

Chapter 12

The Nations and Their Gods

You probably know some people who are Catholic or Jewish or Muslim, but do you know anyone who is a worshipper of the god called BAAL? Do you know anyone who worships the "great goddess Diana" (compare Acts 19:27,28)? You may have heard about a kind of automobile which is named "MERCURY." This car was named after the Roman messenger god. Do you know any people who worship or believe in Mercury today? Do you know anyone who worships the god "DAGON"? These false gods have little place in our modern world. Other false gods have taken their place. In Bible times people actually worshipped and bowed down before false gods such as Baal and Dagon. As we study the nations and their gods we will learn much about the peoples of the world today and the false gods and idols that they serve.

What is a false god? What is an idol? Do people worship idols today? Do people in other countries worship idols today? Do people in our country worship idols?

READ MATTHEW 4:9-10. What did the devil want the Lord to do?

_____ Who is the only Person that we should worship? _____ Who is the only Person that we should serve? _____ No one else is WORTHY OF WORSHIP.

READ REVELATION 22:8-9. John fell down to worship before the feet of the

_____. Did the angel allow him to do this (verse 9)? _____ The angel gave John very clear instructions: WORSHIP _____ (verse 9).

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 8:4 and 8:6. How many GODS are there? _____ People have many false gods and idols (1 Cor. 8:5) but "there is but one _____" (see 1 Corinthians 8:6).

READ ISAIAH 44:6. The LORD says that "beside Me (apart from Me) there is _____." READ ISAIAH 44:8 (especially the last part of the verse). Does God know of any other God beside Him? _____ If there really were other gods, the LORD would certainly know about them because HE KNOWS ALL THINGS. But He says, "I KNOW NOT _____" (Isaiah 44:8).

The Beginning of False Worship

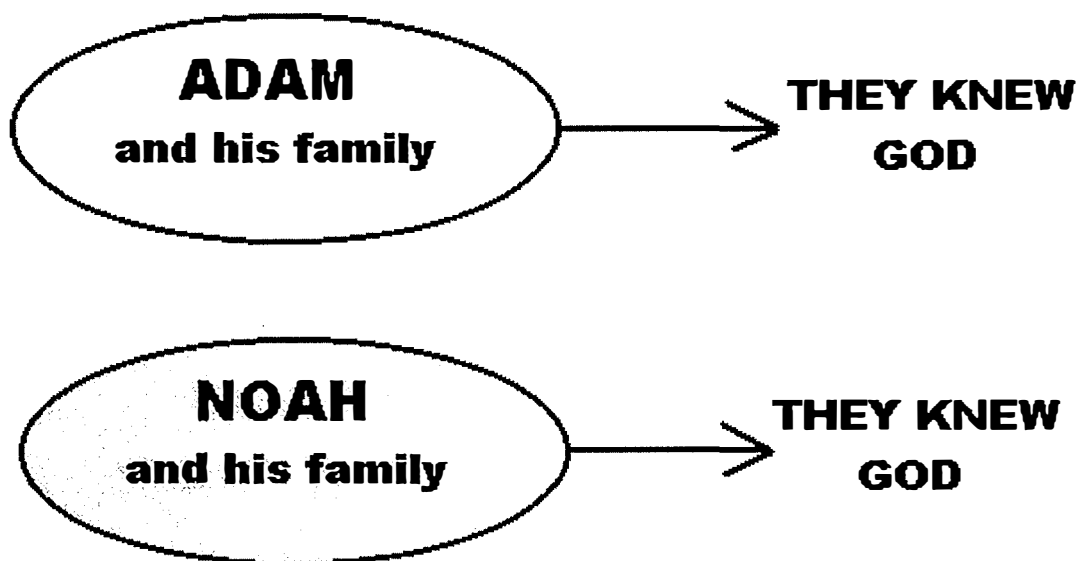
If we go back to the beginning of the human race, we do not find man worshipping false gods and idols. From the very beginning *MAN KNEW THE ONE TRUE GOD*. Who was the very first man? _____ Did he know the ONE TRUE GOD (see Genesis chapter 2)? _____ Did his sons know that God was the ONE TRUE GOD (see Genesis chapter 4)? _____ Did both of his sons serve and obey and please the ONE TRUE GOD (Genesis 4:1-8)? _____

In the days before the great flood, people knew God but they chose to disobey God and ignore God. They refused to do what they knew was right. Man multiplied upon the face of the earth

(Genesis 6:1) and so did man's wickedness (Genesis 6:5). Finally, the true God stepped in and put a stop to it all. How did God judge the wicked world (Genesis 6:17)?

God gave the world a new beginning. After the great flood there were only eight people on earth. Who were they (Genesis 8:16)?

