

Naked Bible Conference

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Topic: The Divine Council in the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls

Qumran / Dead Sea Scrolls

The plural of מלאכים (*mal'ākîm*; 'angels') occurs in close proximity to אלים (*'ēlîm*; 'gods') or semantically plural אלוהים (*'elôhîm*; 'gods') only twice in the Qumran corpus. In neither case is there sufficient warrant to conclude that the Qumran writers redefined these terms of pre-exilic divine plurality as angels. The two instances are:

4Q403 1 I.1

לאֱלוֹהֵי [מ]לְאֲכֵי רוֹם

"[to] the God of the exalted angels."

4Q405 23 I.8

בַּמְבוּאֵי אֱלִים דַּעַת בַּפְתָּחֵי כְבוֹד וְבְכוּל מוֹצְאֵי מַלְאֲכֵי קוֹדֶשׁ לְמַמְשַׁלְתָּם...

"... When the gods of knowledge enter through the gates of glory, and through all the exits of the holy angels to their domains. . . ."

The first example simply bears witness to the idea that angels are lesser than God in the cosmic hierarchy. It provides no commentary on frequent divine plurality language occurring elsewhere in the scrolls. The second example seems to distinguish the gods from the angels via different temple locations.

In contrast, there are over 160 Dead Sea Scroll References to plural *'elôhîm* and *'ēlîm*, several of which include mention of a divine council or assembly.

1. Council / Assembly Terminology

"divine assembly" (*'adat 'ēl*) - 1QM 4:9; 4Q401 11 3; 4Q427 7 I.14; 4Q427 8 I.10; 4Q457b 1 I.5; 11Q13 2 10. The last reference is a citation of Ps. 82:1.

"assembly of the gods" (*'adat 'ēlîm*) - 1QM 1:10; 1Q22 1 IV.1; 4Q400 2 7; 4Q491 11 I.12

"assembly (*'adat*) of all the gods" / "with the gods in the assembly (*'adat*) of the community" - 4Q400 1 I.4 and 4Q427 7 II.9; 4Q431 2 8

"council of the gods" (*sôd'ēlîm*) - 4Q400 1 II.9; 4Q418 69 II.15; 4Q511 10 11

"council (*sôd*) of the pure gods" - 4Q286 7 I.6

2. Members of the Divine Council

'ēlîm (106 aggregate references)

1QM 1:10,11; 14:15, 16, 17; 15:14; 17:7; 18:4,6; 1QH^a 15:28; 18:8; 24:11; 27:3; 2 I.3, 10; 11:8; 1Q22 1 IV.1; 1Q35 1 2; 4Q166 1 II.6; 4Q181 1 4; 4Q248 1 3; 4Q286 2 2; 4Q286 7 I.6; 4Q381 15 6; 4Q400 1 I.4,20; 4Q400 1 II.9, 17; 4Q400 2 1,7; 4Q401 14 I.5 (2×),7; 4Q401 16 1; 30 1; 4Q402 4 8; 4Q402 6 3; 4Q402 9 2; 4Q403 1 I.14, 18, 21, 26, 31, 33, 34, 35, 38 (2×); 4Q403 1 II.26, 33, 35; 4Q404 2 2; 4Q404 4 6, 7; 4Q405 4–5 1, 2, 3; 4Q405 13 2, 5; 4Q405 14–15 I.3; 4Q405 19 3; 4Q405 23 I.8; 4Q418 69 II.15; 4Q418 81+81a 4; 4Q423 8 4; 4Q427 7 I.8, 11; 4Q427 7 II.9; 4Q428 8 2; 4Q428 9 3; 4Q428 15 3; 4Q431 I.4,7; 4Q431 2 8; 4Q471b 1a-d 1; 4Q471b 1a-d5; 4Q471b 1a-d8; 4Q491 8–10 I.13 (2×),14; 4Q491 10 II.15; 4Q491 11 I.12,14,18; 4Q491 13 1; 4Q491 14–15 8 (2×),11; 4Q491 24 3, 4; 4Q496 1–2 2; 4Q503 48–50 8; 4Q503 65 2; 4Q510 1 2; 4Q511 10 11; 4Q511 16 4; 5Q13 1 6; 11Q11 2 10; 11Q13 2 14; 11Q17 3 5, 9; 11Q17 4 1, 10; 11Q17 5 7; 11Q17 6 4; 11Q17 8 7

benê 'ēlîm (cp. Pss 29 :1 ; 89 :6 [Eng])

