

# The Great Reversal

## The Loss of Meaning and the Problem of Idolatry—part 6

April 2, 2023

### DAY 1: Idolatry and the loss of meaning

*Exodus 20:1 And God spoke all these words: <sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. <sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.*

*<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

1. Idolatry is a foundational root of sin. Idolatry is the replacing of God with self as its highest point of reference. Idolatry rearranges the existence of the idolater around self. What’s the result? The human self comes to be its own idolatrous creator, healer and sustainer, exalting self above everything else.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, atheist and philosopher noted, “The noble type of person feels that *he* determines value, he does not need anyone’s approval, he judges that ‘What is harmful to me is harmful in itself,’ he knows that he is the one who gives honor to things in the first place; he *creates values*. He honors everything he sees in himself: this sort of morality is self-glorifying.”

3. For Nietzsche, the humanist, these two sentences form the highest human ascension. This is the pinnacle of humanistic belief. Ironically, he came to believe and cheerlead for nihilism.

4. In stark contrast, the bible depicts Nietzsche’s words this as the epitome of the road to confusion, loneliness, emptiness, and the loss of meaning.

5. Nihilism (from 'nothing') is a philosophy that rejects generally accepted or fundamental aspects of human existence, such as objective truth, knowledge, morality, values, or meaning.

6. The bible depicts that human beings “look” in two directions. Either we look up to God and slowly become like Him, or we look down to the creatures for something to emulate, slowly becoming like what we admire.

7. God has made us as reflective beings. We grow to resemble what we revere, either for ruin or restoration. We will always reflect something, either something of God’s character or some feature of the world. If we choose to reflect something of God’s character in how we live and how we relate, we will become more and more like His character. If we are living to reflect something else we will grow spiritually empty and lifeless. Such vanity and its consequences is a form of judgment we bring on ourselves. Ultimately, I am an emptiness creating machine, a lifeless creating machine. **The process results in the loss of meaning in life.**

8. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

## DAY 2: Hebrew words for “idol”

1. Idolatry in the Old Testament is depicted with four different words. Each word suggests something about idolatry itself.

a. “*Gillulim*” –

Its root meaning is “roll.” Think of a Tootsie Roll.

It was used as either “pellets of dung” or “shapeless, loggy things.” It is the expression of utter contempt for something. Modern man uses the “Sh--” word.

*Lev. 26:30 I will destroy your high places... and heap your remains on the remains of your gallulim.*

(See also Ezek. 16:36 ...*your detestable gillulim*)

b. “*hebel*” –

It means vanity, emptiness.

2 Kings 17:15 “...*they followed vanity and became vain*”

c “*Eliil*” –

This Hebrew word can also be translated as a vain or empty thing. People turn to idols (*hebel*) for security but such idols will “vanish” and be “cast away” to the trash because they are worthless and cannot provide any security at all, except false security.

*Isaiah 2:17 The arrogance of man will be brought low and human pride humbled; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day, <sup>18</sup> and the idols will totally disappear. <sup>19</sup> People will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from the fearful presence of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth. <sup>20</sup> In that day people will throw away to the moles and bats their idols of silver and idols of gold, which they made to worship.*

d. “*Mipleset*” –

This word means a thing of horror, or a thing of shuddering.

*1 Kings. 15:13 He even deposed his grandmother Maakah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive image for the worship of Asherah. Asa cut it down and burned it in the Kidron Valley.*

2. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

### DAY 3: A metaphor of idolatry

- **The potter and the clay**

1. In both Jeremiah and Isaiah, God uses the example of a potter who is making clay pots on a spinning wheel.
2. The potter is free to make any kind of pots he wants—big, small, fat, slender, and of all kinds of shapes—narrow necks, a brim, etc.

3. God used this image to create a missing perspective in the Creator—creature relationship.

The Creator is in charge.

4. This is a distinction that is largely lost in our secular culture.

5. When you think about the Creator—creature (humans), what comes to mind?

6. In Isaiah's and Jeremiah's day, the people complained about God's dealings with them. They considered this no problem.