_____ Did these people know the ONE TRUE GOD? _____ Did they worship Him (see Genesis 8:20)? _____ God gave the world a new start and from the very beginning people KNEW ABOUT THE ONE TRUE GOD!



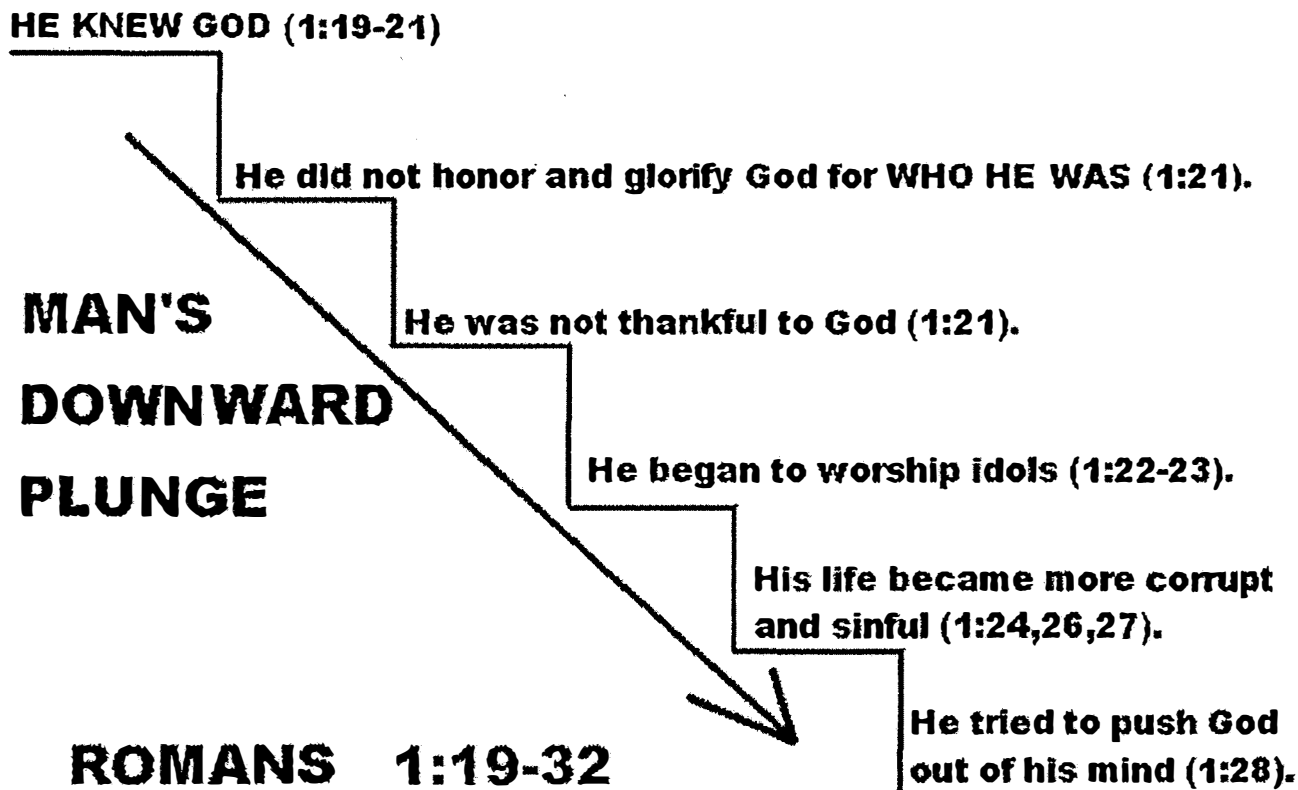
If man knew God from the very beginning, WHAT HAPPENED? What went wrong?

Why did people start worshipping idols and false gods? Why did they turn away from the ONE TRUE GOD? Remember, man did not start with idols and then turn to the worship of the true God. Instead man started with TRUE WORSHIP and turned to FALSE WORSHIP. Man went BACKWARDS instead of FORWARD. Man started in the right direction and later he turned away and went in the wrong direction.

Man's downward steps are described in ROMANS CHAPTER 1. Has God revealed Himself and made Himself known to ALL MEN (Romans 1:19-20)? _____ How has God done this (Romans 1:20 and see also Psalm 19:1-6)?

_____ Can people who live in the deepest jungle see God's wonderful work of CREATION? _____

In Romans 1:21 we learn that at the beginning man K_____ G_____. Men started with the knowledge of the ONE TRUE GOD. What happened? What went wrong? Notice the DOWNWARD STEPS that man took:



Can people today take these same DOWNWARD steps? Could you? Do you KNOW GOD? Do you have parents who have taught you about the ONE TRUE GOD? Do you attend a church that has taught you about the ONE TRUE GOD? Do you have a Bible that tells you about the ONE TRUE GOD? What are you doing with this knowledge that you have? Are you honoring this God and putting Him first in your life? Are you thankful for all that He has done for you and all that He has given to you? Are you beginning to take some of these same downward steps? If so, remember that it is not too late to turn back to God as long as you do so NOW (Isaiah 55:6-7).

