

When Your Worship Is An Abomination

The Bible refers to about forty different false gods and goddesses in both the Old and New Testaments. Some of these false gods and goddesses were named: Anat, Baal, Bel, Chemosh, Dagon, Moloch, Nebo, and Tammuz. They were worshiped because people believed they provided various benefits such as food, pleasure, finances, and protection, for example. Sexual activity and human sacrifices were a major part in the worship of some of these false gods and goddesses. These false religions of the past and those of today are dangerous because they were created by Satan. In 1 Corinthians 10:20 Paul taught that when people offered sacrifices to gods and goddesses, they are actually sacrificing to demons. He wrote,

No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. 1 Corinthians 10:20 (NASB)

This means demons are behind every false religion. Satan has created a smorgasbord of false religions and cults that appeal to a wide spectrum of people to pull them away from the true God. He has been very successful.

The first example of a false religion in the Bible is found in Leviticus 17:7. Yahweh told the Israelites to not sacrifice to

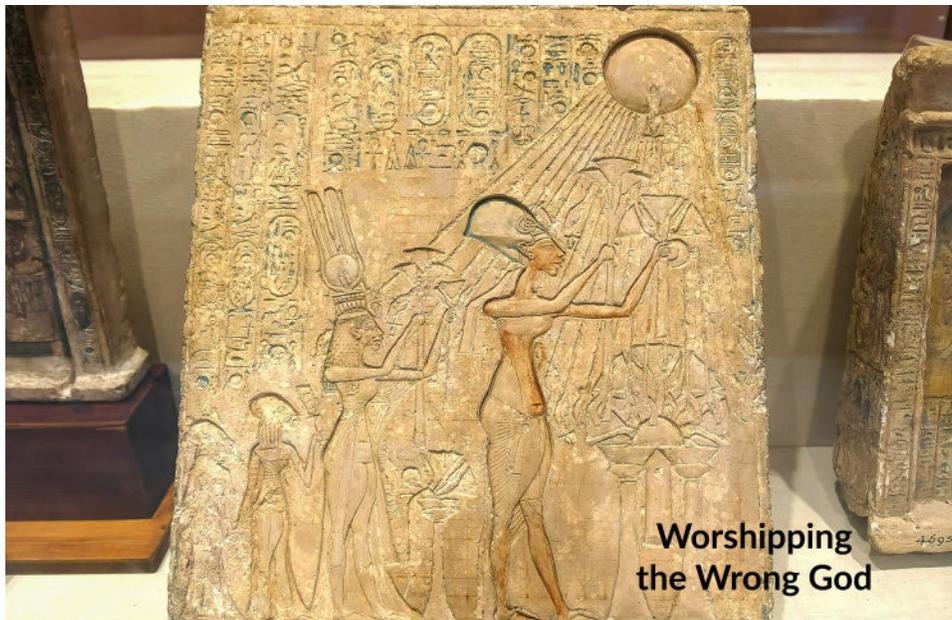
the goat demons. It is believed the goat god was a satyr that occupied Lower Egypt. The religion was occultic in which women had sex with goats.¹ Later, in Deuteronomy 18:9-14 Yahweh warned the Israelites to avoid the occult.

When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets

omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you. You shall be blameless

before the LORD your God. For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do so. Deuteronomy 18:9-14 (NASB)

Jeremiah 10:3-8 has an incredible description of false gods. It states that the idols of false religions are made by men's



1. R. K. Harrison. Leviticus. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Inter-Varsity Press. 1980. p. 179-180.

hands. It says,

For the customs of the peoples are delusion;
Because it is wood cut from the forest,
The work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool.
They decorate it with silver and with gold;
They fasten it with nails and with hammers
So that it will not totter.
Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they,
And they cannot speak;
They must be carried,
Because they cannot walk!
Do not fear them,
For they can do no harm,
Nor can they do any good.”
There is none like You, O LORD;
Jeremiah 10:3-6 (NASB)

In 2 John 10-11, God has also warned us to avoid the teachers of these religions. There we are told to not even allow them into our homes. God has also urged us in both Deuteronomy 6:13-1 and Matthew 4:10 to worship Him only. Here is the Deuteronomy passage,

You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you. Deuteronomy 6:13-14 (NASB)

So, both the Old and New Testaments warn us to flee false religions. Now why should we do this? Isaiah 43:10 reminds us there are no other gods. There were no gods before and there will not be any after Yahweh. Isaiah 46:9 says there is no one even like Yahweh.

THE GLORY OF GOD. That was the introduction to our study in Ezekiel 8. Ezekiel contains three visions, and this chapter is the start of the second vision. This vision is recorded in chapters 8-11. It is the second cycle of prophecies. These chapters continue the theme that judgment is certain. Verse 1 states,

It came about in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there. Ezekiel 8:1 (NASB)

The first thing we are given in this passage is the date of this vision. The first vision began in Ezekiel 1. Verse 2 said the date of the first vision was the fifth year, the fifth month, and the fifth day of King Jehoiachin's exile in Babylonia. The date of the second vision is the sixth year, the sixth month, and the fifth day of the exile of the king's exile. That means the prophet Ezekiel waited 13 months before he received another vision from Yahweh. The date is now August/September in the year 592 B.C.,² and the Babylonian army's invasion will start in December 589 or January 588 B.C. The defeat occurred on August 25, 587 B.C., but fighting continued until the early part of 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 32:1-2).

