

Lecture 2: The Bible's Main Ideas.

Reading: Hayes, excerpt from Lecture 2 (Kaufmann on Polytheism); Wikipedia, "Documentary Hypothesis"; the text which appears on the Basic Ideas timeline when you rollover each of the horizontal bars (also available as a PDF file).

Theological truth claims of the Bible:

- God, variously called YHWH or Elohim, is the universal God who created the world and established a universal moral order;
 - ✦ YHWH = a uniquely Israelite name for God;
 - ★ Pronunciation uncertain (not "Jehovah"), translated "Lord";
 - ✦ Elohim = the deity, translated "God," a variant on a divine name found all over the ancient near east (El);
 - ✦ Documentary hypothesis makes much of the change of names ("J," "E").
- There is no other God;
- This God is the God of both nature and history:
 - ✦ Nature: creation; natural phenomena obey God;
 - ✦ History: the Bible's grand narrative, from the creation of the world, to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob), the Israelites in Egypt (Joseph), the Exodus (Moses), the conquest of Canaan (Joshua), the establishment of the monarchy (David and Solomon), the splitting of the kingdom in two, the destruction and exile of the northern kingdom (722 BCE) and the southern kingdom (587 BCE), exile to Babylonia, return from Babylonia.
- God stands in a special relationship with the people of Israel through a covenant and revealed law;
- God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, both individually and collectively, both of Israel and of the nations.

These truth claims are accepted by both Jews and Christians.

The Bible shows in spite of itself that these truth claims have a history, esp. "there is no other God" and "God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked."

"There is no other God."

Bible's own view: One true God creates the world; truth precedes error.

Bible does not explain how idolatry came about; but it shows that the Israelites (beginning with the golden calf episode, Exodus 32) regularly practiced it.

- Bible does not have a word for idolatry but refers frequently to two interrelated phenomena:

- ♦ Worship of images (proper worship of God is to be *aniconic*, without images);
- ♦ Worship of many gods (polytheism) in addition to, or instead of, YHWH.

The Bible's grand narrative: from worship of the one God to idolatry back to worship of the one God (when the Israelites repent).

MBS: this entire narrative is backwards. Polytheism and image worship come first.

Biblical itself and archaeology show that for a long time Israelites worshiped more than one God. (We have a large number of Israelite cultic figurines.)

The contrast between polytheism and monotheism is not just the one and the many; contrast in world views; see Hayes summarizing Kaufman.

Standard view of MBS:

- 8th century BCE emergence of God-alone theology ; prophets (Hosea) are champions of *monolatry*: Israel is to worship one God (not necessarily a statement about the existence of other Gods). Marriage metaphor; Israel is to be a one-man (one-God) woman (people).
- 6th century BCE emergence of *monotheism*; prophets (Second Isaiah) promote the belief that only one God exists;
- Image-less worship is associated with these two movements.

So, belief in one true God who created heaven and earth is a belief that derives not from the beginning of the biblical period but from the middle, and is projected back onto the narratives.

The Torah reflects this belief even if there are traces here and there of monolatry (Deuteronomy 4:19) and more than one God (Exodus 15:11).

God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked.

Numerous Biblical passages (as we shall see) and the book of Job show that many Israelites were not comfortable with the traditional belief that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked.

As a result in the second temple period there were two major developments:

1. Instead of the view that the one true God is in charge of everything (cosmic monism), comes the view that some hostile force (Satan, the elements, Beliar, the

rulers) is in temporary command of this world (cosmic dualism) and that God's full power is manifest only in the next world.

2. Reward and punishment take place not in this world but the next:
 - ♦ Heaven/hell;
 - ♦ Judgment after death, judgment in the end time;
 - ♦ Messiah, messianic deliverer;
 - ♦ Resurrection of the dead;
 - ♦ "Apocalypticism": the belief that history is about to end, that the fated pre-determined time is about to come, that we are living on the brink, that the evil forces will soon be overthrown, etc.

Christianity will carry forward cosmic dualism.

Rabbinic Judaism will carry forward cosmic monism.