

The Sons of Adam

Maurice W. Lusk, III

And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to Yahweh; 4and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And Yahweh had respect to Abel and to his offering: 5But to Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. 6And Yahweh said to Cain, Why are you angry, and why is your countenance fallen? 7If you do well, will you not be accepted, and if you do not well, sin lies at the door. And to you shall be his desire, and you shall rule over him. 8And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and killed him (Gen 4:2b-8).

And Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6And it grieved Yahweh that he had made man on the earth, and it pained him at his heart. 7So Yahweh said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it grieves me that I have made them (Gen 6:5-7).

God destroyed the human race with exception of Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives, and started all over again repopulating the earth with eight people. In the history that followed, the human race again gave themselves over to the power of sin and turned away from God. But God found Abraham, then Abraham's son, Isaac, and his son, Jacob (later named Israel). Through these patriarchal figures *Yahweh* became the God of the children of the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel, called "the children of Israel."

The Children of Israel

But again, after several generations of offspring the Hebrew people drifted from their relationship with *Yahweh*, the God of their fathers. Then, around 1,250 BC, Moses arose as God's prophet, through whom God gave the *Torah*, the Hebrew word for "instruction," which was to be Israel's treasured possession. Through the *Torah* God gave Israel a record of the history of man, who they were, who their ancestors were, and who he was, the God of their fathers, to whom he revealed himself as *Yahweh*, meaning "He Who Is," the very ground of being who was Creator of heaven and earth and all thing in them. In addition to these matters, God revealed through Moses a large collection of moral codes to instruct them in behavior and ritual codes by which they were to present themselves before God to receive repentance and forgiveness sins. Through the next two centuries that followed (1,250 to 1,050 BC), the Hebrew people turned away from the God who had delivered them from enslavement to Egypt to walk in the ways of the nations surrounding them whose devotions centered in self-worship and idols of non-existent gods and goddesses who required nothing of them concerning moral behavior.

The Kingdom of David

Then God raised up David, whom he anointed to become the king of the Hebrew people making up the nation of Israel. With the aid of prophets God had sent the Hebrew people to admonish them to walk faithfully with God, David gave the nation of Israel and renewal in identity and an awareness of the God of their fathers. At his death David left the united kingdom of Israel to his son, Solomon, who build a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem for the worship and service of *Yahweh*, the one who was God, and the only one who was God. Solomon, even though blessed with a special wisdom given to him by God, found himself yielding to the appeals of his wives of other nations to acknowledge the gods represented by their idols. For his Egyptian wife, the daughter of an Egyptian priest, he built a temple to her Egyptian deity.

The people of Israel were not faithful to their monotheism in the worship of the God of Israel and those who followed Solomon on the throne, with only a few exceptions, over the next three centuries were carried away into rampant unfaithfulness to the Law of Moses and the exclusive worship of the God of Israel; even the Levitical priesthood responsible for teaching the moral codes of the *Torah* to the people of Israel, who led Israel in Temple worship and the celebration of their feast days had perverted, distorted, and compromised the religion revealed to them through Moses almost beyond recognition. The prophets God sent to admonish them and warn them of the consequences of their unfaithfulness to the covenant he made with their fathers were ignored and rejected. The descendents of the patriarchs with whom God had made covenants and promises concerning their children refused to walk with God and became a people characterized by their love of the darkness and their attraction to the self-willed rebellion that resulted in the sin of Adam and his rejection from the Garden of God.

Enacting the Curses

Eventually, the longsuffering of God reached its limit and he moved to enact the curses he had promised for unfaithfulness to the covenants he had made with the fathers of the descendents of Abraham. God had promised through Moses ‘blessings’ and ‘curses.’ He had sent prophet after prophet to warn Israel of what would happen if they continued to reject him. The blessing of the land promised to Abraham was taken away and the curse enforced in the form of an invasion of the homeland of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel were scattered throughout the kingdoms of the east of the Mediterranean world. In the following century, the remaining two tribes of the southern kingdom were carried away into Babylon in 586 BC. God had promised through the prophets that he would bring a remnant of descendents of Abraham back to the land he had promised Abraham. In less than a generation, the remnant began to return and again inhabit the land promised to their ancestors with a renewed devotion to walk with

God and never again allow themselves to betray their monotheistic believe in Yahweh, the one God of Israel.

