

Lecture 14: The Image of God and the Names of God.

Reading: Genesis 32 (Jacob and the angel);

Exodus 3:13-15, 6:2 (re name of God);

Exodus 31:18 (the allure of idolatry);

Exodus 3:19 (hardening of Pharaoh's heart);

Kugel 107-118, 159-162, 209-216, 413-435.

Topics:

- What are the different images of God that Kugel sees in the Bible?
- Who or what are angels?
- Do humans have free will?
- Is God omnipotent?
- What are the different names of God and what do they mean?

Who is Israel's God?

- Gen 1: *Elohim*, a plural form but grammatically singular (usually), translated "God," apparently the plural of *Elowah*, which in turn is a variant of *El*, a standard ANE name for "God" and the Ugaritic name for the chief god of the pantheon.
 - ♦ Sometimes *elohim* in fact means "gods" and governs a plural verb or adjective (e.g. Exodus 20:2, Deuteronomy 5:7);
 - ♦ When the Bible is speaking universally (e.g. Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes – three "wisdom" books – and Jonah), it uses *Elohim* "the deity."
- Gen 2-3: *YHWH Elohim*, translated "Lord God"; chapter 4 simply *YHWH*, "Lord."
 - ♦ The translation "Lord" derives from the Hebrew *Adonai*, or Greek *Kyrios*, substitutions that Jews used when reading *YHWH* since they did not want to pronounce the name.
 - ♦ "Lord" or *Kyrios* is standard Christian title for Jesus;
 - ♦ *Adonai* remains the standard Hebrew name for God;
 - ♦ The vocalization *Yahweh* is the work of a nineteenth century German philologist.
 - ♦ Traditionalist Jews to this day do not use that pronunciation.
 - ★ The taboo on writing the name *YHWH* gradually extended even to translations and substitutes and written forms of this name including G-d or L-rd. No basis in Jewish law.
 - ★ Pronunciation *Jehovah* is the result of an error.
 - ♦ *YHWH* seems to mean "the being one" or "the one who causes [things to come into] being," but not sure.
 - ♦ Much debate whether *YHWH* (the God and the name) is originally Israelite or came to the Israelites from elsewhere; *YHWH* is also found in inscriptions in

neighboring areas, much debate how to interpret those inscriptions and their relationship with Israelite religion (Kugel 426).

- Other names too: *El*, *El Shaddai*, *El Elyon*, “the God of Abraham your father” (Gen 26:24, 28:13), “the God of my father Abraham and the God of my father Isaac” (32:9), “the God of your father” (46:3), etc.

How to make sense of all this:

- Traditionalists see here different aspects of God; name = essence, so different names reflect different aspects of God.
- Academic scholars see here the combination of different strata/sources, and homogenization of Gods.
 - ♦ Similarly, modern scholars see “name changes” as a result of the combination of different versions, sources, dialects (e.g. Abram/Abraham, Sarai/Sarah, etc.) (see Kugel);
 - ♦ Modern scholars see confirmation of YHWH’s newness in Exodus 3:13-15 and 6:2-3. See JSB and Kugel.
 - ♦ Exodus 3:13-15 ¹³Moses said to God, “When I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?”¹⁴And God said to Moses, “Ehyeh–Asher–Ehyeh.” He continued, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites, ‘Ehyeh sent me to you.’”¹⁵And God said further to Moses, “Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.
 - ♦ Exodus 6:2-3 ²God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD (YHWH). ³I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name YHWH.

So who is YHWH?

MBS: a warrior God who comes to Israel from the deserts of the south; various poetic passages seem to reflect this (Kugel 216, 424):

- e.g. Deuteronomy 33:2 The LORD came from Sinai; He shone upon them from Seir; He appeared from Mount Paran, And approached from Ribboth–kodesh, Lightning flashing at them from His right [meaning not certain].
- Habbakuk 3:3-7 ³God is coming from Teman, The Holy One from Mount Paran.*Selah*. His majesty covers the skies,His splendor fills the earth:⁴ It is a brilliant light Which gives off rays on every side—And therein His glory is enveloped. ⁵Pestilence marches before Him ,And plague comes forth at His heels.⁶When He stands, He makes the earth shake; When He glances, He makes nations tremble. The age–old mountains are shattered, The primeval hills sink low, His are the ancient routes:⁷As a scene of havoc I behold [meaning not certain] The tents of Cushan; Shaken are the pavilions Of the land of Midian!
- Are these poetic passages “real” theology or “just” poetry?
 - ♦ Cf. poetic references to God’s battles with the sea monster.
 - ♦ Mountain of the Lord (=Sinai =Horeb) is in the desert outside the land.
 - ♦ But other poetic passages give YHWH a northern connection, most clearly Psalm 29: ¹Ascribe to the LORD, O divine beings [lit. “sons of Gods”], ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.²Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name; bow down to the LORD, majestic in holiness.³The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over the mighty waters.⁴The voice of the LORD is power; the voice of the LORD is majesty;⁵the voice of the LORD breaks cedars; the

LORD shatters the cedars of Lebanon.⁶He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion, like a young wild ox.
⁷The voice of the LORD kindles flames of fire ...

