

Helping Christians Understand Ancient Idolatry

'God spoke to Noah saying, "Go out of the ship, you, your wife, your sons and your sons' wives with you." ... Noah went forth with his wife, sons and his sons' wives with him' (Genesis 8:15, 16 & 18). 'The sons of Noah who went forth from the ship were Shem (the eldest), Japheth and Ham (the youngest). These three were the sons of Noah and from these (and their wives) the whole earth was populated' (Genesis 9:18 & 19).

Noah was born approximately 1,056 years after the creation of the earth and mankind, and his three sons, Shem, Japheth and Ham were born when he was 500 years old (Genesis 5:32). One hundred years after the birth of Noah's three sons, by then Noah was 600 years old (Genesis 7:11) the flood came and the family were locked in the Ark filled with animals and birds for a year, landing on Mount Ararat (Genesis 8:4, 13 & 14). Noah died aged 950, which was 350 years after the flood (Genesis 9:28 & 29). Calculating the years, that brings us to 1,657 after creation. There were twenty generations from the creation of Adam to Abraham. Every man mentioned in this ancient lineage had 'other sons and daughters' but only a few people from each generation were named. After the flood, the earth changed so dramatically people could not live for hundreds of years as they had done before the flood came, and this can be seen by the shortening of the years of the subsequent lineages.

God had made it very clear, the flood was His righteous judgement for sin. 'The earth was corrupt before God and the earth was filled with violence. God saw the earth and saw that it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth"' (Genesis 6:11 to 13). Every person and land animal on earth died during the flood but the sea creatures survived. The animals and birds inside the Ark also survived. Shem, Japheth, Ham and their unnamed wives went on to have children. All of the people born after the flood would have known about the Lord, creation, the flood, God's judgement of a sinful world and they would have known they were not to worship creation, idols or any false gods. Everybody knew that, but evil started to overtake the earth very soon after Noah's flood. Within about 500 years after Noah's flood almost all of humanity had turned their backs on God and the truth. They started to worship creation, false gods, goddesses, other false deities, idols, their ancestors and images. People still believed in creation, the flood, heaven and hell but their concept of eternity became skewed. They would have known the only way to a heavenly eternity was to walk with God but in their rebellion, they chose to make up their own religions. The ancient world became increasingly spiritually dark as the populations spread around the earth. Native tribes and peoples throughout the world continue, even today, to have their own opinion, tradition and false teaching regarding creation and Noah's flood. The native aboriginal tribes in Australia actually believe a serpent created the world when it was the serpent that deceived Eve, which brought the destruction of the world. Some evolutionist told the Australian natives they are the oldest living continuous culture in the world, which is utter nonsense because they are African descendants of Noah's son Ham who was alive only about six thousand years ago. Only the Bible account of human history is accurate. When we look at the ancient Egyptians and all they strange things they worshipped, we can see how far they had fallen away from God in just a very short time. Other ancient peoples also turned away from God and we can see that, but it is hard to understand why they worshipped dozens of false gods and idols when they knew there was only One God of the universe. The ancient world believed all of creation were created solely to be slaves to their deities and to exist in a permanent state of servitude. It is true mankind was created to serve God and be in close fellowship with Him but their cowering servitude was not what God wanted. God our Creator wants us to serve Him with reverence, joy and gladness in complete cooperation, not fawning fear. With this belief the ancient world saw gods in everything. The wonder of creation enticed them into worshipping the creation instead of worshipping our Creator. 'They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator' (Romans 1:25).

Instead of repenting and turning back to God the Creator, they tried to make sense of their pagan world so they created myths and legends. They believed their false gods had power and control over the natural world, the universe and the weather. Their false beliefs became their reality and continued generation after generation, spreading the paganism around the world. They believed their gods had strange beginnings. Each god, goddess, deity or idol were born, came from the heavens or were created in some strange manner and each of them had a role to play in life. Their deities behaved as badly or worse than humanity and they were violent, bloodthirsty and nasty. They were often sexually promiscuous and we can see their obsession with sex in ancient relics, paintings and artefacts. People could never comprehend the idea of divine intervention because their false gods had no interest in nature, the universe or the earth's events. To the pagan world, every experience was religious, all laws were spiritual, all events were caused by their false gods and all their sacrifices or duties were done to appease their false gods. Their false gods were cold, distant, perpetually angry and indifferent to the needs of their worshippers. Obviously, the gods did not speak or convey their thoughts, their will or desires to anyone but humans had to placate them, please them and worship them. The confusion among people came when weather was unpredictable, natural events like earthquakes, famine, floods or droughts caused havoc and terror.

