

Bite Size Bible Study

Idols in Israel #168

By Pastor Lee

Idolatry seems to have been one of the hardest things that Israel had to keep them selves from. Actually it is not surprising in that they came from Egypt, a land of many gods and idols. They spent 400 years in Egypt and for much of that time they had no guidance regarding idol worship. When God called Moses near the end of that period to lead the people, He gave them instructions on how to live a holy life. They made a covenant with this God and promised that they would follow only Him. That, it turns out, was easier said than done.

God told them that they should not even entertain the idea that there were other gods besides Him. It was part of the covenant they all agreed to.

Another Elohiym will not exist for you in my face (meaning presence). You will not make for you a sculpture and any resemblance which is in the skies above, and which is in the land below, and which is in the waters below the land. You will not bend yourself down to them, and you will not be made to serve them, given that I am YHWH your Elohiym, the mighty one of zealousness, registering the twistedness of the fathers upon the sons, upon the third generation, and upon the fourth generation, to the ones hating me, and doing kindness to the thousands, to the ones loving me, and to the ones safeguarding my directives. Exo 20:3-6 Benner Translation

With 400 years of paganism in their culture and pagan worship in all the cultures surrounding them, they were constantly being bombarded with pagan's idolatrous customs. But it all began to escalate under King Solomon who, even though he had great intellect, was deficient in this area of his life. So idolatry would be lesser under some kings but the next king would frequently undo all the progress made earlier.

It finally got so bad that God decided to show them what life in the pagan cultures was like and sent Israel into exile then Judah a few years later.

In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned nine years (ca. 732-723 BC). He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, but not like the kings of Israel who preceded him.

Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up to attack Hoshea, who had been Shalmaneser's vassal and had paid him tribute. But the king of Assyria discovered that Hoshea was a traitor, for he had sent envoys to So ^[possibly Osorkon] king of Egypt, and he no longer paid tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had

done year by year. Therefore Shalmaneser seized him and put him in prison. The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes. 2 Kings 17:1-6 NIV

People in the ancient Middle East believed that each nation or territory had its own gods who had limited powers within those territories. These gods controlled among other things the prosperity and fertility of the area.

These other nations had gods that inhabited human-like idols, these gods needed to be fed sacrifices to gain power. These other gods were subject to manipulation to gain their favor – it was *quid pro quo*.

These gods did not make any moral demands on them. The people would setup sacred stones and Asherah poles, where they practiced witchcraft, occultism, perverse sexual practices; the land was filled with the blood of God's children killed in infant sacrifice. In worshiping these idols to various gods they abandoned all moral codes and sank into the depths of degeneracy.

The people could gain benefits by feeding these gods and worshiping them. If a person were to acquire wealth and position even through devious means, he was admired for his abilities in gaining the favor of the gods.

The real God, YHWH, insisted on moral conduct, and claimed that He is God over everything. It is a fact that it is more difficult to be honest than dishonest, moral than immoral. It was very challenging for the Israelites to believe in this new kind of a god.

YHWH insisted that they not make idols to worship Him, because He was invisible and incomprehensible to humankind. He neither need nor desired their sacrifices to be their God, and He could not be manipulated. It was hard concept to grasp that YHWH was utterly greater than all the other so called gods.

When the Israelites worshipped idols, they were not only violating their covenant with YHWH, who insisted that they serve no other gods or even entertain their existence. They were showing the world that they didn't believe that YHWH was greater than the gods of the nations around them. God's desire was that Israel would teach the world about the True God.

Next week: Idols in USA

Cornerstone Community Church

PO Box 654 Lemon Grove, CA 91945-0654 – www.cornerstonecommunityonline.org