

verse 4 is possibly a continuation of the depiction of the saints as “calves” in verse 3. In other words, when plants are burned, they are reduced to stubble and ash and what we have here is an image of cattle walking on ashes inside the confines of a metaphor. Consequently, “stubble” and “ash” are used here not because the wicked will literally become stubble or ash, but because of the utter weakness and powerless of the wicked before God and his saints is being described using plant and agricultural imagery. Asserting that this verse proves the wicked will be reduced to ashes requires potentially using particular metaphorical terms as if they were meant to describe literal reality.

In addition, even if this description in Malachi is taken literally, there are several reasons why it cannot be interpreted to refer to either an annihilation of the wicked on Judgment Day or any annihilation of the wicked by fire.

Second, notice that these verses repeatedly assign the fiery burning to a day. Verse 1 says, “the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven.” Notice that it is the day that will burn. The same verse concludes with the phrase “the day that cometh shall burn them up.” Again, it is the day that will burn the wicked. Notice also that there is no mention of Hell or any of the synonymous titles for Hell in this passage. Although not conclusive on its own, this language suggests that it is not the fires of Hell that burn up the wicked, but fires associated with a unique day in history.

Third, Hell is not the only place in scripture where we see fire used in a destructive way. In Genesis 3:24, God places a flaming sword to keep sinful men from reentering the Garden of Eden. Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed by fire and brimstone (Genesis 19:24). When God leads the Israelites out of Egypt he stands between the Israelites and the Egyptians within a pillar of fire (Exodus 14:24). When God appears to the Israelites on Mount Sinai, a devouring fire surrounds him (Exodus 19:18, 24:17, Deuteronomy 5:4). In Leviticus 10:1-2, two sons of Aaron the high priest of Israel are killed by fire that comes out from the presence of the Lord when they approach God’s holy place in a way that contradicted God’s instructions. Even Revelation 20:9 explains that at the end of the thousand years “fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured” the armies gathered by the devil at that time. This event in Revelation 20 very much seems to parallel the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moreover, the textual details of Revelation 20:19 make it very clear that it is not a description of annihilation in Hell. Notice that the fire is from heaven where God is, not below the earth in Hell and not in a lake of fire on the surface of the earth. Likewise, the fire devours the nations on the earth who surround the camp of God’s people. These are not wicked souls in Hell. And lastly, we can see that after the devouring of the wicked by fire from heaven at the end of the millennium there is a subsequent resurrection and judgment of the dead (Revelation 20:11-15). Therefore, the devouring by fire from heaven, which is dispensed upon the nations at the end of the millennium in verse 9, is not a description of final end of those wicked from among the nations and it cannot be taken as an annihilation from existence.)

Most importantly, all of these examples involve destructive fire and yet none of them are referring to Hell. Moreover, many of these examples entail the use of the fire to kill mortal men. Consequently, we must be careful not to assume that all references to fiery destruction are descriptions of Hell or descriptions of what happens to the wicked in Hell. There are a significant number of examples in scripture describing the use of fire to kill mortal men that have nothing to do with Hell or what happens to the wicked when they are cast into Hell at the final judgment.

Fourth, in Peter's descriptions of the return of Jesus Christ, Peter states that the wicked will perish in a great fiery cataclysm, which takes place at that time. (For more information on the relationship between the new heavens and new earth mentioned here in Peter at the start of Jesus' millennial reign and the new heavens and new earth mentioned in Revelation 20-21 after the millennium, please see our Cosmology study.)

2 Peter 3:3 Knowing this first, that there shall come **in the last days scoffers**, walking after their own lusts, **4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming?** for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. **5** For this they willingly are ignorant of, that **by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:** **6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:** **7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.** **8** But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. **9** The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. **10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.** **11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,** **12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?** **13** Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

In Peter's words this killing of the wicked by fire is comparable to God killing the wicked of Noah's day with water at the time of the Flood. In other words, the fire on the day of Jesus' return is not a reference to what happens to the wicked in Hell after they are resurrected and damned at the final judgment, which takes place a thousand years after Jesus' returns to rule the earth. Instead, what Peter is describing here involves the death of mortal men by a particular outpouring of fire at the start of Jesus' reign, just as Sodom and Gomorrah involved the death of mortal men by fire and just as fire will come from God out of heaven to devour the nations at the end of the millennium right before the final judgment and the general resurrection of mankind.

Fifth, consider a similar description of the day of the Lord's coming as depicted in Joel 2.

Joel 2:1 Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and **sound an alarm in my holy mountain:** let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for **the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand;** 2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: **a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.** 3 **A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth:** the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and **nothing shall escape them.** 4 The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run. 5 Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, **like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array.** 6 Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness. 7 They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and **they shall not break their ranks:** 8 Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. 9 They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; **they shall enter in at the windows like a thief.** 10 The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: 11 **And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?**

Number one, notice that like Revelation 19, this passage in Joel is describing the coming of the army of God under the command of God himself. We know that the people described here in Joel are God's army because verse 11 uses the term "army" to describe them. Likewise, verse 5 describes them as "a strong people set in battle array" and verse 7 says that they will "not break their ranks."

Number two, more importantly notice the description of God's army here. Verse 3 says that "a fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth." And verse 5 says that their sound is "like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble."

Number three, verse 9 compares this army to "a thief," which is interesting because 2 Peter 3:10 describes the day of the Lord's coming not only as fiery but as "a thief in the night."

Number four, the word "stubble" in verse 5 here in Joel 2 is "qash" (Strong's Number 07179), which is exactly the same word used to describe the wicked as "stubble" that will be burned in Malachi 4:1.

Sixth, Hebrews 10 affirms this same basic scenario on the day of Jesus' return and describes "fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

Hebrews 10:27 But a certain fearful **looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.**

In other words, when Jesus' returns to conquer, those who reject him and oppose him around the world will be killed by fire, similar to Sodom and Gomorrah or perhaps Aaron's two sons in Leviticus 10. In all of these cases, this is not a fire from Hell within the earth or even that originates at a lake on the earth's surface. It is a fire specifically dispensed by God for these particular occasions in order to kill the wicked, mortal men.

Seventh, we have already examined Jesus' words in John 5:28-29, in which Jesus' declares that all of the wicked will be resurrected, which Revelation 20:1-15 identifies as occurring at the final Judgment after Jesus' millennial reign.

John 5:28 Marvel not at this: for **the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.**

Given the evidence that a literal interpretation of the "fire" in Malachi would correspond to the fiery destruction of the wicked at the beginning of Jesus' millennial reign, Malachi is describing an event that is too early to refer to resurrected wicked men or the punishment that awaits the wicked after final judgment. Instead, Malachi could only be a description of the physical death of mortal men. Furthermore, based on John 5, any such destruction described by Malachi could not be one that annihilates the wicked from existence due to the fact that they will be resurrected a thousand years later along with all the rest of the wicked, including the wicked who were killed by water in the Flood and those killed by fire and brimstone at Sodom and Gomorrah. In short, God's use of fire to kill mortal men at the beginning of the millennium in no way contradicts the fact that they will later be resurrected at the final judgment one thousand years later.

In conclusion, although Malachi uses language that describes the wicked being burned by fire and reduced to ashes, there is internal evidence that this language is metaphorical, not a literal description. In addition, Malachi is not a description of Hell or the effects of the fires of Hell. Nor is it a description of what happens to immortal humans or of resurrected wicked men at the final judgment after the end of the millennium. At most, Malachi is a reference to the fiery destruction that will be used to kill wicked, mortal men and remove them from the earth when Jesus' returns to start his kingdom. At the least, it is a metaphorical description of the powerlessness of the wicked to overcome the righteous when Jesus' return, without necessarily intending any literal description of the fire involved in Jesus' return. Consequently, Malachi 4 does not provide any evidence that would suggest the resurrected wicked are annihilated by the fires of Hell. It simply does

not even touch on that topic but instead focuses on an entirely separate, peculiar, and limited historical event that occurs on a particular day of world history, just as the Flood did and just as Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction did.

As we finish our analysis of Malachi, we should also mention a few similar statements found in the New Testament. Luke 3:17 (and a parallel verse in Matthew 3:12) records a statement from John the Baptist who describes the Messiah, saying, "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable."

Number one, such a description aligns easily with Peter and Joel's description of how Jesus will remove the wicked from his kingdom through the use of fire when Jesus' returns to reign. Conversely, there is nothing in John the Baptist's description which would allow a definitive identification of the timeframe of the Final Judgment. As a result, although they mention fiery death for the wicked, statements like this do not add any direct evidence concerning whether the wicked will be annihilated by fire after the Final Judgment.

Number two, it should also be noted that other Gospel passages suggest that the wicked will be separated from the kingdom and put into a place where they will continue to exist in darkness and misery, rather than being annihilated by flames. Such descriptions of relocation to a place of conscious misery can be found in the two parables about servants in Matthew 24:42-51 and Matthew 25:14-30. Matthew 24:51 conclude with the phrases, "cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And Matthew 25:30 similarly concludes, "cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Both of these parables lead up to Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats, which is a description of his return to reign. In fact, the parable of the sheep and the goats begins in Matthew 25:31 with Jesus' declaration, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory." And, Jesus concludes the parable of the sheep and goats with another statement about relocating the wicked to a place of long-term punishment. Matthew 25:46 states, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." The close proximity of these three parables and their shared relationship to Jesus' return requires that the "everlasting punishment" mentioned in Matthew 25:46 refers to the duration of the misery of the wicked in a place of darkness and gnashing of teeth where they are relocated at the end of the parables in Matthew 24:51 and 25:30. Any interpretation of Luke 3:17 and Matthew 3:12 in support of annihilation by fire on the day of Jesus' return is simply unable to reconcile with such depictions relocating the wicked to a place of long-term misery.

Consequently, statements such as those in Luke 3:17 and Matthew 3:12, should be interpreted similarly to Malachi 4 as descriptions of the bodily death of mortal wicked men by fire when Jesus' returns to start his millennial reign, not as descriptions of a possible annihilation event occurring at the time of the final judgment.

#6 – Does “Reaping Corruption” in Galatians 6 Refer to Annihilation?

