

## Bible Cosmology 303B:

### Immortality, Consciousness, Hell, Universal Salvation



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#### *Addendum 1: The Early Church Writers Regarding Eternal Existence in Fires of Hell*

Below we have included passages from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus on the topic of the eternal existence of wicked men and angels in the fires of Hell. Although their writings are not authoritative or infallible, these two men reflect very early views of the church from the first two hundred years of Christian history. (Additional information about these men can be found in our study titled, “Early Church Confirmation Rubric.”) As the quotes below will demonstrate, their views on this topic are consistent with our findings in this study. However, two comments from Justin Martyr are particularly worth highlighting. Justin states that the devil and all the angels and men who followed him “would be punished for an endless duration” as “Christ foretold.” And perhaps even more striking is his commentary on Isaiah, in which Justin writes, “we know from Isaiah that the members of those who have transgressed shall be consumed by the worm and unquenchable fire, remaining immortal; so that they become a spectacle to all flesh.”

#### **Justin Martyr –**

##### **THE FIRST APOLOGY OF JUSTIN**

CHAP. XXVIII. For among us **the prince of the wicked spirits is called the serpent, and Satan, and the devil**, as you can learn by looking into our writings. **And that he would be sent into the fire with his host, and the men who follow him, and would be punished for an endless duration, Christ foretold.**

##### CHAP. XX.--HEATHEN ANALOGIES TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

...we affirm that **the souls of the wicked, being endowed with sensation even after death, are punished**, and that those of the good being delivered from punishment spend a blessed existence...

##### CHAP. LVII.--AND CAUSE PERSECUTION.

Nor can the devils persuade men that there will be no conflagration for the punishment of the wicked; as they were unable to effect that Christ should be hidden after He came. But this only can they effect, that they who live irrationally, and were brought up licentiously in wicked customs, and are prejudiced in their own opinions, should kill and hate us; whom we not only do

not hate, but, as is proved, pity and endeavour to lead to repentance. For we do not fear death, since it is acknowledged we must surely die; and there is nothing new, but all things continue the same in this administration of things; and if satiety overtakes those who enjoy even one year of these things, they ought to give heed to our doctrines, that they may live eternally free both from suffering and from want. **But if they believe that there is nothing after death, but declare that those who die pass into insensibility, then they become our benefactors when they set us free from sufferings and necessities of this life,** and prove themselves to be wicked, and inhuman, and bigoted. For they kill us with no intention of delivering us, but cut us off that we may be deprived of life and pleasure.

#### THE SECOND APOLOGY OF JUSTIN

Chapter VIII. And it is nothing wonderful; **if the devils** are proved to cause those to be much worse hated who live not according to a part only of the word diffused [among men] but by the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Word, which is Christ. **And they, having been shut up in eternal fire, shall suffer their just punishment and penalty.** For if they are even now overthrown by men through the name of Jesus Christ, **this is an intimation of the punishment in eternal fire which is to be inflicted on themselves and those who serve them. I or thus did both all the prophets foretell, and our own teacher Jesus teach.**

Dialogue of Justin – PHILOSOPHER AND MARTYR, WITH TRYPHO, A JEW  
CHAP. XLV. **Since those who did that which is universally, naturally, and eternally good are pleasing to God, they shall be saved through this Christ in the resurrection equally with those righteous men who were before them, namely Noah, and Enoch, and Jacob, and whoever else there be, along with those who have known(8) this Christ, Son of God, who was before the morning star and the moon, and submitted to become incarnate, and be born of this virgin of the family of David, in order that, by this dispensation, the serpent that sinned from the beginning, and the angels like him, may be destroyed, and that death may be condemned, and for ever quit, at the second coming of the Christ Himself, those who believe in Him and live acceptably,--and be no more: when some are sent to be punished unceasingly into judgment and condemnation of fire; but others shall exist in freedom from suffering, from corruption, and from grief, and in immortality."**

CHAP. CXVII. But these filthy garments, which have been put by you on all who have become Christians by the name of Jesus, God shows shall be taken away from us, **when He shall raise all men from the dead, and appoint some to be incorruptible, immortal, and free from sorrow in the everlasting and imperishable kingdom; but shall send others away to the everlasting punishment of fire.**

CHAP. CXXX. **And by these words He declares that we, the nations, rejoice with His people,--to wit, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the prophets, and, in short, all of that people who are well-pleasing to God, according to**

what has been already agreed on between us. **But we will not receive it of all your nation; since we know from Isaiah(4) that the members of those who have transgressed shall be consumed by the worm and unquenchable fire, remaining immortal; so that they become a spectacle to all flesh.** But in addition to these, I wish, sir," said I, "**to add some other passages from the very words of Moses, from which you may understand that God has from of old dispersed all men according to their kindreds and tongues; and out of all kindreds has taken to Himself your kindred, a useless, disobedient, and faithless generation; and has shown that those who were selected out of every nation have obeyed His will through Christ,--whom He calls also Jacob, and names Israel,--and these, then, as I mentioned fully previously, must be Jacob and Israel. For when He says, 'Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people,' He allots the same inheritance to them, and does not call them by the same name;(1) but when He says that they as Gentiles rejoice with His people, He calls them Gentiles to reproach you. For even as you provoked Him to anger by your idolatry, so also He has deemed those who were idolaters worthy of knowing His will, and of inheriting His inheritance.**

**Irenaeus –**

AGAINST HERESIES, BOOK I

CHAP. XXVIII. 2. **...thus also the punishment of those who do not believe the Word of God, and despise His advent, and are turned away backwards, is increased; being not merely temporal, but rendered also eternal. For to whomsoever the Lord shall say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire,"(6) these shall be damned for ever; and to whomsoever He shall say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you for eternity,"(7) these do receive the kingdom for ever, and make constant advance in it.**

Against Heresies, Book II

CHAP. XXXIV.--SOULS CAN BE RECOGNISED IN THE SEPARATE STATE, AND ARE IMMORTAL ALTHOUGH THEY ONCE HAD A BEGINNING.

1. **The Lord has taught with very great fulness, that souls not only continue to exist, not by passing from body to body, but that they preserve the same form(2) [in their separate state] as the body had to which they were adapted, and that they remember the deeds which they did in this state of existence, and from which they have now ceased,--in that narrative which is recorded respecting the rich man and that Lazarus who found repose in the bosom of Abraham. In this account He states(3) that Dives knew Lazarus after death, and Abraham in like manner, and that each one of these persons continued in his own proper position, and that [Dives] requested Lazarus to be sent to relieve him-- [Lazarus], on whom he did not [formerly] bestow even the crumbs [which fell] from his table. [He tells us] also of the answer given by Abraham, who was acquainted not only with what respected himself, but Dives also, and who enjoined those who did not wish to come into that place of torment to believe Moses and the prophets, and to receive(4) the preaching of Him who was(5) to**

rise again from the dead. By these things, then, **it is plainly declared that souls continue to exist that they do not pass from body to body, that they possess the form of a man, so that they may be recognised, and retain the memory of things in this world;** moreover, that the gift of prophecy was possessed by Abraham, and that each class of souls] receives a habitation such as it has deserved, even before the judgment.

2. **But if any persons at this point maintain that those souls, which only began a little while ago to exist, cannot endure for any length of time;** but that they must, on the one hand, either be unborn, in order that they may be immortal, or if they have had a beginning in the way of generation, **that they should die with the body itself--let them learn that** God alone, who is Lord of all, is without beginning and without end, being truly and for ever the same, and always remaining the same unchangeable Being. **But all things which proceed from Him, whatsoever have been made, and are made, do indeed receive their own beginning of generation, and on this account are inferior to Him who formed them, inasmuch as they are not unbegotten. Nevertheless they endure, and extend their existence into a long series of ages in accordance with the will of God their Creator; so that He grants them that they should be thus formed at the beginning, and that they should so exist afterwards.**

3. For as the heaven which is above us, the firmament, the sun, the moon, the rest of the stars, and all their grandeur, although they had no previous existence, were called into being, and continue throughout a long course of time according to the will of God, so also any one who thinks thus respecting souls and spirits, and, in fact, respecting all created things, will not by any means go far astray, inasmuch as all things that have been made had a beginning when they were formed, but endure as long as God wills that they should have an existence and continuance. The prophetic Spirit bears testimony to these opinions, when He declares, "For He spake, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created: He hath established them for ever, yea, forever and ever."(6) And again, He thus speaks respecting the salvation of man: "He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest him length of days for ever and ever;"(7) indicating that it is the Father of all who imparts continuance for ever and ever on those who are saved. For life does not arise from us, nor from our own nature; but it is bestowed according to the grace of God. And therefore he who shall preserve the life bestowed upon him, and give thanks to Him who imparted it, shall receive also length of days for ever and ever. But he who shall reject it, and prove himself ungrateful to his Maker, inasmuch as he has been created, and has not recognised Him who bestowed [the gift upon him], deprives himself of [the privilege of] continuance for ever and ever.(1) And, for this reason, the Lord declared to those who showed themselves ungrateful towards Him: "If ye have not been faithful in that which is little, who will give you that which is great?"(2) indicating that those who, in this brief temporal life, have shown themselves ungrateful to Him who bestowed it, shall justly not receive from Him length of days for ever and ever.

4. **But as the animal body is certainly not itself the soul, yet has fellowship with the soul as long as God pleases; so the soul herself is not life,(3) but partakes in that life bestowed upon her by God.** Wherefore also the prophetic word declares of the first-formed man, "He became a living soul,"(4) teaching us that by the participation of life the soul became alive; so that the soul, and the life

which it possesses, must be understood as being separate existences. **When God therefore bestows life and perpetual duration, it comes to pass that even souls which did not previously exist should henceforth endure [for ever], since God has both willed that they should exist, and should continue in existence.** For the will of God ought to govern and rule in all things, while all other things give way to Him, are in subjection, and devoted to His service. **Thus far, then, let me speak concerning the creation and the continued duration of the soul.**

Against Heresies, Book V,

CHAP. XXVII.--THE FUTURE JUDGMENT BY CHRIST. COMMUNION WITH AND SEPARATION FROM THE DIVINE BEING. THE ETERNAL PUNISHMENT OF UNBELIEVERS.

2. **And to as many as continue in their love towards God, does He grant communion with Him. But communion with God is life and light, and the enjoyment of all the benefits which He has in store. But on as many as, according to their own choice, depart from God. He inflicts that separation from Himself which they have chosen of their own accord. But separation from God is death, and separation from light is darkness; and separation from God consists in the loss of all the benefits which He has in store. Those, therefore, who cast away by apostasy these forementioned things, being in fact destitute of all good, do experience every kind of punishment.** God, however, does not punish them immediately of Himself, but that punishment falls upon them because they are destitute of all that is good. **Now, good things are eternal and without end with God, and therefore the loss of these is also eternal and never-ending.**

**Tertullian**

Apology

Chapter XLVIII,

**When, therefore, the boundary and limit, that millennial interspace, has been passed, when even the outward fashion of the world itself-which has been spread like a veil over the eternal economy, equally a thing of time-passes away, then the whole human race shall be raised again, to have its dues meted out according as it has merited in the period of good or evil, and thereafter to have these paid out through the immeasurable ages of eternity. Therefore after this there is neither death nor repeated resurrections, but we shall be the same that we are now, and still unchanged-the servants of God, ever with God, clothed upon with the proper substance of eternity; but the profane, and all who are not true worshippers of God, in like manner shall be consigned to the punishment of everlasting fire-that fire which, from its very nature indeed, directly ministers to their incorruptibility.**

Ad Nationes

Book I, Chapter XIX. -If Christians and the Heathen Thus Resemble Each Other, There is Great Difference in the Grounds and Nature of Their Apparently Similar Conduct.

