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## **A Choice of Gods?**

### **Opening:**

1. What do you think when you consider the religious diversity in the world today? Does it really make a difference what one believes religiously? Is one religion just as good as another?
2. Watch the video Ep. 2 The Holy Land: Three Faiths One Land. Go to [johnabeckauthor.com](http://johnabeckauthor.com). At the bottom of the page click on The Holy Land, then click on YouTube. It will take you to where you need to go for Episode 2. Pay particular attention to the diversity of culture in Jerusalem: religion, language, clothing, etc.

### **Into the Text:**

1. Daniel Block points out in his book THE GODS OF THE NATIONS, that the religions of the nations emphasized the relationship of the place and their gods. The people were a secondary consideration in the triad: deity > land > people. However, the God of the Bible emphasizes His relationship with the people primarily and the land is a secondary consideration in the triad: deity > people > land.

- a. When Israel was carried away into Assyrian exile the Assyrians repopulated the land of Israel with people from other cultures. These people seemed to have a problem “with knowing the custom of the god of the land.” Read and discuss 2 Kings 17:24-33.
- b. Is the God of the Bible limited to a particular geographical area? Why or why not? What aspect of His nature is under consideration?
  - 1) His unlimited power
  - 2) His unlimited presence
  - 3) His unlimited knowledge

2. There are many gods and many religions mentioned in the Bible (ex. Baal, Melkart, Dagon, Chemosh, Astoreth, et al.). Paul was particularly perplexed by the diversity of religions in Athens in the first century. See Acts 17:16, 22-31.

3. You may be familiar with Joshua’s famous statement made near the end of his life.

“Fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River (Euphrates) and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were

beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:14-15).

- a. Yes, Abraham’s father, Terah, was an idolater (Josh. 24:2). God took Abraham and separated him apart from the culture of idolatry.
- b. Yet, in Egypt the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham, worshiped the gods of the Egyptians. Ever wonder why they had the idea of making a golden calf? Their worship in Egypt had provided the blue print. See Ex. 32. But God had separated them apart from such worship. In the ten plagues God demonstrated that the power belonged to Him, not to the gods of Egypt.
- c. The first commandment from Sinai said, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods besides Me. You shall NOT make for yourself an idol . . . You shall NOT worship them or serve them” (Ex. 20:3-5).

4. As they were anticipating going over to enter the land of Canaan Moses had forbidden them from listening to the sources of information that the Canaanites listened to. The nations listened to diviners, those who practiced witchcraft, interpreted omens, sorcerers, those who cast spells, mediums, spiritists and those who called up the dead. BUT God would raise up a prophet for Israel. He would put His words in the mouth of the prophet (Deut. 18:9-22).

5. But they were led astray after the idols. Solomon was a prime example. Although he had constructed the temple of God, that represented God’s presence with Israel, “his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord” (1 Kings 11:1-8). He married foreign women and allowed their influence to turn his heart away. So he went after Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh and Molech.

6. Ultimately they were taken into Babylonian captivity as a result of such idolatry. The shekinah glory of God that had been associated with the temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3) was removed (Ezek. 10:18-19). In Babylon they hung up their harps in grief. There was no song of rejoicing (Psa. 137:1-6).

7. Ezekiel saw in a vision that the glory of God would return (Ezek. 43:1-5). What a time of rejoicing that would be.

8. Isaiah had called on the people to come out of Babylon and to be separate (Isa. 52:11). John the Baptist called on the people of the first century to repent in preparation for the kingdom of God (Matt. 3:2). Peter preached that Jesus was the King, exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2:33-36) and that men should repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Now the people of God are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Eph. 2:21-22). Do you see why one

manifestation of being filled with the Spirit is making melody in our hearts to the Lord (Eph. 5:19)?? It is a time of rejoicing!!

9. Eph. 2:11-22 says that the blood of Christ is the means of bringing people together in this one temple. Eph. 4:4-6 says, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

**Application:**

1. So what do you think? Is one religion just as good as another?
2. Do you think it is God's intent that men be divided religiously? Do you think it is God's intent for Christians to be divided into various denominations?
3. What can we do to come together? Who do we need to listen to? Whose blood has been shed to bring us together?
4. Are we walking in a manner worthy of this great calling? See Eph. 4:4.