Now that we’ve established that the fires of Hell act as a perpetual, non-annihilating counterforce to the inherent vitality of immortal angels, we might take a few brief moments to address a statement in Galatians 6. Verse 8 of Galatians 6 states, “he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Of particular interest is the phrase “he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.” And the critical question is, does the term “corruption” in this verse necessitate that the wicked will be annihilated? At the center of this question is the presumption that corruption must end in annihilation. But as we have seen, that is only the case when the object being subjected to the forces of decay and corruption is mortal and corruptible. Immortal beings, on the other hand, are not capable of being succumbed by the forces of corruption. Moreover, because our model asserts that the fires of Hell do act as a consuming force to siphon off the resilient inherent vigor of immortal angels and men, this verse in Galatians 6 does not pose any problems. In short, our model does not in any way deny that the wicked will reap corruption. We simply deny that the corruption will result in annihilation. And Galatians 6 says nothing that would demand annihilation is the result of the forces of corruption exerted by the fires of Hell. On the contrary passages like Isaiah 66 and Mark 9 indicate that the corruption which is reaped by the wicked will endure eternally.

#7 – Does Psalm 82 Prove that Angels Can Be Annihilated?

Over the course of this study, we’ve established that the wicked are resurrected as immortals rather than as mortals and enter Hell as immortals with bodies that are inherently imbued with vitality and unyielding to the forces of corruption. One of the passages that we’ve pointed to as evidence of this fact is Luke 20:35-36 in which Jesus teaches that when men are resurrected they become equal to angels and no longer have the capacity to die. We’ve also already examined the scriptural evidence that demonstrates that angels are, in fact, immortal. But one last challenge remains regarding that conclusion. And that challenge stems from language in Psalm 82, which we will now examine.

Psalm 82:1 God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods. 2 How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah. 3 **Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.** 4 **Deliver the poor and needy:** rid them out of the hand of the wicked. 5 They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course. 6 **I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.** 7 **But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.** 8 Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.

First, as we read through Psalm 82, we can see that the term “angels” does not appear anywhere in the entire 8 verses of this Psalm. The term “gods” is used

twice in verse 1 and verse 6. This leads us to a very crucial point with regard to this Psalm. Its entire potential to support the theory that angels could be put to death rests completely on the idea that the term “gods” in Psalms refers to angelic beings.

Second, John 10 provides additional details that can help determine whether or not Psalm 82 is referring to angels.

John 10:23 And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon’s porch. 24 Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. 25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me. 26 But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: 28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. 29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. 30 I and my Father are one. 31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. 32 Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? 33 The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. 34 Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? 35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; 36 Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?

Let’s begin with the basic course of this narrative. Verses 23-36 record a conversation in which certain Jewish men accuse Jesus of blasphemy. Verse 23 informs us that this conversation occurs in Jerusalem when Jesus is walking in the temple. In verses 25 and 29 Jesus refers to God as his Father. And in verse 30, Jesus says, “I and my Father are one.” At this point, verse 31 records that these Jewish men picked up stones to kill Jesus. In verse 32, Jesus asks them why they want to stone him. And in verse 33, these Jewish men explain that they want to stone him “for blasphemy; and because thou, being a man, makest thyself God.”

Moving on from the basics, the critical component of this passages occurs in verse 34 where Jesus replies, “Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?” Here in verse 34, Jesus is actually quoting verse 6 of Psalm 82, which reads, “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.” But here a critical question arises. Is Jesus citing Psalm 82 in reference to the human critics that he was conversing with or in reference to angels?

Number one, it is noteworthy that nowhere in this exchange does Jesus mention the term “angels.” Neither do his critics. So, in order to interpret Jesus’ reference to Psalm 82 as a reference to angels, we would have to assume a connection that is not stated in the text, namely, that the word “gods” in Psalm 82 refers to angels. Perhaps that is a reasonable assumption. Perhaps it isn’t. We will see other clues

as we move forward. But for starters, it is worth highlighting that John 10 itself does not make any direct connection between angels and the term “gods” in Psalm 82.

Number two, to be fair, it should be noted that the phrase “Ye are gods” is not a statement that Jesus makes directly to his critics. Rather, Jesus begins with the phrase “is it not written in your law” and then he proceeds to cite Psalm 82, which states, “I have said, Ye are gods.” In short, the phrase “Ye are gods” occurs within the quotation from the Psalm. There are several points worth making here.

One, to illustrate the importance of this detail, imagine for a moment that Jesus was not quoting Psalm 82 here or any other Old Testament text but simply replied to his critics with an altogether new statement put together right at that moment and said to them, “Ye are gods.” In such a scenario, we would readily have to conclude that Jesus was applying the term “gods” to his critics in some sense. But since the phrase “Ye are gods” occurs within a quote of Psalm 82, a direct connection of the term “Ye” to his critics is not as straightforward, at least not when we read the written words on the page.

Two, although in John 10 Jesus does not specifically identify who the Psalmist is referring to by the term “gods,” it is possible that both Jesus and his audience already understood that the Psalm was referring to angels. In which case, Jesus’ citation of Psalm 82 would simply be an attempt to justify his own claim to be the Son of God by citing an Old Testament verse in which God Himself referred to some other party as “gods” and as his “children.” In other words, Jesus’ argument here would effectively amount to something along the lines that, “It’s OK for me to refer to myself in this way since God referred to angels in this way.” But in the immediate context of John 10, there are at least a few considerations, which argue against such an interpretation, which leads to our next point.

Number three, although less definitive, there is at least a natural connection between Jesus’ use of the pronoun “your” in the phrase “in your law” and the pronoun “Ye” in the phrase “Ye are gods.” More specifically, although “your” and “Ye” are translated from two different Greek terms, both Greek terms are second person pronouns. Second person pronouns are pronouns that refer to the speaker’s audience. In this case, it is clear that at least the word “your” refers to Jesus’ critics. Since the second personal pronoun “Ye” occurs within Jesus’ quote, it is possible that it only referred to God’s original audience at the time when God made this remark. As such, God’s use of “ye” might refer to some entirely different group than the group referred to by Jesus’ use of “your.” But here we have to remember that this statement from Jesus in John 10 was first spoken, not written down. So, we have to put ourselves in the position of someone overhearing Jesus’ make this remark and ask what they would have likely perceived by his use of two second person pronouns. And even though the phrase “Ye are gods” occurs within Jesus’ quotation of Psalm 82, it is arguable that for anyone actually hearing the conversation unfold, Jesus’s use of another second person pronoun literally in the same breath would create a natural connection between who was identified by these two second person pronouns.

To understand just how problematic the actual sound of this statement would be, consider an illustration using modern English. Imagine overhearing a conversation in which a younger brother makes a Facebook post claiming to be smart. But, the next time his older brother sees him, the older brother objects, calling the young brother arrogant for making such a claim. Then the younger brother replies, “Doesn’t your own Facebook page state, ‘Mom said, “You are so smart?””” In that context, who would we think that their mother was remarking about, the older brother or someone else entirely? Even though we know that the younger brother is not himself describing the older brother as smart, but is instead quoting a Facebook page with their mother’s words, the close proximity between the younger brother’s use of “your” and “you” would strongly suggest to anyone overhearing the conversation that the younger brother meant to infer that their mother’s remark was made about his younger brother to whom he was speaking. Similarly, despite the fact that the phrase “Ye are gods” occurs within Jesus’ quote of Psalm 82, when we imagine hearing this remark aloud instead of simply reading it, the actual audible experience would likely reinforce that Jesus’ meant to apply the “ye” in Psalm 82 to the same group with whom he was speaking.

In this light, we can see that arguing Jesus meant the phrase “Ye are gods” in reference to some unstated third party rather than his audience only seems to work because we are reading it and, as words on a page, it is easier to technically dissect the second person pronoun in Jesus’ own words from the second person pronoun in the Psalm that he is quoting. The thrust of actually hearing Jesus’ statement would make such a dissection much more difficult.

Number four, even if we assume that Jesus’ critics thought that Psalm 82 used the term “gods” to refer to angels, it is not likely that Jesus’ citation of angels would have countermanded their accusation of blasphemy against him. As we can see in verse 33, the basis of their allegation is that Jesus was “a man” who was “making himself God.” For Jesus to attempt to justify his words by pointing out that “angels” could be called “gods” simply would have been insufficient. Any reasonable one of his critics (or a bystander overhearing the conversation) might easily have thought, “So what? You are no angel either! You are just a man!” His critics may have had no problem with the idea that angels could be called “gods” and yet still condemned Jesus for applying that title to himself. Consequently, if Psalm 82 is referring to angels, then Jesus’ citation of Psalm 82 would not have refuted his critics’ allegation at all. If anything, for Jesus to compare himself to angels would likely have been perceived as a further demonstration of his arrogant claims. In short, whether God called angels “gods” isn’t directly relevant to whether it was appropriate for a human being to claim such a status. (And Jesus’ critics clearly perceived him only to be a human being.) Since his critics’ central objection pertained to a human being claiming the title of “god,” in order to refute these critics soundly, Jesus would need to cite some justification for the application of the title “god” to a man. And, in this context when his critics complained that Jesus was making himself God, it would make very natural sense for him to cite their own sacred texts describing them as “gods.” Such a citation

would indeed confound their objections and require greater explanation on their part.

But there are other evidences corroborating that Jesus was applying Psalm 82 to men and to the Jewish leadership more specifically.

Number five, it is also easy to explain the use of the term “children of the most High” in the phrase “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.” While such terms are sometimes used in reference to angels in the Old Testament (for example, Job 1:5-6, 2:1, and 38:7), the particular use of the term here in Psalms stems from a statement regarding Israel at the time of the Exodus journey. In a moment, we will also see that this is case with regard to the phrase “Ye are gods, which will show a continuity with regard to the historical and cultural origin of both phrases. With regard to the origin of the phrase “ye are children of the most High,” Deuteronomy 32:18 says concerning Israel, “Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.” Clearly the scriptures of Moses refer to God as the Father of the people of Israel. Another clear example in which the people of Israel are referred to as God’s children can be found in Hosea 1:10, which says, “Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.” Of course, the prophecies of Hosea were came after the Psalms, so Psalm 82 cannot be referring to God’s statement in Hosea. However, Hosea still illustrates that even before the time of Christ, the Jewish culture had no problems associating the people of Israel with the phrase “children of God.” Consequently, even the phrase “children of the most High” in Psalm 82 also makes perfect sense as a statement to the leadership of the Jewish people.