The Gods of the Nations

After the great worldwide flood, people again turned away from the ONE TRUE GOD and they took these downward steps. At first all the people were together and spoke one language (Genesis 11:1-2). These people tried to build the great tower of Babel (Genesis 11:3-9). Did these people want to honor God and thank God? _____ Did these people want to build this city and this tower for God or for themselves? _____ Was God pleased with what they were doing? _____

God confused their language and scattered the people. THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD. These people ignored the ONE TRUE GOD and turned away from Him. In their foolishness they thought of other gods that they could worship instead of the true God. Let's consider some of these FALSE GODS and IDOLS:

1. Baal

Baal was the favorite god among the Canaanites (the people who lived in the land of Palestine). The Canaanites believed in many gods (a belief in many gods is called POLYTHEISM), but Baal was the god that they honored and worshipped most of all. Even some of the children of Israel became Baal worshippers, including King Ahab. Ahab was influenced in this direction by his wicked wife Jezebel.

Baal was believed to be the storm god. He was the god of sky and rain and thunder and lightning. The farmers looked to Baal to give them successful crops. They felt that he controlled the weather.

When the children of Israel moved into the promised land, they lived among the Canaanites who worshipped Baal. "You had better offer sacrifices to Baal," their pagan neighbors advised, "or your seed might be bad or you might not get rain."

Who is the One who is really in charge of the rain and the storms and the weather and the crops (Psalm 148:8)? _____ The TRUE GOD should get all of the credit for these things. Do you see how instead of honoring and thanking God (Romans 1:21), men robbed God of His glory and substituted a false god that was not even real?

In the days of Elijah, God proved who the TRUE GOD really was. What did God do (1 Kings 17:1 and James 5:17)?

Was the storm god (Baal) able to do anything about this? _____ Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal is well known to most of us (see 1 Kings 18:20-40). If Baal had really been in control of the forces of nature, what should he have been able to do?

_____ Was he able to do this?
 _____ Was he able to do anything? _____ What was the TRUE GOD able to do?
 _____ Did God have any
 problem sending rain (1 Kings 18:41-45)? _____

2. Molech

The children of Ammon (the Ammonites) worshipped a god called Molech (1 Kings 11:7). The people did not want their god Molech to be angry with them, so they tried to do what they thought would please him the most. They wanted to give their god the very best gift, and what could be a better gift than THEIR OWN CHILDREN? These pagan people would actually sacrifice their own children. The child would be put into the fire (see 2 Kings 21:6). See Leviticus 18:21 ("seed" = children). Did God want His people to do this wicked thing? _____

See also Leviticus 20:1-3 and *Deuteronomy 12:31*--"for even their _____ and their _____ they have burnt in the _____ to their _____."

Read Micah 6:7-8. This passage teaches us that sinful people would rather give God THEIR OWN CHILDREN ("the fruit of my body") than THEIR OWN HEART (verse 8). God wants us to give Him a humble and broken heart, but man does not want to do this. He would rather give God anything else.

Isn't it amazing that God sacrificed and gave His own Son for us (John 3:16 and Romans 8:32)? God hates it when people sacrifice their own children, but God is very pleased when people put their complete trust in the sacrifice that took place at the cross of Calvary. Many lives were lost at the altar of the false god MOLECH. Many lives have been saved at the foot of the cross. MOLECH represented DESTRUCTION and DEATH. God's sacrifice of His Son opens the door to ETERNAL LIFE for all who believe.

3. Dagon

Dagon was the chief god of the Philistines (see 1 Chron. 10:10). The Philistines built a house or temple for this god and they made an idol or statue of their god and put him in this temple. Some believe that this god had the body or trunk of a fish and human hands and a human head.

According to 1 Samuel 5:2-4, what happened to this god?

_____ Do
you think it is wise to worship a god who can fall over and break his head off? _____

Do you remember at the end of Samson's life how he pushed the great pillars in the Philistine temple, and the building fell and multitudes perished? The people were all gathered together on this occasion to honor what god (Judges 16:23)? _____

4. Jupiter and Mercury and Diana

When Paul and Barnabas came to Lystra they found a crippled man who had never walked (Acts 14:8). What happened to this man (Acts 14:9-10)?

