



Multiple "gods"?

I think that before we start with this linguistic categories (definite-indefinite, nominative and qualitative), we have to clarify whether in the theological framework of the NT, the term **θεός** is indeed a general concept that can be applied in a positive and affirmative sense to creatures: angels, prophets, agents of God, human leaders, or not.

The main problem with the NWT translation of John 1:1c is that it assumes, without any evidence, that this is the default meaning of the word **θεός**, that is, that it is an existing category in the theological framework of the NT, and then quickly includes the Logos in it.

This is the problem here, that we have not clarified this before we start to engage in various linguistic discussions. Because when we discuss the translation "a god", the criticism should start there, that this type of **θεός** category, that "a" (lesser) "god" (among many) does not even exist in the terminology of the NT.

The New Testament nowhere calls angels, God's agents (e.g. the apostles), no one in a positive and affirmative sense, and this is relevant here. This is so true that even the OT verses where angels are named as "*elohim*" are not rendered as **θεοί** in the NT quotes, in my opinion precisely because these remnants of henotheism have been weeded out so far.

The JW argument hinges on the translation of "*elohim*" and "*theos*." They cite Psalm 8:5 and Hebrews 2:7, interpreting "*elohim*" as angels. However, contextually, "*elohim*" in Psalm 8:5 should be understood as "God," reflecting man's creation in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). The Septuagint (LXX) translated "*elohim*" as "*angels*," which Hebrews quotes, but this translation was not meant to be literal or accurate to the Hebrew text. It introduces a new understanding without contradicting the original.

Psalm 8:5 speaks of man's exalted status, whereas Hebrews 2:7 refers to Christ's temporary humbling. The original Hebrew "*elohim*" likely means "God," not angels. Hebrews 2:7 uses "angels" to reflect Christ's humanity, not to equate angels with gods.

Actually **nowhere** in the New Testament are angels referred to as "*gods*" in a positive, affirming sense. Even when OT verses (e.g., Psalm 8:5) call angels "*elohim*," the NT does not translate this as "*theoi*." This is evident in Hebrews 2:7, where "*elohim*" becomes "angels," indicating a deliberate avoidance of calling angels "gods" in the NT.

The Bible consistently uses "*theoi*" in a mocking or condemning sense for false gods (e.g., 2 Corinthians 4:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:4). The inspired author of Hebrews uses "*aggeloi*" (angels) instead of "*theoi*" to avoid any positive attribution of divinity to created beings.

Christ is distinct from angels, being worshipped by them and identified as God's Son (Hebrews 1:4-5). He is not an angel but the Lord who created everything (Hebrews 1:10-13). Therefore,

equating Jesus with angels or considering angels as gods undermines the biblical affirmation of Jesus's unique divinity.

The arguments presented by the JW apologists fail to recognize the consistent biblical theme that angels are not referred to as "*gods*" in a positive sense. The NT avoids attributing divinity to created beings, affirming instead the unique divinity of Jesus Christ.

So the NT, and John also uses **θεός** to refer to the one true God consistently, and "a *god*" would imply monolatristic henotheism, which contradicts John's monotheistic context. John, a first-century Jewish-Christian monotheist, would not imply such monolatristic henotheism by suggesting that the Logos was "a god." Instead, John emphasizes the Logos sharing in the divine nature of the one true God. By not addressing these broader syntactical and contextual nuances, the JWs' argument remains superficial, and they neglect key interpretative elements that contribute to understanding John 1:1c.

John 10:34 does not establish at all that this is an existing category of **θεός** within the theological framework of the NT, and especially not that this is the default meaning. This is merely a quote that Christ uses here to argue "a fortiori", at the same time he distances himself from it, because he refers to it as "in **your** Law", and otherwise the original psalm is mostly mocking about these judges, at all it does not break the fundamental and strict monotheism of Second Temple Judaism, which is also John's own (Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 44:6).

- ["I Said Ye Are Gods:" Psalm 82:6 and John 10](#) Jerome Neyrey
- [An Apologetic Study of John 10:34-36](#) W. Gary Phillips
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Nowhere in the NT will you find a place that claims the exalted servants of God as **θεοί** in a actual, positive and affirmative sense. In all cases, it is consistently used in a condemning, mocking sense, for usurper, impostor "*gods*", like 2 Corinthians 4:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

It is no coincidence that for example in Hebrews 2:7, the inspired author translates what the original psalmist wrote as "*elohim*" to "*aggeloi*" (angels). Why? Because, on a principle level, in the NT, calling actual "theoi" to created beings is kept away.

The JWs' translation implies a category of **θεός** that refers to a lesser deity or one among many. However, the NT does not support this usage. The NT consistently uses **θεός** to refer to the one true God and does not apply it to angels, apostles, or any other beings in a positive and affirmative sense.

JWs often refer to Psalm 82 where judges are called "*elohim*," which means "*gods*." However, this term's use in Psalm 82 is unique and context-specific, referring to human judges who represent God's authority but are not divine beings. The term "*elohim*" here is used poetically and sarcastically, criticizing the judges for their failures. In the OT, calling someone "*a god*" did not mean they were divine in the sense of possessing the fullness of deity like Christ. The term

was used in a specific, limited context, primarily to emphasize the judges' representative role and their failure to uphold justice.

