

God's Promise to the Chinese

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Read Books Publisher
Dunlap, TN

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Originally published as *Mysteries Confucius Couldn't Solve*, © 1986 Ethel R. Nelson. Revised 1994 (Concordia Publishing House) as *Genesis and the Mystery Confucius Couldn't Solve*.

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Published by Read Books Publisher
HCR 65 Box 580
Dunlap, TN 37327, U.S.A.

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ISBN 0-937869-01-5

To our beloved spouses,

Roger Nelson,

Maggie Broadberry, and

Hal Chock

Foreword and Acknowledgments

About thirty years ago, I picked up a little book entitled *Genesis and the Chinese* by C. H. Kang. I never dreamed this subject would eventually be a consuming interest, for my initial response to the title was “no connection!” But upon opening the book, my curiosity was immediately piqued. I began using selected Chinese characters in my Bible studies with persons in Bangkok, Thailand where I then worked as a medical pathologist in a large mission hospital. Nearly ten years later I finally met C.H. Kang, by then quite elderly. The eventual result of our friendship was publication of *Discovery of Genesis* (Concordia Publishing House, 1979).

I soon became determined to confirm the idea that the ancient Chinese had indeed possessed an unusual knowledge of sacred history, which they had incorporated into their written language. To authenticate the study, therefore, I needed to delve into the more ancient forms of the characters—the seal and bronzeware characters. Pastor Kang, gave me a book to use as I began the investigation. As a result of the publication of *Discovery of Genesis*, I received many letters, among these, a letter from Richard Broadberry, living in Taipei, and also working in the medical field. As he began making significant contributions to a new manuscript then in preparation, I invited him to be my co-author.

As we neared completion of the book, Richard became convinced, after talking with a curator at the Palace Museum in Taipei, that we should include a study of the oracle bone writing, this oracle bone writing *is* the most ancient known Chinese writing, and therefore carries the most authentic original thought. It was an excellent decision to include it in *Mysteries Confucius Couldn't Solve* (Read Books Publisher, 1986), published in both English and Chinese.

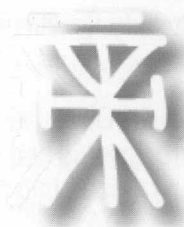
With my retirement from the active practice of medicine, I had more time to devote to the fascinating Chinese character research. The result for Richard and myself was a revised and enlarged book entitled *Genesis and the Mystery Confucius Couldn't Solve* (Concordia, 1994).

Additional correspondence resulted in my meeting Dr. Ginger Tong Chock, who had received her doctor of philosophy degree in Chinese Art Studies from Stanford University. Richard, Ginger, and I were able to meet together in Taipei in March, and again in Singapore in October 1995, to join in yet another publishing venture. This time we prepared *God's Promise to the Chinese*—in both Chinese and English—concentrating *only* on analysis of completely authenticated oracle bone characters. To our minds, this book is good confirmation of our proposed “hieroglyphic” interpretation of Chinese characters.

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Confucius^{3f} Revealed the Clue

For more than 4,000 years the reigning emperors of China traveled annually to the border of their country or to the imperial city. There, on an outdoor altar, they sacrificed and burned young unblemished bullocks to their God, *ShangDi* (上帝), whose name means literally the *God* 帝 *above* 上, or *Supreme God*.

The Border Sacrifice (郊祀), as this ceremony came to be called, was a ceremony conducted in continuous sequence ever since the legendary period of Chinese history, before the first dynastic rule which began in 2205 B.C. Unfortunately, the Border Sacrifice became closely identified with the rulership of China, for the emperor himself, acting as high priest, was the chief participant in the ceremony. Consequently, when the Manchus were deposed in 1911 of our own century, not only did the dynastic reign end forever, but so did China's longest celebrated and most colorful sacrifice: the Border Sacrifice. So important to the mind of the great philosopher Confucius

(551-479 B.C.) was this Border Sacrifice that he compared a comprehension of the ritual to the efficient ruling of the Chinese empire.

He who understands the ceremonies of the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth . . . would find the government of a kingdom as easy as to look into his palm!

Why did Confucius attach so much significance to this ancient Border Sacrifice? You will find the answer to this question as you read on!

One of the earliest accounts of the Border Sacrifice is found in the *Shu Jing (Book of History)*,² compiled by Confucius himself, where it is recorded of Emperor Shun (c. 2230 B.C.) that "he sacrificed to ShangDi."³ From an early date, the Chinese were already offering sacrifices to ShangDi on an altar of earth on the top of Mount Tai in Shan-Dong, at the eastern border of China. A border sacrifice at an eastern locale is most significant, as we shall subsequently learn.

