

Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

The statements of Psalm 45:6-7, depicting the Messianic King referred to directly as *Elohim* or “God,” but also being anointed by “God, Your God,” were employed by the author of Hebrews 1:8-9 to contrast the nature and status of Yeshua the Messiah, with that of the more general Heavenly host of angels:

“For to which of the angels did He {the Father} ever say...But of the Son *He says*, ‘YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS’” (Hebrews 1:5a, 8-9).

If the text of Psalm 45:6 read with a term like *melekh* or “king,” rather than *Elohim* or “God,” then we could have some sort of a Davidic or Israelite/Judahite psalm, to be applied to Israel’s Messiah, and the only issues we would have to probe would concern the nature and quality of the Messiah’s reign. But rather than *Elohim* being modified in versions such as the Greek Septuagint or Aramaic Targum, the King being a Divine figure is only confirmed. As those who affirm the Messiahship of Yeshua of Nazareth, and the clear application of Psalm 45:6-7 to Him in Hebrews 1:8-9, we conclude that Yeshua addressed as “God” is affirming of His Divinity, although as Messianic King that He is the designated servant of the LORD God of Israel, for accomplishing His redeeming purposes for the Earth. As Ortlund puts it, “Psalm 45, if allowed to speak for itself, demands recognition as a prophecy of a divine-human Messiah and the joy of his ultimate glories with his people.”²⁰⁸

Psalm 82:1-8

“God Calls Mortal Beings ‘gods’”

“A Psalm of Asaph. God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the rulers. How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah. Vindicate the weak and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver *them* out of the hand of the wicked. They do not know nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are sons of the Most High. Nevertheless you will die like men and fall like *any* one of the princes.’ Arise, O God, judge the earth! For it is You who possesses all the nations.”

Psalm 82 is broadly condemning of various officials and magistrates within the community of Ancient Israel. In stark contrast to the fair and righteous judgment of the Lord, He chastises and rebukes the behavior of those human judges appointed to administer the law, asking them, “How long will you judge perversely, showing favor to the wicked?” (Psalm 82:2, NJPS). Cohen is correct to conclude,

“They contravened the basic rule: *Thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor favour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour* (Lev. xix. 15). The scales of justice must be held evenly, without bias in favour of the poor from a feeling that the verdict against the richer party to the suit would not inconvenience him, and certainly without partiality to the man of influence from a fear of the consequences to the judge or as the result of bribery.”²⁰⁹

The solution, to the problem exclaimed, would be for these various human judges to take care of the destitute and disenfranchised (Psalm 82:3-4). One does not get the impression that the Lord anticipated the officials and magistrates enacting a change of action or ethics, witnessed by

²⁰⁸ Ortlund, “The Deity of Christ and the Old Testament,” in *The Deity of Christ*, 47.

²⁰⁹ Cohen, *Psalms*, 270.

His statement, “They know not, neither do they understand; they walk to and fro in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are shaken” (Psalm 82:5, ATS).

When reading Psalm 82 from an Ancient Israelite perspective of appeal to the Lord for help in the midst of corrupt leadership, then the assertion of Psalm 82:6 can be much easier to follow. Here, the Lord is speaking, and He says, *ani-amarti elohim atem u'benei 'elyon kul'khem* (עֲלִיּוֹן כֻּלְכֶם) (אֲנִי־אָמַרְתִּי אֱלֹהִים אַתֶּם וּבְנֵי 'עֲלִיּוֹן). A version like the RSV has, “I say, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.’” Here, it is absolutely legitimate to consider the flexibility of the Hebrew term *elohim* (אֱלֹהִים), which while most frequently employed in terms of God proper, can, dependent on context to be sure, relate to “God, gods, judges, angels” (TWOT),²¹⁰ or “rulers, judges, either as divine representatives at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power” (BDB).²¹¹ As we have surely discussed in this publication, the Semitic *elohim* can refer to various created entities. And so, noting these lexical definitions, and given the qualification of the *elohim* also with the *benei 'elyon* also being “sons of the Most High” or “children of the Most High” (NRSV), Psalm 82:6 can fairly be recognized as a usage of the title *elohim* applying to created mortals. Alternative translations of *elohim* in Psalm 82:6, other than the standard “God,” are witnessed:

- “I had taken you for divine beings, sons of the Most High, all of you” (NJPS).
- “I said, ‘You are angelic, sons of the Most High are you all’” (ATS).
- “I had said, You are angels, all of you sons of the most High” (Jerusalem Bible-Koren).
- “I said, You are angelic beings, all of you are sons of the Most High” (Keter Crown Bible).

To emphasize the place of the corrupt, human judges as being inferior to God proper as the True Judge, it is understandable why the title *elohim* would be rendered by some of the versions above as “angels” or “angelic.” And, it is to be acknowledged that this is a lexical possibility.