The second thing we are told is that the prophet was sitting in his home and the elders of Judah were sitting before him. This reveals that even though many Jews were exiled to Babylonia from the 605 B.C. and 797 BC. Babylonian army invasions of Jerusalem, there was still some form of leadership among the exiles. So, all of the Judah's leaders are sitting there. We will learn more about them in the chapter.

The third thing we are told is that the "hand of the Lord GOD fell on" Ezekiel while he is talking with these men. He had a vision. As we study this vision, imagine how these leaders felt when they heard what the vision was about.

Just as the first vision started with Yahweh on a throne, this vision starts the same way. Verse 2 says,

Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward there was the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal. Ezekiel 8:2 (NASB)

Once again we are told that Ezekiel saw Yahweh in the "likeness as the appearance of a man." Once again, His appearance was like fire from His waist downward, but above His waist

2. Ralph H. Alexander. Ezekiel. The Expositors Bible Commentary. Regency Reference Library. 1986, vol. 6, p. 781.

He appeared like glowing metal (Ezekiel 1:27). Verse 3 adds,

He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located. Ezekiel 8:3 (NASB)

Then we are told Ezekiel saw something like a hand. Before I go farther, it is important to notice that the prophet did not say Yahweh was a man in verse 2 or had a human hand. He was careful. In Ezekiel 1:27-28 and here the prophet keeps saying Yahweh had a “likeness as the appearance of” or “the form of.” That is, Yahweh appeared in a form the prophet would recognize. Here we are told this “form of a hand” caught the prophet by his hair and the Holy Spirit lifted him up between the earth and heaven. There he saw the visions of God. Then he was taken to the entrance of the north gate to the inner court. Also, he saw the idol of jealousy which provokes jealousy.

Verse 4 says that Ezekiel also saw the glory of God. This is common to both visions.

And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain. Ezekiel 8:4 (NASB)

ABOMINATIONS. More information is given to us about the idol of jealousy in verses 5-6.

Then He said to me, “Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north.” So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate was this idol of jealousy at the entrance.

And He said to me, “Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary? But yet you will see still greater abominations.” Ezekiel 8:5-6 (NASB)

Next, Ezekiel was told to look to the north of the altar gate. Verse 7 will tell us the prophet is in the outer court at this point. So, he sees the north gate. It was just north of the great bronze altar, and was also called the altar gate. At that gate, the prophet saw the idol of jealousy right at the entrance. He saw

the people committing abominations before the idol. What were those abominations? Some Bible commentators think the idol of jealousy may have been an idol of Asherah. It stood in the temple during the reign of Manasseh (2 Kings 21:7; 2 Chronicles 33:7). It was removed by King Josiah (2 Kings 23:6), but the prophet Jeremiah reports it was back in the temple. In Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:17-30, the prophet Jeremiah refers to the idol of Asherah again when he calls it the “Queen of Heaven.” The last passage is amazing for it illustrates how the demonic world makes false worship appear to be real. In Jeremiah 44:17-30, the people complained that when they were burning sacrifices and drink offerings to the Queen of Heaven, life was better and they had plenty of food. Then the prophet Jeremiah told them the reason they were suffering was because Yahweh was punishing them. It is important to remember that timewise Jeremiah’s ministry and Ezekiel’s ministry overlapped and they had similar experiences.

So, it is possible the idol of jealousy was the grotesque idol of Asherah, which was usually depicted as a naked woman. It was an idol of jealousy because the people were performing abominations and not worshiping the one and only true God. So, it was located in the outer court of the temple, just north of the altar on which sacrifices to Yahweh were to be made.

GREATER ABOMINATIONS. In verses 7-9 the prophet is told about even greater abominations. Now the prophet was at the entrance of the court. The passage says,

Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. He said to me, “Son of man, now dig through the wall.” So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance. And He said to me, “Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here.” Ezekiel 8:7-9 (NASB)

Ezekiel was told to dig through the wall of the temple from the outer court. When he did, he saw an entrance. When he went in he saw “wicked abominations” being committed. Verse 6 has already told us these abominations were greater than those in verses 5-6. That reveals some sins are worse than others. Romans 3:23 has taught us that every sin falls short of the glory of God, and this reveals some sins are worse than others. For example, Genesis 18:20 teaches that homosexual-

ity is a greater sin. So, as we read verses 10-13, ask yourself what are the greater abominations?

So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around. Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising. Then He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'" And He said to me, "Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing." Ezekiel 8:10-13 (NASB)

After Ezekiel moved through the entrance, he saw a wide variety of animals and idols carved on the walls around him. The message is that these grotesque things were shocking. So, why did they worship them? We have already learned the answer from Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:17-30. The demons made it appear that the worship of these false gods was beneficial.

