



The Secret of Ancient Religion Revealed! - Part 2

by Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D, 1982
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Most people today know very little about the origin of the world's religions. There has been a cloak of secrecy obscuring this subject over the centuries. Last month the central teaching of ancient paganism (the belief that most deities were once humans who lived on earth and were deified by the belief in the Immortality of the Soul) was revealed by biblical and historical proofs. In this article the matter is taken a step further by disclosing the source of pagan idolatry and the error of its teaching. The information in this article could be an eye-opening revelation to those who wish to understand the Bible and its teachings!

We begin this article with a statement that many people may find unbelievable, but is nonetheless true! For the first 2500 years of human history there is not one record available (and certainly not in the Bible) which shows the use of idols in the form of stones, metals, woods, or any other earthly substance as a means through which humans worshipped the true God in heaven — or even in the worship of false gods! This fact can be abundantly proved by the Bible and the historical records that have come down to us from antiquity.

This truth means that for well over a third of recorded human history, no one in civilized society thought it proper to worship divine beings through images made of earthly materials. Such early people would have considered that procedure to be silly and absurd. When it finally occurred, as it assuredly did, it represented a major departure — actually, a degeneracy — into a form of worship that the earliest people on earth would have found ridiculous and childish! Believe me, this includes such folk as would have been living in the areas of Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome, or Palestine.

This may be difficult to believe but it is a truth that can be absolutely proved from the biblical revelation if one is willing to pay attention to what it teaches. But people are more prone to conveniently overlook (either by accident or design) what the Bible actually says on these matters. This is a sad state of affairs because the Bible is so clear and understandable if people would just pay heed to what it says.

What emerges is this: Pagan idolatry (in which images made of stones, metals, woods, etc., were used) had its origin only about 3500 to 3600 years ago. It developed at a time when almost the entire world went into a wholesale idolatry. The series of historical events that brought about its evolution occurred within a one-hundred to a two-hundred year period. The biblical record shows that hardly anyone in the civilized world used images through which to worship God, and then suddenly the whole world seems to have gone over to the error of using material substances to worship God.

It is time that this historical truth is made known to the general public. If people of the present (and those who have lived since the introduction of images and idolatry) could thoroughly understand how the pagan gods originated and how images and idolatry developed (and how silly the whole thing is), people would have long ago been able to appreciate and comprehend the simple truths of God which He revealed to mankind from

the beginning. Strangely these false teachings, which should have been jettisoned by thinking people years ago, have become firmly entrenched within the very fabric of modern Christianity itself!

The Bible tells us that the move into idolatry was a deliberate attempt on the part of some intelligent people to corrupt the simple teachings of God. Paul gives us some facts about the origin of idolatry, and he is very pointed in saying that the people who devised such erroneous beliefs were well aware of their falsity.

"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they KNEW GOD, they glorified him not as God ... [these were they] who HOLD BACK [original Greek] the truth in unrighteousness."

- *Romans 1:20–21, 18*

Paul goes on to say that mankind's determined will was to "hold back" the real truth and to change the glory of the incorruptible God into, "**corruptible man, birds, fourfooted beasts, and creeping things**" (Romans 1:23).

There was a definite reason why paganism and idolatry were inaugurated. And though many false teachings began to emerge not long after the Flood of Noah, the use of image/idolatry was something that came on the world scene at a particular time. That period was just after the death of Joseph (who had ruled as second in command next to Pharaoh in Egypt). By the time of the Exodus from Egypt by the Israelites, idolatry was a prime religious factor in the worship of all deities. In this article we will show some of the main reasons why image/idolatry came into use and the consequences of it.

How Myths of the Gods Arose

We previously gave two examples of modern day fairy tales. ¹ The two were Jack and the Beanstalk and Cinderella. The Dark and Middle Ages in Europe were periods of time when many people could not read or write; yet the people were normally dominated by a theocratic system of Christianity. Still there was some knowledge of biblical characters and their exploits. It was common for storytellers to frequent the fairs and festivals. They told many types of stories (such things were counterparts to our movies and television today), and some of the most famous were those who had their original themes centered on various personalities of the Bible.

At first the stories would be more or less the main teachings of the Bible, but as time went on and the tales got repeated, every storyteller added some of his own creativity to the plots in order to heighten the interest of the hearers. What resulted were some new and often contradictory stories that no longer resembled the original accounts in the Bible. ² This happened with the storytellers of the Middle Ages. Jack and the Beanstalk was a mixed-up hodge-podge of the biblical story about Jacob and the ladder which he saw at Bethel (about ten miles north of Jerusalem). The folk tale of Cinderella was a corrupted account of Ruth the Moabitess who married Boaz, the grandfather of king David. The basic story of Cinderella has shown this to be true.

What is significant, however, is the fact that most of the stories about the gods and goddesses of ancient paganism arose in a similar manner. Almost all of them of which we are familiar from early Greek literature had their beginnings at a time when the art of writing was practically extinct in the Greek areas of the world.

