

“You” Are Gods?

John 10:22-42

²² At that time **the Feast of Dedication** took place at Jerusalem. It was winter,

²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon.

²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? 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 bear witness about me,

²⁶ but **you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.**

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will 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 the Father's hand.

³⁰ I and the Father are one."

³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.

³² Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?"

³³ The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'?"

³⁵ If he called them gods to whom the word of God came--and Scripture cannot be broken--

³⁶ do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?

³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me;

³⁸ 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 am in the Father."

³⁹ Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.

⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained.

⁴¹ And many came to him. And they said, "John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true."

⁴² And many believed in him there.

James' Confession of Jesus Christ

I was struck in preparing for last week's sermon by something I read about the death of James, the Lord's brother. The Jews conspired to kill James. Legend has it that they eventually threw him off the pinnacle of the temple (a fall which he survived) and then beat him to death with a club. They demanded that James should renounce faith in Christ in the presence of all the people. Instead, James boldly confessed Christ saying that our, "Saviour and Lord Jesus is *the Son of*

God.” So they asked him “What is the gate of Jesus?” (see **John 10:7**; we looked at this last week). He replied that he was **the Savior** and that Jesus, being raised from the dead, ascended bodily into heaven to “the right hand of the great Power” and would return again, “**upon the clouds of heaven.**”¹

Two things struck me. **First**, the language James used: Son of God, right hand of the great Power, and upon the clouds of heaven. **Second**, it is then recorded that “**many even of the rulers believed**” that Jesus is the Christ. *Many Jewish rulers became Christians* because of the things James said about Jesus to them.

What’s the big deal? What I’m going to talk about today is how there is something in what James said that both scribes and laity prior to the destruction of the temple² could understand. They would have read about it at any corner bookstore in the “best sellers” section. They were completely familiar with something you and I know almost nothing about. It is something that touches directly on our passage in John 10.

¹ Hegesippus, *Memoirs* Book 5 (now lost), cited in Eusebius, *Church History* 2.23.1-14.

² If we take Hegesippus’ account rather than Josephus’, James was probably killed the year before the temple was destroyed—in 69 A.D.

It is something that later Jews, and still Jews to this very day, think is utterly heretical. They think it heretical because after the destruction of the temple and because so many of their people were converting to Christianity, the Rabbis began systematically eradicating it so that no Jew would ever again be tempted to turn to Christ. Such was their loathing for our Lord.

I want you to understand that if you, for some reason, have an emotional reaction against what I'm going to say, this same strong reaction was first seen in unbelieving, Christian suppressing Rabbis who hated Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean you can't be a Christian if you disagree with me. But I need you to be aware of the history. The early church understood these things well, but for whatever reasons, as time passed even many Christians just couldn't find it within themselves to believe them, or the idea was simply forgotten to time and history. Most Christians stopped understanding it. But it has never been fully lost, and it holds the key to fully

understanding the unique and incredible claims that Jesus made about himself.

Jesus Accused of Blasphemy

In all of the Gospels, we have recorded that on only three different occasions, for three different things that Jesus was saying, the Pharisees were so outraged that they accused him of blasphemy. **Blasphemy** is at the heart of our passage today, for it is one of those three occasions. **What is blasphemy?** Technically, blasphemy is “**impious and reproachful speech injurious to the divine majesty**” (Thayer’s Lexicon) or “**Speech that is against the nature and power of God**” (Friberg’s Lexicon). Less technically it is **slander against God** or perhaps you just think of it as the act of **claiming that you are God**.

The three occasions that Jesus is accused of blasphemy are:

1. When he claimed he could forgive sins (**Matt 9:2-3; Mark 2:5-7; Luke 5:20-21**).
2. When at his trial before Caiaphas, and interestingly, the Sanhedrin Council (made up of 70 members), he said exactly what we have heard James quote about the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven (**Matt**

26:64-65; Mark 14:62-64). 3. In John 10:33 they say Jesus makes himself out to be God by a. Saying that he and the Father are one, thereby making himself equal with God (10:30; see John 5:18), b. For citing Psalm 82:6 which says, “I said, You are gods” (10:34) c. Calling himself the “son of God” (10:36) and d. Returning to the idea that “The Father is in me and I am in the Father” (10:38).³

Each instance has two things in common. The first is that in context, Jesus is demonstrating from the OT that he is equal with God.⁴ Second, he does so in each case by going to a key OT passage which some Jews of that day had speculated referred to what came to be called a second power in heaven. The idea was that the OT referred to “Two Powers” in heaven, both good, both participating equally of divinity and essence, yet one was greater and the other was lesser (thus differentiating their persons). “Two Powers” is the Rabbis’ own language. Recall how James talked about the right hand

³ For these three see the summary chart at the end of the sermon.

⁴ See the questions of the Jews, “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7); “Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt 26:63); “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24).

of “the great power.” Two-powers theology was the fertile soil from which sprang the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

My Angel

Let’s look at the first two instances. When Jesus says to the man, “**Your sins are forgiven**,” there is one clear OT precedent for someone other than God in heaven forgiving sins. It is **Exodus 23:20-21**. The text refers to the Angel of the LORD. It says, “**I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My Name is in him.**”⁵ Someone other than God (the Father) forgiving sins is the link between the two passages. Jesus is basically saying, “**I’m that person come in flesh.**”

I want to tell you how some Jews in Jesus’ day interpreted this “Angel.” In what has to be my favorite name for an angel they said, “**This refers to Metatron**” (t. Sanh 38B V.10.c.).

