

What god is like our God? 1 of 3, Abraham changed everything – 20200912

Hi all,

I was the Director of a Bible school when a twenty-something year old student made an appointment to talk to me. She sat down in the office and with a very sincere and yet very scared look on her face she asked: "Is any of this real?" When I asked what she meant, she replied; "This. Christianity. Jesus. Is it real or is it just something man made up like a philosophy or business or way to control people?"

She believed in Jesus and she admitted He had saved her from what would have been a disastrous life. But once in the Lord she looked around at all the religions and philosophies and wanted to be sure she was going the right way; She didn't want to get tricked into following one way or the other if it was error. Essentially, she was looking at all the gods and goddesses and wondering if our God was THE God.

Our world is just as full of gods and goddesses as the ancient world's gods and goddesses, though in different forms. Pop culture, sports, movie and tv stars and their cultures and ways of thinking have made its way into everything from religion to sports to politics. Their celebrities are elevated to god status as are their way of thinking and reasoning. Anything placed in importance between man and God is idolatry, and it is all around us.

As people were dispersed across the face of the earth after the Tower of Babel they gradually lost knowledge of the one true God. They developed religious systems involving the worship of gods, represented by idols and barbaric rituals that ranged from cutting oneself in blood letting to human sacrifice, and so much more.

Ancient gods of the Middle East

Some of the gods of the ancient east included Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Canaanites associated with fertility. She was often described as a mistress of Baal, the Canaanite supreme god associated with fertility, the sun, and rain and lightning. Baal worship involved having sex with the Baal priests and priestesses, and sometimes human sacrifice. Solomon worshipped Ashtoreth after gathering wives of the Canaanites.

There was Chemosh the one who subdues all, the god of the Moabites and Ammonites, and was said to be a very cruel god, demanding human sacrifice. Solomon set an altar to Chemosh outside of Jerusalem on what is known as 'the hill of corruption', referenced in II Kings 23:13.

Dagon of the Philistines was the god of water and grain, with a human body but head of a fish. Samson died bringing down the temple of Dagon.

Marduk of the Babylonians had 50 names, including Bel, and was worshipped in Babylon, Assyria, and Persia.

What makes Abraham different?

Abraham came from this culture of many gods and goddesses to know the one true God. The first thing to know about Judaism is that it was the first monotheistic religion. In other words, it was the first time someone had said without a doubt there is but 1 God and the rest are imposters.

Abraham also was the first to introduce the idea that God was God for everyone, everywhere. Up to that time the Canaanites had their gods, the Moabites theirs, the Egyptians theirs, and so on. God came out of eternity to appear to Abraham, asserting and proving He is the one true God, and He is the God for everyone everywhere.

Abraham

Consider what God and Abraham brought to mankind:

- 1) God is the true God, there are no others, the rest are imposters.
- 2) God is God for everyone, everywhere on the earth.
- 3) God is sovereign; He cannot be manipulated by ritual, impressed by sacrifice, indeed in the blood of bulls and goats He has no pleasure (Hebrews 10: 5-8)
- 4) God created earth, the natural forces and created man in His image and likeness.

- 5) God is so meek, lowly, humble and therefore approachable, that He offers to become a friend to any who want Him.
- 6) God is so eager to help mankind that He entered into a covenant with Abraham to bring a promised restoration to the whole earth.
- 7) He gave humans free will to choose good or evil, every person responsible for their own actions.

Up until Abraham none of these thoughts, none of these concepts, none of this knowledge was found in any religion with any god.

Consider your own walk with the Lord - rituals? Formula?

Every religion around Abraham was based on man making some ritual to reach or move or impress their god.

Every other religion reached their gods through a man-made framework of ceremony, statues, pictures, and other elements of physical worship. That was the culture then, that is the culture today among man-made efforts to reach God. Many well-meaning Christians have fallen from grace into works as well.

When God appeared to Abraham and became his friend, Abraham realized there could be no mechanism he could put in place by which to reach or appease Him. They were friends. There was no statue he could pray to because he knew God personally. There was no ritual, speech, prayer, building or liturgy he could devise to approach God because he already knew God personally. All of those mechanisms were now obsolete.

And to those of us who walk with God today in such freedom, we realize that too - buildings, liturgy, ritual, statues and icons - obsolete. We know God personally. Christ is in us. We have the mind of Christ. We've been sealed by the Father God's Spirit who is holy. Nothing we could do on this earth can improve upon having Christ in us by our spirits being born anew of the Father God's Spirit.

What person has a friend and then builds a framework of ritual and sacrifice and declarations by which he may access his friend? That's silly. He just talks to him. There is nothing between them but that they know each other. That is what Abraham introduced into the world - the ability to know God personally without religious ritual.

What god is so considerate that he tells followers to cancel debt, take a day off, take vacations, and love everyone? We'll pick it up there next week, until then, blessings,

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What god is like our God? 2 of 3, Take a day off and vacation? - 20200919

Hi all,

In this world connected by the Internet we have access to all religions, thoughts, opinions and philosophies that man has ever had through history. With some discipline those who walk with the Lord can easily dismiss all the other voices to follow only His voice, but we often do so without fully realizing how unique we and our faith is.

