

## **PAGANISM – PART 1**

Zechariah 10:2 ... “For the idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies, and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; they are in trouble because there is no shepherd.”

Living among an indigenous people, I come face to face with paganism often. Even among those who claim to be Christian, there is often fogginess when it comes to the distinctions between pagan beliefs and Biblical beliefs. In Biblical terms, the two cannot be intermingled.

Zechariah observed the tension among the Israelites who struggled to obey God because they were influenced by people living in Israel who were not Godly; people who had pagan beliefs. Long before Zechariah's time, Israel disobeyed God and welcomed followers of pagan gods to live among them and inter-marry with them. This is how satan works even today. He entices a believer with weak faith to befriend or marry someone of another religion. This forces the Christian to compromise his or her beliefs to avoid arguments. For the sake of peace, the Christian adopts some of the practices of the other. The result is a hybrid religion that dishonors God.

It disturbs me when I see Christians relying upon pagan healers, and honoring pagan idols and beliefs for the sake of friendship or tradition. They listen to fortune tellers and practice pagan practices of their ancestors in the name of cultural preservation. Some Christians defend themselves by claiming that some pagan practices can be used by God. However, that is not compatible with the character of God who instructs us to pursue righteousness.

It is easy to blindly ignore pagan practices around you if you do not fully understand their meaning. For instance, some of the tribal dances we all are entertained by, have roots in pagan beliefs; they subtly pay homage to pagan gods or spirits. Some of the unique patterns in IP fabrics also represent certain pagan beliefs. Pagan beliefs are interwoven into some tribal medicine and ceremonies. Even if you do not subscribe to or celebrate those practices, you are at risk of compromising your faith by being entertained by them. If you are not sure, seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

When you compromise and allow some pagan things into your own life, it opens a door to some of the things Zechariah shared in today's verse. He noted that his people were in trouble and lost because they had no shepherd. They had no shepherd because they were living outside the will of God. They were being misled by idols, diviners (fortune tellers), and the dreams they received from evil spirits.

This can be a sensitive subject, especially for our readers who, like myself, live among IPs who have a wide and mysterious array of pagan beliefs. In part 2 of this lesson, we will suggest ways to help you identify pagan influences around you and what you might do about it.

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