**By the award of the judgment, we say that the wicked will have to spend an eternity in endless fire, the pious and innocent in a region of bliss.**

De Testimonio animae,  
Chapter IV.

Even now, as the matter refers to thy opinion on a point the more closely belonging to thee, in so far as it bears on thy personal well-being, **we maintain that after life has passed away thou still remainest in existence, and lookest forward to a day of judgment, and according to thy deserts art assigned to misery or bliss, in either way of it for ever;** that, to be capable of this, thy former substance must needs return to thee, the matter and the memory of the very same human being: for neither good nor evil couldst thou feel if thou wert not endowed again with that sensitive bodily organization, and there would be no grounds for judgment without the presentation of the very person to whom the sufferings of judgment were due. **That Christian view,** though much nobler than the Pythagorean, as **it does not transfer thee into beasts;** though more complete than the Platonic, since it **endows thee again with a body;** though more worthy of honour than the Epicurean, as **it preserves thee from annihilation,-yet,** because of the name connected with it, it is held to be nothing but vanity and folly, and, as it is called, a mere presumption. But we are not ashamed of ourselves if our presumption is found to have thy support. Well, in the first place, when thou speakest of one who is dead, thou sayest of him, "Poor man"-poor, surely, not because he has been taken from the good of life, but because he has been given over to punishment and condemnation. But at another time thou speakest of the dead as free from trouble; thou professest to think life a burden, and death a blessing. Thou art wont, too, to speak of the dead as in repose,<sup>7</sup> when, returning to their graves beyond the city gates <sup>8</sup> with food and dainties, thou art wont to present offerings to thyself rather than to them; or when, coming from the graves again, thou art staggering under the effects of wine. But I want thy sober opinion. Thou callest the dead poor when thou speakest thine own thoughts, when thou art at a distance from them. For at their feast, where in a sense they are present and recline along with thee, it would never do to cast reproach upon their lot. Thou canst not but adulate those for whose sake thou art feasting it so sumptuously. Dost thou then speak of him as poor who feels not? How happens it that thou cursest, as one capable of suffering from thy curse, the man whose memory comes back on thee with the sting in it of some old injury? It is thine imprecation that "the earth may lie heavy on him," and that there may be trouble "to his ashes in the realm of the dead." In like manner, in thy kindly feeling to him to whom thou art indebted for favours, thou entrest "repose to his bones and ashes," and thy desire is that among the dead he may "have pleasant rest." **If thou hast no power of suffering after death, if no feeling remains,-if, in a word, severance from the body is the annihilation of thee, what makes thee lie against thyself, as if thou couldst suffer in another state? Nay, why dost thou fear death at all? There is nothing after death to be feared, if there is nothing to be felt.**

On the Resurrection of the Flesh

Chapter XXXIV.-Christ Plainly Testifies to the Resurrection of the Entire Man. Not in His Soul Only, Without the Body.

**We, however, so understand the soul's immortality as to believe it "lost," not in the sense of destruction, but of punishment, that is, in hell. And if this is the case, then it is not the soul which salvation will affect, since it is "safe" already in its own nature by reason of its immortality, but rather the flesh, which, as all readily allow, is subject to destruction. Else, if the soul is also perishable (in this sense), in other words, not immortal-the condition of the flesh-then this same condition ought in all fairness to benefit the flesh also, as being similarly mortal and perishable, since that which perishes the Lord purposes to save.**

On the Resurrection of the Flesh, Chapter XXXV.-Explanation of What is Meant by the Body, Which is to Be Raised Again. Not the Corporeality of the Soul. **But He also teaches us, that "He is rather to be feared, who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell," that is, the Lord alone; "not those which kill the body, but are not able to hurt the soul,"** 229 that is to say, all bureau powers. **Here, then, we have a recognition of the natural immortality of the soul, which cannot be killed by men; and of the mortality of the body, which may be killed: whence we learn that the resurrection of the dead is a resurrection of the flesh; for unless it were raised again, it would be impossible for the flesh to be "killed in hell."** But as a question may be here captiously raised about the meaning of "the body" (or "the flesh"), I will at once state that I understand by the human body nothing else than that fabric of the flesh which, whatever be the kind of material of which it is constructed and modified, is seen and handled, and sometimes indeed killed, by men. In like manner, I should not admit that anything but cement and stones and bricks form the body of a wall. If any one imports into our argument some body of a subtle, secret nature, he must show, disclose, and prove to me that identical body is the very one which was slain by human violence, and then (I will grant) that it is of such a body that (our scripture) speaks. If, again, the body or corporeal nature of the soul 230 is cast in my teeth, it will only be an idle subterfuge! **For since both substances are set before us (in this passage, which affirms) that "body and soul" are destroyed in hell, a distinction is obviously made between the two; and we are left to understand the body to be that which is tangible to us, that is, the flesh, which, as it will be destroyed in hell-since it did not "rather fear" being destroyed by God-so also will it be restored to life eternal, since it preferred to be killed by human hands. If, therefore, any one shall violently suppose that the destruction of the soul and the flesh in hell amounts to a final annihilation of the two substances, and not to their penal treatment (as if they were to be consumed, not punished), let him recollect that the fire of hell is eternal-expressly announced as an everlasting penalty; and let him then admit that it is from this circumstance that this never-ending "killing" is more formidable than a merely human murder, which is only temporal. He will then come to the conclusion that substances must be eternal, when their penal "killing" is an eternal one. Since, then, the body after the resurrection has to be killed by God in hell along with the soul, we surely have sufficient information in this fact respecting both the issues which await it, namely the resurrection of the**

**flesh, and its eternal "killing." Else it would be most absurd if the flesh should be raised up and destined to "the killing in hell," in order to be put an end to, when it might suffer such an annihilation (more directly) if not raised again at all. A pretty paradox, 231 to be sure, that an essence must be refitted with life, in order that it may receive that annihilation which has already in fact accrued to it! But Christ, whilst confirming us in the selfsame hope, adds the example of "the sparrows"-how that "not one of them falls to the ground without the will of God." 232 He says this, that you may believe that the flesh which has been consigned to the ground, is able in like manner to rise again by the will of the same God. For although this is not allowed to the sparrows, yet "we are of more value than many sparrows,"233 for the very reason that, when fallen, we rise again. He affirms, lastly, that "the very hairs of our head are all numbered,"234 and in the affirmation He of course includes the promise of their safety; for if they were to be lost, where would be the use of having taken such a numerical care of them? Surely the only use lies (in this truth): "That of all which the Father hath given to me, I should lose none,"235 -not even a hair, as also not an eye nor a tooth. **And yet whence shall come that "weeping and gnashing of teeth," 236 if not from eyes and teeth?-even at that time when the body shall be slain in hell, and thrust out into that outer darkness which shall be the suitable torment of the eyes. He also who shall not be clothed at the marriage feast in the raiment of good works, will have to be "bound hand and foot,"-as being, of course, raised in his body. So, again, the very reclining at the feast in the kingdom of God, and sitting on Christ's thrones, and standing at last on His right hand and His left, and eating of the tree of life: what are all these but most certain proofs of a bodily appointment and destination?****

*Addendum 2: The Term "Son of God" and Its Relationship to Angels, Rebirth, and Resurrection*

Our study of immortality has delved into a discussion of the term "spirit" and its association with immortality, incorruptibility, and the terms "sons of God." We see these associations when comparing 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 and Romans 8:11-23. In addition, there is also a relationship between the fact that resurrected men are deemed the children of God in passages like Romans 8, angels are at times in scripture identified as the sons of God, and Jesus' statement in Luke 20:35-36 that the resurrection makes men into children of God. In addition, the fact that the properties of immortality and incorruptibility seem to be shared by all those who are identified with the title, "children of God" is also related to verses like 1 Corinthians 15:28 and Ephesians 1:23, which describe how eventually God will be "all in all," when all things are made immortal. And, of course, these are just a sample of some of the passages from our study that touch on the confluence of all these terms in one way or another.

Consequently, because the term "sons of God" is so closely associated with these other factors, we thought it would be good to include a more thorough analysis of scripture's application of that title. (Incidentally, this topic is also addressed in our



“Born Again” study and our “Trinity” study, in which we discuss in depth what the scripture means when it refers to the saints as “sons of God,” particularly in connection with Christ as the “Son of God.”)

First, let’s start with the term, “son of God.” In scripture, this term is used primarily with two meanings. Jewish Christian apologist and linguistic scholar Dr. Michael Brown identifies both meanings in volume two of work “Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus.” As Dr. Brown explains, the title “son of God” relates to God’s promise that David’s son would reign after him. In addition, the phrase “son of God” conveys sonship and parentage in the same sense that the term “sons of men” would infer sonship from human parents.

“What about the sonship of Israel’s king? There are a number of important Scripture passages to consider. I previously quoted 2 Samuel 7:14, in which the Lord tells David that he will establish a dynasty for him, treating the future ruling sons of David as his own sons. Speaking of Solomon he said, “I will be his father, and he will be my son.” In Psalm 2:7, the king (David? Solomon? A later descendent of David?) says, “I will tell of the decree. The LORD said to me, ‘You are My son: this day have I begotten you.’” When did the LORD utter those words? They were probably spoken by a prophet at the time of the king’s coronation, when the descendant of David became recognized as a “son” of God, and they may have become a regular feature of that momentous ceremony, whenever a new king would begin his reign. But there’s something more. Note carefully those final words “today I have begotten you” (‘ani hayyom yeliditika; yalid is the standard Hebrew verb used for a woman giving birth to a baby or a man fathering a child).” – Dr. Michael Brown, Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus (Volume Two), p. 39

In the New Testament, authors apply the title, “Son of God” to Jesus in both in terms of his conception and birth from Mary as well as his kingly appointment.

In scripture, the first meaning of the phrase “son of God” deals with parentage. In scripture, there are places when the phrase “son of God” denotes that God Himself directly creates something without an intervening agent, such as human parents or grandparents, etc. Luke 3:38 is an example in which “son of God” is used in this ontological sense. Here Luke traces Jesus’ ancestry back to Adam. Each person in that ancestral chain is referred to as the son of a human father, except for Adam. Instead of a human father, Adam is referred to as “the son of God.” Luke 1:31-35 also uses “sonship” to refer to God’s direct involvement in the creation of a human being. When the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will conceive a son who will inherit the kingdom of David, Mary asks how this could happen since she had never “known a man” in a reproductive sense. Then Gabriel answers Mary’s question and explains how she will conceive, saying, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” In short, God’s direct involvement in the conception is at least one reason that Jesus is called the “Son of God.” Like Adam, Jesus (the second Adam) was a man who was created by God directly. (However, unlike

Adam, Jesus was an incarnation of God, specifically the Person of the Word of God who became flesh.)

