



Evangelistic Apologetics
The Church Under Attack
Part 3

By
Mark McGee

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The Potter

My wife and I were spending a wonderful vacation together in the mountains many years ago and wanted to purchase something that would be a reminder of the experience. We visited several artisans and watched them create beautiful works of art from wood, stone, clay and canvas. Some of the most interesting artisans were the potters who took dry lumps of clay and changed them into works of art. As I watched them work with clay on the potter's wheel I thought about how the Bible referred to God as a Potter.

As we consider Satan's continual attack on the Lord's Church and the work of evangelistic apologetics God has called us to perform, I am reminded of the powerful words of the Prophet Isaiah spoken during Satan's attack on the people of Israel.

“And there is no one who calls on Your name, Who stirs himself up to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us, And have consumed us because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand. Do not be furious, O Lord, Nor remember iniquity forever; Indeed, please look—we all are Your people!” Isaiah 64:7-9

God has used the image of the potter to help His prophets and people comprehend the true relationship they have with Him. Jeremiah is a good example. God told Jeremiah that He was going to

judge and punish Judah. God required Jeremiah to say harsh things to the leaders and people and he often struggled with his prophetic calling, even saying – “Woe is me, my mother, That you have borne me, A man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!” (Jeremiah 15:10)

God knew Jeremiah was the right person for the job and gave him many wonderful insights into his calling as a prophet. One of the most beautiful and powerful insights came when God sent Jeremiah to the house of a potter. The potter and his work at the wheel became a visual aid to help Jeremiah understand God and His ways better.

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: ‘Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.’ Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the Lord. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom,

to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. 'Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.'" Jeremiah 18:1-11

The people of Judah rejected Jeremiah's prophetic warnings, refused to turn away from evil and suffered the punishment God had warned was coming. The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and turned Judah into a wasteland.

The Apostle Paul reminded Christians of this truth in his letters to the Church – “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?” (Romans 9:20-21)

As we watched the potters working the clay on their wheels, modeling the clay, drying the clay, firing the clay and finishing the clay, my wife and I talked about how that's what God does to us and for us, conforming us to the image of His Son.

Keep this image of the Divine Potter in your mind as you defend the faith because it's an important aspect of the Gospel. The "good news" is that there is a Creator who has the desire and the power to accomplish His will in the world.

When we talk with atheists, agnostics and others who accuse the God of the Old Testament of being – to quote Richard Dawkins – “the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully” – we need to remember they are talking about the Creator God, the One who formed the thing formed.

“But now, O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand.” Isaiah 67:8

“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the Lord. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!’” Jeremiah 18:5-6

“But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?” Romans 9:20-21

Christians, this is for our understanding. As unbelievers attack the teachings of Christ, we understand the attack at its source. Satan has done everything in his power to deceive, manipulate and confuse the masses of humanity from the very beginning.

This brings us then to the core of the difficulty between believers and unbelievers – the analogy of being in language construction. We speak of God as being the “Supreme Being” and ourselves as “human beings.” What does that mean and how do we overcome the attack against the clear teachings of God’s Word concerning God and humanity?

The word “being” comes from the verb “to be” and carries the idea of “to exist.” We see this in Genesis 2:7 – “And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” The Hebrew word is *nephesh* (living being, soul, person, self) and speaks of life. How did this living being come into being (existence)? “And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.”

The word “formed” is the Hebrew *yatsar* (to form, to fashion, to shape). This is the same word used for potters forming clay into vessels with a variety of purposes. It’s not surprising that we see God forming man “of the dust of the ground” since potters clay comes from the soil of the ground. The word “dust” comes from the Hebrew *aphar*, which was used for the finest part of the soil.

When God speaks of Himself as “the Potter” who “formed” man, He is simply referring to the process He used to fashion the first human being from the dust of the earth.

The word *yatsar* is used three times in Genesis 2:

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” Genesis 2:7

“The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. ” Genesis 2:8

“Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name.” Genesis 2:19

From this we see that God “formed” man and animals from the “ground.”

What happened after God “formed” man from the dust of the ground? He “animated” him by breathing into his nostrils “the breath of life.” The word “breathed” is the Hebrew *naphach* (to breathe with force, blow) and demonstrates God’s active involvement in giving man “life” (Hebrew *hay* – alive, having vital energy, living).

God “formed” man from the dust of the earth, then “breathed” into his nostrils the “breath of life” (Hebrew *neshamah hay* – breath of vital energy) and that’s when man became a “living being. What does this tell us about God? That He is intelligent, creative, resourceful and alive. We also see that God is a “superior” being to the man and animals He formed from the ground. That’s why Paul wrote, “Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it*, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” God is the Potter and human beings are the clay. That’s the way God formed the first man and the way He continues to view us to this day.

Satan’s attack on the Church stems from how created things relate to God. God is infinite (without limits, impossible to measure, boundless) and immortal (undying, deathless, not subject to death, living forever). Man is finite (limited, capable of being measured, having bounds) and mortal (dying, subject to death, certain to die).

Satan is an angel (e.g. 2 Corinthians 11:14) and a leader of angels (e.g. Revelation 12:7-9). God created angels (e.g. Psalm 148:1-6; Colossians 1:16) as “spirit” beings (e.g. Hebrews 1:7, 14). However, God did not create angels in His image; that was for man alone (e.g. Genesis 1:26-27).

Did the fact God made man in His image, His likeness, bother Satan? Is that what drove Satan to rebel against God and deceive the first human beings? Maybe. Or maybe Satan wanted to hurt God because of what happened to him because of his pride and evil desire (e.g.

Ezekiel 28:11-19;). Whatever the reason, Satan attacked the first humans as soon as he could. That attack began a tsunami of destruction that will not end until the end of time.

