

God's Assembly - council in the heavenly- divine realm

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Psalm 89

There are a large number of verses in the Bible that point to God having a divine council with whom He consults. Psalm 89 has several references to a divine council, some of which are very clear.

Psalm 89:5-8 (REV) **5)** Let the heavens praise your wonders, Yahweh, your faithfulness, too, in the assembly of the holy ones. **6)** For who in the skies can be compared to Yahweh? Who among the sons of God is like Yahweh, **7)** a very awesome God in the council [sōd] of the holy ones to be feared more than all those who are around him? **8)** Yahweh, God of Armies, who is a powerful one like you, O Yah, and your faithfulness is *all* around you.

These verses speak of the heavenly council and assembly of the spiritual beings in heaven. In verse 5, the "heavens" that praise God is, or in part is, a metonymy for the spiritual beings that inhabit heaven. This is clear from the verb "praise" and the second stanza in the verse, which speaks of the "assembly of the holy ones," an assembly of spiritual beings in heaven.

Psalm 89:6 refers to spiritual beings in the "skies" (or "clouds") and also to the "sons of God," which is a phrase that refers to the created beings of God (called "divine beings" in some English versions). Then, from Psalm 89:7 we learn that there is a "council" of these spirit beings; however, it is noteworthy that even though God's council is around Him, Psalm 89:8 lets us know that none of God's council is as powerful (or "mighty") as God.

Daniel's Heavenly Courtroom

In Daniel 7, God gave Daniel a vision of the Last Days, and Daniel 7:10 and 26 portray the heavenly court that will convene at that time. In Daniel 7:8, the man known as the "Little Horn," one of the biblical titles for the person commonly known as the Antichrist, was speaking arrogantly against God. During that Last Time, God will sit with His divine council and give judgment concerning the people on earth.

Daniel 7:9, 10 (NIV84) **9)** As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. **10)** A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten

thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

We notice in Daniel 7:9 that God is not the only one who has a throne. There are other thrones for other judges. The Hebrew word translated "court" in Daniel 7:10 and 26 refers to a council of judges (*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon; Holliday Hebrew-English Lexicon*). Daniel wanted to know more about the vision and asked about it, and he was told:

Daniel 7:25, 26 (NIV84) 25) He [the Antichrist] will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time. 26) "But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever.

Daniel 7:10 and 26 both mention the "court" that sits in judgment of the Antichrist. God could rule and judge on His own, but He does not want to operate that way; He works in cooperation with His created beings to restore and maintain order in the universe.

Isaiah 14 and the Devil

Isaiah 14:12-17 is about the Devil, whose description is well translated as the "Shining One, son of the dawn" in Isaiah 14:12 (NET).[3] Millennia ago, before his rebellion against God, he was part of God's divine council, and had a throne in heaven (Isa. 14:13). But he became filled with pride and wanted to be above the other angels, the "stars of God" (Isa. 14:13). In fact, it seems most likely that he wanted to replace God as the Most High God.[4] We see what the Devil was saying to himself in Isaiah 14:13 and 14.

Isaiah 14:13, 14 (NASB) 13) "But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. 14) 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'

We should pay special attention to the Devil saying, "I will sit on the Mount of Assembly" (Isa. 14:13 CJB). For one thing, the word "sit" in this context of an assembly of gods means to have a ruling position. The NET Bible even translates the phrase, "I will rule on the mountain of the assembly." In 1 Kings 22:19, in the vision God gave Micaiah, Yahweh sat on His throne while the host of heaven stood around Him.

Also, the "Mount of Assembly" seems to be a special place where certain select spiritual beings assemble to meet with God and help Him rule creation. That is why the Devil wanted to be there and have his throne "above the stars of God" who were assembled there. According to Eastern custom and speech, saying that the Devil

wanted his throne “above” the other thrones did not mean “above” in the sense of vertically in height (although there may have been a vertical aspect to it at that particular place). Instead, it referred to having his throne in a more important position than the other thrones. We see this cultural use of “high” and “low” in Jesus’ parable of the wedding feast (Luke 14:7-11). Jesus said when you go to a feast, take the “lowest place” (Luke 14:10), and when the host sees you there he will say, “Friend, go up higher,” and “higher” means closer to the host himself. If the Devil could sit “above” the other thrones, then he would consider himself “like the Most High.” The “Mount of Assembly” seems to refer to a special assembly of spirit beings, because if it only referred to a place where all of God’s spirit beings assembled, then the Devil would not have made such a big deal about going there. As an important spirit being, he would have already been invited to any general meeting of all the spirit beings (cp. Job 1:6).

