

THE SABBATH SCOOP

VOLUME 27

MARCH 2015

NUMBER 12

Can We Have Other Gods if We Place Them AFTER the True God?

The first commandment tells us to have no gods BEFORE the true God. What about having other gods AFTER Him?

By Gregory Dullum
Part 5

The last two words of the first commandment are: “BEFORE Me.” God tells us, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” That begs the question, can we have other gods if we place them AFTER the true God instead of BEFORE Him?

This may sound like an odd question, but in fact, a great many people do just that. It was a problem in ancient Israel.

Solomon’s Example

King David’s son—Solomon, the third king of Israel—is a prime example.

When he was first king, he had a humble, close relationship with God. He prayed, “You have shown great mercy to your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (1 Kings 3:6-9).

Solomon’s prayer pleased the LORD, who granted his request (vv. 10-13). Solomon was told to CONTINUE his obedience to God: “So if you walk in

My ways, to keep My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days” (v. 14).

As time went on, Solomon married women of other lands, who worshiped other gods. Solomon *never gave up worshipping the true God*, but he ADDED to his true worship the worship of his wives’ false gods (1 Kings 11:1-2). You could say, he had no other gods BEFORE the true God, but he had *a lot of gods AFTER* Him.

“For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father, David. For Solomon went after Ash-toreth the goddess of the Sidonians (for whom the holiday of Easter is named), and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as his father David” (vv. 4-6).

Notice, the Bible doesn’t say Solomon COMPLETELY gave up his worship of the true God to follow false gods. It says he “did NOT FULLY follow the LORD.” He followed the LORD and other gods too.

The Common People

The common people of Israel did not *completely* give up their worship of God either. Like Solomon, they added to their worship of the LORD worship of other gods from nations around them. Their religion became a mixture of true and false worship. That is why God condemned their sacrifices, prayers and observances of the Sabbath and holy days!

The prophet Isaiah compared them to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which God had destroyed because of their wickedness:



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Some people make money their god. They may think they are serving God first and their desire for wealth is secondary. Does the first commandment allow us to serve two or more gods as long as we serve God first?

“Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah: ‘To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?’ says the LORD. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs and goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure the iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood’ ” (Isa. 1: 10-15).

The people were still keeping the Sabbath and appointed feasts of God. They were still praying and sacrificing to God. These were things God had com-

BEFORE GOD

Continued on Page 2

Before God

Continued from Page 1

manded them to do! But now God was wearied by these deeds because they were not *fully committed to obeying the laws of God*—they were SINNING! They, like Solomon, had allowed the idolatry of the nations around them to creep into their worship. In the next chapter of Isaiah, this problem is mentioned specifically: “Their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made” (Isa. 2:8).

The Israelites continued in their true worship but added pagan idol worship to the worship of the true God.

Syncretism in Israel

The mixing true worship and false worship is called syncretism. This is what happened in ancient Israel. It was condemned by God. He told the Israelites:

“When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to possess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way: for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deut. 12:29-31).

God said, “Don’t add to my instructions.” The Israelites were to do what He said to do, and NOT *add pagan worship to it!*

Years later, the prophet Elijah brought the problem of syncretism to a head. “In the presence of ‘all the people of Israel’ ([1 Kings] 18:20) Elijah takes on all the prophets of Jezebel’s Baalistic cult. Elijah does not entertain the assembled peo-

ple with magic; instead, he confronts them with the words, ‘How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him (18:21).’ In the use of the verb ‘to limp’ we have a provocative allusion to the double-mindedness of the contemporary Israelite population, who were not yet convinced that honoring both Yahweh and Baal was such a bad idea. Elijah insists that there is but one God in Israel. Men must choose” (*The People of Ancient Israel* by J. Kenneth Kuntz, 1974, p. 245).

The Israelites thought they could worship both God and Baal. God, through Elijah, told them No! There was no room in ancient Israel for more than one God!

Syncretism in the Church

Syncretism was not just an Old Testament problem. It was a problem in the New Testament church as well!

When the Church of God began in the first century, it followed the teachings of Jesus and the Bible (1 Cor. 11:1, 2 Tim. 3:16-17). It didn’t take long for false teachers to begin adding their false teachings to the truth, leading Christians astray (Gal. 1:6-8, 2 Pet. 2:12).

