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Does Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible Demonstrate an Evolution From Polytheism to Monotheism in Israelite Religion?

o. Introduction

The title of my paper today raises a question that is quite current, though that might sound strange to evangelicals who specialize in fields other than the ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible. Its present currency derives not only from 19th century critical scholarship that many evangelicals (right or wrong) consider methodologically suspect, but from textual and literary discoveries in ancient Syria and Canaan that bear a direct relationship to the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps most importantly, the question also arises from the text of the Hebrew Bible itself. This paper will focus on this last point of origin, since assumptions brought to the biblical text contribute significantly to what I will suggest are manufactured problems that yield a pre-fabricated conclusion about an Israelite religious evolution toward monotheism. The first set of assumptions concerns divine plurality in the Hebrew text; the second set involves a point of divine plurality that in my judgment is brought to the text. I'll address them in order.

1.o. Divine Plurality in the Text of the Hebrew Bible

1.1. Summary of the Problem

Scholars of the Hebrew Bible and others who pay close attention to the Hebrew text underlying English translations know that there are a number of instances where **אלהים** is accurately translated plural "gods" and where such translations are used of an Israelite divine assembly or council under the authority of Yahweh (Psa 82:1). Other terms like **אלים** ("gods") and **עליון / אלים / אלהים** / **בני (ה) אלהים** also occur in the Hebrew Bible, several of which are used in the context of a heavenly divine council.

Since the concept of a divine council is witnessed throughout the ancient Near East among polytheistic religions, it is assumed that a divine council of plural **אלהים** in the Hebrew Bible is evidence of an antiquated polytheism in Israel's religion. The religious literature from Ugarit is in particular cited as evidence for this connection, since its descriptions of the structure, membership, and meeting place for the councils of El and Baal match material in the Hebrew Bible very closely, sometimes word-for-word. These observations have contributed to the view held by a basically all critical Old Testament scholars that Israelite religion's view of the unseen world is largely derived from that of Ugarit. As such, Israel's council is thought to reflect a pre-exilic polytheistic bureaucracy.

Historical circumstances, we are told, propelled a theological change in the mind of Israel's religious elite. Eventually, the divine council disappeared as Israelite religion achieved the breakthrough to monotheism

as a mechanism for coping with the exile. During and after the exile Israel's religious elite came to believe Yahweh was intrinsically superior to other gods. Toward the end of the exile or shortly thereafter, biblical writers cast Yahweh as the sovereign of all nations who sentenced the gods of the nations to death (Psalm 82). Yahweh was now the lone God; no others existed. An alleged editorial agenda driven by monotheistic zealot-priests and scribes during and after the exile enforced and assured this religious transition via their work on the final redaction of the Hebrew Bible.¹

This evolutionary paradigm is allegedly evident in the Hebrew Bible. In material before the exile, other gods exist and that existence is not denied. Even the *Shema* does not deny the existence of other gods, but demands Yahweh alone be worshipped. Those who presume that a council of אלהים is incompatible with monotheism would say Israel's religion was henotheistic and monolatrous since it did not deny the existence of other אלהים but only forbade their worship.² Henotheism is the belief in many gods alongside the belief that one god rules the others; it is a monarchical polytheism by modern understandings of monotheism. Henotheism does not forbid praying and offering sacrifices to many gods; it requires only the recognition of a supreme deity. It is important to note as well that a henotheist would not see the top deity as utterly unique in attributes; he was only at the top through an imagined conquest of the pantheon, or perhaps earthly popularity—but in theory he could be toppled. Monolatry excludes worship and sacrifice to any deity other than the supreme deity.

One could ask several questions at this point, such as, "Denial statements ["there is none besides me"] occur in pre-exilic texts as well as later texts—so why are these denial statements only denials of existence of other gods after the exile but not before? Why are some of the clearest examples of a divine council of בני אלהים in material dated by critics after the exile (Job 1-2)? Did it *really* never occur to Israelites before the exile that Yahweh had command over all nations and their gods? Why is it that, given the assumption that in the exile Israel came to deny the existence of all other gods—they crux to calling Israelite religion monotheism in the evolutionary view—do we find 200 references to plural אלהים / אלים in the Qumran sectarian literature, many of them in the context of a divine council?³ Were the Jews of Qumran not monotheists? Didn't anyone get the memo?

It is these sorts of inconsistencies and logical flaws that have led some scholars to question the usefulness of the term "monotheism" at all. But instead of abandoning the term, my view is that the biblical writers understood the word אלהים in a way that never created any of the tensions modern scholars feel or

¹ Robert Karl Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (JSOTSup 241; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 201-205.

² Mark Smith's words are representative: "Monotheistic exclusivity is not simply a matter of cultic observance, as in the First Commandment's prohibition against 'no other gods before me' in Exod 20:3 and Deut 5:7. It extends further to an understanding of deities in the cosmos (no other gods, period). . . . Statements of incomparability are not included; such hyperbole is known also in Mesopotamian texts" (Mark S. Smith, Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 151, 279, n. 20).

³ This topic is covered in my dissertation, but my most recent treatment of it was in the 2011 regional SBL meeting ("Divine Plurality in the Dead Sea Scrolls"; available at www.thedivinecouncil.com/DSSelohim.pdf).

perceive. That understanding included a belief in other אלהים alongside a belief in the uniqueness of Yahweh among אלהים.

1.2. The Meaning of Elohim for the Biblical Writers—Not Us

We are confronted with two phenomena in the Hebrew Bible that propel the misunderstanding that the biblical text must be understood in terms of an evolution toward monotheism. First, the Hebrew Bible does in fact witness to plural אלהים.

אלהים	אלים
Deut 32:17; Ps 82:1; 86:8; 95:3; 96:4; 97:7, 9; 136.2; 138:1	Exod 15:11; Ps 89:5-7 [Heb: vv. 6-8]; 58:11 ⁴ ; Ps 29:1

Second, the existence of those plural אלהים is assumed by the biblical writers, and even embraced as part of their own theology.

Psalm 82:1 is probably the textbook example:

אֱלֹהִים נֹצֵב בְּעֵדֹת־אֱל בְּקִרְבֹּ אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט:

God (אלהים) stands in the divine assembly;

in the midst of the gods (אלהים) he passes judgment.