I shared last week how Abraham introduced the world to the one true God, the One who came out of eternity to be Abraham's friend. That was the first time anyone had said there is but 1 true God who you could actually know and carry on a relationship with, and the rest are imposters. It was the first time God was revealed to be God for everyone, and that He had created man in His image and likeness.

For us today, like Abraham in his day, at the point we come to know God personally, all religious ritual becomes obsolete. This is because we have Christ in us the hope of glory. We know Him. He knows us. Nothing we could ever do could improve on having our spirit born again, sealed by the Spirit of God. No giving, no fasting, no declarations or positive confessions, no tears, nor even a lifetime of work serving God can ever improve upon having Christ in us. So just stop. Rest. Walk and talk with Him conversationally.

Invest the time to get to know the Father. Talk to Him. Address the Father and find things to express thanks and gratitude for. Then listen to His quiet response in your spirit. That's what we have. That's what Abraham introduced into the world. It was revolutionary.

A little background

Other gods from the time of Abraham through Moses demanded harsh things of their followers. Human sacrifice including babies, were common among many religions. In part, to show He was different, God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac, then stopped him. Thus showing Abraham and the world that He would provide a sacrifice Himself, ending any suggestion ritual human sacrifice would ever be associated with the One True God. At every step of Abraham's life God countered the culture of gods with a revelation of who He is.

In the time of Moses God finally had a people by which He could share rules that would lead to a happy life. The Law of Moses had 613 laws (the most generally agreed upon number) and was divided into 3 sections: Moral law, sanitary law (food, cleanliness, health/healing), and religious law.

These laws were often rather vague for no single law could cover every situation that would ever happen to anyone in their life. So when you read Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy especially, you'll notice the Lord provided many examples and hypothetical situations when giving the law. The reason they were vague is so that man would have to walk with God so he would know how best to apply the principles of the law to a given situation.

For instance, when Joseph was told by Mary that she was pregnant, he could have had her stoned to death. But we are told 'he was a good (just) man', so he sought a quiet divorce. (Matthew 1:19) There was a lot of flexibility in the law.

The religious law described how a sinner might approach the holy and pure God without being killed in the process, providing in types and shadows a promise of a future when man and God would be one in Christ. The religious law was summed up by the first 4 commands of the 10 Commandments, which were then summed up in one: You will have no other gods but Me.

The moral and sanitary laws were summed up in last 6 commands of the 10 Commandments: Honor your parents, do no murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, lie, nor lust. These 6 are summed up in this: Love your neighbor as yourself. So the 613 are summed up by the 10, which are then summed up by the 2: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, strength and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. (See Mark 12:28-31)

As Paul would later write in Romans 13:9-10: "If there be any other saying, it is briefly summed up in 'love your neighbor as yourself'. Love works no ill toward its neighbor. Therefore love fulfills the law."

A day off? Vacation?

Within the first 4 of the 10 Commandments is the command to take a day off each week. What other god ever told its followers to take a weekly day of rest? None. False religion drives a person, but God leads by His voice. Take a day off kids, you need it, you work hard all week, take a break. That is a kind and compassionate God.

That command is a summary of other days off in the 613 laws. In Deuteronomy 16:16 among other places, the Lord tells them that adult males (and their families) must go yearly to Jerusalem for the week of Unleavened Bread/Passover, then 50 days later for the week of Pentecost, and then in the fall for the week of Tabernacles.

Considering that most participants lived outside Jerusalem, and the means of travel being on foot or riding an animal, it means that for every week of festival, there were several days or at least a week of preparation and travel before and after each festival. For Jews scattered around the Roman Empire, weeks of travel were required. Those are days off from work to attend what amounted to a giant family reunion in the Lord.

In Luke 2:41-49 we see Joseph and family returning from Jerusalem after Passover week, and losing track of 12 year old Jesus, assuming He was among the multitude of family, friends, neighbors and others traveling home.

With the 3 festivals and travel and preparation, we are talking about a total of at least 6 weeks off from work each year. Plus a mandatory day of rest weekly. Additionally, Deuteronomy 24:5 states that a man who was newly wed was exempt from military service and work for one year. A year of paid vacation for newlyweds. Wow.

What an amazing God! Today we can follow that pattern of days off, days to recharge, to worship, to fellowship with friends and relatives we may only see during special times. What we have in Him is special. Be thankful.

The contrast between the God of Abraham and other religions was as unique then as it is now. But wait, there's more...and we'll pick it up there next week. Until then, blessings,

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What god is like our God? 3 of 3, cancelled debt, long memory - 20200926

Hi all,
What god is like our God? He instituted a national debt cancellation program - a national bankruptcy - to prevent the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, and to relieve those overburdened with debt.

National debt cancellation

In Deuteronomy 15 the Lord commands every 7th year to be a cancellation of debts. Any servants who were Jewish serving Jewish masters were released. Following this command was so important that it was mentioned by Moses in his last words to the nation before his death, in Deuteronomy 31:10.