We again see the aspect of “sonship” in relation to parentage in passages like John 1 and 3. John 1:12-13 states, “as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Inherent to this verse is the idea that human beings are not “sons of God” simply and automatically when we are born or when we are conceived in our mother’s wombs. To the contrary, the entire statement is framed as a contrast between merely being children from human parents and becoming “sons of God” through the work of Jesus Christ. We might call God our “great-great-great...grandfather” going all the way back to Adam, as we see in Luke 3. But except for Adam (and Jesus), human beings are not “sons of God” specifically because God is not directly involved in the generation of our individual being. Instead, we are generated by human reproduction.

When we are born again by God’s spirit, then God is directly involved in the fashioning (or refashioning) of our individual being and we, therefore, become “sons of God.” We learn more about this process of being born again in John 3 where Jesus explains it to Nicodemus, one of the religious leaders of Israel.

**John 3:3** Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, **Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.** 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? **can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?** 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, **Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.** 6 **That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, **Ye must be born again.** 8 **The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.**

There are quite a few details in this passage that relate to the general subject of resurrection and immortality.

First, just like John 1:12-13 contrast human physical birth from our human parents with the rebirth that makes us children of God, here also we see Nicodemus and Jesus contrast birth from our human mothers with being born of the Spirit of God himself. This again affirms that human beings are not God’s children at our natural births. Instead, we are simply the children of our human parents.

Second, verse 6 and 8 inform us that process of rebirth occurs by means of by an endowment of the substance of spirit dispensed by the Holy Spirit of God. It is also important to notice that here in Jesus’ own teachings, the term “spirit” is used in two ways in verse 6. It is used to refer to the Person of the Holy Spirit, but it is also used more generally to refer to spirit as a substance right alongside mortal

flesh in verse 6 and analogous to wind in verse 8. The use of the term “spirit” in reference to a substance that is dispensed by the Person of the Spirit of God is echoed later in Romans 8 and also in 1 Corinthians 15, which we will look at later.

Third, notice that Jesus begins by declaring that a man “cannot see the kingdom of God” unless that “man be born again.” Jesus repeats this sentiment again in verse 5 and more briefly in verse 7. Although Jesus does not use the term resurrection in this passage in John 3, this phrasing from verse 3 will be echoed later by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 when Paul discusses the resurrection. In fact, Paul’s application of Jesus’ teaching here to the resurrection tells us that in Paul’s understanding, the resurrection and the rebirth overlap one another and are directly interconnected, if not largely interchangeable.

And fourth, the language of passages like John 3 is similar to Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 15. 1 Corinthians 15 talks extensively about the saints being resurrected just as Jesus was resurrected, about the resurrected body being a “spiritual body,” about the spiritual body being immortal, and about the fact that we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven without such a spiritual body.

**1 Corinthians 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: 43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: 44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. 46 Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. 47 The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. 48 As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. 50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? 56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.**

Romans 8 also ties the resurrection of the saints directly to the resurrection of Jesus and attributes such resurrection to the work of the Holy Spirit. It goes on to

relate this resurrection to the saints being children of God through adoption and that this adoption will be complete when our bodies are redeemed. The passage also defines the redemption of our bodies in terms of deliverance from corruption, using similar language to 1 Corinthians 15 where corruption is conceptually paired with mortality. The chapter closes by describing the resurrection and the transformation of our bodies to an immortal condition as a process of being conformed to Jesus Christ so that he is the firstborn among many brothers.

**Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.** 12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. 13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. 15 **For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption,** whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 16 **The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.** 18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with **the glory which shall be revealed in us.** 19 **For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.** 20 **For the creature was made subject to vanity (3153), not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,** 21 **Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption (5356) into the glorious liberty of the children of God.** 22 For we know that **the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.** 23 **And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.** 24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? 25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. 26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate **to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.** 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, **them he also glorified.**

The similarities between John 3, Romans 8, and 1 Corinthians 15 demonstrate that Paul is simply expounding on Jesus' own teaching. And these similarities also confirm that becoming a son of God is related to the rebirth, which is a process completed by the transformation of our bodies through resurrection.

The first indications of this overlap between the rebirth and resurrection can be found in Jesus' own words in Luke 20. In verse 36 of Luke 20, Jesus describes the resurrected, saying that they "and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." These words themselves denote that the resurrection is what fully makes us "children of God." As we will shortly see, Romans 8 also confirms that it is through the resurrection that we ultimately and completely become children of God in the fullest sense of the term. This relationship between the resurrection and becoming children of God is also reflected in passages like Acts 13 and Romans 1. In Acts 13:33-34 and Romans 1:4, we even see the term "son of God" applied to Jesus himself as a direct reference to his resurrection from the dead, which of course transformed his mortal body into a glorious, immortal body. And this makes perfect sense. After all, we have already seen Jesus' resurrection associated with the phrase "firstborn from the dead" in Colossians 1:18.

So, whether referring to the creation of a being or the refashioning of a being through the resurrection, whenever God is directly involved with no intervening parents, the phrase "son of God" is used. In the case of Christ specifically, God was directly responsible for the conception of Jesus' human nature in the womb of Mary and also directly involved in transforming Jesus' mortal body through the resurrection. Consequently, God's generative role as "Father" is consistently maintained at both the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ.

(It should also be noted that scripture describes Christians as "children of God" even from the moment we begin to believe the Gospel, not just as the point in time when we are resurrected. In a larger sense, scripture compares the moment we believe in God's word and repent with the moment of conception whereas the resurrection and transformation of our bodies are likened to birth. So, we begin to be God's children as soon as we receive God's word and repent, but that generative process is considered complete only at the resurrection and transformation of our bodies. More information on this is outlined in our "Born Again" study.)

It is also very important to note that in the ontological sense, the term "sons of God" is applied to angels as well. In fact, not only is scripture's first use of the term "sons of God" in reference to angels, but it is the earliest term used for the beings commonly known as "angels." Genesis 6 uses the term "sons of God" to describe those angels who came down and had children with the daughters of men. And it is also used in Job (1:6, 2:1), a book considered to be one of the oldest in the bible, where we see the angels coming to present themselves before God. Job 38:7 uses this term "sons of God" again when referring to beings that are present before the creation of man on Day 6 of Genesis 1. (We discuss these issues in more detail in our Born Against study, our Spiritual Warfare study, in our main Cosmology study, specifically in the section titled, "Humans and Angels: How Similar Are We?" and in a separate study titled, "Was the Israelite Conquest of Canaan in Large Part to Eradicate Giant Lineages?")

These scriptural facts can be summarized in this way. When human beings are resurrected, which completes the process of our rebirth, we become direct offspring of God since God is at that point directly involved in the generation of our individual being. Just as angels are “sons of God” due to the fact that God is directly involved in their creation, humans become “sons of God” as well through God’s direct regeneration of our bodies in the resurrection. No wonder Jesus says in Luke 22:35-36 that “they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.” And in the ontological sense, Jesus is the Son of God both through God’s direct involvement in the incarnation in the womb of Mary and also through God’s direct involvement in Jesus’ resurrection, which transforms his mortal human body and makes it equal to the immortal body of an angel.

Now we’ll turn our attention to scripture’s use of the second meaning of the phrase “son of God,” which deals with promotion or ordination to the status of high priest and king of God’s people, particularly the Davidic king. There are numerous examples of this, including Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22, 2 Peter 1:16-18, Matthew 17:1-5, Mark 9:2-7, Luke 9:27-36, Luke 1:32-33, Hebrews 1:5, and Hebrews 5:5.

We have already examined the use of the phrase “son of God” in Luke 1 when discussing the meaning of that title in verse 35 with regard to God’s involvement in Christ’s incarnation in Mary’s womb. However, verses 32-33 also use the same title, “Son of God” in reference to Jesus inheriting the David’s kingly throne over the nation of Israel. Verses 32-33 declares, “he shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” Consequently, in this single, short series of 5 verses from Luke 1 we actually see the title “Son of God” with both meanings, including creation or procreation as well as ordination to kingly office.

Matthew 3:13-17 and Luke 3:21-22 record Jesus’ anointing as priest and king by John the Baptist who acted as his forerunner in a scene akin to the anointing of Old Testament priests and kings. Moses anointed his brother Aaron as high priest in Levitical 8:1-2, 12, and 30. Elijah anointed Jehu to be king in 1 Kings 19:13-16. Samuel the prophet anointed Saul and David as king in 1 Samuel 9:27-10:1 and 1 Samuel 16:11-13. Nathan the prophet anointed David’s son Solomon as king in 1 Kings 1:34. These Old Testament precedents are precisely why Jesus insisted on being baptized by John the Baptist in Matthew 3 and Luke 3 despite John’s initial objection. When Jesus told John, “thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness,” he was referring to his need to be anointed as high priest and king by a prophet in the same manner that God had set forth in the Old Testament. And it is at this moment that Matthew 3:17 and Luke 3:22 record God the Father declaring that Jesus is his Son.

It is not surprising that we see God once again publically declaring Jesus to be the “Son of God” during the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17:1-5, Mark 9:2-7,

Luke 9:27-36. In 2 Peter 1:16-18, the Apostle Peter relates being an eyewitness to Jesus' transfiguration with Jesus' coming in power. He also describes himself as an eyewitness to Jesus' majesty because he saw the transfiguration. Clearly, Peter understood the transfiguration as a preview of the glorified Christ coming to reign. This was a reasonable conclusion on Peter's part given the fact that Jesus had told his apostles of a coming day "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" (Matthew 25:32, Matthew 24:30, Mark 13:26, Luke 21:27). The transfiguration is a preview of Jesus' reign on the throne of David, which he is promised in Luke 1:32-33. (Incidentally it should also be noted, of course, that in addition to previewing Jesus' resurrected body and future return to reign, the transfiguration of Jesus also demonstrated his true divine nature to his apostles.)

Interestingly, Hebrews 1 affirms Peter's association of the transfiguration to the kingly majesty of Jesus. In verse 2, it describes how God the Father has "appointed" Jesus as "heir of all things," which is another reference to his inheritance of David's throne (as well as the promise to Abraham that he would be heir of the world in Romans 4:13 and Galatians 3:16-18). Verse 3 then goes on to describe Jesus as "the brightness of God's glory," which is likely a reference back to the exceeding brightness exhibited by Christ before his apostles during the transfiguration. Verse 3 concludes by saying that after Jesus "purged our sins," he "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." The same Greek word for "majesty" (Strong's Number 3172) is used here as we find in 2 Peter 1:16-18. However, in this case, Hebrews is referring to God the Father's throne in heaven. We know a throne is in view because the text refers to Jesus' sitting down on the right hand side. Consequently, the use of "majesty" in Hebrews confirms that Peter's use of the same word was intended in reference to Jesus' kingly authority and throne. (It should be noted that 2 Peter 1 is referring to the throne of David, not the throne of God the Father in heaven. For a distinction between the throne of David and the throne of God in heaven, see our study entitled, "A Throne of His Own" at the end of our Preterism study.)

