into 70 different nations, as recorded in the 10th chapter of Genesis:

GENESIS 10:32 These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were **separated** on the earth after the flood. (**NASU**)

Chapter 10 of Genesis is the backdrop for Moses' statement in Deuteronomy 32:8 that God is responsible for the creation and placement of the nations (Heb. **goyim**). In fact, variations of the same Hebrew root word **parad** ("separate") are used in both Genesis 10:32 and Deuteronomy 32:8.

If Moses was indeed referencing God's separation of the nations according to Noah's offspring (specifically their physical separation at the Tower of Babel), it is important to note that Israel is not listed in the index of the 70 nations found in Genesis 10. The nation of Israel did not yet exist at that time. Therefore, the statement that God "set the boundaries of the nations according to the number of the children of Israel" clearly seems out of context here.

However, if we accept the rendering of Deuteronomy 32:8 found in the **Septuagint** and the Hebrew copies of Deuteronomy from Qumran (which is supported by the testimony of the Book of Jasher), we face the same dilemma that the Jewish scribes later faced. Did the Hebrew Scriptures at one time suggest polytheism in the religion delivered to the Israelites?

Ancient Hebrew language expert Michael S. Heiser has shown that there is good reason to accept the earlier version of this Scripture. In his article on this passage, he writes:

. . . What could possibly be meant by the textual option that created a correspondence between the number of the nations in Genesis 10-11 and heavenly beings?

Literary and conceptual parallels discovered in the literature of Ugarit, however, have provided a more coherent explanation for the number 70 in Deuteronomy 32:8 - and have furnished powerful ammunition to textual scholars who argued against the "sons of Israel" reading in MT. Ugaritic mythology plainly states that the head of its pantheon, El (who, like the God of the Bible, is also referred to as El Elyon, the "Most High") fathered 70 sons, thereby setting the number of the "sons of El" (Ugaritic, bn 'il ).

An unmistakable linguistic parallel with the Hebrew text underlying the LXX reading was thus discovered, one which prompted many scholars to accept the LXX reading on logical and philological grounds: God (El Elyon in Deut. 32:8) divided the earth according to the number of heavenly beings who already existed from the time of creation.

. . . Understanding "sons of God" as the correct reading in Deuteronomy 32:8 in no way requires one to view Israelite religion as polytheistic. (p. 3, "Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God")

Ugaritic is an ancient near eastern language that is closely related to biblical Hebrew. Evidently, Ugarit developed a divine mythology based on antediluvian truths regarding the one true God and His government of the world through the angelic creation. Ugaritic literature contains many council scenes where the chief deity '**El**' presides over the council of his divine sons, who stand before him on the holy Mount of Assembly.

We see a very similar scene portrayed in the Bible at I Kings 22 and II Chronicles 18, where **YHVH's** prophet Micaiah describes a vision of the heavenly council that he had been given in regard to a question posed to him by Ahab, king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah:

II CHRONICLES 18:18 Then Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and **all the host of heaven standing on His right hand and His left**. 19 And the LORD said, '**Who will persuade Ahab king of Israel to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?**' So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. 20 Then a **spirit** came forward and stood before the LORD, and said, 'I will persuade him.' The LORD said to him, 'In what way?' 21 "So he said, 'I will go out and be a **lying spirit** in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the Lord said, 'You shall persuade him and also prevail; go out and do so.' 22 Therefore look! The LORD has put a **lying spirit** in the mouth of these prophets of yours, and the LORD has declared disaster against you." (**NKJV**)

Here we see mention of the "host of heaven" (Heb. **tzeva' hashamayim**) which stands before **YHVH**. Clearly this is speaking of angelic beings, including those on the heavenly divine council. This vision seen by Micaiah shows that **YHVH** is in complete control of events. He only approves the course of action that suits His purpose, which in this case was to bring about the death of evil King Ahab (I Kings 22:20; II Chr. 18:19).

The "host of heaven" is spoken of in many Scriptures. Some Bible scholars attempt to downplay the true meaning of this phrase and imply that it speaks mainly of the stars in the sky. Contextually, however, it is evident that **tzeva' hashamayim** often refers to the realm of spirit beings in the heavens.

