

No Other Gods (1): Many Gods or One True God

(Exodus 20)

I. Introduction

- A. When we meet people for the first time, there are certain stock questions you must ask.
1. They could have a parrot on their head, but you must ask, “*So where are you from?*”
 - a. “*What do you do for a living?*” “*How long have you been living around here?*”
 - b. It’s just what you have ask. This time of year maybe, “*Who’s your favorite team?*”
 - c. Only after those questions are out of the way can ask, “*So what’s with the parrot?*”
 2. In Bible times, they had another ice-breaker question, “*So what god do you pray to?*”
 - a. Old saying, “*There are no atheists in fox-holes.*” Weren’t any in ancient Near East.
 - b. Everyone had their own god or goddess; everyone has a different one... or many.
 - c. Want an argument? Don’t brag about politics or sports; suggest your god is best!
- B. The ancient pagan view of life and religion basically consisted of four basic ideas—
1. **First**, there are many gods; the ancients saw gods lurking behind every rock and tree.
 - a. Your city would have a patron god— the temple of Dagon in Ashdod. (**1 Sam 5**)
 - b. Your family might have a household deity— story of Laben and Rachel. (**Gen 31**)
 - c. Countryside was littered with gods; must take those into account while travelling.
 2. **Second**, all of these gods really were gods; all had power and all were to be feared.
 - a. Ahab’s war with over Ben-Hadad and the Arameans of gives perspective here.
 - b. He would attack Israel on plains because Israel’s God was of mountain (**1 Ki 20:23**)
 - 1) *Two problems. First*, God knew about the plan and told Ahab about it. (**20:28**)
 - 2) **Second**, God had power in flatlands too —the Arameans were rounded routed!
 3. **Third**, if all gods had power, you don’t want to offend any; all religions are valuable.
 - a. That’s why Rome included idols of all their vanquished enemies in the Pantheon.
 - b. They built an altar to “*the unknown god*” just in case they missed one. (**Acts 17:23**)
 - 1) Paul could have had fun here; a real god *would* be offended being left unnamed
 - 2) But’s Paul’s objective in Athens was to build bridges. (*Church can learn lesson.*)
 4. **Fourth**, objective of pagan religion was to appease the gods... and thus be left alone.
 - a. Goal of worship was to make sure the gods are happy and didn’t interfere with life.
 - b. If the gods were angry; they made life difficult—drought, pestilence or hurricanes.
 - c. Pagans didn’t want a relationship with gods— they just wanted to be left alone!

- C. I know that everyone loves historical trivia questions, especially Bible history trivia.
1. **Question:** What was biggest problem Israel faced throughout its history as nation?
 - a. It was a problem repeated over and over in Judges. (*before Israel became a nation*)
 - b. It was Solomon’s slip-up that led to the split-up that became the divided kingdom.
 - c. It’s was Jeroboam’s sin that led every king of Israel that followed and fall of North.
 - d. It was also recurring sin of South, condemned by the prophets until Judah also fell.
 2. What’s your final answer? What was recurring sin of God chosen people? ***Idolatry!***
 - a. Now they didn’t stop worshipping God; they just added idols to worshipping God.
 - 1) Why? Because all gods were gods; all gods had power and were to be feared.
 - 2) All religions were valuable; worship of Baal (fertility god) added something.
 - 3) If Baal had power and if his worship could increase your flocks and herds...
 - b. What Israel could not understand is that God would not share their affection.
 3. Some relationships are such they are aren’t meant to be shared— you must pick one.
 - a. Lynn says her favorites teams are Redskins and Cowboys— *drives the girls nuts!*
 - b. Marriage is a relationship that by its very nature is mutually exclusive. Pick one.
 - 1) There’s an old song by Mary MacGregor years ago, *Torn Between Two Lovers*
There's been another man that I've needed and I've loved, but that doesn't mean I love you less
And he knows you can't possess me and he knows he never will
There's just this empty place inside of me that only he can fill
Torn between two lovers, feeling like a fool, loving both of you is breaking all the rules
 - 2) Is that stupid or what? You think the guy she’s singing to is convinced by that?
 - c. Marriage is “*forsaking all others.*” Not KJV words to make weddings sound solemn.
 4. That’s the relationship Israel had with God; prophets use marriage. (**Isa 54:5, Jer 3:14**)
 - a. Israel’s pursuit of idols is denounced as spiritual adultery— she is married to God.
 - b. Hebrew in Jeremiah has a wordplay contrastong lover (Baal) and husband (God).
- D. When God brought Jews out of Egypt, He did more than bring them out of land of slavery
1. He also brought them out of a land of pagan idolatry— where there were many gods.
 - a. Nile, giver of life; Ra, god of sun; Nut, goddess of sky, Pharaoh, himself a god.
 - 1) The plagues on Egypt were God’s message to Pharaoh—“*let my people go.*”
 - 2) They were also a message to the Jews; God’s judgement on the false gods.
 - b. Jews knew something of God, but they didn’t as yet know His name. (**Exo 3:13**)
 2. God introduces Himself to Israel by showing his power over the idols of Egypt.
 3. We’ll fast-forward as God takes Israel to Sinai to give them the Law in **Exodus 20**

