

94. What does God require in the first Commandment?

That, on peril of my soul's salvation, I avoid and flee all idolatry, sorcery, enchantments, invocation of saints or other creatures; and that I rightly acknowledge the only true God, trust in Him alone, with all humility and patience expect all good from Him only, and love, fear, and honor Him with my whole heart; so as rather to renounce all creatures than to do the least thing against His will.

Baal worship

Baal worship involved

- Male and female prostitutes who acted out the mating ritual in order to convince Baal to mate with Asherah. Every worshiper was expected to take part in this
- Ecstatic dancing and flailing, weeping and yelling rituals to get the local Baal to pay attention
- Jehovah was considered another Baal. He was useful for certain things, but they wanted all of their bases covered.
- Baal was worshiped on high places; Asherah was worshiped through obscenely carved tree trunks, which became known as asherahs

Ahab built a temple to Baal, and carved an asherah for the ritual obscenities.

If he needed anything, his bases were covered: ritual prostitution to get the crops to grow; sacrifices to the images that Jeroboam had set up; treaties with surrounding countries to secure the borders.

And God. He didn't have any problem with God as long as God was a genius in a bottle to be brought out when needed.

God is the creator of heaven and earth. We are His creatures. Baal worship was much like it is today. God is viewed just like we are only bigger.

Jesus said that you cannot serve God and the things of this world. See Matthew 6:22-34

How Ahab really thought is given to us in hints:

1. He married Jezebel. God had forbidden this marriage so strongly in his word. But What God said really didn't matter. It was how Ahab felt about God that was really important. Jezebel was sincere. She was really spiritual. She just had a different opinion, but God is OK with that.
2. Hiel rebuilt Jericho – once again, what God said did not matter. There is a force in the universe that controls everything. God is just another Baal who discovered something. He will do what I want if I am sincere enough.

But God's word stands. Hiel's interpretation of that passage in Joshua didn't really matter. His firstborn and his youngest sons died anyway. Just as Joshua had written 400 years ago, so it happened. "According to the word of the LORD" is the recurring theme of 1 and 2 Kings

What now proceeds is a contest. Who is the true and only God? How will this doctrine affect our worship? Is true worship obeying and trusting in God's word, or ecstatic and obscene ritual?

Is true worship obeying God or trying whatever tricks we can to get God to obey us?

17:1 Contrast between God and the Baals
Elijah "My God is Jehovah"

- God is the God of the rain and the dew. Try as hard as the worshipers of Baal might, there would be no rain until God says so through Elijah.
- It is not just a “force of nature” but even the rain does not come except at the command of God. We don’t eat unless God says we can. We don’t make scientific discoveries unless God says we can
- Elijah is then hidden away. For three years there was not a drop of rain in all the land.

Elijah and the ravens

- Ravens are ravenous – but not even raven eat unless God says they can.
- This one God had commanded to feed Elijah.
- Who can command a raven not to eat except the one who had created them?

Elijah and the widow

- Notice the contrast between Ahab and the widow.
 - He had all that he needed; she had nothing
 - She had enough flour and oil for one cake, and was prepared to die
 - But God makes a promise to her and she acts on the promise, even though the promise would take a miracle.
 - The word of God is even more sure to her than what she sees with the eyes
 - What an act of faith it was for her to feed her last bit of flour to Elijah, trusting in only the word of God!
 - God sometimes takes everything away from us so all we have left is his word and his promises. Where is your trust?
- Ahab was a descendent of Abraham; this widow was a Sidonian, just like Jezebel
- While all of the armies of Jezebel are looking for Elijah, God is hiding him in her own country
 - Elijah had brought the word of the Lord to God’s people and they were seeking to kill him. But there was a widow in Sidon who trusted God
- While all of the prophets of Baal are carrying on their elaborate, obscene rituals, God is quietly feeding the godly widow and Elijah, and all of her household
- But there is one more thing that this widow has left: her son.
 - Is God still good even when he takes away everything?
 - Is God’s promise still good even when you have lost everything?

1. The word of God brings us into remembrance of our sins
2. Remembrance of our sins bring us remembrance of death
3. But the promise of God is the end of the curse of death

To the worshipers of Baal, even Baal himself was subject to death. This is why their rituals were so noisy. Every year he would have to be awakened from death to bring rain on the earth.

But this widow recognized that it was her sins that brought death. Death is not just a natural cycle, but a curse for sin.

But who is the God even of death?

Notice that in the widow’s severe trials they began in pain and death, but ended in new life and hope.

Each trial brings her closer to Jehovah. She learns even more to trust in Him.