The pagans tried their best to please their gods until the ultimate evil came to the forefront. Human sacrifices were done to please their unpleasable false gods, which was strictly forbidden by the Lord our God. Human sacrifice was a serious abomination of the nations (2 Kings 16:3), an affront to the unspeakably wonderful creativity of the Lord. Human sacrifices are despicably evil because they are sacrificing people who were all created in the likeness and image of God Himself (Genesis 1:27). 'There will not be found with you anyone who makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire (of sacrifice where they were bound up and burned alive), one who uses divination, one who practices sorcery, an enchanter, a sorcerer, a charmer, a consulter with a familiar (ancestral) spirit, a wizard or a necromancer. Whoever does these things is an abomination to God and because of these abominations the Lord your God will drive the wicked people out from before you. You will be perfect with the Lord your God. These nations that you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery and to diviners but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do so' (Deuteronomy 18:10 to 14). Can people see what is written here? God drives the worshippers of false gods out of their lands and replaces them with people who believe in God. Native tribes like the American Indians, Maoris, Aboriginal Australians, savage tribes in Papua New Guinea, Africa and other more ancient tribes like Minoans and even the idol worshipping Egyptians were all invaded by groups who knew God. Cannibalism, tribal wars, ancestor worship and other abominations almost ceased. It was because of their continuous wickedness God brought judgement upon them. 'Know this, your God is He who goes over before you as a devouring fire. He will destroy them (the idol worshippers) and He will bring them down before you so you will drive them out and make them to perish quickly as God has spoken to you. It is because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord is dispossessing them before you ... because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is evicting them and driving them out' (Deuteronomy 9:4 & 5).

Their priests, magicians, diviners, shamans and other seekers of oracles chanted, gave offerings, took mind altering drugs, cut themselves or danced in an effort to make their false gods take notice and give them supernatural signs. These wicked behaviours were going on in ancient times. The Bible reveals some of this behaviour happening in Egypt. 'Pharaoh called for the wise men and the sorcerers. The magicians of Egypt did in like manner with their enchantments' (Exodus 7:11). This is what the worshippers of Baal did. 'They cried aloud and cut themselves with knives and lances until the blood gushed out of them. When midday was past, they 'prophesied' until the time of the evening offering but there was neither voice nor any answer' (1 Kings 18:28 & 29). This is what the followers of the Babylonian cult did. 'The king called the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams' (Daniel 2:2). The inability to receive any answers from their false gods left those people in a constant state of uncertainty, fear, hopelessness, bewilderment, disconnection and feeling vulnerable. They felt the false gods could favour them one day then torment them the next day. They had so many false gods they did not know what they had done to anger the gods, what their gods wanted from them or even which of their many gods were angry. The pagans were always fearful and frustrated so they prayed to the unknown god (Acts 17:23). The ancients did not realise earthquakes, storms, weather patterns or lovely weather was all natural events and nothing to do with their false deities.

Names and identities of the false gods were tied in with their role and function. Neptune and Poseidon were gods of the sea. Thor was a god of thunder and storms. Ishtar was the goddess of fertility. Artemis was the goddess of the moon and hunting. Pagans foolishly believed the false gods would not reveal their true names for fear of mankind being able to take control over them. The gods would not speak to them so the 'diviners' would utter vague messages supposedly from the deity. The ancient Egyptians did more than worship manmade idols, deities and gods, they also worshipped the ibis bird, cats, crocodiles, frogs, cattle, insects and the scarab or dung beetle and many other animals, birds or bugs believing their deities existed within them. They believed the gods controlled the Nile River, the sun, moon, crops and people. They believed the gods were graded from the strongest to the weakest with the sun god 'Ra' being the strongest. That was the plight of a life without God and His revelation to mankind, and it all took place very soon after the judgement of mankind via Noah's flood. It is surprising how quickly humanity fell into sin and idolatry after such a catastrophic form of global judgement. This idolatry continues in various forms to this day and there are many false religions on earth. When people turn away from God as the ancient people did, that opens the door to evil and that evil causes people to behave badly.

The Sovereign Lord, living God and Creator of everything revealed to the Jewish people what the lifeless pagan gods could never do for the pagans, which was to reveal His holy name. God gave them His holy name YHVH meaning 'I AM Who I AM' (Exodus 3:14). The Hebrews heard the true and actual voice of God Himself as He spoke directly to them and told them He loves them (Deuteronomy 4:12, 36 & 37). He told them they were special to Him and He had chosen them and only them out of all nations and tribes on the entire earth (Exodus 19:3 to 5; 1 Chronicles 17:21). The Children of Israel witnessed the unmatched power, majesty and the marvellous acts of God. They had the supernatural cloud, pillar of fire and manna to eat, which was angel's food (Psalm 78:25). He gave them His commandments and His will for their lives (Exodus 20:1 to 17). They learned He is holy (Leviticus 11:44 & 45). He told them they could never, ever serve another God but they had to serve only Him and He forbade any contact with images or idols (Exodus 20:3 to 5). Over time and through obedience, the Israelites moved onto their land and worshipped the Lord in the

Tabernacle and later the Temple as He had always wanted them to. Synagogues sprang up all over Israel and when Jesus was on earth He preached to His people constantly. Now there are Synagogues all over the world. Worshipping the one true God of the universe brings certainty to the soul. We do not have to please an unpleasable false god, we can openly worship our Creator.