1QH^a 2 I.3, 10; 4Q381 15 6; 4Q491 24 4; 5Q13 1 6

'ēl 'ēlîm - 4Q403 1 II.26.

'elôhê 'ēlîm - 4Q401 16 1; 4Q402 4 8; 4Q402 9 2; 4Q403 1 I.26; 4Q511 16 4; 11Q11 2 10; 11Q17 4 3; 11Q17 5 7

'elôhîm (semantically plural in context)

4Q400 1 I.2; 4Q400 1 II.7; 4Q400 2 2, 3, 5; 4Q400 3 I.3; 4Q401 1–2 5; 4Q401 14 I.8; 4Q402 3 II.12; 4Q402 4 7, 9, 10; 4Q403 1 I.2, 32, 33, 36, 40, 43, 44, 46; 4Q403 1 II.5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 16, 20; 4Q404 5 5; 4Q405 4–5 4; 4Q405 6 5, 7; 4Q405 14–15 I.5, 6, 8; 4Q405 18 3; 4Q405 19 2, 4, 5, 6, 7; 4Q405 20 II-22 3, 7, 8, 11, 13; 4Q405 23 I.4, 5, 6, 13; 4Q511 8 12; 11Q17 2 6; 11Q17 4 8, 10; 11Q17 5 3, 4, 6; 11Q17 6 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9; 11Q17 7 5, 10, 11, 13; 11Q17 8 4, 6, 8

Septuagint (LXX)

It is true that the LXX utilizes *angeloi* for translating plural *'ēlîm* or *'elôhîm* and *benê 'ēlîm* / *'elôhîm*. But it is a misrepresentation of the data to say that the Septuagint does this most of the time. As the Table in your handout illustrates, most of the time the Septuagint opts for the more literalistic *theoi* (or some other plural form of *theos*, “god”).

Hebrew Bible “gods” / “divine beings” <i>(’elōhîm; ’ēlîm)</i> “sons of God” <i>(benê ’ēlîm / ’elōhîm)</i>	LXX renders the Hebrew terms with plural of <i>angelos</i> (“angel”)	LXX renders the Hebrew terms with plural form of <i>theos</i> (“god”)¹
Torah references to other gods <i>(’elōhîm)</i> . Examples: Exod 18:11 (“greater than all gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>) Deut 8:19 (“go after other gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>) Deut 10:17 (“God of gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>) Deut 17:3 (“served other gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>) Deut 29:26 (“served other gods . . . gods whom they had not known and whom [God] had not allotted to them”; <i>’elōhîm</i> twice)		Plural of <i>theos</i> is ubiquitous in Torah legal literature (over 60 times, including all the verse references to the left): Exod 18:11; Deut 8:19; 10:17; 17:3; 29:26
Exod 15:11 (“among the gods”; <i>’ēlîm</i>)		Exod 15:11 (θεοῖς; <i>theois</i>)
Psalm 82:1 (“in the midst of the gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>)		Psa 81:1 (θεοῦς; <i>theous</i>)
Psa 86:8 (“among the gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>)		Psa 85:8 (θεοῖς; <i>theois</i>)
Psa 95:3 (“great king above all gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>)		Psa 94:3 (θεοῦς; <i>theous</i>)
Psa 96:4 (“feared above all gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>)		Psa 95:4 (θεοῦς; <i>theous</i>)
97:9 (“you are exalted far above all gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>)		Psa 96:9 (θεοῦς; <i>theous</i>)
Psa 136:2 (“the God of gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>)		Psa 135:2 (θεῶν; <i>theōn</i>)
1 Sam 28:13 (“I see a god/gods coming from the earth”; <i>’elōhîm</i>)		1 Sam 28:13 (θεοῦς; <i>theous</i>)
Gen 6:2 (“sons of God”; <i>benê</i> <i>hā-’elōhîm</i>)		Gen 6:2 (οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ; “sons of God”)
Psa 29:1 (“sons of God”; <i>benê</i> <i>’elîm</i>)		Psa 28:1 (υἱοὶ θεοῦ; “sons of God”)
Psa 89: 7 (“sons of God”; <i>benê</i> <i>’elîm</i>)		Psa 88:7 (ἐν υἱοῖς θεοῦ; “sons of God”)
Psa 8:5 (“you have made him a little lower than God / the gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>)	Psa 8:6 (“less than the angels”; ἄγγελους; <i>aggelous/angelous</i>)	
Psa 97:7 (“worship him all you gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>)	Psa 96:7 (“all the angels”; οἱ ἄγγελοι; <i>aggeloi / angeloi</i>)	
Job 1:6; 2:1 (“sons of God”; <i>benê hā-’elōhîm</i>)	Job 1:6; 2:1 (“angels of God”; οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ; <i>aggeloi / angeloi</i>)	

