

council.³⁶ The earliest iterations of this divine council appear to have been closely related to those of Ugarit, the coastal Syrian city that was destroyed around 1200 BCE, centuries before the establishment of an Israelite or Judahite national identity or literary tradition. Deuteronomy 32:8–9, for instance, preserves what may be the earliest biblical witness to the divine council, and in it the high deity (Elyon) divides and distributes the nations to their offspring (the *bene 'ēlōhîm*, “children of deity,” or “deities”; 4QDeut^d) according to their number, with the nation of Israel assigned to YHWH, who would seem to be one of those offspring.³⁷ This not only distinguishes YHWH from Elyon, but also describes the divine council as composed of the high deity’s offspring, which corresponds to the Ugaritic designations of the divine council as the *mphrt bn 'il*, “assembly of the children of El” (*KTU* 1.65.3), and *dr bn 'il*, “circle of the children of El” (*KTU* 1.40.25, 33–34). The table of nations in Gen 10 suggests there were understood to be seventy nations on earth, and this tradition appears in later literature in reference to seventy guardian angels over the nations of the earth (e.g., 1 En. 89.59; 90.22–25).³⁸ If this tradition of seventy nations was in circulation at the time of the composition of Deut 32:8–9, the number of nations would correspond with the number of the divine offspring, which would correspond with the Ugaritic literature’s designation of the members of the divine council as the seventy offspring of Athirat, El’s consort (*KTU* 1.4.vi.46; cf. Smith 2001, 41–43, 55–56).³⁹

Two major changes may be noted regarding the conceptualization of YHWH between the early iteration of the divine council in Deut 32 and the much later iteration in Ps 82. Perhaps the most significant difference is that YHWH appears to direct the council in the latter witness but is subordinate in the earlier. There has been a great deal of debate regarding the distinction of YHWH and El in Ps 82, but if El is identifiable in the psalm, they are utterly inoperative, and the exilic (or later) dating of the psalm renders unlikely the preservation of a firm distinction. There may be a relic of YHWH’s subordination preserved in the

³⁶ As Robert Gordon (2007, 190) notes, “Old Testament references to this Divine Council ... are too widely distributed among the individual books and across the canonical divisions for them to be regarded as simple ‘vestigial’ and immaterial to the presentation of God in the Hebrew scriptures. The Pentateuch, Former and Latter Prophets, Psalms, Job and Daniel all draw directly on the concept of the DC in their portrayal of the God of Israel.”

³⁷ MT begins Deut 32:9 with *kî* (“because,” “that,” “but”), the interpretation of which has been a subject of some debate (Tsevat 1969, 132; Heiser 2006, 5–8), but it has largely facilitated identifying YHWH with Elyon and reading the passage to indicate YHWH reserved one of the allotments for themselves. The Septuagint, however, begins the verse with *kai egenēthē*, “and it happened that,” which almost exclusively renders the narrative marker *wayāhî*.

³⁸ The number seventy was a conventionalized way to refer to a large number of something.

³⁹ Fleming (2021, 269) points out that a high deity distributing sovereignty over lands or peoples is “unknown from any ancient writing.”