7. The absurdity of complaining about God is illustrated in the imagery of the potter and the clay.

*Isa. 29:14 Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.”<sup>15</sup> Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their work in darkness and think, “Who sees us? Who will know?”*

8. They attributed their well-being to the idols and themselves, attributing themselves and their idols “true wisdom and understanding (v. 14), and that God had no real understanding.

*Isaiah 29:16 You turn things upside down, **as if the potter were thought to be like the clay!** Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, “You did not make me”? Can the pot say to the potter, “You know nothing”?*

9. They attributed their well-being and even their existence to the gods represented by idols.

10. When the potter is considered equal with the clay, then the clay can gripe about what the potter makes with the clay.

11. The potter—clay metaphor sets our place in the world in its proper perspective. God is the potter. We are the clay.

12. What strikes you from today's devotional?

#### **DAY 4: The big picture:**

- **God desires everyone to know His goodness and graciousness**

*Isaiah 45:3 I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. <sup>4</sup>For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor...*

- **In spite of our hardness of heart**

*...though you do not acknowledge me. <sup>5</sup>I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, <sup>6</sup>so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.*

- **God reminds them of His creative power and acts...**

*<sup>7</sup>I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things. <sup>8</sup>“You heavens above, rain down my righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness flourish with it; I, the LORD, have created it.*

- **...And the absurdity of kicking against God**

*<sup>9</sup>“Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘The potter has no hands’?”*

*<sup>10</sup>Woe to the one who says to a father, ‘What have you begotten?’ or to a mother, ‘What have you brought to birth?’*

*<sup>11</sup>“This is what the LORD says— the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands?*

*<sup>12</sup>It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts.*

1. What strikes you from this section of scripture, Isaiah 45:1-12?

*Isaiah 45:16 All the makers of idols will be put to shame and disgraced; they will go off into disgrace together. <sup>17</sup>But Israel will be saved by the LORD with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting.*

*<sup>18</sup>For this is what the LORD says— he who created the heavens, he is God; he who **formed** and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but **formed** it to be inhabited...*

2. The Isaiah makes two great contrasts. (1) The work of God’s hands versus the work of man’s hands. (2) What God formed and what man forms. (See Isa. 43:1, 7, 21). The potter re-forms us, and transforms us (Isa. 49:6). Isa. 48:6-7. The reformation He is working in you and me is the kind of re-formation that reflects Him the most.

3. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

## DAY 5: Returning to God: Hosea 14

1. Sometimes, we falsely believe that it's a high bar we have to leap over for God to accept us again, after we've failed. We are badly mistaken.

*Hosea 14:1 Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, your sins have been your downfall.*

2. God *invites* us to return!

*<sup>2</sup> Take words with you and return to the LORD; say to him, "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously that we may offer the fruit of our lips. <sup>3</sup> Assyria cannot save us, we will not mount warhorses. We will never again say, 'Our God,' to the work of our hands, for in thee the fatherless finds compassion."*

3. He even gives us the script of what we should be saying!

*<sup>4</sup> I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.*

4. God: (a.) Offers to heal (fix) the problem of our waywardness, (b.) Tells us He loves us *freely* (not grudgingly), and (c.) Tells us His righteous anger is over.

*<sup>5</sup> I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily, like a cedar of Lebanon he will set down his roots.*

*<sup>6</sup> his young shoots will grow; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon.*

5. God gives rich images of the blessings He wants to bestow upon His people, even those who have been idolatrous!

*<sup>7</sup> Men will once again dwell under my shade. They will flourish like the grain, they will blossom like the vine, and their fragrance will be like the wine of Lebanon.*

6. The picture here is people finding rest, inner peace.

*<sup>8</sup> O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? I will answer him and care for him. I am like a green pine tree; your fruitfulness comes from me.*

7. Ephraim is an affectionate name for His people. God paints a delightful contrast between Himself and idols.

*<sup>9</sup> Whoever is wise, he will realize these things; whoever is discerning, he will know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.*

8. And here is man's choice! Who wouldn't choose rightly, now???

9. What strikes you from today's devotional?