II. No Other Gods: Many Gods or One True God

A. “*And God spoke all these words.*” That is the way that **Exodus 20** begins.

1. God spoke the Ten Commandments from Sinai so that all Israel heard His voice.
 - a. The Ten Commandments were the pillar upon which the rest of the Law was built.
 - b. Moses will go up by himself up on Sinai to receive the rest of the Law from God.
 - 1) But all of Israel hears with their own ears God speak the Ten Commandments.
 - 2) What would it be like to hear God the voice of God speak to you. *Terrifying.*
 - 3) Moses says that “terrifying” part of the point! (**Reading: Exodus 20:18-21**)
2. Groundwork was laid for this terror—there was a process of preparation. (**Exo 19:10f**)
 - a. They washed their clothes and purified themselves for 3 day, abstaining from sex.
 - b. They were to mark off God’s holy mountain and go near it—not even their animals.
 - c. That wasn’t hard; Sinai was terrifying, shrouded with thunder, lightning & smoke.
 - 1) Whole mountain trembled violently and the sound of a trumpet blasted over it.
 - 2) This was God’s shock-and-awe showing that His very presence had come near.
3. When God’s voice spoke from Sinai, it was to put “*the fear of God*” into the people.

B. The Jews call the Ten Commandments the “*Ten Words*” or in Greek “*The Decalogue.*”

1. Hebrew version is divided differently; their first word isn’t in our list (**Exo 20:2**)
 - a. Why? It’s not a commandment. There isn’t a “*thou shall*” or a “*thou shall not*”
 - b. But this is the foundation for all the commandments, “*I am the LORD your God...*”
 - 1) Because God is their God, then He can indeed give them these Laws to follow.
 - 2) All of these Laws are founded on the fact that God is God, and he is God alone.
2. The video the small groups will watch tonight calls this idea “*ethical monotheism.*”
 - a. Remember, pagans appease their gods so that they are free to live as they please
 - b. God tells Israel, “*I am God alone, and you must follow these Laws because I am.*”
3. The next two commandments are “*one word*” in the Jewish count. (**Exo 20:3-4**)
 - a. **First**, if God is God, we can have no other god before God, no other God but God.
 - 1) All of those false idol gods they saw in Egypt—those aren’t really gods at all!
 - 2) Remember, pagan idea was all gods are gods; God says, “*No, I am God alone.*”
 - b. **Second**, they were not could to make idols to use in worship even of the true God.
 - 1) That is essentially what they did when Aaron created the golden calf. (**Exo 32**)
 - 2) They made an idol as an image for the God that brought them out of Egypt.

III. Conclusion

- A. On our first trip to Pepperdine in 1990, we were with friends driving in Malibu Canyon.
1. We got lost... and saw a lot more than we would have if we'd known where we were.
 - a. Like a sub-division "*Happy Acres*" with gaudy sign "*Homes starting at \$699,999.*"
 - b. We also stumbled on a Hindu temple; we got out, took off our shoes and took a tour.
 - 1) We saw idols shrines upon which solemn worshippers sacrificed coconuts.
 - 2) The friend we were with was overcome with emotion—pagan idolatry in USA!
 2. But we see pagan idolatry all around us all the time... we just don't call it that.
 - a. We saw it there in Happy Acres with those starter homes going for \$699,999.
 - 1) We saw it in Beverly Center in Beverly Hills ("*Buy tie for \$50, get 1 for 1/2 off*").
 - 2) We saw it driving Rodeo Dr. looking for celebrities (*maybe we were pagans*).
 - b. Paul says that materialism and greed become idolatry. (**Eph 5:5**, NLT; **Col 3:5**, NCV)
 3. Jesus saw money as a false god in competition with the one true God (**Luke 16:13**)
 - a. God has to be the only God of our life; nothing else can be on the throne of our life.
 - b. We can't serve God **and** money; some Pharisees evidently disagreed. (**Lk 16:14-15**)
 - c. When we try to serve God while seeking other gods, there's a word— **PAGANISM**.
 4. This series will look at false gods of our culture, idols people have always served
 - a. **STATUS**: Pharisees loved honor at banquets & best seat at synagogue. (**Mt 23:5**)
 - b. **PRAISE**: Some priests wouldn't confess Jesus; they loved praise of men. (**Jn 12:43**)
 - c. **POWER**: Rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and exercise authority. (**Mt 20:25**)
 - d. **SEX**: Corinth proverb, "*Food for the stomach and stomach for food.*" (**1 Cor 6:13**)
- B. Remember: Idolatry was the besetting sin of the chosen people of God in the OT!
1. The danger that Israel faced was NOT that they would stop worshipping God .
 - a. Israel's temptation was always in worshipping false gods alongside the true God.
 - 1) Israel generally always worshipped God, usually with all the right rites, right?
 - 2) They just wanted to add the worship of Baal, Asherah, Molech and few others.
 - b. And that's what the first two commandments forbid-- both for Israel and for us.
 - c. If God is really God, then He is God alone; He won't share us with gods of world
 2. Do we need a return visit from Sinai; do we need Him to shake the mountain again?
 - a. When we seek to serve God and alongside the gods of this world, that is paganism!
 - b. If we truly believe that God is truly God, then we must LIVE like God is God alone!