The **New Bible Dictionary** says this about the "host of heaven":

This phrase (*tzeva' hashamayim*) occurs about 15 times, in most cases implying the object of heathen worship (Dt. 4:19, *etc.*). The two meanings 'celestial bodies' and 'angelic beings' are inextricably intertwined. The LXX translation, using *kosmos*, *stratia*, or *dynamis*, does not help to resolve this. No doubt to the Heb[rew] mind the distinction was superficial, and the celestial bodies were thought to be closely associated with heavenly beings. . . . The Bible certainly suggests that angels of different ranks have charge of individuals and of nations; no doubt, in the light of modern cosmology this concept, if retained at all (as biblically it must be), ought properly to be extended, as the dual sense of the phrase 'host of heaven' suggests, to the oversight of the elements of the physical universe--planets, stars and nebulae. (p. 495, "Host, Host of Heaven")

Regarding the meaning of the related title "Lord of hosts" (Heb. **YHVH tzeva'ot**), the **New Bible Dictionary** states:

It is thought by some to have arisen as a title of God associated with his lordship over the 'host' of Israel; but its usage, especially in the prophets, clearly implies also a relationship to the 'host of heaven' in its angelic sense; and this could well be the original connotation. (p. 495, "Host, Host of Heaven")

The following Scriptures indicate that the "host of heaven" is more than just the stars in the night sky:

NEHEMIAH 9:5 . . . "Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise! 6 You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, **the heaven of heavens, with all their host**, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. **The host of heaven worships You.**" (**NKJV**)

Only living creatures can worship God. Clearly, the "host of heaven" here refers to sentient created beings which reside in the heavens.

JEREMIAH 19:13 "And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah shall be defiled like the place of Tophet, because of all the houses on whose roofs they have burned incense to all **the host of heaven**, and poured out drink offerings to **other gods.**" (**NKJV**)

Here Jeremiah draws a parallel between "the host of heaven," to whom incense was burned and "other gods," to whom drink offerings were poured out. This grammatical construction in Hebrew is meant to show that both the "host of heaven" and the "other gods" were the same. They were "the gods of the nations," the angelic rulers assigned by God over the nations of the earth.

One of the most grievous sins of the ancient Israelites was their continual idolatry. Instead of worshiping the one true God, they instead worshiped the inferior "sons of God," the "host of heaven":

II KINGS 17:15 And they [Israel and Judah] rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them that they should not do like them. 16 So they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all **the host of heaven**, and served Baal. (**NKJV**)

II KINGS 21:3 For he [Manasseh] rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he worshiped all **the host of heaven** and served them. 4 He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name." 5 And he built altars for all **the host of heaven** in the two courts of the house of the LORD. 6 Also he made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. (**NKJV**)

The Bible shows that the "host of heaven" was on the scene during the creation of the earth. In Job 38:4-7, we see **YHVH** questioning Job in order to prove a point to him. During that interrogation, He asks Job where he was during the creation of the universe:

JOB 38:4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, 5 Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? 6 On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, 7 When **the morning stars** sang together and all **the sons of God** shouted for joy?" (**NASU**)

This Scripture clearly indicates that the "sons of God" (**beney 'elohim**, also called "morning stars" here) were present at creation week. This fact is supported by the first chapter of Genesis:

GENESIS 1:26 Then God said, "**Let us make man in our image, in our likeness**, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (**NIV**)

This verse is often used by modern scholars to attempt to prove that the doctrine of the Trinity can be found in the Old Testament. Regarding this erroneous contention, **The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary** states:

The "us" in "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26; cf. 3:22; 11:6-7) refers to the "sons of God" or lesser "gods" mentioned elsewhere (6:1-4; Job 1:6; Ps. 29:1), here viewed as a heavenly council centered around the one God (cf. Ps. 82:1). In later usage these probably would be called "angels." (p. 1019, "Trinity")

Deuteronomy 32:8 is paralleled by a passage from Deuteronomy 4 that speaks of the allocation of the heavenly host:

DEUTERONOMY 4:19 "And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all **the host of heaven**, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, **those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.** (*NASU*)

The "host of heaven" here is said to be "**allotted** to all the peoples under the whole heaven." The word allotted in Hebrew is *chalaq*, which literally means "apportioned" or "assigned." In a statement similar to Deuteronomy 32:8, we are told here that God has assigned "the host of heaven" to the peoples of the earth.