The use of "*elohim*" in Psalm 82 should be interpreted within the poetic and literary context of the Psalms, which often employ metaphorical language. This does not establish a general category of divinity applicable in a positive sense to humans or angels in the NT. The term "*elohim*" in Hebrew is much broader and can be translated as "*mighty ones*" or "*judges*," rather than "*God*" in the proper sense. This broader usage is not carried over into the NT at all, where **θεός** specifically refers to the one true God, in all cases where this is not stated mockingly or condemningly.

The only NT example where a similar usage appears is in John 10:34, which quotes Psalm 82:6. Here, "*gods*" (*elohim*) refers to earthly judges mockingly called "*gods*" due to their role, but they are condemned for their corruption and mortality. Jesus uses this passage to argue from the lesser to the greater (a "*kal va-chomer*" argument) to defend his divinity but does not equate his divine nature with the flawed judges (cf. v36). He argues that if human judges could be called "gods" in a limited sense, how much more could he, the Son of God, be called God? Jesus does not equate his divinity with that of the judges in Psalm 82. Instead, he uses a "kal va-chomer" argument to assert a higher and superior sense of divinity.

If representatives of God could be called "*gods*" in the theological framework of the NT, why are the apostles or angels never called "*gods*" in the NT? This absence indicates a significant shift in understanding from the OT to the NT. Acts 28:6, where Paul is mistaken for a god by the Maltese, is neither affirmative nor positive. It shows the misunderstanding of the pagans, not a biblical endorsement of calling God's representatives "*gods*."

In the NT, the term **θεός** refers to the omnipotent, creator, infinite single God, not to any lesser beings. This is significant because it shows that the NT authors, including John, did not recognize a category of lesser deities within their monotheistic framework. The NT attributes to Jesus characteristics that affirm his divinity: omniscience, timelessness, the ability to hear prayers, and being worshipped. These attributes cannot apply to created beings, like angels or human judge, and firmly place Jesus within the identity of the one true God.

This superior divinity is consistent with Jesus being truly God. The NT never calls angels or apostles "gods" in a positive and affirmative sense, indicating that the category of "*lesser gods*" does not exist within the theological framework of the NT.

The NT consistently uses **θεός** to refer to the one true God. There is no category of lesser deities or "gods" in the NT. This usage underscores the monotheistic context of the NT, where only the one true God is recognized and worshipped. Designating Jesus as "*a god*" would imply a form of monolatristic henotheism, which contradicts the NT's monotheistic theology. John, as a Jewish-Christian monotheist, would not suggest such a concept by describing the Logos as "*a god*."

The plural form "*theoi*" always refers to false, pagan gods. The Bible does not call angels "*gods*," but "*sons of God*" (*b'nei Elohim*), so Michael the archangel cannot be

scripturally called "*a god*" or "*the Son*." Additionally, God mockingly refers to the corrupt judges of Israel as "the congregation of the gods" and individually as "gods," who could decide matters of life and death and might think of themselves as gods, but due to their wickedness, God's judgment is upon them, and they will die like ordinary men (Psalm 82:1-7). This is the spectrum of the term "GOD" in biblical meaning.

For completeness, Hebrew also uses the word "god" in some possessive constructions as an adjective meaning "giant" or "mighty": for example, Nineveh is described as "the city of God," meaning "great city" (Jonah 3:3).

Christ, the Son, obviously does not fall into the category of a corrupt judge, a deified human, or a false, pagan god. Thus, the only valid interpretation is that the Word was God, by nature and eternally.

- **Psalm 8:5** - The translation of "*elohim*" here can indeed be interpreted as "God" or "divine beings," but contextually, it refers to human beings' exalted status, not equating them with divine nature. The argument here is that "Elohim" in Psalm 8:5 should be translated as "angels." However, it's important to note that "Elohim" is a term that can refer to God, gods, or divine beings, depending on the context. The Septuagint (LXX), an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, translates "*elohim*" as "*angels*" (*ἄγγέλους*) in this passage. The New Testament author of Hebrews follows this translation. This does not imply that angels are being called gods in a polytheistic sense; rather, it reflects the flexible usage of the term "Elohim" to denote beings with divine qualities or roles.
- **Exodus 7:1** - Here, "*god to Pharaoh*" metaphorically indicates Moses' authoritative role over Pharaoh, not literal divinity. This is clearly metaphorical, indicating the authority and power given to Moses by God. It does not imply that Moses is a deity in the same sense as God Himself. This use of "*god*" highlights the function or role rather than a literal divine nature.
- **Psalm 82:6** - The term "*gods*" (*elohim*) here refers to human judges or rulers who represent God's authority, not implying they are deities. In Psalm 82, God is addressing the judges of Israel, who are called "*gods*" (*elohim*) because they represent God's authority in executing justice. The subsequent verses clarify that these judges are mortal and will die like any other human (Psalm 82:7). The term "*gods*" here is used metaphorically to describe their role, not their nature.
- **2 Chronicles 19:6** - The judges represent God's justice, not divine status. This verse emphasizes the responsibility of judges to act on behalf of God, reinforcing the idea that they represent divine authority in their judgments. Again, it does not suggest that these judges are deities but that they are appointed to execute God's justice.