The 200-year period of the "Judges" — both in Palestine and other areas of the world — was a time of great decline in literary and academic endeavor in the world. It was the first "Dark Age" since the Flood of Noah. It was in this period that most of the mixed-up stories about the gods and goddesses of the Greeks, Phoenicians, and other Mediterranean peoples came into existence.

The works of Homer are the first examples of Greek literature to come down to us

practically in its entirety. The time of Homer's life has been disputed, but without doubt we can know that he flourished during or before the 8th century B.C.E. By the time Homer wrote, his accounts of the early gods and goddesses which the Greeks worshipped had become elaborate and complicated (often contradictory) stories. These early tales reflected an outgrowth of the legends that originated in times of illiteracy among the early inhabitants of Greece and others who bordered the Mediterranean. Just as today with our modern myths of Cinderella and Jack and the Beanstalk, so it was when Homer began to compose his romances about the Trojan War and the wanderings of Odysseus. Though his accounts could have been basically true, the matters of the gods and goddesses who preceded the period were accounts generated in times of illiteracy.

When Greek literature came of age in the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.E. most of the intelligent peoples were already admitting that the stories of the myths of the early gods and goddesses were fabulous elaborations. And they were! But what must be recognized is the fact that there were often some truths (much corrupted) that inspired the creation of the tales in the first place.

Who Were the Early Gods?

One of the earliest Greek writings was a composition written by a Phoenician named Sanchoniathon. His work preceded that of Homer, but how long before no one knows. In it Sanchoniathon described the origin of the major gods and goddesses — and that many of them were once humans who lived on the earth and were later, after their deaths, deified and sent into the starry heavens. Sanchoniathon's main interest was in the early Phoenician deities. His account is important to biblical students because the Phoenicians lived next door to the Israelites of Palestine. And what is interesting, he records events about the pagan gods which occurred in the biblical areas, and he mentions deities that the later Greeks and Romans adopted into their own pantheons. Remarkably, some of those early pagan gods and goddesses are none other than people of the Bible that God dealt with in a personal way in the patriarchal period.

Take for example the ancient pagan god Cronus. This early Phoenician author Sanchoniathon states that Cronus went about the world establishing settlements and colonies. He gave the best part of Greece to his daughter Athena. But he did more than that. Sanchoniathon said, "**Cronus offered up his only son as a sacrifice and circumcised himself, and forced his allies to do the same.**"

This account is so reminiscent of the chief events in the life of Abraham that there can be little doubt that the pagan Cronus was none other than a mixed-up version of Abraham — the father of the faithful! And recall, Abraham sent the twelve children of Ishmael into the areas south and east of Palestine, and his six sons of Keturah into the east country to settle and colonize those areas (Genesis 25:1–18). The Phoenicians knew that Cronus did the same thing but they had some of his descendants going into Greek areas. ³ The offspring of Cronus went to Crete, from thence to Troy (some of them), and all over Greece. Many of these stories are vague (often being mixed-up tales) but remnants of truths can be seen here and there within them. ⁴ It may be astonishing to realize, but the historical Zeus (one of the major gods of the Greeks and the Romans) was none other than a literal descendant of Abraham who went to Crete and established a kingdom for himself.

The fact is, God told Abraham that he was to become a "**father of many nations**" (not only of the Jews and Israelites), and that many famous kings of the world would issue forth from him (Genesis 17:4–6). It can be shown from history that some of the later Parthian kings, who were the chief adversaries of the Roman Empire in the time of Christ, were descendants of Abraham. ⁵ Indeed, even the *Austrian Chronicle* (which has a confused history of peoples who first lived in the Danube valley region) says that an Abraham had a prime influence in the early colonization of that area. It was common for pagans to call Abraham by various names, but the Phoenician name was Cronus, the god who controlled time!

As for Cronus, he was often confused with other historical beings, but his Abrahamic connection is clear. Sanchoniathon ⁶ gives evidence to further substantiate this.

"For Cronus, whom the Phoenicians call *Il* [the word "Il" is phonetically the Semitic "God" or sometime "Bull"] a man *who after his death was deified and instated in the planet which now bears his name.*"

The particular planet that the Phoenicians called "Cronus" was the one the Romans referred to as "Saturn." It was well known that the day of Saturn was Saturday (the weekly Sabbath of the Jews). And note this. Sanchoniathon went on in his description of Cronus by saying that one of his sons was called *Ieoud* — clearly a corrupt take-off on the Israelitish tribe of "Judah."

There can be little doubt that Cronus (the god of time) was basically the biblical Abraham (with elements of Shem thrown in). Since Abraham was given promises by God to last throughout *time*, he was designated as the one who best governed *time*.

What the heathen did was to elaborate the account of Abraham in the biblical history by adding new and erroneous information. In most of the later pagan myths one could hardly find the actual Abraham in the tales of Cronus as shown by the Greeks, Phoenicians, and Romans, just as today it is difficult for us to find Ruth and Boaz in the story of Cinderella, but there is little doubt that the original Cinderella was the biblical Ruth.