The "host of heaven" are the same spiritual "**principalities**," "**powers**," and "**rulers**" Paul speaks of in Ephesians 6:12. These heavenly "powers" are mentioned many times in the New Testament:

MATTHEW 24:29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and **the powers of the heavens** will be shaken." (*NKJV*)

MARK 13:24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars of heaven will fall, and **the powers in the heavens** will be shaken." (*NKJV*)

LUKE 21:25 "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; 26 men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for **the powers of heaven** will be shaken." (*NKJV*)

ROMANS 8:38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor **angels** nor **principalities** nor **powers**, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (*NKJV*)

I CORINTHIANS 15:24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all **rule** and all **authority** and **power**. 25 For he must reign till He has put all enemies under his feet. (*NKJV*)

EPHESIANS 1:20 Which He worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at His right hand in the heavens, 21 far above every

**principality, authority, power, and dominion**, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come. (**NAB**)

EPHESIANS 3:8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; 10 that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to **the principalities and powers in the heavenly places**. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, (**RSV**)

COLOSSIANS 1:15 He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or **principalities or powers**; all things were created through him and for him. (**NAB**)

COLOSSIANS 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all **principality and power**. (**NKJV**)

COLOSSIANS 2:13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He [God] made you alive together with him [Christ], having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the **rulers and authorities**, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through him. (**NASU**)

1 PETER 3:22 [Christ] who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, **angels and authorities and powers** having been made subject to Him. (**NKJV**)

In Hebrews 2:5, the author indirectly establishes the current rulership of our world by powerful angelic beings:

HEBREWS 2:5 It is not to **angels** that He has subjected **the world to come**, about which we are speaking. (**NIV**)

By saying that God will **not** subject the coming world to the rule of angels, the author implies that the current world **is** being ruled by spirit entities.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the book of Job show two instances of the divine council composed of the **sons of God** (the **beney 'elohim**) gathering in heaven for a meeting of the council:

JOB 1:6 Now **there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD**, and Satan also came among them. 7 And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." (**NKJV**)

JOB 2:1 **Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD**, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. 2 And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." (**NKJV**)

What we see described here appear to be accounts of the "sons of God" (**beney 'elohim**) coming to regularly scheduled meetings of the divine council. Satan also came to these meetings, but from the text we cannot tell if he is one of the members of the council, or if he simply appeared to bring a petition before the council. Other Scriptures seem to indicate, however, that Satan may be a high-ranking member of the divine council given charge over the kingdoms of the world (e.g. Luke 4:5-7).

A couple of other Scriptures mention the divine council in passing:

JOB 15:7 "Are you the first man that was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills? 8 Have you listened in **the council of God**? And do you limit wisdom to yourself? (**RSV**)

JEREMIAH 23:16 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. 17 They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD says: You will have peace.' And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, 'No harm will come to you.' 18 But which of them has stood in **the council of the LORD** to see or to hear His word? Who has listened and heard His word?" (**NIV**)

Psalms 82 is the most detailed description we have of a meeting of the heavenly divine council which was given rulership over the 70 nations of the earth:

PSALM 82:1 {A Psalm of Asaph.} God has taken His place in the **divine council**; in the midst of **the gods** He holds judgment: 2 "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah* 3 Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. 4 Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." 5 They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. 6 I say, "**You are gods, sons of the Most High**, all of you; 7 nevertheless, **you shall die like men, and fall like any prince.**" 8 Arise, O God, judge the earth; for to thee belong all the nations! (**RSV**)

In this psalm, we see God take His place as the leader of the divine council. The psalmist records that, during this meeting of the council, God criticizes the "gods" (**'elohim**) for their unfairness and wickedness in carrying out the responsibilities He has assigned to them. Asaph tells us that the sin and

rebellion of the '**elohim**' have shaken the foundations of the earth. He records God's warning to these divine spirit entities, that their fate for corruption and disobedience will be to "die like **men**" (Heb. '**adam**'). Since clearly all **men** will "die like men," attempting to apply this Scripture to human rulers, as some scholars do, is illogical. Asaph ends the psalm by exhorting God to judge the earth and its divine rulers, because all nations truly belong to Him and not to them.