In the 15th century A.D., this important sacrifice was moved to the southern part of Beijing, where an extensive Altar of Heaven complex came to quarter three main sacred edifices. Each is laid out on a north-south axis, joined by a paved way. The northernmost structure, the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, was originally built in 1420, then rebuilt in the late 19th century after lightning caused it to be burned. Its circular hall with three layers of eaves rises upwards in its cone-shaped tiered roof, its deep blue tiles mirroring the sky above. The terrace it stands on consists of three circular levels of marble, each bounded with carved balustrades.

To the south is a second, smaller building, called the Impe-

rial Vault of Heaven. Built in 1530, its architectural plan is similar to the Hall of Prayer, raised also upon a marble stone foundation with balustrades. Inside this edifice resides no religious images. A tablet on the north wall (also found in the Hall of Prayer) is inscribed with the characters 皇天上帝 (*Heavenly Sovereign ShangDi*), clearly indicating that ShangDi was the God they worshiped in the Border Sacrifice.

In a straight line, yet farther south, is the altar of sacrifice itself. This great, triple-tiered, white marble Altar of Heaven, 75 meters (250 feet) in diameter, again surrounded on each level by balustrades, is an imposing structure. The uppermost level can be reached by a series of steps on each of four sides. A monumental undertaking, construction of it was completed in 1539.

Transport yourself back in time to observe firsthand the events surrounding ancient China's most sacred site and rite. As the winter solstice (about December 22) approaches, the supporting cast taking part in this ceremony readies itself for the glorious ritual. Singers prepare their colorful silken robes; musicians dust off their racks of suspended bronze bells, varying-sized drums, cymbals, flutes, and stringed instruments, dedicated exclusively for use in this annual event.

On the morning before the winter solstice, the emperor, the "Son of Heaven," in gorgeous array passes through the front gate of the Imperial Palace (the Forbidden City) and makes his way in a procession to the Altar of Heaven complex. An impressive retinue of princes and high officials follows. The streets of Beijing are silent, as all residents are required to remain hidden behind shuttered windows.

By reviewing the litany of the Statutes of the Ming Dynasty (大明會典) in which the prayers and hymns of praise used in this ceremony are recorded, one may begin to understand the Chinese reverence for ShangDi. After arriving at the Altar of Heaven complex, the emperor first meditates in the Imperial Vault, while the costumed singers, accompanied by the musicians, sing the recitation:

To Thee, O mysteriously—working Maker, I look up in thought. How imperial is the expansive arch (where Thou dwellest).... With the great ceremonies I reverently honour Thee. Thy servant, I am but a reed or willow; my heart is but as that of an ant; yet have I received Thy favouring decree, appointing me to the government of the empire. I deeply cherish a sense of my ignorance and blindness, and am afraid, lest I prove unworthy of Thy great favours. Therefore will I observe all the rules and statutes, striving, insignificant as I am, to discharge my loyal duty. Far distant here, I look up to Thy heavenly palace. Come in Thy precious chariot to the altar. Thy servant, I bow my head to the earth reverently, expecting Thine abundant grace. All my officers are here arranged along with me, joyfully worshipping before Thee.... Oh that Thou wouldest vouchsafe to accept our offerings, and regard us, while thus we worship Thee, whose goodness is inexhaustible!⁴

The emperor then makes his way to the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests.

On the next day's festive solstice, the emperor returns to the Imperial Vault. He then proceeds to the Round Altar (of Heaven) to perform the sacrificial rituals, the most important part of the ceremony. The crisp morning air is filled with songs

of praise and prayer. (Some of these will be presented at appropriate points in subsequent chapters). Gems and silks are brought forth, as well as vessels of food, and three offerings of wine, all accompanied by music and dances:

The dances have all been performed, and nine times the music has resounded. Grant, O Te [Di], Thy great blessing to increase the happiness of my house. The instruments of metal and precious stones have given out their melody. The jeweled girdles of the officers have emitted their tinklings. . . . While we celebrate His great name, what limit can there be, or what measure? For ever He setteth fast the high heavens, and establisheth the solid earth. His government is everlasting. His unworthy servant, I bow my head, I lay it in the dust, bathed in His grace and glory.⁵

Lastly, after the sacrificial bullock has been slaughtered on the Altar of Heaven, it is burned, and a final song resounds:

We have worshipped and written the Great Name on this gem-like sheet. Now we display it before Te, [Di] and place it in the fire. These valuable offerings of silks and fine meats we burn also with these sincere prayers, that they may ascend in volumes of flames up to the distant azure. All the ends of the earth look up to Him. All human beings, all things on the earth, rejoice together in the Great Name.⁶

Today the Temple and Altar of Heaven (Tian Tan) in Beijing are prime tourist attractions. However, few people in the surging crowds that clamber over the worn marble steps even concern themselves with wondering about the origin and meaning of the great Border Sacrifice⁷ that used to be performed there. But centuries ago, the important ceremony that inspired

the construction of these beautiful edifices was recognized by Confucius as representing perhaps the emperor's single most responsible act of obedience to the ultimate Ruler of all, the Supreme God in Heaven, ShangDi.

