

STUDY PACK 11

DEVELOPMENT OF WORLD RELIGIONS

“Once men reject the one omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent God in favor of lesser deities, they eventually discover—to their frustration—that it takes an _____ to fill the true God’s shoes.”

~~ Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, p.18 ~~

I. WORLD RELIGIONS

The pagans in each local region developed their own local religion built around spirits manifested locally. When a religious tradition spread over a large area it began to be referred to as _____ rather than a local one.

II. THE MELCHIZADEC FACTOR

The worship of the one true God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, the God of the Bible, remained in the world outside of Israel. Though rare, Scripture gives us a clear record that non-Jews sometimes still understood _____. Canaan was the heart of _____. It was singled out for _____. Yet, in Canaan there was a “_____”—Melchizadec.

Melchizadec was a godly king in Jerusalem and a priest of the true God, Gen. 14:18-20. He was accepted and honored by Abraham, the chosen originator of Israel.

Scripture provides hints of others surrounded by pagan culture who honored the true God.

III. MONOTHEISM

Even many of the pagans acknowledged that there was something more than their paganism. They might worship the local spirits, but they recognized that there was a Creator God greater than the spirits. Some even called for a rejection of the spirits and the worship of one true God.

That view is well documented by the famous Egyptologist, Sir Wallis Budge, in his best known text, *The Book of the Dead*. Following are statements from the *Book of the Dead* as to the attributes of the true God, selected from *The Papyrus of Ani*: “A Hymn To Amen-Ra ... _____ ... Lord of the heavens ... Lord of Truth ... maker of men; creator of beasts ... Ra, whose word is truth, the Governor of the world, the mighty one of valour, the chiefs who made the world as he made himself. His forms are more numerous than those of any god ...” Adoration be to thee, O Maker of the Gods, who hast stretched out the heavens and founded the earth! ... Lord of eternity, maker of the everlastingness ... creator of light ...

“He heareth the prayer of the oppressed one, he is kind of heart to him that calleth upon him, he delivereth the timid man from the oppressor ... He is the Lord of knowledge, and Wisdom is the utterance of his mouth. “He maketh the green herb whereon the cattle live, and the staff of life whereon men live. He maketh the fish to live in the rivers, and the feathered fowl in the sky. He giveth life to that which is in the egg ... “Hail to thee, O thou maker of all these things, thou ONLY ONE. In his mightiness he taketh many forms.”

Wallis Budge states: “After reading the above extracts it is impossible not to conclude that the ideas of the ancient Egyptians about God were of a very exalted character, and it is clear that they made in their minds a sharp distinction between _____”
... *Here then we have One God* _____”

Wallis Budge sees monotheism as the original Egyptian belief corrupted into polytheism. He argues convincingly that the various attributes of the one great God were transferred to become other lesser gods. Budge states: “The truth seems to me to be that the Egyptian religion never wholly lost the monotheistic element which was in it.” He suggests a similarity to the monotheism of the Hebrews. Crude polytheism developed in Egyptian history, with increasing numbers of deities. This is an indirect confirmation of a beginning with monotheism – not “many gods”.

Other scholars have endorsed the arguments of Sir Wallis Budge, and he quotes others. One example is: “As a result of their studies of Egyptian texts, many of the earlier Egyptologists, e.g. Champollion-Figeac, de Rouge, Pierret and Brugsch, came to the conclusion that *the dwellers in the Nile Valley, from the earliest times, believed in the existence of one God, nameless, incomprehensible, and eternal.*” (p.105)

Other people were also originally monotheists, knowing of only one true God. The late Dr. Arthur C. Custance wrote a series called *The Doorway Papers* (Brockville, Ontario, Canada). In Paper 34 he gives evidence to show that this was the case with many such people, contrary to the views of many scholars.

Many of those scholars held to polytheism instead of monotheism because they believed that man has evolved upward in such areas as physical development, social relationships, intellectual capacities, and spiritual understanding.

The truth is that man is the crown of God’s creation, originally perfect (before his fall), and having a very clear understanding of the nature of God, Who was in fact his Friend. *There was no evolution of religion – _____, and a _____ from the relationship that it had been possible for man to enjoy.*

Dr. Arthur Custance elaborates the argument, and he makes the point that at first scholars examining the records of ancient peoples: “... found themselves dealing with a tremendous number of gods and goddesses and other spiritual powers of a lesser sort which seemed to be always at war with one another and, much of the time, highly destructive.”

