

Come to Understanding

They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24

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Confusion of Worship

As Yahweh (the LORD) was leading Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land of Canaan, He gave clear instructions to Moses regarding the objects and places of worship that were prevalent in the land:

- 50 And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan *near* Jericho, saying,
- 51 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan;
- 52 Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places:
- 53 And ye shall dispossess *the inhabitants* of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it. -Numbers 33

Yahweh told them to “destroy *all* their pictures,” “destroy *all* their molten images,” and “pluck down *all* their high places.”* Israel was to get rid of *all* pictures, images, and high places in the land, without exception.

It was Yahweh’s will that Israel obey Him and Him only as He spoke to them through His prophets, such as Samuel. Israel, however, did not want to be under the direct authority of God. They wanted a king, as the other nations had, to rule over them:

- 19 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us;
- 20 That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.
- 21 And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD. -1 Samuel 8

*“High places,” translated from the Hebrew **בָּמֹת** (bamah), are open-air shrines that were usually erected on an elevated site. They served as shrines to the Canaanite fertility deities, the Baals (Lords) and the Asheroth (goddesses). In addition to an altar, matzhevot (stone pillars representing the presence of the divine) and asherim (upright wooden poles symbolizing the female deities) often were erected on the high places, which sometimes were located under a grove of trees.

Despite His warnings to them, Yahweh relented and told Israel that they could have an earthly king:

- 22 And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city. -1 Samuel 8

Yahweh gave Israel its first king, Saul, who proved to be disobedient. Although King David, Saul’s successor, made errors in judgement, he had a repentant heart that kept him in the will of God.

After David’s death, his son Solomon, worshipped Yahweh. However, he, along with the people of Israel, *also* sacrificed in the high places of the heathen, which Yahweh had commanded Israel to destroy!

- 2 Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days.
- 3 And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. -1 Kings 3

Solomon and his people could rationalize that they had to go to the high places to offer sacrifices because they had no other place to go. This problem was solved when God told Solomon to build a house in Jerusalem that was dedicated *only* to the name of Yahweh. However, even after Solomon built the house of Yahweh, he sinned greatly.

Solomon blended the worship of Yahweh with various practices of the pagans, who sacrificed in “high places:” In an effort to please his many wives, Solomon brought the abominations of his image worshipping wives to Israel:

- 4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.
- 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8

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6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as *did* David his father.

7 Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that *is* before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. 1 Kings 11

Because of Solomon's sin, Yahweh divided Israel into two kingdoms. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel were taken away from Solomon's son and were given to Jeroboam. (These ten tribes represented the northern kingdom, which was called Israel. The southern kingdom, consisting of two tribes, was called Judah.)

Jeroboam based his reign on the worship of the images of golden calves, sacrifices in high places, and on feast days that he invented (see 1 Kings 12:25-33). Jeroboam *even made himself a priest* of the high places:

33 After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became *one* of the priests of the high places. -1 Kings 13

Solomon's son, Rehoboam, *also* adopted abominable worship practices in Judah:

23 For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. -1 Kings 14

Both Israel and Judah continued in spiritual confusion, with few exceptions, throughout their history. Most of their kings proved to be a great disappointment to Yahweh. Because they were attracted to the religious practices of the heathen nations, they led their people into the worship of images and to the abominable rituals that were performed in the high places.

Israel continued for nearly 200 more years (approximately 922 to 722 B. C.). Judah continued for about 336 years (approximately 922 to 586 B.C.). Both, however, were finally taken captive, Israel by Assyria and Judah by Babylon, because of their disobedience to Yahweh.

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Judah lasted longer than Israel because some of their kings tried do that which was right. Even though some of their the kings tried to serve Yahweh (see 1 Kings 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kings 12:3; 14:4; 15:4; and 15:35), they did not destroy the high places where their people continued to worship.

The kings of Israel hardened their hearts against Yahweh. Ahaz, for example, sacrificed his own children:

3 But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel.

4 And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. -2 Kings 16

Despite continued warnings from the prophets of God, Israel continued in the practices of idol worship. True to His word, Yahweh judged Israel:

22 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them;

23 Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day. -2 Kings 17

Israel wanted a king. Yahweh gave them a king. They needed a place to worship. He gave them a house dedicated to His name. It did not help. When they blended the worship of Yahweh with the worship of images:

40 Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner.

41 So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day. -2 Kings 17

Even when Israel was scattered among the heathen, they profaned the holy name of Yahweh with their idolatrous worship practices:

20 And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These *are* the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land. -Ezekiel 36

Yahweh, however, gave a promise of hope to Israel:

22 Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not *this* for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went.

23 And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I *am* the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. -Ezekiel 36

He is the Lord, Yahweh!