It is in this context describing Jesus' kingly majesty that Hebrews 1 declares Jesus to be the Son of God in verse 5. Verse 5 is actually a quotation of Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14. Psalm 2:7 declares, "the LORD hath said unto me, 'Thou art my Son; this day I have begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.'" This is what verse 2 had in mind when it described Jesus as the "heir of all things." Again, we see Jesus' kingly authority in view in the Psalm. In 2 Samuel 7:8-14, God tells King David, "I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son." Here again, we can see Jesus' inheritance of the throne of David is clearly in view when Jesus is pronounced to be the Son of God here in verse 5.

Hebrews 5 quotes Psalm 2:7 again, but this time it refers not to his appointment as king, but to his appointment as high priest. Verses 5-6 states that "Christ glorified

not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Lastly, it might also be noted that just like the first meaning of the phrase “son of God,” this second meaning of the phrase “son of God” is also applicable generally to the saints through Jesus Christ. And the New Testament authors understood this fact.

Once again, the doctrine can be traced back to Jesus in Luke 19. The parable starts in verse 12, where Jesus says, “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.” The nobleman represents Jesus Christ, particularly the departure between his two advents. His return as king is subsequently represented in verse 15, at which time he rewards his servants as depicted in verses 16-19. The first faithful servant is rewarded with “authority over ten cities.” The second faithful servant is reward with authority “over five cities.”

Given the fact that New Testament authors took Jesus eventual earthly, political reign literally, it is not surprising that they took the reward of his servants in these parables literally as well. In Revelation 1:6 and 5:10, the saints declare that Jesus “hath made us kings and priests unto God.” Chapter 5:10 even concludes “and we shall reign on the earth.” 1 Peter 2:9 describes the redeemed as “a royal priesthood.” In Romans 5:17, Paul declares that “they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.” In 1 Corinthians 6:2, Paul rhetorically asks, “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” 2 Timothy 2:12 assures, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” And Revelation 20 couples the beginning of our reign with Christ with the resurrection of the saints. Verse 6 declares, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” And, of course, we find God promising that the saints will rule the nations in famous passages such as Daniel 7:13-14, 18, 22, and 27. Verse 27 concludes by saying, “And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”

Consequently, the two meanings of the term “son of God” are well established in scripture, both as a reference to ontology on some occasions and as a reference to being appointed high priest or king. Moreover, both meanings are applied to redeemed men through the sacrifice and generosity of Jesus Christ. We become “children of God” through the resurrection Jesus’ provides through his own resurrection and we become kings to rule with him when he comes in his kingdom and appoints us as his deputies. From these considerations, four additional and very important scriptural facts emerge.

First, we must take a moment to consider what Hebrews 1:5 says with regard to angels. Verse 5 applies the term “son of God” to Christ in a way that explicitly



excludes angels. Specifically, the author poses a rhetorical question, “unto which of the angles said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?” Does this mean that authors of scripture did not consider angels to be “sons of God” in an ontological sense? Number one, if we interpret verse 5 as a denial of the ontological status of the angels, then we are directly contradicting Genesis 6, Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7. Number two, it is clear that Hebrews 1 is not invoking the title “Son of God” ontologically but instead as a reference to appointment to the office of High Priest and king. We have seen this explicitly in the context of Hebrews 1. Consequently, Hebrews 1:5 is intended solely as a denial that God had ever appointed an angel to be High Priest or King over Israel. It is a mistake to infer that Hebrews is using the term ontologically and, subsequently, to interpret Hebrews as a denial that angels were seen as “sons of God” in the understanding of the Jewish people. (Again, more information regarding the ancient Jewish and Christian understanding on this issue can be found in our Spiritual Warfare Study Part 3 as well as in other studies already listed above.)

Second, although Hebrews rightly informs us that God never approvingly appointed the angels to be kings over his people, it should also be noted that both the Old and the New Testament clearly teach that wicked angels do indeed currently rule the world. In Deuteronomy 32:9, God takes the people of Israel as his portion while Deuteronomy 4:16-19 states that the rest of the nations serve the false gods. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, the devils is depicted as “the god of this world.” We’ve also already looked at Hebrews 2:14, which declares openly that the devil has the authority of death over men. And parts 1-3 of our Prophetic Symbols study collect a myriad of other passages from both testaments asserting in plain terms that the nations are presently ruled by what Ephesians 6:11-12 calls “principalities,” “powers,” “rulers of the darkness of this world” and “spiritual wickedness in high places.” No doubt the saints will one day replace these wicked angelic rulers. But Hebrews 1:5 provides on strong distinction. While these angels may rule the nations, it was without the same kind of approving and joyful ordination that was given by God to the incarnate Word. In fact, we already know the story of how the wicked angels obtained power of men. Rather than being ordained to rule as a reward for their righteousness and faithfulness, they obtained authority over mankind by tricking mankind to sin, which is a far cry from the lauded appointment given willingly to Christ by God in Hebrews 1:5. So, while the rule of the saints is parallel to the rule of the angels, Hebrews 1:5 remains perfectly accurate when it attests that God never ordained these angels to be high priests and kings. The second meaning of the term “sons of God” does not apply to the wicked angels, even though the ontological meaning does.

(Incidentally, here there is perhaps an intentionally engineered similarity between the people of Israel and the ruling angels. The New Testament is clear that when it came to God’s approval and their inheritance of the earth, some Israelites rested entirely and erroneously on their biological descent from Abraham. We see this in passages such as Matthew 3:7-10, Luke 3:7-9, John 8:31-44, Romans 2:10-12, Romans 9:6-8, and Galatians 2:15-16. Being a “natural” son does not, on its own, equate to receiving God’s approval or exaltation. Similarly, wicked angels may be

sons of God because they were created directly by God, yet this on its own did not automatically entail any right to inherit and rule earth. Even for those who are already a “son” ontologically, the right to rule is conferred by God only to those who he deems worthy. So, while angels are referred to as “sons of God” in an ontological sense in the Old Testament, that fact alone does not mean they have been approvingly appointed with the right to rule that Jesus has received. They may have finagled the position of rulers over men, but they did not receive it in rightful fashion by God’s approving ordination.)

Third, the title “Son of God” is only applied to Jesus Christ starting with his incarnation and the events of his first advent. These events include his incarnation in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:35, Romans 1:3), his baptism by John the Baptist which both anointed him as king and priest and marked the beginning of his ministry (Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22, 2 Peter 1:16-18), the transfiguration in which Peter, James, and John previewed Jesus’ post-resurrection immortal state and majestic return (Matthew 17:1-5, Mark 9:2-7, Luke 9:27-36) and his resurrection from the dead (Acts 13:33-34, Romans 1:4). All of these particular applications refer to the period starting at his incarnation and in reference to his advent as a human being. Moreover, the New Testament also confirms that even references in the Old Testament (such as Psalm 2:7, 2 Samuel 7:12-14) are clearly applied to Christ only in a prophetic manner looking forward to the events of his incarnation. This is demonstrated by the quotation of this Psalm in Acts 13:33-34, Hebrews 1:5, and Hebrews 5:5. Although often overlooked by Christians, the fact is that the title “Son of God” is never used in scripture to describe the Person of the Word of God prior to his incarnation. And it certainly does not refer to his relationship with the Person of God the Father prior to the incarnation, as if there was some progenitor-progeny or abstract generative relationship between them within the Godhead. Instead, when the Person of the Word of God became a man, he took on a human nature, which by definition is a created thing. Only at that time forward has there been a part of him that has been part of God’s creation. Therefore, at the incarnation (and only from the incarnation onward) does the Word of God become the “Son of God.” Prior to the incarnation, the Word was not a “son of God.” He was simply and utterly God.

Fourth, when these considerations are pulled together and combined with the information we’ve already seen in this current study, a complete picture emerges. God created man as a mortal and ordained for male and female to marry, which in turn facilitates the reproduction of offspring and, in turn, ensures the perpetuation of humans on earth even as earlier generations of parents sin and die. But God created angels as immortal and as such he did not ordain for them to marry and have children. Their immortality precludes the need for them to procreate and as such, God did not institute marriage or procreation for them. Consequently, angels don’t have “mom and dad” angel parents. Instead, each angel is directly created by God and, therefore, is a “son of God.” When the Person of the Word of God became a man, he took on a human nature, which by definition is a created thing. Therefore, at the incarnation (and at the incarnation only) the Word of God became the “Son of God” because through that wondrous event there was now a part of the Word that had been created by God, namely his humanity. Then,

through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God introduced immortal resurrection to the human experience, which is the means by which he will make mortal men immortal. In this manner, Jesus became the firstborn of the dead and the first among mortal creation to be made immortal. When the saints are resurrected, God's power will transform their bodies to be like the angels and like the resurrected Christ, so that they will also be "sons of God" and adopted "brothers" to Christ. Of course, this does not mean we become God in any sense. We are brothers only with regard to Jesus' human nature, which itself was ultimately transformed to an immortal condition through his resurrection.

It must be noted that any alternate model regarding the meaning of the term "sons of God" must necessarily reconcile all of these terms and concepts that are so closely associated with one another in scripture. And on this challenge, all other models inevitably fall short, either having to ignore or contradict particular passages and details. Models that reject the identification of angels with the title "sons of God" in Genesis 6 and Job are forced to ignore ancient Jewish and Christian testimony. They also have to ignore Jesus' explicit declaration that resurrected humans become equal to angels in the resurrection at which point they also become sons of God. There are models that attempt to apply the term "Son of God" as a title uniquely describing the Word of God and his relationship to the Godhead prior to the incarnation. But these models must ignore the scriptural details strictly associating that title with Jesus' first advent, including especially Luke 1:35. There are also models which assert that all people are God's children from the moment of our conception in our mother's wombs. But these models must ignore passages such as John 1:12-13. Ultimately, the only model that can accommodate all of these factors is one in which the Word first becomes the "Son of God" during his incarnation, in which angels are sons of God, in which Adam is a son of God, and in which the rest of mankind are not sons of God by means of physical birth but only through the completion of rebirth through the resurrection.

### *Addendum 3: Mark 8 and Losing One's Soul*

When we examine Mark 8, we should consider whether the phrase "lose his own soul" refers to the utter cessation of existence.

**Mark 8:34** And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, **Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 35 For whosoever will save his life (5590) shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life (5590) for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. 36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul (5590)? 37 Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul (5590)?**

It is true that throughout Mark 8:34-37 Jesus uses the Greek word "psuche" (Strong's Number 5590), which is the common New Testament word for "soul" and which corresponds to the common Hebrew word for "soul," which is

“nephesh” (Strong’s Number 05315). However, there are several points to keep in mind.

