

Moses – part 28

You shall not sacrifice to other gods

by Victor Torres

A few weeks ago, I helped my 11 year-old daughter make a science project. The project was to create a model of the solar system, which includes the Sun, the planets, Pluto and its moon, Charon.

What are the planets in the solar system, starting from the one closest to the sun?

Mercury – the smallest and innermost planet in the Solar System. It is named after the Roman god Mercury, the messenger to the gods.

Venus – the second planet closest to the sun. It is named after the Roman goddess of love and beauty.

Earth – the third planet from the sun. The English word 'earth' is translated from Latin and Greek words meaning 'ground'. The Hebrew word 'erets' is translated 'earth' in the Bible.

Mars – the “Red Planet” is the fourth planet from the sun. It is named after the Roman god of war.

Jupiter – the largest planet in the Solar System. It is named after the Roman god of the sky and thunder.

Saturn – a gas giant with an average radius about 9 times that of the Earth. Named after the Roman god of agriculture.

Uranus – the ice giant is the seventh planet from the sun. Named after Ouranos, the Greek god of the sky.

Neptune – the densest giant planet and furthest from the sun. Named after the Roman god of the sea [source of info about the planets: Wikipedia].

Did you notice something about the planets?

That's right, most of them are named after Roman gods. The ancient Romans worshiped these false gods.

What sin did they commit? Idolatry.

What is idolatry?

[Exo 22:20 \(HCV\) He that sacrificeth to any god, save to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.](#)

Idolatry is worshiping false gods.

How else can we define idolatry?

Deu 12:29 (CEV) Israel, as you go into the land and attack the nations that are there, the LORD will get rid of them, and you can have their land.

Deu 12:30 But that's when you must be especially careful not to ask, "**How did those nations worship their gods? Shouldn't we worship the LORD in the same way?**"

Deu 12:31 **No, you should not!** The LORD hates the disgusting way those nations worship their gods, because they even burn their sons and daughters as sacrifices.

To review:

- Idolatry is worshiping false gods
- Idolatry is worshiping the true God in wrong ways

Where did the ancient Romans get their ideas of false gods? Their ideas came from the tower of confusion, also known as, the tower of Babel.

Remember the story?

God destroyed the whole earth with the flood because of mankind's evil ways. He only saved Noah, his family, and the animals in the ark. After the flood, God gave Noah this command:

Gen 9:1 (ESV) And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

There were only eight people on earth after the flood. They had to make big families, and they had to spread out in order to obey God's commands. Noah's three sons, Japheth, Ham and Shem, obeyed, and they had lots of sons and daughters.

Their descendants had other ideas, though. They didn't want to be scattered around the world. They started making a city instead. Inside that city, they started building a tower that would reach up to heaven. They had one language back then.

The Lord didn't like this, so He confused them by giving them different languages.

That's what the words Babel or Babylon mean – confusion. If every other person around you speaks a different language, you will be confused too!

Over time, these confused people formed their own ideas of:

- How the universe was formed
- Who created them
- How to serve their creator

That's how the ancient Romans came up with their false gods.

Out of these confused people of the world, God called a group of people that He wanted to teach the following:

- Who He is
- How He wants to be served

After Noah, God called these men to lead His people:

- Abraham
- Isaac
- Jacob
- Joseph
- Moses

God told Moses and Israel:

- Do not worship other gods
- Do not worship Me like those people worship their gods

Did Israel obey those commands?

1Ki 11:5 (GNB) He worshiped Astarte, the goddess of Sidon, and Molech, the disgusting god of Ammon.

Jdg 2:11 (GNB) Then the people of Israel sinned against the LORD and began to serve the Baals.

Jdg 2:12 They stopped worshipping the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God who had brought them out of Egypt, and they began to worship other gods, the gods of the peoples around them. They bowed down to them and made the LORD angry.

From the verses above, it is obvious that Israel committed idolatry. God told ancient Israel to get rid of their idols (Jdg 6:25 – 30, 1Sa 7:3 – 4, Jer 7:31).

After Israel destroyed their idols, they stopped practicing idolatry, right?

Let's look first at how God punished Israel for their idolatry. God said whoever sacrifices to other gods will be utterly (completely) destroyed. First, God lets Israel's enemies conquer them, then God allowed those other nations, the ones who were confused at the city of Babel, influence Israel.

Fast forward to New Testament times, Israel is under the Romans (the same people who named the planets after their gods). Israel is now heavily influenced by the nations that conquered them. They are now practicing hidden idolatry. They are now worshiping idols of their heart. Jesus came to expose this hidden idolatry.

[Joh 9:39 \(MKJV\) And Jesus said, I have come into this world for judgment, that they who do not see might see, and that they who see might be made blind.](#)

[Joh 9:40 And *those* of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, Are we also blind?](#)

[Joh 9:41 Jesus said to them, If you were blind, you would have no sin. But now you say, We see. **Therefore your sin \[of idolatry\] remains.**](#)

What were they not seeing? How were they committing idolatry? They were serving God the way those other nations serve their gods!

