

Psalm 82

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Among th' assemblies of the great
A greater Ruler takes his seat;
The God of heav'n, as Judge, surveys
Those gods on earth, and all their ways.

Why will ye, then, frame wicked laws?
Or why support th' unrighteous cause?
When will ye once defend the poor,
That sinners vex the saints no more?

They know not, Lord, nor will they know;
Dark are the ways in which they go;
Their name of earthly gods is vain,
For they shall fall and die like men.

Arise, O Lord, and let thy Son
Possess his universal throne,
And rule the nations with his rod;
He is our Judge, and he our God.

April 28, 2023

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

A Noted Passing

Kevin T. Bauder

I first heard of Michael Heiser when I was pastoring in Texas during the mid-1990s. A visiting speaker to our church had recently visited the campus of Pillsbury Baptist Bible College in Owatonna, Minnesota. This speaker commented about the impression that the young Bible professors in Minnesota had made on him. One of those professors was Mike Heiser.

Shortly after that conversation a disruption at Pillsbury resulted in the exodus not only of the young professors but also of the president. This was the event that began the long downward spiral resulting in the college's closure in 2008. It was also the event that steered Michael Heiser toward a more visible and public career than he would likely have enjoyed as a professor at PBBC.

Heiser had been reached for Christ under the ministry of David Burggraff in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. After graduating from high school he enrolled as a student at Pillsbury Baptist Bible College. He became one of the students who transferred to Bob Jones University during a period of conflict between Baptist leaders in Pennsylvania and Minnesota. He later attended Calvary Baptist Seminary in Lansdale, Pennsylvania, and then Dallas Theological Seminary. By the time he returned to teach at Pillsbury, he had completed a master's degree in ancient history at the University of Pennsylvania. After Heiser left Pillsbury, he completed another master's degree and a Ph.D. in Semitics at the University of Wisconsin (Madison), writing his dissertation on the so-called "divine council."

As Heiser understood it, the divine council is an assembly of very powerful spirit beings who act as advisers to the true and living God. These advisers are encountered in Genesis 1 ("let us make man in our image"), in the Sons of God of Genesis 6 and Job 1, and in the "gods" of Psalm 82. They are created spirits, higher than the angels, whom God has placed in exalted positions of rulership in heaven and on earth. They include both fallen and unfallen spirits. While Yahweh is the one true and living God, the divine council are "gods" of a lower, creaturely order.

This putative divine council became a major focus of Heiser's research and writing. After he was made scholar in residence by Logos Bible Software



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.
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(2004–2019), Heiser’s books became some of the most popular for the Logos/Faithlife/Lexham network. Heiser almost single-handedly popularized the divine council theory, establishing it as a respectable option within evangelical theology.

The divine council theory had not previously commanded much respect in evangelical circles. It had been developed by liberal scholars in tandem with an evolutionary view of Israel’s religion. This view saw the Israelites beginning as polytheists, then gradually advancing through henotheism and into monotheism as they elevated Yahweh to the position of sole God. In some of his best work, Heiser ably refuted this evolutionary understanding of Israelite religion. In doing so, he managed to uncouple the divine council theory from its liberal and evolutionary context, thus allowing it to be reassessed within an evangelical understanding of Scripture.

These contributions fit well with the peculiar turn of Heiser’s interests. He was a big fan of *The X-Files*, and he also devoted considerable attention to examining paranormal and “fringe historical” hypotheses from a biblical point of view. He wrote extensively about things like UFOs, ancient alien astronauts, Bible codes, and alien abductions. He was even recognized by *Fate* magazine as one of “The 100 Most Influential People in Ufology.”

While Heiser wrote many scholarly articles and papers, he will be best remembered for his popular works and his podcast. *The Naked Bible Podcast* had an eight-year run with a total of 458 episodes, the last of which Heiser recorded only six weeks before he died. He loved to communicate to ordinary people, and he wasn’t afraid to employ a bit of sensationalism in doing it. His eagerness to spread his views at the popular level is much of what built his legacy.

So is his charity, good will, and kindness. Several years ago I interacted with him while writing an article on Psalm 82. Even though my conclusions ended up being almost directly opposite his, Heiser provided truly generous help as I wrote the article (“Who Judges the Judge?” in *The Old Testament Yesterday and Today*, ed. by Rhett P. Dodson). He was eager to interact—and that is not a uniform trait among scholars.

Most of all, Heiser’s legacy rests upon his single-minded focus. Starting from his advocacy of the divine council theory he developed related theories of biblical angelology and demonology, an understanding of the development and role of nations in the plan of God, and ultimately an overarching storyline for the outworking of God’s plan. The result was an integrated system that reflected a comprehensive biblical theology. By continuously publishing the elements of this theory through a variety of scholarly and popular venues, Heiser was able to advance his views significantly within the evangelical world.

In 2019, Heiser left Logos and moved to Florida to become Executive Director at Awakening School of Theology and Ministry. The following year, while the rest of the world was panicking about COVID, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. The cancer took his life in February of this year. Michael Heiser was just sixty years old.

Heiser was a true scholar. He was a true gentleman. He was a true man of God and a faithful witness for Jesus Christ. But he was also unique in his interests and in his passion to communicate them. We shall not look upon his like again.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
