

**THE BOOK OF AMOS**  
**Lesson 10, Chapter 6 continued**

We'll continue in Amos chapter 6; however, early in this lesson we are going to make a major pivot to a challenging topic that can be a little harrowing to venture into, but it is one that needs to be addressed openly and intellectually honestly, and seriously considered by all worshippers of the God of Israel, and His Son Yeshua. So, we'll go just a couple of minutes long today.

There has been a slight deviation in Amos 6 to now include the Kingdom of Judah along with God's ongoing condemnation of the Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel. The condemnation begins by targeting the decadent materialism of their government leaders and their elite citizens not only because of their laser-like focus on wealth, leisure and personal entitlement, but also because it further drives the ordinary citizens of both Kingdoms into poverty. Let's re-read this entire (short) chapter.

**RE-READ AMOS CHAPTER 6 all**

As we concluded our last lesson the subject was the nearly daily eating of meat that the rich enjoyed. I pointed out that the diets of ordinary Israelite citizens only included meat from cattle and sheep a few times per year; their source of animal protein was nearly exclusively fish. Rather, the ordinary citizens usually only ate meat at the time of biblical feasts when it was required to sacrifice a sheep, goat, cow or bull. The rules of ritual sacrificing from the Law of Moses allowed these folks to keep a portion of the meat from the slaughtered animal, with the remainder given to the priests and the largest part of *that* portion burned up on the Temple altar. Yehoveh deemed such an imbalance in diet between the wealthy and the average Israelite to have been symbolic of gross unfairness and it violated the basic governing principle of the entire Bible to "love your neighbor".

Although this is not the harrowing pivot I mentioned, I want to take a few minutes to sermonize on an issue that, since the Fall of Adam and Eve, has always been part of life on Earth in human society. The issue concerns money, wealth, generosity and charity. Since this sticky issue will remain with us until Yeshua returns to rule and reign, while He was still on earth He offered a severe

warning about this topic that all too often is offered merely as a regular Christian platitude but only sometimes is it taken seriously.

**CJB Matthew 6:19-24** <sup>19</sup> *"Do not store up for yourselves wealth here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and burglars break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> Instead, store up for yourselves wealth in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and burglars do not break in or steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your wealth is, there your heart will be also. <sup>22</sup> 'The eye is the lamp of the body.' So if you have a 'good eye' [that is, if you are generous] your whole body will be full of light; <sup>23</sup> but if you have an 'evil eye' [if you are stingy] your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! <sup>24</sup> No one can be slave to two masters; for he will either hate the first and love the second, or scorn the second and be loyal to the first. You can't be a slave to both God and money.*

It can be most challenging in modern Western societies to figure out exactly how to put this complex instruction of Christ into action. Standards of living and sources of income and how societies and cultures are structured are so vastly different today than they were 2000 years ago (and more) that we must be discerning as well as deliberate in the application of this obviously important command of God. The first thing for us to grasp is that the Bible never rails against the idea of gaining wealth and abundance. Rather the issue is how it is obtained and what is done with it, and overriding even that is how much of our life's focus is supposed to be given to obtaining and maintaining wealth. I want to be clear: the humanist Socialist ideal of no one having more than anyone else...that government should see to it that all should have equal wealth to the lowest common denominator... is not at all what Christ is suggesting. Jesus is telling us that our mental focus and our energies are to be spent much more on building up things that are of value in the Kingdom of Heaven than on earth. This does NOT mean that, mystically, some items and objects that we can purchase have any actual intrinsic value in Heaven whatsoever... or that some material items are in some way greater in worth in Heaven than what their monetary worth might be on Earth. Rather the idea is that it is the value of a person's virtuous and compassionate actions and deeds as measured in terms of God's economy that has the greater value and so, in a certain sense, are therefore "stored up in Heaven". These are the things of eternal rather than material value.

At the same time, Yeshua goes on to speak about being generous and not stingy on earth and is of course speaking about material items. When He says that the eye is the lamp of the body it is a Hebrew expression and not to be taken literally. A "good eye" is a generous eye and an "evil eye" is a stingy eye. And since in this expression the eye is compared to a lamp, then it is that the type of "eye" we have indicates whether our souls are full of light or they emit darkness (no light at all). Our generosity and compassion towards others demonstrate that we have enlightened souls, while the lack of those virtues indicates that our souls are full of darkness and wickedness.

