

# FROM ATHENS TO JERUSALEM

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## *THE GREEK MIND & THE HEBREW MIND*

The Greek understanding of who man is and how he thinks is very different to the Hebrew (biblical) understanding of who man is and how he thinks.

According to the Greeks man is "a rational animal". He is distinguished from animals by his ability to use abstract thinking. The Greek philosophers, especially Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, developed this understanding. It is to Aristotle we owe the definition: "Man is a rational animal." He was a student of Plato and became the personal tutor of Alexander the Great. The Greek view of man as a thinker controlled by his mind was revived in the late Middle Ages by Thomas Aquinas and was reformulated by Descartes and enlightenment philosophers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Knowledge Limited to The Five Senses**

With this understanding of who we are, the Greeks went on to

develop the theory that all information comes through the five senses. Since all knowledge must come through the senses, the possibility of knowing God is automatically excluded because He is unseen. At most we can infer His existence by induction, but we cannot hear from Him directly.

Greek anthropology (understanding of who man is) has not only influenced scientific thought, but it has also had a huge influence on Christian thought, through Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin. It has affected western theology deeply because, while acknowledging that God spoke through the prophets, through Jesus and the apostles, the Greek mind set leaves no place for Him to speak to ordinary human beings today.

Because western Christianity, has followed the Greek mind the fact that God spoke to the prophets and apostles came to be seen as a rare exception requiring a special

intervention of God. God became silent, virtually dead, boring or irrelevant. With this mindset the Bible is understood as the record of God's speech, to be understood only with the mind while His direct communication with His followers is virtually excluded.

## The Hebrew Mind

The Hebrew/Biblical view of man differs from the Greek view in two major ways

- in their understanding of *who man is* and
- in their understanding of *how he thinks*

In the Hebrew/Biblical understanding, man is not simply a rational animal with a soul and a body. He is a being made "in the image of God" with a spirit, a soul and a body. Therefore he receives knowledge not only through the five senses but also through his spirit. He is a spiritual being with a capacity to communicate with and hear from God even while he sojourns on the earth. Man differs from the animals not because he can communicate with language, use tools, or exercise intelligence but because he alone has the capacity to communicate with God. The Hebrew/Biblical

viewpoint is not just slightly different from the Greek view – it is in total contrast with it. The silent God of pagan temples and the non-communicative Allah of the Moslems is a direct consequence of Greek anthropology - totally different than the God of the Bible.

## We Can Hear From God

The Hebrews understood that information comes to us not only through the five senses but also through the spirit. In other words we have two sources of information:

- The senses, which receive information from the physical world; and
- the spirit of man, which receives information from the spiritual world.

Through his spirit, man is in contact with the spiritual world and through it he can commune with God and hear from Him. The Hebrews and early Christians understood that we live in a spiritual world inhabited by many beings (including angels, other heavenly beings and demons) but only one God. Not all of these beings can be trusted or believed. We have a responsibility to worship God alone and to avoid communication with any spirit that does not honor Him. Both Moses and Jesus warned against communication with dark and fallen

spirits and forbade idolatry and occultism. But while warning us against communicating with evil spirits, they do exhort us to listen to and hear from God Himself. As John writes: "Believe not every spirit but test the spirits." He assumes we can hear in the spirit but warns us not to communicate with any spirit, which does not acknowledge the Lord or brings any message contrary to the Bible.

Because our anthropology has come from the Greeks rather than from the Hebrews western Christians have tended to confine all knowledge of God to the pages of the Bible, and to exclude direct communication from Him. A return to the Hebrew mind however will help us to see that the Bible is not a book that excludes communication with God. On the contrary it is the book, which gives sound advice and parameters for the correct communication with the unseen God.

This ability to communicate with and hear from God is not diminished by the New Testament revelation or by the completion of the Biblical Canon. In fact it is enormously expanded when we are born again. *"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father."* (Galatians 4:6) The gift of the Holy Spirit far from diminishing two-way communication with God restores increases and enhances our intimate

communion with Him.

Jesus emphasized this aspect of our identity when He declared, *"My sheep hear my voice and another they will not follow."* (Jon 10) There are many voices in the spiritual and natural world but when we follow Him, the Good Shepherd, we will live under the shadow of His protection.

Because western Christianity has succumbed to the Greek mind, which excludes hearing from God, God has been pushed out into a realm beyond our experience. His very existence can only be inferred from His works. Some Christians go so far as to imply that hearing from God is unnecessary, and that since we have the Bible and the words of Jesus, the prophets and the apostles, we can simply study and apply their teachings. Paul addressed this clash of viewpoints when he wrote: *"the intellectual (soul dominated) man does not understand the things of the spirit because they are foolishness to him."* (1 Cor) As a classic Hebrew he insisted that the Greek understanding of man as a soul and a body is insufficient to understand the things of the spirit. They can only be grasped through our spirit and not with our mind. The failure to

distinguish between spirit and soul makes Greek anthropology inadequate for the explanation of spiritual realities.

## A New Renaissance

This “greekified” Christianity has left western Christians with a God who has spoken in the past but who does not speak today except through the recorded word. It has greatly weakened the capacity of westerners for communication and relationship with God.

The problem created by the contrasting mindsets of Hebrew and Greek culture is not simply a matter of western failure to understand Hebrew idiom and Biblical culture. It is more than a failure to interpret the Bible in the light of its Hebrew roots. It goes far deeper. The problem is with our view of man – our philosophical anthropology.

- Is man a **rational animal** (as the Greeks taught) who has heard from God in the past?
- Or is he a **spiritual man** (as the Bible teaches) who is made to hear from God through his spirit (inner man) and related to the physical world through his senses?

Christianity has been in a Babylonian captivity to Greek thought and the Greek concept of who we are and how we think for 1500 years. As we recover the Hebrew worldview, we rediscover that we are not simply **thinking** beings but beings made for communication with God. In the Messiah’s Cross God was ‘reconciling the world to Himself’ to restore us to communication with Himself and to our true identity as children of God.

The return to a proper Biblical anthropology is one of the main keys to the recovery of the authority and rule of God on the earth today. Whenever there has been a real renaissance there has been a fresh discovery of who man is and how he learns. As He enters into partnership with followers, who can hear His voice and follow His word, he can enter into a fuller leadership of His people.

A new wedding of the Spirit and the Word will release not only a revival but also a complete renaissance of western culture, faith and a renaissance of Christianity itself., arising from a rediscovery of who we are and how we relate to God and to one another.