Number six, notice that verse 35 of John 10 confirms that the Psalm is talking about men, not angels. Right after quoting Psalm 82:6 in verse 34, Jesus says, “he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came.” Although New Testament passages such as Acts 7:53, Galatians 3:19, and Hebrews 2:2 describe that angels were involved in the giving of the Law, angels are always depicted as participants on the side of transmission of the Law, never as the recipients of the Law.

Acts 7:52 Which of the prophets have not **your fathers** persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom **ye have** been now the betrayers and murderers: 53 **Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.**

Galatians 3:19 **Wherefore then serveth the law?** It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and **it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator...** 23 But before faith came, **we were kept under the law**, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. 24 Wherefore **the law was our schoolmaster to** bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Hebrews 2:2 For **if the word spoken by angels was steadfast**, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;

Even though Acts 7, Galatians 3, and Hebrews, depict the angels as speaking and ordaining the Law, it is clear that the Law was mediated by Moses for the Jews who were the hearers to whom the Law was spoken and for whom it was ordained. In other words, the role of the recipients of the Law is always reserved for the Jewish people, never the angels. Likewise, in a context of John 10:34 where Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that the Law of Moses is “your law,” it is very difficult to conclude that Jesus would immediately turn around in verse 35 and refer to angels as the recipients of the Law. On the other than, this phrase “unto whom the word of God came” is readily explicable in terms of Old Testament texts which describe the reception of the Law of Moses by the people of Israel during the Exodus journey. Deuteronomy 30:10-14 explains that God’s “commandments” and “statutes” are not “hidden” or “far off” or “up in heaven,” but that God had brought “the word nigh” unto them. (Similar attestations about the people of Israel receiving God’s word at the time of Moses can be found in Deuteronomy 4:12, 5:23-26 and Hebrews 12:18-21.) But most importantly, in John 10:35, Jesus identifies those that God called “gods” with the phrase, “he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came.” Consequently, since it is impossible to identify the angels as those “unto whom the word of God came,” and such a phrase must be identify with the Israelites, we must conclude that in Jesus’ view the phrase “Ye are gods” also applied to Israelites. So, once again Jesus’ words in John 10 confirm that Psalm 82 is referring to the leadership of the people of Israel, not to angels.

(We should also address Jesus switch between the pronoun “your” in the phrase “your law” in verse 33 and the pronoun “them” right before the phrase “unto whom the word of God came” in verse 34. Would the switch between these pronouns indicate that the men Jesus is talking to are part of a different group than those who “received” the Law of Moses? In other words, since Jesus is talking to the leadership of Israel when he uses the pronoun “your,” would that mean the pronoun “them” must refer to some other group besides the leadership of Israel? In this case, the switch between these pronouns is not indicative of two different groups. In short, there were multiple generations of leadership in Israel between the Exodus and Jesus’ day. Consequently, Jesus could refer to his contemporary audience of Israelite leaders as “you,” and then switch to use the pronoun “them” to refer to the general of Israelite leadership alive at the time of the Exodus. Or, to put it another way, Jesus could easily be referring to Israelite leadership in general, despite his switch between “your” and “them.”)

Number seven, one of the important questions in Psalm 82 and John 10 concerns when God actually first said, “ye are gods.” Initially, the answer might seem to be obvious. God said, “Ye are gods” in Psalm 82. But look closely at Psalm 82 and Jesus’ quotation of it in John 10. Verse 6 of Psalm 82 actually says, “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.” Notice that it begins with God saying, “I have said.” Even when Jesus quotes this Psalm in John 10:34, he recites it as “Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?” Notice again

that the quote begins with God using phrase “I said.” This short series of words that begins verse 6 of Psalm 82 tells us that Psalm 82 is not the point in time when God first said, “ye are gods” or “ye are children of the most High.” To the contrary, in Psalm 82 God himself is referring back to a time in the past when he made these statements prior to Psalm 82. As we go forward, our next points will help us connect the dots and identify when God first said these remarks that he refers back to in Psalm 82 and also to identify who God was describing.

Number eight, in Matthew 23:1-3 Jesus embarks on a long critique of the Jewish leadership. During this same critique of the Jewish leadership, in verse 14 Jesus accuses them of “devouring widow’s houses” and in verse 23 Jesus accuses them saying that they “have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.” These are roughly the same essential criticisms that God levels against the “gods” in Psalm 82. Psalm 82:1 says, “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.” A lack of just treatment for the poor is at the heart of the criticism in both passages. Although on its own this is not conclusive, this similarity suggests that Jesus may have had Psalm 82 in mind when he was critiquing the Pharisees and Jewish leadership in Matthew 23. We will see additional evidence for this possibility as we continue.

Number nine, it is important to note that Jesus actually begins this long critique of the Jewish leadership in Matthew 23 with the words, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.” The term “Moses’ seat” is curious and informative. Why would Jesus’ say this and what does it mean? That’s an important question. But even before we answer it, we should note that we now have a three-way connection between Psalm 82, John 10, and Matthew 23. In John 10, Jesus identifies that Psalm 82 is in reference to some of his contemporary Jewish men in Jerusalem. We have argued that these particular Jewish men from Jerusalem are, in fact, members of the Jewish leadership. And Matthew 23 seems to confirm this when Jesus criticizes the scribes and Pharisees, identifies them with the seat and authority of Moses, and then levies the same basic criticism against them that is at the heart of Psalm 82.

Interestingly, the line connecting Psalm 82 to Matthew 23 traces through a theme of Old Testament prophetic passages in which God criticizes the leaders of Israel for violating his commands for them to rule justly and particularly not favoring the rich to the detriment of the poor. This theme is particularly apparent when we compare God’s initial commands to the leaders in Israel in Exodus 18:12-25, Exodus 22:8-9, Deuteronomy 1:9-17, and Deuteronomy 15:1-11 to God’s later criticism of the leaders of Israel at the time of the prophets in Isaiah 3:14-26, Isaiah 32:1-7, Isaiah 58:1-7, Isaiah 59:1-21, Jeremiah 2:1-8, 34, Jeremiah 22:11-19, Jeremiah 34:1-22, Ezekiel 18:1-13, Ezekiel 22:23-31, and Ezekiel 45:8-10. Among these passages, Exodus 22:8-9 is perhaps the most interesting because it actually refers to the leaders of Israel using the same Hebrew word that is translated as “gods” in Psalm 82, which we will discuss in more detail momentarily. Ultimately, this thematic criticism of Jewish leadership for the very same items God criticizes in Psalm 82 further substantiates how natural it would have been for the Jewish people to interpret Psalm 82 as a reference to the Jewish

leadership, not angels. (We have included the full analysis regarding these Old Testament prophetic passages as an addendum to this study.)

Number ten, if we investigate the history of the leadership of the Jewish people in the Old Testament we can fill in even more pieces of the picture. At the time when God sent Moses back into Egypt to deliver the people of Israel, the people of Israel were led by men called “elders.” In Exodus 3:16-18, 4:29, 12:21, and 17:5-6, the elders of Israel are references as a group that already exists before Moses arrives to deliver the people. In Exodus 24:1-9, we find that there are exactly seventy of these elders.

It is possible that this informal leadership developed in relationship to Exodus 1:1-5, which declares that there were “seventy souls” from “the loins of Jacob” when the Israelites first entered into Egypt at the time of Joseph. The use of the phrase “every man” in verse 1 of Exodus 1 even hints that this seventy may have only been a numbering of the male offspring. (For example, when Jesus miraculously feeds the five thousand in Matthew 14, verse 19 records that only the men were included in the count, not the women and children.) As the people of Israel had children after they went to Egypt, which is described immediately afterward in verses 6-7 of Exodus 1, these seventy would have naturally been the oldest members of the family and regarded as having wisdom and authority.

As we continue forward in history, this body of seventy elders is instituted formally under Moses in Exodus 18:12-26 when Moses’ father-in-law Jethro suggests that Moses appoint seventy elders to assist him in leading the people and Moses follows this advice. More specifically, it is important to note that in verse 16 of Exodus 18, Moses explains to Jethro, “I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws.” This will become more important a little while later. (Numbers 11:24-25, likewise describes that God took the spirit that was on Moses and gave it to the seventy elders.) As we continue forward, by the time of the New Testament, this leadership body was known as the Sanhedrin. The Greek word “sunedrion” (Strong’s Number 4892) appears numerous times in the Gospels. Although “sunedrion” is typically translated into the English word “council,” the Online Bible Greek Lexicon defines “sunedrion” as “the Sanhedrin, the great council at Jerusalem, consisting of the seventy one members, viz. scribes, elders, prominent members of the high priestly families and the high priest, the president of the assembly.”

Consequently, the reason that Jesus states that the “scribes and Pharisees” sit in the seat of Moses is because the Jewish leadership of Jesus’ day consisted of seventy elders, known as the Sanhedrin, who were regarded as having inherited their position and authority from the original seventy elders that Moses’ appointed as his deputies in Exodus 18.

Number eleven, a critical question needs to be asked. Are there any places in scripture where God refers to men as “gods?” Certainly, there are many places in the Old Testament where God refers to the false gods who the nations worshipped. In other studies such as our Prophetic Symbol series, we examine

statements from authors like Daniel and Paul which reveal that the Jewish people understood that the nations were ruled by wicked angels. Deuteronomy 32:16-17 explains that the Israelites provoked God when they “sacrificed unto devils, not to God” and it immediately goes on to describe these “devils” as “gods whom they knew not” and “new gods that came newly up.” In the phrase “gods whom they knew not,” the Hebrew word for “gods” is “elohim” (Strong’s Number 430), which is the same word used in Psalm 82:6. Paul echoes this sentiment from Deuteronomy in 1 Corinthians 10:19-20, where he describes the “idols” to whom Gentiles sacrifice as “devils.” In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul also refers to the devil as “the god of this world,” in which the Greek word for “god” is “theos” (Strong’s Number 2316), which is the same word used by Jesus in the phrase “Ye are gods” in John 10:34. In light of such evidences, the question is not whether angels are ever called “gods,” but whether angels are the only party that God has called “gods” and whether they are the most likely party that we should infer from the use of the term “gods” in Psalm 82 and John 10. Our next two points will help to answer that question, once again connecting the dots that identify the Jewish leadership as the intended group to whom both Psalm 82 and Jesus are applying the title “gods.”