The **analogy of being** (*analogia entis*) is a philosophical concept relating to the unique existence of all living beings and their analogous relationships. God is superior to all other living beings because He created them. God created angels to be “ministering spirits” and to worship Him (e.g. Hebrews 1:6-7). One of the responsibilities of angels is “to minister for those who will inherit salvation (e.g. Hebrews 1:14).

This helps us understand some of the challenges we have in understanding God. God is infinite and immortal. His knowledge and experience are unlimited and undying. We are finite and mortal. Our knowledge and experience are limited and dying. How can the finite and mortal understand the infinite and immortal?

There are three basic ways of understanding **being**: univocal, equivocal and analogy (also known as univocity, equivocity, and analogy). Univocal is understanding a word to mean the **same** thing (e.g. John is a man, you are a man, they are men). Equivocal is understanding a word in **different** ways (e.g. I threw a ball, the umpire said the ball I threw was a ball instead of a strike, our friends are going to dance at the ball tonight). Analogy is understanding a word to have a *similar* meaning (e.g. my son is a fish when he gets in the water).

God made the first human being (Adam) in His “image” and “likeness,” but Adam was not God. God put Adam into a deep sleep and took one of his ribs,”and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.” (Genesis 2:21-22) God “formed” the first man from the ground, then “made” the woman from one of man’s ribs. “So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

There’s no question that God “created” the first man and woman in His image. What about the children of Adam and Eve? Does God “create” every child in the womb? Does He begin afresh and “form” each boy child from the ground and “make” each girl child from the rib of a man? Of course not. So, in what image are we? God answers that question soon after He removed Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

“This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.” Genesis 5:1-3

Seth and all of other children who were born from Adam’s lineage (including us) are “begotten” in Adam’s own likeness, after his image. The Hebrew word is *yalad* and used almost 500 times in the Old

Testament in the sense of conception and birth. The first time we see *yalad* used in the Scriptures is Genesis 3:16 – “To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire *shall be* for your husband, And he shall rule over you.” The idea of “bring forth” children is the full process of bringing human life into being – from conception to gestation to birth. English translators of the Old Testament have chosen many words to represent the meaning of *yalad* depending on the context (e.g. begot, begotten, beget, father, bore, childbirth, give birth, born, in labor, have children, midwife). The Greek word for “beget” is *gennao* (to be born). Examples are Matthew 1:2-16 and Luke 1:13 and 57. The word “generation” in Matthew 1:17 is the word *geneai* (kindred, offspring, family, tribe), which is from the same root for *gennao* – *ginomai* (to become, to come into existence, origin). The word “genesis” comes from *ginomai*.

This idea of humans being *yalad* or *gennao* in the image and likeness of Adam is supported in the New Testament.

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense.

For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." Romans 5:12-19

Bottom line here is that the human race lost something significant because of Adam's disobedience and finds something significant because of Christ's obedience. Understanding the loss of "image" because of sin and death makes this statement even more significant:

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He

predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Romans 8:28-30

Jesus is the “express image” of God (e.g. Hebrews 1:3, Colossians 1:15) and we are being conformed (*summorphos*) into the image (*eikonos* – likeness) of Christ.

So, given all that, how does the infinite, immortal God communicate His knowledge and experience to finite, mortal human beings? That’s the importance of God’s Word – He communicates infinite ideas in ways that finite beings can understand.

Israel’s King David said, “The Lord is my rock” (Psalm 18:2). Is God a literal rock? No. David used the word in a metaphorical sense. David also wrote in that same verse that God was a fortress, deliverer, strength, shield, horn of salvation, and stronghold. King David, who was a shepherd as a child, said God was his “shepherd.” Another metaphor.

God is called “wise” (Job 9:4) and so is Solomon (1 Kings 5:7). Is their wisdom to be understood as being analogous? The Apostle Paul wrote that God is “alone wise” (Romans 16:27; 1 Timothy 1:17). How can that be true when Moses chose “wise and knowledgeable men” from the tribes of Israel to help him rule over the people of God? (Deuteronomy 1:15) The Prophet Ezekiel wrote that before Satan sinned against God he was “Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty”

(Ezekiel 28:12). Do angels have “full wisdom” that compares to the wisdom of God? How can that be?

The answer is in the vast difference between the Supreme Being, angelic beings and human beings. God is Eternal, All-Powerful, All-Knowing, Everywhere Present at the Same Time, and Unchangeable. Words describe and compare, but they have to be used in a way that can be truly analogous. There must be enough of a similarity to afford a comparison of beings.

“Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them.” (Exodus 18:11)

There is really only One Supreme being, but the Israelites had lived in Egypt for several generations and shared a common misbelief that there were many “gods.” They saw the many carved idols that represented the Egyptian gods and believed these gods had supernatural powers. That was the primary point of God’s attack on all the gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12), in addition to freeing Israel from slavery. God’s plagues on Egypt were proof that He alone is Supreme.

When Paul wrote that God is “alone wise,” he was using the word as descriptive of the Being who is unlike any other being and above all other beings. When Ezekiel wrote about Satan being “full of wisdom” before his disobedience, the prophet was using the word as

descriptive of an angelic being who could be compared with other angelic beings. The writer of 1 Kings wrote that Solomon “excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men—than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol.” (1 Kings 4:30-31) It was possible to compare Solomon’s wisdom to the wisdom of all the men of the East and of Egypt because they were all human beings.

Atheists and agnostics often attempt to compare God’s attributes, thoughts, intents and behavior with that of human beings. The problem is that God and humans are not analogous; not even close. Analogous things can be compared to each other, so how do you do that with God and humans? There is no method to compare the immortal with mortal, the infinite with the finite, the All-Powerful with limited power, the All-Knowing with limited knowledge, Everywhere Present at the Same Time with limited to one place at a time, Unchangeable with changing often. Without a method to compare it is impossible for the limited to understand the “limitless.” That doesn’t mean we cannot know God or understand something of “His ways,” but it does mean we are limited in “how” we can know God and understand His ways.