⁵ Targum Pseudo-Jonathan has the now familiar, “Because His word (Memra) is in My Name.”

Metatron is not the name of a Transformer. He is not Optimus Prime's arch-nemesis (that would be Megatron). He was a very peculiar angel. At this early stage in history, Jews quarreled over the nature of Metatron. Some thought he was the Second Power; others felt he was not equal with God in any sense. After the temple fell, the debate was ended. While they didn't say you can no longer talk about Metatron, they made sure to stamp out any hint of equality with God saying things like, "What need do I have for the statement, 'He will not pardon your transgression' [since Metatron has no right to do so anyhow]?" (t. Sanh 38B V.10.f.). In other words, the passage says the Angel won't forgive your sin, and the Rabbis say this is because he *can't* forgive your sin, because he is merely an angel. That's not exactly how I would read it, but it certainly fits with someone changing the meaning of a passage because they are angry about Jesus Christ claiming to be able to forgive sins.

Son of Man

The second passage is where Jesus talks about himself as the “Son of Man.” He is asked to defend his claim that he is God and responds, “From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt 26:64). This is what James was talking about. The only significant difference is that James calls it the Great (*megalés*) Power.” Jesus is harkening back to Daniel 7:9-13.

Let me tell you about the setting of Daniel 7. Daniel has a vision of heaven. He sees **thrones** (plural). Then he sees the “Ancient of Days.” We would call this God the Father. He and the rest of the court of heavenly beings are seated. Books are opened, and the judgment is about to begin. This is what the Bible refers to as a “**divine council**” scene. It reminds me of the Supreme Court. **We’ll talk about the divine council shortly.**

For now, notice that it says, “Beyond, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.” This is the

language Jesus uses for his return. He is Daniel's Son of Man. Guess how Jewish sages sometimes interpreted this Son of Man? If you said, "Metatron," you go to the head of the line. Citing **Daniel 7:9-10** it asks, "**And what is his [the Prince's/Michael's/Son of Man's] name? ... Metatron, like the name of the [divine] Dynamis**" (Hagigah 12b).⁶ It compares the Ancient of Days to this Dynamis. *Dynamis* is the word for "power" as in "the right hand of power" or James' "the right hand of the great power" or the Jewish "two powers in heaven."⁷ There is obviously a person here in some sense equal with God and in some sense not the same as God, since the Ancient of Days is different from the Son of Man.

Ancient Jews talked about Metatron a lot. His name is fascinating in light of the things we know about Jesus. It means "**Prince of the World**" or "**The Great Prince**" or "**The Great Prince of God's Throne**" (from *meta thronos* meaning "**one who serves behind the throne**" or "**one who occupies the**

⁶ b.(?) Hagigah 12b (cited in Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965), 46.

⁷ Another biblical passage that often comes up in two-powers discussion is Exodus 15. One verse says, "**Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy**" (**Ex 15:6**). Earlier it said, "**The LORD is a man of war**" (**15:3**) and the post-70 AD Rabbis were brutal in this attacks against this as a "two power" proof text, which it certainly was prior to that time.

throne next to the throne of glory”). He is sometimes called “Lesser Yahweh” (*Yahoel*). Metatron may also mean “Keeper of the Watch” (from *mattara*; think Chief “Watcher”). He wasn’t always viewed as equal with God, but in some traditions he was.

In a very interesting passage Metatron says, “I have seventy names, corresponding to the seventy nations of the world, and all of them are based on the name of the King of kings”.⁸ As such, some think it is not really a proper name, but a way to talk *about* God.⁹ All of this is to say that Metatron’s names have a great deal in common with the titles, offices, and acts of Jesus Christ. I’m not saying that Metatron is Jesus (it isn’t even a biblical term), but that Jews did see a figure that Jesus can quite easily “fulfill” in their imagination. But again, just so good little Jews after the temple was destroyed will no longer be allowed to view Metatron (or any other name he might

⁸ This is found in 3 Enoch 3.

⁹ Following this, some think the word may have been chosen because of its numerical value through Gematria. though you may not have heard about Gematria, you know it though the number 666. People try to figure out who is the Antichrist with the number 666? They’ve been doing this almost since the beginning. In both Hebrew and Greek, each letter was assigned a numerical value. You can add up the letters of any name and get a specific number (thus Nero, several popes, Kissinger, Reagan and many others have all been called Antichrist using Gematria). Metatron and Shaddai have the same numerical value.

happen to bear) as one who participates in a Godhead, thereby cutting off any link that they might make between Jesus and Metatron, the Rabbis add after a story where Metatron accepts the worship of a two-power heretical rabbi who saw him in a vision (named Elisha b. Abbuyah), “They took out Metatron and flogged him with sixty lashes of fire” (b. Hag. 15A IV.36.F.).

What we see in **Exodus 23:20-21** and in **Daniel 7:9-13** are two passages where Jews of Jesus’ day saw a second God figure, both like God yet not like God, both bearing the name of God, yet having his own individual identity. Remember to keep in mind that Jesus was accused for blasphemy for basically saying, “I’m that figure in those OT passages.” Some Jews believed him. Others became irate. Look inside your heart and ask yourself what you are thinking as you’ve been introduced to this fascinating figure in the OT. Is your response one of agitation or wonder in what Jesus is saying about himself?