One, a critical piece of information comes from God’s statement to Moses in Exodus 7. In Exodus 7:1, God says to Moses, “See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet.” And, in fact, the Hebrew word for “god” that is applied by God to Moses in Exodus 7:1 is “elohim,” the same word used in Psalm 82:6. When Moses appointed seventy elders to be his deputies, his authority passed to them and so, in God’s eyes, the statement “I have made thee a god” applied to all of them. This historical precedent could easily corroborate how Jesus could easily quote Psalm 82:6 and apply the phrase “I said, Ye are gods” to the Jewish leadership of his own day. In the words of Matthew 23, the Jewish leadership of Jesus’ day sat in the seat of Moses’ authority, so the statement to Moses in Exodus 7 and, by extension the statement from God in Psalm 82, could be applied to them as well. However, we don’t simply have to rely on extrapolation, as we will see in our next point.

Two, the line of evidence in which God refers to the Jewish leadership as “gods,” does not end with Moses. To the contrary, God himself directly calls the elders of Israel “gods” very early on during the onset of the nation and the culture of Israel. Exodus 21:6 uses the word "elohim" to refer to the men who served as judges in Israel. Moreover, we can also show that the Jews remained aware of this application in a long-lasting fashion by viewing Exodus 21 alongside a few other passages, including 1 Samuel 2:25.

Exodus 21:5 And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: 6 **Then his master shall bring him unto the judges (0430 - elohim);** he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.

In Exodus 21, the Israelites are receiving commands regarding indentured servitude. In verse 5 in particular, the Israelites are instructed how to handle a situation in which an indentured servant prefers to remain in the employment of his master. And, the rule is that in such situations, the master is to bring the servant “unto the judges.” The key detail is that the word “judges” is actually the Hebrew word “elohim,” the same word used in Psalm 82:6. The question is whether this verse is commanding the Israelites to bring the servant before the angels? Or are they supposed to bring the servant before the men who were deemed judges in Israel as witnesses? To answer that, consider this next verse in the same chapter of Exodus 22, which describes how "all manner of trespases" shall be brought "before the judges" to determine "whom the judges shall condemn."

Exodus 22:8 If the thief be not found, then **the master of the house shall be brought unto the judges (0430)**, to see whether he have put his hand unto his neighbour's goods. **9 For all manner of trespass**, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of **both parties shall come before the judges (0430); and whom the judges (0430) shall condemn**, he shall pay double unto his neighbour.

Here in Exodus 22, we see that the Israelites were required to bring certain matters before the “judges” and the “judges” would render a verdict. Once again, the Hebrew word “judge” is “elohim.” In fact, Exodus 22 uses the word "elohim" 3 times to refer to the individuals who made such decisions in matters of civil justice. Notice the phrase “for all manner of trespass” in verse 9. This indicates that these instructions pertain to a variety of common issues that might arise with regard to civil justice. Perhaps more importantly, this is exactly what Moses said he was doing in Exodus 18:16, when he told his father-in-law, “I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws.” As we can see from Exodus 18:12-26 below, it was at this same time when Moses’ father-in-law proposed that Moses appoint other men to assist him in this task of judging between one man and another in legal matters.

Exodus 18:12 And Jethro, Moses' father in law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God: **and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father in law before God.** **13** And it came to pass **on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening.** **14** And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, **What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?** **15** And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: **16** **When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws.** **17** And Moses' father in law said unto him, **The thing that thou doest is not good.** **18** Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for **this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.** **19** Harken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: **20** And thou shalt teach them ordinances

and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. 21 Moreover **thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:** 22 **And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee.** 23 If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. 24 **So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said.** 25 **And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.** 26 **And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves.**

Exodus 21-22 are only a few short chapters later. At this point, either Exodus 21-22 are commanding the Israelites to bring rather trivial matters before angels who would render a verdict, or God is using the word “elohim” to refer to the rulers of Israel, just as God had done with Moses, who likewise rendered verdicts with regard to such civil matters. Of course, the reasonable conclusion is that the Israelites understood the “elohim” to refer to their human leaders. And 1 Samuel 1 not only confirms this understanding, but it will also demonstrate that the Israelites were still using the title “elohim” to refer to their human rulers even at the time of David, many generations after Moses and the Exodus. This show the long-standing place that this application had in Israelite culture. It was an established use of the term “elohim.”

1 Samuel 2:25 If one man sin against another, the judge (0430) shall judge him: but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him?

Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them.

Once again, the Hebrew noun for “judge” here is “elohim.” Notice how this verse specifically distinguishes between the “elohim” that judges men when they sin against each other in contrast to “the LORD” who slays those who “sin against the Lord.” Clearly, the “elohim” who judges sins against men is not the Lord. Moreover, the phrase “if one man sin against another” is a summarization of the basic rule in Exodus 22 that “all manner of trespass” between one man and another must be brought before the “elohim” to decide the case. Like Exodus 21-22, it is not reasonable to conclude that Samuel believed that angels were hearing cases and rendering verdicts when legal disputes arose between the men of Israel. Once again, 1 Samuel refers to the human judges as “elohim.”

In addition, we can also consider Exodus 18: and Exodus 22:8-9 side by side with Moses' explanation in Deuteronomy 1 regarding why he set up "captains" in Israel to decide matters of civil justice. Notice how Deuteronomy 1:9 begins with Moses

saying, "I am not able to bear you myself alone," which is a clear reference back to the statement from Moses' father-in-law in Exodus 18:18.

Exodus 18:15 And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: 16 When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws. 17 And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good. 18 Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone...24 So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said. 25 And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 26 And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves.

Exodus 22:8 If the thief be not found, then **the master of the house shall be brought unto the judges (0430)**, to see whether he have put his hand unto his neighbour's goods. **9 For all manner of trespass**, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of **both parties shall come before the judges (0430); and whom the judges (0430) shall condemn**, he shall pay double unto his neighbour.

Deuteronomy 1:9 And I spake unto you at that time, saying, I am not able to bear you myself alone: 10 The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude. 11 (The LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you, as he hath promised you!) 12 How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife? 13 **Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you.** 14 And ye answered me, and said, The thing which thou hast spoken is good for us to do. 15 **So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known, and made them heads over you, captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes.** 16 **And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him.** 17 Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.

Deuteronomy 1 makes it clear that the "judges" who are deciding cases in Exodus 21, 22, and 1 Samuel are these human leaders appointed by Moses to help in his task of leading Israel. Moses even specifically commands these human judges to "hear the cause between your brethren" just as Exodus 21, 22, and 1 Samuel describe. And, Moses specifically warns them not to be a respecter of persons. In other words, judge rich and poor, great and small on the merits of the case. This directly relates to the criticism in Psalms 82 in which God criticizes the "elohim"

because they do not “judge unjustly” and “accept the persons of the wicked” rather than defending the poor, fatherless, needy, and afflicted. There can be little doubt that Psalm 82 is intended to record God revisiting the leadership of Israel for failing to judge justly without being a respecter of persons. The fact that Psalm 82 uses the term “elohim” to refer to these unjust judges is simply a reflection of the use of the same term “elohim” with regard to those human judges that Moses appointed with God’s approval in Exodus 18:12-26 and Numbers 11:24-25.

In short, Exodus 21, 22, and 1 Samuel 2 are three early passages in the cultural development of Israel in which God the leaders of Israel are referred to as “elohim,” the same word used in Psalm 82. Given these statements in Exodus 21, 22, and 1 Samuel, there is commanding precedent for interpreting the word “elohim” in Psalm 82 as a reference to human leaders in Israel, not angels. At this point, two questions emerge. Although angels are referred to as “elohim” in scripture, with so much precedent and contextual cues from John 10 identifying the “elohim” in Psalm 82 as the Jewish leadership, what reason is there to insist that Psalm 82 is instead referring to angels? But without Psalm 82 as support for the idea that angels can die, what clear scriptural basis would remain for such a doctrine?

Number twelve, as a general principle in interpretation, unless the evidence is reasonably incontrovertible, it is always preferable to interpret a passage in a way that conforms to expected norms rather than producing what is essential novel or unprecedented doctrine. In this case, if Psalm 82 is referring to angels, then it becomes the cornerstone passage and the only clear passage declaring the doctrine angels are essentially mortal and can die like men. This would be well and good if the evidence required the identification of angels. But in light of Exodus 7, 21, and 22 as well as 1 Samuel 2 and Jesus’ comments in John 10, there is an ample basis to conclude that Psalm 82 is using the term “elohim” with regard to the human rulers of Israel, in which case Psalm 82 does not become the cornerstone for any otherwise obscure doctrine about angels. On the other hand, when we pull all of these facts together, God’s intended meaning in Psalm 82 becomes clear. When God inspired Moses to write Exodus and Deuteronomy, God not only called Moses an “elohim” but he told Moses to appoint elders to assist him when judging the people, and Moses’ called those elders “elohim” on multiple occasions in the surrounding chapters. In those same Old Testament books, God also used language referring to the people of Israel as his offspring, his children. Deuteronomy 32:18 says concerning Israel, “Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.” Yet, God commanded the elders to judge fairly. But the Jewish leadership became arrogant. They mistook their authority from Moses as absolute. And in Psalm 82 God is reminding these elders that despite what he said to Moses in Exodus 7:1 and to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:18, they are not really “gods” but can and would die like the mortal men that they are. The entire passage makes sense historically and pragmatically strictly as a reference to the Jewish leadership. There remains no reason to infer that the statements in the psalm were intended in reference to angels dying.

Number thirteen, now that we have seen very early texts establishing that the Jewish culture did, in fact, use the term “elohim” to refer to human leaders, perhaps we should take a moment to address the potential lingering impression that “elohim” more naturally suggests angels than men. On this point, we should be clear that angels are not actually gods either. They are no more gods than Moses, or Pharaoh, or Caesar, or the leaders of Israel. As we have acknowledged previously, God does use the term “gods” regarding angels at times, but God is using this term toward as a fictitious conceit. According to Oxford Dictionaries, in literary terms, a “conceit” is “a fanciful expression in writing or speech; an elaborate metaphor.” Men sometimes worship angels, imagining these angels to be gods. And the angels themselves, who know better than to think they are gods, enjoy this inflated adoration from men. But they are no more gods than men are gods. And Exodus 7, 21, and 22 demonstrate that God sometimes applies the term “gods” to the leaders of Israel as a similar fictitious conceit because they, too, imagine themselves better than average men, feel secure in their wealth and power, and enjoy inflated adoration from other men. But ultimately, since neither angels nor men are “gods,” there should be no absolute connection that term has to one more than the other.