The first occurrence of אלהים is correctly translated as the singular “God” due to subject-verb agreement (נֹצֵב). The second אלהים is equally obvious as a plural since it is the object of the preposition (בְּקִרְבֹּ). One cannot be in the midst of one (and for anyone thinking of the Trinity here, that presumption in this verse leads to heretical theology I doubt anyone in this room would embrace). The grammar and syntax are crystal clear. The God of Israel is, in Psalm 82, presiding over a group—a council (עֵדֹת)—of אלהים.

The plurality point is also echoed in verses 6-7 where the אלהים suffer the loss of their immortality.

But how could the biblical writer tolerate the existence of multiple אלהים and yet write denial statements in other passages? I believe the question, though understandable, is misguided. Having many אלהים does

⁴ For text-critical reasons, as well as reasons of literary parallelism, MT consonantal אֱלֹם should be vocalized אֱלֹם or emended to אֱלִים. See Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 2002) 82; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100* (AB 16; New York: Doubleday, 1968) 57; M. Heiser, “Should אֱלֹהִים (‘ēlōhîm) with Plural Predication Be Translated ‘Gods?’” *Bible Translator* 61:3 (July 2010): 135-136.

nothing to undermine an orthodox Israelite view of Yahweh. I would suggest that that issue is resolved by letting the biblical writers inform us as to how they understood אלהים. Doing that demonstrates conclusively that plural אלהים were no threat to a belief in the unique Yahweh.

There are at least five (and I would argue for six) things that are called אלהים in the Hebrew Bible.

- A. Yahweh, the God of Israel (over 2000 times)
- B. The אלהים of Yahweh's heavenly council, both loyal and disloyal (Psa 82; Psa 89; cf. Deut 32:8-9, 43 [with LXX, Qumran⁵]; Psa 58:11)
- C. The gods of foreign nations (e.g., 1 Kings 11:33)
- D. "Demons" (שדים; Deut 32:17)⁶
- E. The disembodied human dead (1 Sam 28:13)
- F. Angels (Gen 35:7 – the context of the plural predicator with אלהים subject;⁷ I believe it ultimately refers back to the angel of Yahweh)

This listing alone should inform biblical scholars of something critical to the discussion, but which seems to have gone unnoticed. The fact that the biblical writers could use אלהים of more than one entity or figure—all of which are elsewhere described in far lesser terms than Yahweh—tells us clearly that they did not associate the term אלהים with a specific set of attributes. We do that reflexively as moderns—we use “g-o-d” thinking of the singular Being we know as the God of the Bible. Consequently, we feel uncomfortable with other אלהים no matter how clear the biblical text is in that regard. The biblical writer did not think about אלהים the way we think of “g-o-d.” They did not presume that אלהים spoke of specific attributes that might be shared equally between Yahweh and other entities called אלהים. It would have been absurd to the biblical writer to suggest that dear, departed uncle Jehoshaphat and aunt Rivka

⁵ Textual critics of the Hebrew Bible are unanimous in agreement that the Qumran reading (in brackets) is superior to the Masoretic text in Deut 32:8, which reads בני ישראל (“sons of Israel”). See for example, P. W. Skehan, “A Fragment of the ‘Song of Moses’ (Deut 32) from Qumran,” *BASOR* 136 (1954) 12-15; idem, “Qumran and the Present State of Old Testament Text Studies: The Masoretic Text,” *JBL* 78 (1959) 21; Julie Duncan, “A Critical Edition of Deuteronomy Manuscripts from Qumran, Cave IV. 4QDt^b, 4QDt^c, 4QDt^d, 4QDt^e, 4QDt^f, 4QDt^g, 4QDt^h,” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1989); Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 269; Eugene Ulrich et al., eds., *Qumran Cave 4.IX: Deuteronomy to Kings* (DJD XIV; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 75-79; Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy* 32, 156; J. Tigay, *Deuteronomy, The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 514-518.

⁶ See M. Heiser, “Does Deuteronomy 32:17 Assume or Deny the Reality of Other Gods?” *Bible Translator* 59:3 (July 2008): 137-145.

⁷ See M. Heiser, “Should אלהים (‘ēlōhîm) with Plural Predication Be Translated ‘Gods’?” *Bible Translator* 61:3 (July 2010): 123-136.

were on an ontological par with Yahweh and the אלהים of His council, or that the members of Yahweh's council and the אלהים of the nations were on par with Yahweh simply because they were all אלהים. And yet this is precisely what is assumed by those who contend that monotheism cannot co-exist with other אלהים and a divine council. That assumption makes no attempt to parse the variegated use of אלהים. It is a modern error in perception.

The most straightforward way to understand the biblical use of אלהים is to divorce it from attribute ontology. אלהים is what I like to call a "place of residence" term. It doesn't tell me what a thing is in terms of attributes; it tells me the proper domain of a thing. All אלהים are members of the unseen spiritual world, their place of residence. In that realm there is rank, and hierarchy, and in the case of Yahweh, uniqueness in attribute ontology. Those concepts are conveyed by other words and descriptions, *not the word אלהים*.⁸ Yahweh is an אלהים, but no other אלהים is Yahweh. Yahweh was not one among equals; he was species unique. *That* is what the biblical writers believed. Our modern term "monotheism," coined in the 17th century as an antonym to "atheism," is deficient for describing this, since it carries the baggage of identifying "g-o-d" with a single set of attributes held only by Yahweh. However, the thought behind the term—that Yahweh is utterly and eternally unique—remains completely intact.

This simple but profound shift in perspective undercuts most of the arguments upon which a presumed evolution toward monotheism is considered necessary. There is no need for orthodox Yahwism to have evolved anywhere.

1.3. *The Meaning of the "Denial Statements" (The Biblical Writers Were Not Schizophrenic)*

If the above understanding of is coherent, what do we make of the various statements on the part of the biblical writers that there was no god besides Yahweh? I addressed this issue at length in my dissertation on the divine council in late canonical and non-canonical Second Temple Jewish literature, and more briefly in an article in BBR. What follows is a brief summary.