Son of God

Now we come to our third passage. We'll look at **John 10:22-42**. The setting is the temple during the **Feast of Dedication** (**10:22**). This feast was a non-biblical feast, yet Jesus seems to be attending it. The reason seems to be that he is the one being "consecrated" (**John 10:36**) by the Father, showing that he is the fulfillment of this feast of "dedication."¹⁰

If the setting is the feast/fulfillment of Jesus, then the reason Jesus will cite the OT passage is because of a question he is asked at this feast. They ask him, "**How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly**" (**vs. 24**). **I cannot understate** how important this question is to a

¹⁰ For time's sake I put this in a footnote: As usual, the mention of a feast by John isn't here just to add color to the story. This "**Feast of Dedication**" (called by Josephus "the Feast of Lights") was in winter, well over a year since Jesus healed the man at Bethesda. This feast began not long after **Judas Maccabaeus** recaptured the temple from the Greeks (and the famed **Antiochus IV Epiphanes**) in December, 164 BC. It was not a prescribed feast in the OT.

It is interesting that Jesus seems to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast (this would be the consistent way to read it compared with the other feast stories in the Gospel), even though it wasn't commanded (something Christians who think Christmas is of the devil should at least consider before making a final conclusion on the matter), and even though you could be a "good Jew" and celebrate it in your home. In fact, some argue that it, like Christmas, was actually a replacement holiday for the winter solstice. It is also a curious fact that Jesus was in the colonnade of Solomon, an indoor area of the temple, where the first believers, after the resurrection, would assemble regularly to proclaim that Jesus is the Christ (**Acts 3:11; 5:12**).

Antiochus wanted to eradicate Jewish worship, but Judas brought it back, saving and then sanctifying the temple that had been desecrated. Now Jesus says (again in **vs. 36**), "**The Father consecrated and sent [me] into the world**." In John, Jesus is bringing "**true worship**" (**John 4:23-24**) to its fullest possible point as the "**true temple**" (**John 2:19-21**), a temple that at this very moment the Jews are trying to destroy, just as Antiochus Epiphanes did to the prototype 150 years earlier. Talk about irony. But it is typical of the way John sees Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish feasts throughout this book (**6:4; 7:21-24, 37-38; 8:12; 19:31-37**).

proper interpretation of Jesus' OT citation. Almost no one seems to notice this question.

I've had several friends this week, including one who is preaching this same passage this very morning, tell me that in what we are about to discuss, Jesus is not trying “to prove that he is God, but to refute the charge of blasphemy.” That seems to fly in the face of this question. In vs. 25 Jesus says, “I told you, and you do not believe.” But it isn't like Jesus now gives up telling them. He will make four points that follow from this question. Each is intended to answer their question, to demonstrate that he is their Messiah; but his answers are a correction of their mistaken understanding of Messiah, for he would be no mere political leader, but God in the flesh, pre-existent, there in the OT. As we look at these four things, I agree that Jesus is refuting the charge of blasphemy, but he does it precisely *because* he is proving that he is God. You see, if he is God, then what he says about himself is not blasphemy.

As mentioned, there are four things (excluding the whole “sheep” discussion we looked at last week) Jesus says that gets

him into hot water for blasphemy (“blasphemy” occurs in **John 10:33** and **36**). They are all related and have a focal point in a third OT passage. The **first** teaching is found in **John 10:30**. Jesus says, “**I and the Father are one.**” What was the result of this statement? The Jews “**picked up stones again to stone him**” (**31**). Jesus responds, “**I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?**” (**32**).¹¹ “**The Jews answered him, ‘It is not for good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.’**”

Going in chronological order would take us to the second thing Jesus says that gets him into trouble. It is a follow-up to their statement that he making himself equal with God. It is an OT explanation of how he can make such a presumptuous claim. **I’m going to skip** this for now because it takes us to our OT passage (this is **John 10:34**). We’ll save it for last.

¹¹ You might recall back in John 5 when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath it said, “**This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because ... [he] was breaking the Sabbath**” (**5:18**; Jesus said he was doing good works on it; **Luke 6:9-10**; **John 5:17**).

However, Jesus was speaking like this about himself and the Father way back then too, which would have been over a year earlier from the present conflict. So it adds that they were even more upset because “**he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.**” That’s how they respond here too.

The **third** thing Jesus says comes on the heels of his OT citation. He says, “**Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’**” (10:36). We’ve just looked at the “consecration” part. Now I want you to think about the title Jesus gives himself. He has called himself the **Son of God**. As you will see, this identification is intimately related to the OT passage that Jesus cites. It is not just some add-on or space-filler. What I’ll point out here is simply that **today we think very little of this title “Son of God.”** It is so common in our vocabulary about Jesus that we have forgotten how it generated intense anger in some Jews. The Jews saw this title as blasphemous, not as something that any old Jew could claim for themselves.¹²

The fourth thing Jesus says that reinforces their accusations of blasphemy returns to the first. He says, “**The**

¹² A relevant point to know about this title is that it is not Jesus’ favorite term for himself (Jesus has only called himself “Son of God” in public one time. That was way back in John 5:25, a passage we’ve already cited. He seems to prefer “Son of Man” (we looked at this title in Daniel 7). Who seems to prefer this title above all others? Spirit beings do, including angels (**Luke 1:32**), Satan (**Matt 4:3, 6**), and demons (**Matt 8:29** etc). The title is an obvious link between Jesus as God and the Father as God, and just as obviously, heavenly beings know that something is going on with him, much more than humans seem to be able to figure out. This has relevance for our understanding of Psalm 82 (below).