Abraham is not the only biblical person found in the early mythical stories of the Phoenicians and Greeks. The patriarchs Jacob and his brother Esau are prominently featured. Sanchoniathon said that a man by the name of *Hypsuranius* (a name signifying High-Heaven) took up an abode in the city of Tyre.

"And he fell into enmity with his brother *Usous*, who first made clothing for the body of the skins of the wild beasts which he could catch."

It is plain that this *Usous* of the Phoenicians is the biblical "Esau" — the brother of Jacob. Note that the Bible says that Esau was a hairy man (like that of an animal), and that Jacob received the blessings and birthright of Esau by deceiving his father by putting on animal skins (Genesis 27). Even the prestigious *Dictionary of Religion and Ethics* (vol. XI. p. 179) states that there is no question but that this *Usous* within the Phoenician pantheon was the biblical "Esau."

Sanchoniathon said that the god *Usous* (Esau) was the one who taught the Phoenicians the art of ship-building and navigation. The other name for Esau was Edom (meaning "Red"). The Greek name for "Red" was *Erythras*, and it was recognized in ancient times that a King *Erythras* was one who made sailing vessels. ⁷ The Red Sea near Egypt and also the arm of the Indian Ocean called the Persian Gulf was named after this King *Erythras* (Edom). *Usous* was the one who inspired the Phoenicians on the Mediterranean to do the same. Really, both were the same man! Jewish beliefs also thought that Esau helped to colonize Tyre and that his descendants became some of the Phoenicians who settled North Africa and parts of Spain. ⁸

As a matter of interest, the Jews in the time of Christ (and later) said that the aristocratic Romans who came to Italy from the ruins of the Trojan War were Edomites from Esau. There may be some truth to this. One of the principal tribes that helped defend Troy (the supposed homeland of the original Romans) was the *Paiones* who came from the Strymon River region of Macedonia (*Iliad* 2.99). Herodotus called these people the *Syro-Paiones* (*History* 5.15) and Plutarch (*De Fluv.* 11) said the Strymon River was *Pestinian*. This seems to show that people from Palestine (Syria, to the Greeks) were in Macedonia. Another name for these people was the *Odomantoi* (Edomites?). Amazingly, Aristophanes (*The Acharnians*, 157) said these people practiced circumcision, and an early commentator to Aristophanes said they thought themselves to be kin to the Jews. ⁹

Whatever the case, it is clear that people from Palestine colonized a lot of the western and northern areas of the Mediterranean and that the early traditions attest that Esau (Edom) was among the ones who went in that direction. For certain, we can know that *Usous* (Esau) was one of the prime gods of the ancient Phoenicians.

What must be realized is the fact that many of the pagan deities were actually people

within the early biblical period who often had special spiritual experiences in their lives that had profound effects upon society at the time. These individuals were finally *deified* after their deaths. Later people added many fallacious accounts to the history of their lives so that if Abraham, Jacob, Esau, Joseph, Samson, Ruth, Boaz, etc., could come back to life and witness what later interpreters said they did, they would be astonished and no doubt disappointed.

The Rise of Idolatry

As stated at the beginning of this article, there is no evidence that images of stone, metal, wood, etc. (or pictures), were used in an idolatrous way for about the first 2500 years of recorded history. But the Bible shows that after the time of Joseph's death such things were utterly prohibited and outlawed — at least they were for the Israelites from the time of the Exodus onward. No longer could normal images and pictures be used in worship. But in the patriarchal period (from Joseph on back to Adam), such things, even representations of divine beings, were not looked on as evil. Rachel, the wife of Jacob, stole the images of her father and took them with her to Palestine (Genesis 31:19–35). These were in the form of divine beings [10](#) (verses 30 and 32), but these images were not looked on as something evil. The fact is, those images were *not* being used for idolatrous purposes! At no time does it say that Jacob or Rachel "worshipped" the images or "worshipped" God through the use of the images! What these represented were title deeds (as verses 43 through 55 show) and they were in the shape of images to denote the covenant with God (the *elohim*) that the holder had for the use of certain lands. Those images were no more being worshipped than any other stick or stone found along the wayside.

"Abraham planted a grove [a tree] in Beersheba" (Genesis 21:33), as a memorial for God's blessing, and there was not the slightest condemnation from God for doing so. However, from the time of Moses onward such a thing was prohibited for the Israelites to do, although it was common for later people to wrongly use such trees for idolatrous purposes (2 Kings 21:3).

Abraham and Jacob thought it perfectly proper to construct altars anywhere they saw fit, but after the time of Moses it was forbidden to make such altars (Deuteronomy 12:13–14). Jacob set up a pillar to remind him of a sacred event that occurred in his life (Genesis 28:18), but this was later proscribed by Moses (Deuteronomy 16:22, margin).