An unbeliever must be open to the “possibility” that God exists if they are ever to be open to evidence of His existence. Being open to “possibility” is not the same as being open to “probability.” An atheist will not begin an investigation into the claims of theism believing in the “probability” that God exists. They would be a weak agnostic if

they believed in the probability. However, an atheist or strong agnostic cannot be truly open to the evidence for God's existence until they are open to it as a possibility.

As I investigated the claims of theism several decades ago I realized I could not be honest in my investigation until I was open to the "possibility" of God's existence. Atheists often ask me how I could have changed from being an atheist to a theist. I explain that after becoming an honest investigator I saw how much real evidence there was for the existence of God and His Son Jesus Christ.

My challenge to anyone who attacks Christians for their belief in God is whether they are willing to be open to the possibility of God's existence. If they are, we can look at the evidence together. If they are not, then they are not ready to be honest about the evidence. An investigator who is not open to truth will not find it.

Christians are under strong attack, but not without strong defense.

Changing Lives

One of the amazing things I experienced when passing from atheism to theism was how easy it became to accept and understand ideas that I had earlier found unacceptable and absurd. Had I, as many of my atheist friends accused me, lost my mind? Also, why was I suddenly drawn to protect with all my heart and mind that which I had recently attacked with full vigor?

Salvation as described in the Bible seemed silly to me as an outsider (a non-Christian). However, after becoming an insider (a Christian) I found that salvation made more sense than anything I had ever known.

C.S. Lewis, also a former atheist, explained it this way.

“There are certain things in Christianity that can be understood from the outside, before you have become a Christian. But there are a great many things that cannot be understood until after you have gone a certain distance along the Christian road. These things are purely practical, though they do not look as if they were. They are directions for dealing with particular crossroads and obstacles on the journey and they do not make sense until a man has reached those places.” (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, HarperOne Edition, 2001, p. 144)

What makes the difference? One minute you are lost, the next minute you are saved – from death to life in a fraction of a second. How can we explain that change to someone who has not experienced that change? And how do you explain all the things you learn during your journey as a Christian? I believe strongly in things I once thought ridiculous and laughable. There must be a way to communicate these spiritual things in ways that non-believers can see as possible.

One of the most powerful ‘evidences’ of the truth of Christianity is how it ‘changes’ the human mind and heart. Jesus passed through Jericho one day and a man named Zacchaeus wanted to see Him. Zacchaeus was a tax collector – seen by his own people as a traitor for helping the Roman government heavily tax fellow Jews. Zacchaeus was too short to see over the crowd, so he climbed a tree so he could see Jesus. Jesus came by the tree, looked up and saw Zacchaeus, and told him to come down so He could stay at Zacchaeus’ house. Zacchaeus climbed down and received Jesus joyfully. The people in the crowd who were watching complained saying that Jesus was going to be a guest with a ‘sinner.’ Zacchaeus looked at Jesus and told the Lord that he would give half of his goods to the poor and would restore fourfold to anyone he had taken from by false accusation. Meeting Jesus changes minds and hearts.

Saul of Tarsus had a deep hatred for Jesus and His followers. Saul hunted down believers, arrested them and dragged them into court. Saul consented to their deaths. Saul traveled to Damascus with letters from the high priest for the purpose of finding Jesus’ disciples

and bringing them bound to Jerusalem for trial. As Saul came close to Damascus, a bright light shone around him from heaven. He fell to the ground and heard the voice of Jesus saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Saul asked who was speaking to him and Jesus said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul knew that the apostles claimed to have seen the risen Jesus and now he had heard His voice calling his name. Saul became a follower of Jesus Christ that hour and went on to preach the Gospel of Christ in many countries leading thousands of people to Christ, establishing many Christian churches and writing almost half of the New Testament. Meeting Jesus changes minds and hearts.

Those are just two of millions of stories of minds and hearts changed by meeting Jesus. If you believe what the Bible teaches about Jesus and Christianity, you should expect that kind of change. Becoming a follower of Jesus Christ, as described in the New Testament, will change people dramatically and those changed people will impact the lives of other people dramatically. A changed life is proof of a changed mind and heart.

Evangelistic Apologetics (a reasoned defense of faith in the Christian worldview with the desire and intent of unbelievers becoming believers in Jesus Christ) can be divided into two primary categories: *Informational Apologetics* and *Incarnational Apologetics*. How important are they separately and together? Here's one person's perspective.

I grew up with Christian parents and attended church with them multiple times a week from soon after my birth until I was 17 years old. That offered me ample opportunity to witness the effect of the Christian apologetic. I was already “in the camp” so to speak, so it should have been easy enough to keep me there if the Christian worldview was true. As I look back on my experience I see that Christians fail in their apologetics in two primary ways.

God and the Bible were presented as “the truth,” but with no perspective as to “why” they were true. They were “just true.” Statements about biblical truth were presented *regularly* but *not convincingly*. As for “evangelism,” children were expected to “receive Christ” at some point before their 12th birthday. I chose to walk the aisle at 10, attend the baptism classes and get baptized. Evangelism done, another soul saved – or so people thought. I wasn’t saved and was able to hide that fact easily within the framework of how Christianity was viewed by family and friends. Saying one was a Christian, attending a Christian assembly regularly and following accepted protocol was all that was necessary to be deemed by others as being a Christian.

The ages of 10-17 are crucial in many ways. Children become teenagers during those years and they think, feel and see a lot. What people “do” becomes as important, if not more important, than what people “say.” I saw and heard things that were evidence to me that Christians didn’t practice what they preached. That included preachers, teachers and other leaders in the church. The

“incarnational” did not match the “informational.” It was acceptable to say one thing and do another and was a dysfunctional model to me of what it meant to “be a Christian.” Living *like* a Christian was not necessary to *be* a Christian was the message I saw and heard loud and clear. Hypocrisy is a powerful teacher.