⁸ I have in mind here the claim that Yahweh was responsible for creating the host of heaven (Psa 33:6; 148:1-5), conceived of as divine beings in ancient Near Eastern cosmology; the notion that he commanded the heavenly host (1 Kings 22:19-23; the phrase יהוה צבאות, used many times in pre-exilic literature); and the use of האלהים and similar phrases for the supremacy of Yahweh as God. Several instances of these phrases occur in pre-exilic texts, an observation that will become noteworthy as the paper continues. For example: יהוה הוא האלהים ("Yahweh, he is *the* god [i.e., par excellence]; 1 Kings 8:60; 18:39); הוא האלהים ("He is *the* god"; 2 Sam 7:28); אתה האלהים ("You are *the* god"; Isa 37:16); יהוה האלהים ("Yahweh is *the* god"; Josh 22:34).

The evolutionary view of Israelite monotheism regularly cites passages in which plural **אלהים** or **בני אלהים** appear as proof of vestigial polytheism in the Hebrew Bible. One passage that is absolutely critical to the evolutionary view is Deut 32:8-9, where the Most High divides the nations and distributes them according to the number of the sons of God (with LXX, Qumran). This theology is echoed in Deut 4:19-20. Deuteronomy 32:17 adds the notion that lesser divine beings, the “demons” (*shedim*), are **אלהים**. Curiously, both chapters contain denial statements:

Deuteronomy 32:17 – They sacrificed to demons, not God, gods whom they had not known... (**זִבְחוֹ**)
(לְשֵׂדִים לֹא אֱלֹהִים לֹא יִדְעוּם)

Deuteronomy 4:35 – “You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD, he is *the* God (**הָאֱלֹהִים**); besides him there is no other (**אֵין עֹד מְלִבְדֹו**).”

Deuteronomy 4:39 – “Know therefore this day, and lay it to your heart, that Yahweh, he is *the* God (**הָאֱלֹהִים**) in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other (**אֵין עֹד**).”

Deuteronomy 32:29 – “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me (**וְאֵין אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי**); I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.”

The evolutionary view of Israelite religion would have us believe that those who fashioned the final form of the Hebrew Bible combined statements affirming the reality of **אלהים** while simultaneously affirming no such **אלהים** exist. It is much more coherent to say that the biblical writers believed in the existence of many **אלהים** (that is, after all, how they use the term) but that the God of Israel was incomparable with respect to other **אלהים**. That faith assertion would seem to be the clear point of the definite article juxtaposed to **אלהים** in both Deut 4:35, 39—Yahweh was the God, par excellence. The same pattern follows through Isaiah 40-66, the other section of the Hebrew Bible considered fertile territory for asserting that Israelite religion came to believe no other gods existed. As I noted in my dissertation, several passages in this section affirm the divinity of the heavenly host simultaneous to offering denial formulae.

Drawing on the work of Nathan McDonald (“Deuteronomy and the Meaning of Monotheism”), C. H. Williams’ study (*I am He: The Interpretation of ‘Anî Hu’ in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*), and Hans Rechenmacher’s study of these formulae, I collected them and made the point that all of them are used in contexts that either affirm the existence of other gods in some way, or contexts that require interpreting them as statements of incomparability, not denials of existence. The two most telling instances are found

in Isaiah 47:8, 10, with a parallel in Zeph 2:15. In Isa 47:8, 10 Babylon says to herself, אֲנִי וְאֶפְסֵי עוֹד ("I am, and there is none else beside me"). The claim is not that she is the only city in the world but that *she has no rival*. Nineveh makes the identical claim in Zeph 2:15 (אֲנִי וְאֶפְסֵי עוֹד). In these instances, these constructions cannot constitute the denial of the existence of other cities and nations. The point being made is very obviously incomparability. I therefore suggest that the denial statements in the Hebrew Bible fit rather nicely with the biblical writers' use of plural אֱלֹהִים. There is no denial of the uniqueness of Yahweh or an unseen world where various entities are called אֱלֹהִים—and as such, there is no need to sort all this out with an evolution toward monotheism.

Before leaving this point, I ask you to recall the quotation from Mark Smith I used early on. Smith would assert that incomparability statements do not equate to monotheism, being hyperbole and in view of their use in Mesopotamian texts. First, if I understood אֱלֹהִים the way he does as a modern person, I'd agree with him, but I don't. That objection is therefore moot. I'd ask why such statements are hyperbole—it would seem the claim that no other gods exist ups the ante in the hyperbole department for an ancient Semite. Again, I don't consider this objection coherent. Lastly, while statements of incomparability exist in Mesopotamian material, it is a logical fallacy to presume that the Mesopotamian was thinking the same thing as an Israelite in this regard. We know how the biblical writers measured Yahweh as incomparable since they assert that only he was the creator—of all things material and all other divine beings. He alone was sovereign; He alone deserved worship. This sort of exclusive attribute language isn't used of a deity as far as I know. It would seem if it were Smith would also be writing about the evolution of Mesopotamian or Babylonian monotheism.

By way of summary to this point, I asserted in the introduction that there were two sets of assumptions used to prop up the idea of Israelite religious evolution from polytheism to monotheism. The first of these concerned the presence of plural אֱלֹהִים, which I addressed in terms of its meaning and then the coherence of that meaning in relation to the denial statements in the Hebrew Bible, which I take as incomparability statements. In the time that remains I want to address the second item—arguments that stem from divine plurality imported into the text.

2.0. Divine Plurality Imported into the Text of the Hebrew Bible

2.1. Summary of the Issue

Those who see an evolution toward monotheism in Israelite religion argue their case from a presumed distinction between Yahweh and Elyon ("the Most High") in the Hebrew Bible, namely in Deuteronomy 32:8-9 and Psalm 82. In both passages it is alleged that the biblical writers drop hints that Yahweh and Elyon were once separate deities.⁹

⁹ Once again, Mark Smith's comments are representative: "The author of Psalm 82 deposes the older theology, as Israel's deity is called to assume a new role as judge of all the world. Yet at the same time, Psalm 82, like Deut 32:8-9, preserves the outlines of the older theology it is rejecting. From the perspective of this older theology, Yahweh did not

2.2. Distinguishing Yahweh and Elyon: Deuteronomy 32:8-9

To illustrate the basis for the argument, let us first consider Deut 32:8-9.

When the Most High (Elyon) gave the nations as an inheritance,¹⁰

when he divided mankind,

he fixed the borders of the peoples

according to the number of [the sons of God].