To learn how they were doing it, we must learn how those nations served their gods. How did the Romans serve their gods?

Roman mythology is the body of **traditional stories** pertaining to ancient Rome's legendary origins and **religious system**, as represented in the literature and visual arts of the Romans [from Wikipedia, under "Roman Mythology" entry]

When the stories illuminate **Roman religious practices**, they are more concerned with ritual, augury, and institutions than with theology or cosmogony. [*Roman Religion* by John North]

To break down what we just read above, Roman religious practices are more concerned with:

- Ritual
- Augury (the practice of divination)
- Institutions

They are less concerned with:

- Theology
- Cosmogony (the theory of the creation of the universe or world)

Ritual – a religious ceremony consisting of a series of actions. Synonyms: observance, custom, tradition.

Were the Jews also concerned with their traditions?

They criticized our Lord when His disciples didn't wash their hands before eating

(Mat 15:2).

John the baptist's followers asked why the Lord's disciples are not fasting like them (Mat 9:14).

They wanted to kill our Lord when He broke the Sabbath (Joh 5:18, Mat 12:14).

The Romans honored their gods during special days:

- Saturn is honored during Dec 17 to 23 with a festival called Saturnalia
- Janus (January is named after this god), is honored during the first day of the year

Today, people all over the world, including Christians, dedicate special days to their god.

- Muslims – Ramadan, Eid al-Adha
- Hindus – Diwali
- Buddhists – Birthday of Buddha
- Christians – Christmas, Easter

If we are His true followers, we must honor Him every day of our lives, as our Lord has given us an example by breaking the Sabbath (Joh 5:17).

God calls those who observe occasions on certain days slaves of “weak and beggarly elements” (Mar 2:27, Gal 4:9 – 10).

God sees the weak faith of those who “esteem one day over another” even if they're doing it “unto the Lord” (Rom 14:6).

If we don't see the evil in dedicating certain days to God, then our sin remains.

[Joh 9:41 \(MKJV\) Jesus said to them, If you were blind, you would have no sin. But now you say, We see. **Therefore your sin \[of idolatry\] remains.**](#)

Augury is the study of what will happen in the future. Synonyms: omen, signs, divination.

Were the Jews also focused on signs?

The Pharisees and Sadducees (Jewish leaders) repeatedly asked Jesus for signs from heaven to test Him (Mat 16:1, Mar 8:11, Luk 11:16).

His immature disciples asked Him for signs of the end of the world (Mat 24:3).

The Jews wanted Him to show miracles before they believed Him. They even bragged about the miraculous manna, which their ancestors ate during the time of Moses (Joh 6:30 – 31).

Today, people of this world are also focused on physical signs of the end of the world. The year 2012 was prophesied to be the end of the world according to the Mayan calendar, and many believed it.

Christians throughout the world are looking for physical signs of the Lord's second coming. They are excited to be in the "rapture" and escape the trials of God's people.

What does God think about all these?

The Lord told us to concentrate on what's happening inside us, the war of good and evil inside us (Luk 17:21, Mat 15:19-20, Gal 5:17).

He called those who believed without seeing physical signs "blessed" (Joh 20:29).

He said worrying about the future will not add one day to our life (Mat 6:27).

Institutions are societies or organizations founded for a religious or social purpose. Synonyms: establishment, association, hierarchy

Were the Jews also focused on their church institution more than the words of God?

They followed their leaders in persecuting and killing our Lord (Mat 27:20).

They struck Christ when He answered their high priest. (Joh 18:19 – 22).

His immature disciples focused on ranking within the church, so they argued who will be the greatest in the kingdom of God (Luk 9:46, Mat 20:21).

Today, people will defend their church leaders even if they are doing something wrong. They continue to listen to these leaders even if they teach things that are contrary to the Bible.

The false religions of this world continue to have hierarchy or ranking within their organizations. And they consider their high priest, their pope, or their executive minister untouchable and incapable of making mistakes.

The world is still practicing idolatry. If you don't belong to the true body of Christ, then you will see yourself focusing on these:

- **Rituals** – Traditions. Dedicating a certain day to honor God.
- **Augury** – Signs. Focusing on physical events more than what's happening

inside us.

- **Institution** – Ranking. Valuing your church leaders more than the words of God.

What should we focus on then?

[Joh 17:3 \(ESV\) And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.](#)

We should focus on knowing God and our Lord Jesus Christ. We do that by knowing His words written in the Bible, and by knowing His people.

Are we ready to give up our idols?

Traditions with which we grew up are probably the hardest idols to give up. We are guaranteed to suffer if we stop celebrating these traditions with our family and friends. However, the Lord has also promised us that if we suffer with Him, we shall also rule with Him.