

Did Jesus Teach the Deity of Humanity?

Investigating the intent of Jesus' statement, "You are gods."

"Jesus answered them, **Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?**" Jesus, John 10:34, KJV

Mystic, New Age, cultic and Word of Faith spiritualists commonly assume that in the essence of their being they are divine, that either they are or can become gods. [1] By employing The Third Eye for example, mystics attempt to contemplate into the consciousness of their divine nature. One Norwegian website explains:

During deep meditation, the single or spiritual eye becomes visible within the central part of the forehead. This omniscient eye is variously referred to in scriptures as the third eye . . ." [2]

The website asserts that the Lord is in heaven. But where is heaven? How can heaven be found? "Gliding inside oneself in the right way should 'work wonders'," the university explains. How can someone "glide within" to discover heaven within where the Lord dwells? By meditating upon the assumption that you are "the image of God inside yourself." In a spirit of self-hype, members of the Word of Faith movement also claim themselves to be little gods who can self-create what they want out of life. To assert their divinity, both movements employ the statement of Jesus where He asked the Jews, "**Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'?**" (John 10:34).

When in John 10:34 He told the Jews "*You are gods*," did Jesus mean to say that persons possess an essential divinity awaiting their discovery by taking a meditative journey into "inner space"? To support their claim that man is or can become God, teachers of the "man-is-god" doctrine have *seized* upon words that Jesus intended only for the Jews, *ignored* their original intent and arrogantly *applied* them to their own being. Without conscripting Jesus words to make them conform to any preconception of what we might want them to say, what did Jesus really mean when He said to the Jews, "**You are gods**"? [3]

To discover the intent of Jesus' statement to the Jews, Psalm 82, the source of Jesus' quotation in John 10:34, must be understood. The psalm begins by asserting that God (verse 1a) is the Judge of "**the gods**" (verse 1b). The psalmist then directs attention to God's indictment of "**the gods**" (verses 2-7). God accused them of prejudice in favor of the wicked and of oppression of the poor, the innocent and the needy (verses 2-4). He accused them of being blinded by their might, of being corrupted by their power, and of having perverted the nation's legal "**foundations**" (verse 5). Sound familiar? Because they thought themselves to be invincible, God reminds the arrogant *judges/gods* of their mortality and that He had appointed them to their office (verses 6-7). The song closes with the congregation's petition to God that He would administer justice on the earth (verse 8).

Because Jesus quoted this psalm in His argument with the Jews, any understanding of His words must be connected to the psalm's original intent. As the Master Lawyer, we assume that Jesus' reference to the Law of Psalm 82 was a key part of His defense against the charge of blasphemy which the Jews leveled against Him for stating, "**I and the Father are one**" (John 10:30).

In order to determine the original intent of the psalm's declaration, "**I said, 'You are gods'**," two interpretive questions must be answered: *first*, who are the "gods" to which the psalm, and then Jesus, refer (Psalm 82:1b, 6a); and *second*, who is the designated speaker in the phrase "**I said**"?

The First Question: Who are the gods?

Scholars offer three interpretations of the identity of the *gods*: **a.** that gods refer to pagan idols; **b.** that gods refer to angelic beings; and **c.** that gods refer to human judges who were vice-regents in the administration of Israel's theocratic kingdom. As already intimated and for good reasons, the *gods* of Psalm 82 can only refer to human judges.

First, Psalm 82 begins, "**God [Elohim] takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the rulers [elohim].**" In the psalm's opening verse, there are two *elohim* references. First, there exists the single and sovereign God (*Elohim*) who possesses authority over His earthly vice-regents (the *elohim*). Like "**the gods**" in Psalm 82:1b and 6a, *elohim* is elsewhere translated "judges" or "rulers" in the Old Testament (See Exodus 21:6 and 22:8.). **[4]** God had therefore invested *the gods* with authority to administrate the Law in Israel's theocratic kingdom (verse 1). For the purpose of administering day-to-day justice, the *judges/gods* (the *elohim*) were the extension of *Elohim's* authority amongst His ancient people, Israel.

Second, the immediate context also identifies these *elohim* (i.e., gods) to be human. God chastises the judges *for* showing partiality in administering justice, *for* oppressing the unfortunate, and *for* ignoring the needy (verses 2-4). Such offenses can only be committed by human rulers. Further, because of their crookedness "**All the foundations of the earth are shaken**" (verse 5). For reason of judicial prejudice, the "shaken-foundations" metaphor signals that Israel's legal system had collapsed. As David questioned elsewhere, "**If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?**" (Psalm 11:3). For better or for worse, human judges administer earthly justice. Angels and/or pagan gods do not.

