



Introduction to “ ‘Ye Shall Be As Gods’ ”

Review of Previous Article

For over 200 years (ca. 539-332 BCE) Judaism survived Persian rule and adapted to Persia's Zoroastrian religion. Then the Achaemenid Persian dynasty was swiftly conquered by Alexander the Great of Macedonia, and for over 150 years (ca. 332-164 BCE) the tiny province of Judea came under the direct suzerainty of Alexander, his Diadochi (Successors), the Ptolemies (Egypt) and the Seleucids (Syria).

Meanwhile, despite numerous internal and external controversies, the politics, culture and religion known as Hellenism had a profound impact on the territories and peoples conquered and occupied by the Macedonian Greeks. Although the Hebrews were permitted to live under their ancestral laws, and although the Zadokite priesthood was given both secular and sacred local governance, there was virtually unremitting pressure to conform to Hellenistic practices. These practices included adoption of the Greek language for speaking as well as writing. They also involved the formation of Greek cities (*poleis*), with their enormous economic potential. Each city (*polis*) was jointly governed by an *ekklesia* composed of the local priesthood and of selected male civilians who were both educated and wealthy. With this governance came Greek institutions for education such as the *gymnasium* and the *ephebion*. In addition, Greek culture permeated every *polis* with athletic arenas, theaters, bathhouses and military barracks. However, beneath the explicit cultural practices lay more profound religious convictions:

1. The entire Greek culture was founded on the unity of the secular and the sacred.
2. The Greeks claimed that the supreme god was transcendentally unapproachable, immovable and impassible.
3. The Greeks believed that divine ideas, sparks, souls, psyches, spirits dwelt immanently within educated and well-to-do human males.

The underlying conviction of their own present or potential divinity gave power to Hellenists and their influence over subject peoples. In this conviction the Greeks differed from ancient Judaism, which believed that every created person *was* a “soul” rather than *possessed* a “soul.” The Greeks also differed from Persian Zoroastrianism, which contended that every “soul” (*menog*) had become embodied (*getik*) in this life and would remain so in the resurrected life to come. Hellenism believed that every “soul” was immortal and divine. While the “soul” might be denigrated in this life and confined to a body, it would ultimately be liberated from the body through proper Greek *paideia* (instruction) and finally released to return to the ethereal realm and to the original Cosmic Oneness.

While Judaism was generally repelled by Hellenistic culture, it gradually and implicitly adopted aspects of Hellenistic theology. Such Hellenistic theology could only be authoritatively anticipated and confronted by YHWH himself in his human manifestation as Jesus Christ.

Overview of This Article

The One God is not ultimate substance or essence (Greek, *ousia*). Rather, God is ultimate relationality. Contrary to intuitive thought, relationality does not emerge from individual entities, but entities emerge from relationality. Moreover, to be true to “human” reality, relationality must be mutual. It also must be free, responsible, and open to endless “others.” Free, responsible and open reality must therefore have the option to deny, reject and eliminate “others.” This posed the ultimate challenge to the God who determined to create a universe of “otherness.” To create enduring, positive and mutual relationality among “others” is to be the Author of “good.” To create the possibility of the rupture, negation and elimination of relationality among “others” is to be the Author of “evil.” Furthermore, God could only create from “nothingness” by initial command, possession and subordination of the “other” – all contrary to mutual, free, responsible and open “human” relationality. It is in this context that Second Isaiah represents God as declaring, “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (Isaiah 45:7).

While mankind has been able to cope with and acknowledge the presence of evil in the created order, mankind has not been able to accept the origin of evil in God himself. As a result, mankind has persistently devised models designed to terminate the evil of relational Creation by returning mankind to the supposed goodness of uncreated and solitary Godhood. The sole exception to this was the Hebraic model that began with Moses and then David. In this concept God promised to become the Human One and to accept the consequences of evil for himself and on behalf of all humanity.