

Deuteronomy And Idolatry

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 18-Oct-08; Sermon #FT08-09

We are going to begin this sermon in Deuteronomy 14:22-23. I do not believe anybody has yet used these verses in Deuteronomy, because they are kind of specialized, usually being given during an offering.

Deuteronomy 14:22-23 "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LOORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LOORD your God always.

I do not know that Bill Onisick knew that I was going to begin with this verse, but I already had it down, because this sermon is going to touch on "fearing God," at least for some portion of it.

The only thing that I want you to extract from this verse, at this time, is that one of the reasons God has assigned the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles is that we learn to fear Him. "Fear," as it is used here, has the sense of "standing in awe of Him." It is a deep abiding reverential respect that is mingled with some measure of dread that results in Him having a hefty degree of positive influence over our lives. This kind of fear influences one to yield in submission to it, and it is good even though one may have to submit to a bit of sacrificing in order to accomplish this.

Much of the sermons, here, have revolved around these verses.

Deuteronomy 17:18-20 "Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LOORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

The other day you heard a number of comments from renowned commentators regarding Deuteronomy's value to the Christian. Now basically those commentators stated, in a variety of ways, that the book of Deuteronomy is the Old Testament's most helpful resource for strengthening a Christian's understanding.

There is no way such an evaluation can be measured, but I know that I believe the same way, and I think God has some of the same inclinations, because it is the only book in the entire Bible that God assigned, by commandment, to be gone through every seventh year. It is also the only book in the entire Bible that God assigns, by commandment again, for the kings of Israel to write a copy of and to refer to all the days of their life, and thus be thoroughly familiar with its instruction.

There are additional important reasons for God's assignment that we Christians especially need to consider since we are preparing to be kings. Verse 20 says: "That his heart [or *our* heart] may not be lifted above his brethren, . . . [That is, that we are able to see ourselves in pages of the book of Deuteronomy]; that he [we] may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he [we] may prolong his [*our*] days in his kingdom."

To paraphrase, God is saying, "That the king may remain humble before Me and his subjects, that he will remain submissive to Me and to My instruction, and that he and the nation may be blessed while he occupies the throne."

In one sense, I think we can safely conclude that the book of Deuteronomy contains a great deal of instruction which, if followed, will produce good things for the person and for his posterity. There is a reason for this, and it is because the book is fundamental to a good personal relationship with God.

I believe that it could be described as a concentrated condensation. Shall we call it a *Reader's Digest* version of the plan of salvation, or the Cliff's Notes (for those of you who have been through college) for the plan of salvation. And as such, it touches on how it is that we have a relationship with God in the first place—know something about Him—and the reason, brethren, is because He loves us. That is the bottom line in the book of Deuteronomy.

Everything we have in way of a relationship with God is because He loves us. We do not come anywhere near loving Him the way He loves us, and before we were ever aware of Him (in terms of more of His reality and in truth), He loved us then and had plans already for us that one day He was going to spring on us.

The book of Deuteronomy touches on the Savior role—the Savior role of Jesus Christ—but it is evidenced in this case by Moses. It shows us also that we are not merely isolated individuals, but part of a community that God has called out, and to which we have major responsibilities. To them, it was Israel. To us, it is the Church of God—God's family of regenerated children.

This book shows us that we must love God in return by keeping His commandments. It shows us that we must live by faith, making choices as to which way we shall go. It shows us that life is a pilgrimage, and that we are headed toward a specific goal, called in the book, "The Promised Land." But for us it is the Kingdom of God.

The book of Deuteronomy makes it very clear that there is only one way of life that is acceptable to God, and that is the one that is *in* this book. It is this way of life that we have to learn and put into practice, and when we do, it shows Him we love Him in return. As such, the book of Deuteronomy has very much to say to us, or God never would have given the assignment that it must be gone through every seven years, and that the king must study and follow its contents thoroughly.

All of the details regarding salvation are not in Deuteronomy, but it does, as I said a little bit earlier, provide the foundation.

The sermon takes a little bit of a turn here. We know from the prophetic books that Israel was a faithless partner in the covenant, and God names that faithlessness "harlotry."

We are going to go to the book of Ezekiel. Yesterday in his message, Charles Whitaker mentioned this, and I thought, "Hey! That is a good idea. I am going to put that in my sermon in a little bit expanded form." Turn to Ezekiel, chapter 1.

Ezekiel 1:1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

Ezekiel was a Jew. In the larger sense, he was an Israelite, but specifically he was of the tribe of Judah. He was a Jew, and he was writing the book of Ezekiel. He was given the instructions for this book while he was in a concentration camp in Babylon. That concentration camp was located on the River Chebar. He was given very specific instructions, but the instructions were not for Judah. They were for Israel.

You will recall, that under David, the thirteen tribes making up Israel were combined into one nation. However, a couple of generations later Solomon's son Rehoboam was faced with a division of the nation. He would not give in to those who were against him, and so they just walked away from the unity as a nation, and Israel and Judah became separate nations. Israel became the nation of the ten tribes to the north. Judah became the name of the two tribes, plus some Levites and so forth who were with them in the south.