Then he saw seventy elders of the house of Israel. It appears that Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan was the leader of the seventy elders, and they were offering incense to these gods and goddesses. They were doing it in secret. Lamar Cooper in his commentary on Ezekiel states,

To his shock and surprise the men inside were worshiping idols in various kinds of animal forms (v. 10). The terminology used was very much like the prohibitions against idolatry (cf. Deut 4:16-19; Lev 11:40-42).

There was no apparent reason for the secrecy of this group of worshipers. Some interpreters suggest that these practices resembled Egyptian worship rather than Babylonian cults. If so, the group would have had to worship in secret because the gods of the Egyptian pantheon would have been offensive, perhaps even illegal under Babylonian rule. All public altars would have had to

conform to required standards of Babylonian worship.³

So, why were the abominations greater? First, the leaders of Judah were engaged in the worship of these things. The very men who should have been examples to the people were committing this evil. Second, these gods and goddesses were so evil. Third, the leaders were hiding their abhorrent behavior from the people. The end of verse 13 says still greater abominations were coming.

STILL GREATER ABOMINATIONS. Now ask yourself what are the "still greater abominations"? Verses 14-15 describes them.

Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these." Ezekiel 8:14-15 (NASB)

Here the prophet was taken not through the north gate but to a gate that was north but directly across from the temple. There he saw women weeping for Tammuz. Tammuz was an Akkadian god, a god of fertility. He was both the brother and husband of Ishtar. Ishtar was a goddess. Tammuz was also called Dumuzi or Duzu. Ishtar and Tammuz had an incestuous relationship. Archaeology has discovered very graphic love poems from antiquity that supposedly describe their relationship. That is consistent with the extreme sexual fertility festivals involved in the worship of Tammuz.⁴

It was believed that Tammuz died and was resurrected annually. When he died, the crops died. He was resurrected in the spring by the wailing of Ishtar. This religion taught that his resurrection caused the rains to return and the crops to grow. The followers helped this process by weeping and engaging in the fertility festivals. This was a women's religion. Verse 15 says that "still greater abominations than these" will be described next.

STILL GREATER ABOMINATIONS THAN THESE. Verse

3. Lamar Cooper. Ezekiel. The New American Commentary. B&H Publishing Co. 1994. Vv. 17., p. 121.

4. Alexander. Ibid. p. 784.

16 described them.

Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun. Ezekiel 8:16 (NASB)

Ezekiel sees twenty-five men who were worshiping the sun as it arose from the east. There are several things we must notice. First, since only priests were allowed between the bronze altar and the porch of the temple, these twenty-five men must have been priests. Second, we are told they were worshiping toward the east. That suggests they were worshiping the sun. Deuteronomy 4:19 specifically prohibited the worship of the sun. Sadly, sun worship kept reappearing in Judah. It was removed during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Kings 23:5, 11; 2 Chronicles 29:5-7). The false Egyptian gods of Osiris and Ra involved sun worship. Some of the worst sexual perversions that can be imagined were part of the worship of Osiris.

CONCLUSION. Verses 17 begins the conclusion to the chapter.

He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose." Ezekiel 8:17 (NASB)

Yahweh asked, "Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations"? Now we must ask, "What were the abominations?"

First, the abominations may have included the various idols. Because there seems to be a progressive degradation in sexual activity from the idol of jealousy to the sun worship. Sexual perversions progressively desensitize people. They progress from bad to worse. Secondly, we are told the house of Judah was committing these abominations. The emphasis is on the actions of the people. We are told the ordinary people were committing the abominations, then the seventy elders,

the women, and twenty-five priests were doing things with these grotesque idols. There is a progression from the common person, to the elders, to the women, to the priests. This gives us the principle that the sins of those in more responsible positions commit the greater abominations. Jesus said in Luke 12:48 that to whom much is given, much is required. That helps us understand why Yahweh removed Moses for what appears to be a small sin.

Sadly, these people did not think their abominations were serious. Because of their disobedience, violence had filled the land. By abandoning Yahweh and worshiping these demonic deities, they had rejected God's standard of holiness. Consequently, violence was flooding the land. In Romans 1:24, 26, and 28, we are told that when a person rejects God He removes constraints and allows them to engage in homosexual sins. At the end of the chapter, we also see a long list of sins. God had allowed violence to flood the land. It is happening today in our own nation.

At the end of the verse, we read the curious statement, "putting the twig to their nose." The meaning of "putting the twig to their nose according to H. W. Saggs is that it refers to a "ritual practice of sun worship."

Everyone had forgotten all that Yahweh had done for them. In their desires and lusts, they abandoned Him. They did not care about Yahweh. So Yahweh responded in verse 18,

Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them." Ezekiel 8:18 (NASB)

In the last study, Yahweh said that He would have, "no pity nor will I spare" them. He repeats it again. "And though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them."

Today, our nation is worshiping everything but God. The gods and goddesses of our time are sex perversions, climate change, the environment, low population growth, abortion, deception, injustice, dishonor of parents, and many others. Just as God poured out His wrath on Israel, He will pour out His wrath on any other nation who fails to put Yahweh first.

The message for Christians is Matthew 22:37-38,

And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment.” Matthew 22:37-38 (NASB)