Most of professing Christianity today is syncretism: a mixing of the Bible with false, pagan beliefs. They put God *first*, in that they claim his name (“We are a CHRISTIAN church”) and take some of their beliefs from the Bible. But they add to the truth numerous pagan beliefs, which are not supported by the Bible, such as man having an immortal soul, going to heaven and hell as spirit beings after death, Sunday as a day of worship, and observance of holidays with pagan origins (Easter, Christmas, Halloween, Valentine’s Day, etc.).

Paul warned the Christians at Corinth that it is *impossible* to worship the true God FIRST and *add worship* of false gods AFTER the true God. When we worship the true God, *there is no room* to add worship of false gods!

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.’ I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the

Lord Almighty’ ” (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Once again, we see that the personal, very real and true God tells us to put Him first in our lives and avoid all pagan entanglements because He wants to DWELL IN US and wants us to become his sons and daughters! *He seeks a close, personal relationship with us* and that is IMPOSSIBLE if we are also seeking after other gods.

Jesus Christ said we cannot serve two gods in his Sermon on the Mount. “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mat. 6:24).

Mammon is defined as “Riches, avarice, and worldly gain personified as a false god in the New Testament” (“Mammon,” *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 1992, p. 1,010.)

Riches are just one of the gods we could be tempted to serve *after* the true God. Jesus could just as well have said, “You cannot serve God and fame” or “God and power” or “God and pleasure” or “God and religious tradition contrary to God’s teaching” or “God and self”—or whatever else *we make into our god*. We must serve *one MASTER*—God alone!

Jesus warned against claiming to be Christian (putting God first) but then having reasons NOT to *obey* God (for those reasons become “other gods”). He said it this way, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?’ And I will declare to them, ‘I never

BEFORE GOD

Continued on Page 6

Know Your Bible

By Charles Nenninger

1. What was Peter’s occupation?
2. What was Luke’s occupation?
3. What was Matthew’s occupation?
4. On what day of the seventh month does the Feast of Tabernacles begin?
5. What sea is known as the Salt Sea?

(Answers on page 5)

The SABBATH SCOOP

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PRINT CIRCULATION: 79 • COST PER ISSUE: FREE
www.thesabbathcoop.org

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Do Not Worship Graven Images

Why does God tell us not to make any graven images and worship them?

By Gregory Dullum
Part 6

In part four we discussed the difference between the first and second commandments.

The first commandment tells us not to have ANY OTHER god but the true God. The second commandment is a prohibition against making *physical representations* of any god—including the TRUE God—and bowing before them.

There is more to the second commandment than just its shortened memorized form: “You shall make no graven images.”

The second commandment is quite lengthy; it is the second longest—only the fourth commandment (regarding Sabbath observance) has more words.

God tells us in the second commandment: “You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or 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 on 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” (Ex. 20:4-6).

Making Artwork

When God tells us not to make any graven or carved images, does that prohibit us from creating art? Are all statues and paintings that are “likenesses” of things in heaven or on earth prohibited by this commandment?

No. Just a few chapters later, artisans and engravers are given specific instructions to form objects for the tabernacle that represented items in heaven (Ex. 35:30-35, 37:1-38:31). These artisans and engravers were not condemned for using their talents as artists and engravers. It was probably the ones who had best honed their skills and talents who were selected for this important job!

Later, the Temple was built to represent God’s throne in heaven. It included representations of cherubim (1 Kings 6:7-38, especially vv. 23-29).

Representations of objects and beings IN HEAVEN that were made for the tabernacle and temple were NOT WRONG, because these representations were *not meant to be worshiped!*

The prophet Ezekiel was told to make a



NAPS photo

Does the second commandment forbid the making of all statues and artwork? Is it wrong to make any kind of depiction of God—even if it’s just artwork? If so, why?

small sketch or model of the city of Jerusalem on a clay tablet (Ezek. 4:1). Making this image of Jerusalem was not breaking the second commandment—the representation was used to teach a prophetic lesson (vv. 2-3). It was not used for worship.

It is NOT wrong to make statues, drawings and paintings of various objects as long as we don’t turn the ARTWORK into IDOLS—objects of worship. Artwork as artwork is not banned by the second commandment.

Representations of God

What about making representations of God? Is it wrong to make artwork representing Jesus or God the Father in the form of drawings, paintings and statues?

There are two problems with creating artwork that represents God.

1. We don’t know what God looks like. Jesus tells us, “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father” (John 6:46). The apostle John stated very plainly, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18).