First, the “psuche” also translates to “life.” Definition 1b of the Online Bible Greek Lexicon is “life.” Here it would be helpful to look at some examples when “psuche” refers to the life of the body, not the existence of the soul.

Number one, Matthew 2:19-20 is the first occurrence of “psuche” in the New Testament. The passage records that when King Herod died an angel appeared to Joseph and told him that it was safe for Joseph to take Jesus and Mary back to “the land of Israel” because “they are dead which sought the young child’s life.” The Greek word for “life” in Matthew 2:20 is also “psuche.” The “child” in this instance is Jesus himself. Of course, the angel certainly knew that there was never any threat that Herod could end the existence of Jesus’ soul. Consequently, the natural conclusion here is that the angel is using the term “soul” to refer to the possibility of Herod putting Jesus to bodily death. Herod wasn’t seeking Jesus’ soul. Herod was seeking to kill Jesus’ body, which leads to our next point.

Number two, just eight chapters later in Matthew 10:28, Jesus himself explains that men can “kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.” The word “soul” in Matthew 10 is also “psuche.” There are two interesting considerations that emerge from viewing Matthew 2 and Matthew 10 side by side. One, Matthew 10 confirms that the threat posed by Herod was never to Jesus’ existence, but to his bodily life. Herod was never capable of ending Jesus’ “soul” or existence as a being. Two, Matthew 2 and 10 once again demonstrate that, just like its Hebrew counterpart “nephesh,” the term “psuche” is quite flexible. Notice that the angel’s use of “psuche” in Matthew 2 refers to the life of the body specifically, since Herod could not kill Jesus’ “soul” according to Matthew 10. On the other hand, Jesus’ use of “psuche” in Matthew 10 actually distinguishes between killing the “psuche” and killing the body. So, here we have two instances in the same book where “psuche” first refers to the life of the body alone and then where “psuche” refers to human existence even after the death of the body. In fact, this flexible New Testament usage of “psuche” is perfectly consistent with our analysis from the Old Testament in which we concluded that “psuche” is an overarching term that refers to an individual living being and can at times refer to different components that comprise that living being, such as the body or alternately the spirit.

Number three, for another example in which “psuche” is used to refer to bodily life, we turn to John 10. In verse 11, Jesus refers to himself as the “good shepherd” and declares, “the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” Again, the word “life” is “psuche.” Jesus is clearly not saying that he will give up his existence for the sheep. When Jesus died on the cross, he did not cease to exist. Rather, here Jesus is remarking that he will give up his bodily life for the sheep when he dies on the cross. In other words, here again “psuche” is necessarily shown to refer to bodily life only in direct distinction from existence as a whole.

Number four, just a few verses later in John 10:17, Jesus explains, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.” The word “life” here is “psuche.” But once again, here we see Jesus referring to the impending death of his body on the cross, not the end of his existence.

Number five, in John 12 Jesus again refers to his impending death on the cross. In Verse 23, he says, “The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified.” In verse 24, he continues and explains, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” Clearly, Jesus is discussing the forthcoming death of his body on the cross. And immediately on the heels of verse 24, verse 25 continues with Jesus declaring, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” Once again, the word for “life” in verse 25 is “psuche.” What is interesting about John 12 is not only that it begins with a reference to Jesus’ bodily death on the cross, but also that it concludes in verse 25 with a reference to a man “losing” his “psuche,” which is very similar to Jesus’ statement in Mark 8.

As it turns out, these three examples from John 10 and 12 are actually particularly relevant to Mark 8 specifically because Mark 8 also begins with a reference to Jesus’ death on the cross. In verse 34, Jesus tells his disciples, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” Consequently, here we can see that Jesus begins this set of verses by referring to his own bodily death on the cross as a model for the attitude his followers should have. But more specifically, this introductory remark by Jesus in verse 34 of Mark 8 informs us that the word “psuche” refers to losing bodily life, just as Jesus’ body was put to death on the cross. Simply put, contextual analysis of Mark 8 and linguistic comparison to other uses of “psuche” provide sound reason to conclude that Mark 8 is not referring to the losing one’s “soul” in the sense of losing one’s existence, but rather merely to being put to bodily death.

Number six, it must be pointed out that even if Mark 8:35-36 did intend to convey losing your soul, not simply bodily life, the phrase “lose the soul” still wouldn’t clearly convey annihilation. In this passage, the concept of “losing one’s soul” is contrasted with “gaining the world.” And verse 37 concludes with the question about what a man would give in exchange for his soul. We must keep these statements in mind within their historical context.

One, going back to the time of the Exodus, the Israelites lived in a culture in which indentured servitude was part of their social landscape. Wikipedia’s article on the “Jewish Views on Slavery” states, “slavery in antiquity among the Israelites was closer to what would later be called indentured servitude... Hebrew slaves, in contrast to non-Hebrew slaves, became slaves either because of extreme poverty (in which case they could sell themselves to an Israelite owner) or because of inability to pay a debt.” With regard to Jesus’ language in Mark 8, perhaps the most relevant aspect from Wikipedia is its description that in ancient Israel if a man fell on hard times and went into debt, one way to get out of debt was to become another man’s servant. In such a social context and in a passage where Jesus is employing material wealth as his primary metaphor, the idea of

“losing one’s soul” would be likely to conjure up images of indentured servitude in which your soul comes under the authority of another man. And in a literary context in which Jesus refers to “gaining the world” as your possession, it would be natural to think that the contrast was one in which your soul becomes the possession of someone else.

Two, the Jewish Encyclopedia’s article on “Slaves and Slavery” has a section titled, “Self-Redemption Possible,” which explains that a “servant is entitled to redeem himself by paying his master a portion of the original purchase price proportionate to the number of years still unexpired; thus if he was bought for ninety shekels for a term of six years, the master must allow him to go upon the payment of fifteen shekels for every year still remaining of this term.” Jesus’ closing questions in Mark 8 must be viewed directly in this light. When Jesus asks, “what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” and “what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” we should certainly be thinking about a Jewish indentured servant who has gained enough money to buy himself out of servitude but does not. What does it profit him to gain so much if he won’t buy back his own soul from servitude? What would a man pay to redeem his own soul from such service?

In short, it is difficult to insist that “losing one’s soul” would have conveyed annihilation in the minds’ of Jesus’ Jewish audience when it very easily would have related to their familiar concept of indentured servitude, which involved losing one’s freedom and coming under someone else’s control. Here we must also remember Jesus’ parable concerning sin in Matthew 18:30, in which a servant is “cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.” In fact, the parable concludes in verses 34-35, which states, “his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” Here we notice that payment of debt is at the heart of why the servants in this parable are put into prison. And the parable concludes by saying imprisonment and “torment” are what God will likewise do to those who do not repent of sin. Clearly, Mark 8’s discussion of “losing one’s soul” is not only reflective of the Jewish concept of indentured servitude, but it is completely consistent with imprisonment and torment for the payment of debts, which symbolize sin.

Ultimately, whether we interpret Mark 8 in terms of the loss of bodily life only or in reference to the loss of the soul, there is simply nothing about the passage that directly suggests annihilation.

#### *Addendum 4: Job, Psalms, Malachi, and 1 Thessalonians – Jesus’ Return vs. Final Judgment*

A variety of scripture passages are available which describe God “destroying” the wicked or causing the wicked to perish. We have placed a series of such passages below as a sample.

**Job 4:8** Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. **9 By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed.**

**Job 34:14** If he set his heart upon man, **if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath;** **15 All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.**

**Psalm 37:18** The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever. **19** They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. **20** But **the wicked shall perish,** and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: **they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.**

**Psalm 49:12** Nevertheless man being in honour **abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.** **13** This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. Selah. **14 Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them;** and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty **shall consume in the grave from their dwelling.** **15** But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah. **16** Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; **17 For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him.** **18** Though **while he lived he blessed his soul:** and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself. **19 He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light.** **20** Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, **is like the beasts that perish.**

**Psalm 68: 1** Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: **let them also that hate him flee before him.** **2 As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.** **3** But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice.

**Psalm 73:26** My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. **27** For, lo, **they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.**

**Psalm 104:29** Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: **thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.**

**Malachi 4:1** For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. **2** But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. **3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be**

**ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.**

There are several points worth noting about these passages in general.

First, it is possible to summarize the themes in these passages into three basic categories. Some of these passages, particularly Psalms, comment on the ordinary death of the wicked over the course of human history. Job 34 seems to contain an “if” statement at the start, which suggests that it is merely a speculative pondering of God’s capacity, if he wanted to, to kill all mankind by gathering or summoning the spirit he has imparted to them. However, Job says nothing about whether or not the spirit would retain its individual human consciousness and identity when it is removed from its body and gathered back to God. Finally other passages, such as Malachi (as well as 1 Thessalonians, which is discussed below) describe the specific historic event of the Lord’s return in which he will kill the wicked. Arguably, Job 4 and 34 could likewise describe a mass execution of the wicked that God will perform at some point in history, however, it would need to be demonstrated whether or not the mass execution in Job is referring to some other point in time besides Jesus’ return as described in Malachi and 1 Thessalonians (below). Ultimately, it is noteworthy that none of these passages have content that would allow us to identify them with the setting of final judgment specifically. Of course, this does not rule out the possibility that the wicked utterly cease to exist the moment that their bodies die, long before final judgment. But, it does prevent any of these passages from being used to demonstrate that the wicked will be annihilated after their resurrection at the time of the final judgment.

Second and most importantly, it is important to remember that there is at least the possibility to conceptually distinguish between God putting the wicked to bodily death in contrast to God causing the wicked to utterly cease to exist, body, soul, and spirit. Consequently, it is necessary to demonstrate that the vocabulary of these passages necessarily refers to the destruction of the entire human being from existence rather than just the destruction or perishing of the body alone. Unfortunately, simply citing the verses or quoting the vocabulary does little to demonstrate whether the “destruction” refers to the destruction of the bodies of the wicked or their entire being. While it might be tempting to assume that “destruction” must be “total” destruction and entail everything about the wicked, the Jewish belief that when the wicked die they descend consciously into Sheol argues against making such an assumption. The fact that in Luke 16 Jesus’ himself depicts the wicked dead as consciously alive in Sheol (without their bodies) only further cements this obstacle. Ultimately, citation of lexical meanings cannot justify ignoring or overturning other historical and biblical evidence that the wicked dead survive in Hell after their bodies die but before their resurrection at the final judgment. All of the evidence, including the vocabulary, has to be reconciled in order to have a reliable model.

Third, we have placed 2 Thessalonians and Psalm 146 below in order to give special attention to particular arguments related to the details in those two passages.



**2 Thessalonians 1:7** And to you who are troubled rest with us, **when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: 9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; 10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints,** and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

There are two points worth noting regarding 2 Thessalonians in particular.