Father is in me and I am in the Father” (10:38). In coming full circle, Jesus shows that he never really left the point in the first place. What I want you to see here is that after this fourth saying, the Jews’ wrath is not abated. I’ll come back to this point too. They are not turning their swords into plowshares or their stones into Coco Pebbles as some kind of a peace-meal offering. Rather, “Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands” (10:39). Understanding that the Jews’ rage is not softened here is simply vital to interpreting the passage correctly. Whatever Jesus means by quoting his OT source, it had the effect of rousing their anger, not reducing it.

Now we are ready to consider the second thing Jesus says. It is his quotation of the OT. This occurs in John 10:34. It is the centerpiece of Jesus’ argument, because it is an OT quotation. The ESV reads, “Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your law, “I said, you are gods”?’” Vs. 35-36 is Jesus’ commentary, “If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of

him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘you are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’”

There are significant differences of opinion on the meaning of this and these differences rest on some fairly subtle but critical assumptions. Let me give you the main views of the verse and then follow that up with the main views of the Psalm the quote comes from.

Most (I consulted over 50 commentaries) take the view that the “gods” referred to here are human beings; that Jesus is saying that the Jews he is talking to can be called gods in some sense. The idea is that somewhere in the law, that is, the first five books of Moses, God called human rulers “gods.” These rulers, such as Moses and Aaron, are the original group “to whom the word of God came” (vs. 35). So, Jesus is making a “how much more” argument. If the OT can call people like that gods, how much more can I call myself a god? Consider the ESV Study Bible for instance, “Jesus’ point in quoting Ps. 82:6 is that if human judges (Ps. 82:2–4) can in some sense be called gods (in light of their role as representatives of God),

this designation is even more appropriate for the one who truly is the Son of God (John 10:33, 35–36).¹³

As we are thinking about different views, I find it is extremely curious that Mormons have a similar kind of interpretation. They believe Jesus is also referring to human beings as gods. They don't take it figuratively (gods does not refer to judges), but eschatologically. We will all become gods

¹³ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2044. You can see this view reflected in what are not translations, but interpretations of the text in several versions: NAS: God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the rulers.” CJB: Elohim [God] stands in the divine assembly; there with the elohim [judges], he judges ... “My decree is: ‘You are elohim [gods, judges], sons of the Most High all of you” (Ps 82:1, 6). And “Yeshua answered them, ‘Isn’t it written in your Torah, ‘I have said, “You people are Elohim’ ”? (John 10:34). JPS: “A Psalm of Asaph. God standeth in the congregation of God; in the midst of the judges He judgeth.” NIV 2011: “I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High” (Ps 82:6; notice that gods is in quotations). Punctuation varies greatly, to reflect the interpretation, and some even add words (“rulers”; NAS) that can’t be justified (more below) or words (“people”; CJB) that are simply not in the text. To me, it is one thing to have a commentary; it is another to change the words of the Bible to “help people” understand what it “really means.” I find the later terribly dangerous.



Punctuation matters

John 10:34: How Punctuation Matters		
ESV	Complete Jewish Bible	NIV (2011)
answered them,	answered them,	answered them,
it written in your Law,	written in your Torah,	it written in your Law,
	said,	
you are gods'?	people are Elohim' "?	said you are
		?

one day. But the net effect is similar. Jesus is still talking to his audience, telling them that their own Scripture calls them gods, so why can't he call himself a god too? The idea in both views is [to get Jesus off the hook for blasphemy](#) by somehow comparing himself to his audience rather than distancing himself from them. In other words, he isn't actually telling them plainly that he is God. Rather he is saying that he is more like his audience than he is like God (or perhaps they are more like God than they know)! Frankly, I'm not even sure people who hold this view realize that this is what they are doing.

The third view is completely different. It doesn't see God talking to human gods, but to heavenly beings. Heavenly beings are referred to as gods. It does not see the "Law" here as anything originally coming to Moses or Aaron. Rather, "law" stands for the passage itself, the place from which Jesus is quoting (Ps 82). Psalm 82 is "the law" (a common enough way to refer to the Psalms in those days) and it said of someone in that very place, ["I \[God\] said, you \[heavenly beings\] are gods."](#)

Again, these gods are not humans, but rather created heavenly beings. Today, most would be comfortable calling them angels. The idea is that Jesus is saying he came down from heaven, the very same place where these gods reside.

Therefore, since there are other gods [in the place from which he came](#), they can't get upset if he calls himself God, since he came from the same place. He isn't making a comparison here between the gods and God, for there is no comparison, except that both groups bear the title god in some sense.¹⁴ He is simply saying that they have the title sons of God, and he is one of them. But he is also not like them, for he is one with the Father.

Which view is correct? To answer that, we have to understand who the Psalm is written to. There are two basic views of this as well. These views correspond to the interpretations we've just mentioned. The first view says that Psalm 82 is written to Jewish rulers. They are the "gods" of

¹⁴ Michael Heiser argues that *elohim*/god is a term of residence (sort of like "Denver" Broncos), expressing the location of certain beings. I would add that an *elohim*/god refers to both location and function (ruling), although my addition could be argued against, depending on the ruling function of angels and demons, which are both called *elohim* in the Scripture. What makes God unique is not the term "god" but his name "Yahweh" or self-existent one, or any other name applied to him that describes his incommunicable attributes.