Number fourteen, another question regarding Psalm 82 concerns the phrase “ye shall die like men” in verse 7. Perhaps it could be suggested that the phrase “like men” implies that God cannot be addressing a group of men. The basic argument here is that the word “like” implies a comparison to men, in which case it would be redundant and make no sense to compare something to itself. Analogous comparisons by nature involve asserting similarities between two different things. So, if God is comparing someone to men in some sense, then the group he is comparing must be different from men, or at least that would be the argument. However, while this argument may seem reasonable as a theoretical analysis, it fails on more than one level. One, it isn’t necessarily the case that the phrase “like men” is being used as an analogous comparison at all, in which case there is no need to insist that this statement is comparing two distinct groups. In fact, when we examine the verse with Strong’s Concordance numbers showing everywhere that Hebrew words actually occur, we see that the English word “like” isn’t even in the Hebrew text (neither with regard to the word “men” nor with regard to the word “princes”). Instead, we find only the Hebrew words for “ye shall die men” and “fall one princes.”

Psalm 82:7 But (0403) ye shall die (04191) **like men (0120)**, and fall (05307) **like one (0259)** of the princes (08269).

Hebrew does have a word that can function similar to the English word “like.” The word “ken” (Strong’s Number 03651) can be translated as “in like manner,” which we see in Exodus 7:10-11 when Aaron’s rod becomes a serpent Pharaoh’s magicians did “in like manner with their enchantments.” And while it is possible that a comparison might be implied here, even without a Hebrew word comparable to “like,” the absence of a Hebrew word for “like” further raises the question of whether this verse is intended to be a comparison between two different groups. Perhaps Psalm 82 is simply saying that although they have been

called “gods,” they will die men. In other words, rather than saying they will be “like men,” it would be saying that they are men.

Two, beyond the absence or presence of the word “like” in the Hebrew text, we can look for other examples in the Old Testament of similar phrasing. And when we do, we actually find examples which of similar phrases that are not comparing different groups at all. (It should be noted that in Psalm 82 the word “men” is translated from the Hebrew word “adam,” Strong’s Number 0120, which means, “man, mankind.” Hosea 6:7 is the only other time that the Hebrew word “adam” is used in the English phrase “like men” in the King James translation. Once again, we have placed the Strong’s Concordance number behind each word that appears in Hebrew text.)

Psalm 82:7 But (0403) ye shall die (04191) like men (0120), and fall (05307) **like one (0259) of the princes (08269).**

Hosea 6:4 O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. 5 Therefore have **I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth:** and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. 6 **For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.** 7 But **they like men (0120) have transgressed (05674) the covenant (01285):** there have they dealt treacherously (0898) against me.

As we can see, Hosea 6:4 identifies that God is speaking to Ephraim and Judah, which is no doubt a reference to the people living in those areas, not the geographic regions themselves. In verse 6, God further denotes that he is talking about individuals who offered sacrifices and burnt offerings. And in verse 7, God states that those he is criticizing here “have transgressed the covenant,” which is no doubt the Law of Moses. In all these ways, Hosea clearly identifies that God is speaking to men. And yet, in verse 7 we find the phrase “they like men have transgressed.” Clearly, in this context God is not talking about angels named Ephraim and Judah who offered sacrifices and burnt offerings and broke the Law of Moses. Instead, he is talking about his people Israel. And in this context, the expression “like men” indicates what is common among men, not a comparison between men and some other group. In that sense, it is similar to Numbers 16:29-30, which says, “If these men die the common death of all men (0120), or if they be visited after the visitation of all men (0120) then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD.” Numbers uses the Hebrew word “adam” (Strong’s Number 0120) when referring to the possibility that a certain group of men might experience something that is common to all men. And that is essentially the meaning of the phrase “like men” in Psalm 82 and Hosea 6. It does not mean that the designated party is not human. Instead, it is meant to convey that particular men will experience something just like all men do. Likewise, the phrase “like men” in Psalm 82 is not intended to indicate that God is speaking to individuals who are not human beings any more

than Hosea 6:7 is intended to indicate that the people of Ephraim and Judah were not human beings.

Number fifteen, at first glance the phrase “congregation of the mighty” might also seem to suggest that Psalm 82 is talking about angels. For reference, below we have placed the text of verse 1 where we find this phrase and included the Strong’s Concordance numbers behind the key terms. In particular, notice that the Hebrew word “elohim” (Strong’s Concordance number 0430) appears twice in this verse, once at the beginning where it is translated as the singular “God” and once at the end where it is translated as the plural “gods.”

Psalm 82:1 God (0430) standeth in **the congregation (05712) of the mighty (0410); he judgeth among the gods (0430).**

There are several points worth noting here.

One, the use of “elohim” in the second half of the verse is understood to refer to a group that is not God. The general interpretation is that God is judging among this group identified as “elohim.” The Hebrew word for “among” is “qereb” (Strong’s Number 07130), which means, “in the midst, among, in the middle.” Clearly, the party doing the judging is not judging himself or itself, but instead one party is judging among another party. The obvious implication is that God is the one doing the judging and the party among whom he is judging are referred to by the Hebrew term “elohim.” However, the fact that “elohim” refers to another party besides God in the last half of the verse suggests that the use of the term “elohim” in the first part of the verse also refers to the same group, not to God. So whether “elohim” refers to men or angels here, the first half of the verse would be saying that it is they who are standing in “the congregation of the might.” But if that is true, then where is God identified in this verse? This question leads to our next point.

Two, notice that in the phrase “congregation of the mighty,” the word “mighty” is “el” (0410), which is used in the OT to refer to God himself. In fact, the first occurrence of “el” is in Genesis 14, where it clearly refers to God, not some lesser being or angel.

Genesis 14:18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of **the most high God (0410)**. 14:19 **And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God (0410), possessor of heaven and earth:** 14:20 **And blessed be the most high God (0410), which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand.** And he gave him tithes of all. 14:22 **And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God (0410), the possessor of heaven and earth.**

Since the Hebrew word “el” can certainly be used to refer to God himself, as Genesis 14 demonstrates, perhaps a better, more consistent interpretation of Psalm 82:1 would be that the group known as the elohim “standeth in the congregation of” God, he judges among the group known as the elohim. This would make

perfect sense and it would connect the fact that these elohim are standing in God's presence directly to the subsequent statement that God is judging "among" them.

Three, once we identify that the Hebrew term "el" is most likely a reference to God himself, then the phrase "congregation of the mighty" could and should probably be translated as "congregation of God." But what is the "congregation of God"? Is it an angelic court in heaven? Or, could it refer to the nation of Israel? As it turns out, this phrase "the congregation (05712) of the mighty (0410)" does not appear anywhere else in the Old Testament. This leads us to a choice. Should the use of this phrase in Psalm 82 be interpreted as something new or rarely mentioned? Or, should it be interpreted as a synonym for something familiar and well-known to the Israelites? As it turns out, this phrase "congregation of El" is most likely a parallel to the phrase "congregation of Yahweh," which we do find elsewhere in scripture. Notice in the example below that whenever the phrase "congregation of Yahweh" is used, it is a synonym for "congregation of Israel" or "congregation of the children of Israel," which appears in adjacent verses in the same chapter.

Numbers 27:17 Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that **the congregation (05712) of the LORD (03068)** be not as sheep which have no shepherd.

Numbers 27:20 And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all **the congregation (05712) of the children of Israel** may be obedient.

Numbers 31:16 Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among **the congregation (05712) of the LORD (03068)**.

Numbers 31:12 And they brought the captives, and the prey, and the spoil, unto Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and unto **the congregation (05712) of the children of Israel**, unto the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by Jordan near Jericho.

Joshua 22:16 Thus saith the whole **congregation (05712) of the LORD (03068)**, What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the LORD? 17 Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the **congregation (05712) of the LORD (03068)**.

Joshua 22:12 And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole **congregation (05712) of the children of Israel** gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them.

Joshua 22:18 But that ye must turn away this day from following the LORD? and it will be, seeing ye rebel to day against the LORD, that to morrow he will be wroth with the whole **congregation (05712) of Israel**.

Also notice that when the “congregation of Israel” or “congregation of Yahweh” is mentioned, so are the leaders of that congregation, the “princes” (nasiy, 05387), “elders,” and “heads of thousands.”

Numbers 31:13 And Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and all the **princes (05387) of the congregation (05712)**, went forth to meet them without the camp.

Joshua 22:30 And when Phinehas the priest, and **the princes (05387) of the congregation (05712) and heads of the thousands of Israel** which were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh spake, it pleased them.

Interestingly enough, these terms appear very similar to the ranks of men that Moses set up in Exodus 18 to help him judge between the Israelites and which are referred to just a few chapters later in Exodus 21 and 22 as “elohim.”

Exodus 18:25 And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. **26 And they judged the people at all seasons:** the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but **every small matter they judged themselves.**

Exodus 21:6 Then his master shall bring him unto the **judges (“elohim” 0430)**; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.

Exodus 22:9 For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the **judges (“elohim” 0430)**; and whom the **judges (“elohim” 0430)** shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour.

In conclusion, the concept of the “congregation of God” or “congregation of Yahweh” was a well-established term synonymous with the phrase “congregation of Israel” and often included the leaders of the people of Israel in particular. Consequently, here we can see that the term “congregation of God” in Psalm 82 actually provides further evidence that God is judging among the human leaders of Israel. And, we have also seen that the term “elohim” was established as a term for the judges of Israel whom God had commanded to judge fairly without regard for rich or poor, great or small. In this light, Psalms 82 is simply a depiction of these human judges of Israel standing in the congregation of Israel with God himself judging them. Any assertion that the “elohim” here most reasonably refers to angels is an assertion that is completely foreign to the terminology used to describe the prominent features of the civil government of the nation of Israel.