The bottom line that Yeshua arrives at on this matter is explained when He says: ***<sup>24</sup> No one can be slave to two masters; for he will either hate the first and love the second, or scorn the second and be loyal to the first. You can't be a slave to both God and money.***

While mostly self-explanatory, He simply means that if our life focus is on obtaining and maintaining wealth, then we will necessarily shun being generous and compassionate. There is no way we can be equally focused on two things that in God's economy are opposites. It operates much like a teeter-totter. Finding a good balance is near to impossible, so one end is up and therefore the other must necessarily be down. We all want to live decently, to have as few financial worries as possible, and attaining this involves hours every day of going to work, as well as demanding a goodly portion of our attention, as we attempt to produce something of value that earns us money to live on. Being wise in our choices, determined in our hard work, and blessed by God can and often does lead to building up our wealth. No matter the era, working and toiling much of our waking hours has been necessary to provide a good living for ourselves and for our families...and God expects that of us. However, our good fortunes are also to be used for more than only our own personal or family needs and wants. There are those people who have their basic needs going unmet and they need care. If we have the means to help them, we are commanded to do so. But again, this in no way means a Socialistic "leveling-up" whereby a government determines how much each person ought to have and so plays the role of Robin Hood, taking from some to give to others in order to achieve a government defined equality of wealth.

At the same time let us also remember another biblical principle that is part of the equation: just as greed and decadence are not to be tolerated neither are laziness, irresponsibility and drunkenness. A person who is lazy or foolish with their lives and money, or is always drug-dazed and has decided to live (unnecessarily) on the charity of others is by no means who the Bible says is to be financially helped. In the biblical era there were no such things as government food stamp and welfare programs. Whatever charity was given to the poor came only through individual acts of mercy. In modern Western societies taxes are taken from us in order for the government to be the primary source of aid for those that need it. In my opinion, while well-intentioned, such a system has its drawbacks. For instance, irresponsibility and laziness are now entirely tolerated and these folks are lumped right in with those who are sick, or lame, or have other issues not of their own making that have thrown them into poverty. In some nations, such as France, whether completely capable persons decide to work for a living or not, it is up to the government to provide a basic living for them if they decide against working. The philosophy is that if a person is essentially forced to work in order to provide for themselves, it amounts to slavery. While such a societal viewpoint is the extreme (at the moment), nearly all Western societies are moving towards a belief that all people...regardless of their reason or circumstance... are owed a basic living. This philosophy is thoroughly anti-biblical and God doesn't approve of it. I could quote to you literally dozens of Scripture passages that address this head-on (especially in the Proverbs), but for the Believer I believe the following sums it up best.

**CJB 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12** ***<sup>11</sup> We hear that some of you are leading a life of idleness- not busy working, just busybodies! <sup>12</sup> We command such people- and in union with the Lord Yeshua the Messiah we urge them- to settle down, get to work, and earn their own living.***

The problem God had with the wealthy people of Israel was not that they had wealth. It was what they did with it and how they got it. They looked with a blind-eye towards those fellow countrymen who were desperately poor through no fault of their own. They showed no generosity and no compassion to those who couldn't put food on table, while at the same time they gorged themselves on the finest of everything, as much as they wanted and far more than they needed. Used as an example of this decadence was the excessive eating of meat

that in that era would have been one of the most blatant displays of such decadence and indifference.

The issue Yeshua spoke about was the same as what Amos is addressing, only He did it almost 800 years later. As His followers we are expected to help those who are in dire straights due to no fault of their own. The wealthier among us ought to help at a greater proportion; but all who can are to help. And the wealthy are to keep their lifestyles in check so as not to descend into abject decadence. This isn't left to us as an option; it is a commandment. God prodded the people of Israel (especially the wealthy) for centuries to "love their neighbor" by being generous and compassionate. But, when the wealthy became even more wealthy to the detriment of the ordinary citizens, and the poor were driven further into poverty, God became very angry and took action to strip the wealthy of their abundance due to their disobedience to Him and lack of compassion to their fellow man. It is no different for us today and at some point, should we who have so very much compared to so many around us who aren't sure where their next meal is coming from tarry and not act, we can expect the same response from God.

