

The Divine Council

When many people think of spiritual beings in the Bible, it's usually God and angels, Satan and demons, that come to mind. The biblical authors, however, have a much more nuanced conception of the spiritual realm, which is matched by a wide vocabulary for talking about spiritual beings. In the study notes for episode two of the Spiritual Beings series, we discovered that the biblical words *elohim* and *theos* can refer to spiritual beings that are not the one Creator God. So, who are these other *elohim*, and what role do they play in the biblical story?

The biblical authors believed that heaven and earth are parallel realities, each inhabited by creatures that have been delegated with God's blessing to rule and oversee that realm.

1. In the heavens, the celestial lights are appointed to "rule" day and night, that is, the order of time. (Genesis 1:14-18)
2. On the land, humans are appointed as God's image to rule over land, sea, and air creatures. (Genesis 1:26-30)
3. These creatures are called "the host of heaven" and "the host of the land." (Genesis 2:1)

This portrait of the ordered world is fundamental to understanding the biblical storyline, and it prepares us for an entire tier of creatures in the spiritual realm that we will meet at many points in the Bible.

This crew goes by many titles, but in every appearance, their role in the heavenly realm is similar. They are God's "staff-team," his agents of delegated authority that mirror God's earthly staff-team, the humans. These spiritual beings are portrayed as honoring the one who created and rules them, and they also are invited by God to participate in making decisions and carrying them out.

1. Psalm 89:5-7 contains the most diverse collection of titles.

The heavens will praise Your wonders, Yahweh; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the **holy ones**. For who in the skies is comparable to Yahweh? Who among the **sons of God** is like Yahweh, A God greatly feared in the **council of the holy ones**, And awesome above all those who are around Him? Yahweh God **of hosts**, who is like You, mighty Yahweh? Your faithfulness also surrounds You.

2. Sons of God

PSALM 29:1-2 Sons of God, give to Yahweh, give to Yahweh honor and power. Give to Yahweh the honor due his name, worship Yahweh in the splendor of holiness.

JOB 1:6-7 Now, one day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and the satan also came among them. The Lord said to the satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it."

JOB 38:4-5, 7 Where were you when I laid the foundations of the land? Tell me if you have understanding. Who set its measurements, since you know. Or who stretched a measuring line over it? ...when the stars of the morning sang together, and all the sons of God shouted aloud.

3. The host of heaven

1 KINGS 22:19-22 Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. The Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?' And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, 'I will entice him.' The Lord said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.'

4. The council

JEREMIAH 23:18, 23 “But who has stood in the council of Yahweh, that he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened?” “I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds.”

PSALM 82:1 God takes his stand in the divine council, In the midst of elohim he renders justice.

JOB 15:7-8 “Were you the first man to be born, or were you brought forth before the hills? Have you listened in the divine council? And do you limit wisdom to yourself?”

Observations on the phrase “The council”

In both of these Jeremiah and Job passages, the focus is on humans who occasionally get glimpses into God’s heavenly throne room to overhear what God is discussing with his council. In the book of Job, these words are ironic because while Job of course does not have access to the divine council to know why he is suffering, the reader actually does because of Job chs. 1-2.

When all of these texts are read together, a fairly clear picture emerges. God is consistently depicted on his heavenly throne, surrounded by his staff-team who participate in discussing and then carrying out God’s plans.

1. The divine throne room is the place from which Yahweh governs the world with his heavenly council, the place where “Yahweh’s decrees directing the human community and the divine world are set forth and through whom they are communicated or enacted.” [MICHAEL HEISER , “ DIVINE COUNCIL ,” IN DICTIONARY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: PROPHETS, P. 163]

2. This concept helps us to make sense of one popular and puzzling passage in Isaiah 6 ISAIAH 6:1-4, 8 : In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is the fullness of His glory.”

And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.... Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

3. Notice that Isaiah is having a vision of the divine throne room and sees Yahweh exalted, surrounded by spiritual beings. Then in verse 8, Yahweh speaks to represent both himself (“whom shall I send?”) and the divine council (“who will go for us?”)

In all of these texts we have a positive portrayal of the divine council functioning in their ideal role, and notice that it’s parallel to the human realm.

God’s representatives honor their creator and King and carry out his purposes in heaven and earth. But the biblical story is driven by a plot conflict about a rebellion against God in both the heavenly and earthly realms. There are actually three significant waves to the rebellion explored in Genesis chs. 1-11. Here they are in summary form:

The heavenly and earthly rebellions of Genesis 1-11

1. A rebel divine council member lures God’s images into a rebellion (Genesis 2-4)
2. More divine council members rebel and try to restore eternal life to humans by impregnating women. (Genesis 6)
3. More divine council members rebel and lure the empire of Babylon into a rebellion, giving birth to the scattered nations who worship idol-gods. (Genesis 10-11)