

Biblical Theological Seminary
1985 Summer Institute: "Our Great God"
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DESCRIBING GOD IN GENDER TERMS

Introduction

Feminist Movement

Emphasis on feminity of God vs traditional emphasis on masculinity of God

Some Samples from *Women's Bible* (1895, 1898)

Some Samples from *Inclusive Language Lectionary* (1983-4)

Response

Often Christians respond to obviously unbiblical approaches by means of contradiction, taking opposite extreme

Want to respond here by seeing what Bible has to say

God as Masculine

Pronoun "he": standard form for reference to God; used 100s of times

Father

Term "father": 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chron 28:6; Ps 27:10; 68:5; 89:26; 103:13; Prov 3:12; Isa 9:6; 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:4,19; 31:9; Mal 1:6; Matt 5:16,45,48; 6:1,4,6,8,9,14, 15,18,26,32; 7:11,21; 10:20,29,32,33; 11:25,26,27; 12:50; 13:43; 15:13; 16:17,27; 18:10,14,19,35; 20:23; 23:9; 24:36; 25:34; 26:39,42,53; 28:19; John 1:14,18; 3:35; 4:21,23; 5:17,18,19,20,21,22,23,26,30,36,37,45; 6:27,32,37, 44,45,46, 57,65; 8:16,18,19,27,28,29,38,39,41,42,44,49,54,56; 10:15,17,18,29, 30, 32,36, 37,38; 11:41; 12:26,27,28,49,50; 13:1,3; 14:6,7,8,9,10,11, 12,13,16, 20,21,23, 26,28,31; 15:1,8,9,15, 16,23,24,26; 16:3,10,15,16,17,23,25,26,27,28,32; 17:1,5, 11, 24,25; 18:11; 20:17,21; 3x in Acts; 4x in Rom; 8x in Cor; 4x in Gal; 8x in Eph; 3 x in Php; 6x in Col; 8x in Thess; 2x in Tim; 1x ea in Tit/Phm; 2x in Heb; 3x in Jas; 4x in Pet; 13x in 1 Jn; 4x in 2 Jn; 1x in Jd; 4x in Rev

Parabolic Use: Jer 35:1-19; Ezk 16; Hos 1-3; Mt 21:28-32; Lk 15:11-32

Husband: Isa 54:5ff; 64:4-5; Jer 3:20; 31:32; Ezk 16l Hos 1-3 (esp 1:2; 2:19-20); 1 Cor 11:7; 2 Cor 11:2; Gal 4:27; Eph 5:23-27,32; Rev 19:7-9

King: Ps 10:16; 22:28; 24:10; 29:10; 44:4; 47:2,7; 74:12; 95:3; 98:6; Isa 33:22; 43:15; 44:6; Jer 10:10; Dan 4:37; Mal 1:14; Mt 2:2; 5:35; 18:23; 21:5; 22:2,7,11,13; 25:34,40; 27:11,29, 37,42; Jn 1:49; 12:13,15; 18:33,37,39; 19:3,14,15,19,21; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:15; Rev 15:3; 17:14; 19:16

God as Feminine

Pronoun "she," Queen & Wife not used

Mother (Human)

Term: not used per se, but only in comparisons, below

Parabolic Use: Ps 27:10; 131:2; Isa 66:13
Mother Hen: Mt 23:37
Mother Eagle: Deut 32:11
cp refs. to wings: Ruth 2:12; Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4
Other Possible References
Lost coin (Lk 15:8-10): woman represent God?
Leaven (Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21): woman represent God?

Conclusions

Clear predominance of masculine in reference to God
Not merely result of patriarchal society, since many such had goddesses; cp Asherah.
Astarte, Artemis, Athena, Juno
Partly due to authority relation; only clear refs to God in feminine terms are those where
God pictured as mother in authority over children; other pictures (wife/queen)
would imply husband/king still higher
Feminine forms prob saved to represent people of God collectively, as wife/queen to
God/Christ, and as mother to individual believers; cp Ps 45:10ff; Isa 54; Hos 1-3;
Eph 5:23ff
There may also be additional reasons we do not yet discern
Not safe to restructure imagery of Bible to suit our own preferences; C.S. Lewis'
distinction betw "teacher's metaphor" and "student's metaphor"; Biblical warnings
about tampering: Deut 4:2; Prov 30:5-6; Rev 22:18-19