First, here a question arises concerning the meaning of the phrase “everlasting destruction” in verse 9. Does this mean “never-ending cessation of existence?” Or, does it mean being perpetually subjected to forces of decomposition and decay without ever actually ceasing to exist? In the main body of our study, we focus particularly on the concept of Hell as a place where the forces of destruction continually act to restrain the strength and vitality of immortal beings, such as angels. In that sense, they are subject to destruction forever without ever ceasing to exist. We argue that the same is true for the wicked when they are resurrected, particularly since in Matthew 25:41, Jesus explains that wicked men will be sent to a place of fiery punishment that is designed for wicked angels. Ultimately, it must be noted that the mere occurrence of the phrase “everlasting destruction” does not prove one particular definition or another.

Second, notice that 2 Thessalonians 1:7 tells us specifically that Paul is describing an event that occurs when Jesus returns, not a thousand years later at the final judgment. If the wicked permanently cease to exist in this destructive event at the return of Christ Jesus, then that would have to be reconciled with Revelation 20. Verses 4-7 of Revelation 20 describe the setting at the beginning of Jesus’ thousand-year reign, right after his return to the earth. And in the midst of the setting at the start of the millennium, verse 5 declares that “the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.” Keep in mind that this statement about the resurrection of “the rest of the dead” occurs right after Jesus’ fiery return in which the wicked were destroyed from the earth, an event which is depicted at the end of Revelation 19. In addition, Revelation 20:15 clearly identifies that the wicked will be among those raised at the end of the millennium. In John 5:28-29 Jesus himself confirms that all the dead, including all the wicked that have died, will one day be resurrected. Consequently, if 2 Thessalonians means that the wicked permanently cease to exist when Jesus returns, then that would contradict Revelation 20:4-7, 15, which declares that the wicked dead who have died prior to Jesus’ return and millennial reign will be resurrected at the end of his reign. In short, the wicked who are destroyed at Jesus’ return will not permanently cease to exist at the time, but will be resurrected at the end of Jesus’ thousand-year reign. Therefore, the phrase “everlasting destruction” in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 cannot refer to “permanent non-existence.” It can, however, refer to their placement in a location where they will consciously experience the forces of corruption for all time without end.

Ultimately, this passage from 2 Thessalonians reminds us that no passage of scripture can be soundly interpreted and no doctrinal model can be reliably established unless it reconciles with the rest of scripture.

This brings us to Psalm 146, which is a passage we have already examined earlier in our study. In particular, we already addressed the phrase ““his thoughts perish” in verse 4. However, we will return to it now in order to address some additional points.

**Psalm 146:**1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. 2 **While I live (02416) will I praise (01984) (8762) the LORD (03068): I will sing praises (02167) (8762) unto my God (0430) while I have any being.** 3 Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. 4 His breath goeth forth, **he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.**

There are two points worth noting regarding Psalm 146 in particular.

First, in the quotation of Psalm 146:2 above, the Strong’s Concordance numbers have been included for every word in the verse. As can be seen, there is no Strong’s Concordance number behind any word in the phrase “while I have any being.” In other words, this phrase appears only in the English and there is no corresponding language in the Hebrew. It is an interpolation from translators. There is no underlying Hebrew text for this phrase.

Second, Psalm 146 is available at <http://biblehub.com/interlinear/psalms/146.htm>, which provides an interlinear display of the Hebrew and English text. In this interlinear version, the phrase “while I have any being” is translated from a Hebrew word denoted by Strong’s Concordance number 5750. The Online Bible Hebrew Lexicon defines this word as “a going round, continuance” or “still, yet, again.” Consequently, this phrase could alternately be translated as “while I continue” or “while I go around” in the sense of continuing on alive on earth, in which case it would not have any connotations that the “being” of man utterly ceases when the body dies.

These factors make it difficult to argue that Psalm 146 supports the idea of annihilation of individual human existence.

In conclusion, none of the verses discussed in this section provide any details, which would prove the wicked are annihilated, neither when their bodies die, nor when they are placed in the fires of Hell at the final judgment, nor by God withdrawing his spirit from them after being placed in Hell for some duration starting at the final judgment, especially after the vocabulary and details of these passages are reconciled with other scripture.

*Addendum 5: Comparing Psalm 82 to Old Testament Prophetic Criticism*

One important element to consider regarding Psalm 82 is historical context, particularly with a focus on parallel language in other passages in the later portion of the Old Testament. Specifically, there are numerous passages in which God expresses his anger at the leaders of his people for their injustice and their oppression of the poor. To be clear, these passages are directed at the men who rule in the nation of Israel, not angels. This forces the reader of Psalm 82 to a choice. Which would have been more natural to the Israelites in the Old Testament, to interpret Psalm 82 as yet another specific example of God's criticism of the human leaders of Israel regarding their mishandling of justice and the poor, or to interpret Psalm 82 as a rather atypical moment when God decides to turn his attention to criticizing angels regarding injustice and the poor?

Now, let's examine the common elements that Psalms 82 shares with these other Old Testament passages.

**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.

As we begin, it's important to note the following elements in Psalm 82. Number one, verse 1 refers to God standing in judgment of a certain group, possibly angels or perhaps men. Number two, in verse 2-3 God criticizes this group for two sins, judging unjustly and afflicting the poor and needy. Number three, in verse 5 God describes those he is criticizing as devoid of proper knowledge and understanding and "in darkness." Number four, in verse 7 God decrees death as a punishment for these two sins. Number five, in verse 7 we also find a reference to "the princes." Number six, over the course of this passage, God very much intends to humble those he is criticizing. God is aware that they might think of themselves as "gods" and as "mighty" but making sure they know that despite these lofty titles, they will "die like men." It's difficult not to see this as a criticism that they are arrogantly overestimating themselves.

And number seven, it should be noted that verse 8 already provides us with one possible indication regarding who God is judging here in this Psalm. Verse 8 says, "Arise, O God, judge the earth." This phrase suggests that those God is judging are primarily associated with the earth and identified as those who dwell on earth. This fits very well with God judging his people and the leaders of his people. Conversely, such phrasing is less fitting to the idea that God is judging angels in a heavenly court.

There are two possible responses to this challenge.

One, it could be theorized that this congregation of wicked angels also dwells on earth, but Ephesians 6:11 informs us that the wicked “spiritual” principalities, powers, and rulers of this world who are “not flesh and blood” dwell in “high places.” The Greek word translated as “high places” is “epouranios” (Strong’s Number 2032), which literally means, “existing in heaven.” Similarly, Ephesians 2:2 describes the devil as a “spirit” who is the “prince of the power of the air.” The words “existing in heaven” and “of the air” indicates that the wicked angels who rule the earth in the present age should indeed be thought of as “heavenly,” not earthly. As such, the fact that Psalm 82 is about God judging the earth does not naturally lend itself to the idea that God is judging wicked angelic rulers.

Two, it could also be theorized that the Psalmist is petitioning God to judge the earth himself, replacing the wicked angels who were ruling unjustly. However, this interpretation would seem to run directly contrary to the opening line of the Psalm, which is the first place we see the term “gods.” The King James translation of verse 1 indicates that God “judges among the gods.” This at least suggests that God will judge the “gods.” While it could be theorized that God is simply “among” these “gods” as God judges men on earth, rather than judging the “gods” themselves, this notion is also problematic. The rest of the Psalm is filled with God’s criticisms of these “gods,” which certainly corroborates that it is these “gods” that are being judged. In fact, verse 6 uses the phrase “I have said, Ye are gods,” which reinforces that God’s criticisms in this chapter are applied to these so-called “gods.” In other words, verse 6 demonstrates that God is still addressing the “gods” throughout the Psalm as he declares his criticisms. Consequently, this Psalm begins with phrasing that God will “judge among the gods” and continues with criticisms that God declares against those “gods,” which strongly argues against the notion that God is judging the earth while merely present “among” the “gods.”

Ultimately, here we have a passage filled with God’s criticism of so-called “gods,” which also seems to be characterized as God “judging the earth.” This indicates that these “gods” are individuals who rule on the earth, not angels in a heavenly court. Only by separating God’s judgment of the “gods” in verse 1 from God’s judgment of the earth in verse 8 is it possible to deny that the phrase “judge the earth” supports a conclusion in which the “gods” are human rulers on the earth.

With these seven elements in mind from Psalm 82, we can take some time to review other passages in the Old Testament, which contain similar elements. The first step is to review a few of the early passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy in which God sets up the rulers of Israel under Moses. In Exodus 18, Moses “judges between one and another” among the people of Israel and his father-in-law suggests that Moses appoint rulers in Israel to assist him in this process. In Exodus 22, Moses gives commands in which the Israelites are to bring “all manner of trespass” before the “judges” to decide and the Hebrew word translated as “judges” is “elohim” (Strong’s Number 430), the same word translated as “gods” in Psalm 82. In Deuteronomy 1 and 15, Moses reiterates his command to these human rulers to judge “small as well as the great” with fairness without

“respect” or deference to the rich. Finally, in Deuteronomy 15 Moses commands the wealthy, the “great” men in Israel, to release the poor from indentured servitude at the end of a seven-year period. Here we see the connection between the establishment of rulers to judge the people and God’s concern that the poor be judged with fairness and that those in authority should deliver the poor from oppression.

**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 Hearken 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 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 15:1** At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. 2 **And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother;** because it is called the LORD'S release. 3 Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; 4 **Save when there shall be no poor among you;** for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it: 5 Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to **do all these commandments which I command thee this day.** 6 For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee. 7 **If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates** in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, **nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:** 8 But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. 9 **Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought;** and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. 10 Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. 11 For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, **Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.**

Regarding Deuteronomy 15 specifically, there are several critical points worth highlighting. Number one, it is noteworthy that Deuteronomy 15 is primarily concerned with one of the two main criticisms that God expresses in Psalm 82, particularly the mandate to treat the poor fairly and relieve their burdens rather than oppress them. Number two, Deuteronomy 15 is outlining God's command that every seven years the poor Israelites were to be released from their debts and

any indentured service that they had entered into in order to provide for themselves. Number three, notice that this instruction to release the poor from debt and bondage is specifically referred to as a command in verse 5. And likewise, this set of commands specifically prohibits a wicked person from deciding in his heart not to release the poor in the seventh year. This will become relevant below when we examine passages in Jeremiah and Matthew 23. Number four, notice the way that this passage logically equates ruling with wealth. The poor Israelites go into indentured servitude while the Israelites who are financially doing well become their masters and obtain authority over the poor in this way. In short, this passage reflects a pattern in which those with money obtain power over the poor. And number five, notice the phrase “within any of thy gates,” which also contains language that we will see in other passages in this section.

The first passage we might consider in comparison to Psalms 82 is Isaiah 3.

**Isaiah 3:14 The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof:** for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of **the poor is in your houses.** 15 What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces **of the poor?** saith the Lord GOD of hosts. 16 Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion **are haughty,** and walk **with stretched forth necks** and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: 17 Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts. 18 In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, 19 The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers, 20 The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, 21 The rings, and nose jewels, 22 The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, 23 The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. 24 And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty. 25 **Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war.** 26 **And her gates shall lament and mourn;** and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground.