Back to Amos chapter 6. Verse 5 is speaking about the extravagant banquets and the leisure time of the elites. Background music was important then as now. And, the ability to play an instrument and to compose songs and music was something that usually only the aristocrats had the time to do. By mentioning King David, the comparison was that Israel's wealthy are trying to act like royalty. We must also remember that David didn't go from poor to wealthy when he became King of Israel. He came from a wealthy Judahite family and so at an early age had already begun to learn how to play a lute and to sing and even to compose songs. King David was the historic "gold standard" of Kings for the people of Israel, and so God accuses all of Israel's wealthy of striving to become like David in that regard.

In verse 6, after chastising the wealthy over their eating excesses and musical indulgences, Amos turns to their drinking habits. As with the issue of money, simply having some wine is not wrong. It is matter of excesses. Thus, as a means of highlighting that excess Amos says that not only do they regularly drink wine, they drink it bowls-full at a time. The picture, then, is that they drink so much

wine they give up drinking from goblets and instead drink directly from the wine cask! Saying they (the elite) anoint themselves with the finest oil is referring to the normal practice of rubbing olive oil on one's skin and scalp. All but the poorest of Israel did this mostly because it killed the ever-present problem of lice infestation. Of course, in addition to hygiene it also had the property of soothing dry skin and moisturizing a female's skin so that it was softer to the touch. This issue is not of the use of olive oil for this purpose; the issue is that they used the "finest" oil. Olive oil has always come in various levels of purity and quality. Today we call these levels virgin, extra virgin, and extra-extra virgin (even their source matters). The better the grade of oil, the better food that was cooked with it tasted. So, the idea is that rather than the elite using the typical lower grade oil to rid oneself of lice, they used the more conspicuously expensive high-grade oil normally used for cooking as but a moisturizer and lice killer. In other words, needless and graphic extravagance.

There's one other aspect of these expensive indulgences that the ancient Jews would have noticed that we probably don't. It is that God in earlier verses said that Israel ought to be in mourning for how far from righteousness they have fallen, and because of the catastrophes that He has promised are soon to befall them. It was traditional that abstinence from these finer things of life during the required periods of mourning was to be observed.

Although taken from a slightly later period, we read this in the Book of Daniel:

**CJB Daniel 10:3** ***<sup>3</sup> I hadn't eaten any food that satisfied me- neither meat nor wine had entered my mouth, and I didn't anoint myself once, until three full weeks had passed.***

It is no co-incidence that what Daniel mentions as something he deprived himself of as he was in mourning, was the same things Amos threw at the Israelites for continuing to indulge in when they should have behaved as though they were in mourning. This mourning concept is highlighted when verse 6 ends with "but feel no grief with the ruin of Joseph". I have pointed out in much earlier Torah Class lessons, that if one looks at the names of the tribes that form Israel we find the conspicuous absence of Jacob's favorite son Joseph. Instead, we find that Joseph's 2 sons...Ephraim and Manasseh... born to his Egyptian wife during

Israel's 400 year stay in Egypt... were each given tribes of their own in their father's stead. In this way the tribe of Joseph was doubled in power and size. For the point Amos is making, it is to be noticed that Ephraim and Manasseh together made up the bulk of the Northern Kingdom of Israel...in both land mass and in population. So, while Joseph was intended to receive a double-portion inheritance from his father, Jacob (reflected in the 2 tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh), now the rebellion of Israel has brought that intention of great blessing for Joseph to ruin.

Verse 7 begins with the word "therefore". "Therefore" is a standard word used in prophecy to announce the judgment sentence for the crimes that were committed. And since the main subject in Amos 6 has been the elite, the wealthiest of Israel who slather themselves in only the choicest of everything, therefore it is they who will also hold the choicest of places in the columns of exiles as they leave the land...at the front. The leaders of Israel will lead the people into exile...from the front. This section of chapter 6, then, concludes with the notice that the elite won't be able to avoid the same fate as all the "lesser" ordinary Israelite folk. While their wealth has always allowed the wealthy to find ways around all the problems and difficulties that the regular Israelites face, God has decided that the party is over. Their exceptionalism is coming to a harsh ending.