But YAHWEH'S portion is his people,

Jacob his allotted inheritance.

בְּהִנָּחַל עֲלֵיוֹן גּוֹיִם ⁸

בְּהַפְרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם

יַעַב גְּבֻלַת עַמִּים

לְמִסְפָּר ¹¹ [בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים]:

כִּי חֶלֶק יְהוָה עַמּוֹ ⁹

יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ:

The evolutionary view argues that these two verses describe Elyon ("Most High") giving Yahweh His portion among the nations—Israel. There are two deities in view; Yahweh is one of the sons of Elyon.

One obvious retort to this perspective is the parallel passage of Deut 4:19-20. In verse 20 Yahweh is not given Israel by any higher deity—the text specifically says Yahweh "took" (לקח) his own inheritance. This is cast as a sovereign act and would seem to nullify the assumption of two deities. It is at this point that the card of the presumed dating of Deuteronomy and its parts is played:

Deut 5-26 (8th-7th centuries, into time of Josiah; this is the core of the book)

Deut 27-28 (added in exile as explanation for exile; curses and blessings with clear exilic flavor)

Deut 1-4, 29-34 (added after exile, but chs 32-33 considered originally independent and pre-exilic¹²)

belong to the top tier of the pantheon. Instead, in early Israel the god of Israel apparently belonged to the second tier of the pantheon; he was not the presider god, but one of his sons" (Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 49).

¹⁰ Deut 32:8a reads בְּהִנָּחַל עֲלֵיוֹן גּוֹיִם. בְּהִנָּחַל is pointed as a Hiphil infinitive absolute, but should probably be

understood as a defective spelling of the infinitive construct: בְּהִנָּחַל (Paul Sanders, *Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*

[Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996], 154). The object of the infinitive form is גּוֹיִם. As Sanders notes, the Hiphil of the verb נָחַל can be "connected both with an *accusativus personae* (the inheriting person(s); hence some translations render: "When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance") or with an *accusativus rei* (the object inherited by this person; and so rendering, "When the Most High gave the nations as an inheritance"). Instructive parallels include Deut 1:38; 3:28; 21:16; 31:7; Josh 1:6; 1 Sam 2:8; Zech 8:12; and Prov 8:21 (Sanders, *Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, 154).

¹¹ See the earlier note (5) on this reading.

¹² Interestingly, recent research on the NW Semitic *yaqtul* form, formerly a strong criterion for dating biblical Hebrew texts, has come under question (see Yigal Bloch, "The Prefixed Perfective and the Dating of Early Hebrew—A Re-Evaluation," *VT* 59 [2009]: 34-70). After a lengthy examination of these forms Bloch concludes: "[T]he use of prefixed verbal forms to signify past situations in the Song of the Sea, in the Song of Moses and in the psalm of 2 Sam. 22/Ps. 18 (or at least in the narrative parts of the latter) justifies dating these poems a couple of centuries before the Babylonian exile—i.e., to the 8th-7th, or perhaps even the 9th, centuries B.C.E.—but it does not provide justification for dating these poems to the 13th-10th centuries B.C.E." (p. 67). He then adds in a footnote (131): "Of course, in dating the supposedly early biblical poems on linguistic grounds, one has to take into account not only the use of short prefix-conjugation verbal forms to signify complete situations in the past, but also other linguistic features which have been

One notices immediately how Deut 1-4 are conveniently dated as post-exilic, and Deut 32-33 are likewise conveniently considered “independent and pre-exilic.” Those who see Deut 1-4 as post-exilic would say that the reason Deut 4:19-20 has Yahweh taking his inheritance and no mention of other gods is that Israelite religion had evolved away from that belief by the end of the exile.

Another argument used to prove an older, polytheistic theology in Deut 32:8-9 is the fact that at some point the original reading “sons of God” was altered to “sons of Israel” as in MT. Verse 43 also contains a reference to plural gods that was removed from MT. We know about these removals because of the Qumran material (echoed in LXX by *aggeloi*, viewed as a deliberate downgrading of the gods to angels in the wake of the rise of pure monotheism).

2.3. Assessing the Coherence of this Presumed Separation and Evolution

So how coherent are these arguments and the conclusions drawn from them? Let’s start with the text-critical issue of the deletion of the sons of God reading.

2.3.1. The Text-Critical Issue

Although the deletions that occurred in Deut 32:8, 43 do not directly relate to the Elyon and Yahweh separation, it is presumed that the deletion was only made because the polytheistic content of the original offended scribes who had come to believe in monotheism. This argument has two weaknesses: it assumes that the monotheistic biblical writers could not abide plural אלהים, and it relies on circular reasoning in that it assumes what it seeks to prove.

Regarding the first weakness, the understanding of אלהים I covered earlier undercuts any perceived “need” to rid the text of a plural אלהים reference. The biblical writers and both the texts of MT and LXX retain a number of references to plural אלהים, even in late texts. I would argue the reason is that they thought of אלהים as indicating residence in the unseen spiritual world. Additionally, though I agree that at some point a scribe altered the original reading, the facts of the matter are that no one knows *when* the deletion occurred and *why*, especially when other instances of divine plurality are left untouched. Those who want an evolution to monotheism assume the deletions happened near the point of the monotheistic leap. There is no evidence for this, as the earliest textual data we have are the Qumran scrolls. We don’t have textual fragments of the MT reading from Qumran, so it could be easily argued that the Qumran material preserved the true reading and the alteration was made much later, at the time when MT as we know it was created (ca. 100 AD; Tov) in the process of textual standardization. And even if such evidence was forthcoming, it would not address why the change was made. We literally have to read the dead scribe’s mind for that. Finally, in regard to the LXX and *aggeloi*, my thoughts are sketched in the handout

suggested as indicative of early dating.” This conclusion (albeit with the caveat in mind) would put Deut 32 at the same time as Deut 5-26 in the critical dating scheme. One wonders what exactly compels the first four chapters to be “out of sync” with the rest of the material—aside from the desire to see an evolution in Deut 4.

as Appendix 1. It is simply a fact that LXX is uneven in its treatment of plural אלהים, as it uses the plural of θεος and υιοι θεου in passages where the Hebrew would be plural אלהים. The uneven use of *aggeloi* cannot be coherently defended as indicating a theological shift in Jewish thinking about divine plurality. The Qumran material also mars that picture due to the numerous instances of plural אלהים, often in divine council contexts, in those texts.