Now for a surprising fact! It could be said that the erection of that pillar by Jacob at Bethel was the prime event that brought the idolatrous use of images into vogue. It is not that Jacob himself was an idolater, but what he did at Bethel was so famous among later peoples (heathens as well as Israelites), that the event sparked the use of stones as a means of worshipping God — or the worshipping of pillars and images themselves! Let us see how this happened.

The patriarch Jacob was famous in the ancient world. The reason for this is plain. He was the father of Joseph who had been raised to second in command of all Egypt. This was at a time when all the civilized world came to Egypt to get food for their survival (Genesis 41:56–57). Joseph became a man held in the highest esteem by all peoples of the Middle East. Obviously, his father Jacob was held in almost similar respect since Joseph profoundly honored him. The religious experiences of Jacob must have affected Joseph, and all Egypt, very much — and later history shows that they did. The fame of Jacob, and the other patriarchs, spread throughout the known world at that time.

Let us now return to the records of the Phoenician called Sanchoniathon. He mentions that one of the major gods of the Phoenicians was *Ouranus*. This deity was the first one who constructed stones that were looked on later as having life in themselves — in other words, he was the one who originated an idolatry based on pillars or stones. Here is how Sanchoniathon put it, "Moreover, the god Ouranus devised Baetulia, these are the contriving stones that move as having life." The word "Baetulia" is a clear reference to "Bethel" — the place where Jacob first raised up a memorial pillar stone.

Really, the god *Ouranus* and teachings about him are a corruption of Jacob and some events associated with his life. The word *Ouranus* means "Heaven" and is a part of the name *Hypsuranus* (High-Heaven) who had a brother by the name of *Usous* (Esau). Though

the early Phoenician stories are much confused, as are all fairy tales and myths that arose in times of illiteracy, *Ouranus* (Heaven) is a Phoenician reference to Jacob. He was called "Heaven" by the pagans because he was the first man in history to see "**the Gate of Heaven**" (Genesis 28:17). It was Jacob who dreamed and beheld "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached *to heaven*: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (Genesis 28:11).

Jacob was terrified at what he saw.

"And he was afraid, and said, 'How dreadful is this place! this is none other than *the house of God* [that is, Bethel], and this is the *Gate of Heaven*.'"

- *Genesis 28:17*

What did Jacob do as a result of seeing heaven opened and the entrance to the heavenly abode of God displayed in front of him? He decided to set up the stone pillar on which he had lain his head (which was probably, in this case, a rectangular stone that was once a part of a building from the ruined city of Luz — the site where he had been sleeping.)

"And Jacob rose up in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a PILLAR, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first."

- *Genesis 28:18–19*

This event, believe it or not, was the excuse for later pagans to commence their use of stone pillars (in the form of images, etc.) in an idolatrous way. It is NOT that Jacob himself began the nonsense, but this occasion was reckoned by later people as so profound in the history of religion, that they imagined that the heavens themselves opened their doors and the gods descended down the ladder directly into the stone itself. This made the pillar a "live" or "spirit-filled" stone. The heathen began to call this pillar stone (and all such stones like it) "Bethel stones" — or in the Greek language *Baetulia* or *Baetylus*. There came to be thousands of these Bethel-stones raised up in various parts of the world. Note what the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th ed.) has to say under the article titled "Baetylus,"

"*Baetylus* (Greek), a word of Semitic origin that means Bethel and denoting a sacred stone, which was supposed to be endowed with life. These fetish objects of worship were meteoric stones, which were dedicated to the gods or reserved as symbols of the gods themselves (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xvii. 9; Photius, *Cod.* 242). In Greek mythology the term specially applied to the stone supposed to have been swallowed by Cronus. This stone was carefully preserved at Delphi, *anointed with oil every day* [italics mine — this is exactly what Jacob did to the first Bethel-stone] *and on festal occasions covered with raw wool* (Pausanias x. 24) [to put on rough wool, or a wool garment, was like Esau who was covered with hair. It supposedly represented the prophetic office — see Zechariah 13:4]. In the Phoenician mythology, one of the sons of Uranus [Jacob, who supposedly initiated the use of Bethelstones] is named Baetylus. Another famous stone was the effigy of Rhea Cybele, the holy stone of Pessinus, black and of irregular form, which was brought to Rome in 204 B. C. and placed in the mouth of the statue of the goddess. In some cases an attempt was made to give a more regular form to the original shapeless stone: thus Apollo Agyieus was represented by a conical pillar with pointed end, Zeus Melichius in the form of a pyramid. Other famous baetylic idols were those in the temples of Zeus Teleios at Tegea. Even in the declining years of paganism, these idols still retained their significance, as is shown by the attacks upon them by ecclesiastical writers."