Verse 8 to the end of the chapter is a literary unit that is about the terrible military defeat that is about to engulf Israel. First, Ephraim/Israel will feel the sting of defeat by Assyria, and then a little over a century later Judah will experience the same from a different invader (Babylon). This next oracle begins with an oath that God makes in His own name. Literally it begins with saying "By His (God's) life". This is the equivalent of saying "Himself". But there is more here than meets the eye. God references Himself in a couple of ways and in both cases the English rather obliterates what is actually said. First, He calls Himself "Lord **Yehoveh**". Second, He adds to His identity by saying "**Yehoveh, Elohim** of the hosts". I want to take this opportunity to focus on the term "**Elohim**", which is nearly always translated in our English Bibles as simply "God" and at other times as "gods" (plural) that, within traditional Christianity, inevitably carries with it the sense of being false gods. I contend that there is quite possibly (even probably) a different picture of what this word "**elohim**" actually means to impart

to us than what we have historically thought within Judeo-Christianity. And, just like when we dealt with the word "Nephilim", taken as the Bible intends and not as historical Christianity has changed it into, it answers so many challenging questions that come from the words of a number of biblical passages. Words that we traditionally gloss over because to take them at face value feels most uncomfortable to us, especially now in the modern age of Enlightenment.

So, we're going to detour for a while by opening yet another can of worms. The "wormy" subject concerns the biblical meaning (or meanings) of "**elohim**". I want first to prepare you by admitting that some of what I'll be saying might feel uncomfortable if not shocking or even almost heretical to you. I believe, however, that by the time we're done you'll see that if there is any heresy at all in it, that it would be heresy towards some long-held manmade doctrines but certainly not heresy to what God's Word says. And, that as with the issue of the **Nephilim**, more mysteries of the Bible will be answered in ways that finally make sense. I further want to state for the record that nothing I am going to say in any way challenges the notion of Yeshua as God's Son, or as our Lord and Savior. Nor does it address the substance of God Himself, nor challenge the reality of His plural nature. So, keep that at the forefront of your minds as the worms start to crawl out in order that you not assume I'm saying something that I'm not. Open your Bibles to Psalm 82:

### **READ PSALM 82 all**

If you read and listened closely, those words ought to raise some questions in you. There are a few different ways that translators have chosen to interpret especially the opening verse. You've heard the CJB, now hear the RSV, one of the more widely distributed Bibles among traditional churches.

<sup>RSV</sup> **Psalm 82:1** ***A Psalm of Asaph. God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:***

Other versions such as the NRS say essentially the same, and I can assure you that when you read the Hebrew they are correct. So, what are we to make of God taking His place in the divine council, which is further elaborated when the Psalmist says: "in the midst of the gods He holds judgment"? Divine council?



Gods? If this were the only place in the Bible that we are confronted with such statements perhaps we could owe it to copyist error or something else. But by no means is that the case. Adding back in the Hebrew word that is the core of our topic (*elohim*) the verse reads: "*Elohim* has taken His place in the divine council: in the midst of *elohim* He holds judgment". *Elohim* is the most used name or title in the Old Testament for God, second only to His formal name Yehoveh. In this verse of Psalm 82 we see the word *elohim* used twice. The first time it is said to mean "God" (the standard Judeo/Christian God), and the second time it means.... what, exactly? Unless we accept the translations of some Bible versions that attempt to say "God had taken His place in the divine council: in the midst of God, He holds judgment", which is nonsensical on its face, then how are we to understand what is being communicated?

To arrive at an answer the next issue we have to necessarily tackle is: what is the divine council? The majority of historical Christian scholarship says it just means a council of humans. Or, alternatively, that this was talking about the Trinity. That makes no sense within the context it is given especially when we read that God says that these *elohim* had become corrupt over the nations of the earth. But even more, verses 6 and 7 say that these *elohim* who form the divine council, although being sons of God, will instead die like mortals. One has to work awfully hard to filter out what is plainly before us. But, over the centuries, much filtering-out has been done in order to uphold church doctrines that simply don't fit what the Holy Scriptures plainly say.