Jeremiah, Job, and the Council of God

Jeremiah 23 contains a very important section of Scripture about God’s divine council.

Jeremiah 23:16-18, 21, 22 (HCSB abridged) 16) This is what the LORD of Hosts says: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They are making you worthless. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the LORD’s mouth. **17)** They keep on saying to those who despise Me, ‘The LORD has said: You will have peace.’ They have said to everyone who follows the stubbornness of his heart, ‘No harm will come to you.’” **18)** For who has stood in the council [sōd] of the LORD to see and hear His word? Who has paid attention to His word and obeyed? **21)** I did not send these prophets, yet they ran with a message. I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. **22)** If they had really stood in My council [sōd], they would have enabled My people to hear My words and would have turned them back from their evil ways and their evil deeds.

In Jeremiah 23, the false prophets spoke from their own minds and had not “stood in the council [sōd] of Yahweh” (Jer. 23:18). If they had stood in the divine council of Yahweh, verse 22 says that they would have heard the truth and been able to tell it to the people of Israel. These verses clearly indicate that Yahweh has a council with whom He confers, and those who stand in that council hear the truth. God’s prophets sometimes are given access to the information in those council meetings, which is why they can speak the truth. The book of Job also mentions the council of God. That is noteworthy because Job likely lived around the time of Abraham and of some of those ancient cultures whose mythology included a council of gods. Job went through a terrible ordeal, and had to defend himself against his three friends who were accusing him of sin. In Job 15:8 (HCSB), Eliphaz was accusing Job and he asked, “Do you listen in on the council [sōd] of God, or have

a monopoly on wisdom?" Clearly Eliphaz believed there was a divine council of God where the truth was spoken, and he asked Job if he had listened in on those council meetings.

Assemblies of Spirit Beings

There are verses in the Old Testament that show God presiding over a large assembly of spirit beings. These assemblies would include God's intimate divine council but seem to be bigger than just that intimate group. For example, the prophet Micaiah had a vision of Yahweh seated on a throne with "the whole army of heaven" standing before Him (this is often translated: "the whole host of heaven"). God confers with them about how to entice the evil king Ahab to enter battle and be killed. Although it seems certain that this "whole army" is bigger than God's divine council [sōd], the council would have been part of that large meeting.

Job 1:6 and 2:1 describe the spirit beings assembling themselves before God. The wording of Job, that the "sons of God" (the created beings of God, in Hebrew: *bene ha-elohim*, בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים) came before Yahweh, indicates a much larger gathering of the spirit beings than just a divine council of God, yet, like the record in 1 Kings 22, it shows that God did meet with His created beings, and the divine council would certainly have been at this meeting.

Psalms 82:1 mentions God taking his place in the *edah-el* (#5712; #410 עֵדָה-אֵל), a Hebrew phrase that means "assembly of gods," "assembly of the mighty," or "great assembly." Like in Job and Kings, this appears to refer to a larger assembly than God's intimate council, as we can see from the context. Psalm 82 is important and gives us a unique view into what goes on in the heavenly realm because it shows God reproving these "gods" for their unrighteousness. All the spirit beings are created beings of God, but not all of them turned out to be loving and obedient, and God calls these gods to account and confronts them for their actions. Thus, the meeting mentioned in Psalm 82 is somewhat similar to Job 1:6. In both Job and Psalms there is a large assembly of gods and in both groups there are some of the gods who are adversarial to the true God.

God rules over spirit beings of various ranks and powers who are sometimes called "gods." Indeed, there are many "gods" (1 Cor. 8:6). That is why God is called the "Most High" God; because He is far greater than all the other gods. In fact, God is called the "Most High" God more than 50 times in the Old Testament (Gen. 14:18). Not all of God's created spiritual beings have the same rank or power, and that includes both the angelic world and demonic world, which is why Ephesians 6:12 says Christians fight against "rulers" (*archē*), "authorities" (*exousia*) and "world-rulers" (*kosmokratōr*). Similarly, Colossians 1:16 mentions "thrones" (*thronos*), lordships (*kuriotēs*), rulers (*archē*) and "authorities" (*exousia*), and these are different positions of authority in the kingdom of God. The biblical text shows that God holds large assemblies of His created beings, but also has much smaller meetings with an intimate council of His high-ranking and trusted ones.