We know some generalities about God’s appearance. Mankind was created in God’s image, so God looks like a human and not like some animal or a shapeless blob (Gen. 1:26-27). He has hands (Ps. 10:12), arms (Jer. 21:5), a head with eyes (Prov. 15:3), nose (Job 4:9), lips (Job 11:5), ears (Ps. 78:1), and hair (Dan. 7:9).

Even though Jesus Christ is described in his glorious state in Rev. 1:12-18, it is difficult to get an accurate representation

of Him. For example, verse 14 says, “His eyes like a flame of fire.” What does that mean? Do they GLOW? Are they red, orange, white, yellow or blue in color? Do they *draw our focus into them*, just as we may stare into the glowing coals of a campfire or fireplace?

Many professing Christians have representations of Jesus as a baby in a manger. These crèches are displayed at Christmas-time. Much of this traditional Christmas scene didn’t happen. Jesus was not born in a wooden barn with animals surrounding him. He was most likely born in the private home of a relative. He was not visited that night by three kings. Wise men (not kings) from the east (their number is not mentioned) arrived some time after his birth. The star that guided the wise men would not have been over his birth place.

Many professing Christians have in their homes paintings (or prints of paintings) of a feminine, long-haired Jesus. Jesus didn’t look like these paintings. He was Jewish. He looked like the average Jew of his day and easily escaped into crowds (John 10:39). He did not have long hair, for the Bible says it is a shame for a man to have long hair (1 Cor. 11:14). Instead of being thin and looking emaciated, he was a strong, robust carpenter (Mark 6:3). His great physical strength helped him to endure the physical beating he took prior to his crucifixion.

The images humans make of God are INACCURATE. They *don’t honor God*. Would we be honored if an artist created a representation of us that looked nothing like us? We probably would be offended by such artwork!

2. Such false representations can affect our worship of God in a negative way. “Many will claim they do not worship these pictures or images. Perhaps so. But this *false picture* and *false concept* of Christ undoubtedly comes into their minds quite often when they think of Christ or pray. These false pictures and statues actually come between them and Christ. They separate the worshipper from Christ!” (*The Ten Commandments* by Roderick C. Meredith, 1969, pp. 39-40).

Worshipping God With Images

What about using images for worship? Why would anyone make a carved image

IMAGES

Continued on Page 4

Images

Continued from Page 3

and bow down to it?

“The natural mind of physical man cries out for something to help him in his worship of God. He wants some physical object to ‘remind’ him of the invisible God—some ‘aid’ to worship. Yet, *that is EXACTLY what is forbidden in this commandment!*” (Meredith, p. 35).

Israel did not keep this commandment (which God had spoken from the top of Mount Sinai) very long! Notice what happened while Moses *was still on the mountain with God*:

“Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, ‘Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him’ ” (Ex. 32:1).

Aaron collected jewelry and fashioned a golden calf. What was this calf called? Was it a god called “Baal” or “Bull” or “Bossy the Cow” or any such name? No! This calf was meant to represent the true God! “Then they said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’ ” (v. 4). Aaron fashioned an altar before the calf and proclaimed a feast day to worship it.

They weren’t worshipping a FALSE god! They were using a golden calf to *represent* the TRUE GOD who had brought them out of Egypt. They were not observing one of God’s feasts. They were proclaiming a feast of their own making to honor God. This is *exactly* what God DID NOT WANT THEM TO DO (Deut. 12:30-32). God wanted them to worship Him WITHOUT a physical object and *on the feast days He created*—NOT on other days.

If we look around us, we see professing Christians gathering to worship God on the day of their choosing (Sunday) instead of the day God commands (the seventh-day Sabbath). In their churches are representations that they think picture God—statues, paintings and stained-glass representations of a long-haired Jesus with a glow about his head (a halo). These representations of the true God are no more accurate than was the Israelites’ golden calf!

How did God react to the Israelites worshipping before (and sacrificing to) a golden calf that *was supposed to represent* HIM? Did it please Him to see their SINCERE but *misguided* religious dedication?

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-

necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation” (Ex. 32:9). The Israelites’ breaking of the second commandment so angered God that He wanted to destroy them all and start over with Moses! Fortunately, Moses was a humble, meek man who was not in it for his own glory. Rather than snatching this opportunity, he talked God out of destroying the Israelites (vv. 11-14).

Why is making an image of God for worship purposes wrong?