2.3.2. Distinguishing Yahweh and Elyon

Moving on to whether Yahweh and Elyon are separated in Deut 32:8-9, I have addressed this issue in an article, so what follows are summary points, with some new criticisms.¹³

First, I asked a moment ago on what grounds Deut 1-4 were to be dated as post-exilic, yielding the neat evolutionary movement toward monotheism. The most exhaustive work on Deuteronomy 32 to date is that of Paul Sanders, who devotes seventy pages to the issue of inter-textual links between Deut 32 and other portions of the Hebrew Bible. He finds pre-exilic and post-exilic elements in the chapter, so the picture is hardly neat and self-evident. The real answer to, “On what grounds?” seems to be “because that is the way the evolutionary trajectory needs to flow.” In other words, the answer assumes what it seeks to prove.

Second, I think it is worth noting that Deut 32:8-9 never actually says Yahweh received or was given anything. We simply read: “But Yahweh’s portion was Israel; Jacob his allotted inheritance.” These are verbless clauses. The idea of Elyon *giving* the subordinate Yahweh his portion actually has to be read into the passage. *It is nowhere stated*. This is allowing one’s presuppositions to guide interpretation.

Third, Deut 32:6-7 utilizes vocabulary associated with El and Baal in Ugaritic material to describe Yahweh. This is no surprise since, as is well known by Hebrew Bible scholars, the biblical writers associated epithets and other descriptors of both deities with Yahweh, a phenomenon at times used as evidence for an original Israelite polytheism. By all accounts in critical scholarship, this conceptual fusion occurred prior to the 8th century BC. But note that this fusion is not a fusion of Elyon and Yahweh, but of certain attributes of El and Baal with Yahweh.¹⁴

Fourth, presuming a source-critical approach to the Pentateuch, I have to wonder what scholars who

¹³ M. Heiser, “Are Yahweh and El Distinct Deities in Deut. 32:8-9 and Psalm 82?” *HIPHIL* 3 (2006); online journal, <http://see-j.net/index.php/hiphil/article/view/29>; posted October 3, 2006.

¹⁴ As I argued in my dissertation, the fact that Israelite religion retained a divine council structure with a co-regency at the top mirrors the relationship of El and Baal, but the biblical writers fill both slots with Yahweh. This conceptual decision reflects a binitarian approach to Yahweh found elsewhere in the Tanakh, featuring an invisible and a visible Yahweh where the latter appears in human form (at times embodied) and is at times tightly fused with the former. And in at least one scene, the two Yahwehs appear together (Judges 6). The literary strategies reflect an aversion to polytheism—rule by a co-regency of two distinct deities—in favor of rule by Yahweh, enacted in many instances by a co-regent or agent who “is but isn’t” Him. This, I argued, was the conceptual framework for the Two Powers idea that emerged in Second Temple Judaism (to the second century AD) and the high Christology of the New Testament.

distinguish Yahweh and Elyon on the basis of Deut 32:8-9 do with the J source. Specifically, is J later than Deut 32? Had J evolved to monotheism? I raise the issue because the event Deut 32 draws upon for the division of the nations is Gen 11, part of the J source. *J has Yahweh doing the dividing*. Israel is not mentioned since it does not yet exist (cp. the Table of Nations). The J writer has Yahweh call Abram in the next chapter to begin raising up his own portion, Israel. How could J have missed the polytheistic outlook known to whoever wrote Deut 32? I can imagine the response would be something like, “Well, that was just the way J had it and the final redactor failed to reconcile J and Deut 32, or didn’t care about a contradiction.” Once again, psychologizing the author on the way to assuming what one seeks to prove is the method du jour—and blaming a bungling redactor always helps, too.

I have to admit that the evolutionary view is not moved by these inconsistencies, though. Those who hold that view are convinced in large part by the assumption that the global kingship of Yahweh over the nations allotted in Deuteronomy 32 is a late development—at least exilic if not after. This notion is absolutely crucial to the evolutionary view. Without it, there is little in the way of an evolutionary pinnacle to reach, and the logical coherence of distinguishing Yahweh and Elyon in Deut 32 and Psa 82 utterly implodes.

2.4. *Distinguishing Yahweh from Elyon: Psalm 82*

The second passage used to separate Elyon and Yahweh is Psalm 82, which is conceptually related to Deut 32.

Psalm 82	Flow of the Psalm (Evolutionary View)
<p>¹ God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he passes judgment: ² “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? <i>Selah</i> ³ Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. ⁴ Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” ⁵ They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. ⁶ I said, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; ⁷ nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.” ⁸ Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!</p>	<p>Yahweh standing in the council of EI (Elyon), who is the seated judge (v. 1)</p> <p>Yahweh brings the charge against the <i>elohim</i> of the council (vv. 2-5), the sons of Elyon of v.6</p> <p>Yahweh (“I said”) refers to the council <i>elohim</i> as sons of Elyon and pronounces judgment upon them (vv. 6-7)</p> <p>The psalmist cries out to Yahweh to “rise up” and inherit all the nations as their own (v. 8), in the wake of the gods who have been stripped of their immortality (cp. Deut 32:8-9 where the nations were given as inheritances to the sons of God)</p>

Psalm 82 is part of the Elohist psalter, and so it is assumed that where **אלהים** is used for a singular deity the psalm originally read Yahweh. The first verse would then have Yahweh standing in the council of El (the high sovereign in Ugaritic religion, associated by the biblical writer as Elyon, "Most High," in verse 6). The verb (**נצב**) is often used in texts whose genre is the covenant lawsuit and depicts one standing before a judge to bring a charge against the plaintiff. In Psalm 82 Yahweh is presumed to be playing the role of prosecutor, decrying the corruption of the gods of the council. The judge of the council lawsuit is then presumed to be Elyon since it is presumed that we cannot have a single deity be both prosecutor and judge. When the reader comes to verse 6 the prosecutor Yahweh refers to the gods as "sons of the Most High (Elyon)" not as his own sons. This allegedly implies a separation of Yahweh and Elyon, which would be in concert with Yahweh as prosecutor and Elyon as judge in the scene. The last verse is then read as the psalmist pleading for Yahweh (**אלהים** in the Elohist text) to rise up and inherit the nations after judging the gods in verse 7. The implication is that Yahweh was not previously viewed as the global sovereign of the nations. The psalm therefore casts this as a new idea and a shift in Israelite religion.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, the psalm is taken as post-exilic. Thus Israelite religion evolved to kill off the gods and the divine council in favor of the new monotheistic innovation, where no god but Yahweh existed.