"Let Us"

God confers with and works together with a divine council. This explains the verses where God says, "let us." While God supplies the power for what He does, He also works in concert with His creation. Thus, in Genesis

1:26, He speaks to his divine council and says, "Let us make man in our image." [5] Although some theologians think this use of "us" could be the plural of majesty (also called the plural of emphasis), where God uses the plural "us" to magnify Himself, that is not the case here. For one thing, Hebrew scholars point out that there is no other example of a speaker speaking in the plural while addressing himself as the one being spoken to. If God says, "Let us make," then He is speaking to others. Even more to the point, however, is the work of recent Hebrew scholars who show that the plural of majesty applies to nouns but not verbs. "The plural of majesty does exist of nouns...but Gen. 1:26 is not about nouns—the issue is the verbal forms." [6] In Genesis 1:26, the verb "make" in the phrase "Let us make," is plural, and so that is not a plural of majesty; that is God speaking to others about making mankind.

The most common objection to the "us" in Genesis 1:26 referring to angels is that Scripture attests that God made mankind. But God could easily have had a council with whom He conferred, but headed up the council and did the work they decided upon. In fact, it is likely that in God's divine council, as with many councils, the members do not initiate or act as much as they support and give input, and come to understand what God is doing and why.

There are a couple of other times in Scripture when God and those He works with are referred to as "us." For example, in Genesis 3:22, God says that the man "has become like one of us." It seems highly unlikely that God would be using a plural of majesty here. It seems clear that God is speaking to His council and pointing out that Adam, like them, now has full knowledge of good and evil. The council would have become very aware of evil when the Devil sinned and rebelled.

Another time when God uses "us" is Genesis 11:7. Genesis 11:1-9 is the record of the tower of Babel. The people building the tower of Babel had pride and evil desires. In response to their acting against His purposes, God said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them" (Gen. 11:6 ESV). It is clear God was speaking to His intimate divine council who supported Him. Thus, in Genesis 11:7 (ESV), God continues, "Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." As in Genesis 1:26, the verb "go down," which is associated with "us," is plural, so this cannot be a plural of majesty. Since God often works with angels to accomplish His purposes, like He did at Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:13), we conclude that the "us" is the divine council He was working with.

We again see God speaking to others in Isaiah 6:8, and like in Genesis 11, who He is speaking to is not specifically stated. God wanted to send someone to help Israel, so He asked for advice.

1 Kings 22:19 But [Micaiah] said, "I call upon you to hear the word of GOD! I saw GOD seated upon a throne, with all the host of heaven standing in attendance to the right and to the left. GOD asked, 'Who will entice Ahab so that he will march and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' Then one said thus and another said thus, until a certain spirit came forward and stood before GOD and said, 'I will entice him.' 'How?' GOD asked him. And he replied, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then [God] said, 'You will entice and you will prevail. Go out and do it.' So GOD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours; for GOD has decreed disaster upon you."

Isaiah 6:8 (ESV) And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

We should first notice the interplay between the “I” in “Whom shall I send,” and the “us” in “...who will go for us?” The text is showing that God is in charge, but He is supported by, and asking advice from, others. The context shows that God is appealing to others who support Him in His desire to help Israel, and so the “others” in this context cannot be the full assembly of spirits, because some of them did not support Him. Given what we know about God’s divine council from other places in Scripture, it is logical that God is speaking to His divine council and asking them about who He could send to do His work.

The record in Isaiah 6 seems to be exactly what Jeremiah 23:22, above, is speaking about. God opened a view of heaven up to Isaiah, who saw God in His Temple guarded by seraphs and speaking to His divine council (Isa. 6:1-8). Because Isaiah “sat in on” that council meeting, he offered to be the messenger and to bring the true words of God to the people of Israel (Isa. 6:9-13).

The Watchers

Daniel 4 makes references to “the Watchers,” who in that context are spirit beings who help to watch over God’s creation and make and enforce decrees. There is a tremendous amount of insight that can be gained from the record in Daniel 4. The word “watcher” is unique to Daniel, and is a good example of God working with a person in terms of his understanding. In this case, due to Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian upbringing and culture, he would have already believed in some sort of heavenly council, but he would have viewed any such council in pagan terms, not the way the divine council is revealed in the Jewish writings. So God gave His revelation dream to Nebuchadnezzar in a way he could understand it, but that still fit the truth of the situation, showing that God was ultimately in control.

