

LESSON 1 ABRAHAM

When ancient people looked around them, they saw the changing seasons, the rising and setting of the sun, and the cycles of women. When they looked at the sky, they saw the changing phases of the moon and the changing position of sun in the sky during the year. They recognized that these things occurred in cycles and these cycles became the foundation of their view of life. This happened in all ancient cultures except one, that of the Jews.

In all other ancient cultures, the view was that man was trapped in these cycles and could not change his circumstances. If he was born poor, he was destined to be poor always. The gods had the characteristics of humans and they played games with people as if they were ants and they had a magnifying glass.

A quote from Black Elk:

“Everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the power of the world always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation . . . Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood and so it is in everything where power moves.”

A quote from MAN AND TIME by Henri-Charles Puech describing Greek thought:

“No event is unique, nothing is enacted but once . . . ; every event has been enacted, is enacted, and will be enacted

perpetually; the same individuals have appeared, appear, and will appear at every turn of the circle.”

A quote from William Carlos Williams:

“Unless there is a new mind there cannot be a new line, the old will go on repeating itself with recurring deadliness: without invention, nothing lies under the witch hazel bush.”

A quote from THE GIFTS OF THE JEWS by Thomas Cahill:

“The Jews started it all—and by “it” I mean so many of the things we care about, the underlying values that make all of us Jew and gentile, believer and atheist, tick. Without the Jews, we would see the world through different eyes, hear with different ears, even feel with different feelings. And not only would our sensorium, the screen through which we receive the world, be different: we would think with a different mind, interpret all our experiences differently, draw different conclusions from the things that befall us. And we would set a different course for our lives.”

“For better or worse, the role of the West in humanity’s history is singular. Because of this, the role of the Jews, the inventors of Western culture, is also singular: there is simply no one else remotely like them; theirs is a unique vocation. Indeed, as we shall see, the very idea of vocation, of a personal destiny, is a Jewish idea.”

It all started with Abraham initially known as Abram.

GENESIS 12: 1-4

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a

blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

The time was about 2000 BC. Abram was a member of a family of Semites living in Ur, a city in Sumer. Semites were originally nomads who were described by the Sumerians as “A tent-dweller buffeted by wind and rain, he knows not prayers, with the weapon he makes the mountain his habitation, contentious to excess, he turns against the land, knows not to bend the knee, eats uncooked meat, has no house in his lifetime, is not brought to burial when he dies.”

How did these Semites end up in Ur? These nomads had formed a movement in the past that had overwhelmed the Sumerians and they then had been absorbed into the Sumerian urban culture. The trend at that time was for nomads to “move to town.” Abram is called to go in the opposite direction. He started in Ur and went to Haran where God called him to go to the “land that I will show you.”

What cultural thought would Abram have taken with him when he left Haran for this land? Sumerians believed that each person, family, city etc. had a guardian spirit (an ancestor or an angel) who would take special care of them. These gods fought among themselves as do human beings and families. They were represented by little statues and amulets, which could be carried with the person, family, etc.. These gods could not counter evil in all situations and human beings were thought to be filled with evil from birth onward. The only way to avoid the wrath of the gods was to adhere to the rituals of the cult.

When GOD spoke to Abram, Abram probably assumed that it was his patronal god speaking. Thus He is referred to as the GOD of Abram. It will take some time for Abram to realize who this GOD is. The process of GOD revealing himself to Abram is a gradual one.

GENESIS 12: 4

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him.

Thus a paradigm shift in thinking has occurred. Abram goes forth to 'only GOD knows where', to change the prospects of his family and his descendants. This is counter to the prevailing thought that man cannot change his circumstances but is subject to the whim of the gods. This is a new idea, that of personal destiny.