Psalm 82:1 and 6. This view basically sees Psalm 82 as a commentary or reflection on the days of the Exodus. This is the old anti-Christian Jewish view imposed on Jews by the Rabbis and it has to rely on changing the words of the text to make it work. The second view says that Psalm 82 is written to the heavenly beings. They are the gods of Psalm 82:1, 6. This view predates Christianity and I believe is the view that best explains why so many Jews converted to Christianity.

Psalm 82 Original Meaning

There are two ways of figuring out which view is correct. We can look at the context of Psalm 82 and we can look at the context of John 10. [Let's look at Psalm 82 first. Let's look at its word "gods" first.](#) The word in Hebrew is *elohim*; in Greek it is *theoi*. The most important thing I can say here is that [neither word has any clear precedent for ever meaning human beings anywhere in the entire Bible.](#) The word appears thousands of times, yet not once must it mean "human rulers." Not even once.¹⁵ When making such a bold interpretive claim

¹⁵ I don't have time to prove this today, so I'll refer you to the classic article demonstrating the claim. Cyrus H. Gordon, " 'elohim in Its Reputed Meaning of Rulers, Judges," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 54 (1935): 139–44. If you would like a copy of this article, I have it in PDF. Another passage sometimes

as “It refers to human judges,” I would think you would want to establish at least one clear precedent to justify that claim. To me, this is a devastating blow to the human interpretation. Maybe that doesn’t bother you. Maybe it is fine with you that this would be the only place where *elohim* means human rulers, but it bothers me a lot.

Let’s expand out to the other part of Psalm 82:6 that Jesus did not quote (at least we aren’t told that he did). As I do this, understand there isn’t a Pharisee on earth that would have thought Jesus was cherry picking a verse and using it out of context, as if all he cared about what the first half of the one verse and nothing else at all in the Psalm. They knew the whole Psalm and would have been thinking about all of it even if he just quoted a small part of it, especially if they were trying to understand what he was talking about as we are.

The verse uses the phrase “Sons of the Most High” or “sons of God.” This is directly tied to Jesus’ commentary where he says that he is the Son of God. There is an obvious

cited is Psalm 45:7. But the Hebrews 1:8-9 citation of the Psalm 45:6 makes it certain that the other “elohim” in this verse is Jesus Christ.

comparison being made. “Sons of God” is a technical phrase used in the Bible and the Ancient Near East to refer to heavenly beings. There is no instance it cannot mean this in each of the ten times the phrase is used in the Bible.¹⁶ Thus, the Psalm Targum translates it, “I said, “You are reckoned as angels, and all of you are like angels of the height.”¹⁷

If we had the time, I would take you through these other instances of the phrase, but we can stay in Psalm 82 to see it just fine. The Dead Sea Scrolls say that this Psalm “concerns Belial [another name for Satan] and the spirits of his lot”,¹⁸ and sees the whole Psalm as being fulfilled in a second power (Melchizedek/Metatron). It does so for good reason. Let’s begin in **Psalm 82:1**. This is where things get really messy, not

¹⁶ See Michael Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (Jan-Mar, 2001): 52-74. Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, “SONS OF (THE) GOD(S).” [See chart “Sons of God” at the end of the sermon.](#)

¹⁷ You will often read that John couldn’t possibly be talking about angels here, because no where else does he talk about angels: “The context in the Fourth Gospel makes no mention of angels” (George R. Beasley-Murray, vol. 36, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002], 176); “Unlikely in light of the scarcity of references to angels in John” (Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004], 315); “The difficulty with this line of argument is that the Fourth Gospel fails to mention angels or Melchizedek” (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991], 398). This is both absurd and untrue. Must someone bring up a topic before they bring up a topic? Furthermore, John references angels throughout his book (John 1:51; 5:4; 12:29; 20:12). See Michael S. Heiser, “Jesus’ Quotation of Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34: A Different View of John’s Theological Strategy,” (2011 SBL regional; Spokane, WA). <http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/Psa82John10.pdf>.

¹⁸ See Chart “Three Occasions Jesus is Charged with Blasphemy” where they identify Melchizedek (Metatron in other places) with the Son of God.

because the text is obscure, but because **people don't like what it says**, something that irritates me, since my view is that I should conform myself to Scripture, not make it conform to what I think it should say.

The ESV actually translates it clearly and correctly, even though their official notes contradict the translation. “**God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment.**” This is exactly how the LXX reads, “**God stands in the assembly of gods; and in the midst *of them* will judge gods.**” The Greek couldn't be clearer. The Hebrew is just as clear, at least to anyone that studies the OT and is acquainted with field of the divine council (which most NT scholars are virtually oblivious to).

What is the divine council? Well, we saw it in Daniel 7 with the thrones in heaven. You see it in Job 1-2, Isaiah 6, 1 Kgs 22, Ezekiel 1, and many other places. In the Bible, the divine council were **70 heavenly beings**¹⁹ called “sons of God” (**Deut 32:7-9**) who were given over to the nations by God to

¹⁹ The number 70 corresponds to the number of nations after the Tower of Babel. Remember how Metatron had 70 names that corresponded to the 70 nations of the world.

rule them (also Dt 4:19-20; 17:2-3; 29:26). You can see the location of the council clearly in the parallel passage in Psalm 89:5-7 which uses both the idea of the divine council and the sons of God, “Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones! For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings (lit. “sons of God”, i.e. Ps 82:6) is like the LORD, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones (i.e. the divine council), and awesome above all who are around him?” It is not a big deal that God would address part of the Scripture to angelic beings, because 1. He does so very clearly in other places (Ps 29:1) and 2. The Israelites reading God’s judgment upon these beings would have been a great comfort to the people reading it.