First, Nebuchadnezzar describes his dream to Daniel, and tells Daniel about the “watcher” he saw, who he also describes as a “holy one.”

Daniel 4:13, 14, (ESV) 13) “I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in bed, and behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. **14)** He proclaimed aloud and said thus: ‘Chop down the tree [Nebuchadnezzar himself] and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.

Then Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and mentions that what is about to happen to Nebuchadnezzar is “by the decree of the watchers” but also a “decree of the Most High.”

Daniel 4:17, 23-25 17) The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.' 23) And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Chop down the tree... 24) It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, 25) that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field...till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men...

The decree the watcher enforces in Daniel 4 is called "the decree of the watchers," and "the decision by the word of the holy ones," but it is also called "a decree of the Most High." This shows that God is working with a council of spirit beings to make and enforce decrees. The picture being drawn in Daniel is of a council that works together to agree upon a decree, but ultimately it is "the Most High" who rules the council, which then carries out His will. Here again we see the importance of God being called "the Most High."

New Testament References to a Divine Council

The New Testament has many clear references to the one who will head up God's Divine Council: the Lord Jesus Christ. After his resurrection, Jesus took command as God's "right hand man," stating that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18 REV). God elevated Jesus and "seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above every ruler, and authority, and power, and lordship, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but in the coming one also, and he put all things in subjection under his feet" (Eph. 1:20-22 REV). Here again we see the use of "above" as more than an elevation in height. The Devil wanted to be "above" the stars of God (Isa. 14:13); but Jesus is "far above" every other earthly and heavenly being, he is the only begotten Son of God and sits at His right hand. The very fact that God was willing to give His Son authority over His other "sons" (created beings) shows that He works with others to rule His creation—which is good support for His working with a Divine Council in the Old Testament.

The authority that God gave to Jesus is very clearly portrayed in the New Testament in that it is Jesus Christ who created the spiritual powers known as "thrones," "lordships," "rulers" and "authorities" for the Church today, as per Colossians 1:16.[7] Also, Jesus is the one who appoints the equipping ministries in the Church.

Ephesians 4:7, 11, and 12 (REV) says, "Now each one of us has been given grace according to the measured portion of Christ's gift. And he gave some apostles, and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the holy ones for the work of ministry, with a view to the building up of the body of Christ."

Jesus Christ heads up God's Divine Council, and there are other New Testament references that infer it exists. For one thing, the New Testament continues the use of the term "Most High" or "Most High God" when referring to the true God (Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28; Acts 7:48; 16:17; Heb. 7:1), indicating that the New Testament writers acknowledged that there are other "gods" besides Him. Although it has been assumed by many Christians that

the other “gods” are demons, there is no reason to assume that all the other gods have to be demons, especially in light of the Old Testament references to a divine council of gods. Also, the New Testament shows that there are 24 elders who sit on thrones around the throne of God (Rev. 4:4). Based on the vocabulary involved and what these “elders” do, E. W. Bullinger concluded that “These elders are the heads of the heavenly priesthood...the princely leaders, rulers, and governors of Heaven’s worship. They are kings and priests. They...are not redeemed...They are heavenly unfallen beings...as ‘elders’ they are also rulers.”[8] It seems logical that the 24 elders sitting on thrones around the throne of God are part of God’s divine council. In fact, they are likely part of the same group of spiritual elders as the ones who sat on the thrones spoken of in Daniel 7:9. That God ruled through “rulers” explains why the New Testament uses the word “archangel” (1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 1:9), which in Greek is a compound word built from *archē* (ruler) and *angelos* (angel). “Archangel” refers to a ruling angel. While it would be possible that ruling angels were not part of a special council of God, since the Old Testament clearly refers to such a council, it makes sense that the ruling angels would be a part of it.

Conclusion

There is a lot of evidence that God works with an inner council of spirit beings to rule His creation. This is not only supported by Scripture, but it is in harmony with God’s loving nature. Just like God asks man to help rule over mankind, which is why He supports righteous rulers, God has spirit beings, now headed up by Jesus Christ, who help Him rule over His creation. Also, although there is ample scriptural support for God’s divine council, there is not an overemphasis on it. An overemphasis on God’s divine council would detract from the honor due God. God is still the Creator, the Most High, and the One who should get glory from both spirit beings and human beings.