

The Unlikely Realm

Countering the Divine Council Worldview

by **Jesper Veiby**

The article can be shared freely in unaltered form.

jesper@veiby.dk

www.jesperveiby.org



The Divine Council Worldview (DCW) has gained some traction in later years, likely most prominently popularized by the late Michael S. Heiser in his book *The Unseen Realm*. As I understand it, many proponents consider DCW a suitable tool in explaining the spiritual battle believers are facing. However, as I will demonstrate in the following, such is easily explained without DCW and without embracing the dubious worldview expressed herein.

The Divine Council Worldview...

DCW might best be summed up by the claim, that there are other beings than God/Yahweh who are divine and thus fundamentally different from angels. Furthermore, that these beings together with God form a divine council, probably akin to a royal court where they are involved in decisions and participate in deliberations, perhaps even in a fallen state.

Proponents of the view find their support in Psalm 82:1, where these beings are called “gods,” and the word *elohim* is used referring to both these beings and God, and in which a “divine council” is mentioned, forcing upon the reader associations of human gatherings or council meetings. Likewise, regarding the events in Job, where Satan seemingly engages in dialogue with God in some assumed proximity, being labeled as one among the sons of God,¹ or the later mention of sons of God² present at the time of creation, as well as yet another reference to God’s council.³ There are similarities to other divine councils in Ancient Near East (ANE) mythology, leading some to interpret ancient Scripture in light of ANE sources, in a way that these inform the reading of Scripture or at least are considered trustworthy sources to knowledge of the spiritual world.

...and Sound Bible Reading

While the words quoted before are part of Scripture and cannot be disputed, it seems the exegesis fails for various reasons. The books of the Bible are written from within a particular worldview and naturally makes references to such, either by analogy or by using terms common in their days. Thus, when a psalm mentions other “gods,” it is reasonable to understand this as meaning “beings who are thought to be gods” or “powerful beings, common culture would tend to call gods.” If I were to pen a text

concerning the spread of Christianity, I might metaphorically claim that “Christ defeated the Norse gods,” without believing them to be gods or even to exist at all. When a psalm mentions God in the company of other gods, it might similarly mean something akin to “in comparison to.” I, likewise, might symbolically claim that “God has silenced his critics,” because of the trustworthy claims of Christianity. This by no means would have to imply that God had appeared in some debate on prime-time television to do so. Both examples merely make use of available imagery and vocabulary to express the point in question.

If one were to read an encyclopedia and find a list of “gods,” one might be justified in reading a literal meaning into it. Used in everyday language, poetry or even debates, one must deal with analogies, cultural references, reuse of imagery and the like. Besides that, just like the notion of the Trinity at best is quite dim in OT times, only to be revealed later, the same must be assumed regarding the general understanding of God and/or gods, and the early Biblical texts merely attempt to communicate in this setting. Scripture using known language and imagery does not imply that the content of such is dogma to be taught – unless this is substantiated and reaffirmed by the bulk of Scripture.

Similar caution must be taken towards other sources of truth. Obviously, there are sources of truth apart from Scripture, for example, scientific and historical facts that can be uncovered in their own right. Matters turn a bit more complex, when such seem to counter Scripture, but it is hardly controversial that truth can be found outside of Scripture. However, when sources of dubious origin are at play, we ought to be careful not to trust their overall leading, even when they might contain truthful facts. For example, it might be possible that some occult writings mention the names of arch angels also found in Scripture, yet obviously they shouldn’t be used as a supplementary source to knowledge of the spiritual world regarding other claims presented therein. Similarly, a fictitious story might incorporate the names of actual presidents or kings and depict them factually correct, yet historians centuries later should not use such a text as a source of knowledge to the lives and whereabouts at large of

¹ Job.1:6

² Job 38:7

³ Job.15:8

people back then, if the text as such is not deemed a trustworthy historical document. As an aside, something similar might be observed when Christians put their trust in conspiracy theories or spurious worldviews. Perhaps neither of these explicitly contradict Scripture, that is, revealed knowledge, and some might think it therefore should be allowable to believe such. To me the question at hand is another: What can be trusted and believed in without compromising one's own intellectual and spiritual integrity? Such is also the crux of the matter when addressing the use of ANE sources.