The people at Lystra were very superstitious. When they saw this great miracle they thought that Barnabas and Paul were gods that had come down to earth in the likeness of men. According to Acts 14:12 they called Barnabas J _____ (the Romans called him this but the Greeks called this same god Zeus) and they called Paul "Mercury" (this was the Roman name; the Greeks called this god "Hermes"). Jupiter was the king of the gods and Mercury was the messenger of the gods. Mercury carried messages from the gods to men. He was often pictured as having winged feet. They probably thought Paul was the messenger god because he did most of the talking. Even in New Testament times the nations worshipped all kinds of false gods which were really no gods at all.

Another popular Roman god was the goddess Diana. She was the goddess of the moon and of hunting. In the city of Ephesus there was a great temple built to honor this goddess. This temple had more than a hundred columns of stupendous size, single stones of sixty feet in height. This great temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Inside the temple was a great image or statue of this goddess. The silversmiths who lived in Ephesus would make small images of the goddess and sell them to tourists for a great profit. Everything went well until the Apostle Paul came to town and told the people that "they be no _____ which are made with _____" (Acts 19:26). Paul's message was believed by many and it hurt the business of the silversmiths (see Acts 19:21-28).

5. Other Idols and Objects of Worship

Some of the people who lived long ago used to worship the sun, moon and stars. They would look to the stars for guidance instead of to the God who made the stars. Did the Lord want His people to do this (Deut. 4:19)? _____

Are there people today who worship the stars? Are there people today who look to the heavens for guidance and direction? Are there people today who are involved with astrology and horoscopes? Are there people today who hope that the stars will tell them something about their future? The Bible tells us everything about the future that we need to know. It is dangerous to look anywhere else.

In Daniel chapter three we learn about another object of worship. King Nebuchadnezzar worshipped THE IDOL OF **SELF**. He made a huge image of HIMSELF and demanded that people bow down and worship it. He wanted everyone to worship himself! Did everyone do this (Daniel 3:12)? _____

Are there any SELF-worshippers today? Can a person be so proud as to make a god out of himself and think that he is the most important person in the world? Instead of having God at the center, many people put SELF at the very center of everything.

Does the DEVIL promote SELF-worship? Does he want people to worship himself (Matthew 4:9)? _____

The Folly and Foolishness of Idol Worship

What are four things that an idol cannot do (Deuteronomy 4:28)?

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |

What are three things that an idol cannot do (Revelation 9:20)?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

There are two things that idols cannot do according to Isaiah 41:23:

1. They cannot predict the future.
2. They cannot do good or evil.

What is one very important thing that an idol can never do (Isaiah 45:20)?

_____ Who can do this (Isaiah 45:21-22)? _____

According to Jeremiah 10:5, AN IDOL CANNOT DO ANYTHING (see also Isaiah 46:1-7). In fact, idols need people to take care of them! They need people to carry them places, and they even need people to feed them (the pagan people would often offer food and drink offerings to

their gods). Isn't it sad that people would worship gods that are so HELPLESS!

Read Psalm 115:1-9. What does this Psalm teach us about idols? What does this Psalm teach us about God? What does this Psalm teach us about those who worship idols? What does this Psalm teach us about those who worship the TRUE GOD?

Modern Day Idolatry

Idolatry is not just an ancient problem. It is also a modern day problem. What is the very last verse in the book of 1 John?

What is an idol? An idol is a false god. It is something that takes the place of the true god. An idol is ANYTHING that is given the worship, honor and devotion that only God should get.

What is the first of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus chapter 20?

An IDOL is anything that we put BEFORE GOD.

What is the GREATEST COMMANDMENT OF ALL (Matthew 22:36-37)?

An IDOL is anything that is loved more than God. The LORD God demands my SUPREME DEVOTION. He must be my FIRST LOVE.

Thus an IDOL is any substitute for God, anything that takes the place of God in my life, anything that occupies the place in my heart which should be reserved for God alone.

One example of modern day idolatry is found in Colossians 3:5--"C_____ which is IDOLATRY." This happens when material things or even the DESIRE for material things takes the place of God, and my love for things becomes greater than my love for Christ. For example, printed on our dollar bills are the words "IN GOD WE TRUST." Sadly, many people do not trust God but trust the dollar bill instead. Many people depend upon the dollar bill to bring them happiness and blessings and all that they need. They have made an idol out of money.

When a person is saved, what does he turn from (1 Thess. 1:9)? _____ Whom does he turn to (1 Thess. 1:9)? _____

What does God tell us to do about idolatry according to 1 Corinthians 10:14?

_____ According to 1 John 5:21?
 _____ According to Genesis 35:2?
 _____ (GET RID OF THEM!)

If I find an idol in my life, I must UTTERLY DESTROY IT, WIPE IT OUT, CUT IT DOWN AND GET RID OF IT! See 2 Kings 18:4 and Exodus 32:20 for examples of this in the Bible.

What are the gods and idols of today? What false things do people worship today? Can pleasure