- "Baetylus," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th ed.) vol. 3. pp. 191–192

The truth is, there came to be thousands of these Bethelstones scattered around the world. There were many of them in Ireland and Scotland. In fact, some people claim the rectangular stone which is under the throne of England is the actual stone that Jacob anointed back at Bethel. ¹¹ What nonsense! That type of red sandstone is not found anywhere near Bethel in Palestine (but is found in abundance around Dunstaffnage in Western Scotland). And just because the stone very early had the name "Bethel" associated with it is no proof whatever that it was Jacob's actual pillow stone which he set up as a pillar. This is especially so because there were thousands of such Bethel-stones in the various temples and shrines of the pagans.

It may be surprising but the first use of tombstones (by the early heathen) was a take-off on these Bethel-stones.

"There is reason to think that baetyls originated upright tombstones, which from being at first Divine or ghostly dwelling places became merely commemorative in a late age."

• *Dictionary of Religion and Ethics*, vol. I. p. 143

The stones in front of sacred shrines, such as obelisks, or even special pillars in temples or homes (if used for divine purposes) were also types of these Bethel-stones (*ibid.*). ¹²

The setting up of the pillar stone by Jacob was not of itself idolatrous. Even the manufacture of images of heavenly creatures, humans, or animals on this earth was not wrong in the patriarchal period. Egypt and Babylon were filled with such representations from a very early date. But after the death of Joseph in Egypt, the whole scenario changed. People then began to believe that the images and pictures of divine beings took on the characteristics of the deities themselves. ¹³ This is when idolatry began. By the time of Moses the practice was rampant (Exodus 20:1–9).

The Importance of the Book of Job

The Book of Job is the main biblical key to show when idolatry started in the world. This is easy to prove if one will pay close attention to what the Book of Job relates. Note how this is done.

It is possible that the patriarch Job was the son of Issachar and the grandson of Jacob (Genesis 46:13). At any rate, we know that he lived *before* the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Eliphaz who counseled Job was a son of Esau, and Jacob was his uncle (Genesis 36:10; Job 4:1). Bildad the Shuhite was a person from Shuah (Genesis 25:2) who descended from Abraham through Keturah. What this shows is that Job lived in the third generation from Jacob — and before the Israelites left Egypt at the Exodus. This can be further proved because there are no references in the Book of Job to special Mosaic customs, ceremonies, priesthood, laws of tithing, Moses' dietary regulations, festivals, fasts, sabbaths, etc. Had Job lived after the Exodus (and with him having kinship to Israelites), some of these Mosaic ceremonies could not fail to be mentioned. The point is, none of those Mosaic customs or rituals (including the sabbaths) were in force when the patriarch Job underwent his trial.

This point is very important!

It is important because when Job's three counselors tried to point out the sins they thought Job had committed that caused God to afflict him, *not once* did they tell him that he must have transgressed the weekly Sabbath, Mosaic ceremonies, or tithing laws. True, they were aware (as was Job) that he was not a murderer, and not an adulterer, or a thief. But his counselors looked at every little nook and cranny of his life to find some kind of sins that normally disgrace mankind, but they could find no obvious ones with Job. And while Job recounted all types of sins done by the wicked (see Job chapters 24 & 31), it is a marvel that Job called no one a sinner for Sabbath breaking, or any other Mosaic laws. The reason he did not do so is because those ceremonies were not then in force. Indeed, in Nehemiah 9:14 and Ezekiel 20:12 we have the plain statements that the sabbaths came into existence for man to observe in the time of Moses! Abraham, the father of the faithful

(who kept all of God's commandments authorized for his time — whom Paul called a chief example for Christians) *NEVER* kept the Sabbath!

But more than this, even the start of image/idolatry is a point that is also dealt with in the Book of Job. It has some very remarkable indications which show that during the trial of Job, no images were being used as idols! The only idolatry that Job refers to was man's penchant to worship the heavenly bodies — notably giving adoration to the sun and moon (Job 31:26–28). *That's all! Nothing else!* This is an important and very significant recognition. Since Job's friends were nit-picking to find any sin that Job might have done, and Job gave a survey of all the sins of mankind (including even rituals and ceremonies), it is a very instructive matter to note that the only idolatry that he pays attention to is the worship of the celestial bodies! Had images of stone, metals, woods, etc., been used in worship there would surely have been some recognition of it. But there is not one word about such degeneracy. [14](#)

What does all this mean? It shows Job lived at a period *before* people were making images or pictures and saying that the gods and goddesses inhabited them. This only occurred when people of later times (not long before the Exodus) began to interpret the pillar of Jacob, which he erected at Bethel, as having been imbued with an actual nature of God. Jacob had no intention that such an interpretation would be placed on his symbolic pillar. But it happened! The later pagans turned that pillar (and all others like them — and there came to be thousands of these Bethel-stones) into idolatrous religious objects.

In the time of Job, however, people were not worshipping stone, metal, or wood images of the gods. In fact, in the oldest parts of the Book of Proverbs (in the Bible) are some of the proverbial statements made by Joseph or his contemporaries — and recorded in Proverbs by King Solomon — yet there is not a word about the sin of image/idolatry in these early sections. See Proverbs chapters 1 through 9, and the special section that has its counterpart in early Egypt, Proverbs 22:17 to 24:22. [15](#)

The only idolatrous rites that Job referred to were placing divine significance in the heavenly bodies — the sun and the moon. And the fact that this was the first type of idolatry (not images, etc.) is attested by the ancient historians themselves. Diodorus Siculus of the 1st century C.E. spoke of the early Egyptians and mentioned the type of idolatry they practiced.

