

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 379
Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8
Verses: Acts 7:37-44
Topic: Stephen's Sermon Part 4 - Idolatry
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Acts 7:37-44 MKJV This is that Moses who said to the sons of Israel, "The Lord your God shall raise up a Prophet to you from your brothers, One like me; you shall hear Him." (38) This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him in Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, who received the living words to give to us, (39) to whom our fathers would not be obedient, but thrust him away and turned back again to Egypt in their hearts, (40) saying to Aaron, "Make us gods to go before us, for as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." (41) And they made a calf in those days and offered sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the work of their own hands. (42) Then God turned and gave them over to serve the host of the heavens, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: "O house of Israel, have you offered to Me slain beasts and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness? (43) Yea, you took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made in order to worship them; and I will remove you beyond Babylon." (44) The tabernacle of witness was among our fathers in the wilderness, as commanded by God, speaking to Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen.

The key phrase here is the judgment of idolatrous Israel: "Then God turned and gave them over to serve the host of the heavens" Now this takes a lot of explaining but back before Christ, and still in tribal societies today, life is ruled by astrological taboos. For instance the pagan deity Moloch and Remphan above were both forms of the god Saturn and were supposed to "rule over" the Sabbath (which we still call Saturday – Saturn's Day). Also each hour of the day was supposedly ruled by one of the twelve signs of the Zodiac – which is why we have a 12 hr clock.

This idolatry is why the Bible does not give names to the days or hours of the week but merely says "the first day of the week" or "the ninth hour of the day". Now the worship of the astrological signs was a lot more severe than just a few names. These times indicated what "powers" were at work and what were the propitious times to do things and what fate awaited you if you violated some particular taboo. For instance Pan pipes could not be played at noon because the god Pan was supposed to sleep then and to wake him would provoke a dreadful curse. We cannot imagine the mind-bending and life-controlling superstitious bondages of the ancient world.

To be given over to serve the host of heavens was to be given over to the worship of astrological fates. If you do not serve the Creator, you end up serving the Creation and its lesser gods. If you won't worship YHWH, you will end up worshipping Zeus or Saturn or Jupiter or Neptune. The worship of these gods that

supposedly control time was through festivals in their honor which is why Paul says: Galatians 4:9-11 MKJV But now, knowing God, but rather are known by God, how do you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements to which you again desire to slave anew? (10) You observe days and months and times and years. (11) I fear for you, lest somehow I have labored among you in vain.

The observing of “days and months and times and years” seems to have been a threat to the very salvation of the Galatians, and a return to “slavery”. Why? Because it was a return to “feng-shui” and the astrological view of propitious times and fate ordered by stars and new moon festivals and all the rest. As Christ has been rejected astrology and feng-shui and other enslaving nonsense has arisen to fill the void. I was an avid astrology buff before being saved and I can testify to its fearful enslaving power. Indeed I could not go a single day without reading my horoscope – and I took it most seriously!

The Israelites rejected Moses and went quickly back to astrology. They secretly kept their idols hidden as they traveled in the wilderness and when Moses went up on the mountain they demanded an idol from Aaron – who obliged! In the end the idols filled the land and Israel was sent into captivity in Babylon. Stephen is saying just as the Israelites turned from Moses to a golden calf, so the Sanhedrin were turning from Christ to their system and were refusing to listen to God. This is especially so since Sadducees were often also Kabbalists and astrologers! They wanted a philosophical god compatible with their “sophisticated” Romanized world (the Sadducees were ardent admirers of the Greeks and Romans) that was soaked with astrology. Stephen is putting his finger on their not-so-secret replacement of YHWH worship with Graeco-Roman astrology! Outwardly they were strict observers of a rather dry temple ritual, but inwardly they were mystical, philosophical astrologers wrapped up in pagan Hellenism!

Colossians 2:8-23 is a long section where Paul denounces these ancient pagan philosophies and beliefs. Here are some of the highlights:
Colossians 2:8-23 MKJV Beware lest anyone rob you through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ... (16) Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or in respect of a feast, or of the new moon, or of the sabbaths. (17) For these are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ. (18) Let no one defraud you, delighting in humility and worship of the angels, intruding into things which he has not seen, without a cause being vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, (19) and not holding the Head, from whom all the body, having been supplied through the joints and bands, and having been joined together, will grow with the growth of God. (20) If then you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to its ordinances: (21) touch not, taste not, handle not; (22) which things are all for corruption in the using, according to the commands and doctrines of men? (23) These things indeed have a reputation of wisdom in self-imposed worship and humility, and unsparing severity of the body, but are not of any value for the satisfying of the flesh.

The term ‘elements of this world’ is the Greek word *stoichea* and means the basic building blocks of pagan religious life – such as taboos, astrological signs etc. It

literally means the “measured out things” as in the Masonic symbol of the compass (calipers) and set square – measuring tools. The dimensions of temples and the position of shrines and the correct times for things and how much you should give to this god or that and when. These are inferior spiritual principles compared to Christ and we should not fear them or even notice them!

I have not got time or space to fully explain this concept but I have a long article on it that I hope you find helpful at: <http://www.aibi.ph/ebooks/TheStoichea.htm> or go to <http://www.aibi.ph/tt/> and click on the links there.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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