

Doctrine

Christian Principles & Teachings

Session 3b: God of the Greeks
John Elliott Lein — April 28, 2019

*Doctrine: a collection of teachings in a system of belief.
True doctrine heals; it is a “doctor for our souls.”*

The Evolution of Theism

Theism (n): belief in the existence of a god or gods, especially belief in one god as **creator** of the universe, **intervening** in it and sustaining a **personal** relation to his creatures.

Primordial Faith: 10,000 BCE

Hunter-gatherer societies don't need moral codes but do need explanations of bad events and how to solve via ritual or practice. While “religion” and “supernatural” are modern concepts, forces acting on human environment include:

- **Elemental Spirits:** sun, clouds, moon alive.
- **Puppeteers:** beings controlling nature.
- **Organic Spirits:** animals with good and evil powers.
- **Ancestral Spirits:** lingering spirits, good and evil.
- **Great Spirit:** often the creator, more important.

Shamanism: the development of Religious Experts

Shamans are unique individuals “seeking contact with an otherwise hidden world that shapes human destiny.”

- Emergence of a specialized caste; influencers.
- The origins of mysticism: direct experience.
- Vision quests and altered states (and frauds).

Chieftoms and Agricultural Societies: 5,000 BCE

Larger societies, built on agriculture, are more complex and need organization, control, and justification.

- Polytheism: divided by role, just as humans became.
- Everything is sacred; taboos and rules important; chiefs take absolute authority from divine.
- Religion enforced order, structured, and comforted.

The Gods of Ancient States: 3,000-1,500 BCE

Writing enabled the growth of civilization, .

- Greater, grander gods with elaborate mythology, defending order from forces of chaos.
- Kings as representatives of gods.
- Clear ethical guidelines enforced by religion.
- International war, trade, and peace under divine rule.
- Gods develop hierarchy: toward monotheism. Hammurabi/Marduk (1750), Amenhotep IV/Aten (1350).

Monotheism Emerges in Israel

First Monolatry: 1,500-800 BCE

Monolatry, or Henotheism, acknowledges the existence of many gods, but worships only one.

- El (“god”) ruled over a pantheon of gods (Ps 82) with his wife Asherah in Canaan, depicted as a bull.

- Chemosh, Mot, Ba’al, Asherah, and other Canaanite gods are recorded in Scripture as if existing powers.
- Yahweh seems to have begun as a warrior god, God of Mountains (*Shaddai*), from Edom.
- Gradually YHWH took over the roles of Ba’al, El, and others, as the supreme God, as Levites took over.
- Gradually YHWH moved from an anthropomorphic deity with wife on the council to being the formless creator.

“I revealed myself to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but was not known to them by my name, YHWH.”

— Exodus 6:3

Monotheism Arises: 800-400 BCE

The unique claim of monotheism is universalism; all religions and nations ultimately are under the same divinity,

- The Prophet Amos around 750 BCE makes the first recorded insistence that YHWH is not just the god of Israel but the God of all nations.
- By the return from the Exile and the final editing of the first canon of Scripture around 450 BCE, monotheism is firmly rooted in Hebrew religion.

To be continued...

Resources:

- *The Evolution of God* by Robert Wright
- *The Case for God* by Karen Armstrong
- *Exodus* by Richard Elliott Friedman

