

"My heart rejoices in the lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth Boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance, There is no on holy like the Lord; There is no one besides you; There is no rock like our God, For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's upon them he has set the world," (I Samuel 2:1,2).

"I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image," (Exodus 20:2-4).

While Israel clearly was influenced by some of the traditions of her neighbors, the Hebrew prophets and religious leaders abhorred other aspects of these cultures.

First they condemned such religious practices as idolatry, common in Canaan and in the surrounding regions.[\(1\)](#)

The Hebrews called a pagan deity to whom child sacrifices were often made by the contemptuous title Molech.. This name combines the Hebrew consonants for "king" with the vowels from the word meaning shame..[\(2\)](#)

Moses stayed on the mountain for 40 days and received from the Lord all the laws that were to govern the religious and secular life of the Israelites. The Israelites felt abandoned by Moses during his absence. They went to Aaron and said to him, "**up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him,**" (**Exodus 32:1**).

Modern scholars have suggested that ancient people often used "idols" not as gods, but as "pedestals" on which they imagined an invisible god to be standing or riding. The Israelites who clamored for 'gods" may not have perceived any contradiction between creating images for such use and God's prohibition against idolatry.

Aaron collected gold from the people, melted it down, and constructed the image of a calf or young bull, a common symbol of the divine in ancient Near Eastern religions .The Israelites acknowledged the calf as their god. Aaron announced a religious feast to take placed the next day. Moses' "**anger burned hot, and he threw the tables out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain,**" (**Exodus 32:19**). The people had violated their covenant with Yahweh. Moses "**took the calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it upon the water, and made the people of Israel drink it,**" (**Vs.32: 20**). On Moses' instructions, members of the tribe of Levi put to death 3,000 Israelites who had worshiped the Calf.

The next morning Moses sought to restore the people in God's good graces. He audaciously declared that if Israel was not forgiven, "**blot me, I pray thee, out of the book which thou hast written**" (**Vs. 32:32**). [\(3\)](#)

Throughout the Old Testament, it is evident that the peoples of that day, regarded gods, deities, spirits or angelic powers of various kings as having territorial jurisdiction.

Household gods: Such as those stolen by Rachel from her father, Laban was small portable of ancestors or family deities. The possession of these images symbolized the holder's claim to leadership and property. (4)

They were symbols of the right of inheritance. If Jacob possessed Laban's idols, he might legally claim to be Laban's heir. This may have been the reason Rachel took them from her father's house.

Laban was outraged when he found Jacob's family, and the idols, gone. He pursued them but Jacob insisted that he was innocent of the theft. Laban searched Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two maidservants, but he did not find them. He entered Rachel's tent. There Rachel sat upon the saddle in which she had hidden the images. After searching her tent, she said to her father, "**Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me.**" The ruse worked and Laban gave up the search and Laban and Jacob parted after swearing a ceremonial friendship, a covenant of peace.

Gideon met God's angel under an oak in Ophrah. **Genesis 28:1-8.** Gideon's divine encounter marked a spiritual and physical deliverance of Israel. Not only did Gideon rout the desert raiders, he led a renewal of faith in Yahweh. The choice of Gideon becomes more remarkable as the story reveals how deeply his own family and city were committed to the worship of the Canaanite god, Baal. Now, at God's command, Gideon tore down his father's altar to Baal as well as the Asherah, a totem to a pagan goddess, using a harnessed bull.

The villagers were outraged at such sacrilege and wanted to kill Gideon, but his father, Joash, stopped them by saying, "**If Baal is a god, let him contend for himself.**" Thus Gideon gained the name Jerubaal, "**Let Baal contend.**" Since Gideon had been called by God to deliver his people from the Midianites, his first act was to put an end to pagan worship among his own people. For it was not until this was done that he could hope to defeat the enemy. Gideon delivered Israel from the destructive raids and achieved a peace that lasted for 40 years. He had 70 sons. He refused to be anointed as a king or to establish a dynastic succession for his sons, saying, "**I will not rule over you, and my sons will not rule over you: the Lord will rule over you.**" (5)

Numbers 33-32, commands the children of Israel to "**destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places.**" There is more to these stones and images and high places than just harmless native art. (6) Many of these had become the literal dwelling place of demonic spirits, later in the New Testament called powers and principalities. (7) who, rather than destroy the high places worshiped and served the demonic beings that occupied them. (8)

Worship of Baal. Jezebel Worshiped Baal, a Phoenician god. She approached her religion with a fanatic's zeal. She came to Israel with 450 priests of Baal and 400 "**prophets**" of Aasherah, the mother-goddess. and dined at the palace. When Ahab built his "**ivory house,**" he constructed a temple of Baal with quarters for the priest next to the palace. The greater part of this sacred structure was a court, enclosed with thick walls and open to the sky. Within the court was a small sacred chapel containing symbols of Baal and the mother-goddess, Asherah. The temple priest

and their attendants kept an eternal flame burning in a large dish-shaped brazier on the chapel's altar.

Since Baal was a nature cult, worshipers joined the priests and temple prostitutes in sacred orgies before the altar, especially at the new-year celebration. They acted out the reproductive theme so that the gods, who control earth and water, would follow their example and improve the fertility of agriculture, animals and man.

In time of crisis, such as famine or war, these cultists sacrificed firstborn children in the sacred fire to summon the help of their gods. When some Israelite prophets opposed Jezebel's policies, she had several of them executed. (9)

Ahaz was one who "**in every single city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God his fathers**" (2 Chron. 28:23). (10)

God had to execute judgment and punish Israel for what was frequently referred to by the prophets as spiritual adultery. The Babylonian captivity was one such judgment.

The New Testament. Paul's task of carrying the gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles was difficult but possible, for the Gentile world was far from irreligious. Aside from allegiance to pantheon of Greek gods, adopted and renamed by the Romans, every town and village had its own deity.

In his travels Paul encountered most major pagan belief. In particular, a group of so-called mystery cults had developed in different regions to the empire. They were local cults based on legends of gods who were reborn every spring: Hercules, Dionysus, Isis, Mithras and others. Although their central beliefs were based on the fertility of their central beliefs were based on the fertility cycle of nature, the mystery cults embraced a number of sophisticated ideas, including those of immortality, resurrection and the struggle between good and evil. This superficial similarity to Christ belief was useful to Paul in explaining the message of Jesus to pagans. In Athens Paul entered into debate with followers of the two major philosophies of his day. The Stoics and Epicureans. The Stoics believed the universe was governed by reason, or logos. They taught that the greatest virtue was wisdom, which consisted in making one's will conform to the destiny governing the universe. The Epicureans, who scorned Paul's teaching about the restriction, believe the goal of life was happiness. (11)

NEXT CHAPTER

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Foot Notes:

1. [Mysteries of the Bible, The Reader's Digest Association, Inc. Pleasantville, New York /Montreal.](#)

2. [Ibid](#)
 3. [Ibid](#)
 4. [Great People and the Bible, The Reader's Digest Association, Inc. 1974.](#)
 5. [Ibid, Mysteries....](#)
 6. [Ibid](#)
 7. [C. Peter Wagner, Warfare Prayer, Regal Books, A division of Gospel Light, Ventura, Ca.](#)
 8. [Ibid](#)
 9. [Ibid, Great People....](#)
 10. [Ibid](#)
 11. [Ibid, Great People.....](#)
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