The cited sources, such as Brown-Driver-Briggs, acknowledge "*elohim*" can mean judges or rulers reflecting divine power, but not literal "*gods*". Therefore, the OT usage of "*gods*" symbolizes authority or representation rather than equating beings with God's nature.

The use of "*elohim*" to describe humans or angels in the Hebrew Bible is metaphorical and denotes roles of authority and representation, not literal divinity. This is consistent with monotheism, where there is only one true God, and any application of "god" to others is figurative.

The biblical texts where creatures are called "*gods*" are using metaphorical language to describe roles of authority and representation. This usage does not conflict with the monotheistic belief in one true God. In the New Testament, angels are not called "*gods*" in a literal, affirmative sense. Instead, terms like "*sons of God*" or "*angels*" are used to denote their roles as divine messengers. The context and interpretation provided by the Church Fathers and biblical scholarship reinforce the understanding that these references do not imply polytheism but rather metaphorical descriptions of authority and function under the sovereignty of the one true God.

The critical point remains: John 1:1 refers to "*the Word was God*" (*theos*), denoting Jesus' divine nature, not as a lesser or different deity.

The Church Fathers often explained that terms like "gods" used for angels or humans in the Scriptures were honorific and figurative, not literal. They highlighted that such usage was meant to acknowledge the high status or divine commission of these beings rather than equate them with the one true God. They strongly affirmed that such descriptions did not imply polytheism or diminish the core monotheistic belief. Instead, these beings were seen as reflecting God's power or acting on His behalf.

For example, Psalms 82:6, where it says, "*I said, 'You are gods,'*" was often interpreted as referring to human judges or leaders who were acting as God's representatives on earth. The term "*gods*" indicated their role in executing divine justice, not that they were deities themselves. Similarly, in John 10:34, Jesus quotes this verse to demonstrate that calling someone "*god*" in a figurative sense was not blasphemous, thereby defending His claim of being the Son of God.

The Church Fathers emphasized that while these beings could be called "*gods*" in a secondary, figurative sense, Jesus Christ, the Son, was uniquely divine. His divinity was intrinsic and essential, not merely honorific. This distinction was crucial in maintaining both the unique divinity of Christ and the monotheistic framework.

They stressed the importance of understanding the context and the intended message behind these scriptural terms. The purpose was often to underscore the authority and responsibility given by God rather than to suggest actual divinity.

The Church Fathers rejected any notion of henotheism (belief in one primary god among many). They clarified that references to "*gods*" in scripture were never meant to introduce a

hierarchy of deities but to highlight God's sovereign appointment of certain beings to specific roles.

- **Justin Martyr:** Justin explained that the term "*gods*" when applied to angels or humans is not in the same sense as the true God. He emphasized that these beings are called "*gods*" due to their role and not because they possess the divine nature. This usage reflects their function or office rather than their essence.
- **Irenaeus:** Irenaeus argued that although certain beings are referred to as "*gods*," it is always in a subordinate sense to the one true God. He highlighted that this figurative language is used to denote honor or authority granted by God, and it should not be confused with the worship due to the one true God.
- **Clement of Alexandria:** Clement elaborated that the term "*god*" used for humans, especially judges or kings, signifies their role as representatives of God's justice and authority. He maintained that this did not imply polytheism but rather underscored their duty to uphold divine justice.
- **Origen:** Origen focused on the interpretive aspect, noting that the term "*gods*" is metaphorical. He pointed out that such language is meant to teach about the delegated authority and honor bestowed by God to certain individuals or beings. This delegation does not elevate them to the status of the supreme God.
- **Augustine:** Augustine discussed the term "*gods*" in a figurative sense to highlight that it reflects the honor and authority given by God to humans and angels. He stressed that while these beings are called "*gods*," it is because they act as instruments of God's will and not because they possess divinity themselves.
- **Athanasius:** Athanasius made it clear that references to "*gods*" among angels or humans are figurative and should be understood as such. He emphasized the uniqueness of the true God and clarified that any other use of the term "*god*" is symbolic of the role or function endowed by the true God.
- **John Chrysostom:** Chrysostom explained that the term "*gods*" in Scripture often refers to the office or role given by God to judges or leaders. He reinforced the idea that these titles are honorific and do not imply any form of divine nature.
- **Theophilus of Antioch:** Theophilus interpreted the use of "*gods*" in a similar manner, noting that it denotes the authority given by God to certain individuals to act on His behalf. He clarified that this terminology is figurative and serves to illustrate their responsibility rather than any divine status.

These Church Fathers consistently argued that the term "*gods*" when applied to creatures is metaphorical, used to signify their role or authority granted by the one true God. They reconciled this with monotheism by emphasizing the supremacy and uniqueness of the true God, ensuring that any figurative use of "god" did not contradict the fundamental belief in one

God. They also affirmed the divinity of the Son within the framework of monotheism, distinguishing between the unique nature of the true God and the delegated authority represented by the term "*gods*."