The **impotence of the informational** and the **insincerity of the incarnational** combined to open my mind and heart to wander through polytheistic and pantheistic world views and eventually find a home with atheism. There is no way for me to know for sure, but I do wonder if things would have been different in my life if Christians had presented me with a powerful apologetic that was strong in both information and lifestyle.

As we consider how to defend the truth claims of Christianity against the onslaught of the enemies of Christ and His Church, may we not forget the importance of practicing what we preach. It is a powerful and necessary element of Evangelistic Apologetics.

The Beginning

Have you ever wondered how we got here? I mean how we got from the Garden of Eden to, well, this ... life as we know it now.

How do you go from “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” to “they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.” ??

Yes, I know it's just a small jump from Genesis 2:25 to Genesis 3:7, but isn't that really a huge jump from living on a perfect planet to the mess it became? I think it is a huge jump and a big disappointment. I read Genesis 1 & 2 and Planet Earth sounds like a really nice place to live. Genesis 3 & 4? Not so much. I'm telling you, it's a big disappointment.

But, here we are; all of us in the same situation. As complicated as life appears, it's really quite simple. **We're all doomed.** No, really, we're all doomed. That is the truth of the matter. We have no hope ... without God. And there is the rub. We have no hope without God, so believing that God exists is the starting point for everyone.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Hebrews 11:6)

But what about people who don't believe God exists? What about people who believe there's a God, but the god they believe in is not really God? What about people who believe there are many gods and none of them are the real God? What about people who believe God is in everything or everything is God? How in the world did we go from one God in the Garden of Eden to no God, different God, several gods, millions of gods, everything's god, god's in everything?

Back to Genesis to figure this out.

Here's a quick look at what we know from Genesis 1 – 3.

- God Created the heavens and the earth
- God Created man and woman in His image, in His likeness
- Satan deceived the woman to disobey God and Adam also disobeyed
- God cursed Satan and told the man and woman how their life would change
- God promised that He would send the Seed of the woman (Jesus) to defeat the seed of the serpent (Satan)
- God removed the man and woman from the Garden of Eden so they would not eat from the tree of life and live forever in their sinful state

Satan's deception is the game-changer. There's something in what he said that we need to "get" if we're going to understand why there are so many different beliefs about God.

- Atheism – no God
- Monotheism – one God
- Polytheism – many gods
- Pantheism – everything is part of god
- Panentheism – god is in everything
- Henotheism – many gods, but worship one more than others

What did Satan say that lead to so many different beliefs about God or gods?

“God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”
Genesis 3:5

What did the woman think when she heard those words?

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.” *Genesis 3:6*

The woman heard the words of the serpent (Satan), looked at the tree and saw that it was (1) good for food, (2) pleasant to the eyes, (3) desirable to make one wise, and (4) she ate fruit from the tree. (5) She also gave the fruit to her husband and he ate it, too.

What happened next?

“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.” Genesis 3:7

That exchange took less than 60 seconds, but it opened the floodgates to what almost became the destruction of the human race.

“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” Genesis 6:5-7

Eve did not think through the results of her action. She saw the pretty fruit and heard the enticing words of the serpent. She did not consider the awful consequences of what it would mean to “surely die” (Genesis 2:17); what it would mean to her husband, her children and

her children's children. As we learn from the Apostle Paul, Eve was deceived and fell into sin; Adam was not deceived. (1 Timothy 2:14)

The death God warned them about was more than the death of the body – “the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.” Goodness was gone; evil had taken its place.

Think about the intent of the thoughts of Adam and Eve's heart before they met the serpent. As God commented after creating the first humans – “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was* very good” (Genesis 1:31). It didn't happen overnight, but death showed its ugliness from the first child born on earth murdering the second child born until the wickedness of man was great in the earth and every intent of the thought of his heart was “only evil continually.” Every worldview (belief system), if taken to its logical conclusion, will arrive at an undeniable ending point. That's where logic takes us – to the logical conclusion. If you took the ideal version of a worldview and imagined what that world would look like if it faced no opposition and was not balanced by any other idea, what would that worldview look like at its logical end? Do that with every worldview and follow the logic of that view to its logical conclusion. You may be surprised where each one ends.

Satan's worldview of eyes wide open, being like God, knowing good and evil, arrived at the human race thinking only about evil and being filled with wickedness. The impact of that kind of evil has a powerful

effect on the planet. It became corrupt before God, “and the earth was filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11). It also impacted how the earth looked to God – “So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth” (Genesis 6:12).

Take any worldview (e.g. Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, paganism, spiritualism, scientism, agnosticism, atheism) and follow it logically to its undeniable conclusion. Most people living in their worldview have never done that. I was proud to be an atheist and understood some of the ramifications of what I believed, but I never took atheism to its logical conclusion. The undeniable end of the atheistic worldview is depressing and hopeless. I’m reminded of these words from *The Tragedy of Macbeth* by Shakespeare.

“Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, Creeps in this petty pace from day to day To the last syllable of recorded time, And all our yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more. It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.”
(Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5, Page 2)

I didn’t think of atheism in that way when I was an atheist, but that’s where it would lead if you considered the truth about atheism – despair and hopelessness. I was just doing what I wanted to do, living

life **my way**. After talking to hundreds of atheists during the past 45 years, I've found that most have not taken atheism to its logical conclusion either. And why would you want to do that? It's such a sad ending to a life.

The same is true for polytheism, pantheism, panentheism, henotheism, agnosticism and any other non-Christian worldview. The ending for all of them is depressing and without hope. Whether you believe you'll be nothing, become something else over and over again, be judged hopelessly, or disappear into a void of purposelessness, it's a depressing and hopeless ending.