2.5. Distinguishing Yahweh from Elyon: Psalm 82

This viewpoint suffers from problems of coherence and a failure to account for the evidence for the belief in Yahweh's supremacy over the nations and their gods in pre-exilic texts. Let's take those in order.

2.5.1. Incoherence in the Presumed Flow of Psalm 82 that Produces Distinct Deities

I'm hoping that the logical incoherence of the evolutionary view is readily evident. If we presume Yahweh is the standing prosecutor and Elyon is the seated judge in Psa 82, things seem workable through verse 5, as Yahweh is bringing accusation. But when we hit verses 6-7 there is a problem. The first person "I said" in verse 6 would be Yahweh speaking—but that would in turn mean Yahweh also pronounces the sentence (the role of the judge) in verse 7. This seems odd, but yet there is there is no indication at all that the speaker has switched to Elyon as the speaker. This is important because the evolutionary view wants to distinguish between the prosecutor and judge to achieve two deities in the passage. The solution for the evolutionary view cannot be that Yahweh is doing both tasks, for that begs the very obvious question of why you'd need two deities in the first place. If Yahweh is also doing what the judge is supposed to do, why do we need Elyon as the judge? Verse 8 also presents a coherence problem. The psalmist pleads for

¹⁵ S. Parker states that, "There is no question that the occurrences of *elohim* in verses 1a, 8 refer (as usually in the Elohist psalter) to Yahweh . . . Yahweh is actually just "one of the assembled gods under a presiding El or Elyon . . . the psalmist then balances this with an appeal to Yahweh to assume the governance of the world" (Simon B. Parker, "The Beginning of the Reign of God – Psalm 82 as Myth and Liturgy," *Revue Biblique* 102 [1995]: 546). Mark Smith echoes this view: "[A] prophetic voice emerges in verse 8, calling for God (now called *'elohim*) to assume the role of judge over all the earth. . . . Here Yahweh in effect is asked to assume the job of all the gods to rule their nations in addition to Israel" (Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 48).

Yahweh to “rise up” and inherit the nations—but wasn’t it Elyon who was supposedly seated in the heavenly courtroom as judge?

This problem was perceived by David Frankel in a recent article on Psalm 82.¹⁶ Frankel has Yahweh as the prosecutor in verse 1, who is bringing charge against the gods in the council of El. He feels that were this the council of Yahweh, the text would read “Yahweh takes his stand *in his council*,” not the “council of El.” When he comes to verse 6, Frankel argues that El is the speaker, since it is his council and he is the judge. Otherwise, if El is not filling any role, Yahweh is bringing charge before a “headless council”¹⁷ Frankel asserts that Yahweh is the speaker in vv. 2-5 but “El is the speaker, who plays the role of high judge in vv. 6–8.”¹⁸ He also believes that it is El who calls upon Yahweh in the last verse to rise up and rule the nations.¹⁹ Unfortunately, Frankel offers no grammatical reasons for a change of speaker in verses 6-7. This is understandable since there are no grammatical or linguistic indicators that point to a change in speaker. Frankel’s main line of argument is verse 8, where, if one assumes that Yahweh is the speaker in verses 6-7, a new speaker is demanded in verse 8 since Yahweh (אלהים) is addressed. He notes in this regard that, “other than the assumption that vv. 6-7 are spoken by YHWH, there is no other reason to posit a change of speaker in v. 8.”²⁰ I would suggest that one does not need to assume Yahweh is the speaker in verses 6-7. One merely needs to start with the recognized character of the Elohist psalter, that the singular אלהים of verse 1 is Yahweh, and then observe in the text that Yahweh (אלהים) is speaking in verses 2-5 (as Frankel acknowledges), and then that there is no textual cue for a change of speaker until verse 8—when one is required since Yahweh (אלהים) is addressed. There is nothing to assume—the text flows nicely, there is no violation of grammar by omission or insertion, and the psalm is bookended by אלהים references to Yahweh. Frankel tries to argue that verse 8 is not a petition, but his arguments are subjective, not deriving from the passage itself. The text is again clear, “Arise” in verse 8 is a grammatical imperative—someone is being asked by a speaker to do something. And that someone being asked is

¹⁶ Frankel, “El as the Speaking Voice in Psalm 82:6-8,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* vol. 16, article 16 (2010); located at http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article_144.pdf.

¹⁷ Frankel, 6. Frankel notes that other scholars (Eichrodt and Fishbane) attempted to posit other speakers in the council besides Yahweh. In footnote 14 of his article he writes: “The main exception to this rule is Eissfeldt (“El and Yahweh,” 29–30), who suggests that El is the speaker in vv 2–7, and the Psalmist the speaker in vv 1, 8. However, as noted by Loewenstamm (“Nahalat YHWH,” 355), this position cannot be accepted. The analysis leaves the role of YHWH in vv 1 and 8 totally unaccounted for. If El is the sole speaker, how do we explain that it is YHWH who is said to stand and judge in v 1? Furthermore, why in v 8 does the Psalmist call upon YHWH rather than El to rule the world? A more nuanced exposition that seems close to that of Eissfeldt is adopted by M. Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003) 75, n. 26. Fishbane suggests that behind the first Elohim in v 1 lay an original El, and that the mythological “residue” of the original Psalm is newly adapted to Yahwism both in the alteration to Elohim in v 1, and the appeal to YHWH in v 8. This approach also encounters difficulty. First, the purportedly original אל נצב בעדת אל is jarring. One would expect בעדתו or the like. Second, the decision to see an original El behind the Elohim of v 1 and an original YHWH behind the Elohim of v 8 is arbitrary. One would expect the same original to lie behind both.”

¹⁸ Frankel, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

Yahweh (אלהים). The imperative requires a speaker other than Yahweh in verse 8, which is entirely consistent with Yahweh being the previous speaker.