"The first men looking up to the world above them, and terrified and struck with admiration at the nature of the universe, supposed the sun and moon to be the principal and eternal gods."

• *Diodorus Siculus, Bk I*

Even earlier, Plato in his book *Cratylus* said.

"The first men who inhabited Greece, held only to be gods which many barbarians at present worship, namely the sun, moon, earth, stars, and heaven."

• *Plato, Cratylus*

The early church historian Eusebius, who had access to many ancient pagan writings, expressly affirmed that even the etymology of the Greek word *Theos* ("God"),

"... proved that no beings were formerly accounted gods or divine beings but only the celestial bodies — the sun, moon, stars, ..."

• *Eusebius, Praep. Evang. I. 9*

There is not the slightest hint in the early records that images of deities, men, animals, etc., were adored in a form of worship. Certainly there were images of divine beings (note the images that Rachel carried with her to Palestine mentioned in Genesis 31) — but these were mere title deeds to lands, and they were not used to worship divine beings.

When Jacob set up his pillar stone at Bethel, there was no thought in his mind that God had entered the stone — or that the stone itself should be worshipped. But when the Israelites left Egypt at the time of the Exodus, Moses bore down hard on them *NOT* to set up any images or draw any pictures of divine things (and even things on this earth), other than the images of the two cherubs in the holy of holies and the pictures of cherubs on the curtains of the Tabernacle.

Why Was Idolatry So Wrong?

The representation of divine beings in image forms, or planting trees in commemoration of divine favors, or making pictures was not wrong in itself! In the time of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph such things were done without the slightest condemnation by God. They only became idolatrous when persons reckoned the image itself to have some power from God, or that the image partakes of some kind of "life" or "spirit-essence." When Jacob set up the first Bethel-stone he did not believe that God *entered* the stone, which was what the later pagans came to believe. It was simply a memorial stone to Jacob. But from the time of Israel's Exodus from Egypt, images of various creatures (human, animal, etc.) were then being acknowledged as containing the efficacy of God himself. This is what made God so angry when Aaron made the calf and presented it before the Israelites as their God who brought them out of Egypt. **"These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt"** (Exodus 32:4). This was a great error and God showed how evil it was in the latter part of the Exodus 32. Even Israelites became idolaters!

This was the main reason that there is a prohibition against making any images of anything in the Ten Commandments. The only exceptions were statues of the two cherubs in the holy of holies and their pictures on the curtains. Since these were within the holy place of the Tabernacle (and later the Temple), God allowed these images to continue under the supervision of the priests. But the common people were prevented from making any other images or pictures. Interestingly, it is prophesied that in a future rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, one of these authorized cherubs will be allowed to speak and to deceive the people. Even that cherub will become an idol (that the world will worship), and will be condemned (Revelation 13:14). [16](#)

What this shows is that people are prone to turn things that God allows (or even ordains) into illegal and promiscuous uses. This is why God forbade the common people to employ any images, pictures, etc., in the worship of Him. They misused what God once allowed!

The same thing happened with the brazen serpent. God actually commanded Moses to construct such an image as a symbol (or as a reminder) of God's protection from the serpents at that time (Numbers 21:8). Within a few generations (as normally happens with special items connected with religious symbolism), the people turned it into an idol and began to worship it — or to worship God *through* it. The righteous king Hezekiah saw the evil of this Mosaic image (commanded by God himself) and he ordered it destroyed (2 Kings 18:4). Our modern medical profession has adopted the image as a symbol. Frankly, this is perfectly all right as long as it represents a mere symbol (as did Moses' first caduceus) and not an idolatrous emblem to be worshipped or through which to worship God. If the latter is done, it turns the innocent image into a dangerous idol — as far as the biblical revelation is concerned.

Another example of a righteous ornament being turned into an idolatrous emblem is that of the *ephod* [17](#) — which was ordained of God to be a part of the High Priest's official wardrobe (Exodus 28:4, 6). But in the time of the judge Gideon, the Bible says he,

"... made an ephod, and put it in the city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither a whoring after it: which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house."

● *Judges 8:27*

The fact is, it makes no difference how holy and proper something might be (and even if previously ordained of God himself), if people misuse the item in a wrong way, the biblical

writers would call the thing idolatrous. And that means *anything* — even if it included sabbaths, new moons, and holidays (Galatians 4:10; Colossians 2:16)! Men have sorely mishandled all these things over the centuries, as well as images, caduceuses, ephods, trees, pillars, temples, etc.