In the years I studied Eastern metaphysics, I don't remember being particularly fond of the idea of being **absorbed into the void**. The futility of that worldview made becoming an atheist easy because I saw nothing in either Christianity or Eastern philosophy that offered any proof of life after death. All I could see at the time was grabbing all the fun I could before death because that's all there was to life.

The Apostle Paul pointed out the futility of a false worldview when he wrote – “If *the* dead do not rise, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!’” (1 Corinthians 15:32) The Christian worldview is built on the foundation of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote that “if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.” Paul was more honest about the Christian worldview than people are of other worldviews. “For if the dead do not

rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Corinthians 15:15-17)

Futility! That's an excellent word for what is true about every worldview that is false. How many worldviews are false? All of them minus one. Since every worldview views the world differently and is opposed to every other view, there can be only one true worldview. Which one is it? Satan told the first humans that his worldview was right, but it almost ended in the destruction of mankind and the planet. What saved us? The **grace of God** – "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). Where did that come from? The words of God to Satan in the Garden.

"And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." Genesis 3:15

The only worldview that is true is the view God has of the world. Any other view ends in futility.

Worldviews

“The only worldview that is true is God’s view of the world.”

In the last part of our study we saw that the undeniable end of Satan’s worldview (“you will be like God, knowing good and evil”) was great wickedness and every intent of the thoughts of the hearts of humans being “only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). Satan’s worldview is every worldview except one – God’s.

We’ve seen in previous articles that worldviews that grew from Satan’s lie included atheism, agnosticism, polytheism, pantheism and panentheism. How did they develop and what can we learn from their development to understand how Satan is attacking the Church today?

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Genesis 1:1

Monotheism

The first worldview we see in Bible history is **monotheism** – one Creator God. At least the first few generations of human beings were monotheists. It’s obvious from Genesis 4:25-26 that the lineage of Seth (the third son of Adam and Eve) were monotheists (“Then *men* began to call on the name of the Lord.”). However, it

appears something changed prior to the 7th generation in the lineage of Cain (the first son of Adam and Eve).

“Then Lamech said to his wives: ‘Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.’ Genesis 4:23-24

Lamech was mocking what God said to Cain many years earlier after Cain killed his brother Abel. God told Cain, “Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold” (Genesis 4:15). Lamech may have heard that story directly from Cain because of the longevity of humans at the time. We know from 1 John 3:12 that Cain was a wicked man whose works were evil. Cain was afraid for his life, so he moved away from his mother and father and built a city for protection. Cain named the city after his first son, Enoch, and pursued the desires of his heart, which were based on wickedness and evil. That pursuit impacted his family, deeply.

Another person named Enoch was in the lineage of Seth. Enoch was a child of the 7th generation from Adam even as was Lamech in the lineage of Cain. The fact that the Genesis account gives us specific insight into the firstborn son of the 7th generation from Adam in both the godly lineage of Seth and the ungodly lineage of Cain is important to notice.

“Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.” Genesis 5:21-24

Hebrews 11:5 reads – “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found, because God had taken him.” Men at that time lived more than 900 years before they died, but God took Enoch from earth when he was just 365 years old. Why did God take Enoch hundreds of years before he would have been old enough to die? “... for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Enoch was known to be a monotheist who pleased God.

Enoch of the lineage of Seth and Lamech of the lineage of Cain would have been cousins in the same generation from Adam, so we can compare what had happened to each line during a similar period of time.

- Lamech — mocked God
- Enoch — walked with God

Atheism

Lamech was at least a practical atheist in the 7th generation from Adam. Enoch was a committed monotheist in the 7th generation from

Adam. I think that what happened from the 7th to the 10th generations from Adam may explain why God took Enoch from earth more than 500 years before he would have died a natural death. Monotheism was dying out as a dominant worldview and atheism was taking its place.

“Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the Lord said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years. ’There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’” Genesis 6:1-7

The lines blurred at some point during or after the 7th generation from Adam and the sons of the godly line (Seth) married the daughters of

the ungodly line (Cain), leading to a diminishing of the practice of monotheism. For all practical purposes the world became humanistic and atheistic. They lived as if there were no God, which led to a corrupt earth that was “filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11).

Jesus referred to this same period of time when He said, “And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.” (Luke 17:26-27)

The entire human race was living their lives with no thought about God at all. Life to them was about doing what they wanted to do, no matter who else it hurt.

“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’”

How thankful we can all be for Genesis 6:8 – “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Why did God choose Noah? It began with Noah’s father, Lamech (not the same Lamech as in the lineage of

Cain). Lamech was practicing monotheism in a world that was overwhelmingly atheistic.

“Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. And he called his name Noah, saying, “This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed.” Genesis 5:28-29

Lamech believed in the God who created Adam and knew that the hard life he and other human beings lived was because of the ground the Lord had cursed in the Garden of Eden. Lamech was the 9th generation from Adam and many people in his family alive during his lifetime would have known and spoken with Adam and Eve. They would have had first-hand accounts of the Creator God, the Garden of Eden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the serpent, the sin, the curse, leaving the Garden of Eden, the first murder, the birth of Seth and Enosh, and the disappearance of Enoch. Some may have even traveled to see the angel on the east side of the Garden of Eden with the flaming sword, “which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:24). To anyone who wanted to know the truth about God, they could find the answers directly from the people who were eyewitnesses of those early events.

Lamech named his first son Noah saying, “This one will comfort us.” Enoch raised Noah to believe in the Creator God.

“Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.” Genesis 6:9

Noah did not become a father until he was 500 years old. That may have been because he didn't marry until God called him to build the ark. It may have been difficult for Noah to find a wife who was a monotheist or he may not have married until late for some other reason. They had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. By the time Noah entered the ark just before the Flood, his sons were married. Noah, his wife, three sons and their wives entered the ark with the animals God brought to the ark to save them all from destruction.