Dr. Michael Heiser once said: "**We've been trained to think that the history of Christianity is the true context of the Bible... but Christian history is NOT the context of the biblical writers**". That ought to be self-evident since Western Roman Christianity didn't even exist until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, hundreds of years after Yeshua's death, and the Bible itself (Old and New Testaments) had been written over a span of time from 300 to 1500 or more years earlier than that.

In Church and Synagogue, we have no problem talking about a supernatural world. But in practice we act like doubters. We can talk about God as spirit, even about invisible angels, but much of anything beyond that gets a bit painful and makes us squirm a little. As we learned in our study about the *Nephilim*, we tend to rationalize-away a number of things that are plainly said in the Bible because

they feel so odd or on the fringe of strangeness or primitive myth. Our most learned scholars and Pastors, Rabbis included, tend to do the same. Nonetheless we are going to face this matter of **Elohim** and the divine council head-on and assume that the Bible says what it means and means what it says. Truth is not always comfortable.

A rather common debate today not only between Christians and the world of science, but also within the world of Christianity itself is: before the world was created, who or what existed? The usual answer from Christians and Jews is "God" ... and nothing else. As it turns out the Bible says something different; it says that God was not alone when He created the Universe. Job chapter 38 says something most tantalizing.

**CJB Job 38:1-7** *Then ADONAI answered Iyov out of the storm: <sup>2</sup> "Who is this, darkening my plans with his ignorant words? <sup>3</sup> Stand up like a man, and brace yourself; I will ask questions; and you, give the answers! <sup>4</sup> "Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell me, if you know so much. <sup>5</sup> Do you know who determined its dimensions or who stretched the measuring line across it? <sup>6</sup> On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, <sup>7</sup> when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?*

What does this passage plainly say? It says that when God laid the foundations of the earth the sons of God were already there with Him, as were the morning stars who sang praises as God created the Universe. Clearly the reference to morning stars singing is to NOT lifeless balls of burning gas; rather they are to mysterious spirit beings. And just as clearly the sons of God are certainly NOT human beings since they were there prior to Creation. Further, while it might be convenient for us (perhaps comforting) to lump all these spirit beings together and label them as angels, that also can't be correct. What we learn is that there were spirit beings in existence BEFORE Creation, and there were different groups and categories of them. So, the sons of God of Psalm 82 are not human beings; rather, they are some type of spirit beings. The other thing we learn is that we can generally say that God had a family of sorts... spirit beings He apparently created before Creation...and they lived in Heaven along with God BEFORE Creation.

In order for us to have an honest discussion about this, yet accomplished in a way that doesn't shock or offend so much that we sort of shut-down and zone-out, I would like to use the term "divine beings" to characterize and define these various spirit beings (you will see why later in this lesson). I realize that the term "divine beings" is a rather non-descript name for them, but it at least acknowledges that whatever they consist of, they definitely are NOT fleshly, they are spirit.

Now, going back to Psalm 82 verse 1 where we find the Hebrew word "**elohim**" used twice. **Elohim** is, according to Hebrew grammar, a plural; that is, the "im" that ends that word makes it mean more than one. Yet, some 2000 times in the Bible this **plural** word is used as though it were singular (one). When this occurs, it is said to refer to the one God, Yehoveh. Thus, this word **elohim** can be used either as plural or singular and only the context can tell us which is which. This isn't all that strange or rare. English words such as deer, fish, dice, fruit, and lots more are used as both singular and plural. It's the context in which it is used that helps us to interpret that word and its meaning as singular or plural. Clearly in this verse the first use is singular (God) since it points to a single entity, but the second use is plural (gods) because it speaks to an assembly of entities. So, might Psalm 82 be God essentially talking to Himself as the Trinity...God talking to the other 2 members of the Trinity? Not a chance. If that were the case then we have 2 members of the Trinity who are said to be corrupt, so they are going to be punished by dying like mortal men instead of living eternally. Anyone want to sign up for a corrupt Trinity? Me neither. So, we must discard that option. But even more, Psalm **89** blows a hole completely through any false notion that these **elohim** (sons of God) mentioned in Psalm 82 that form the divine council are human men.

