

THE CHRISTIAN  
UNDERSTANDING  
OF GOD

THEO 331 – week 3

# **NAMING GOD: ELOHIM**

- **CONTAINS THE SEMETIC ROOT 'EL**
  - **A common part of proper names**
    - **Mi-cha-el: “Who is like God?”**
    - **Samu-el, Rapha-el, Gabri-el, Emmanu-el, Nathana-el, Ya-el, Jo-el, El-ijah, El-isha, etc.**
  - **The suffix –IM indicates a plural form!**
    - **Christian tradition has commonly seen this as an early Biblical indicator of the possibility of some sort of plurality within God**

## **NAMING GOD: יהוה**

- These four Hebrew letters (yod-he-vav-he) are also called the “Tetragrammaton” (meaning “four letters”)
- Written, but never spoken – instead, the word “LORD” is used in its place (*Heb.: Adonai*)
- Possible transliterations: YHWH, YHVH, JHWH, JHVH (from which we get Jehovah)
- Possible pronunciations: Yahweh / Yahvé
- Possible translations:
  - I am who I am (from the Greek Old Testament)
  - I will be who I will be

## **HEBREW CONCEPT OF GOD**

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

-- Deuteronomy 6: 4-9

## **GOD IS THE CREATOR OF ALL**

- “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.” (Genesis 1: 1-3)
- God is the all-powerful source and sustainer of everything

## **GOD RELATES TO HUMANITY THROUGH COVENANTS**

- The concept of RELATIONSHIP is the key to understanding the Old Testament approach to God – it is not a philosophical treatise
- Covenants with Noah (Genesis 9:8), Abraham (Genesis 17:7-11), Moses (Exodus 19: 1-6)
- Messianic promise to David (2 Sam 7: 11b-13)
- The promise of an eternal covenant (Jeremiah 31: 31-34)
- Fidelity to the covenant and the jealousy of God (Hosea 2)

## **THE WRATH OF GOD AND OTHER DIFFICULTIES**

- The God of the Old Testament sometimes seems cruel and even bloodthirsty
- Some have rejected the Old Testament entirely (e.g. Marcion of Sinope, d. 160)
- How can a God of love be a God of wrath?
  - The solution lies in the concept of PROGRESSIVE REVELATION
  - The Bible is not just a record of who God is, but how the people view who God is – this view is subject to development and progress

## PLURALITY IN GOD?

- There are some tantalizing hints in the Old Testament that, while God is one, there is also a plurality in God
  - The triple presence of God, God’s Spirit, and God’s Word at creation (Genesis 1: 1-3)
  - “Let us make man our image” (Genesis 1: 26)
  - The oaks of Mamre (Genesis 18)
  - The Trisagion (Isaiah 6:3)



## THE WORD OF GOD

- The Old Testament sometimes refers to God's word (*dvar*) as a force coming from God with a certain independence of action.
  - "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55: 10-11)

## THE WISDOM OF GOD

“The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth; before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men. (Proverbs 8: 22-31)

# THE SPIRIT OF GOD

- The Old Testament makes frequent reference to the Spirit (*ruah*, which means “wind” or “breath”) of God, which has a special connection to God’s presence in human beings.
- “Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” (Genesis 2: 7)
- “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.” (Ezekiel 36: 25-27)