

EPHESIANS

WEEK THREE

• ADULT STUDY •

BACKSTORY

In Ephesians 2, we read the apostle Paul focusing on the culture of Ephesus to explain the mystery and revelation of the Gospel to those that are either newly Christians or yet to be Christians. Ephesus was the neokorus, or the dead center, for the pagan worship of the Greek goddess Artemis. Artemis was a pagan she-god that uniquely took aspects of both the more eastern pagan religions of Cybele and the western religions of Diana - melting them all into a modern blend of worship that was well liked and received by many people in Ephesus. She was so well liked that the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus was said to be #1 of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Artemis was believed to be a divinity of healing and fertility; but also could bring diseases such as leprosy, rabies, and gout. She was also believed to be the protector of the hunt; possessing attributes such as being skillful, quick, and elegant, able to slay evil spirits...all while yielding protection for those who appeased her. She was also believed to have been granted eternal virginity by her father Zeus, so her worship was shrouded by a false sense of somehow being pure.

In one myth it is said that Artemis, with her twin brother Apollo, put to death the children of Niobe. This reaction was sparked when Niobe, a mere mortal human, had boasted to Leto, the mother of the divine twins (Artemis and Apollo) that she had bore more children (14). In Niobe's eyes, this made her superior to Leto who only had born two, Apollo and Artemis. Apollo became outraged at such an insult on his mother, and informed his sister Artemis. The twin gods then hunted Niobe's children down with their bows and arrows. Apollo killed the male children and Artemis the girls.

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2: 1-3 ESV

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

DISCUSSION

Look back at verse 1-2: “...you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air...”

It was believed in the ancient world that the gods and spirits dwelled in the kingdom of the air---that is the realm between the heavens above and the earth below. Satan also can be attributed to dwell in this “kingdom of air.” In all reality, it is all Satan, part of his delusion of truth. Being “dead in the way you used to live” (NIV) could have easily meant a past life that early converts to Christianity used to live. It also gives recognition to a life and indulgence that is altogether now dead for new believers in Christ.

Now look at verse 3. “children of wrath” What does that mean? Think back to the mythical introductory story about the children of Niobe...how they were caught up in the story as collateral damage because of a claim that diminished the greatness of a mythical god. Was Paul using parts of familial culture to explain a greater meaning? Didn't Jesus do the very same thing by using parables?

REFLECTION

Think for a minute about past pleasures and sins that you may have once participated in. How has your faith in Christ changed your path and course? What are some tangible ways that you have changed course?

This week, be more aware of how we as sinners diminish the Name of the One True God, through “carrying out the desires of the body and mind”. Notice how our God does NOT hunt us down if we do mess up. He forgives, restores, and loves us. Thank God today that your course has been changed and ask forgiveness for those things that need yet to be changed.

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• FAMILY STUDY •

BACKSTORY

Israel's sacrifice system was rooted in the covenant formed between God and Abram in Genesis 15. God told Abram that he would have many descendants and that all nations would be blessed through him. They then sealed the agreement with a covenant ceremony.

When forming a covenant in ancient days, the two people making the covenant would gather animals, cut them in two parts and place them so that the two halves' blood would flow down and form one stream, or blood path. Each person making the covenant would then pass through this blood path. It would symbolize that if either person broke their end of the deal, they were willing to pay with their life - just as the animals did.

God made a covenant with Abram this same way. God had Abram collect several animals and prepared them in a way to make a blood path covenant. Abram knew full well what was happening, and he was troubled by the ramifications of what was about to happen. The text says a "dreadful and great darkness fell upon him". Abram knew he could not be obedient to his end of the agreement.... to walk blamelessly before God. Instead of making Abram walk thru the blood path, God walked through symbolically not once, but twice - the first time as a smoking fire pot and a second as a flaming torch. God effectively promised Abram (and all mankind) that he was willing to pay either way for the breaking of the covenant with his very own blood.

Israelite animal sacrifices that God desired and commanded Moses to implement were a visual reminder of God's covenant promise. God required continual sacrifice so that there would be a continual remembrance that they were sinful and in need of forgiveness.

SCRIPTURE

Leviticus 4:13

“If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, when they realize their guilt and the sins they committed becomes known, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the tent of meeting.”

DISCUSSION

Leviticus chapters 4-6

These chapters talk about two categories of sin: unintentional and intentional sin.

We all can probably grasp what is meant by intentional sin. That should make sense to us that God would require a sacrifice to forgive those sins. But, notice how God spends more time giving instructions on how to make sacrificial atonement for the sins that are done unintentionally...the sins that are often times diminished or realized after-the-fact.

Leviticus 4:13 - “If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, when they realize their guilt and the sins they committed becomes known, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the tent of meeting.” Notice that unintentional sin is often found out after the fact...but God still asks that reconciliation be made.

The truth is, we are all guilty of sin. We have all broken the Lord’s commandments. How do we think about sin, as Christians? Do we often have light views about sin?

As Oswald Chamber writes: “It is quite possible to be living in union with God through the Atonement and yet be traitors mentally. It is easy to be traitors unless we are disciplined along the lines that Jesus taught, the need to submit our intellect to Him as He submitted His intellect to His Father.”

REFLECTION

When thinking about how real our sin is, how grateful are we that Jesus Christ is our Eternal Sacrifice? Christ, through the cross, made atonement for all our sins and has welcomed us into a new covenant of grace with Him.

As Christians, we are people who are still under covenant. Jesus offered Himself as our atoning sacrifice and desires for us to enter into covenant with Him. It is His deepest desire to be in relationship with us. But, it is up to us to open the door to our hearts. This week let us all be made more aware of our sin and the continuous atonement that Jesus has made on our behalf.

Sources:

www.ttwmk.com "That the World May Know Ministries"

Samuel Schultz "The Old Testament Speaks"

Oswald Chambers; "The Complete Works"