

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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But the High Places Were Not Removed

It had been a long journey for the children of Israel. Because of their failure to trust in Yahweh to protect them as they entered into the Promised Land, He made them wander in the wilderness for forty years, until the doubters died off:

13 And Yahweh's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of Yahweh, was consumed. -Numbers 32

Finally, those that were still alive camped in the plains of Moab preparing to cross the Jordan River. Before they passed over toward Jericho, the first city they would reach in the Promised Land, Yahweh gave them some clear and specific orders:

50 And Yahweh spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by *the* Jordan *near* Jericho, saying,

51 Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, When you have passed over *the* Jordan into the land of Canaan;

52 Then you 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 you shall dispossess *the inhabitants* of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it. -Numbers 33

Before they could take possession of the Promised Land and live there, Yahweh ordered the children of Israel to do these four things:

1. drive out all of the inhabitants of the land
2. destroy all their pictures (these included carved images and idols)
3. destroy all their molten images
4. "quite pluck down" (meaning destroy or exterminate) all their high places.

Failure to drive out the inhabitants of the land, He said, would allow them to become "pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides." Therefore, the result would be that Yahweh would do to the children of Israel what He thought to do to those inhabitants of the land:

55 But if you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which you let remain of them *shall be* pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall trouble you in the land wherein you dwell.

56 Moreover it shall come to pass, *that* I shall do to you, as I thought to do to them. -Numbers 33

Unfortunately, the children of Israel were never able to accomplish that which Yahweh required of them. First, they were unable to drive the inhabitants from the land. Even the Jebusites, the early inhabitants of Jerusalem, remained:

63 As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out: but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day. -Joshua 15

Because the inhabitants of the land remained, their influences on the children of Israel became great. Their influences ultimately even led to the deception of King Solomon:

3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.

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 Yahweh 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.

6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of Yahweh, and went not fully after Yahweh, as *did* David his father. -1 Kings 11

Solomon's evil led to the destruction of Israel:

11 Therefore Yahweh said to Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of you, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. -1 Kings 11

As the kingdom of Israel was split into two, the northern kingdom, which retained the name of Israel, continued in the wickedness of the people of the land. Its king, Ahab, even married Jezebel, the princess of the Zidonians, and made images of Baal and for the goddess (a grove):

30 And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of Yahweh above all that *were* before him.

31 And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him.

**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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32 And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.

33 And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke Yahweh God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. -1 Kings 16

Because Israel refused to listen to Yahweh, they were ultimately removed from the Promised Land:

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

23 Until Yahweh 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

Notwithstanding, Yahweh revealed His love and patience toward Judah, the southern kingdom, giving them countless opportunities to repent. While many of the kings of Judah utterly rebelled against Yahweh, others, such as Asa, did that which was “right in the eyes of Yahweh.”

11 And Asa did *that which was* right in the eyes of Yahweh, as *did* David his father.

12 And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made.

13 And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from *being* queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; and Asa destroyed her idol, and burnt *it* by the brook Kidron. -1 Kings 15

Even though Asa did that which was right, he struggled in one area. He could not completely exterminate the “high places” from Judah:

14 But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa’s heart was perfect with Yahweh all his days. -1 Kings 15

Likewise, Asa’s son, Jehoshaphat, was also unable to eliminate the “high places” from the land:

43 And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from them, doing *that which was* right in the eyes of Yahweh: nevertheless the high places were not taken away; *for* the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places. -1 Kings 22

He was unable to remove the high places because the people of Judah had not prepared their hearts to serve Yahweh:

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33 However the high places were not taken away: for as yet the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers. -2 Chronicles 20

It seemed that every other abomination could be removed from Judah except the places of idolatrous worship called “high places.” They were the places where people ascended by their own power to get near their gods, which they built in close proximity to heaven. As such, high places may not always be what we think they are. Micah even said Jerusalem represented the high places of Judah:

5 For the transgression of Jacob *is* all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What *is* the transgression of Jacob? *is it* not Samaria? and what *are* the high places of Judah? *are they* not Jerusalem? -Micah 1

Anything made with hands that we put our trust in, even the temple of Yahweh, could be considered such a place. Yahweh told Jeremiah to warn Judah against trusting in the temple:

4 Trust you not in lying words, saying, The temple of Yahweh, The temple of Yahweh, The temple of Yahweh, *are* these. -Jeremiah 7

In the year that the great and powerful King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw his own lowness in comparison to the highness and holiness of the Lord Yahweh:

1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he did fly.

3 And one cried to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* Yahweh of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory. -Isaiah 6

When we fail to recognize the highness and holiness of Yahweh, we can easily lift up other things besides Him. We thereby set them upon high places within our hearts, competing for the love that must only belong to Him. Yahweh says that there is only one way to love Him, which is with all our heart, all our soul, and all our might:

4 Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God *is* one Yahweh:

5 And you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. -Deuteronomy 6

The “high places” of Israel and Judah were places where idols competed for the love that was only due to Yahweh.

While we may not be bowing to tangible idols in worship, anything in our lives that competes with Yahweh for our total love can become an idol to us. Whether they are tangible objects, positions of power or wealth, or even prideful thoughts, they may become idols that we hide in the “high places” of our hearts, enticing us to compromise in our love for Yahweh. Unless they are removed, they can cause Yahweh to remove us from out of His sight. They can, however, only be removed by completely trusting in Yahweh, as we love Him with all of our heart, soul, and might.