

Idolatry Ancient and Modern

Idolatry, defined as “the worship of a physical object as a god” and “immoderate attachments or devotion to something,” is first mentioned in Gen.31:17-19 when Rachel “*stole the household idols*” (Heb. *teraphim*) of her father Laban as she and Jacob departed. These typically seemed to be small representations of a *god* or *gods* that were either cast in precious metal, or carved and overlaid with it, cf. Isa.30:22. They were apparently used as *good luck charms*, *divination* (contacting departed spirits), and/or a *physical representation* of supposed *spiritual god(s)* to whom worship/prayers were offered, Gen.31:30,34; 35:2-3. This tendency toward idolatry seems to have been associated with Abraham’s family back in Ur (Lower Mesopotamia) and Haran (Paddan-Aram or Upper Mesopotamia), cf. Josh.24:2,14-15.

Thus, when the nation of Israel was “incorporated” from Abraham’s family, God legislated against *idolatry* with the first commandment, Ex.20:3; and specifically against *graven images* with the second, vv.4-5. But the fledgling nation had also been exposed to rampant idolatry during its Egyptian experience (Ex.12:37-40), and soon after their exodus, returned to it, Ex.32:1ff. Despite God’s prohibitions and explanations (Isa.45:4-7), Israel continuously *served* and *purged* idolatry, but never completely escaped its clutches...and the Gentile/heathen world openly embraced it, cf. Acts 17:16ff.

And yet, many believe in, submit to, and worship many ‘gods’- both foreign and domestic today. We have our own idols- inherited from our ancestors, stolen from our fathers’ households, borrowed or adapted from the nations around us, or created ourselves....

Consider our worship of and devotion to:

- **Atheism-** the notion that there is *no god*, and therefore no *universal moral or spiritual law*; no *soul*; and therefore no *eternal existence*- no *heaven* and no *hell*, cp. Ps.14:1 with Ps.19; Rom.1:18-22;
- **Nature, Mysticism, Universal Consciousness**, or some vague notion of the **Spirit of the Universe-** the acceptance and proclamation of a generic *Higher Power*, but without any appreciable knowledge, submission, or devotion to “It” (rather than Jehovah); these are nothing more than pure *idolatry*, and seek to worship and serve “*the creature rather than the Creator*,” Rom.1:24-25; Isa.44:12-18,19; and,
- **Allah, Buddha, or other Denominational Distortions of God-** all share a tragic flaw in that they seek to *create a god* man desires instead of acknowledging and submitting to the God who created man, Phil.3:19; Isa.45:5-7.

But there are others that may not be considered as “Gods,” but are submitted to and worshipped nonetheless:

- **Morality (the “Just be a good person/Follow your heart/do what is right for you” god)-** the fallacy of this ‘god’ is that there is no real knowledge or standard of “good” without “God”- one can be kind to strangers and help the homeless and abort their own baby, cf. Rom.1:31 (“*unloving*,” from *astorgos*- without natural

affection); basic *morality*, without God, is merely derived from the mean/middle of the spectrum of *human thought* and *behavior*, cp. Jer.10:23-25;

- **Money/Materialism-** every economic model has its “Achilles’ heel”- Capitalism’s is that it promotes *greed* and the *love/trust/idolization of money*, cf. 1Tim.6:9-12; Matt.6:19-34;
- **Pleasure/Recreation-** though there is nothing wrong in and of itself with pleasure/recreation, it can easily become an idol; think about it, do you devote more time, energy, and resources to serving God, or recreation? “Ouch!” But think seriously and soberly about 1Tim.4:7-8; 1Cor.9:24-27; and Jas.4:1-4;
- **Politic/Political-Social-** in addition to *idolatry* (or perhaps just another form of it), ancient Israel’s downfall is directly linked to trusting its own military might, and/or reliance on political treaties and alliances with other nations rather than God. Remember that it was the religious elites and politicians that *rejected Jesus as the Messiah* in the face of overwhelming affirming evidence, and then formulated a *cover-up lie* to conceal the truth from the people, Matt.28:11-15. And yet, many today *love their nation*, and are more concerned with and devoted to it more than with and to God, cf. John 11:47-48.
- **Science/Technology-** we’ve heard a lot about “science” and “technology” in the last couple of years. Remember Jer.10:23-25 and realize that although science/technology has made tremendous strides, people “trusted the settled science” and “government” of their day and sprayed children with DDT, thought smoking was good for pregnant women, viewed asbestos as a life-saving wonder composition, and literally bled people to death because they said their blood was poisoned, Rom.1:22. “Trust the science/government”? How about let’s trust THE God who cannot lie and is never wrong!

Conclusion:

It’s easy (and convenient!) to disdainfully look with credulity upon ancient Israel’s seemingly never-ending struggle with *idolatry*... until we take a really good and sobering look at ourselves, cf. Rom.2:1. *Idolatry* (putting anything before God) is still an abomination to Jehovah. May God forgive US! Acts 4:12