

Angels, Elohim, or Both?

Commentary for November 15, 2021 — Should the Translation Be *angels* Or *gods*

Let me give an example of Old and New Testament texts that inform each other. Hebrews chapter 2 tells of God the Father acting on behalf of His Son, calling Him “**the son of man**” when the Son emptied Himself (see Philippians 2:5–7) to be born to Mary and became a man (*anthropous*), a term that designates a human being and not a supernatural being:

“But one in a certain place testified, saying,

‘What is man, that you are mindful of him? or the son of man [ἄνθρωπος in Greek], that you visit him? You made him a little lower than the ANGELS [ἄγγέλους 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. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the ANGELS [again, ἀγγέλους] for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Hebrews 2:6–9, King James Version

The passage that Paul quoted was from Psalm 8:

“What is man, that you are mindful of him? and the son of man [adam in Hebrew], that you visit him? For you have made him a little lower than the ANGELS [elohim in Hebrew], and 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 8:4–6, KJV*

The King James Version accurately translates the *Greek* text of Hebrews 2:6–9, but it changes the plain *Hebrew* of Psalm 8:5. Why? Was it because Paul, writing in *Greek*, made the same change? Yes, Paul changed the *Hebrew* word *elohim*, the generic term for “god” or “gods” as we say in English,¹ to the *Greek* term *aggelous* (ἀγγέλους), which means “angels” in English.

Why did Paul make that change? **First**, I believe that as an apostle, Paul had full authority to make that change. **Second**, Paul may have followed a *Greek* translation of Psalm 8:5. Paul’s audience understood *Greek* and may have been more familiar with the *Greek* Old Testament than the *Hebrew* text, although they were themselves Israelites.² They would have been Hellenist Jews. Whatever the case, Paul quoted from the *Greek* Old Testament translation called the Septuagint, and he had the perfect right to do so.

¹ *Elohim* in the Old Testament is most used with reference to YHWH in a corporate sense. See Dr. Martin’s 1991 article “[How Should the Names of Deity be Properly Rendered?](#)”

² According to the article “[Septuagint](#)” in the *McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia*, in the New Testament the *Greek* Septuagint is cited often rather than the *Hebrew* text,

“... the number of direct quotations from the Old Test. in the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles may be estimated at 350, of which not more than fifty materially differ from the Sept. But the indirect verbal allusions would swell the number to a far greater amount.”

Greek of Psalm 8:5 and Hebrews 2:7, 9 Compared

So, the two phrases “a little lower than the **angels**” in Hebrews 2:7, 9 completely changed the meaning of Psalm 8:5, which was also changed by the King James translators to conform with the Hebrews passage: “**For you have made him a little lower than the **angels**, and have crowned him with glory and honor.**” Note the word “angels.” The *Hebrew* does not have angels, it has *elohim*. However, it is “angels” or *aggelous* in the *Greek* Old Testament. They are the same:

ἡλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχὺ τι παρ' ἀγγέλους		Psalm 8:5(6), the <i>Greek</i> Septuagint
ἡλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχὺ τι παρ' ἀγγέλους		Hebrews 2:7 and 2:9

Letter for letter they are identical. But in the *Hebrew* of Psalm 8:5 the word is clearly “**elohim**” which means “gods” and not “angels.” Paul in Hebrews 2:7 and 2:9 changed the text from “elohim” (gods) to “angels.”

Both Are Correct, Here Is Why

Angels are a subset of a larger group of spiritual beings called “**elohim**” (plural), the generic *Hebrew* term for *gods*. Paul, the author of Hebrews went along with the LXX rendering of angels and specified what the passage of Psalms referred to, which was angels and not simply generic *elohim*. Paul agreed with the LXX because angels are *elohim* (gods, small “g”). To put it simply,

All angels are *elohim*, but not all *elohim* are angels³

Let me give you an example, first from the King James Version (with my clarifications):

“For the LORD [YHWH] your God [Elohim] is God [Elohim] of gods [Elohim, lesser gods], and Lord of lords, a great God [El, singular], a mighty, and a terrible, which regards not persons, nor takes reward.”

• *Deuteronomy 10:17 (KJV)*

“For Yahweh your Elohim, He is the Elohim of elohim and the Lord of lords, the El, the great, the masterful and the fear inspiring One, Who neither shows partiality nor takes a bribe.”

• *Deuteronomy 10:17 (Concordant Literal Version)*

Let me give a final example, often mistakenly thought to refer to Satan:

“Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus says the Lord GOD [YHWH]; **Because your heart is lifted up, and you have said, ‘I am a God [an El], I sit in the seat of God [Elohim], in the midst of the seas’; yet you are a man [adam, in Hebrew], and not God [Elohim], though you set your heart as the heart of God [Elohim].”**

• *Ezekiel 28:2 (KJV)*

Clearly, it is important for us to study and understand the terms for God.

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³ YHWH is the “*Elohim* of *elohim*” or God of gods (Psalm 136:1–3, and Daniel 2:47, 11:36). See my article “[Elohim and the Son of God - Part 1](#).” Scripture shows that other minor *elohim* or “gods” exist, as 1 Corinthians 8:4–7 clearly states about pagan gods in the context of food dedicated to idols.