

Sometimes it is useful to understand how other people think and reason in order not to judge them. This is especially true when we are confronted by a different theological understanding. It is all too easy to label a group as pagan or heretical and in our own mind dismiss them from any love that God has for them. History is replete with this kind of “religious” thought and the wrong actions that follow this kind of thinking.

People who believed in polytheism over the ages have believed that each nation or area had its own god, and that gods had limited powers and territories. These gods controlled the physical elements like water, weather, animals, floods, fertility, etc, etc. These gods only expected to be venerated through sacrifices and rituals to grant their favor to those who would bow down to them. These gods could care less about morals and such (many of them were amoral themselves). A person who became prosperous through devious means was admired for his or her cleverness in gaining the favor of the gods.

Many of these gods were believed to inhabit idols, some were believed to be human-like, to have desires like their human worshipers. They would war amongst themselves; they were supposed to be able to die and rise from the dead. They needed to be fed sacrifices in order to gain power. But most interestingly they were subject to manipulation to gain their favor. In the worshiping of these gods the people engaged in such things as idolatry, drunkenness, divination, perverse sexual practices, sacrificing infants, sinking to various depths of moral depravity. (Read 1 Peter 4)

Interestingly if one were to ignore one of these gods, they may incur the wrath of that god and their life and the lives of their families or nation may be in jeopardy. So to avoid this, these people would collect a pantheon of gods and would worship and sacrifice what ever they thought would gain the favor of each of these gods. To each god they would sacrifice this or that and so on down the line of gods.

If a person moved from one area to another that had a different god they would add this new god to the pantheon but not delete any other god for fear of retribution from that god.

This may explain some of the reasoning of the people that were resettled in Samaria from Babylon. The people in Babylon were for the most part polytheistic.

*The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Kuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites. They took over Samaria and lived in its towns. When they first lived there, they did not worship the Lord; so He sent lions among them and they killed some of the people. It was reported to the king of Assyria: “The people you deported and resettled in the towns of Samaria do not know what the god of that country requires. He has sent lions among them, which are killing them off, because the people do not know what he requires.”*

*Then the king of Assyria gave this order: “Have one of the priests you took captive from Samaria go back to live there and teach the people what the god of the land requires.” So one of the priests who had been exiled from Samaria came to live in Bethel and taught them how to worship the Lord.*

*Nevertheless, each national group made its own gods in the several towns where they settled, and set them up in the shrines the people of Samaria had made at the high places. The people from Babylon made Sukkoth Benoth, those from Kuthah made Nergal, and those from Hamath made Ashima;<sup>31</sup> the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire as sacrifices to Adrammelek and Anammelek, the gods of Sepharvaim. They worshiped the Lord, but they also appointed all sorts of their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high places. **They worshiped the Lord, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought.***

2 Kings 17:24-33 (NIV)

They just added the Israelite God to their pantheon. Yahweh did not attempt to change their thinking at that time. And honestly, they only did what they were taught to do.

The Creator God said in the covenant with Israel that: *ADONAI is God in heaven above and on earth below — **there is no other.***

We have been fortunate to know this truth, but not everyone has been so blessed at this time. Only when Jesus returns, will the whole earth be privileged to know this life saving knowledge. Until then we must be careful not to look askance on those who have not been privileged to this truth.