Why would God be judging these heavenly beings? The problem in Psalm 82 is that the gods (angels if you will) did not rule wisely (Psalm 82:2-4). Rather, they rebelled, and this is all part of what Psalm 82 is explaining.²⁰ Verse 5 says that

²⁰ Those who think that “gods” don’t judge or weren’t supposed to help the wicked (Ps 82:2), couldn’t give justice to the wear and fatherless, maintain the right of the afflicted and destitute (vs. 3), rescue the weak and needy and deliver them from the wicked (vs. 4) need to seriously rethink this. For, this is

because of this unjust rule, the foundations of the earth shake. Let me make an observation here about human rulers here. There were human rulers in Israel, and they were related to the heavenly rulers. But they were never called gods. Israel had something called the [Sanhedrin](#) (mentioned above). Following the lead of Moses who took 70 elders onto Mt. Sinai, it was composed of 70 members. See the connection with 70? The whole point was that Israel's judges were earthly counterparts of the heavenly court. Not that they were gods, but that they performed this particular function of ruling that these heavenly beings performed. They were to rule on earth as the heavenly beings ruled from heaven. They were to mirror one another. Of course, the Sanhedrin only ruled in Israel. But the Psalm says that God is judging the gods because their poor rule has caused "[the foundations of the earth](#)" to shake ([Ps 82:5](#)). You will have a difficult time convincing me that the Jewish

exactly what Yahweh is said to do for Israel time and time and time again. This is the true comparison—not Jesus to humans, but Jesus to the heavenly rulers and elohim. He is unlike the other gods, for he actually does these things, not because they couldn't, but because they wouldn't; they rebelled. Thus, one of the few written defenses of this position writes, "[The congregation of God'—in the opening of the 82nd Psalm—alludes to what we see in Job 1:6–8. The angels, or sons of God, assemble before Jehovah. Jesus is superior to these titled Gods in \(1\) the dignity of His Person—in \(2\) the elevation of His personal character above them—and in \(3\) the Father's designation of Him, before He became a man, to the work He was then fulfilling](#)" (Robert Govett, *Exposition of the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* [London: Bemrose & Sons, 1881], 455-56).

Sanhedrin any time other than the death of Jesus caused the foundations of the earth to shake. But heavenly beings?

That's another story (see [Job 38](#); [Isa 24:28-23](#), etc).

The Psalm condemns these sons of God to “[die like men](#)” ([82:7](#)). It is hardly a unique punishment for men to die like men. As [Michael Heiser](#) says, that's sort of like [sentencing a dog to bark](#).²¹ In the second half of this verse, the word “prince” is often used for heavenly rulers ([Dan 10:13](#), [20](#); [12:1](#); [Ezek 39:1](#)).²² In fact, it is used for Satan in the Gospel of John ([John 12:31](#)).

Finally, and most important of all, the last verse says, “[Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations](#)” ([Ps 82:8](#)). Does this “God” refer to the Father? No. It refers to Jesus, one of the sons of God who is the Son of God, Asaph's God, and this gets to the heart of his citation. Psalm 2 is the parallel this time, “[I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends](#)

²¹ Michael Heiser, “You've Seen One Elohim, You've Seen Them All? A Critique of Mormonism's Use of Psalm 82,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 221–266 (p. 225).

²² Also recall the meaning of Metatron.

of the earth your possession” (Ps 2:7-8). All of this is the original context of Jesus’ quote to which we now turn.

John 10:34 and Jesus’ Quote of Psalm 82:6

As we begin to think about John 10:34 in the context of John, I want to ask you a question. In citing this passage, is Jesus trying to get himself off the hook or to support his claim at deity? What is the reason for his citation? For some reason, hardly anyone seems to ask this question in the commentaries. The problem is, the common interpretation can only be seen as Jesus trying to get himself off the hook, something that does not actually happen at all. However the Jews understood him, it only reinforced their anger and desire to kill him. Our interpretation must take this seriously.

Let’s look at Jesus’ quote. He quotes Psalm 82:6 verbatim from the LXX. The verse says, “I have said, ‘You are gods and sons of the Most High all of you.’” Quoting from the LXX is important for two reasons. First, if he was using the LXX, it is reasonable to conclude that he agreed with its interpretation on who these gods were. Second, the LXX is clear on who it

thinks these “gods” are, the very point in dispute in today’s arguments over both passages. It uses the word “gods” not “rulers” throughout the passage. You have to change the word and make up a definition of “gods” that just doesn’t exist anywhere else in order to make it work.

Second, what possible reason could Jesus have for calling his opponents “gods”? Very few stop to think about this question. Honestly, the ESV note makes absolutely no sense to me. The “how much more” argument is absurd. Jesus is not comparing himself with human rulers. He isn’t saying, “Look guys, I’m a god and you’re a god. Don’t you know that your own Scripture calls you gods too? What’s the big deal?” Has Jesus suddenly become a Mormon? Is Jesus somehow suddenly claiming that he isn’t really one with the Father, that he is more like the people he is talking to, just “gods” or “rulers”? And how is Jesus their ruler anyway at this point? No, he is identifying himself in a unique way with God the Father who isn’t even on the same chain of being with humans. You can’t compare God with any of his creation.