Monotheism – Again

After the Flood that destroyed all but eight souls on earth (1 Peter 3:20), Noah and his family left the ark with the animals that were onboard and started a new life with the original worldview of **monotheism**. They had personally witnessed the awesome power of the **Almighty God**. God blessed Noah and his family and told them to “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1).

The atheistic society that existed before the Flood had been a violent one, so God made a covenant with Noah and his family that addressed future violence.

“Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man.

From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man." Genesis 9:5-6

It was not long after the Flood that the families of Noah and his sons decided to leave the mountains of Ararat (Genesis 8:4) and travel to a plain in the land of Shinar (present day Iraq). There they began building a city and a tower "whose top is in the heavens." They wanted to make a name for themselves, "lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.'" Genesis 11:1-4

This action was in direct disobedience to God's commandment that they "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). Why would the families of Noah and his sons do that?

Something happened to the hearts and minds of these people that led them toward a new worldview; one that would have devastating effects on the human race to this day.

Polytheism

The insight we need is found in the previous chapter, Genesis 10. It's the genealogy of Noah's sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. Most of the names of people born into Noah's extended family are mentioned briefly, but one receives many words. His name is Nimrod.

“The sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. The sons of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabtechah; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, ‘Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.’ And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city).” Genesis 10:6-12

I wrote extensively about this in my book, *A History of Man's Quest for Immortality* (Fifth Estate Publishing, 2007), so just a brief summary here should help set the stage.

“Cush was father to six sons: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, Sabteca and Nimrod. Nimrod became a mighty warrior who was known as “a mighty hunter before the Lord.” In the Hebrew language the name Nimrod means “rebel.” It is apparent from his name and actions that Nimrod rebelled against God and the

familial system of life and government and started his own personal kingdom. It may be that he wanted to be his own god. According to the Biblical record the first centers of Nimrod's kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calenh, in the land of Shinar. The definition of the word Babylon gives us some insight into the possible purpose of the kingdom. Babylon means "gate of the god." It was established as a physical kingdom, but also as a spiritual center for people searching for a connection to the immortal. It may also speak to Nimrod's desire for godlike immortality.

There is a difference among Bible translations about what happened next. Some translations state that Nimrod continued to expand his kingdom and went to Assyria where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen. Other translations state Asshur founded those cities to the north of Babylon. Asshur is mentioned as being one of the sons of Shem. The prophet Micah mentions the land of Nimrod in the context of protection from Assyrians (Micah 5:6), so Nimrod's desire to rule every part of the world he could reach could be the better understanding of the Biblical record.

All of these cities were located in ancient Mesopotamia (known as the cradle of civilization), which included the area along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers now part of eastern Syria, southeastern Turkey, and much of Iraq. Nimrod began his kingdom in Babel which many archaeologists believe was near the modern city of Al Hillah, Iraq. Babel was located on the Euphrates River in the southern half of Mesopotamia (south of Iraq's capital city of

Baghdad). It later became the capital of many Mesopotamian civilizations and was a center for trade, religion and culture. Babylon (Babel) was an important city for many centuries. Civilizations that claimed Babylon as a capital or primary city included Sumeria, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, and Macedonia. Sumeria, Babylonia, and Assyria were located in various parts of what is now Iraq. Ancient Persia was located in modern Iran. Ancient Macedonia was located north of Greece.

Nimrod expanded his kingdom from Babel to other cities, including Erech, Akkad and Calenh. Erech (also known as Uruk) was located south of Babylon and is now known as Warka, Iraq. Archeological artifacts from the area showed religion was an important aspect of culture in Erech. The city of Akkad was located close to modern Baghdad. Archeologists are not positive about where Calenh was located, but believe it may have been near Babylon.

Nimrod, or Asshur, went to the northern part of Mesopotamia and built the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen. This area is now part of northern Iraq. Nineveh became the capital of the Assyrian empire and was located on the Tigris River about 200 miles north of Baghdad. Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen were close to Nineveh.”

(A History of Man’s Quest for Immortality, Mark A. McGee, Fifth Estate Publishing, 2007, pp. 15-16)

Instead of being fruitful, multiplying and filling the earth, everyone stayed together and traveled to a large plain and began building a city and a tower. Building the city was in direct violation of God's command to fill the earth and building the tower with a top that reached toward the heavens was so they could make a name for themselves – a reminder of what the serpent told Eve centuries earlier – “you will be like God” (Genesis 3:5).

God intervened again in the history of the human race, but instead of destroying the people with a Flood, He confused their language so families would not be able to understand the speech of other families. God knew that because the people were one in purpose and all had the same language and were intent on building the city and the tower, “now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them” (Genesis 11:6) “So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city” (Genesis 11:8).

Imagine the impact of people suddenly speaking in different languages. They couldn't communicate with anyone outside of their own family. There's also the theory that God also changed the genetic racial structure of human families at the same time He confused the languages. If that's true, such changes would quickly move people of differing language and look away from each other.

Here's a quick look at what happened to each of the family lines from Noah's sons. Notice that each group of families had their languages, their lands and their nations. All of that happened after God confused the language of man at Babel.

“The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras ... From these the coastland peoples of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.” Genesis 10:2, 5

“The sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan ... These were the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands and in their nations.” Genesis 10:6, 20

“The sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram ... These were the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, according to their nations.” Genesis 10:22, 31

After the confusing of tongues at Babel, the families of man moved away from each other to make new lives for themselves. Some moved north, some south, some west and some east. We know that Nimrod was a leader within the clan of Ham and built many cities in what was later known as Mesopotamia. They included Babel, Erech, Accad, Calneh in the land of Shinar and Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah

and Resen in the land of Assyria. We know that area today as including Iraq, Kuwait and areas of Turkey and Syria.

