

The Acts of the Holy Spirit and the early church

June 8th, 2014 Stephen's message, Part 11

Despicable worship of strange gods



Acts 7:41-43 (NIV)

That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made. But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: “‘Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel? You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship.

Therefore I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon.

So we see that in a short little statement made before the great Sanhedrin, Stephen recites the history of idolatry in Israel, from Mount Sinai to Babylon. Now all those years wandering in the wilderness, the nation of Israel had the law all that time! They had teachers of the law, the Scribes as well as others to help them to remember and put into practice all the laws, starting from the Decalogue and continuing on to encompass all the rules and regulations found in the books of Leviticus and Numbers.

They just kept rejecting both God and His regulations, over and over. So Stephen in essence says, "Don't accuse me of blaspheming the law. Check your own history, for you and your ancestors have slammed God and His Law more than either I or my friends, (The disciples and followers of Jesus) ever have.

God turning away from His own:

And so God just let them go. And what did they do? From the time of the wilderness wandering after they left the comfy confines of Egypt, to the Babylonian captivity, all those years in between they just kept worshipping idols, just like saw in Egypt. It was a constant pain in the side for God, quite literally a constant problem. Note the tie in through the book of Romans:

Romans 1:18-25 (NIV)

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For 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 people are without excuse.

*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. **Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.** They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.*

God is as we all know ever loving and full of grace; however in these phrases, God is found to be withholding his grace which they had abused. Now we see that God gives them up to fall from one sin to another, both with the Nation of Israel in the Old Testament as well as with some Christian believers in the New Testament. This is not in the desired will of God, however it is in His permissive will. Note the language of Joshua that again shows the seriousness of turning away from God:

Joshua 24:19-22 (NIV)

*Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. **If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.**” But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the Lord.” Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord.” “Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.*

The literal rendering of the phrase (turned away from) which in turn carries with it the same idea according to historians as to (give them up). In both these cases, the idea is that God allowed the sin that these people were in to continue and in fact to even grow much worse. Now we see that Stephen quotes the Old Testament prophet Amos, in his prosecution case against these men of the hierarchy of the Jewish Nation noting that the nation of Israel had fallen:

Amos 5:25-27 New International Reader's Version

People of Israel, did you bring me sacrifices and offerings for 40 years in the desert? Yes. But you have honored the place where your king worshiped other gods. You have carried the stands the statues of your gods were on. You have lifted up the banners of the stars you worship as gods. You made all of those things for yourselves. So I will send you away as prisoners beyond Damascus, says the Lord. His name is God Who Rules over All.

Worship of the Sun, Moon & Stars:

Worship of the heavenlies is perhaps the oldest form of idolatry practiced by the ancients. According to historians, the observation of the stars in the East very early led the people to regard the planets and the fixed stars as gods.

The religion of the ancient Egyptians is known to have consisted preeminently of sun-worship. Moses had sternly warned the Israelites against worshiping anything other than the Lord, God:

Deuteronomy 4:15-20 (NIV)

*You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below. **And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.** But as for you, the Lord took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are.*

Of Manasseh the son of one of the better kings of Israel, Hezekiah, it is related that he worshiped strange and detestable things:

2 Kings 21:1-6 (NIV)

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. His mother's name was Hephzibah. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done.

He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. He built altars in the temple of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem I will put my Name." In the two courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, arousing His anger.

Altars for star-worship were built on the roofs of the houses, and horses and chariots were dedicated to the worship of the sun. Star-worship continued in Judah until the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, when the king took measures to abolish all kinds of idolatry. But although star-worship was then abolished as a public cult, it was practiced privately by individuals, who worshiped the heavenly bodies, and poured out libations to them on the roofs of their houses.

The ancient Hebrews, being nomads, like the Arabs favored the moon, while the Babylonians, who were an agricultural nation, preferred the sun. But, as appears from Scripture that the moon-worship of the Israelites, even while they were still in Egypt, was combined with sun-worship.

Since the most ancient times, the sun has been a favorite "god" or god symbol of pagan people all around the world. The Babylonians, Persians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans all had their sun gods. The native peoples of North and South America widely practiced sun worship, as did

their Asian ancestors. The Europeans as well were deeply involved in sun worship, and many of their sun-god festivals were carried over when they professed conversion to Christianity. These can still be seen today in the Easter bonfire and sunrise services, and the Christmas burning of the Yule log.