At this point, Frankel and others would ask me to make sense of my own view that Yahweh is the prosecutor and the judge—El's role—in the psalm, and so the speaker in verses 6-7. I do not need to guess about the correctness of my position. If Mark Smith and many others who argue with him are correct in their assertion that Israelite religion had successfully identified both El and Baal with Yahweh by the 8th century, my position is on solid ground. Smith argues for this date on the basis of archaeological data. To quote Smith, "Asherah, having been a consort of El, would have become Yahweh's consort . . . only if these two gods were identified by this time."²¹ This means that El and Yahweh would have been seen as the same deity in Israelite religion by that time—before the exile.²² Popular religion expressed that belief by hailing Asherah as Yahweh's wife, an idea known from inscriptions at Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom. As such, casting Yahweh in the El role of judge in Psalm 82 seems quite normal and expected to me—especially if the Psalm is dated later than the 8th century B.C. Likewise the designation "council of El" is not odd, since Yahweh and El would have been the same for biblical writers, though it ought to be noted that "El" in the phrase could be adjectival ("divine council").²³ Lastly, Frankel charges that if Yahweh was head of the council at the beginning of the psalm there would be "little new in the call of verse 8 that YHWH take up rule of the world." I disagree. The new element is not that Yahweh all of a sudden becomes sovereign—that idea is pre-exilic as we shall see momentarily—but that Yahweh is pronouncing his eschatological will to take back the nations he disinherited at Babel. This is an idea we see elsewhere in late canonical literature (e.g., the fullness of the Gentiles in Isa 66).

2.5.2. Yahweh's Supremacy Over the Nations and Their Gods in Pre-Exilic Texts

The idea that Yahweh's kingship over the gods and their nations is post-exilic—a notion crucial to any defense of an evolution toward monotheism—ignores evidence to the contrary in the Hebrew Bible. The idea is in direct conflict with several enthronement psalms that date to well before the exilic period. Psalm 29 is an instructive example. Some scholars, such as F.M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, date the poetry of this psalm between the 12th and 10th centuries B.C.E.²⁴ The very first verse contains plural imperatives directed at the בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים, pointing to a divine council context. Verse 10 declares:

יְהוָה לַמַּבּוּל יֹשֵׁב וַיֵּשֶׁב יְהוָה מְלֶכֶד לְעוֹלָם: ("Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits

²¹ Smith, *Origins*, 49.

²² For El as a title of Yahweh, see the examples in Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (electronic ed.; Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999), 49.

²³ See Psa 36:7. The noun אֱלֹהִים is also occasionally used this way (e.g., 1 Sam 14:15; Jonah 3:3).

²⁴ F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 151-157; F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 45, n. 59. Cross dates the psalm on many criteria, including ancient poetic structures and the high degree of structural and content similarities to a Canaanite Baal hymn (CTA 5.1.1.5). See Frank M. Cross, "Notes on a Canaanite Psalm in the Old Testament," *BASOR* 117 (1950): 19-21. That a number of features indicate antiquity, and not only morphological forms, is important in light of recent work questioning the NW Semitic *yaqtul* form as having any merit for dating a text (see footnote 11).

enthroned as king forever”). In Israelite cosmology, the flood upon which Yahweh sat was situated over the solid dome that covered the round, flat earth. *It did not cover only Israel!* Since it cannot coherently be asserted that the author would not have Gentile nations under the dome and flood, this verse clearly reflects the idea of world kingship. The thought is echoed in the Song of Moses, also among the oldest poetry in the Hebrew Bible. In Exodus 15:11 we encounter the rhetorical “Who is like you, O Yahweh, among the gods?” followed in verse 18 by: **יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד** (“Yahweh will reign forever and ever”). As F. M. Cross noted over thirty years ago, “The kingship of the gods is a common theme in early Mesopotamian and Canaanite epics. The common scholarly position that the concept of Yahweh as reigning or king is a relatively late development in Israelite thought seems untenable.”²⁵ I would agree, but would add this question: If pre-exilic Israelites in fact believed that the nations were under the authority of other gods (Deut 32:8-9), how is it that scholars who promote the evolutionary view presume that “Who is like you, O Yahweh, among the gods?” would *exclude* Yahweh’s supremacy over the nations of those gods? This simply makes no sense in the context of divine council theology.

This evidence alone is sufficient for overturning the thesis, but there is more.

Psalm 47:2 not only declares that Yahweh is a great king over all the earth, but in so doing it equates Yahweh with Elyon: “For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth.” Verse 7 adds, “God is the king of all the earth.” This psalm belongs to the category labeled by scholars as “enthronement psalms.” J.J. M. Roberts argued that the psalm should be situated in the “cultic celebration of Yahweh’s imperial accession, based on the relatively recent victories of David’s age.”²⁶

Psa 97:9 does the same thing—equate Yahweh and Elyon in the process of declaring him king of the nations and their gods. Most critical scholars classify it as late, but the criteria for doing so (other than an evolutionary presumption) are not at all clear or coherent. This is especially an issue since Psa 97 utilizes storm theophany imagery associated with the divine warrior motif, which is known to be early. Again it is worth asking if anything in such psalms drives their dating other than the presumption of an evolution toward monotheism.

Psalm 108:5 is noteworthy in this regard since it proclaims, “be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!” The second clause is verbless (**וְעַל כָּל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדֶךָ**). I’m sure no one will be surprised when I note that the critics take the psalm as exilic or post-exilic, but then what do they do with Isaiah 6:3 which reads (in another verbless clause): “the whole earth is full of your glory”

(**מְלֵא כָל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ**). Why is it that this language in Psa 108:5 dictates a late date when the same thought is communicated First Isaiah, which is clearly pre-exilic? It could be posited that the psalmist adopted the language from the earlier Isaiah, but that is my point—the language is early.

I could produce more of these sorts of inconsistencies, where language of Yahweh’s kingship occurs in texts that could easily be defended as pre-exilic. For example, the writer of the Deuteronomistic History

²⁵ Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 99, n. 30.