1. We make the same mistake making an object of worship we do if making an artistic representation of God. We don’t know what God looks like. The ancient Israelites were an extreme example of this when they made a golden CALF and said, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!” God doesn’t look like a calf! He doesn’t look like *any representation* humans make of Him!

2. Making images of God limits God in our minds. Any way we picture Him will be LESS than what He *truly is!*

“The Second Commandment differs from the First in that it explains that, in our worship, *we must not reduce God to a likeness of a physical object*. Doing so is unquestionably unacceptable to God” (*The Ten Commandments* by the United Church of God, 1998, p. 16).

“Even thinking about God as an old man who sits on a celestial throne is a form of idolatry. While the Bible must use anthropomorphic language to discuss God (‘...I shall redeem you with an outstretched hand and with judgments,’ Exodus 6:6), nowhere is there an attempt to describe what God looks like. The Torah is written in the language of man to describe the unfathomable. Instead, God is described by what he ‘does’ and ‘says’ as perceived through his interactions with humans...

“Why is it so bad to envision God as a kind of celestial grandpa? Why is it that when we focus on God’s physical nature, we engage in idolatry? Reduced to human description, God’s true and ultimate power is made to seem limited, and his motives humanly frivolous and changeable” (*The Ten Commandments* by Dr. Laura Schlessinger and Rabbi Stewart Vogel, 1998, pp. 33-34).

God is unique! There is NOTHING *like Him* in all the created universe! God is not *like this* or *that* object or being. He exists BECAUSE He exists. We exist because He exists. He brought everything into existence and sustains it all. God exists outside of time and space as we hu-

mans understand those things. Therefore, there is no way we can accurately portray who God really is. Creating images of Him puts limits on our understanding of who He is. When we see an image of God, we tend to think God is like that image, or God is that image, and we forget his other attributes.

3. True worshippers of God are to worship Him *in spirit* and in *truth*—NOT through physical representations which are neither spirit nor truthful (John 4:24).

False Religions Use Images

False religions throughout the ages have used images in their worship. The nations around ancient Israel had them, whether we are speaking about the Egyptians, Babylonians, Canaanites or others.

These images of false gods were *made in the image of humans* and gave the pagans excuse for BAD BEHAVIOR.

“Idolatry is dangerous at a personal level because ‘gods,’ being created by man, are endowed with human characteristics. The baser human desires of *unrestricted sex*, violence, and selfishness achieve validity, permission, and company by being associated with the worship of that specific god: Bacchus and gluttony, Zeus and power, Aphrodite and love, for example.... Human beings never had to rise above themselves because these deities were merely extensions of human qualities. We simply needed to create gods to serve and justify our desires and weaknesses” (Schlessinger and Vogel, p. 31).

True Religion Doesn’t Use Images

The TRUE religion of ancient Israel did not use images.

“In the final analysis, the religious disposition of Canaan and that of Israel remained distinct. Israel continued to affirm that Yahweh alone was sovereign and that it was his nature to be jealous. If some Israelites paid homage to select Canaanite deities, others held firm to an austere form of Mosaic Yahwism. Israelite religion remained imageless, and therein lay part of its uniqueness” (*The People of Ancient Israel* by J. Kenneth Kuntz, 1974, p. 158).

In the days of the New Testament church, the Greek and Roman mythological gods were depicted with many different images. The true Church of God did not then—and does not now—use images in its worship.

In the Greek city of Athens, the Apostle Paul preached, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I

even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you. God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things" (Acts 17:22-25).

God Is Jealous

As the second commandment continues, God reveals why He doesn't want us to make any images to worship: "For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God."

In what way is God jealous? The word "jealous," as defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1992), has many negative qualities: "Fearful or wary of being supplanted; apprehensive of losing affection or position. Resentful or bitter in rivalry; envious." Is God fearful, apprehensive, resentful, bitter or envious? No. We must look at the final definition: "Intolerant of disloyalty or infidelity; autocratic: *a jealous God*" (p. 965).

Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's *Commentary* says God is "a God who cannot brook a rival, cannot receive a partial or divided homage, ...zealous for his own honour" (1945, Vol. I, p. 357).

God is unwilling to share his place of worship (which is well deserved) with other gods that are not really gods. And He doesn't want his awesomeness to be lowered in status to a mere carved image.

God Holds Us Accountable

The final section of this commandment warns us that God is holding us accountable for our actions.