That ancient idolatry continues in various forms to this day and there are many false religions on earth. Sadly, there will be people who worship idols and continue with their wickedness right up until the end of this world. 'The remainder of mankind who were not killed with these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands. They would not stop the worship of demons and the idols of gold, of silver, of brass, of stone and of wood, which cannot see nor hear nor walk. They did not repent of their murders, of their sorceries, of their sexual immorality nor of their thefts' (Revelation 9:20 & 21). Every false religion keeps its followers out of the Kingdom of God. The leaders of those false religions are described negatively in the Bible. 'They (the leaders) are wells without water, clouds driven by a storm for whom the blackness of darkness has been reserved forever. For uttering great swelling words of emptiness they entice in the lusts of the flesh by licentiousness, those who are indeed escaping from those who live in error, promising them liberty while they themselves are in bondage to corruption, for a man is brought into bondage by whoever (and whatever) overcomes him' (2 Peter 2:17 to 19).

For Christians to understand ancient idolatry that has continued through to the present day, we need to know and fully understand the reasons and the one whose wicked ideas are behind it all. The devil is behind it all. 'Our wrestling (troubles) is not against flesh and blood but against the evil principalities, against the evil powers, against the world's wicked rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 6:12). The devil uses invisible evil beings to carry out his evil plans and one of those evil plans is to get humans to worship him. When humans made in the image of God bow down to worship their false gods, false deities and false religions, they are worshipping the devil. The devil stupidly tried to get Jesus, the Son of God to worship him. 'The devil took Jesus to an exceedingly high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. The devil said to Jesus, "I will give You all of these things if You will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Get behind Me Satan! For it is written, "You will worship the Lord your God and you will serve Him only"' (Matthew 4:8 to 10). The fact is the devil never owned the kingdoms of the world. The earth and everything on it belongs to our Creator Lord (Exodus 19:5). Then on the cross, Jesus stripped the devil of everything. 'Having stripped the principalities and the powers, Jesus made a show of them openly, triumphing over them on the cross' (Colossians 2:15).

Jesus stripped the devil of all his power but unless individuals turn away from sinful, worldly pleasures and wholly worship and serve God, the devil still has his hold over them and causes chaos in people's lives. Bible believing people who have turned to God, still have troubles in life but can overcome those evils through prayer, worshipping God and submitting to Him. When we pray and seek God He comes close to us. When we have done that we can resist the devil and he has to flee. 'Be subject to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you' (James 4:7 & 8). Understanding the truth, that once we are in close fellowship with God He places His protection around us, gives us real hope. We need to take that truth into our hearts and exercise the authority God has given to us through the blood of Jesus. Without God in their lives, there is no hope for unsaved people in this world or for eternity. It is vitally important for parents to teach their children these truths so they too can walk with God and resist the devil. 'Jesus called to Himself His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean evil spirits and demons, to cast them out' (Matthew 10:1; Luke 9:1). 'The Lord Jesus appointed seventy others and sent them two by two ahead of Him into every city and place where He was about to come ... The seventy returned with joy saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!" Jesus said, "I saw Satan having fallen like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions (evil beings) and over all the power of the enemy (the devil). Nothing will in any way hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the evil spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:1, 17 to 20). We have the power to overcome evil, all we need to do is exercise it. 'Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good' (Romans 12:21). The Jewish people have synagogues, Christians have churches in which to worship and learn more about God. Jewish people and Christians are the only true, genuine, Creator worshipping groups on earth. If any religion does not have God our Creator after Whose image and likeness all of humanity were created, as the centre of their lives, then that religion is false and the followers are doomed. Jewish people and Christians have certainty because we worship the one true God of the universe. The name of Jesus the Son of God is actually Yeshua, meaning 'the Lord is Salvation'. God has revealed Himself to humanity through the Jewish people (Genesis 12:2 to 3; John 4:22) and He gives precise directions through His Word for us to follow and obey (2 Peter 1:19 to 21). 'You are of God and have overcome evil because greater is God Who is in you than the evil one who is in the world' (1 John 4:4). 'Whoever is born of God overcomes the world. Your faith is the victory that has overcome the world. Those who overcome the world are those who believe Jesus is the Son of God' (1 John 5:4 & 5).

Amen and God bless you.

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