Psalm 82:7 refers to the governing '**elohim**' as "princes." This designation connects these council members to whom rulership of the nations was given (Deu. 32:8) with another passage of Scripture found in Daniel:

DANIEL 10:5 I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! 6 His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude. . . . 12 Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. 13 But **the prince of the kingdom of Persia** withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, **Michael, one of the chief princes**, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with **the kings of Persia**. (*NKJV*)

The Scripture above gives us an intriguing glimpse into the order and activities of the spiritual realm. Gabriel was sent by God to give Daniel insight into what would happen to his people (the Jews) in "the latter days." However, this mighty angel was delayed for three weeks because "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" contested God's command. This prince of Persia clearly was not human; he was the divine council member who had authority over the nation of Persia.

Indeed, if Michael (who is described in Dan. 12:1 as the great prince who stands over the people of Israel) had not helped Gabriel, God's message to Daniel might not have been delivered. For additional information on Michael, the spiritual prince over God's portion, Israel, refer to my article "[Christ in the Old Testament](#)."

DANIEL 10:20 Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? Now I must return to fight against **the prince of Persia**, and when I am through with him, **the prince of Greece** will come. 21 But I am to tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth. There is no one with me who contends against **these princes** except Michael, your **prince**." (*NRSV*)

After conveying his message to Daniel, Gabriel states that he must return to again do battle with "the prince of Persia." Furthermore, he states that he will also have to combat "the prince of Greece" after he has finished with "the Prince of Persia." The picture portrayed by this brief narrative is one

of opposition to God's will by the spirit beings of the council who have been given rule over the nations.

The book of Daniel mentions the fate of some of the "host of heaven" under the coming Antichrist:

DANIEL 8:10 And it [the little horn] grew up to **the host of heaven**; and it **cast down some of the host** and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them. 11 He even exalted himself as high as **the Prince of the host** [Yeshua, cf. Eph. 1:21; Col. 2:10; I Pet. 3:22]; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down. **(NKJV)**

We see from Daniel 8 that the Antichrist will come against these spiritual powers and "cast down some" of them and "trample them." It's likely that the remainder will join his end-time rebellion against God.

Just as Psalm 82 speaks of the eventual fate of these heavenly princes, the prophet Isaiah tells of their coming punishment in a couple of passages:

ISAIAH 24:19 The earth is broken asunder, the earth is split through, the earth is shaken violently. 20 The earth reels to and fro like a drunkard and it totters like a shack, for its transgression is heavy upon it, and it will fall, never to rise again. 21 So it will happen in that day, that the LORD will punish **the host of heaven on high**, and **the kings of the earth on earth**. 22 They will be gathered together like prisoners in the dungeon, and will be confined in prison; and after many days they will be punished. **(NASU)**

As Isaiah 24:21 shows, the "host of heaven" ruling from "on high" are differentiated from the kings ruling on the earth below. Let's look at another prophecy of their doom:

ISAIAH 34:1 Come near, you nations, to hear; and heed, you people! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world and all things that come forth from it. 2 For the indignation of the LORD is against all nations, and His fury against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to the slaughter. 3 Also their slain shall be thrown out; their stench shall rise from their corpses, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. 4 All **the host of heaven** shall be **dissolved**, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; all **their host shall fall down** as the leaf falls from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree. 5 "For **My sword shall be bathed in heaven**; indeed it shall come down on Edom, and on the people of My curse, for judgment." **(NKJV)**

Like the "host" of the nations that come against the Messiah will be slain, the "host of heaven" (Heb. **tzeva' hashamayim**) who rule these earthly

nations will also be defeated. The sword of the Eternal, wielded by the Messiah, will "drink its fill in the heavens" as well as on the earth.