Number sixteen, there one other odd indication that Psalm 82 is not intended to refer to angels. Notice the expectations that God places on those he is criticizing

throughout this Psalm. In verse 3, God admonishes them “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.” In verse 4, God again admonishes them, “Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.” Here we must ask ourselves a rather obvious question. Do we really believe that God expected and required angels to intervene regularly in the affairs of everyday men throughout Israel, showing up to defend the poor against wicked men like some sort of supernatural angelic heroes? Do we really believe that God’s command to the angels to intervene regularly in human affairs was such a clear, strong mandate that God would kill them for failing to step in and help out a poor person who was being treated unfairly? If we believe that Psalm 82 is referring to angels when it uses the term “elohim,” then we are forced to conclude that God fully expected angels to swoop in and save the day like superman whenever some thug was hassling them. There is no basis in scripture that God expected or commanded angels to intervene in human affairs on such a scale. But what is more reasonable? We have seen numerous places very early on in the Old Testament, particularly in Exodus and Deuteronomy, when God commanded the Israelites who were in positions of power to look out for the poor and deliver them from oppression. The fact that God reiterates that expectation to intervene on behalf of the poor and deliver them in Psalm 82 is yet another proof that the “elohim” in Psalm 82 are men, not angels.

Number seventeen, since we have demonstrated from the evidence that the term “elohim” in Psalm 82 can reasonably refer to human beings, one last question that arises is whether or not Psalm 82 could have a dual reference both to men and to angels. With regard to the existence of a possible parallel between the elders of Israel and angels, it is certainly possible to suggest that the seventy elders of Israel reflect a heavenly court of authority comprised of seventy angels who rule the nations. And there is some evidence in scripture to support this notion.

One, scripture does assert that the nations are ruled by angels, wicked angels in particular. Parts 1-3 of our Prophetic Symbols study collects a myriad of other passages from both testaments asserting in plain terms that the nations are presently ruled by angels, which Ephesians 6:11-12 calls “principalities,” “powers,” “rulers of the darkness of this world” and “spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Two, when Genesis 10:1-32 records nations that descended from Noah’s three sons, the total number of nations listed is seventy.

Three, Deuteronomy 32:8 begins by stating that “the most High divided the nations” and “separated the sons of Adam” and then concludes with the assertion that God “set the bounds” of the nations “according to the number of the children of Israel.” The “division of the nations” and “separation of the sons of Adam” is likely a reference back to the list of nations in Genesis 10 followed subsequently by God dividing the nations at the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9. Likewise, the phrase “the number of the children of Israel” is likely to be a reference to the seventy descendants of Jacob who went down into Egypt according to Exodus 1:1-5.

Four, strangely when the Old Testament was translated into Greek in the second century BC, the Greek translation of Deuteronomy 32:8 does not say that God divided the nations and set their boundaries “according to the number of the children of Israel.” Instead, the Greek translation (commonly called the Septuagint) says God divided the nations “according to the number of the angels of God.” The full text of verse 8 reads, “When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God.” Likewise, even in the original Hebrew, the text of the nearby passage of Deuteronomy 4:19 says concerning the “host of heaven” who the nations “worship” and “serve” that “God hath divided” those hosts of heaven “unto all nations.”

In light of these facts, there seems to be some reasonable basis to conclude that the ancient Jews understood a basic correspondence between the number of nations that descended from Noah’s three sons, the number of male children that descended from Jacob at the time when the people of Israel went into Egypt, the number of elders of Israel at the time of Moses and onward, and the number of angels set in charge of those seventy nations. Consequently, it would not be difficult to conclude that there is a basic correspondence between the number of rulers the Moses established to help rule Israel and the number of angels comprising a court of heavenly authority that rule the division of seventy nations in Genesis 10-11.

But would such a correspondence between earthly Jewish leadership and a heavenly angelic court demonstrate that Psalm 82 teaches that angels can die? The answer is “no.” The angels and the elders of Israel are not the only parallel that can be found in the Old Testament between earthly things and heavenly counterparts. However, it is equally clear that experiences which befall the earthly counterparts should not be taken to indicate the heavenly parallels undergo the same experience. We will now take a few moments to establish these facts.

One, scripture is clear that the tabernacle and the temple were built as earthly copies of heavenly structures. According to Exodus 25:9, Acts 7:44, and Hebrews 8:5, Moses was told to build the tabernacle in accordance with a vision that God shows him. According to 1 Chronicles 28:11-12, the Spirit of God gave likewise David was given a “pattern” to for how to build the earthly temple. Revelation 11:19, 14:17, 15:5, and 16:17 are repeatedly clear that there is a temple in heaven. And moreover, both Galatians 4:25-26, Hebrews 12:22, and Revelation 3:12 and 21:2 are also clear that there is a heavenly city known as New Jerusalem. As we stated a moment ago, correspondence between an earthly court of authority and an angelic court of authority in heaven would not be the first such correspondence in scripture.

Two, and most importantly, scripture contains prophecies that the earthly counterparts would be conquered and destroyed, including the temple and the city of Jerusalem in particular. Old Testament passages like Jeremiah 37:8, 2 Kings 20:14-18, Isaiah 39:3-7, and Micah 3:12 predicted that the Babylonians would

conquer the city of Jerusalem and destroy it. Daniel 9:26 and Jesus himself in Matthew 24:1-2, Mark 13:1-2, and Luke 21:5-6 prophesied that the Romans would lay siege to the city of Jerusalem and destroy the temple. At this point it should be quite clear that any statement that God makes regarding an earthly “copy” should not and need not be presumed to refer to the corresponding heavenly counterparts. Because we already know from Jesus that Psalm 82 refers to the mortal men who lead the Jewish people, to insist that Psalm 82 also includes the corresponding heavenly angelic court would be as ridiculous as reading the prophecies regarding the conquest and destruction of the temple and Jerusalem and insisting that the heavenly temple and the heavenly city likewise had to be conquered and destroyed by the Babylonian and Roman armies. Regardless of any correspondence between the Sanhedrin and a heavenly angelic court, it is unreasonable to apply Psalm 82 to angels rather than simply to the human men who lead the nation of Israel. Once again, the passages function sufficiently solely as a reference to mortal human beings. There is no reason to insist on including angels in Psalm 82 any more than applying prophecies about the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem and earthly Temple to the heavenly Jerusalem and heavenly Temple, particularly when applying Psalm 82 to angels would result in an unprecedented declaration of an otherwise obscure notion pertaining to angels and mortality.

In conclusion, Psalm 82 does not provide any basis for suggesting that angels can die in any way, shape, or form or for overturning Jesus’ explicit statement in Luke 20:35-36 that angels are immortal and do not have the capacity to die.

#8 – Does Ecclesiastes 9 Prove that Dead Humans Are Not Conscious?

During the introduction to this study, we quoted an article from Wikipedia.org, which defined the doctrine known as Christian Mortalism. The Wikipedia article describes Christian Mortalism as “the belief that the human soul is not naturally immortal; and may include the belief that the soul is uncomprehending during the time between bodily death and Judgment Day resurrection.” At this point we have spent some considerable time demonstrating that according to scripture the soul does continue to consciously exist after the death of the body. However, there are a few remaining points that should be addressed with regard to the issue of consciousness in particular.

One of the points that should be addressed centers around language that we find in Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 9:3 This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also **the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.** **4 For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope:** for a living dog is better than a dead lion. **5 For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.** **6 Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any**

thing that is done under the sun. 7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. 8 Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. 9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. 10 **Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.** 11 **I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.** 12 **For man also knoweth not his time:** as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; **so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.**

When it comes to the issue of consciousness after death, the particularly relevant language can be seen in verses 5, 6, and 10. We will examine each verse to determine whether they offer proof that humans are uncomprehending or unconscious between the death of the body and judgment day.

First, verse 5 states that “the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.” There are actually two components of this verse that have potential implications on this topic.

Number one, there is the phrase “the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing.” Was the phrase “the dead known not any thing” intended to convey that the dead are uncomprehending? To put it sharply, the entire question hangs on whether or not the word “know” refers to consciousness.

One, it is important to note the strong sense of futility that is apparent throughout this passage, even with regard to the living. Verse 3 declares that men’s hearts are crazy while they are alive and then they die. Verse 11 declares, “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.” In other words, speed, strength, wisdom, understanding, and skill are all useless. Everything is about chance, even for the living. A man cannot be sure that his skill, speed, strength, intelligence will avail him anything in this life. This sentiment of futility is important as we consider whether the word “know” was intended to refer to consciousness in these verses.

Two, the first half of this statement provides a critical indicator concerning the meaning of “know” in this verse. In the first half we find the phrase “the living know that they shall die,” which is a minimalist assertion about what even the living know. In accordance with the despair expressed throughout the passage, this phrase really conveys the idea that the living only know one thing, namely, that they will die. In fact, the knowledge that the living have is so limited that verse 12 goes on to note that, although the living know that they will die, they do

not even know the time when they will die. Consequently, when the second half of the statement concludes, “the dead know not any thing,” it simply means that one piece of information that the living had is now useless to the dead. When they were alive, they knew at least one thing for certain. They would someday die. But now that they are dead, the only thing they knew for sure has come and gone.

Now they have no information.

Three, Solomon’s sentiment here in the first portion of verse 5 is really similar to Job 8:9, which states, “For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow.” Job 8:9 is a description of the living and how short their lives are. In fact, the verse conveys that our lives are too short that it limits how much we know. Exaggerating to make his point, the speaker declares that the living “know nothing.” But clearly with these words he does not intend to deny that the living are conscious. He simply intends to assert that human beings have limited information. And that is the same thing that Solomon intends to express in Ecclesiastes 9:5.

In this light, we can see that the word “know” in verse 5 was very much intended in reference to knowing specific, useful information with a measure of reasonable certainty. It was not intended to be so broad as to refer to consciousness itself, which is confirmed by the fact that even the living barely know anything at all that is useful according to the first half of the statement. If “knowing nothing” means that the dead are literally not conscious, then this verse would equally teach that the living are literally, barely conscious at all. To expand this statement to include human consciousness rather than knowledge of specific information is completely without warrant from the text.

Number two, the second half of verse 5 says regarding the dead that, “neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.” There are several points to consider here as well.