²⁶ J.J.M. Roberts, “The Religio-Political Setting of Psalm 47,” *BASOR* 221 (Feb 1976): 132.

presumes that Yahweh controls the destiny of the nations targeted for removal from Canaan—and no one is going to date that material late. How could Israel’s pre-exilic writers express the belief over and over again that Yahweh would defeat and banish the nations in Israel’s land if they had no clue that He was supreme over the nations and their gods? But for my final point, I offer an Ugaritic parallel. If I assume with the evolutionary view that Israel’s early polytheistic divine council theology comes from Ugaritic material, then why is it that I cannot *also* presume Yahweh was king of all the nations—when Baal is referred to as such?²⁷ I think we know the answer by now. Because that just doesn’t fit the picture.

3.0. Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was to highlight the major arguments used to assert the evolution of Israelite religion from polytheism to monotheism. I advocate rejecting this view because the arguments are based on flawed presuppositions brought to terms like אלהים and passages like Deut 32:8-9 and

Psalm 82. My own view is that the biblical writers affirmed an unseen world filled with אלהים, but that term is not to be linked to a specific set of attributes that would result in a denial of the ontological uniqueness of Yahweh and his exclusive worship—and that this was the theology of *the biblical writers* throughout the time of their writing. However, I would not say that all Israelites or even a majority believed this at many points in Israelite history. Both the Hebrew Bible and the archaeological remains inform us that there was a broad spectrum of beliefs about Yahweh and his nature among the people. As is the case today, despite the fact that all Jews and Christians have full access to the books they consider canonical, there is still diversity of belief about God. How much more in ancient Israel?

²⁷ See *Context of Scripture*, 1.86 (the Ba’alu Myth) where the relevant phrases associated with Baal are *’il klh* (“god [over, of] all of it [earth in context] and Baal’s title *zbl b’l arš*, “the Prince, lord of the earth”). The phrases are somewhat controversial, but most scholars would presume they denote a cosmic-geographical rule extending from Baal’s council mountain of Šapanu over the affairs of all humankind—something quite in concert with Psa 82 (and by extension, Deut 4 and 32). Dennis Pardee notes in relation to the issue: “The phrase here is *’il klh*, precisely the same as was used twice above with reference to Kōtaru-wa-Ḥasīsu’s hegemony in Memphis (see note 19). Because they assume that Ba’lu is king of the earth, some scholars have felt constrained to take *’arš* here as denoting a particular land (cf. Caquot, Sznycer and Herdner 1974:258, n. o). On the other hand, a formal claim to kingship of the earth is not to be found in the various statements regarding Ba’lu’s kingship. The closest one comes to the expression of such a concept is in one of his standard titles, *zbl b’l arš*, “the Prince, master of the earth,” and in the phrase *’arš drkt*, “the land of (his) domain” [CTA 4 vii 44]). Because of the very specific terminology used in this passage, viz., that ‘Aṭtaru climbs (’ly) Mount Šapānu to take Ba’lu’s throne and descends (yrd) from there when he abandons that throne, it does not appear implausible to interpret ‘Aṭtaru’s rôle as king of the earth as referring to the earth as flatlands. Such a limited kingship may already have been referred to in CTA 2 iii 17–18 (see above, note 50). This hegemony, though ultimately granted by ‘Ilu, may have been seen as a vice–regency under Ba’lu’s control (in normal times, of course, when Ba’lu is in control). The facts that (1) goddesses have claimed Ba’lu as their king (CTA 3 v 40 [here line 32]; 4 iv 43); (2) Ba’lu’s kingship is stated in this and other passages to be “on the heights of Šapānu”; (3) the members of one of the so-called “pantheons,” the best known, are described as “the gods of Šapānu” (RS 1.017:1 = CTA 29:1), lead to the conclusion that Ba’lu was somehow seen as the king of the earth in the context of divine contact with the earth at Mount Šapānu. Descriptions of his activities also indicate that the link between mountain tops, storm clouds, and his function as provider of rain were inextricably linked (see particularly the link between the window in his palace and the phenomena of thunder and lightning, above CTA 4 vii 25–37). It appears plausible, therefore, to posit a Ug. conception of Ba’lu as king of mountains and storms and ‘Aṭtaru as king of the flat earth, under Ba’lu’s control” (William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture* [Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997-], 269-70, note 250).

Appendix 1: Thoughts on ἄγγελοι vs. אלהים

1. This presumed “downgrading language” comes from LXX—the LXX translators at times change what was presumably אלהים (or בני אלהים) in their Hebrew text to ἄγγελοι. This cannot be viewed as a theological statement for Judaism because :
 - a. Elsewhere the LXX translators retain plural אלהים via plurals of θεος.
 - E.g., Exod 15:11; Deut 32:17; Psa 50:1 (LXX 49:1); 82:1 (81:1; *twice*—even for לַאֲתֵּנָה); 82:6 (LXX 81:6); 85:8; 94:3; 97:9 (LXX 96:9); 135:5 (LXX 134:5); 136:2 (LXX 135:2); bringing in other MSS of LXX adds to the “inconsistency” here.
 - b. Plural θεοι is translated in places where one would not see אלהים in the Hebrew text.
 - E.g., Psa 83:8 (LXX 84:7)
 - c. LXX also retains “sons of God” in places with [οἱ] υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ, not ἄγγελοι:
 - Deut 32:43 (in parallel to ἄγγελοι θεοῦ); Psa 29:1 (LXX 28:1); 89:6 (LXX 88:7); Odes 2:43 (in parallel to ἄγγελοι θεοῦ)
2. I do not believe ἄγγελοι was used in Jewish literature as a “theological downgrade term” in light of this usage (and in other Greek sources). While I would never say *no* Jewish writer thought in downgrade terms, I think it more coherent to say that LXX and other sources reflect a blurring of אלהים and ἄγγελοι (not a displacement of the former by the latter). I think it more coherent to say that the latter becomes a generic place of residence term as the former was in the Hebrew Bible (i.e., an ἄγγελος is a being from the unseen spiritual world who delivers a message; his attributes and rank are designated by other terms and descriptors; the term is not connected to a set of attributes).
3. I believe the NT followed this paradigm, though it is hard to tell in places due to preference for LXX in general. At any rate, LXX uses a range of terms for the gods of the nations that emerge from the Babel event (Deut 32:8-9; cp, Daniel 10). That is, the NT writers assume the cosmic geography of the OT but use a variety of terms to express it. (see Ronn Johnson, *The Old Testament Background for Paul's Use of 'Principalities and Powers'*, PhD Diss, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2004).