

Changing Words of Scripture

Commentary for July 1, 2019 — What Was Their Authority to Do So?

“Bible Pairs” is the title of this month’s article. It will tell you about certain subtleties in the biblical text. There is a great deal more interaction between Books of the Bible than many realize. First read the [“July 2019 Newsletter”](#) for another example of Bible pairs and other interesting information.

“A Little Lower Than the ...” — What?

In this Commentary, I give an example of former and latter texts that inform each other. Psalm 8 is short, having only nine verses. In this Davidic psalm, God’s majesty is presented and a question is asked, why does God care about man? The first word in the Hebrew text of Psalm 8 is YHWH (“**Oh Lord** [YHWH] **our Lord** [adonai] ...”). YHWH is the actor in all 9 verses:

“When I consider YOUR heavens, the work of YOUR fingers, the moon and the stars, which YOU have ordained; What is man [enosh, mortal], that YOU are mindful of him? and the son of man [adam], that YOU visit him?”

For YOU have made him a little lower than the angels [elohim], and [YOU] have crowned him with glory and honor. YOU made him to have dominion over the works of YOUR hands; YOU have put all things under his feet.”

• *Psalm 8:3–6, King James Version*

- In verse 8:4, **“the son of man”** is visited by YHWH.
- In verse 8:5, the son of man was made **“a little lower than ...”** someone or something. Why did the King James Version translate the term *elohim* by *angels*?¹
- In verse 8:6, YHWH gives **“the son of man”** dominion over all creation.

Now look at Hebrews chapter 2 in the New Testament:

“But one in a certain place testified, saying, ‘What is man, that you are mindful of him? or the son of man, that you visit him?’

You made him a little lower than the angels [aggelous in Greek]; You crowned him with glory and honor, and did set him over the works of your hands: You have put all things in subjection under his feet.’ For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.

• *Hebrews 2:6–8, King James Version*

In Hebrews 2:9 the writer, who I believe was Paul, identifies **“the Son of Man”** with Jesus, adding new information not given to the reader of Psalm 8:

¹ The Hebrew is clear; it says **“a little lower than Elohim.”** Elohim is the common word for “God,” used over 2,500 times. It is plural in form but most often singular in use, determined by the singularity or plurality of the verb. It identifies God the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth.

But we see Jesus, who was made “a little lower than the angels” [Why?] for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

• *Hebrews 2:9, King James Version*

Paul later identifies Jesus as the Christ later in Hebrews 3:1, 6, 14, 5:5, 6:1, 9:11, 14, 24, 28, 10:10, 11:26, 13:8, and 21.

Both Psalm 8:5 and Hebrews 2:9 in the King James Version have the translation: **“For you have made him a little lower than the angels”** even though the word “angels” does not occur in the Hebrew text of Psalm 8:5, it should have *elohim* or “gods.” However, the translators of the King James Version certainly knew that “angels, *aggelous* was used in the Greek Old Testament for Psalm 8:5, identical with the text of Hebrews 2:7 and 2:9.

ἡλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχὺ τι παρ’ ἀγγέλους Psalm 8:5 (Septuagint, LXX, the Greek Old Testament)

ἡλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχὺ τι παρ’ ἀγγέλους Hebrews 2:7 and 2:9

They are the same in Greek. But in the Hebrew of Psalm 8:5 the word is not “angels” but “elohim” which in English means “gods.” Paul in Hebrews 2:7 and 9 changed the text from “elohim” (gods) to “angels.” He did not do so because of the Septuagint Old Testament.

Why Was the Greek Meaning Substituted for the Hebrew Meaning?

We cannot be sure. There are no notes on the translation decisions made by the King James Version translators.

“A little lower than gods” should be the proper rendering of Psalm 8:5 with “gods” being preferred to angels (plural) but with no definite article in either the Greek or the Hebrew. How can we know? We know because Paul translated Hebrews 2:9 as **“little lower than angels.”** Angels are “gods” just as the Sons of God, Satan, cherubim, seraphim are gods.

Paul made the general term *elohim* into a specific term with the word *angels* in his composition of Hebrews because angels are a subset of a larger group of spiritual beings called “elohim” (plural) the generic Hebrew term for both *God* (when governed by a singular context) and *gods* (when governed by a plural context).² Paul in Hebrews was telling his readers/listeners which *elohim* the Son was made inferior to when He emptied Himself (Philippians 2:5–9). Angels are probably the lowest rank of heavenly being.

While all angels are *elohim* or gods, not all gods are angels. Paul specified which *elohim* Jesus was made **“lower than”** when he became the Son of Man in flesh. Read John 6:53, Romans 8:3; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18, 4:1–2; 1 John 4:2–3; 2 John 7. Much information Paul gives in Hebrews could come only through visions directly from God through Christ, not through study of the Old Testament. This was Paul’s authority to change Psalm 8:5 as presented in Hebrews.

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² YHWH (God the Father) is **“the elohim of elohim”** (the God of gods) in Joshua 22:22; Deuteronomy 5:8; 1 Chronicles 16:25–26; Psalm 136:2; Daniel 2:47, 11:36.