He further states: “As earlier and earlier tablets, however, began to be excavated and brought to light, and skill in deciphering them increased, the first picture of gross polytheism began to be replaced by something more nearly approaching a hierarchy of spiritual beings organized into a kind of court with one Supreme Being over all.” (p.3)

Dr. Custance also quotes other scholars. For instance, he quotes Stephen Langdon of Oxford who wrote in 1931, in *Semitic Mythology*. Stephen Langdon knew full well that his conclusions would be unacceptable to “the establishment”.

Stephen Langdon believed _____. He made his point very clearly: “In my opinion the history of the oldest civilization of man is a rapid decline

from monotheism to extreme polytheism and widespread belief in evil spirits. It is in a very true sense the history of the fall of man.” Stephen Langdon continued to hold that view, five years later, in *The Scotsman*, November 18, 1936:

“The history of Sumerian religion, which was the most powerful cultural influence in the ancient world, could be traced by means of photographic inscriptions almost to the earliest religious concepts of man. The evidence points unmistakably to an original monotheism, the inscriptions and literary remains of the oldest Semitic peoples also indicate a primitive monotheism, and the totemistic origin of Hebrew and other Semitic religions is now entirely discredited.”

IV. SOME PROMINENT EXAMPLES OF ANCIENT MONOTHEISM

A. PACHACUTI

Yaqui Pachacuti, an Inca scholar of the Seventeenth Century, tried to turn the Incas away from the worship of the Sun. He taught them to worship the Creator God. Dr. B.C. Brundage (University of Oklahoma) summarizes Pachacuti’s description of the Creator God, “He is ancient, remote, supreme _____. Nor does he need the gross satisfaction of a consort. _____ when he wishes ... otherwise only heavenly warriors and archangels surround his loneliness. He created all peoples by his word as well as all huaeas (spirits).

B. AKHENATEN

Akhenaten was Pharaoh of Egypt from 1379 to 1361 B.C. He tried to call Egypt from paganism to the worship of the Creator God.

C The books of Don Richardson account traces of Biblical truth which were incorporated or absorbed into pagan religions.

V. THE DEVELOPMENT OF HINDUISM

“There were really only two answers possible: either _____ or in _____. Everything else was either a preparation for, or else, (in the French sense) “a vulgarization” of these. Whatever you could find elsewhere you could find better in one of these.”

~ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, p.235. ~

C.S. Lewis is making the point that Hinduism is the earliest full explanation of a religion of salvation by works. Christianity teaches _____ and _____. Hinduism teaches _____. Everything else is a corruption of one or the other of these religions.

Hinduism developed as a part of the history of India.

VI. BUDDHISM

Around 600 B.C. an Indian teacher challenged the Hindu caste system. He was a prince (Rajah) named Guatama. He began to travel throughout India teaching. He took the name “enlightened one,” or Buddha.

Buddha taught the Hindu concepts of reincarnation, karma, and nirvana. But he considered all men equal and did not recognize a caste system. He taught that life could be understood by realizing the Four Noble Truths. The First Noble Truth is that life is full _____. The second is that _____. The third states that suffering ceases _____. In other words salvation is achieved by passive acceptance of life around you. The fourth truth teaches that you can follow the “_____.” The eight principles are:

right views,
right (unselfish) desires,
right speech,
right conduct,
right occupation,
right effort,
right awareness, and
the right meditations

Buddha’s followers were called Buddhists. He established an order of teaching monks. They spread throughout Asia. His teachings were often adopted by local animists and witch doctors.

VIII. RECOMMENDED READING

Detailed information about the development of Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Confucianism, Islam and other world religions can be found in:

The World’s Religions by J.N.D. Anderson

This Believing World by Lewis Browne

Eastern Religions, General Editor Michael D. Coogan

IX. GOD AND GODS

The Scripture often refers to the spirits worshipped in the world as “gods.” It always distinguishes between God and the “gods”: Ex. 20:3; Deut. 10:17; Acts 17:18; Psalms 97:9, 135:5, 136:2.

X. THE UNKNOWN GOD

The pagans sometimes acknowledged that there was a God beyond all the gods that they worshipped, Acts 17:23-34.