Ezekiel 20:5-8 (NIV)

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: On the day I chose Israel, I swore with uplifted hand to the descendants of Jacob and revealed myself to them in Egypt. With uplifted hand I said to them, "I am the Lord your God." On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of Egypt into a land I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all lands. And I said to them,

"Each of you, get rid of the vile images you have set your eyes on, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God." But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and spend my anger against them in Egypt.

In connection with this false worship of the heavenly bodies, it is related in the **Mishnah** that the Rabbis were asked if God dislikes idolatry why He did not destroy the idols. The Rabbis answered:

If the heathen worshiped only idols perhaps God would have destroyed the objects of their adoration, but they worship also the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the host of heaven, and God cannot destroy the world on account of the heathen.

Now let's look a little closer at this idea of actually worshiping the lesser light in the sky, that being our moon. Although the moon has not had great prominence in the history of religion, the worship of it has been known since earliest recorded time. In the oldest literatures of Egypt, Babylonia, India, and China, as well as today with some African and Native American peoples, it appears that moon worship is founded on the belief that the phases of the moon and the growth and decline of plant, animal, and human life are related.

In some societies food was laid out at night to absorb the rays of the moon, which were thought to have power to cure disease and prolong life. Among the Baganda of central Africa it was customary for a mother to bathe her newborn child by the light of the first full moon. The moon was frequently equated with wisdom and justice, as in the worship of the Egyptian god Thoth and the Mesopotamian god Sin.

In general, however, the moon has been the basis for many amorous legends and some superstitions (madmen were once considered to be moonstruck, hence the term lunatic) and is particularly important in the practice of astrology.

Jeremiah 8:1-3 (NIV)

*At that time, declares the Lord, the bones of the kings and officials of Judah, the bones of the priests and prophets, and the bones of the people of Jerusalem will be removed from their graves. They will be exposed to the **sun and the moon and all the stars of the heavens, which they have loved and served and which they have followed and consulted and worshiped.** They will not be gathered up or buried, but will be like dung lying on the ground. Wherever I banish them, all the survivors of this evil nation will prefer death to life, declares the Lord Almighty.'*

According to some historical studies, some ancient people actually regarded the Moon as the chief of our two luminaries. The sin of Israel was that it worshipped the created host, instead of Jehovah Sabbath, **the Lord of hosts.**

Noting this idea of host, we see that the word "**host**" actually means "**armies.**" It is applied to the heavenly bodies because they are very numerous, and appear to be "marshalled" or arrayed in military order. It is from this that one of God's many names is the Lord of Hosts as being the ruler of these well-arranged heavenly bodies.

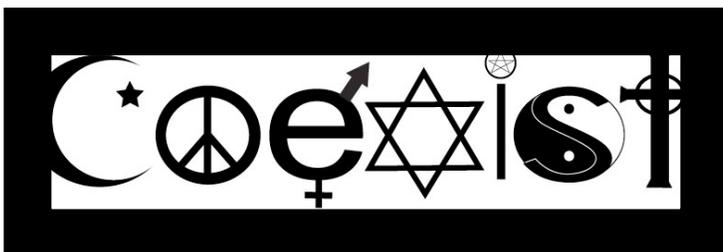
Deuteronomy 17:2-5 (NIV)

If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the Lord gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God in violation of his covenant, and contrary to my command has worshiped other gods, bowing down to them or to the sun or the moon or the stars in the sky, and this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death.

Now it is clear in Scripture that sometimes the idea of the host of heaven is referring to Angelic beings, but rather in our study for today, we understand that the host of heaven is referring to the physical heavenly bodies:

Isaiah 45:9-12 (NIV)

*Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, what are you making? Does your work say, 'The potter has no hands'? Woe to the one who says to a father, 'What have you begotten?' 'Or to a mother, 'What have you brought to birth?'' "This is what the Lord says—the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? **It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts.***



Today, many people have what appears to be a very nonthreatening bumper sticker showing all of their unabashed willingness

to be tolerant of any and all faiths.

