

The eternal God presided over his divine council to judge his heavenly “sons” for their unjust rule over the affairs of the helpless in Gentile nations. When these created but fallen “gods” die, the God of true justice will inherit again all nations for Christ’s kingdom. Open your eyes to the world’s unseen realm!

Introduction – College finals were approaching, and for my friend Josh, God was calling...

Background – Book 3 of the Psalter can be called the Book of Exile. It contains psalms that are particularly relevant for believers who find themselves surrounded by powerful rulers who judge unjustly and favor the wicked over the defenseless. Psalm 82 is a rich resource for not only understanding what is happening in the unseen world around us, but also how to cry for help and overcome by faith in God.

I. **Introducing the Unseen World(view)**

A. **Who are the “gods/elo^him” and “sons of God” in view? (vv. 1, 6)**

1. *Traditional view.* Human judges and rulers may sometimes (debatably) be translated gods/elo^him because they functionally exercise the judicial rule of God (e.g., Exodus 21:6; 22:8-9). This has been the simple majority view of Psalm 82 as reflected in the history of English translations. Older translations that rendered the Hebrew phrase “the council of El” as “the great assembly” (KJV, NIV) or “God’s own congregation” (NAS) say God stands among judges and rulers of his own people. But here’s the problem. Those translators didn’t know how the phrase “the council of El” was widely used in the holy writings of other peoples in the ancient Near East and also by Israel. A newfound understanding has been slowly working its way into biblical scholarship, the newer Bible translations (NRSV, CSB, ESV, NLT, NET), the seminaries, and finally into the church. So what is this “council of El” that sets the scene for Psalm 82?

2. *Recovered ancient (divine council) view.* The Bible’s view of the unseen world is that we live in a place teeming with spiritual entities created by God to roam the heavenly realm. The whole Bible refers to them as angels, demons, cherubim, seraphim, principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness, and other spiritual creatures in the unseen realm. More to the point for Psalm 82, in the Old Testament, the “sons of God” are *always* supernatural created beings (v. 6; Genesis 6:2,4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). The “council of El” turns out to be a well-known concept in the ancient Near East that describes the Most High God presiding over a pantheon of lesser deities. Since the Bible is monotheistic, its “council of El” is a phrase describing capital-E Elohim presiding over his created lower-case *elo^him*—the Most High and his spiritual children, the created sons of God. Drill down further, and you’ll find there is only one other passage in the Old Testament that refers to “sons of the Most High,” and as a companion passage to Psalm 82 it illuminates the inner workings of the divine council (Deuteronomy 32:8; cf. Psalm 82:6).

B. **God’s heavenly council as earth’s mission-control room (vv. 2, 5)**

Concerning the division of the nations and their inheritance, the Song of Moses informs us why God judged the gods in Psalm 82. The gods, the sons of the Most High, are culpable because God allotted to them administration and possession of the nations when he divided the peoples in judgment at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:8; cf. Genesis 10-11). However, the sons of God abused their inheritance of the nations and followed the ways of Satan, leading each nation of people to worship their God-ordained heavenly supervisor as its country’s patron deity. Each glory-hungry and power-wielding fallen “god” seduced their people to act unjustly by favoring the wicked and trampling the defenseless (v. 2). The unseen world of the Bible reveals terrible heavenly and earthly judgments befall us because of past rebellion against God—on the part of earthlings like us (the sons of Adam), and also on the part of heavenly creatures like angels, demons, and other spiritual creatures (the sons of God).

II. Seeing the Unseen World(view)

A. **The supernatural world of the Bible is hidden in plain sight (cf. 1 Kings 22; Job 1-2, 38)**

1. In 1 Kings 22:19-23 we get to peer into a meeting of God’s divine council of spiritual beings in heaven. God assigns one particular spirit to entice Israel’s king Ahab to go to war and die in battle. The spirit will entice Ahab by becoming a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab’s false prophet—all at the LORD’s behest to render judgment and disaster on the faithless king.
2. Another example is in Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7. The “sons of God” including Satan have access to God in heaven. Twice Satan presents himself before the LORD among the “sons of God,” and Satan contends with God regarding Job’s blessing and protection, whose personal righteousness is disputed. At the end of the book of Job, the morning stars singing together are parallel to the sons of God shouting for joy in the heavens. If you understand and believe what the Bible teaches is actually true about the unseen heavenly realm, then you’ll be able to understand God’s supernatural workings through the eyes of faith (Hebrews 11:1; 13:2; cf. 2 Kings 6:15-17).

B. **Many difficult and strange Bible passages can be harmonized (vv. 1, 6-7)**

Interpreting Psalm 82 according to the divine council worldview has immense explanatory power. Many of the “weird” passages in the Bible, both OT and NT, actually harmonize to make sense in the divine council view. Here are a few examples to show you their harmony when viewed through the unseen world. (1) Genesis 6:1-8; Numbers 13:22-33; Dt 1:28; 2:10-21; 9:1-5; Joshua 11:21-22; 14:12-15; (2) Ezekiel 28:11-19; (3) Daniel 10:12-21; (4) 1 Peter 3:18-22; 2 Peter 2:4-11; (5) John 10:34-36.

III. Living in the Unseen World(view)

A. **God’s cosmic justice is a life and death matter on earth and in heaven (vv. 3-4, 7)**

The biblical evidence for the unseen world is all background to the two main points of Psalm 82. The first is you must absolutely hate injustice inflicted on the helpless, stand up for the oppressed wherever you see them, and repent of all ways you are complicit in it. The LORD God establishes the earth with justice so the foundations can never be shaken. And he ordains justice on earth from his throne in heaven, surrounded by his holy ones, the remaining heavenly host who love God and do his will. They are the sons of the Most High, and all people on earth who love and obey God will live forever into eternity as adopted sons of God (Romans 8:13-14, 18-19; Galatians 3:26; 4:4-7). But the reverse is also true. For all those who rebel against God and follow other gods, they will be condemned by God to gloomy darkness in hell. Cosmic justice on earth is a matter of life and death, revealed in the just deeds of God’s sheep and in the lack of justice by the goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

B. **God has (re)inherited the nations through his only begotten and risen Son, King Jesus (v. 8)**

The second main point of Psalm 82 is that God will arise and possess again the nations he disinherited. All the fallen sons of God in the divine council have been judged and sentenced, so don’t fear the false gods that people serve! Before Christ the nations were in bondage to wicked unjust gods. God had cast off the nations and kept Israel only as his special possession. But now Christ, in his death and resurrection, has disarmed the fallen gods and taken back the nations as his inheritance (Acts 2; Colossians 2:15). We live victoriously in the unseen world by faith in Christ the Conqueror.

Conclusion – The gods are fallen from heaven, but like Satan they still roam earth in the unseen world. So you must resist with spiritual warfare (2 Cor 10:3-6; Eph 6:10-20). You may not be able to see clear and incontrovertible evidence that Jesus has inherited the nations for his kingdom, but believe his reign is a reality in the unseen world (Dan 7:18, 27; Rev 1:5-6)—a reality that becomes more visible as Jesus directs his divine council to work and watch as he brings many sons of God to glory (Hebrews 2:7-10). Amen.