

The Word of God
June 27, 2010

There are really two Gods.
At least that was the claim of few groups
that were found to be heretical in the early
centuries of the church.

The problem as they saw it was twofold.

First, how could a good god have created such an
evil world?

And second, how could the god of the Hebrew
scriptures, our Old Testament, seem so radically
different from the God of Jesus in the New
Testament.

Well, their answer to the question was simple.
There were two gods and the god of the Old
Testament wasn't as cool, powerful, important,
and not as GOOD, as the god of the New
Testament – the God of Jesus.

This created a real disconnect between the God of
Abraham and the God of Jesus.

Some people today are still tempted to think
this way.

But there is another, very clear and simple
answer to the problem. So guess what were
going to do today.

Reading of Scripture -- **Deuteronomy 20: 16-18** & **Psalm 146: 5-9**,
FIRST READING

Deuteronomy 20:16-18

But as for the towns of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive.

You shall annihilate them--the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites--just as the LORD your God has commanded, so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the LORD your God.

Psalms 146:5-9

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

the LORD loves the righteous.

The LORD watches over the strangers and upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked The LORD brings to ruin.

Word of God in the Old Testament

As we heard from reading Deuteronomy, God as portrayed in much of the OT was a pretty vicious dude.

He was the God of war;
a God of Genocide.

He was a tribal God among many other gods of the other tribes around.

He was a God who encouraged his earthly followers to kill his enemies.

He was a God that people would pray to and encourage to take vengeance on their enemies.

He was a God, who folk believed, wiped out the whole human population and land animals with a flood, just because he didn't like the way things had gotten out of hand.

You can see how folk had a hard time equating this God with the loving God of Jesus who told us to love our enemies.

But these weren't the only images of God we find in the OT.

There are also some very anthropomorphic images of God, making God almost human; walking in Garden of Eden and holding court like Zeus on Mt. Olympus.

But there are again very sophisticated philosophical images of God that take God way beyond anything human, beyond anything we can even conceive.

And they make God the only god.

Not a god above other gods, but the only God.

We also have images of God as a creator God who brings the world out of chaos and finds that everything God created was good.

And we find a God who really loves people, all people and says that all people are part of God's loving family and meant to worship in God's holy temple.

This is a God who sides with the poor and downtrodden.

And yes, we even have images of God in the OT as a God of steadfast love and faithfulness.

How can God be all of these?

Reading of Scripture -- Matthew 18: 12-14, Luke 6: 29, Matthew 5: 21, 1 John 4: 7

SECOND READING**Matthew 18:12-14**

What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?

And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

Luke 6:29

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.

Matthew 5:21-22a

"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.'

But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment;

1 John 4:7-8

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Word of God in the New Testament

Then we have the God that Jesus revealed to us.

Probably the most prominent image of God we have in the Gospels is the image of God as a Loving Parent.

But we also see God is like a woman who won't give up looking for her lost coin, or a shepherd who won't quite looking for his sheep that went astray –we of course being that which is lost and gone astray.

How different from the image of God in the OT that just kills off those who mess up. The God of Jesus never ceases to re-claim, to reconcile, to save.

Jesus, our earthly embodiment of God, teaches that we should not return evil with evil, we should not expect to overcome violence with violence.

He teaches that even to think hateful thoughts is equivalent to murder.

And Jesus is the embodiment of God's love revealing that this is what God is like.

We learn that God is love.

But even in the NT we find Christians who still look to God with hope, as expressed in Psalm 139, that God will dash the brains of their enemies children upon the rocks or even worse as we find the hope in the Revelation of John that God will totally and viciously and sadistically destroy Rome and Rome's spiritual benefactors and **by force** bring about God's Empire.

Which God is the right God?

Is God the jealous God who sadistically as possible destroys all opposition?

Or is God the God of love and salvation who seeks to save all that can be saved?

Reading of Scripture -- John 14: 15-17, 25-26

THIRD READING**John 14:15-17, 25-26**

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.

This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Word of God in the Continuing Testament

Jesus promise was that God would send us the Spirit to continue to reveal to us more and more about God and our relationship with God.

And it is this listening to a still speaking God that keeps us from putting a period, where God has only put a comma.

It also give us the answer to the question of how can we have some many, and even conflicting, images of God.

What we see in the Bible is an ever changing perception and understanding of God.

This is to say that we are not seeing multiple gods, or necessarily even an evolving God, but rather what we see is our understanding of God changing as God continues to work with us.

The very first images of God found in the Bible are very anthropomorphic, and polytheistic.

That means that the earliest images of God, understand God to be very human like; and to be just one god among many gods.

Our first image of God is of god as the god of the family of Abraham, but other tribes had other gods.

This tribal god begins to be seen by the progeny of Abraham and Jacob as the most powerful of the gods, controlling nature and overpowering the surrounding gods, even the god of the powerful nation of Egypt, as God becomes the warrior God who brings the slaves out of Egypt and conquers the nations of Palestine to bring the Hebrews into the land of the Jordan River.

But over time people understanding of God changes and this God begins to be a God very concerned with justice and compassion for the poor, the widow, the orphan and the prophets reveal this new understanding of God to the world.

Now this is not God changing, but our understanding of God.

The later prophets of the OT also begin to see that this god is not one among many, but that this God is the only God.

And the prophets also begin to reveal a God that is not just war like and vengeful, but a God who is loving, a God who is reconciling, a God who brings the people back into relationship with God, -- a saving God.

The priests during and after their exile in Babylon even begin to see that God is very non-human;

God is the creator of all that is and that God is good and all God created is good.

The God we see in the first chapter of Genesis is a very late understanding of God. That is that it was an understanding of God that is closer to us in time.

The editors that put together the OT thought that it was good to start the story with these Priest's understanding of God and it sounded good to start out with – “In the beginning;” but these verses of the Bible, written by the post-exilic priests were written just a few centuries before Jesus came onto the scene. Not a thousand years earlier in the of Moses or before.

This is to say that the images we get of God in the Bible are not in chronological order. More recent loving, compassionate and just, images of God were intermixed by the ancient editors of the Hebrew scriptures with the very ancient stories of God as warrior and almost human walking around on earth.

What we find is that the OT shows us the evolution of the Hebrew/Jewish understanding of God, which by the time of Jesus, was close enough to what Jesus taught that what Jesus taught and revealed about God made a lot of sense to a lot of people.

Human understanding of God had to evolve to a certain point before what Jesus had to reveal would make any sense.

If Jesus had come with his message in the time of Moses, it would have been like Einstein trying to explain theories of relativity to Copernicus.

Jesus revealed to us a God that is the only God, a God of love, of justice, of salvation; a God that doesn't need brokers, but who relates to each and every one of us directly; without mediation.

But Jesus also revealed a God that can only be understood in metaphor and parable, not a God that can be pinned down, boxed up and labeled.

And today we find that the Old Testament and the New Testament are not the end of the revelation of God, but that the Spirit is among us and there is a continuing testament, an ongoing revelation of God's loving relationship with us.

And that is why it is so important that we continue to listen, because God is still speaking.

And we still have a continuing testament, a continuing testimony to give -- of all that God's Spirit continues to reveal.
AMEN.