While rendering *elohim* literally as “gods,” the NIV notably places “gods” in quotation marks “ ”, to likely emphasize some sort of irony: “I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High.’” A Messianic version like the TLV follows this: “I said: ‘You are “gods”, and you are all sons of *Elyon*.” The CJB/CJSB presents the reader with some interpretive options, as it has, “My decree is: ‘You are *elohim* [gods, judges], sons of the Most High all of you.’”

While the corrupt, human judges in Ancient Israel, may be regarded as “gods” and “sons of the Most High,” such accolades are going to get them no special favors or privileges before the Supreme God. The Lord further decrees, “nevertheless, you shall die like mortals [*k'adam temutun*, תְּמוּתוּן כְּאָדָם], and fall like any prince” (Psalm 82:7, NRSV). And so, all the Psalmist can do is appeal to the Lord, the True and Just *Elohim*, to intervene: “Rise up, *Elohim*, and judge the earth; for all the nations are yours” (Psalm 82:8, CJB/CJSB).

Questions involving Psalm 82:6 and corrupt judges in Ancient Israel being referred to by the title *elohim*, are necessarily raised, given how Yeshua the Messiah would quote from this passage when various Jewish religious leaders accused Him of the crime of self-deification (John 10:33)²¹²:

“Yeshua answered them, ‘Has it not been written in your Law, “I SAID, YOU ARE GODS [Psalm 82:6]’? If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), 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”?’” (John 10:34-36).

²¹⁰ Jack B. Scott, “‘ēlōhīm,” in TWOT, 1:44.

²¹¹ BDB, 43.

²¹² “The Jews answered Him, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God’” (John 10:33).

Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

Yeshua the Messiah surely employed the message of Psalm 82:6-7 against His detractors: as God proper had once called corrupt judges in Ancient Israel “gods,” so the (broadly) corrupt Jewish religious leaders of the First Century were also “gods.” These leaders would meet a fate of rejection from God proper *and death*, despite bearing such an honorific.

So, recognizing that corrupt mortals can be called “gods”—the same ones who accused Yeshua of a crime of self-deification—this should at least have *merited a pause* on their part, with the Messiah truly asking them to consider whether or not He has committed such a crime. Far from usurping the position of God proper, as a standard human might in trying to make himself out to be God—Yeshua’s self-identity is predicated on His being sent from the Father, and in His detractors *probing His personal origins* associated with Him being “the Son of God.”

Psalm 97:5-7

“Supernatural Beings are Enjoined to Worship”

“The mountains melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples have seen His glory. Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, who boast themselves of idols; worship Him, all you gods.”

Psalm 97 is a significant exclaim of not just the majesty and power of the God of Israel, but also of His exclusiveness—in contrast to all other entities of veneration. Psalm 97:1-2 declares forth, “The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many islands be glad. Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.” The absolute supremeness of the God of Israel, to any other apparent gods or goddesses, is also proclaimed: “For You are the LORD Most High over all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods²¹³.” When reviewing the statements of Psalm 97:5-7, specifically, God as Creator is certainly lauded (Psalm 97:5-6), but it is most imperatively directed that not just idol worshippers, but that all the deities which sit behind the idols, worship Him as the One True God:

“All worshippers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods!” (Psalm 97:7, ESV).

There is some variance witnessed among English versions on how to render *hishtachavu-lo kol-elohim* (הִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לֹוּ כָּל־אֱלֹהִים), as it does appear as: “all gods bow down before him” (RSV); “all divine beings bow down to Him” (NJPS); “bow to Him all you powers” (ATS). Psalm 97:7 does employ the verb *chavah* (חָוָה; or *shachah*, שָׁחָה), which in terms of veneration to be properly directed toward the LORD or YHWH, should be rendered as “worship.” The identity of the *elohim*, specified to worship the Lord as the One True God, is rightly taken to be false gods and goddesses worshipped by the pagans of Planet Earth at large. The Greek Septuagint rendering of *hishtachavu-lo kol-elohim* is *proskunēsate autō pantes hoi angeloi autou* (προσκυνήσατε αὐτῷ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ), “worship him, all ye his angels” (LXE).²¹⁴ Here, *elohim* (אֱלֹהִים), the Hebrew word typically meaning “G/god(s),” is understood to be “divine beings” or “powers,” which the Septuagint translators understood to mean “angels” (Grk. sing. *angelos*, ἄγγελος).

Whether in the canonical Hebrew Masoretic Text or an ancient Jewish translation like the Greek Septuagint, Psalm 97:7 conveys the critical point that **all supernatural powers are to worship the LORD God of Israel as the Supreme Creator**. What makes Psalm 97:7 so important, is not just how it is an affirmation that the LORD or YHWH is to be the sole object of veneration

²¹³ Heb. *me'od na'aleita al-kol-elohim* (מְאֹד נִעְלִיתָ עַל־כָּל־אֱלֹהִים).

²¹⁴ “Do obeisance to him, all his angels!” (NETS).