With mature Christians, however, any type of image, picture, or once holy artifact is of little worth in the worship of the true God. Paul makes it clear that even idols themselves are nothing (1 Corinthians 8:4; 10:19). One could even eat meat which had been offered to idols, and even do so within an idol's temple, and be none the worse off, if one truly believes that such things are mere ornaments and have nothing to do with real religion or Christianity (1 Corinthians 8:4–13). If one sees, however, the slightest spiritual influence in an image (be it good or bad), such things should be avoided because they take a person away from a proper relationship with Christ Jesus and the Father in heaven (1 John 5:21).

The Consequences of This Study

We have given some major facts of history that many people are not aware of. But a survey of the origins of religion shows that great numbers of heroes worshipped as gods and goddesses were at one time individuals who lived on earth, and were deified by later human beings. Not all of these deified people were evil or especially bad. Many had done great exploits for the benefit of mankind and who were wrongly honored after their deaths by deification. Some were even the righteous people of the Bible such as Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samson, Ruth, and others.

Even many of the rituals and emblems of religious worship which we associate today with outright heathenism were in many cases corrupted forms of solemnities which were once acceptable to God. What has happened is the fact that people of later times have taken even the good things given to mankind by God and turned them into evil. This has happened with almost everything that one can imagine.

In the early parts of the Bible it was perfectly respectable to call God by the name of *Baal* (which simply means *Lord, Master, or Owner*), but the name got so connected with heathen worship that God expressly prohibited even the phonetic use of the name in association with His true worship (Hosea 2:16).

This same thing has happened since the canonization of the New Testament. It was quite common for the false prophets of the New Testament period and later to use the names, the offices, institutions, ceremonies, and personages of New Testament fame and *turn them into corrupt and alien forms of Christianity*. This is not the mere opinion of Ernest L. Martin, it is precisely what Paul stated:

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness: whose end shall be according to their works."

• *2 Corinthians 11:13–15*

It has always been the common custom of the false prophets mentioned in the Bible to use the righteous institutions, ceremonies and offices which ordinary people recognize as being God-ordained, in order to twist their meanings for their own gain. This even applies to those who misuse such Old Covenant ceremonies as the seventh-day Sabbath, new moons, and the Mosaic holy days. There have been men who have adopted such things into their church for the purpose of ruling and dominating people. ¹⁸ If this is done for wrong reasons, the Bible shows that God would be displeased. It is taking something that God gave to ancient Israel as a blessing and turning it into a curse for people to live under today. God destroyed the holy Temple in Jerusalem (the holiest physical structure on earth at the time) — and He did it twice! Jeremiah warned people about trusting in physical things wrongly (Jeremiah 7:4–16). This is idolatry!

Even people who claim to walk with Christ and have many charismatic gifts are not immune

to corrupting the simple teachings of Christ. Because people look good and righteous on the surface is no standard by which to judge the issues regarding pure and undefiled religion.

"Not every one that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?' And then will I profess unto them I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity [lawlessness]."

- *Matthew 7:21–23*

The law that should now govern all Christians is that of love — *not* the law of Moses or the rituals of the Old Covenant (Romans 13:8, 10). We should now be ruled by the law of faith (Romans 3:27), and having the fruits of God's Spirit actively in our lives (Galatians 5:22–23), **"against such there is no law."** In truth, no law is against those *fruits* — this means that the principles of love, joy, faith, peace, patience, etc., are the laws for Christians today!

Oh yes, if some wish to keep the Old Covenant rituals as Jewish Christians might want to do, that is perfectly proper, as long as people realize that there is not one ounce of salvation in any ritual or ceremony (Ephesians 2:8) ¹⁹. A person could keep every day mentioned in the Old Testament if one wants (and Jewish Christians normally wish to do this — and it is perfectly all right), but even in doing this there should be certain modifications to account for later Christian teaching. For example, it would not be Christian to fast on the Day of Atonement, since it is made clear that Christ has forgiven us of all our sins and it would be wrong to recall them every year by fasting on the Day of Atonement. This is even testified in the Old Testament itself. In Zechariah 8:19 God said the period of the Messianic age will cause all the official fast days (including the Day of Atonement in the seventh month) to be cheerful days of joy and feasting!

And recall that the apostle Paul said Abraham was the example to all Christians *before* he was even circumcised — and Abraham *never* in his life observed a weekly Sabbath (because it was *not* commanded in Genesis 1 & 2). That and other Mosaic ceremonies that many Christians feel they must observe today, only came into existence at the time of Moses,

"And made known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commanded them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant."

- *Nehemiah 9:14*

"Moreover also I gave them [Israel] my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them."

- *Ezekiel 20:12*

However, the use of images, rituals, holy days, and other physical ceremonies have always been acceptable to God as long as such things are not turned into idolatrous actions — or misused to enslave people. This is where heathenism and early Judaism went wrong. The first worshipped idols and the second worshipped days and customs! Both of these practices enslaved men. **"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage"** (Galatians 5:1).

