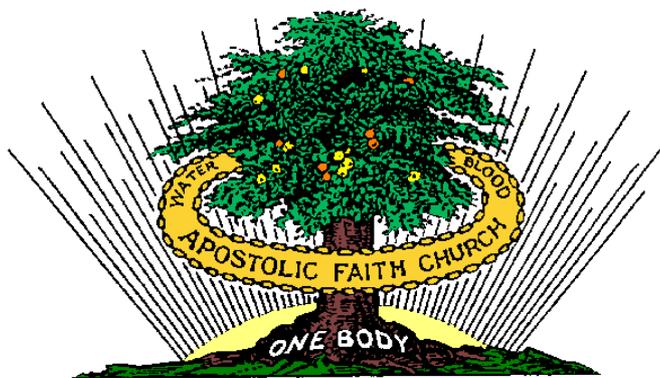


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The History of Sacrifice

I was fascinated to read recently yet more corroboration for the truth of God's word in the Bible. In the book "Ark Of the Covenant" the author, explorer and archaeologist Jonathan Gray, mentions that he spent twelve years researching for a book on the lost secrets and technology of the past, during which time he sifted through thousands of artefacts, records and traditions of the ancient world. He discovered that all people of all continents independently spoke of an original Golden Age of advanced civilisation, of giants who had superior intelligence and technology. This agrees with Genesis 6:4, "There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown". Sacred records affirm that at the beginning men possessed extraordinary mental abilities, and they quickly mastered a high level of civilisation, able to build cities, play complex musical instruments and smelt metals. For example, the sacred book of the Quiche Indians of Guatemala, the Popol Vuh, states that "The first race of men before the Flood possessed all knowledge; they studied the four quarters of heaven and the round surface of the earth".

Nearly all writings of ancient peoples worldwide tell the same story of a fall from an original paradise state of peace, love and happiness, with no suffering. The earliest records ever unearthed were written by the ancient Sumerians of Mesopotamia more than 4,000 years ago. These writings speak of a time when animals were neither wild nor harmful, and when there was no rivalry or enmity among men.

As Gray points out, if man evolved from beasts then why is it that there existed a long tradition of a Golden Age instead of that of a savage past? Today scientists teach that we have evolved to be more intelligent and superior to our ancestors, but it appears that the Bible teaching that mankind was made perfect by God and has since the Fall been degenerating is the truth.

Sacred records affirmed that there had been a departure from harmony with God. Such accounts are not limited to the Bible but are in the oral and written history of many ancient nations. The people were aware of a loss of eternal life as a result of man's disobedience to divine law. Many of the prayers and hymns of the ancients reveal how they understood the principles of the biblical Ten Commandments and that they knew quite well what was right and wrong. They were fully aware of their rebellious condition and were longing for forgiveness.

According to some archaeologists, the oldest piece of art known is that which is termed the "temptation seal". This pictures two people seated on opposite sides of a tree, and behind one of the persons is the upright form of a serpent, which is whispering to one of them. A Sumerian poem laments that "the maiden ate that which was forbidden, the maiden, the mother of sin, committed evil; the mother of sin had a painful experience". Mankind's entrapment by the "evil serpent" was remembered from Egypt to China to the Americas.

The traditions and mythologies of all ancient peoples reflected a hope of future deliverance. They believed in one Creator, in the Creator's love for humans, and that the Creator had immediately after the Fall promised them a rescue plan. Dupuis, in *L'Origine des Cultus*, has collected a vast number of traditions prevalent in all nations concerning a divine person, born of a

woman, suffering in conflict with a serpent, but triumphing over him at last. This being was to come from heaven for the purpose of delivering mankind, sacrificing himself, but rising to life again and returning to heaven. For example, the earliest Egyptian texts contain already ancient prophecies proclaiming the coming of this Saviour of the human race (referring to him as “the teacher awaited since the creation of the world”).

It was to help mankind understand His rescue plan that God set up a teaching device, known as the **sacrificial system**. The requirement was that when a person was sorry for his sins he would take an innocent lamb and kill it with his own hand. The message was that just as the innocent victim (the animal) now died at the hands of the repentant wrongdoer, so at some future date an innocent deliverer would die for guilty man, and free mankind from the curse of everlasting death. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus he said “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Archaeology has shown that this sacrificial system was handed down and became part of the culture of all nations. It was believed that God himself initiated this rite. After Adam and Eve’s disobedience God prophesied about Christ (Genesis 3:15) and then made “coats of skins, and clothed them” (verse 21). These skins were not from naturally dead animals, for up until then there had been no death, nor were they from animals killed for food because God only sanctioned the eating of meat after the Great Flood. It therefore seems most likely that these were the skins of animals slain for sacrifice. The skins typified the “covering” of man’s sins by Jesus’ robe of righteousness, so that man could be considered as never having sinned.

This sacrificial system was perverted as time went by. Archaeology shows that monotheism (belief in one almighty God) lay at the root of all religions, but after about 2000BC this degenerated into pantheism, polytheism and animism. This agrees with the Bible, which indicates that only the later nations believed in many gods.

It can be shown that the various systems of pagan mythology originated from a common source, which was Babel (or Babylon), Mesopotamia, in the time of Nimrod, shortly before 2000BC. Gradually the worship of a Creator who was behind the sun, moon and stars, degenerated into veneration of these visible heavenly bodies instead. This influence spread worldwide as migrants scattered from Babel (“Therefore is the name of it called Babel {Confusion}; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth” – Genesis 11:9).

In the earliest times the prophesied Messiah was associated with bringing spiritual light, and this symbolic meaning was soon displaced by actual light, represented by the sun. From a desire for physical images it was a simple matter to begin worshipping the sun. The sun, moon and other heavenly bodies became regarded as gods, and so astrology (the consulting of these gods on behalf of the nation) became a form of polytheism. Along with the sun the worship of the snake, who had ‘enlightened’ mankind, also spread. Evil, represented by the snake, had indeed become the “god of this world”.

In the sacrificial system the participant ate the flesh of the animal, which typified accepting the benefits of the promised atonement, and also digesting the Word of the Saviour. Later, when animal sacrifice had degraded into human sacrifice, the messianic rite gave way to a sacrament of cannibalism.

Instead of rejecting the doctrine of deliverance, the world at large corrupted it. Owing to this corruption of the messianic prophecy having spread worldwide, modern scholars were led to conclude that Christianity had borrowed from pagan religions. The archaeological evidence now available shows that these scholars were mistaken. It was the pagan religions that had borrowed from Christianity! The good news of mankind’s deliverer is as old as mankind itself.

Article by Keith Robichaud, Bournemouth. First published in Showers no. 4294, 12/8/99.