Archaeological discoveries have shown that the primary worldview of the ancient cities Nimrod built was polytheism: belief in and worship of many gods. In fact, polytheism was the primary worldview of those areas of the world for thousands of years. The people worshipped creator gods, heaven gods, sky gods, earth gods, mother earth gods, water gods, air gods, fire gods, weather gods, king gods, queen gods, gods of the north, gods of the south, gods of the east, gods of the west, wisdom gods, pleasure gods, sex gods, fertility/procreation gods, strife gods, arts and sciences gods, writing gods, agriculture gods, grain gods, harvest gods, shepherd gods, ghost gods, spirit gods, good gods, evil gods, submission gods, health gods, disease gods, planet gods, star gods, moon gods, sun gods, storm gods, love gods, war gods, plague gods, death gods, underworld gods, peace gods, hunting gods, pasture gods, mountain gods, craftsmen gods, carpenter gods, goldsmith gods, boatman gods and many other kinds of gods.

The people gave their gods and goddesses names: Nammu, Anu, Kingu, Utu, Mummu, Enki, Ashur, Abzu, Tiamat, Ki, Kishar, Ishtar, Nimrod, Ninsar, Enlil, Tutu, Aya, Nergal, Nanna, Sin, Tammuz, Gugalanna, Ningikuga, Shara, Ninsar, Marduk, Dagon, Ninlil, Ninshubur, Gilgamesh, Lahmt, Babbar, Nanshub, Baal, Adad, Zababa, El, Ea, Ninurta, Ninhursag, Siduri, Kakka, Zaltu, Hanish,

Adad, Ninildu, Ninagal, Lamashtu, Irra, Birdu, Geshtuegod, Ningizzia, Kalkal, to name some of them.

Those early polytheists developed systems of sacrifices and rituals they believed were essential in getting the gods to behave favorably toward them; possibly based on what they knew about the sacrifices of Noah and his sons after the Flood. Some of the people acted as priests who carried out sacrifices and rituals to the gods; again, possibly based on how Noah carried out the work of sacrificing to God on behalf of his family. People carved images of their gods from wood, stone, metals, ivory and other materials.

Quoting from an article on the British Museum website

“The people of Mesopotamia were polytheistic and believed that every aspect of their world was controlled by supernatural forces. The great gods dominated religion in ancient Mesopotamia and many gods maintained their importance throughout the region’s history. Cities and kingdoms were believed to be protected by individual gods and it was the duty of the ruler to act on the god’s behalf, building temples and performing ceremonies to gain their blessings. Each person had his or her own personal gods (male and female) and smaller shrines have been discovered, for example at Ur, where ordinary people worshipped. Personal gods or major deities and could withdraw their support, which would lead to misfortune for the individual or even the entire kingdom. Prayers

and offerings were made to prevent this happening and divination was practised to discover the will of the gods.”

Monotheism → Atheism → Polytheism → ???

So far we've seen the families of the earth go from Monotheism to Atheism, back to Monotheism, then to Polytheism. As best we can tell from both the Bible and archaeology the people of the world were polytheistic by the third millennium B.C. Was there anything God could do to lead people to believe solely in Him again? What would He do to re-introduce monotheism as a viable worldview?

God Intervenes

Archaeology supports the Bible's history about the human race being polytheistic from the 3rd millennium B.C. Following the lineage of Noah in Genesis 10 and 11, we see that the human race spread out after the confusion of language at Babel and moved to many parts of the earth. There the families of man worshipped many gods.

As far as we can tell from the Bible, archaeology and history, the entire human race had become polytheistic. We have no record of anyone worshipping the God of the Bible, the God who created the heavens and the earth and the first human beings. The human race served other gods, but not the true God.

What happened when the human race became practical atheists? God intervened? What happened when the human race built a city and tower toward heaven? God intervened. What happened when the human race became polytheists and worshipped anything except God? God intervened.

“Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses

you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 12:1-3

Just as God chose Noah to carry on the human race, God chose a man named Abram (Abraham) to carry on the worship of the one, true God. Monotheism on earth was about to begin again.

There is no question that Abram was a polytheist before God spoke to him. Abram's native land was Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 11:27-28), which was known for polytheism. Ur was the principal center of worship for the Sumerian moon god *Nanna* (same as Babylonian god *Sin*). British consul J.E. Taylor discovered the ancient ziggurat of Nanna in the middle of the 19th century A.D. British archaeologists excavated the ruins of Ur during the early part of the 20th century. They unearthed the entire temple area, including the royal cemetery, dating from about 2,600 B.C.

Joshua, who followed Moses as leader of Israel, gathered all the tribes of Israel together toward the end of his life. What he told them gives us more information about Abram's polytheistic roots.

“Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. Then I took

your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac. To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out.” Joshua 24:1-5

Abraham “served other gods.” That’s important to note. God did not look for a monotheist to rebuild monotheism. He found an older man who had served other gods all of his life. God found a man who was born into a family of polytheists and called him to become the human father of monotheism.

“Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Genesis 12:1-3

The covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants was promised to be “everlasting.”

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me

and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.’ Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: ‘As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” Genesis 17:1-8

That is important for every monotheist to understand. God’s promise concerning His working through the descendants will not be defeated. It is everlasting. However, being everlasting and undefeatable does not mean being ‘unchallenged.’ Remember the enemy? We’ve already seen how Satan attacked Eve, Job and Jesus. That’s what committed enemies do – they attack again and again and again. They will not give up until they win or are utterly defeated.

*“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”
Revelation 20:10*

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Before Satan is utterly defeated he is going to challenge God's people at every turn. That means monotheism will be challenged by Satan throughout the history of mankind.

Understanding this battle helps us understand why God repeated His command to His people to serve Him and only Him. God knows the danger that lies within every human being – Satan's lie: "you will be like God" (Genesis 3:5).

This is an excellent reminder for Christians today because we are under a similar attack from Satan – to worship other gods. Look carefully at God's commandments to Israel and see if anything stands out to you that might have modern implications.