We are told in Isaiah 34:4 that "the host of heaven shall be **dissolved**" (Heb. **namaqu**, literally "waste away," "decay"). In Zechariah 14:12, the same Hebrew root word **maqaq** is used to describe the fate of those who come against Jerusalem at the end of the age.

There is a similarity between Isaiah 34:4 and II Peter 3:10-12 that deserves some attention. Peter speaks of an end-time fire in the heavens, which will melt and dissolve the **elements**:

II PETER 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the **elements** [*stoicheia*] will be **dissolved** with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. 11 Since all these things are thus to be **dissolved**, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and **dissolved**, and the **elements** [*stoicheia*] will melt with fire! (**RSV**)

The Greek word **stoicheia**, translated "elements" in the passage above, is understood by many scholars to refer to heavenly spirits. This understanding can be seen in several passages written by the apostle Paul:

GALATIANS 4:1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; 2 but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. 3 So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to **the elemental spirits of the universe** [*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*]. (**RSV**)

GALATIANS 4:9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly **elemental spirits** [*stoicheia*], whose slaves you want to be once more? (**RSV**)

COLOSSIANS 2:8 See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to **the elemental spirits of the universe** [*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*], and not according to Christ. (**RSV**)

COLOSSIANS 2:18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and **worship of angels**, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. 20 If with Christ you died to **the elemental spirits of the universe** [*ton stoicheion tou kosmou*], why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? . . . (**RSV**)

The ***Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*** has this to say about the "elements" as spiritual powers:

A number of interpreters, perhaps even a majority, have concluded that *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* refers to spiritual powers of some sort. . . . The earliest extant extrabiblical Jewish evidence for the *stoicheia* being associated with both spirits and stars is later than the first century (second and third centuries A.D.), but it is well attested and may very well represent beliefs contemporaneous with Paul (cf. Lohse, 99 n.41). The *Testament of Solomon*, a Jewish-Christian work usually dated to the third century A.D., but possibly containing material dating to the first century, testifies to a belief in star spirits called *stoicheia*. Seven bound spirits appear before Solomon and reveal their identity: "We are the *stoicheia*, rulers of this world of darkness [*kosmokratores tou skotous*, cf. Eph 6:12] . . . our stars in heaven look small, but we are named like gods" (*T. Sol.* 8:2-4). (pp. 231, 232, "Elements/Elemental Spirits of the World")

If we understand the usage of ***stoicheia*** by Peter to be the same as Paul's usage in the Scriptures cited above, we can see that Peter was simply reemphasizing what the prophet Isaiah had said about the fate of the spiritual powers aligned against God. Isaiah stated the "host of heaven" would be dissolved; Peter said that these same "elemental spirits" would be dissolved by fire.

## **YESHUA'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE DIVINE COUNCIL**

In the tenth chapter of John's Gospel, Yeshua answers the Jews' question regarding his identity:

JOHN 10:24 Then the Jews surrounded him and said to him, "How long do you keep us in doubt? **If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.**" 25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. 26 But you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. 29 **My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all;** and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. 30 **I and My Father are one.**" 31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. 32 Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from my Father. For which of those works do you stone me?" 33 The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because **you, being a man, make yourself God** [*theon*]." 34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, **You are gods** [*theoi*]' '? 35 If **He called them gods** [*theous*], to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), 36 do you say of him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' **because I said, 'I am the Son of God'**? 37 If I do not do the works of

my Father, do not believe me; 38 but if I do, though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in Him." (**NKJV**)

The passage above starts with the Jews asking Yeshua if he was the prophesied Messiah (v. 24). He answered by saying that he had already told them he was, and they didn't believe him (v. 25a). Yeshua goes on to say that the works he had performed before them in the Father's name were a testimony to his identity (v. 25b). Next he differentiated between those blinded Jews and the sheep his Father had given him (vv. 26-29). Yeshua finished his comments to the Jews by proclaiming that he and his Father were "one" (v. 30).