National bankruptcy and return of property

In Leviticus 25: 8-17 we see a larger national bankruptcy - a national cancellation of real estate debt, every 50 years, called the Year of Jubilee. God mentions that real estate is to be valued in a pro-rated way depending on the time until the next 50th year, with special considerations of homes on a walled city and for the Levites.

If you are buying a house from someone on year 2 then the value would be more because there would be 48 years until Jubilee when that home would be returned to the family that had sold it. But if you are buying it on year 45 then the value would be less because there are only 5 years to Jubilee. What God is so thoughtful to build in a national cancellation of debt so that no one person could accumulate great wealth?

Give the vines, trees, and grain a rest

Furthermore, God commanded in Leviticus 25 that they may farm and work orchards and vineyards and gather the harvest for 6 years, but on the 7th year they must let it all go wild. Every 7th year was a year off from working the fields, orchards and vines.

Think about all this: A day of rest weekly, 6+ weeks vacation per year, 1 year off from work for newlyweds, every 7th year off from farming...what a kind and thoughtful God. Truly He made us human be-ings not human do-ings. And this was all written into the Mosaic law. What god/goddess in the area, what god in our time, takes such good care of his/her people? There is but one true God - and He is good!

They were to let the grain, vines, and trees grow and produce without any pruning or harvesting the 7th year, and He promised the 6th year would provide for 3 years* - it would be so much it would provide for that year, and for the 7th which was the year of rest, through the 8th which was also the start of the next cycle. (*v21)

Long memory to keep His promises

In Exodus 17: 14-17 God promised to Moses to destroy Amalek off the face of the earth because they ambushed and fought against the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. The man for whom they were named, Amalek, was a grandson of Esau*, making them cousins, which made their hatred for Israel worse. (*Genesis 36:12)

Some 400 years later we see King Saul being told by the Lord through the prophet Samuel, to go to war against Amalek and destroy every single one of them: "I remember what Amalek did to Israel, how he laid in wait for Israel (to ambush them) when they came out of Egypt." I Samuel 15:1-3

You may recall that King Saul saved the King of the Amalekites alive, King Agag, the head of his family line called the Agagites. While he was eventually executed, some of his family survived. How do we know this? Because some 500 years after King Saul and 900 years after God first promised to Moses, we learn this of the man who sought to destroy the Jews when Esther was queen in Esther 8:3:

"And Esther spoke again with the king, falling at his feet. She wept and begged him for mercy, that he might nullify the evil of Haman the Agagite and the plot he had intended against the Jews." Haman is identified as an Agagite a total of 5 times in the book of Esther. (3:1,10; 8:3,5; 9: 24)

It took 900 years, but God kept His promise to Moses and Israel to wipe out the Amalekites who hated their cousins, Israel. When He speaks to us about a loved one's salvation - He gives peace they will end up in heaven - remember His promise to Moses that took 900 years to come to pass - He is faithful and it will happen. Rest in that peace.

A vision I saw

I was laying hands on people who came forward for prayer at the end of a service, and one of them was a young man struggling with depression and the pressures of life. Suddenly I saw the Lord above us, with a woman who though appearing to be in her mid-30's in heaven's glory, also had a look of age to her face. She didn't speak.

The Lord said to me that she was this young man's grandmother, who had so faithfully prayed for him. The Lord told me to tell the young man what I was seeing and this: "Tell him she was faithful to pray for him while she was on the earth, and I made promises to her about you. And now she is with me and before the face of the Father. What she said to you is true. You will struggle but you WILL overcome. Just walk with Me and everything will be okay."

He was amazed and then told me about his grandmother who had died some months earlier. She had a huge impact on his life and part of his depression and struggles was feeling that void in his life. The Lord was so gracious to encourage him by letting him know his grandmother is still very much alive - and with the Lord! He realized that day he had not lost her after all, and he was greatly encouraged that day.

Our God is alive, and is Life: That's the difference

In Hebrews 9: 15-20 the writer makes the point a 'testament' is not in effect until the one who made it dies. His point is that Jesus made His 'last will and testament' and then died which put it into effect, and then rose from the dead to become the Executor of His own Estate.

Jesus is doing something no one has ever done before - made a will, died, then rose to see it is executed according to His wishes. All other gods are dead, demonic, mere philosophies, mere figures or other wise life-less. Who we have is alive, and we know Him.

We are different - we know God. And He is as James wrote in 1: 16-17: "Do not fall into error my dear brothers and sisters; Every good and generous gift comes down from the Father of lights, in whom there is no variation nor the slightest hint of change." and I Corinthians 1:9: "The Father is faithful, by whom you were called in fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

He is good, considerate, giving, generous, and also meek, lowly, and approachable. We have only to say, no, we have only to think, "Father..." and we are before His throne. He is Creator and Head of the universe, yet we have access. Amazing grace and kindness to us, His children. Amen.

New subject next week, until then, blessings,

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