Number one, notice that verse 14 contains a clear reference to God acting in judgment, just as Psalm 82 does. However, this verse in Isaiah explicitly notes that God is judging “his people” and “the princes thereof.” This is clearly not an instance of God judging angels, but instead the leaders of his people. Number two, the phrase “the princes” is particularly important because we see that phrase in Psalm 82:7. In fact, both passages are using the same Hebrew word, “sar” (Strong’s Number 08269), which means, “prince, ruler, leader, etc.” Number three, this passage in Isaiah is focused on the same criticism as Psalm 82, the oppression of the poor by those who are rulers. Number four, here we see that these rulers of the people are wealthy, which is evident from the description of their jewelry and fine apparel in verses 16-23. This is exactly the pattern that Deuteronomy 15 was concerned with: some men amassing wealth and gaining

oppressive power over the poor. Number five, notice that verse 26 contains the phrase “And her gates.” This is yet another peculiar similarity to Deuteronomy 15, which we saw commanded the wealthy Israelites to care for the poor “within their gates.” Number six, just like Psalm 82 humbles those who esteem themselves highly, verse 16 of Isaiah 3 similarly records that God is directing his criticism to those who “are haughty.” And number seven, notice that like Psalm 82, in verse 25 God declares his punishment for these oppressive, unjust rulers and that punishment is death. Although Psalms 82:7 uses the word “die,” which does not appear here in Isaiah, both Psalm 82:7 and Isaiah 3:25 use the Hebrew word, “naphal” (Strong’s Number 05307), which is translated as “fall” in both passages. With these similarities in view, it is easy and reasonable to conclude that Isaiah 82 and Psalm 82 are both examples of God criticizing the same basic group for the same bad behavior. But, Isaiah is clearly identifiable as a criticism, not of angels, but of the human rulers of Israel who have become wealthy by treating the poor unjustly.

The second passage we might consider in comparison to Psalms 82 is Isaiah 22.

**Isaiah 32:1 Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment.** 2 And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. 3 And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. 4 The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly. 5 **The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful.** 6 For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, **to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.** 7 The instruments also of the churl are evil: he deviseth wicked devices to **destroy the poor** with lying words, even when **the needy** speaketh right. 8 But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand.

Number one, here in Isaiah 32 God promises a future time when there will be a king of Israel who rules in righteousness and princes who exercise just judgment. This promise regarding the future is clearly meant to contrast with Isaiah’s present time. We know this is a contrast to wicked rulers in Isaiah’s present time because of verse 5 in which we find the phrase, “The vile person shall be no more called liberal.” The Hebrew word “liberal” is “nadiyb” (Strong’s Number 05081), which means “noble, noble one, princely (in rank)” and which is translated 15 times as “prince.” The Hebrew word for “vile” is “nabal” (Strong’s Number 05036), which means, “foolish” or “senseless.” From these words, we can see that God is speaking of a future time when the nobles and princes of the people will no longer be fools. Number two, just like Psalms 82 criticizes those who lack knowledge and understanding and walk “in darkness,” here we see that God is criticizing those who are “foolish.” Number three, notice that just like Psalm 82 and Isaiah 3, this passage use the Hebrew word “sar” (once again translated as “princes”) to describe the leaders of God’s people. Number four, we should not be surprised to find that in verses 6-7 God’s chief criticism of these foolish rulers of Israel is their



oppression of the poor and needy, which is of course the same criticism God is declaring in Psalm 82. And number 5, we should note that verse 6 describes these wicked rulers of Israel as practicing “hypocrisy.” This will become important later when we examine Jesus’ criticism of the Jewish rulers of his day in Matthew 23.

The third passage we might consider in comparison to Psalms 82 is Isaiah 58.

**Isaiah 58:**1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and **shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.** 2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, **and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice;** they take delight in approaching to God. 3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? 6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? **to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? 7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor** that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Number one, although Isaiah 58 is not specifically addressed to the leaders of Israel, it is clear from verse 1 that this passage is addressed to God’s people in general, not to angels. Number two, in verse 6 God explains that one of the main shortcomings of his people is their failure to take care of the poor and oppressed, which is the same criticism found in Psalm 82. Number three, in verse 2 God reminds his people about the “ordinances of justice.” In a context like this, which discusses the oppression of the poor, this reference to the ordinances of justice must be viewed as at least inclusive of the commands regarding the poor in Deuteronomy 1 and 15. Number four, notice the phrase “undo the heavy burden,” which will be relevant later on when we discuss Jesus’ criticism of the Jewish rulers of his day in Matthew 23. Although this passage in Isaiah is not as strong of a criticism as Psalm 82, Isaiah 3, or Isaiah 32, it is yet another instance in which God is citing disregard for justice for the poor as a primary shortcoming of his people, not angels.

The fourth passage we might consider in comparison to Psalms 82 is Isaiah 59.

**Isaiah 59:**1 Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. 3 For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. 4 **None**

**calleth for justice**, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. 5 They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. 6 Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. 7 Their feet run to evil, and they make haste **to shed innocent blood**: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. 8 The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace. 9 **Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us**: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but **we walk in darkness**. 10 We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. 11 We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us. 12 For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; 13 In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, **speaking oppression** and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. 14 **And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off**: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. 15 Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. 16 And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. 17 For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke. 18 According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. 19 So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. 20 And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. 21 As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.

Number one, like Isaiah 58, this chapter does not include a direct identification of the leaders of Israel. However, the use of the pronouns "us" and "we" in verses 9 and 10, for example, demonstrate that Isaiah is talking about his people in general, not angels. Number two, this passage is repeatedly focused on the same two criticisms that God levels in Psalm 82, the oppression of the poor and the lack of justice. And number three, verse 9 contains another striking similarity to Psalm 82 when it includes the phrase, "walk in darkness," which is similar to Psalm 82:5 where we find the phrase, "walk on in darkness." In addition, this phrase also tells us that Isaiah 58 is a criticism of foolishness and lack of understanding, just like Psalm 82 and Isaiah 32.

The fifth passage we might consider in comparison to Psalms 82 is Jeremiah 2.

**Jeremiah 2:34** Also in thy skirts **is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents:** I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these.

Number one, although this verse is brief and does not directly identify who it is criticizing, it is important to note that it does contain the familiar criticism about neglecting justice for the poor. Number two, it is not difficult to determine who God is criticizing here. If we simply back up to the beginning of this chapter in Jeremiah, we learn exactly who God is talking about.

**Jeremiah 2:1** Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 Go and cry in **the ears of Jerusalem**, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me **in the wilderness**, in a land that was not sown. 3 **Israel** was holiness unto the LORD, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD. 4 Hear ye the word of the LORD, **O house of Jacob**, and all the families of **the house of Israel:** 5 Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? 6 Neither said they, Where is **the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness**, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt? 7 And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination. 8 **The priests** said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: **the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.**

There is a list of identifiers in verses 1-8. Verse 1 refers to Jerusalem. And verse 3 refers to Israel. Verse 4 refers to the “house of Jacob” and “house of Israel.” So, we know this is a criticism of God’s people, not angels. But the text is even more specific. Verse 8 refers to the priests, the prophets, and also the “pastors.” The word “pastors” is “ra’ah” (Strong’s Number 07462), which refers to “shepherds” and “rulers” or “teachers,” just as it does in the New Testament. Consequently, it is clear that this criticism regarding injustice toward the poor is directed at the leaders of Israel.

Number three, we should also note the frequent references to the Exodus journey that Jeremiah mentions here in chapter 2. In verse 2 he refers to “the wilderness.” And in verse 6, we find the phrase “the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness.” This is interesting because it was during the Exodus journey that the Israelites had received the words of God’s covenant with all its commands, including the commands in Deuteronomy 1 and 15 to deal justly with the poor and release them from servitude.

The sixth passage we might consider in comparison to Psalms 82 is Jeremiah 22.

**Jeremiah 22:11 For thus saith the LORD touching Shallum the son of Josiah king of Judah, which reigned** instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place; He shall not return thither any more: 12 But **he shall die** in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more. 13 **Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work;** 14 That saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is cieled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. 15 Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, **and do judgment and justice,** and then it was well with him? 16 **He judged the cause of the poor and needy;** then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD. 17 But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for **to shed innocent blood, and for oppression,** and for violence, to do it. 18 Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! 19 **He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.**

Number one, verse 11 starts by informing us that God is addressing a king of Israel, who was formerly one of the princes of his father King Josiah. In other words, this is a statement from God about a particular leader of Israel. Number two, God's criticism here once again parallels the two primary criticisms of Psalm 82 regarding injustice and the oppression of the poor. Verse 13 warns against those who build their own houses through unrighteousness and specifically identifies not paying one's workers. Verses 15-16 remind the king that his father was blessed because he performed justice and "judged the cause of the poor and needy." And verse 17 contrasts the current king with his father, accusing him of shedding innocent blood and engaging in oppression. Number three, like Psalm 82, here in Jeremiah 22 God declares the punishment for this neglect of justice for the poor and that punishment is death. Verse 12 says, this prince and king of Israel "shall die." Number four, verse 19 refers to the "gates" of the city of Jerusalem, which harkens back to the commands of God regarding the poor in Deuteronomy 15, which commanded God's people to care for the poor in the gates of their cities.

The seventh passage we might consider in comparison to Psalms 82 is Jeremiah 34.

**Jeremiah 34:1** The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and all his army, and all the kingdoms of the earth of his dominion, and all the people, fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities thereof, saying, 2 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah, and tell him, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire: 3 And thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken, and delivered into

his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. 4 Yet hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah; Thus saith the LORD of thee, Thou shalt not die by the sword: 5 But thou shalt die in peace: and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings which were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee; and they will lament thee, saying, Ah lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the LORD. 6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spake all these words unto Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem, 7 When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish, and against Azekah: for these defenced cities remained of the cities of Judah. 8 This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after that **the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them;** 9 **That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother.** 10 **Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let them go.** 11 **But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.** 12 Therefore the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 13 Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; **I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying,** 14 **At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear.** 15 **And ye were now turned, and had done right in my sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name:** 16 **But ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids.** 17 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, **I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.** 18 And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, 19 **The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests,** and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf; 20 I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and **their dead bodies** shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth. 21 And Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which are gone up from you. 22 Behold,

I will command, saith the LORD, and cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire: and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant.

Number one, verse 8 identifies this passage as a criticism concerning King Zedekiah. Verse 10 then expands the criticism to include “all the princes.” So, we know that this is a criticism of the leaders of the people of Israel. Number two, verses 8-16 refer back to God’s commands in Deuteronomy 15 regarding the year of Jubilee in which the wealthier Israelites were required to release any Israelite who had become an indentured servant through poverty. In this case specifically, God is angry that the king and the princes and many of the wealthy who had servants because they had initially promised to fulfill the command to release their servants, but then immediately decided to press those same servants back into bondage. This is exactly what God warned his people not to do in Deuteronomy 15:9, where God said, “Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought.” Number three, in verses 17 and 20 we see that God declares that the punishment for this injustice toward the poor is death, which is the same punishment decreed in Psalm 82. In verse 17, God explains that these rulers of Israel will be killed by the sword, pestilence, and famine. And in verse 20, God describes how “their dead bodies” will be eaten by animals. And number four, here again in verse 13 we find another reference to the time of the Exodus journey when Israel received God’s covenant and its commands, including the commands in Deuteronomy to deal justly with the poor and deliver them from bondage.