**CJB Psalm 89:6-8** ***<sup>6</sup> Let the heavens praise your wonders, ADONAI, your faithfulness in the assembly of the angels. <sup>7</sup> For who in the skies can be compared with ADONAI? Which of these gods can rival ADONAI, <sup>8</sup> a God dreaded in the great assembly of the holy ones and feared by all around him?***

Did Hebrew men (or any human men) sometime in ancient times meet together up in the skies, amid an assembly of angels? That would be utter nonsense. And, we also encounter the issue of these gods (**elohim**) being unable to rival Yehoveh,

who is a God (an **Elohim**) that is dreaded among the assembly of the holy ones up in Heaven. How then can we think about this... how can we mentally package it... in a way that we can deal with it and make sense of it? I suggest that we begin by simply stipulating together the clear and obvious: that the holy ones, the sons of God, the **elohim**, and the assembly in the skies that the Bible speaks about are divine spirit beings and not human beings. To move this subject along concerning the word **elohim**, let's see, then, the various ways the Bible uses that word. It is used:

- 1) When it is referring to Yehoveh, God of Israel.
- 2) When it refers to Yehoveh's divine council.
- 3) When it refers to gods and goddesses over other nations.
- 4) When it speaks of the spiritual essence of the Prophet Samuel after he had died (1Sam. 28:13).
- 5) It is also rarely used to speak of angels.

We can also find verses that draw comparisons between Yehoveh (God) and **elohim** (gods).

RSV **Exodus 15:11** *"Who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"*

RSV **1 Kings 8:23** *and said, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to thy servants who walk before thee with all their heart;"*

RSV **Psalm 97:9** *For thou, O LORD, art most high over all the earth; thou art exalted far above all gods.*

If you are like me (and the vast majority of Christians and Jews) then whenever we encounter the word "gods" (little "g" gods) in the Bible, we subconsciously insert the word "false" or "non-existent" before it. That is, we think that this is speaking about something that doesn't actually exist. So, here's the first harrowing question for us: is that actually the case that Yehoveh is the only **elohim** (god) in existence? That there is only one **elohim** and any talk of more **elohim** is pure fantasy or myth? In the Torah we find this:

<sup>NRS</sup> **Deuteronomy 32:17** *They sacrificed to demons, not God, to deities they had never known, to new ones recently arrived, whom your ancestors had not feared*

The Hebrew that gets translated to English as “demons” is **shedim**. There’s not much agreement in the academic world about just what the **shedim** were, exactly. For today, we only need to acknowledge that whatever they were they weren’t humans, nor were they wooden or stone idols. There were real, living spirit beings...likely evil spirit beings. But what do we then do with the several statements in the Old Testament that there are “no other gods (no other **elohim**) beside me (or before me)”? Christianity has for centuries used those Scripture statements to make the claim that this eradicates any possibility of any other gods (**elohim**) existing on any level whatsoever. But is that actually what the Scriptures say? These Scripture statements do NOT say that no other **elohim** exist, rather they say that these other **elohim** are not comparable to, nor are they, the Most High God (the Most High **Elohim**)...Yehoveh.

Then there is the matter of the biblical statements that God is the God above all gods. How can God be above other beings that don’t exist? If other gods (**elohim**) are completely non-existent, then are we saying that God is greater than beings that aren’t real? Let’s pause to catch our collective breath. Here’s the thing: the term God and gods are both attempted translations of the Hebrew word, **elohim**. And, within our Judeo-Christian faith we rail at the idea that any more than one God (whether big or little “g” god) exists in any strata or dimension. When we start to think of gods, our minds instantly run to the Greek pantheon of gods, or to the several Ba’al god systems, and so on. And, then we shut down our minds and close our ears to any meaningful discussion of the matter. Why do we do that? The issue, I think, is with semantics, which is why a little while ago I suggested that perhaps we ought to **stop** translating the Hebrew word **elohim** as gods and instead translate it as “divine beings”. This way we cannot offend ourselves or others by speaking about the possible existence of many gods. In historical, traditional Christianity we see the term “God” as meaning the highest being of any kind in existence, and thus to speak of other “gods” is like saying that other beings are on or near God’s level. That is, it is a repudiation of our belief in monotheism. This is something that we need to put to rest. In fact, often in the Bible, Yehoveh is spoken of as the Most High God (in

Hebrew, the most high **elohim**). How does one even think about something that is most-high if there is nothing in existence that is less-high?