Is it possible that we can trace the original intention of this magnificent ceremony of antiquity? We believe so—and by a most unusual means. We will find, strangely enough, that even though the ritual is no longer practiced in China today, it still has great significance for all—for those of the Western world as well as Asia.



Who Is ShangDi?

Do you ever wonder where you came from? Most people do. Some even have a well-kept family record of ancestors, covering many generations. Regardless of whether or not you know who your ancestors were, do you have any idea how humanity and all life on earth came into being or who the very first human beings were?

Some scientists today tell us that humanity has evolved through countless ages from lower forms of life. They say people emerged as upright creatures, descendants of an apelike animal. However, did you know that the ancient teachings of the Chinese reveal that the first man and woman on earth were stately, intelligent, specially created beings? They even resembled their great Creator God, ShangDi. According to the Chinese, ShangDi (上帝) made not only people, but the earth and all life in it, as well as the entire universe.

In fact, as mentioned in the last chapter, ShangDi, means the *Supreme God* 上帝 and indicates His *Supreme Rulership* in heaven. Since the Zhou Dynasty, the name ShangDi has been used interchangeably with *Heaven, God* (天). In the last chapter we also found that from the most remote time in Chinese history, the sacred Border Sacrifice was conducted each year for the worship of ShangDi. As the emperor himself took part in this annual service dedicated to ShangDi, the following words, recorded in the collected Statutes of the Ming Dynasty (大明會典), were recited, clearly showing that ShangDi is the Creator of the world:

Of old in the beginning, there was the great chaos, without form and dark. The five elements [planets] had not begun to revolve, nor the sun and moon to shine. You, O Spiritual Sovereign [神皇] first divided the grosser parts from the purer. You made heaven. You made earth. You made man. All things with their reproducing power got their being.¹

ShangDi's continuing regard and love for His created beings are further demonstrated in other recitations from the Border Sacrifice ceremony:

All the numerous tribes of animated beings are indebted to Thy favour for their beginnings. Men and things are all emparadised in Thy love, O Te [Di]. All living things are indebted to Your goodness, but who knows from whom his blessings come to him? You alone, O Lord, are the true parent of all things.²

He [ShangDi] sets fast forever the high heaven, and establishes the solid earth. His government is everlasting.³

Your sovereign goodness cannot be measured. As a potter, You have made all living things.⁴

From the foregoing we learn that ShangDi made the heavens and the earth and people. He is the true parent of all things. His love is over all His works. His years are without end. His goodness cannot be measured. This is what the ancient Chinese believed. Could this be the truth?

Said Confucius in the *Zhong Yong (Doctrine of the Mean)*, "The ceremonies of the celestial and terrestrial sacrifices are those by which men serve ShangDi."⁵

Actually there eventually came to be two border sacrifices. The offering to Heaven at the winter solstice on the southern border, representing ShangDi's divine majesty, gradually became the more important. At the summer solstice, a sacrifice to the earth, representative of His divine care, was observed on the northern border.⁶

Did ShangDi die along with the imperial reign in China in 1911? The Chinese today certainly are not ignorant of ShangDi, but few really appreciate Him as the original God of China, the Creator of heaven and earth. Is it possible that though unknown and unappreciated, ShangDi is still the supreme ruler, not only of the Chinese, but over all of earth's inhabitants, since He created them all?

Historically, the Shang Dynasty's (1766-1122 B.C.) recognition of ShangDi as the true Supreme God over all gods may have continued into the Zhou Dynasty (1122-255 B.C.), but by the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-24 A.D.), ShangDi was largely for-

gotten. Buddhism and Taoism, in addition to the interwoven religion of ancestor-worship, predominated. However, all traces and knowledge of the original God of China have not been erased. We believe a beautiful history of the beginnings of the human race on the newly created planet earth have been perfectly preserved in the ancient character-writing of the Chinese language. The written language was invented simultaneously with the development of the early Chinese culture.

According to tradition, during the reign of the Yellow Emperor Huang Di, the first characters, simple drawings of familiar objects, were invented.⁷ Picture words (pictographs) were the earliest form of writing in the ancient world. Other peoples living at the same time in Egypt and Sumer also had their own pictographic writing. During the Shang dynasty, the Chinese writing consisted of simple pictographs as well as compound pictographs, some with phonetic association.

Of course, in order to be meaningful, the compound pictographs would have to be based upon concepts or knowledge commonly held and understood by these ancient people. Familiar historical events of a sacred nature (such as the creation of the first man and woman, the original loving relationship between God and people, how this relationship was broken, and God's remedy to restore it) appear to have been the subjects of great interest and were, therefore, incorporated into such graphs—as we shall see.

Once these specific characters had been invented and accepted, they appear to have gradually lost their original his-