The eighth passage we might consider in comparison to Psalms 82 is Ezekiel 18.

**Ezekiel 18:**1 The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, 2 What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning **the land of Israel**, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? 3 As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. 4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. 5 But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, 6 And hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour’s wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman, 7 And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment; 8 He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, 9 Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord GOD. 10 If he beget a son that is a **robber, a shedder of blood**, and that doeth the like to any one of these things, 11 And that doeth not any of those duties, but even hath eaten upon the mountains, and defiled his neighbour’s wife, 12 **Hath oppressed the poor and needy**, hath spoiled by violence, hath not restored the pledge, and hath lifted up his eyes to the idols, hath committed abomination, 13 Hath given forth upon usury, and hath

taken increase: shall he then live? he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him.

Number one, verse 2 identifies that God is speaking to the “land of Israel,” which is another way of referring to his people. So, we know this criticism is against God’s people, not angels. In addition, the word “land” here is “adamah” (Strong’s Number 0127), which means “ground or land.” This reference to “the land” is related to verse 8 of Psalm 82, which says, “O God, judge the earth.” The word “earth” in Psalm 82 is “erets” (Strong’s Number 0776), which likewise often means “land” or “earth” in the sense of a specific territory (but can also mean the “surface of the earth” rather than the entire planet). Number two, in verses 10 and 12, we once again see God expressing his criticism of those who act unjustly and oppress the poor and needy, which were the same two primary criticisms in Psalm 82. And number three, like Psalm 82, God declares that the penalty for acting unjustly and oppressing the poor will be death.

The ninth passage we might consider in comparison to Psalms 82 is Ezekiel 22.

**Ezekiel 22:23** And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, **24** Son of man, say unto her, Thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. **25** There is a conspiracy **of her prophets** in the midst thereof, **like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls;** they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. **26 Her priests have violated my law,** and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. **27 Her princes** in the midst thereof are **like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain.** **28** And **her prophets** have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken. **29 The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy:** yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. **30** And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. **31** Therefore have **I poured out mine indignation upon them;** I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD.

Number one, this passage is clearly yet another criticism against the leadership of God’s people. Verse 25 refers to the false prophets. Verses 26 and 28 refer to the priests. And verse 27 refers to the “princes.” Number two, the word “princes” here is the Hebrew word “sar,” the exact same word used in Psalm 82. Number three, God’s criticism of the leaders of Israel once again pertains to injustice and oppressing the poor. Verse 25 describes the leaders of Israel acting like “roaring lions ravening the prey” and “devouring souls.” Verse 27 similarly describes them as “wolves ravening the pray, to shed blood, and to destroy souls” and it even specifies that their objective is “to get dishonest gain” or in other words, to get wealthy. And verse 28 specifically refers to “oppression” and “vexing the poor.”

Number four, verse 26 explains that these actions of neglecting justice and oppressing the poor violate God's law, just as we have seen in Deuteronomy 1 and 15 which required dealing justly with the poor and releasing them from bondage. And number five, although the text does not specifically use terms like "die" or "death," the phrases "poured out mine indignation upon them" and "consumed them with the fire of my wrath" in verse 31 make it clear that God's punishment for this injustice and oppression of the poor is death, just like in Psalm 82.

The tenth passage we might consider in comparison to Psalms 82 is Ezekiel 45.

**Ezekiel 45:8** In the land shall be his possession in Israel: and **my princes shall no more oppress my people**; and the rest of the land shall they give to the house of Israel according to their tribes. 9 Thus saith the Lord GOD; Let it suffice you, **O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice**, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord GOD. 10 Ye shall have **just balances**, and a just ephah, and a just bath.

Number one, in verses 8 and 9 God specifically identifies that he is addresses the "princes of Israel." The Hebrew word for "prince" in these verses is not the same word we find in Psalm 82. Here the word for "prince" is "nasiy" (Strong's Number 05387), which means, "one lifted up, chief, prince, captain, leader." So, although the word is different, this is clearly still a criticism of the leaders of God's people, not angels. Number two, here again we find the same criticisms that were in Psalm 82. In verse 8, God commands that there should be "no more oppressing" his people. And in verses 9-10, God commands "executing judgment and justice" and using "just balances." The reference to balances in particular indicates that this oppression is once again dealing with financial unfairness.

In addition to these 10 passages from the prophets criticizing the people of Israel and the leaders of Israel in particular for acting unjustly and oppressing the poor, we should also consider Jesus' criticism of the first-century leaders of Israel in Matthew 23. What we will find is that Jesus is very much acting as a prophet following in the long tradition of God's prophets (arguably including David in Psalm 82) who declared God's criticism of the rich and the powerful among his people for mistreating the poor and neglecting justice.

**Matthew 23:1** Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, 2 Saying, **The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:** 3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. 4 **For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves** 5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, 6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 **And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.** 8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. 9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. 10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your



Master, even Christ. 11 **But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.** 12 And **whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased;** and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. 13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. 14 Woe unto you, **scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses,** and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation...23 Woe unto you, **scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, **and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy,** and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone...35 **That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth,** from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

Number one, in verse 2 Jesus begins by identifying the targets of his criticism as “The scribes and the Pharisees” who sit in the seat of Moses.” So, we know this is a criticism of the leaders of God’s people, just as we found so often in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Number two, in verses 11-12 Jesus criticizes these leaders for their ambition and warns that “whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased.” While not exactly identical, this is somewhat parallel to Psalm 82 in which in general terms God chastises those who perceived themselves highly and informs them that he will demonstrate they are not so lofty. Similarly, in verses 5-6 Jesus complains how these leaders love to be perceived as great men doing great things with great titles. Clearly, this is the kind of haughtiness that the prophets have included in their criticisms of past leaders in Israel and which Psalm 82 includes as well. Number three, just like Isaiah 32’s criticism of the “princes” of Israel for unjustly treating the poor, in verses 13, 14, and 23 Jesus characterizes these leaders of Israel as “hypocrites.” Number four, in verse 4 Jesus criticizes that, “they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.” This phrasing is very similar to criticism for unjust treatment of the poor in Isaiah 58, in which God described one of the shortcomings of his people as a failure to “undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free” and a failure to give food to the poor. Number five, in verse 23, Jesus specifically criticizes the leaders of Israel for “omitting the weightier” or more important “matters of the law,” which Jesus lists as “judgment” and “mercy.” This is generally reminiscent of the commandments in Deuteronomy 1 and 15 in which God commanded Israel to treat the poor justly and deliver them from bondage.

Finally, the comparative language in these Old Testament passages is also relevant to Jesus’ interpretation of Psalm 82 in John 10.

Number one, in this historical context it is interesting that John 10 seems to involve some of the leaders of Israel, a group that Jesus’ previously criticized in Matthew 23 for their haughty, unjust, and oppressive behavior toward the poor, the same basic criticisms levied in Psalm 82. And when this same general group comes to accuse Jesus for what they believe is arrogantly elevating himself to the status of God, Jesus chooses to reply to them by actually quoting Psalm 82.

Number two, it is also interesting that in his response in John 10, Jesus makes references to “your law” and those “unto whom the word of God came.” Here the particular words in the phrases “your law” and “unto whom the law came” seem demonstrably related to one another in their meaning as indicated by the component parts of each. In essence, both phrases associate the “law” or “word of God” with a particular group for whom such commands were intended. And the terms “law” and “word of God” are synonymous in meaning. Likewise, the pronouns “your” and “them” are also probably both references to the same general group, particularly the Jewish people. The ancient ancestors of the Jewish people had received the words of God on Mount Sinai and, consequently, when speaking to his contemporary Jewish audience, Jesus could refer to those words as “your law.” In short, while speaking to Jewish leaders who oversaw the administration of the Law of Moses, Jesus is using these two phrases to underscore the connection of the Jewish people to the Law of Moses and the authoritative nature of the Law of Moses in their current conversation.

Number three, if Jesus is referring to the reception of the Law of Moses at Mount Sinai, then Jesus’ criticism of these Jewish leaders in John 10 is once again similar to Jeremiah 2:2-6 and Jeremiah 34:13, which also contained references to the Israelites’ reception of God’s covenant during the Exodus.

And number four, of course Psalm 82 was not received during the Exodus journey, which might seem to suggest that Jesus is not referring to the reception of the Law of Moses at Mount Sinai. However, it is important to note that in Psalm 82 God says, “I have said,” which means that God is referring back to a previous statement he has made somewhere else. Consequently, when God says, “I have said, ‘Ye are gods,’” we must look for an earlier occasion in which God referred to another party using this Hebrew term. And, as we pointed out earlier in this study, in Exodus 7:1, God uses the word “elohim” (Strong’s Number 0430) when he says to Moses, “I have made the a god to Pharaoh.” “Elohim” is the same word used in Psalm 82 where it says, “I have said, “Ye are gods.” Likewise, we also noted that in other early passages in Israelite history, such as Exodus 21:5-6, Exodus 22:8-9, and 1 Samuel 2:25, God refers to the human leaders of Israel as “elohim.” So, if Psalm 82 is quoting God’s words to Moses and his deputies in Exodus 7, 22, and 21, then it would make perfect sense for Jesus to cite Psalm 82 as a reference back to the time when Israel received God’s commands during the Exodus journey.

Ultimately, the similarity between Psalm 82 and all of these 10 other passages indicates that Psalm 82 should be interpreted as yet another instance of God’s criticism of Israel’s leaders for haughtiness, injustice, and oppression, rather than as a criticism of angels. In addition, Jesus’ application of this Psalm in response to his own critics who were accusing him of haughtiness and elevating himself is itself evidence that Jesus’ is interpreting Psalms 82 in reference to human leaders in Israel, not angels.

In fact, if it weren't for the use of the term "gods" in Psalm 82, there would be little doubt that the Psalmist is conveying another criticism of the human leaders of Israel. And, as it turns out, the use of the term "gods" in Psalm 82 is readily justifiable in light of Exodus 7, 21, and 22 and 1 Samuel 2. When Exodus 7, 21, and 22 are combined with the fact that the Jewish leadership inherited Moses' authority and "sat in the seat of Moses" (as Jesus attests in Matthew 23), the notion that God might taunt the arrogant and corrupt rulers of Israel for thinking of themselves themselves as "gods" among lesser men is sufficiently explanatory for the use of the term "gods" in Psalm 82. There is no need to conclude that amidst a refrain of regular criticism from God against the leaders of his people for their unjust treatment of the poor, Psalm 82 is for some reason a unique instance in which God takes a moment to declare to his people these same criticisms but this time with regard to the angels, especially since the term "angels" is nowhere mentioned in the text of Psalm 82.