There is actually a coexist foundation that is at the heart of these stickers as well as many other activities to increase their belief that we all in the words of that great statesman, Mr. Rodney King, **((Can't we all just get along))** Below is there foundational philosophy that while appearing nice and vague, does neglect the fact of just why Jesus came to die on the cross..

There is a crisis of understanding that tears at the social fabric of societies around the world. Globalization has outpaced understanding, creating divisions that plague societies with prejudice, misinformation, hate, and violence. The Coexist Foundation is a non-profit organization creating understanding across divides. Since 2006, the Coexist Foundation has forged a range of inspiring initiatives to create understanding through education and innovation.

Shown below are the details for the coexist name:

C - The C in Coexist is represented by the crescent moon and star symbol represents Diana a Greek Moon Goddess of ancient times and the worship of sun, moon and sky gods. The crescent moon and star on the sticker is often used to represent Islam. However, the same symbols were used thousands of years before ever being associated with Islam.

O - The O in Coexist is represented by the internationally recognized peace sign. The peace sign was originally designed for the British nuclear disarmament by Gerald Holtom.

E - The E in Coexist is represented by combining the male and female symbols showing equality and peace between the male and female sexes. The male symbol also known as the Mars symbol is a circle with an arrow coming from it pointing in the upper right direction. The female symbol also known as the Venus symbol is a circle with a cross below it.

X - The X in Coexist is represented by the Jewish Star of David which is also known as the Shield of David. The Star of David is in a shape of a hexagram, which is made up of two equilateral triangles.

I - The I in Coexist is represented by a Pagan or Wiccan Pentacle atop the letter I. A Pentacle is a five-pointed star within a circle. This symbol is used to represent one as a Pagan or Wiccan. The upward top point of the star represents the spirit. The other four points all represent an element. The four elements are earth, air, fire and water.

S - The S in Coexist is represented by a Taoist Yin Yang also known as a Taijitu. Yin and Yang represents two opposite but complementary forces found in nature. Yin is often recognized with shade, darkness and femininity. Yang is often recognized with light and masculinity.

T - The T in Coexist is represented by a Christian Cross. The Christian Cross is associated with Christianity and the crucifixion of Jesus.

The book of the Prophets:

When Stephen was giving his Speech, not only does he basically quote the prophet Amos, but also notes that this writing of Amos was from what was then called (The book of the prophets).

This quoting of Amos was the Scripture in basic form that Stephen cited in his speech to the Jewish Sanhedrin, just prior to his departure for Heaven.

Amos 5:25-27 New International Reader's Version

People of Israel, did you bring me sacrifices and offerings for 40 years in the desert? Yes. But you have honored the place where your king worshiped other gods. You have carried the stands the statues of your gods were on. You have lifted up the banners of the stars you worship as gods. You made all of those things for yourselves. So I will send you away as prisoners beyond Damascus, says the Lord. His name is God Who Rules over All.

Now the Hebrews divided their Scriptures into three sections, **the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa, called the Psalms**. Now each of these parts is looked upon as a special and separate book; however today we include them all in one book, the Holy Bible. The Law or Pentateuch comprised the five books of Moses. The earlier prophets were the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings: the later prophets were Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve which we now call Minor Prophets.

The Hagiographa consisted of the following books in the order here given: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther (these five last mentioned were called the five rolls, being written on separate rolls for use at special festival and fast services), Daniel, Ezra (Nehemiah), and Chronicles.

The twelve Minor Prophets were commonly written in one volume and were called the Book of the Prophets to the Jewish people of that day as well as some today, they are as follows:

Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi

Worship of Molek:



Put in its simplest terms, Molek or Molech was an idol of the Ammonites to whom children were offered in return for favor for their crops and their lives. The image of Molech is said to have been hollow, heated from below, with the head of an ox, and outstretched arms in which children were laid alive by their parents, then tied to the outstretched arms of the idol, while they slowly burned to death, their cries of agony being stifled

by the beating of drums. Let's take a closer look at just how God felt about this most unusual worship practice:

Leviticus 20:1-6 (NIV)

The Lord said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'Any Israelite or any foreigner residing in Israel who sacrifices any of his children to Molek is to be put to death.' The members of the

community are to stone him. I myself will set my face against him and will cut him off from his people; for by sacrificing his children to Molek, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. If the members of the community close their eyes when that man sacrifices one of his children to Molek and if they fail to put him to death, I myself will set my face against him and his family and will cut them off from their people together with all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molek. I will set my face against anyone who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute themselves by following them, and I will cut them off from their people.