Third, regarding these *gods* (i.e., *elohim*, verses 1b, 6a), the psalm declares: "**Nevertheless you will die like men, and fall like any one of the princes**" (verse 7). Because *God is eternal* (Psalm 90:2), *angels are immortal* (Luke 20:36), and *pagan gods are lifeless* (Habakkuk 2:19; Acts 17:29), these *elohim* (i.e., gods) are human, not divine.

And *fourth*, the correlation between Psalm 82:6 and Jesus' quotation of it in John 10 necessitated that *the gods* to whom Jesus referred corresponded to *the gods* in the psalm. If *the gods* to whom Jesus referred in John 10 were many of Judah's judges (i.e., *the Jews*), the reference to *the gods* in Psalm 82 must likewise have referred to Israel's judges. The fact that in His quotation Jesus viewed that *the gods* of Psalm 82:1b and 6a were equivalent to *the Jews* indicates that *the gods* were not angels or pagan deities. If they were, then it becomes difficult

to see the relevance of Jesus' reference in the controversy. The *gods* of Psalm 82 whom Jesus made reference to in John 10 *were human judges*.

The Second Question: Who is the speaker in Psalm 82?

When the Psalm states "**I said, 'You are gods'**", who is speaking? (Psalm 82:6). Was speaker the psalmist (Asaph), or God (*Elohim*)? For a number of reasons the speaker must be identified as God. [5] Given that the contents of the psalm flow together after the introduction (verse 1) until the closing petition (verse 8), then it should be concluded that in the middle section (verses 2-7) the speaker in verse 6 is God. The *you-are-gods* statement is intended by God to remind Israel's judges that they served *under* His authority, *by* His appointment and *at* His discretion. The statement "**I said, 'You are gods'**" may have recalled the investiture ceremony by which Israel's theocratic judges were officially installed to their position (See Psalm 2:7.). In assuming their office, the judges were told, *You are gods*. With those words of investiture, the judges were reminded of their solemn relationship with God and their obligation to fairly administrate His justice in the nation. The ceremony by which a Supreme Court justice is sworn in to uphold the U.S. Constitution by placing his hand on the Bible may illustrate the statement.

By declaring them to be *gods* in His defense against the accusation of blasphemy, Jesus made at least five points to the Jews: *one*, their authority to judge was on loan to them from God; *two*, they would account to God for any miscarriage of justice they might perpetrate; *three*, like the judges of Psalm 82:5, Jesus inferred they were corrupt and did not "**understand**" and walked "**about in darkness**" (Jesus after all, was the light of the world! John 8:12; 9:5); *four*, because of the legal precedent set in Psalm 82:6 where the Law called judges *gods*, Jesus was innocent of the accusation of blasphemy; and *five*, by identifying Himself with the divine Speaker in Psalm 82 (i.e., in symphony with God in Psalm 82:6, Jesus also decreed to judges, "**I said, 'You are gods'**"), *Jesus further affirmed that He was God!* And all this Jesus did by the authority of Scripture, for as He said, "**the Scripture cannot be broken**" (John 10:35). The subtly of mystic and Word of Faith spirituality is that to claim their divinity they twist a Scripture Jesus quoted to defend His Deity.

By calling them *gods*, in no way did Jesus assert that the Jews were "enlightened" beings. Fact of the matter is, quite the opposite was the case. Jesus' quotation of Psalm 82 subtly implicated the Jews with the "**darkness**" that characterized the judges of that day. Neither the Jewish judges or people were *gods* for reason of indwelling divinity. After all, they would "**die like men**." Only in so far that God had invested His authority with them were the Jewish authorities *gods*. That was the "original intent" of Psalm 82:6, and that is the only sense, it may confidently be asserted, in which Jesus called the Jews *gods* in John 10:34.

Had Jesus meant, as mystic, New Age, cultic and Word of Faith religion assume, to say that all people are *gods*, then He was guilty of teaching polytheism, something that the context of John 10 (The issue at debate was the accusation of blasphemy.) and the spirit and the letter of Jewish Law did not and will not bear (See Deuteronomy 6:4.). If Jesus was affirming the existence of *gods* other than the Father and Himself, He would have been in violation of the First Commandment, "**Thou shalt have no other gods before me**" (Exodus 20:3). Some might accuse that by declaring Himself to be God in John 10:30, Jesus introduced the possibility of

multiple gods. But that accusation cannot stick in light of Jesus' declaration, "**I and the Father are one**" (John 10:30). *There is unity within the Trinity!*

God's holiness marks him out to be separate and apart from man the creature (Isaiah 6:1-5). Application of Jesus' saying "**Ye are gods**" for the purpose of affirming human *theosis*, that man is or can become God, treats the Holy God as common. A theologian humorously stated, "God created man in His own image and likeness, and man has been returning the compliment ever since!" But God has said, "**I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another**" (Isaiah 42:8). If God intends to uphold the holiness and glory He will share with no one else, then the Holy One must surely be provoked by the compliment with which contemplators compliment themselves. By arrogantly asserting their deity, they seem to imply that God cannot live without them!