¹ Some versification numbers in LXX differ from those in the traditional (Masoretic) Hebrew text.

Deut 32:8 (“sons of God”; <i>benê ’elōhîm</i>)	Deut 32:8 (“angels of God”; ἀγγέλων θεοῦ; <i>aggelōn / angelōn</i>)	
Deut 32:43 (“bow down to him, all gods”; <i>’elōhîm</i>) ²	Deut 32:43 (“angels of God”; ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ; <i>aggeloi / angeloi</i>) ³	
Job 38:7 (“sons of God”; <i>benê ’elōhîm</i>)	Job 38:7 (“all my angels”; ἄγγελοί; <i>aggeloi / angeloi</i>)	
Psa 138:1 (“before the gods I sing your [Yahweh’s] praise”; <i>’elōhîm</i>)	Psa 137:1 (“before the angels”; ἄγγελοί; <i>aggeloi / angeloi</i>)	

The data clearly show that there are only in a minority of passages does the Septuagint opt for a plural of *angelos* instead of a plural of *theos*. Of those instances, half have divergent Septuagint manuscript readings that bear witness to a plural form of *theos* in place of a plural form of *angelos*.

Specifically, for “angels of God” in Job 1:6; 2:1, the Greek text of Aquila reads “sons of God” (οἱ υἱοὶ θεοῦ / οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ respectively). Aquila and Theodotian also have “sons of God” in place of “all my angels” in Job 38:7. Lastly, for “before the angels” in Septuagint Psa 137:1 Aquila and the Heptapla column E’ have “before the gods” (ἔναντι θεῶν). There doesn’t seem to be any systematic effort among the Second Temple Period Jewish translators to make sure people don’t see divine plurality. Further, it doesn’t seem those Jews were troubled by that language—strange if the language meant polytheism.

Helpful Resources

- Peter Hayman, “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42:1 (Spring 1991): 1-15
- R. B. Salters, “Psalm 82:1 and the Septuagint,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 103.2 (1991): 225–39
- Michael S. Heiser, “Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible” *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 18:1 (2008): 1-30.
- Michael S. Heiser, “Does Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible Demonstrate an Evolution from Polytheism to Monotheism in Israelite Religion?” *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 1:1 (2012): 1-24
- Michael S. Heiser, “Monotheism and the Language of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 65:1 (2014): 85-100

² This wording is absent from the Masoretic Text but present in Dead Sea Scroll material. See J. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 516-517.

³ LXX also adds “sons of God” to the first stanza of this verse, a phrase note present in the Hebrew material from Qumran. See Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 516-517 for an explanation.