Divine Beings and a Divine Council?

Having some reservations in place, we can move on to consider some of the DCW claims.

One of the most notable claims, that there are are beings other than God, that are somehow "divine", is puzzling at best. Unfortunately, Heiser did a poor job in defining the criteria for such, even if being insistent on the term claiming that "the sons of God are real, divine entities created by Yahweh".⁴

Are these beings angelic beings who are vastly more powerful or more glorious than ordinary angels? Possibly so, but is that alone enough to earn the term "divine"? Are these beings omnipotent or omniscient? Of course not, and admittedly Heiser never claimed such, stressing that these other divine beings are not on the same level as Yahweh. Are they uncreated? No one claims that either.

Still, the insistence of the term "divine" forces us to somehow perceive these beings as kind of "god-like", blurring the distinction between Creator and creation – if only subconsciously.

Something similar could be said regarding the supposed divine council. While Heiser describes it less like a board meeting and more like a royal court, DCW holds that these beings – perhaps even in a fallen state⁵ – hold a place in this council. We are forced to believe the bewildering notion, that it somehow has pleased God to allow certain created beings to be in his presence no matter what. A suggestion that runs contrary to the pattern seen in the Fall, where humankind lost the privileged position

of access to God regardless of being created in the image and likeness of God.⁶

While a divine council can be understood figuratively in one way or the other, contrasting God with the gods of other worldviews, the examples from Scripture does not demand that actual council meetings in the spiritual realm are to be imagined, neither that access to God's throne is granted to fallen angels.

DCW and the Spiritual World

Some proponents of the Divine Council Worldview insist that it better explains the spiritual war we find ourselves situated in. Perhaps also that it offers explanations to somewhat enigmatic passages, like the *nephilim* before the Flood, or of angels overseeing geographic areas. Perhaps it offers suggestions to such, though Heiser also veers off into rather fantastic stories. Nonetheless, I do claim that all of such can be explained just as easily – and likely better – without subscribing to notions of a divine council and divine beings.

The mere notion that there are spiritual beings called angels, and fallen angels called demons, does not require any of these beings to be anything other than "angelic." These fallen angels likely were of different rank or strength, and some semblance of such structures might have persisted among the fallen angels, hinted in various passages,⁷ yet without necessitating both "angelic" and "divine" beings among them, if we by "angelic" broadly understand a created being of spiritual substance.

Something similar could be said of other questions. Did fallen angels breed demonic offspring in the days of Noah?⁸ Possibly, though there are more mundane interpretations.⁹ But you can believe in such without subscribing to DCW and without believing the so-called "sons of God" to be divine in some sense. Are some fallen angels assigned to certain geographic areas?¹⁰ Likely. But you can subscribe to this view without subscribing to the typical DCW notion that they were mandated as watchers or guardians. Rather, God might simply have restricted their freedom to limit evil.

⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, Bellingham WA: Lexham Press, 2015, chap.3, Kindle.

⁵ As must be claimed in Job's case when read like this.

⁶ Gen 3:24

⁷ Say, in Col.1:16

⁸ Gen 6:4

⁹ Say, the line of Seth intermarrying with the line of Cain.

¹⁰ Hinted in Deut 32:8 and Daniel 10:13

Did the three wise men act on some astronomical knowledge that was passed on from Eden, rather than the astrological knowledge of our day, as Heiser depicts it?¹¹ Such is indeed possible, though such beliefs could be held by Christians of any background, regardless of DCW beliefs and does not further its claims in itself.