Simply put, they asked him to prove that he was Messiah, so he is answering their question!

Third, the Jews do not respond by saying, “Well, I’m glad you cleared that up, now we know you aren’t blaspheming, because you are just like us, only a little higher.” They still want to kill him. If Jesus is trying to get himself out of a jam, he’s doing a lousy job of it.

Fourth, Jesus clearly links **Psalm 82:6** to the title Son of God (**John 10:35**) and coming down out of heaven (**John 10:36** “sent”; see also **John 6:38-58**). The Son of God is a link to the second half of **Psalm 82:6** where it refers to the “sons of God.” The comparison is the Son of God with the sons of God, heavenly beings to a heavenly being.

Finally, please remember the overall context of this sermon. Psalm 82 stands as one of three OT passages that Jesus fulfills. All ²³are passages that the Jews themselves saw as referring to this mysterious “second power,” in this case Melchizedek who is also sometimes called Metatron.²⁴ These Jews knew

²³

²⁴ The Dead Sea Scroll, “About him [Melchizedek] in the songs of David, who said: *Ps* 82:1 Elohim will stand in the assembly of God, in the midst of the gods he judges. And about him he said: *Ps* 7:8-9 And

perfectly well that Jesus was claiming to be the God of **Psalm 82:8** even though he only quoted **vs. 6**, because they knew the whole Psalm. Anyone living in Israel at this time would have understood what he was saying.

Conclusion

I've been talking to several people this week about this passage. Some have asked me, "what's the point" of such a discussion? That's a great question. As I've thought about it, I've felt compelled to give you two. One follows from the other. First, what Jesus is doing in this citation is strengthening his claim that he 1. Came down from heaven, 2. Is the unique Son of God who will one day rule the world and 3. Is one with the Father. He uses a two-power passage to prove it. There are other heavenly beings called gods (or angels) and they are also called sons of God. Jesus is one of them. But Jesus is "The Son of God."

above it, 11 to the heights, return: God will judge the peoples. As for what he said: *Ps* 82:2 How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah*. 12 Its interpretation concerns Belial and the spirits of his lot, who ... turning aside from the commandments of God to commit evil. 13 But, **Melchizedek** will carry out the vengeance of God's judgments, and on that day he will free them from the hand of Belial and from the hand of all the spirits of his lot" (11Q13 Col. ii:9-13).

In John's Gospel, the term is "only begotten" or "unique" Son of God. Jesus is one of them, but he is also not one of them, for he is utterly unique. He is "one with the Father." And he will inherit the nations as God. He will rule over the universe as God. To be one with the Father you have to have come from heaven. But to be one with the Father, you can't be a created being, like the angels/sons of God are. So Jesus' citation is not meant to get him off the hook, but to prove from their own Scripture why he is not blaspheming, even as the other two passages we have looked at do as well. Going to the OT is how Jesus proves that he is God.

If Jesus is this God, then what ought to be your response to him? He has always existed. He is perfectly good in his rule. He is the omnipotent ruler of the universe. The Father has given all things to him. This is the question asked time and again in this book. It is the single most important reason for preaching this book. Who is Jesus and what are you going to do about him? Believe in him and worship him today.

That leads to the second point. It is one that I don't derive from the story itself, nor do I relish having to say it here, but due to how so many people today handle this story, I am compelled. The human ruler view is functionally and historically Rabbinical and Jewish. These Rabbis were anti Christian in the extreme. The unmistakable fact of the matter is, the Jews of Jesus' day were capable of understanding exactly what Jesus was saying, because they had the worldview that could contain it. This is why so many Jews in the first century converted to Christ, why so much of the NT actually argues these very things, and why the Pharisees had to put a stop to it. First they tried to kill Jesus. Then they did kill him (though it was he who laid down his own life). Then they went after the Apostles like James. Then they finally just outlawed the whole theology and began actually changing the wording of texts to conform with their anti-Christian, Jesus hating fury.

The end of this incredible passage of Scripture tells us that Jesus escaped and went back to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained ([John 10:40](#)). Many

came to him and said, “John did no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true” (41). And many believed in him there (42).

Today, we do not see Jews converting to Christ like they did back then because the Rabbis took away the worldview by which they could understand what Jesus was saying. Frankly, Christians have lost it too. Our commentaries don't even seem to know how to interact with this view. Our preachers don't seem to be able to know how to think through these issues or to even know that there are issues to think through. Some of our translations even seem bent on making sure that we will never even question in our minds any other view save the human-rulers view, a view that makes no sense of the context, makes a mockery of the term “god,” and have zero power to explain why the Jews continued to be so angry at Jesus.