The Journey

The story of the Hebrew people and their failure to serve their God *Yahweh* faithfully repeats itself again and again throughout the history of the Hebrew people, the descendents of Abraham. They were repeatedly being cared for and saved from peril by *Yahweh*, but they were never able to faithfully walk with the God who had created man and had chosen the descendents of Abraham to be his people, the people to whom he would reveal himself and his will for them. The leadership of the people of Israel did not seem to ever understand that their moral corruption, their neglect of the teaching of *Torah*, and the perversion of Temple service would displease *Yahweh* and turn him away from them. They refused to hear the voice of God when he spoke through his prophets, so he ceased to speak and became silent for the next four hundred years.

We have been looking at the journey of the sons of Adam through the world beyond the Garden of Eden. All beyond Eden was a vale of soul making, a world through which they would journey until their breath left their body and their flesh returned to the earth from which it came. The man God had created in his image could not maintain a relationship with God that kept the image a reflection of God: the presence of his holiness and his goodness, which are reflections of the moral character of God. So, God drove man from Eden into the lands outside of Eden, in a pilgrimage through the world, which would be for him a vale of soul making, to the end that he would find his way back to God and to Eden through his determination to restore in himself what had been lost, the image that had ceased to be a reflection of the glory of God.

In the Fullness of Time

After four hundred years of silence God began to speak in Israel, this time to reveal his coming into the world in the presence of

one who would be a son of Adam (a *benAdam*). His coming into the world was to destroy the power that had enslaved his people generation after generation, century after century, since the beginning of man's sojourn on earth. He would come not only to Israel but all the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, who unknowingly had within them a quiet presence of the image of God, which had passed through the myriad generations of the offspring of Adam to the whole of the human race. God had set a time to break his silence and that time had come. Paul expressed the moment in Galatians and Ephesians,

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons, (4:4-5).

This redemption was for Israel, but not for Israel alone. God's coming into the world was for the whole of the human race, the whole world of sons and daughters of Adam; as Paul says in Ephesians 1:9-10,

*Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself: **10**That **in the dispensation of the fulness of times** he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.*

But, the world into which he came was as it was centuries earlier when, "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," (Gen 6:5). From the days of Noah to the time of Christ the sons of Adam were forever saying to their Creator, "No, I will not believe your words, I will not worship you exclusively, and I will not walk with you or in the paths you have set before me."

Worship of Creature Rather than Creator (Rom 1:18-23)

Rather than serve God, the sons of Adam found other objects of

devotion to set at the center of their lives. The history of man's defiant existence is revealing as concerns who man thinks he is and what he owes himself. Man, the being created in the image of God, decided to think of God as something created in the image of man. This is the state of mankind Paul describes in the opening chapter of his letter to the church in Rome. Even though addressed to the world of his time, these words of Paul can readily be applied to every generation of man.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse (Rom 1:18-20).

Paul's argument here is that man had every good reason to believe in God and no good reason to disbelieve, so they were without excuse for their disbelief. Yet the pagan world denied their Creator and in place of the Creator they worshipped that which was created.

Gods Created in the Image of Man (Rom 1:21-23)

Although they knew God they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things (Rom 1:20-22).

Idolatry is hard to explain. It seem, however, that man is intent on trying to access whatever powers he thinks will grant him his hearts desires. These desires fall into three areas: the lust for power, the lust for wealth, and the lust for pleasure. The people of these ancient cultures had a large collection of objects of devotion in their pantheon

of deities, all of which may be grouped into these three areas.

The Worship of Power

Zeus was the most powerful of the Greek gods of the Olympian Pantheon. *Nike* was the goddess of conquest or victory. *Ares* was the god of war. *Athena* was a warrior goddess. *Mithras* was the warrior deity of Persia discovered by Alexander when he captured Babylon. *Caesar* was the Roman emperor who received mandatory worship from the people of the empire.

The Worship of Wealth

Plutos was the personification of wealth. *Tuche'* was the goddess for "good fortune," (our lady luck). *Fortuna* was the Roman deity of good fortune. *Mammon* was the Hebrew and Aramaic word for "wealth." Also associated with the worship of prosperity were the fertility gods and goddesses who blessed the lives of their worshippers with goods, crops, property, livestock, and offspring. *Demeter* was the Greek goddess of fertility (our Mother Nature). *Artemis* was the primary fertility goddess of Asia Minor (Diana of the Ephesians). *Isis* and *Osiris* were the ruling deities of Egypt; both granted prosperity to their worshippers through fertility of the land.