One of the greatest and wisest kings in all the world, was Solomon, King of Israel. After showing one of the keenest minds in the world by asking God for guidance, wisdom and understanding, this man grows to follow many other things in his lifetime, other than the Lord, God. In what may have seemed like a wise idea at the time, Solomon decides to marry one or more of the women that each and every nation that Israel had any form of dealings with.

When it was all said and done, Solomon has amassed over 700 wives and 300 concubines. Now, God has made it very clear since Adam and Eve, that there is to be one man with one woman in marriage (**at a time**). Solomon like his father David, defeniately had a wandering eye out for the ladies of the world. God however had even told him that these many women would lead his heart away from the Lord his God to serve worthless idols.

1 Kings 11:1-6 (NIV)

*King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. **He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done.***

There is a report from **Paul Mosca, Phd.** In his writings about Plato's Republic notes the following on the sacrifices to the god Molek.

There stands in their midst a bronze statue of Molek, its hands extended over a bronze brazier, the flames of which engulf the child. When the flames fall upon the body, the limbs contract and the open mouth seems almost to be laughing until the contracted body slips quietly into the brazier. Thus it is that the 'grin' is known as 'sardonic laughter,' since they die laughing.

Plutarch a Greek historian of the first century noted the following sad commentary of the worship practices to Molek:

With full knowledge and understanding they the parents themselves offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds; meanwhile the mother stood by without a tear or moan; but should she utter a single moan or let fall a single tear, she had to forfeit the money, and her child was sacrificed nevertheless; and the whole area before the statue was filled with a loud noise of flutes and drums took the cries of wailing should not reach the ears of the people

Jeremiah 7:30-31 (NIV)

The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the Lord. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it. They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind.

The 12th-century Rabbi Rashi, commenting on Jeremiah 7:31 stated:

Tophet is Moloch, which was made of brass; and they heated him from his lower parts; and his hands being stretched out, and made hot, they put the child between his hands, and it was burnt; when it vehemently cried out; but the priests beat a drum, that the father might not hear the voice of his son, and his heart might not be moved

In Closing:

What a truly sad thing hearing about all these children is for us today.. The fact of the matter is that anyone without the love of God in their lives is more than capable of doing horrendous things to anyone or even themselves. Our prayers need to be continuing for people to come to truly know the Lord. But while we look around in utter astonishment at the senseless acts of our fellow man, we need to keep in mind the facts of life as set out in the classic song by **Jim Reeves, This world is not my home!!**

**This world is not my home I'm just a passing through
my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue**

**Oh Lord you know I have no friend like you
If heaven's not my home then Lord what will I do**

**The angels beckon me from heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore**

**In John Milton's Paradise Lost (1667),
Moloch is one of the greatest warriors of the fallen angels,**

**"First MOLOCH, horrid King besmear'd with blood
Of human sacrifice, and parents tears,
Though, for the noyse of Drums and Timbrels loud,
Their children's cries unheard that passed through fire
To his grim Idol. Him the AMMONITE
Worshipt in RABBA and her watry Plain,
In ARGOB and in BASAN, to the stream
Of utmost ARNON. Nor content with such
Audacious neighbourhood, the wisest heart
Of SOLOMON he led by fraud to build
His Temple right against the Temple of God
On that opprobrious Hill, and made his Grove
The pleasant Vally of HINNOM, TOPHET thence
And black GEHENNA call'd, the Type of Hell."**

THE FULL MOONS OF THE YEAR

JANUARY	WOLF MOON
FEBRUARY	ICE MOON
MARCH	STORM MOON
APRIL	GROWING MOON
MAY	HARE MOON
JUNE	MEAD MOON
JULY	HAY MOON
AUGUST	CORN MOON
SEPTEMBER	HARVEST MOON
OCTOBER	BLOOD MOON
NOVEMBER	SNOW MOON
DECEMBER	COLD MOON

**A SECOND FULL MOON IN A MONTH IS CALLED A
'BLUE MOON'**