Simply put, I'm concerned about our inability to accept the difficult words of Scripture. It isn't just predestination that is hard to accept. I'm not alone. One commentator a hundred years ago said this, “See how solemnly here, and in other

places, the Son of God deals with the Word of God! How He trusts and uses its every word! How unlike in this, as in other things, is He to the sons of men; aye, even to good men. They add to, explain away, pervert the Words of God. But that is a punishable offence. To do away with God's Word, is like breaking His commandments.²⁵

I don't rule out that I could be wrong about this interpretation, and I accept the other interpretation as within the Christian pale. I also understand that because we don't have the worldview any longer, it is just easy to dismiss the whole supernatural thing as strange and "out there." But once you know about it, you have to deal with it. For me to believe the human view again would take a lot more than just dismissal and an upraised chin from people who don't care to actually look into the other view. We must not become so hardened against the supernatural that we are no longer able to accept what the Bible says about it. Incredibly, this is basically liberalism running around in our heads, the easy dismissal of

²⁵ Govett, *Exposition of the Gospel of St. John*, Volume 1, 455.

anything other-worldly. And what does it do to our view of Jesus Christ?

I want to see many believe in Jesus today. I want to see them do so by understanding what Jesus said about himself and how he answered the charges of blasphemy. I want to see you believe in him too, for doing so makes all the difference in the world. Do you really think that you are a god? Really? Is that what Jesus is saying? Because that's what you are left with. Or do you think that maybe he was telling them that he is the only unique Son of God, God in the flesh, and therefore was not blaspheming anyone? That's the question. His own half-brother died for this belief, having understood and confessed Jesus as the Second Power in Heaven. Will you?

Three Occasions Jesus is Charged with Blasphemy			
	Jesus accused of blasphemy	OT Referent	Jewish interpretation of OT referent
Jesus as angel of Exodus 23	(Mk 2:5-7; Mt 9:3; Lk 5:20-21) "Your sins are forgiven." the scribes were sitting there, questioning in his man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who one?"	(Ex 23:21) attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against your transgression, for my name is in him.	(t. Sanhedrein 38B V.10.c, f.) "This refers to Metatron, who is called by the name 'For my name is in him' (Ex. 23:21)." "If so, what need He will not pardon your transgression" [since Metatron w]?" ²⁶
Jesus as Daniel's cloud-rider	(Mt 26:64-65; Mk 14:62-64) him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you shall see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." The high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What need witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy."	(Dan 7:13-14) visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven the Son of Man came, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.	(Hagigah 12b) (cited in Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, 46). [... and myriads] it is said by Daniel: I beheld till the clouds came, and there was a throne, and a stream issued, etc. [7:9-10]. And what is his [the Son of Man's] name? ... Metatron, like the name of the [divine] being.
Jesus as Elohim of Psalm 82	(Jn 10:30, 33-36, 38-39) "I and the Father are one." ³³ The Jews answered him, "It is not for this alone that we stone you, but because you say, 'I am God's son.'" ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Is it not written, 'You are gods'?" ³⁵ If he called them gods to whom the Scripture cannot be broken—do you not say of those whom the Father has anointed, 'You are his sons'?" ³⁶ They answered him, "Because you said, 'I am the Son of God'?" ... that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. They wanted to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.	(Ps 82:1-8) God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he judges. You will judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked; you will overthrow the weak and the fatherless; you will maintain the right of the lowly and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. Neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; they are like men you shall die, and fall like any prince. Judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!	(11Q13 Col. ii:9-13) [... Melchizedek] in the songs of David, who said: Ps 82:1 In the assembly of God, in the midst of the gods he judges. And above it, 11 to the heights, return: God will judge what he said: Ps 82:2 How long will you judge unjustly? Selah. 12 Its interpretation concerns Belial and the wicked. ... turning aside from the commandments of God to do what is evil. ... Melchizedek will carry out the vengeance of God's judgments, ... them from the hand of Belial and from the hand of all the wicked.
Relationship Between Metatron and Melchizedek			
<p>Paul and the Beginning of Jewish Mysticism 101</p> <p>described as the one: "in whom God's ineffable name dwells." Other titles for this figure included Melchizedek, Metatron, Adonai, Eremiel, and preeminently "the Son of Man." For instance, Melchizedek appears at Qumran, in the document called 11QM, where he is identified with the "elohim" of Ps. 82:1, thus giving us yet another variation on the theme of carrying the name of God. Metatron is called YHWH hakaton, or YHWH Junior, and sits on a throne equal to God's in 3 Enoch 10:1.¹⁰ Typically, the name of the angel varies from tradition to tradition. Thus, Michael is God's "mediator" and general (archistratēgos, 2 Enoch 33:10, T. Dan. 6:1–5, T. Abr. 1:4, cf. <i>The Life of Adam and Eve</i> 14.1–2). Eremiel appears in the Apocalypse of Zephaniah 6:1–15, where he is mistaken for God. In The Ascension of Isaiah 7:2–4, an angel appears whose name cannot be given.</p> <p>Alan Segal, "Paul and the Beginning of Jewish Mysticism," in <i>Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys</i>, ed. John Joseph Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 99.</p>			

²⁶ Jacob Neusner, vol. 16, *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 192.

“SONS OF GOD”		
PASSAGE	HEBREW PHRASE	UGARIT EQUIVALENT
Genesis 6:2 Genesis 6:4 Job 1:6 Job 2:1 Job 38:7	<i>beney ha-’elohim</i>	<i>bn ’il</i>
Psalm 29:1 Psalm 89:6	<i>beney ’elim</i>	<i>bn ’ilm</i>
Psalm 82:6	<i>beney ’elyon</i>	
Deut 32:8	<i>aggelōn theou*</i>	
Deut 32:43	<i>uioi theou*</i>	
found in LXX ²⁷		

²⁷ The LXX reading is almost certainly the original. See Michael S. Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*: 158:629 (Jan-Mar, 2001): 52-74.