Israelite poets derived inspiration from many places.

What is God like and how does God relate to the world?

The God of the philosophers: omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, without a body (because a body is finite and corruptible and according to Maimonides believing in a corporeal God is a violation of the principle of God's unity).

- This is the God of Judaism and Christianity;
- Philosophical problem: how does this God create, and interact with, the world? How does this God hearken to prayer?

Not clear whether this conception of God can be found anywhere in the Bible.

- In the narratives of Genesis and Exodus usually attributed to J by MBS God is anthropomorphic, anthropopathic, with a body, located in time and space.
- Kugel: this is "the God of Old."
 - ♦ "Angels" are the manifestation of this God in interaction with a human;
 - ♦ But the function of angels in the narratives are truly confusing, as the text flits from "man" to "angel" to God (classic examples: Gen 18; 32);
 - ♦ And even the philosophers might use angels to express how God deals with the world (cf. Logos/Christ in Christianity);
 - ♦ So, angel might be a sign of "the God of Old" or a sign of a philosophically sophisticated conception of God, what we might call "the God of New."

The Torah's unphilosophical conception of God can be seen from a consideration of the question: who or what dwells in the central sanctuary? Is God universal? If so, how can he be contained in a building?

- **God himself:** God himself took the Israelites out of Egypt and accompanies them in their wilderness encampments. Note Exodus 25:8 with reference to the Tabernacle: Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them (cf. Leviticus 26:11).
- **God's glory** (or is it God himself?) is represented by cloud and/or pillar of fire: God's glory fills up the Tabernacle: Exodus 40:34-35: ³⁴Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.
- **Name of God:** esp. in Deuteronomy 12: the place that God "shall choose in which to cause his name to dwell."
- In P, God is a cosmic god who creates the whole world but who nonetheless is contained by the Tabernacle; the land is sacred.
 - Contrast D: God is everywhere; the Israelites can pray to him from wherever they may be exiled because God can hear them (Deuteronomy 4).

Is the God of the Torah/OT a god of vengeance/war/anger, as opposed to the NT God who is a god of Love?

- This contrast is famously associated with Marcion (a Christian thinker of the mid-second century CE).
- The NT side of this question is not our concern; Matthew 7:13-14, 10:34-39, 24:3-31, 25:31-46 would suggest otherwise. Cf. 1 Corinthians 13 (Paul's sermon about love).

God suffers bad press in the Torah:

- Punishes humanity with death as a response to sin (at least this is the Christian reading of the Garden of Eden story);
- Destruction of the world in a flood;
- Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah;
- Death of the Egyptian first born;
- Repeated threatened destruction of the Israelites in the wilderness;
- Lex talionis — the principle of retaliation (Exodus 22:24-25);
- God is a warrior (Exodus 15:3);
- Visiting the sins of the fathers (parents) upon the children.

BUT:

There is another side ...

- Matthew 22:34-40 greatest commandment citing Deut 6:5: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart* (D) and Leviticus 19:18: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (P or H);

Visiting the sins of the fathers (parents) upon the children:

- God punishes across the generations, an aspect of *divine mercy*: Numbers 14:17-19; ¹⁷Therefore, I pray, let my Lord's forbearance be great, as You have declared, saying, ¹⁸'The LORD! slow to anger and abounding in kindness; forgiving iniquity and transgression; yet not remitting all punishment, but visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children, upon the third and fourth generations.' ¹⁹Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to Your great kindness, as You have forgiven this people ever since Egypt." [Allusion to Exodus 34:6-7: ⁶The LORD passed before him and proclaimed: "The LORD! the LORD! a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, ⁷extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations."]
 - Cash up front vs. a mortgage!!
- God punishes across the generations, an aspect of *divine anger* (softened by the presence of "those who reject me"): Exodus 20:5 ⁵For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, ⁶but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.
 - ♦ Cf. lex talionis;

The mercy of the Torah's God needs to be judged first and foremost in its historical context.

May other Gods/ gods be worshiped too? (see above Lecture 2).
Images and idolatry (see above Lecture 2).