One, earlier in this study, we discussed another passage in Ecclesiastes, which was filled with language expressing despair and futility, just as chapter 9 is. And during that previous examination of Ecclesiastes we noted how devoid of biblical faith Solomon’s remarks were. For example, we contrasted Solomon’s statements about vanity and uncertainty about the afterlife with Abraham. According to Hebrews 11:17-19, Abraham believed that if a man did not receive God’s promises in this life, God would resurrect him to bestow those promises upon him (Hebrews 11:17-20). In fact, the theme of Hebrews 11:13 describes saints of the Old Testament as having “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.” It is this kind of faith that Hebrews 11:6 describes, saying that “without faith it is impossible to please” God and that those “who cometh to God must believe” that God “is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Yet here in the second half of Ecclesiastes 9:5, Solomon is saying the exact opposite. According to Solomon, no reward awaits the dead and no one remembers them.

Consequently, based on the lack of faith reflected in the words of these passages, it would be hard to conclude that God intended this verse to be understood as a revelation about postmortem existence. The hopelessness, uncertainty, and ignorance suggest that scripture preserved these words from Solomon, not as a correct affirmation of postmortem truths, but as a cautionary example of the despair that sets in when one walks away from the truth revealed in God's Word, as scripture records that Solomon did towards the end of his life (1 Kings 11:4, 9).

Second, verse 6 describes the dead, saying, "their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun." There are two points worth noting here.

Number one, the first half of verse 6 doesn't actually have any implications for consciousness after death. It simply states that whatever intentions people might have had when they were alive, there is nothing they can do to accomplish those intentions after they die. This statement is true regardless of whether the dead are conscious or not.

Number two, the last half of verse 6 continues to express sentiments directly opposite of the saving faith exhibited by Abraham, just as verse 5 did. While Hebrews 11:13-16, 39-40 praise the men who died in faith still seeking a country from heaven, here Solomon declares that the dead do not "have any more a portion for ever in any thing." In other words, the dead will inherit nothing and receive nothing from God according to Solomon. We should also point out that Solomon is not distinguishing between the wicked and the righteous dead. Nor is he speaking only of the wicked dead. Instead, he is speaking about all the dead, wicked and righteous. Consequently, his statement here is fundamentally a denial not just of consciousness after death, but of resurrection for any of the dead. Clearly, the sentiment expressed in these verses is instructive about the despair that befalls men who depart from God's commands as Solomon did, but it would be a mistake to embrace Solomon's statements as a correct view about the dead.

Third, verse 10 states, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." The Hebrew word for "grave" is "sheol" (Strong's Number 07585). The meaning of the words "knowledge" and "wisdom" is perhaps sufficiently clear. But it should be noted that the Hebrew word for "work" is "ma'aseh" (Strong's Number 04639), which means, "deed, work." Likewise, the Hebrew word for "device" here is "cheshbown" (Strong's Number 02808), which means, "reasoning, reckoning." Once again, we have to ask whether Solomon intended these terms to refer to consciousness as a whole or simply to knowledge of particular information and wisdom concerning specific issues. There are two items worth noting here, both of them drawing on context to interpret Solomon's meaning for us.

Number one, the sentiment in verse 10 is very similar to the first half of verse 6. Solomon's point here in verse 10 is that while a man is alive he should devote himself to whatever task or whatever plans he has for his life because once he

dies, he will not be able to carry out his intentions. The phrase “there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave” is about the fact that a man cannot continue to execute his plans for his life on earth after he dies. Nothing about these words inherently invokes any connotations about consciousness after death. They simply convey that our plans for this life will end when we die.

Number two, it is important to keep in mind that this entire passage is filled with a strong sentiment of futility and despair. Although verse 10 is discussing the dead, earlier we discussed verse 11, which makes a very similar point regarding the living. Verse 11 notes that it is “time” and “chance,” which dictate what happens to living men, not their speed, strength, wisdom, or even riches. It is entirely reasonable to conclude that verse 10 is simply expressing similar sentiment regarding the dead. When they die, they will not be able to control their own state of affairs by their deeds, reasoning skills, knowledge, or wisdom any more than the living are able to control what happens to them by their speed, strength, wisdom, or riches. Given that the overall sentiment of this passages is that neither the living nor the dead can control what happens to them, there is no basis to insist that verse 10 is a statement about a lack of consciousness in death.

As we can see, despite the amazing amount of despair in Solomon’s words here in Ecclesiastes 9, there is nothing in his remarks, which is intended to infer that men are not conscious after death.

Before we close this section, we will take a moment to briefly cover two other verses in the Old Testament, which might be used to support the idea that men cease to consciously exist after death.

We will start with Psalm 88, which is a psalm expressing despair that is caused by anxiety about a nearing death.

Psalm 88: 1 O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: 2 Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; 3 For my soul is full of troubles: and **my life draweth nigh unto the grave.** 4 **I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength:** 5 **Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand.** 6 **Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.** 7 Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. 8 **Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.** 9 **Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.** 10 **Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee?** Selah. 11 **Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction?** 12 **Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?** 13 But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. 14 LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? 15 I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am

distracted. 16 Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. 17 They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together. 18 **Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.**

There are several points worth noting about this Psalm.

First, verse 10 asks whether the dead can arise and praise God. Does this statement suggest that dead cannot rise and praise God because they do not consciously exist? The problem with such an interpretation is that this specific verses doesn't really isn't making any claims about whether the dead are conscious. Instead, it is a statement about whether the dead will be resurrected to praise God. Although it is understandable that a person in despair might wonder if there is really reason to hope that the dead will one day rise and praise God, we know from scripture that God will indeed one day raise the dead and the resurrected saints will praise him. But most importantly, this particular verse simply does not contain any details that relate to the question about consciousness after death.

Second, verse 10 and 11 ask whether or not God's wonders will be shown to the dead or whether his lovingkindness and faithfulness will be declared to them. But again, there is nothing in these statements that necessarily even relates to the issue of whether the dead are conscious. Instead, the focus of these statements are "showing" and "declaring." If we think of the plagues of Egypt as examples of God's wonders being shown, those were wonders shown on earth to the living located in Egypt. This verse asks if God performs similar wonders among the dead. But just because God doesn't work wonders among the dead doesn't mean that the dead are unconscious. After all, during the time of Moses, God was only showing wonders in the specific location of Egypt, not north America or the far east or Australia. But who would interpret that to mean that no one consciously existed anywhere other than Egypt where God was showing his wonders? Likewise, the absence of anyone declaring God's love and faithfulness to the dead does not mean that the dead are not conscious. It simply means no one is sent to them to declare things to them. God didn't send Moses or the Israelite prophets to Greece or to Egypt to preach. Yet who would interpret that to mean that no one consciously existed anywhere other than Egypt and Israel where God's messengers declared God's love and faithfulness? Nothing in these statements necessitates any conclusions about a lack of conscious existence after death.

Third, in verse 12 the author mentions the land of forgetfulness. Some might take this to indicate that in death, men are unable to remember anything. In such an interpretation, the inability to remember may be thought of as equivalent to not being conscious. However, the word "forgetfulness" is "neshiyah" (Strong's Number 05388), which occurs only in this one instance. "Neshiyah" comes from the Hebrew verb "nashah" (Strong's Number 05382), which means "to forget, to be forgotten, to cause of forget, allow to be forgotten." As such, it is entirely possible that verse 12 is merely attesting to the fact that after someone dies they aren't thought of by their friends and families. This meaning is also supported by

verse 5, which states that the dead lie in the grave and aren't remember anymore by God. Therefore, in concert with the rest of the psalm, verse 12's reference to the land of forgetfulness should be taken to refer to the place where the dead reside and where they are no longer thought of or remembered by others. In other words, this Psalm depicts friends and family and even God as no longer remembering the dead. It is not an attestation that the dead themselves lack the ability to remember or recall their lives or anything else.

Similarly, we have Psalm 115, which declares in verse 17 that "the dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence."

Psalm 115:1 Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. 2 **Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?** 3 But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. 4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. 5 They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: 6 They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: 7 They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. 8 They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them. 9 O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. 10 O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. 11 Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. 12 The LORD hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron. 13 He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great. 14 The LORD shall increase you more and more, you and your children. 15 Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth. 16 The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men. 17 **The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence.** 18 **But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD.**

First, let's consider verse 17, which says, "the dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." If the dead don't praise God or if the dead remain silent, does that prove they do not consciously exist? To answer this question, we should note that this entire psalm is written to express the author's intent is to contrast the people of God with the heathen nations. Verse 1 begins, "not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." Who does the author mean by "us?" Verse 2 explains when it says, "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?" The "us" is clearly in contrast to the heathen. Verses 4-8 then describe the idols that the heathen worship. Verse 9 then declares, "O Israel, trust thou in the LORD." Verse 10 likewise states, "O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD." Verse 12 continues, "he will bless us; he will bless the house of Isarel; he will bless the house of Aaron." This psalm is obviously intended as an appeal from one Israelite to his fellow Israelites to trust in God and to glorify God, not themselves in contrast to the heathen who worship helpless idols. Consequently, when we arrive at the phrase "we will bless the LORD from this time and for evermore" in verse 18, we know that the "we" is again a reference to the worship that Israel offers to

God as a nation. In simple terms, at the heart of this psalm is contrast between faithful Israelites with the wicked and disobedient.

Second, it is in the midst of this contrast between Israel and the heathen nations that verse 17 states, “The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence.” This is not a statement declaring the dead to be unable to praise God. It’s not about the state or condition of the dead at all. Actually, the emphasis is reversed. The sentiment here is a warning to the living that those who do not praise the Lord will perish, but God will preserve Israel because Israel blesses and worships God. The sentiment is similar to Genesis 20:3 in which God comes to King Abimelech in a dream and says, “Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man’s wife.” In fact, in both Psalm 115:17 and Genesis 20:3 the Hebrew word for “dead” is the word “muwth” (Strong’s Number 04191). However, in Genesis 20:3, it is clear that the king is still alive. He is merely being told he is “as good as dead” as a warning for a certain sinful action. The same is true here in Psalm 115. The psalmist is warning his faithful Israelites that those who fail to worship God are as good as dead.

Third, it is important to take a few moments to focus on the phrase “neither any that go down into silence” in verse 17. We know that this is related to the phrase “the dead praise not the LORD” at the beginning of the verse. But does this phrase indicate that death is a state of silence, particularly because you no longer consciously exist? It is important to note that although the English translation of this phrase is comprised of seven words, the Hebrew text is comprised of only two words, both of which are represented below by the numbers in parenthesis.