The Worship of Sensual Pleasure

The Greek *Aphrodite* (called *Venus* by the Romans) was one of the most popular of the pantheon of gods and goddesses. She was the goddess of passion, sexual love, or sensual pleasure. She had affairs with practically every male god of Greek mythology, with exception of *Zeus*, her father. *Eros* (the Roman *Cupid*) was the offspring of *Aphrodite*. He was named after the Greek word for sensual attraction, the word from which "erotic" derives in English. The Greek *Dionysus* was the god of wine and revelry.

These gods and goddesses were nothing more than personifications of the appetites or lusts of the people who worshipped them. Man created gods in the image of himself and it is

the same today as it was then. The driving forces of every culture of man fall into one or more of these areas.

Mankind had rejected God, refused to believe in the Creator, and in his place they set that which was created as their objects of devotion. This is what idolatry is, the displacing God as the object of our devotion; worshipping creation and the creature rather than the Creator.

The God of Man's Wisdom

Although the image of God in man made him religious, he denied the Creator and made the object of his religion "images of himself." It appears to be easier for man to believe in himself as the creator of his world than to believe that he and his world were the result of a wondrous Creator; and especially that he was created in the image of God. This is Paul's point; man did not want their Creator to result from "their wisdom." Another author emphasizes this reality,

The depth and extent of Man's defection is all the more profound because he is, as has been said, "inalienable religious." Created in him, as an inherent aspect of his being, was a *sensus divinitatis* - a feeling for, an affinity with, an awareness of the divine. Man can no more escape his created relationship to God than he can his shadow. Yet, because of this decision to go it alone, this religious sense is no longer able to fix on the Creator. Upon what then does the religious sensibility of unredeemed Man focus? It fashions in one way or another gods of its own devising in the form of the sin of idolatry, denounced throughout the Bible (Harry R. Boer, *An Ember Still Glowing, Humankind as the Image of God*, p 73).

So mankind, down through the centuries has created gods in its own image, gods reflecting himself, his wants and desires. If God has revealed himself to man as a moral being and created man in his moral image, it would seem that man should have intrinsic within himself an awareness of the moral character of God. Anthropologists

have found that man in every culture has a sense of morality; especially, in the area of social morals. If man were created in the image of God, who has revealed himself as a moral being, then would such an essential characteristic not be a part of man's nature, no matter how ancient man's history?

But a question that looms large in this whole discussion is how man has, through the centuries, left in his wake such a record of evil. History is filled with man's atrocities, his hatred and inhumanity to his fellow man. Yet, God has not eternally withdrawn himself from man, even though in the days of Noah he determined to remove all human life from the face of the earth. In the Hebrew Scriptures there are references to God having hid his face from Israel because of Israel's atrocities; e.g. idolatry, murder, assault of his fellowman, illicit sexual behavior, suppression of the poor and oppressed; essentially, the violation of the whole of the ten commands. But when Israel cried out to God for deliverance from their lives in captivity or oppression, God sent a prophet to tell these people what to do to find favor.

Following the flood, God began, through the lineage of Noah, to repopulate the earth with the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. The reason this has always been so is that even though man has fallen, and fallen repeatedly, through the centuries, there seems to be a God consciousness within him that lead him to cry out, "Oh God!" From the midst the people this is always a voice crying to God for deliverance. Even though the image of God is not apparent, there does appear to be something within the human race that is there, but whether it can be brought to life or restored is another question.

Conclusion

This discussion sets the stage for a further discussion of man's life on earth for the many centuries of civilization. Man is constantly trying to make sense of or give meaning to his existence. Every student who has taken an Introduction to Philosophy 101 course in college has heard of the three great questions of man: Who am I? Where did I come from? What am I doing here? These questions go

as far back as the philosophical period of Classical Greece in the fifth century BC. Socrates issued the challenge to the ancient Athenians, "Know Thyself." In fact, this is written on the wall of the temple the Oracle of Delphi. To the one believing in God, the answer is, "You are a being created in the image of God."

All of the recognized religions of the world have, in a diversity of ways, addressed very similar questions. In Western Civilization the answers to these questions have developed out of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Over half of the population of the earth in the 21st century, believes man to have been created by the God of the Hebrews and Christians, that all of the human race has descended from Adam and Eve, who were created by God as recorded in Genesis 1-3. This, for those of Western Civilization, answers the first two questions. From this point we move to the third question, "What am I doing here?" The answer is "Man's life in this world is a journey through a vale of soul-making, where he is fitting himself for eternity. Some take the journey seriously while others have no interest in eternity and are convinced that at the end of their life on earth, they will simply cease to exist.

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