

III. THE SIXTH CENTURY B.C. REVOLUTION

The Patriarchal World (Prior to 600 B.C.)

The Bible presents an original monotheism (one God) that degenerated into polytheism. Four aspects of sacrifice were common knowledge to the Hebrew Patriarchs, early Aryans of India,¹ the ancient Greeks, and others. First, there was the "fellowship meal" where men sat down to eat joyfully before God. Second, there is the custom of "covenant-making" confirmed by eating together and witnessed by the blood of an animal. Third, there were occasional "whole burnt offerings," presented by kings or patriarchs to indicate worship, consecration, or thanksgiving to God. Finally, there were "sin offerings" to take care of known sin and flagrant breaking of moral limits. Three common features of pre-sixth century B.C. religions should be noted and these are belief in one Supreme Creator, animal sacrifice, and belief in a great flood which came as punishment upon ancient rebellious population of the world. There are evidences, even to this day, of the widespread nature of early patriarchal religion.²

"Priestcraft" is, essentially, the rise of a group of people who claim to control access to God. They suggest that offering sacrifice is a meritorious act which forces a deity to grant favors, but they are the only ones which can do so properly. The humanly-inspired rise of priesthoods tends to remove the joy of worship, stifle individual piety, truth and justice, and divorces morality from religion, and often leads men to fight God, as they suppose God is either the ally or the creation of the priests.

In India, we find that there were three groups of priests by 900 B.C. and these became hereditary by 800-700 B.C. In Egypt, the priesthood of Re (sun-god) overshadowed the king until 2400 B.C., when Egyptian pharaohs began to play off the three main priesthoods (Amun, Ptah, and Re) against each other. In ancient Crete, we find bull sacrifice, with a priesthood. China and Persia both had ancient priesthoods and sacrifice.

Ancient Israel rejected the "priesthood of all covenant members" offered them at Sinai (Ex.19:5-6) and the Levite tribe's family of Aaron was given the job (Ex.32:26-29; 28:1-4). They were to teach all Israelites the Law of God (Lev.10:8-11; Dt.31:9-13), but they failed to do this (Jdg.2:10-11; Eze.22:26; Mal.2:1-9).

Around the sixth century B.C., as Israel was being politically dismantled by Assyria and then Babylon, there were a series of revolts in many areas against the corrupt priesthoods that had arisen and perverted patriarchal religion to their own ends. Several reasons could be cited for this break with the traditional priesthoods that had been so influential. (1) The authority of the priests was questioned by those who saw degeneration - this was true in Israel's prophets (Is.1:1-18) as much as in the Indian warrior atheists. By asking them to tell him the dream first, it appears that the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, was suspicious that the Chaldean holy men were running a "dream-interpretation" scam (Dan.2). The priesthoods had become greedy and guilty of financial abuse as well as dabbling in politics, especially in India. (2) With the position of the priesthoods

¹ the Sanskrit Vedas picture nomadic tribes where tribal heads offer animal sacrifice as Abraham did to one creator God - the Vedas later became polytheistic.

² See: Don Richardson, Eternity in Their Hearts (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1981).

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questioned, it was logical to question the theologies they presented - Gautama (founder of Buddhism) wanted out of the Vedantic Brahmanism reincarnation cycle. (3) There was a rise of ethicism, as men recognized the personal and social value of good deeds (Buddha, Confucius, Mahavira, and Zoroaster all emphasized a return to earlier ethical principles). Eastern monism emphasized the spiritualized "meaning" behind a ritual, while Taoism emphasized harmony with nature.

World Religions Arising from this Revolt

Most of the current "world religions" arose out of the great 6th century B.C. revolt against degenerate priesthoods and polytheism. *Zoroastrianism* began in Persia around a prophet (ca. 600 B.C.). Israel was taken in captivity for disobedience around 600 B.C. and began to develop non-Biblical traditions as they added Babylonian and Persian concepts into their thinking in the centuries that followed 600-50 B.C. In the Far East, we find that this was also the general time for the reactions against *Vedantic Brahmanism* (Hindu writings: Vedas and Upanishads) that produced *Buddhism* (Gautama, 563-483 B.C.) and *Jainism* (Mahavira, 599-527 B.C.) in India and Southeast Asia. In China, this was the time at which the foundations for *Taoism* (Lao-Tse, ca. 600-550 B.C.) and later *Confucianism* (Confucius, 551-479 B.C.) were laid. Confucian ethics had been around for several centuries, but it would be several centuries before it would become a major cultural force. Confucian thought was adopted and endorsed by the Chinese Emperor Wu Ti (ca. 136 B.C.) and Confucian scholars were placed in charge of the Chinese education system for training government workers. Within a generation, Confucianism was a major influence in Chinese culture and would remain so for centuries. Japanese *Shinto* can be traced in history as going back to the first Japanese Emperor, Jimmu Tenno (ca. 600 B.C.). Around 600 B.C., we can also identify a basic shift that took place in God's relationship with Israel, as *Judaism* loses its authentic "atonement" system associated with the Ark of the Covenant. Christianity arose with the appearance of Jesus (ca. 30 A.D.) as the Messiah promised from the time of the first sin in Eden. Much later on, Islam would arise in the Arab world (ca. 600-750 A.D.) and Sikhism in India (ca. 1500 A.D.).