Psalm 115:17 ... neither any that go down (03381) into silence (01745).

The entire phrase “neither any that go down” is the single Hebrew word “yarad” (Strong’s Number 03381), which means, “to go down, descend.” The phrase “into silence” is the single Hebrew word “duwmah” (Strong’s Number 01745), which the Online Bible Hebrew Lexicon defines simply as, “silence.” There are two options for how to interpret this term.

Number one, BibleGateway.org provides the translation of Psalm 115 as it is rendered in the Complete Jewish Bible. Verse 17 reads, “The dead can’t praise ADONAI, not those who sink down into silence.” The point here is not that this particular is definitive or preferable. Instead, it simply illustrates that “duwmah” here can be translated simply to convey the idea of someone withdrawing into a state of being silent. But this raises an obvious connection. Why would the psalmist describe these individuals in verse 17 as silent? Because they are not praising God. In other words, “silence” might not be a reference to the state of the dead. It might simply be another phrase referring to the fact that certain people weren’t praising God. Instead, they were remaining silent. In this case, verse 17 would be saying, “those who don’t praise God, who descend into silence instead, they are as good as dead.” Once again, verse 17 would not be a description of what happens after death but a warning that living Israelites who remain silent instead of praising God will ultimately perish.

Number two, the Septuagint translation reads, “The dead shall not praise thee, O Lord, nor any that go down to Hades.” Notice that “duwmah” is translated into “Hades” (Strong’s Number 86), which is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew term “Sheol.” In short, this verse is saying, “Those that don’t praise the Lord are dead. Those who don’t praise the Lord go down into Sheol.”

Here another question arises. Does the fact that the term “the silence” is used to refer to the place of the dead prove that the dead don’t speak because they don’t consciously exist? One, even if this phrase means to indicate that the dead do not speak, there is more than one theoretical explanation for why they do not speak. Perhaps they are not allowed to speak. Perhaps they exist consciously but are otherwise unable or unwilling to speak based on their circumstances. The important fact is that the text neither explains nor dictates a conclusion regarding why the dead don’t speak. Elsewhere in this study, we will examine passages like Jude 1:6, 13 and 2 Peter 2:4, 17, which describe Hell as a place of blackness and darkness, absent of light. Yet these are descriptions of the environment of Hell. The absence of sound is just as easily a description of the environment. In other words, there is simply nothing in the use of the Hebrew term “duwmah,” which demands the conclusion that it is referring to the dead themselves, as opposed to their location. Consequently, it is impossible to use this term “duwmah” to prove that the dead do not consciously exist.

Ultimately, when examined in their context, neither Ecclesiastes 9, nor Psalm 88, nor Psalm 115 provide support for the conclusion that the dead cease to consciously exist.

#9 – Does the Analogy of Sleep Prove that Dead Humans Are Not Conscious?

Concerning the issue of consciousness between the death of the body and judgment day, another issue that needs to be addressed is the analogy to sleep. Although the Wikipedia article on Christian Mortalism describes the term “soul sleep” as a “pejorative term,” it is still necessary to address whether or not the analogy of sleep offers any proof that the dead are uncomprehending or unconscious.

Numerous passages in scripture use sleep as a metaphorical reference to the death of the body, including 2 Chronicles 32:33, Psalms 13:3, Matthew 27:52, John 11:11-14, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, 1 Corinthians 15:6, 18, 51-52, and Revelation 14:13.

There are two reasons why analogy to sleep does not prove the dead are unconscious.

First, arguing the dead are unconscious based on an analogy to sleep misidentifies what the analogy is intending to compare about death and sleep. The analogy of sleep is not intended to convey that sleep and death are alike regarding consciousness. To the contrary, the traits that sleep and death have in common is

the basic idea of the rest of the body. The body does not labor during sleep. Nor does it labor during death. A great example of this fact can be seen in Revelation 14:13, which declares, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours.” John 11:11-14 is similar. In verse 11, Jesus remarks that “Lazarus sleepeth.” Because Lazarus was sick, Jesus’ followers thought that Jesus meant his was resting. Verse 13 explains, “Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.” Here we see that when the Jewish disciples thought of sleep, they primarily conceived of it as a period of rest for the body. Since the analogy primarily denotes the lack of work done by the body, it is simply extraneous and unwarranted to suggest the analogy necessarily conveys similarities regarding the state of the mind.

Second, even if the analogy of sleep was intended to convey similarities between sleep and death regarding the state of the mind, the fact of the matter is that the mind is not unconscious or uncomprehending during sleep.

Number one, loud noises, temperature changes, being doused with water, smelling salts, and bright lights are all capable of waking the mind from sleep. How would this be possible if the mind were utterly unaware or uncomprehending of the external environment of the body during sleep? The fact is that even during sleep, the mind still remains tuned in to the physical surroundings of the body on some level. We might casually call it an “unconscious level,” but to the extent that “consciousness” means “awareness,” that is largely a misnomer. A more accurate description would be that during sleep the body remains “subconsciously aware” or even “less aware” of the body’s surroundings.

Below are excerpts on “sleep” from Britannica.com and Wikipedia.org. Both excerpts confirm that the mind retains an altered form of consciousness during sleep and also retains sensitivity to external, physical stimuli (although to a lesser degree than when awake). The excerpts also define a decrease in the body’s physical activity as one of the defining characteristics of sleep.

“Sleep – Sleep is a naturally recurring state of mind characterized by altered consciousness, relatively inhibited sensory activity, inhibition of nearly all voluntary muscles, and reduced interactions with surroundings. It is distinguished from wakefulness by a decreased ability to react to stimuli, but is more easily reversed than the state of hibernation or of being comatose. Mammalian sleep occurs in repeating periods, in which the body alternates between two highly distinct modes known as non-REM and REM sleep. REM stands for "rapid eye movement" but involves many other aspects including virtual paralysis of the body.”

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleep>

“Sleep - a normal, reversible, recurrent state of reduced responsiveness to external stimulation that is accompanied by complex and predictable changes in physiology...The relaxation of the skeletal muscles in this posture and its implication of a more passive role toward the environment are symptomatic

of sleep...Indicative of the decreased sensitivity of the human sleeper to his external environment are the typical closed eyelids (or the functional blindness associated with sleep while the eyes are open) and the presleep activities that include seeking surroundings characterized by reduced or monotonous levels of sensory stimulation. Three additional criteria—reversibility, recurrence, and spontaneity—distinguish sleep from that of other states. For example, compared with that of hibernation or coma, sleep is more easily reversible.” – <http://www.britannica.com/science/sleep>

In summary, when we are asleep we are still aware of the body’s surroundings, but our consciousness is focused elsewhere during sleep. And that brings us to our next point.

Number two, during sleep our mind is far from uncomprehending. To the contrary, we dream. Our dreams sometimes process various experiences or feelings we are having, even incorporating memories from our past experiences in the physical world. The mind is active during sleep and processing. In fact, bad dreams can even wake us up. Moreover, sometimes it is possible to even be aware that you are dreaming while in the middle of a dream or even to consciously choose to wake up from a particularly scary part of a dream. In addition, we sometimes even remember our dreams after we wake up, which would not at all be possible if the mind was completely uncomprehending or utterly lacked consciousness during sleep. And, of course, the bible itself makes numerous references to the dreams that men have during sleep. To assert that the mind is uncomprehending or utterly unconscious during sleep is simply an inaccurate oversimplification. The reality is that our consciousness is active but instead of being focused on the physical world surrounding our body, our consciousness is focused on a different aspect of our existence. So, even if the analogy between sleep and death did entail a comparison regarding the state of the mind, it would only necessarily imply that when we are dead our consciousness is no longer focused on the physical world surrounding the body but on a different aspect of our existence.

Below are excerpts on “dream” from Britannica.com and Wikipedia.org. Both excerpts once again confirm that the mind retains an altered form of consciousness during sleep. They also attest that the mind is comprehending and processing during sleep, to the commonness of dreaming as a basic characteristic of sleep, and to the ability to remember some dreams.

“Dream - Dreams are successions of images, ideas, emotions, and sensations that occur usually involuntarily in the mind during certain stages of sleep...Dreams mainly occur in the rapid-eye movement (REM) stage of sleep—when brain activity is high and resembles that of being awake. REM sleep is revealed by continuous movements of the eyes during sleep. At times, dreams may occur during other stages of sleep. However, these dreams tend to be much less vivid or memorable. The length of a dream can vary; they may last for a few seconds, or approximately 20–30 minutes. People are more likely to remember the dream if they are awakened during the REM phase. The average person

has three to five dreams per night, and some may have up to seven; however, most dreams are immediately or quickly forgotten.” – <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dream>

“Dream, Sleep Experience - Dream, a hallucinatory experience that occurs during sleep. Dreaming, a common and distinctive phenomenon of sleep...In cases of so-called lucid dreaming, subjects report having been aware that they were dreaming as the dream was taking place. Most lucid dreamers also report having been able to direct or manipulate the dream’s content to some extent. The nature of lucid dreaming and even the coherence of the notion have been disputed, however. Some researchers have suggested that it is a unique state of consciousness that combines elements of wakefulness and ordinary (nonlucid) dreaming. **The typical dream report is of visual imagery...It is unusual, however, to hear of dreams without some auditory characteristics.** Emotionally bland dreams are common. When **dreams do contain emotional overtones, fear and anxiety** are most commonly mentioned, followed by **anger; pleasant feelings are most often those of friendliness...**Despite their generally representational nature, dreams seem somehow odd or strange. Perhaps this is related to discontinuities in time and purpose. **One may suddenly find oneself in a familiar auditorium viewing a fencing match rather than hearing a lecture and abruptly in the “next scene” walking beside a swimming pool.** These sudden transitions contribute a feeling of strangeness, which is **enhanced by the dreamer’s inability to recall the bulk of his dreams clearly,** giving them a dim, mysterious quality.” – <http://www.britannica.com/topic/dream-sleep-experience>

Consequently, although the scripture certainly employs sleep as an analogy for death, it is overreaching to insist that analogy conveys that humans are unconscious or uncomprehending between the death of the body and judgment day. Therefore, the analogy to sleep provides no basis whatsoever for overturning scripture’s straightforward depictions that the dead remain conscious or, by extension, annihilation.