"God holds us accountable for our words and deeds. Bowing before an idol to pay homage to one's own image of God may appear to be an act of great devotion if one is ignorant of God's great purpose for human beings. But God expects those who worship Him in truth and understanding to demonstrate their love for Him by keeping His commandments from the heart, not by going through useless rites in front of any object" (*The Ten Commandments* by the United Church of God, p. 19).

What is meant by God "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me"? Are children and grandchildren cursed for their ancestors' sins which they themselves did not commit?

The *Soncino Jewish commentary* states, "The effects of the penalty imposed upon a sinner are felt up to and including the

fourth generation.... The sins become cumulative only if the next generation is more wicked than the previous" (*The Soncino Chumash*, ed. by Dr. A. Cohen, 1983, p. 459).

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's *Commentary* states, "[T]he uniform course of history and experience attests the philosophical truth and soundness of this corollary to the second commandment, that the iniquity of the fathers in bowing down to and serving graven images is visited upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate the Lord. It is exemplified in the degradation of the heathen. Every people who adopt a false religion begins to deteriorate in character and condition, and in proportion as they become blind worshippers of stocks and stones, they gravitate to the lowest point in the social scale, whereas a steadfast adherence to true religion invariably leads to intellectual progress and moral dignity" (p. 357).

Rejecting God's way of life leads to a more and more depraved lifestyle. This is the way most of humanity has gone.

Jesus said a MAJORITY of people would reject God when He stated: "for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and there are many who go in by it" (Mat. 7:13).

The Little Flock

After the warning for disobedience, the second commandment concludes with these words of hope: "but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Out of the BILLIONS who have lived, God has called and opened the minds of THOUSANDS who have loved and obeyed God. Jesus described it this way: "NARROW is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are FEW who find it" (Mat. 7:14, emphasis added).

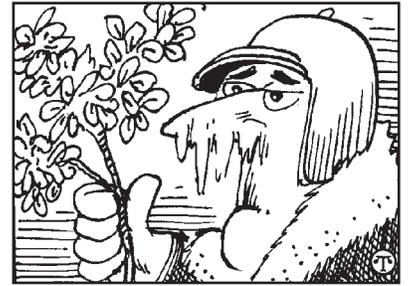
Indeed, the true Church of God—made up of those who love God and keep his commandments—is called a "LITTLE flock" (Luke 12:32). It is NOT one of the major religions of this world.

When God spoke the commandments to the Israelites from atop Mount Sinai, He already knew that only a FEW THOUSAND people out of all mankind would respond to his calling (in this age). Only a few would enter the NARROW GATE into that personal relationship with Him; only a few would LOVE Him by keeping his commandments. We must strive to be among those thousands!

Know Your Bible Answers

1) Fisherman. 2) Physician. 3) Tax collector. 4). 15th. 5) The Dead Sea.

Fun Fact



Drawing and Fun Fact are courtesy of NAPS

In parts of rural England it was once believed by some that after the mulberry tree had sprouted its leaves there would not be another frost that year.

Witerature

Wit and wisdom to complement the truths of the Holy Bible can be found in secular writings.

Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi, The Great Reads, 2005, p. 50.

Time to Keep Silent

"To my mind this Marionette is dead and gone. But if, by any evil chance, he were not, then that would be a sure sign that he is still alive!"

"'I am sorry,' said the Owl, 'to have to contradict the Crow, my famous friend and colleague. To my mind the Marionette is alive. But if, by any evil chance, he were not, then that would be a sure sign that he is wholly dead!'"

"'And do you hold any opinion?' the Fairy asked the Talking Cricket.

"'I say that a wise doctor, when he does not know what he is talking about, should know enough to keep his mouth shut.'"

Prov. 10:19, 17:28; Eccles. 5:2-3, 10:14

Quotable Quotes

"To know how to grow old is the masterwork of wisdom, and one of the most difficult chapters in the great art of living."

—Henri-Frédéric Amiel

Memory Scripture

"But narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

—Mat. 7:14

Before God

Continued from Page 2

knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Mat. 7:21-23).

The Meaning of ‘Before Me’

God’s first commandment, “You shall have no other gods BEFORE Me” does not allow us to have other gods AFTER Him. To think so is a misunderstanding of what He said.

What God meant by “before Me” was “before my presence.” This is made clear in other translations. In the French Bible, as we mentioned in part 3, the verse reads, “devant ma face” or “before my face.”

The *New World* translation is similar: “You must not have any other gods against my face.”