OK. Let's take this exploration of the term **elohim** in another direction. Listen as I read to you a familiar passage in Genesis chapter 1.

**CJB Genesis 1:26-28** <sup>26</sup> *Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves; and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the animals, and over all the earth, and over every crawling creature that crawls on the earth."* <sup>27</sup> *So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.*

<sup>28</sup> *God blessed them: God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and every living creature that crawls on the earth."*

Adding back-in some original Hebrew, verse 26 says: ***Then Elohim said "let us make humankind in our image..."*** This statement about "us making humankind" has always been perplexing and the pat Christian answer that was developed over the centuries is that the "us" is referring to the Trinity. However, a triune-god concept never existed in the entire Old Testament, so this certainly is not what Moses had in mind when He wrote this down nor would any reader have thought of it that way. This is reading a late gentile Christian understanding back into a passage that had been written well over 1000 years earlier. Look at Genesis chapter 3.

**CJB Genesis 3:22-23** <sup>22</sup> *ADONAI, God, said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, to prevent his putting out his hand and taking also from the tree of life, eating, and living forever-"* <sup>23</sup> *therefore ADONAI, God, sent him out of the garden of 'Eden to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.*

There are 2, and only 2, places in the Bible where God seems to be speaking of Himself as a plurality (and this is the Christian perception of the meaning) when He refers to "us". The first time is BEFORE Creation itself, and the second time is shortly after when the only humans that existed were Adam and Eve. Therefore, I mean to offer an alternative explanation that I think presents us with a solution

that is much more in alignment with the Bible as it was written (even though it certainly paints outside the lines of historical and traditional Christian doctrines). I think God is **not** referring only to Himself when He says, "us". Rather I think He is having a dialogue with a group of divine beings that are apart from Him. Who is He talking to? To the divine council of **elohim** (divine beings) that we read about in Psalms and in Job.

We must always draw understanding from the Bible by approaching it as a mosaic rather than as an encyclopedia. In the Bible we don't get all the answers we seek in one place or in one passage; we have to find bits and pieces in various of its books and assemble them together to get more complete answers... a fuller picture. Even though the Book of Genesis doesn't speak of a divine council of **elohim** that was with God at the time of Creation, Job and the Psalms plainly do. But, it is just too upsetting to our Judeo-Christian minds if we insist on using the English word "gods" to translate **elohim** (especially as we find it used in Job and in the Psalms) because it becomes nearly impossible for our modern-era minds to accept these mysterious beings as actually existent and real. It is far more palatable for us (and likely much more accurate in reality) if we instead use the term "divine beings" as the meaning of **elohim**. It should in no way shake our faith or our minds to think of God Himself (in a very broad and general way) as a special and set-apart divine being: the highest and greatest divine being among all beings of every category or kind. He remains the preeminent and first of all spirit beings, and the only infinite, self-existent being, spiritual or fleshly. It is, as we regularly read in the Holy Scriptures, that He is the **Elohim** above all **elohim**, and is therefore the Most-High **Elohim**. Substituting my definition of **elohim** as "divine being" in no way diminishes Yehoveh God, but it does allow for the existence of a category of divine beings who are lesser than Yehoveh, yet who are also above other categories of divine beings (such as angels). Am I saying that it is much better for our understanding to drop the term "God" or "gods" when we encounter the Hebrew word **elohim**, and that Bible translators would do us all a big favor by using "divine beings" as its definition instead? Yes, I am. For one reason, there is a definitive and well understood biblical Hebrew word for God that is not confusing nor is its meaning obscure nor is the word used in other ways: that word is **Yah**. **Elohim** carries a far wider and diverse meaning than we have typically thought it does and until we accept that, our biblical understanding in many areas will be stunted.

We're not done with this topic, just yet. I want to give you a few days to ponder what you've heard, and perhaps to review this lesson, before I bring it to a conclusion the next time we meet.