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 'You shall have no other gods before Me. 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of

those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” Exodus 20:1-6

“For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.” Exodus 23:24

“You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.” Exodus 23:32-33

“Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth. And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord your God has given to all the

peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage. But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day. Furthermore the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, and swore that I would not cross over the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. But I must die in this land, I must not cross over the Jordan; but you shall cross over and possess that good land. Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the Lord your God to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in

distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice (for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.” Deuteronomy 4:15-31

You might be thinking that Christians can't fall into this 'polytheistic' trap of worshipping idols because we are by the very nature of our faith 'monotheists.' Think again because you might be wrong.

It's Not About Us

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’ Isaiah 55:8-9

Christians in the United States often fret about how an unbelieving world is attacking the Church. We worry about what will happen to the Church if “this” happens or “that” happens.

What happens if unbelievers win more elections than believers do? What happens if more liberals are added to the Supreme Court? What happens if Christians become the minority in our country? What happens if churches lose their tax-exempt status? What happens if Christians lose their freedom to worship publicly in the U.S.? What happens if Christianity becomes illegal and the government closes all church buildings? What happens if the Church in the United States suffers severe persecution and loses millions of members? What will God do then?

I'm sure we all would love to keep the freedoms we have in our nation. Those of us who are older remember fondly the years when Christianity was a dominant force in society, but Christians could sense change was coming as far back as the late 1940s. As an atheist active in opposing Christianity in the 1960s and early 70s, I

was part of that change (I am saddened to say) and it's never been the same since.

Whatever you choose to call it – secularism, humanism, naturalism, materialism – our country is becoming less Christian every year. Unless something happens to change the course we're on, Christians will be a small minority within one to two generations and possibly have little to no voice in what becomes of our country.

Before we fret too much, however, I think it's important that we look at things from God's perspective remembering that "as the heavens are higher than the earth," so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts. Maybe a quick reminder of history will help.

- God created the heavens and the earth and warned the first human being what would happen if he disobeyed God.
- The first humans sinned against God and God did what He said He would do. He began their death process, explained how things would work under a different administration and put them out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3).
- The first human family discovered how painful the new way of living was going to be and what a challenge they faced. The "righteous" Abel (Matthew 23:35; Hebrews

11:4) was murdered by his “wicked” brother Cain (1 John 3:12).

- God raised up another “seed” for the first parents and from that seed humans began once again to “call on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4:25-26).
- The human race disintegrated to the point God “saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). The human race had become practical atheists; they lived as if God didn’t exist. God was sorry He made the human race and decided to destroy them. That’s the end of God’s involvement with humans... right? No it wasn’t, because God was gracious and saved Noah and his family. Even though things had become so bad that only one man was left on earth that God would use, God rebuilt the human race from that one man and his wife.
- God started over, but it didn’t take long before everyone on the planet decided to do life their way instead of God’s way.
- *“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said,*

'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.' But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, 'Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.'" Genesis 11:1-9

- As we've seen the human race became polytheistic and worshiped idols. All is lost again, right? What will God do when every human being on earth worships other gods? God selects an elderly polytheist (Abram) and calls on him to become the "father" of a great nation that will be known for worshipping the Living God (Genesis 12).

Do you see what I see? **It's not about us**. It's not about our plans. God is NOT dependent on us. He is solely dependent upon Himself. His thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

Bottom line is that **God does not need us**. He loves us and *uses* us for His purposes, but He does not “need” us. God has demonstrated that He will take the number of human beings on the planet down to almost zero when necessary and start over again. He could do that again “if” he wanted to and still continue to be victorious over all His enemies. What frightens us does not frighten God (we should remember that every day).

I really believe the Church needs to understand the **absolute sovereignty** of God. I’ve thought a lot about what Christians will think when they get to Heaven and I believe their first thought will be that *God is Sovereign*. Once we “see” God on His Throne surrounded by the most powerful created beings in the universe singing His praises and bowing before Him in total gratitude and obedience, all of our silly thoughts about what will happen when “this” happens or “that” happens will disappear. How ridiculous that any Christian question God’s ability to take care of what belongs to Him. *The only real problem the Church has is itself*. If we really believe what we say we believe, what we preach, what we sing, we’ll realize God is sovereign and will accomplish whatever He wills to do.

So, let’s begin by getting over ourselves; over our sense of ‘self-importance.’ We are important, but it’s because God makes us important. How so, you ask?

“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.”
Ephesians 3:8-12

The importance of the Church is *“to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.”* God holds up the Church that has been greatly blessed by His Love and Grace and shows it (the Church) to all the principalities and powers in the heavenly places and by that makes known His manifold wisdom.

That is absolutely brilliant! We, members of the Church, have no power in and of ourselves to save ourselves. There is nothing about ourselves about which we can be proud or boast. Why, you ask? Because of this:

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:4-10

God literally raised us up from the spiritual death He imposed on Adam’s race by His love and grace; not because of something we did, not because we earned or deserved it. We were “dead” (*nekros* – dead, lifeless) in trespasses and sins, doing what our human nature directed us to do, fulfilling the desires of our flesh, being by that very nature children of wrath, and God raised us up!

God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, raised us up and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus that in the ages to come “He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Christians have received what they do NOT deserve and did not receive what they DO deserve. Now that, my friend, is Grace from Heaven.

In Heaven, the Church will forever demonstrate to every created being the exceeding riches of God’s grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. God will use us, people who were without Christ, having no hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12), to demonstrate to all beings in the universe His manifold wisdom.

That is our purpose, that is why God saved us, and that is why nothing this world can ever do to us will change what God will do for us and through us. We the Church, the Body of Christ, will overcome because that is God’s will ... and He will do whatever He wills to do ... because He is God.

Take heart, brothers and sisters, take heart.

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” 1 John 5:4-5

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