The *Soncino* Jewish commentary says this about the words “before Me”: “It also teaches God is omnipresent; for wherever idolatry is practised it is carried out in his presence” (*The Soncino Chumash*, 1983, Vol. 1, p. 458).

Other translations make it clear we should have only one God:

“You shall have no other gods before or besides Me” (*Amplified Bible*).

“Do not worship any god except Me” (*Contemporary English Version*).

“Worship no god but me” (*Good News Bible*).

“You shall have no gods except me” (*Jerusalem Bible*).

“You shall not defy me by making other gods thy own” (*Knox*).

You shall have no gods but me” (*Moffatt*).

“You shall not have other gods besides me” (*New American Bible*).

“You must not have any other gods except me” (*New Century Version*).

“You shall have no other god to set against me” (*New English Bible*).

God’s presence fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:24). He sees everything (Prov. 15:3). We are to worship only Him. We are to have no other god in his presence, and his presence extends everywhere!

We must love the LORD our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength (Mark 12:30). To love God means to keep his commandments (1 John 5:3). We must let absolutely nothing come between us and obedience to God. If we do, that excuse to disobey becomes our god.

As we examine ourselves before Passover, let’s recognize these excuses for what they are (other gods), repent, and re-establish that close, personal relationship with God that He tells us He wants in his first commandment!



Islamic State Expands

“The Islamic State is expanding beyond its base in Syria and Iraq to establish militant affiliates in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt and Libya, American intelligence officials assert, raising the prospect of a new global war on terror.

“Intelligence officials estimate that the group’s fighters number 20,000 to 31,500 in Syria and Iraq. There are less formal pledges of support from ‘probably at least a couple hundred extremists’ in countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen, according to an American counterterrorism official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss confidential information about the group.

“Lt. Gen. Vincent R. Stewart, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said in an assessment this month that the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, was ‘beginning to assemble a growing international footprint.’ Nicholas Rasmussen, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, echoed General Stewart’s analysis in testimony before Congress last week” (“Islamic State Sprouting Limbs Beyond Its Base” by Eric Schmitt and David Kirkpatrick, *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com, Feb. 14, 2015, p. 1).

In the last days before Christ’s return, a “king of the South” will “push at” or “attack” a “king of the North” (Dan. 11:40, *King James* and *NKJV* versions).

Using Jerusalem as the center point, we can conclude that the king of the North will be the seventh resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire in Europe (Rev. 17:9-10). It will consist of 10 “kings” forming a union that is partly strong and partly fragile (vv. 12-14; Dan. 2:33-35, 40-44). This union will be united in a false “Christian” religion led by the false prophet called the “beast” (Rev. 13:1-17).

The king of the South will likely be a union of people to the south of Jerusalem who have an opposing religion uniting them—Islam.

The “push” or “attack” in Dan. 11:40 could be shutting off Mideastern oil to Europe. It could be an outright military

attack. Or, it could be 9/11-style terrorist attacks. Whatever it is, it causes Europe to respond quickly and with overwhelming force (Dan. 11:40). European forces will occupy the holy land and the false prophet will set up camp in Jerusalem (vv. 41-45). This is the scenario we see when Christ returns: armies surrounding Jerusalem and a false prophet preaching from there (Luke 21:20-27, 2 Thes. 2:2--4, 8).

The expansion of the Islamic State may be a stepping stone in the formation of the king of the South.

Wars & Rumors of War

One of the signs that we are in “the beginning of sorrows” prior to Christ’s return is “wars and rumors of wars.” Christ said, “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.... All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Mat. 24:3, 6-8).

In one recent issue of the *New York Times* (Feb. 22) we find the following stories: “Sri Lanka Premier Starts With Fixing Civil War Ills,” “New Violence Belies Talk of Peace in Ukraine” and “China Protests India Leader’s Visit to Disputed Border Area.”

California in Drought

“California just finished its driest year on record and is now in its fourth year of drought....

“January usually arrives with the most precipitation in an average year, but California just had its driest January on record. And despite a few December rains, the state has seen just 47 percent of its usual precipitation four months into the water year [Oct. 1-Sept. 30]” (“California Landscape is Mix of Green and Brown,” NASA’s Earth Observatory Web site, downloaded Feb. 26, 2015).

“Famines” are prophesied to occur as we near the end time (Mat. 24:3, 7; Rev. 6:5-6). Drought is a curse that God will use to punish this nation as it turns its back on Him (Deut. 28:15, 23-24).