The truth is, many of the men and women that later pagans deified, or rituals and symbols that God once allowed, have been turned into false deities or idolatrous institutions. It is such supposed supplements to the truth that have so corrupted the teachings of Christ.

If one had the ingenuity to strip away all the nonsensical additions that have been

attached to some of the early teachings, it might be possible to discover many truths of early mankind and to see that God has never let any of the human race to be utterly destitute of His divine truths. It is hoped that some of these truths may one day be discovered within the records. The key, however, to interpreting all data, both of a historical or religious nature, is the Holy Bible. It is the *only* vehicle by which all teachings (both ancient and modern) can be properly judged. But even here, one must be careful because over the centuries men have even turned the pure teachings and artifacts of God into idolatrous things.

The Christian, however, should hardly have trouble with any of these matters provided that the principles of love (and the fruits of the Holy Spirit) are firmly placed in his or her life. The apostle who emphasized that essential principle of *love* was John. After devoting almost all of his epistle called First John to the subject of *love*, he closed with a solemn appeal: "**Little children, keep yourselves from idols!**" (1 John 5:21).

Ernest L. Martin, 1982

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- 1 See the ASK article, "Female Sex Signs in the Churches"
<http://www.askelm.com/doctrine/d981127.htm> for a short explanation of the origin of these fairy tale and folklore stories. When we say "modern" we mean the myths that arose some five or ten centuries ago, and not those that were engendered before the birth of Christ.
- 2 Even Sir Walter Scott said of himself that he, "**could never repeat a story without giving it a new hat and stick.**" Such things happen with all of us. It is the nature of us humans to supplement stories with ideas that originate with ourselves. In most cases it is not an attempt to deceive deliberately. It occurs simply because we want to make the accounts more interesting.
- 3 It was common knowledge in the time of Christ that the people of Sparta, on the mainland of Greece, were descendants of Abraham. See 1 Maccabees 12:1–23 and the Jewish historian Josephus, *Antiquities*. XII.4.10–11.
- 4 Beware of these stories, for in no way can they be used as prime sources of true history. For interesting accounts of how many biblical characters became the gods and goddesses of later fame, see Robert Graves' well-known book, *The White Goddess* (Faber & Faber, London). We give evidence of this elsewhere.
- 5 Moses of Khoren, *History of Armenia*, translation and commentary by Robert W. Thomson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 83.
- 6 All quotes of Sanchoniathon, "The Theology of the Phoenicians" are cited from Eusebius, *Preparation of the Gospel*, Bk 1, c 10.
- 7 See Strabo, XVI.3.5 and XVI.4.2Q.
- 8 See the comment by the medieval Jewish scholar called Rashi on the biblical text of Genesis 25:23. Since Esau married in with Canaanites (Genesis 26:34; 36:2), it is conceivable that this belief may be correct.
- 9 See Edwin Guest, *Origines Celticae*, vol. I (London, 1883), p. 223.
- 10 Those divine images would have been of the sons of God (*beni ha-Elohim*), or cherubim, seraphim or other angelic beings. DWS
- 11 This stone has since been moved back to Scotland. DWS
- 12 For more information on pagan syncretistic doctrines (usually with sexual overtones) reflected in the symbolism of Christian architecture, see Dr. Martin's excellent article,

- 13 This includes the belief that access to the deity was made easier by direct appeals of prayers and prostrations to the god *through* the image or idol. Still later, the images themselves were believed to contain some aspects of the god's power. However, no pagan in the past or today ever believed that the image or idol *was* the god, but that it merely *represented* the god. DWS
- 14 Remember that Job was acquainted with people in Egypt, Chaldea, Ethiopia, and Palestine, and yet he says no condemnation whatever about the use of images in an idolatrous way. True, there were already in his time images and pictures in great abundance — with numerous "deities" recognized (Genesis 35:2; Joshua 24:2) — yet only the sun and moon were objects of idolatrous worship in the time of Job.
- 15 For more information on these documents from the period when Joseph was in Egypt, see "Appendix Two, The Book of Proverbs: Its Structure, Design and Teaching" in my book *Restoring the Original Bible* (ASK, 1994), pp. 483–492.
- 16 See the article on the ASK Website, "Lingering Idolatry in the Temple of God" at www.askelm.com/temple/t000901.htm. This excellent article expands on many of the points discussed in this article, while identifying the two cherubs before God's throne.
- 17 An *ephod* was a priestly garment, specifically here meaning the special garment of the High Priest of Israel which contained jewels, gold and the *urim* and *thumim* through which in some manner communications from God were received.
- 18 For example, the good and proper practice of tithing as ordained by God has been perverted by people seeking gain for themselves or their organization by false teaching as to who should pay tithes and who can receive tithes. See the book *The Tithing Dilemma*, available free in serial form on the ASK Website at www.askelm.com. DWS
- 19 The Old Covenant rituals *are not necessary* for us to keep today. Jesus Christ has kept them *all* for us — in the past, in the present, and in the future. If this is not the case, then works *must* be required for us to be saved. There is no other option. DWS