But then, are demons the spirits of disembodied *nephilim*,¹² as some of the more far-fetched claims go? Well, I suppose it is hypothetically possible, though almost any other explanation might be hypothetically possible as well, Scripture being silent on the matter. However, I contend that such claims do not meet the heightened burden of proof that should be required. Perhaps more importantly, if we assume that Scripture gives us all essential truths regarding salvation, worldview, and that which is necessary to our spiritual walk – and by extension all things important as well – whatever circumstances that surround the angelic fall and the origins of the various forms of demons, powers, principalities and the like thus must have been deemed irrelevant for us to know. That being the fact, it is difficult to see how the claims of DCW would enhance or enrich the church, no matter what amount of truth they might contain.

Likewise, returning to the notion of the divine council, is there some fashion or form in which God deliberates with angelic beings? Perhaps. At least it is imaginable that God might choose to communicate with angels in a similar way that he chose to communicate with Adam and Eve, or later with Abraham and Moses. But one can imagine such without the notion of divine beings or some other fixed inner circle of high-ranking angels. Also, God being omniscient, any claim and any accusation, even coming from demons, is carried to the throne room. One might imagine such described in imaginative ways¹³ without subscribing to the DCW notion that certain fallen angels or divine beings continued to have access to heavenly places from where they were most likely expelled.

Obviously, Scripture hints of a multitude of angels rebelling against God, the rebellion likely spearheaded by an arch angel, now known to us as Satan,

causing the still present condition of a spiritual war. This is a view that is widely held by Christians everywhere, unless they totally disregard the spiritual world and the scriptural storyline. Still, it does not necessitate any notion of a divine council with divine beings or related beliefs. Rather, it is fully explainable as “ordinary” angels rebelling and being let loose on the earth manifesting themselves according to their powers, abilities or fancy.

A Tainted Worldview

Proponents of DCW rely heavily on the notion that this worldview, also reflected in ANE, as well as 1 Enoch, represents the original revelation to humankind regarding the spiritual realm. However, it is far more likely that ANE sources represent an already perverted worldview, and while 1 Enoch might be known at NT times and hints of such can be attested in Scripture, it was always a dubious text unfitting as a normative source regarding spiritual matters.

In fact, DCW turns everything on its head, when assuming that depictions in ancient texts or ANE sources carry some original and untainted understanding to be superimposed on later texts, since clearly the ancient ANE texts themselves are already tainted by a polytheistic worldview of several gods.

Curiously enough, since proponents of DCW at least uphold the fundamental difference between the triune God and other “divine” beings, we might be facing a straw man. Nevertheless, I still caution against adopting DCW vocabulary or a DCW worldview for various reasons. At least, considering the fuller revelation in NT one might easily claim that the true divine council is the intratrinitarian council of Father, Son and Spirit, and that the notion should not be extended beyond that. Similarly, regarding other concepts and notions. The term “morning star” is possibly a title that the Son claims exclusively for himself,¹⁴ even if attributed to angelic beings in OT passages¹⁵ akin to the similar use of “God” versus “gods.” If that is the case, when Isaiah ascribes the term to Satan,¹⁶ it most likely should be read sarcastically as “you, who attempted to exalt yourself as the morning star.” When all is said and

¹¹ Michael S. Heiser, *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, the Watcher & the forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ*, 2017, chap. 4. Kindle.

¹² Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, chap. 7. Kindle.

¹³ For example, Job 1:6

¹⁴ Rev 22:16

¹⁵ Job 38:7

¹⁶ Is 14:12

done, it seems to me quite convincing that Satan's attempt to copy or imitate divine realities would exemplify itself in such manners. That is, the typical pagan worldview of a council or pantheon of gods might be a mere counterfeit imitation of the Trinity, purported by fallen angels through pagan oracles seeking to imitate divine realities. The notion of divine beings besides God himself likely something similar. Also, the notion of fallen angels creating new spiritual lifeforms via the *nephilim* might potentially represent some twisted version of God creating either angels or humankind.

To put it mildly, it would be unfortunate to even inadvertently adopt such a worldview and such a mindset, based on the misunderstood trust in old sources, which were already in their days tainted and corrupted.