If there be *gods* in our nation today, these *gods* are not mystical contemplators who believe they bear within them a divine nature, but rather *the gods are judges* presiding over a nation's legal system. As Jesus intended it to be understood (recognizing that our government is a democracy and not a theocracy), can the nine justices of the United States Supreme Court be considered *gods*? In a sense, Yes! But should New Age gurus, devotees to mystical or contemplative spirituality and members of the Word of Faith movement be considered *gods*? Absolutely not! For reason of the divine authority invested in judges by God, and as Jesus affirmed before the Jewish resisters He faced, Psalm 82:6 was meant to recognize the authority of some, not the divinity of all.

Conclusion

From Jesus' statement to the Jewish judges ("**I said, 'You are gods'**"), a couple of themes stand out. *First*, those judges possessed authority from God. *Second*, those same judges, as the rest of humanity, were/are accountable to God. Therefore, it evidences a "leap into the dark" when mystic religion "spins" a statement Jesus meant to affirm the authority and accountability of the Jews to God, turns Jesus' words on their head, and announces the divinity of humanity. By quoting Psalm 82 Jesus was not telling the Jews they were deities, but that from the perspective of the Law, He was reminding them of their accountability to Almighty God!

Like Lucifer, Adam and Eve, Tyre and Babylon, and the anti-Christ, those who live in practical denial of God's holiness for reason of affirming their own divinity are heading for certain judgment (Compare Isaiah 14:14; Genesis 3:5; Ezekiel 28:2; Isaiah 47:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). Those claiming to be deities at the expense of God's glory will one day be subpoenaed to the High Court of the universe to appear before Judge Jesus (John 5:26-30), and in that moment of final truth, they will be called upon to defend the indefensible; namely, that they being men had made themselves out to be *gods*. Then, and probably only then, will they come to the stark realization that they were no gods at all.

As the Apostle Paul wrote of the delusion of *theosis*, "**Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man . . .**" (Romans 1:22-23a).

ENDNOTES

[1] In enunciating the view of humanity held by most teachers of the human potential movement, psychologist M. Scott Peck wrote: "God wants us to become Himself (or Herself or Itself). We are growing toward godhood." See M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978) 270. In its "Adam-God" doctrine, Mormonism teaches, "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become." See "Mormonism," *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult*, George A. Mather and Larry A. Nichols, Editors (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993) 194. Word of Faith teachers assert that because Christians are "little gods," they can through positive confession decree their own health and wealth. See Walter Martin, "You Shall Be As Gods," *The Agony of Deceit*, Michael Horton, Editor (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1990) 89-105.

[2] *The Gold Scales*, "The Divine Light and the Third Eye," <http://oaks.nvg.org/eg3ra4.html>.

[3] Because of the negative cast John seemingly ascribes to the Jews, some accuse the gospel of anti-Semitism or racial stereotyping. But the reader should know that in his references to the Jews, John, himself being a Jew, most likely was referring to the leadership of the nation at that time (John 1:19; 5:10,16,18; 7:13; 9:22; etc.). As to how to understand the frequent mention of "the Jews" in the gospel, Morris comments that John employs the term Jews "to denote the Jewish nation as hostile to Jesus. It does not necessarily denote the whole nation. In fact characteristically it means the Jews of Judea, especially those in and around Jerusalem." If Jews may at times be a synonym for Judaeans, then the expression also differentiates Judaeans from Galileans and Samaritans (John 4:9). See Leon Morris, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971) 130-131. One must be careful to think that John's designation "Jews" carries a narrow racial meaning (i.e., the Jewish people).

[4] In reference to the adjudication process, Exodus 21:6 advises, "**Then his master shall bring him unto the judges** [*the elohim*]." Again, reads Exodus 22:8, "**If the thief be not found, then the master of the house shall be brought unto the judges** [*the elohim*]."

[5] Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 5, Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991) 536.

VanGemeren understands the speaker to be God because the "I" is emphatic and is followed by a verb of speaking. Resembling Psalm 2:6, "I said . . ." appears to be the speaking of a divine decree."