This answer prompted the Jews to charge him with blasphemy and prepare to stone him (vv. 31-33). In verses 34-36, Yeshua addressed the charge that the Jews had leveled against him, namely that he had blasphemed by proclaiming himself to be "God." The Greek word **theon** is the equivalent of the Hebrew **'elohim**.

Based on Yeshua's answer to the Jews, why were they planning to stone him? Did they think that he, a man, had proclaimed himself to be God the Father? Or did they understand his claim in a way that was different from the common Trinitarian understanding of today?

Rather than assume that we know, let's allow the Jews themselves define for us what they took Yeshua's claim to be:

JOHN 19:6 Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him." 7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, **because he made himself the Son of God.**" (**NKJV**)

Clearly the Jews understood Yeshua's claim to be that he was an **'elohim**, one of the divine sons of God. Carefully notice Yeshua's specific reply to the charge of blasphemy. He first references the members of the divine council, who were called "sons of God" in the Old Testament (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; etc.), by quoting from Psalm 82:6 (v. 34). Then Yeshua asked the Jews, "Why do you say I'm blaspheming just because I've proclaimed myself to be the **Son of God**, when the Father Himself in the Scripture calls the members of the divine council **gods ('elohim)**?" (vv. 35-36).

Yeshua's response, including the reference to Psalm 82:6, was intended to convey the understanding that Yeshua, the Son of God, had preexisted his mortal appearance and was one of the members (in fact, the foremost member) of the divine council addressed in Psalm 82. Yeshua here was proclaiming himself to be **an 'elohim** (divine); he was NOT saying that he was **the 'Elohim**, the Most High, God the Father.

Many Christians base their understanding of this passage solely on verse 30. They assume that Yeshua's statement that he and the Father are one is an affirmation of the Trinity doctrine (or the less popular "Oneness" doctrine). However, the Bible clearly shows that the state of being "one" does not entail being "the same as" (i.e., Yeshua = the Father).

The example of Adam and Eve clearly illustrates this biblical principal:

GENESIS 2:21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. 22 Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. 23 And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and **they shall become ONE FLESH**. 25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (**NKJV**)

Yeshua himself quoted this passage when defending the sanctity of marriage to the Pharisees (Matt. 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12). Clearly, a man and woman do not **literally** become one flesh when they marry. So out of necessity, it is essential to understand "one" here in a different sense. The Hebrew word for "one" (**echad**) often means "unity." It is this meaning that Jesus intended when he said that he and his Father were "one." Jesus was unified with the Father in accomplishing God's **purpose** and **will** (Matt. 26:39; John 5:30; 14:10, 24).

Yeshua's prayer to the Father before his crucifixion, recorded in John 17, confirms this understanding of "one":

JOHN 17:11 "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, **that they may be one as We are.**" (**NKJV**)

Yeshua prayed that the disciples God had given him would become one, just as he and the Father were one. How then were the disciples to become one? Were they to become some sort of divine triune being? Or were they to be united through the Holy Spirit to do the will of God, just as Yeshua was united to his Father during his entire life on earth?

JOHN 17:20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 **that they all may be one**, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; **that they also may be one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, **that they may be one just as We are one**: 23 **I in them, and You in Me**; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (**NKJV**)

When he prayed "that they may be one just as we are one," Yeshua was not praying for all believers to become a part of the Trinity. Yeshua clearly tells us that he and the Father are "one" by the Father being in him (through the Holy Spirit) and by Yeshua being in the Father (by doing God's will instead of his own). Yeshua always knew God's will because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; he remained in the Father by always doing His will. Yeshua's prayer for all believers was that the Father would make them one with both of them; this would be accomplished by God's Spirit flowing through Christ (the mediator) to dwell within them.

## **CONCLUSION**

The world is currently ruled over by angelic principalities and powers that God gave authority over the nations. Just as the nations over which they rule, these mighty spirits have often chosen to go against the will of God. In choosing not to submit to God's authority, they have become the enemies of God and His chosen people. Eventually, the rebellion of these wicked spirits will lead to their judgment and punishment. The Messiah, the ruler of the sons of God on the divine council, will triumph over them at his second coming and will rule the nations according to the will of God.

Bryan T. Huie

January 22, 2002

*Revised: September 28, 2002*