Ezekiel 2:1-3 And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you." Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. And He said to me: "Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel [not Judah], to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.

The phrase "to the very day" is important. Israel was conquered by Assyria in that period of time between 722 BC and 718-19 BC. They were taken into captivity by Assyria. They disappeared from view. The story is in II Kings. We know that the Assyrians cleaned out the land of the Israelites and replaced them with people from other lands, and those people became the Samaritans of Jesus' day. But the nation of Israel no longer existed.

Ezekiel wrote his book almost 130 or 140 years after Israel disappeared from the scene. God said Ezekiel was to write it to Israel while he was a captive of the Babylonians in Babylon. The book of Nehemiah was written when a small retinue of about 42-43,000 people were allowed by the king to go back and resettle the land of Judah, but Israel never again came into view. We know where they are, because they left a very clear trail across Southern and Central Europe. They are now in Northwest Europe, in the United States of America, and in the British Commonwealth countries in South Africa as well. That is modern Israel.

The book of Ezekiel is written to us. This book never got to Israel until a thousand years or so later after Ezekiel wrote it, and then maybe small portions of it began to be read. But now, here in the 21st Century, it is being read by Israelites in Northwest Europe and in the United States, and in the other nations, but they do not even know it is written to *them*. It is really a serious situation.

I want you to read Ezekiel 16. We will begin in verse 14 and I am going to read twenty verses here.

Ezekiel 16:14-34 Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty [God is talking about the Israel He married, as though Israel was a woman, His bride.], for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord Good. "But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them. Such things should not happen, nor be. You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them. You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and you set My oil and My incense before them. Also My food which I gave you—the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey which I fed you—you set it before them as sweet incense; and so it was," says the Lord Good. "Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your acts of harlotry a small matter, that you have slain My children and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire? And in all your abominations and acts of harlotry you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, struggling in your blood. "Then it was so, after all your wickedness—"Woe, woe to you!" says the Lord Good—that you also built for yourself a shrine, and made a high place for yourself in every street. You built your high places at the head of every road, and made your beauty to be abhorred. You offered yourself to everyone who passed by, and multiplied your acts of harlotry. You also committed harlotry with the Egyptians, your very fleshly neighbors, and increased your acts of harlotry to provoke Me to anger. "Behold, therefore, I stretched out My hand against you, diminished your allotment, and gave you up to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. You also played the harlot with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; indeed you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and even then you were not satisfied. "How degenerate is your heart!" says the Lord Good, "seeing you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot. "You erected your shrine at the head of every road, and built your high place in every street. Yet you were not like a harlot, because you scorned payment. You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband. Men make payment to all harlots, but you made your payments to all your lovers, and hired them to come to you from all around for your harlotry. You are the opposite of other women in your harlotry, because no one solicited you to be

a harlot. In that you gave payment but no payment was given you, therefore you are the opposite."

What a description! So filthy is the behavior of Israel before God. In twenty verses, brethren, "harlotry," "adultery," and "harlot" are mentioned eighteen times, which means that Israel was certainly not faithful to the covenant she made with God. The scattering that came with the people of Israel was certainly well deserved. It is a wonder He did not blow our ancestors to kingdom come.

Now what I do not want you to forget is this. This is written to modern Israel. God is recounting the activity of *ancient* Israel, but what God wants us to get to right now is that this message describes our conduct today. It is just in ancient language, ancient types. Brethren, we live right in the midst of everything that is going on in this nation. That little bit down in that parking lot was minor compared to what we just read in the book of Ezekiel.

As bad as it was, showing the scattered disorganized chaotic mind of the people of Israel, it gets worse when we get into moral and spiritual areas. It is no wonder that God describes, through Jeremiah 30, that the people of Israel are going to go through the worst period of time that has ever faced any nation or any group of nations in the history of mankind. He says, "Nothing like I am going to do to you has ever happened before." As bad as we might think the Babylonians were, or that the Assyrians were, it is very possible that maybe our conduct was not quite as bad as theirs; however, we are more responsible because we have this book from which we could have gotten right conduct and made it a part of our life.

Again, let me remind you that I am going through this so that you understand what we are living *in*. It is a moral and spiritual cesspool. This is what God says we have to pull ourselves out of, with His help, and He will do it. He will clean us up through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and by His spirit. But this is the backdrop of what we have been living in.

We may not be as bad in our personal life as what is being described here, but we have been touched by it, tainted by it, and it is part of our thinking. It is awfully hard to get away from what one grows up with.

Israel's descent into faithlessness was very aggressive. You can see it described there. She chased the lovers and gave herself to them. Of course the lovers were idols. She turned her back on God and obeyed the idols rather than God.

Let us move forward to chapter 20 of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 20:8 But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me. They did not all cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said, 'I will pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.'

Ezekiel 20:10 "Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

Ezekiel 20:15-16 So I also raised My hand in an oath to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, 'flowing with milk and honey,' the glory of all lands, . . . [He is talking about at the end of the second year when they refused to go into the land, and rebelled there.] . . . because they despised My judgments and did not walk in My statutes, but profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols.

Ezekiel 20:18 "But I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols.

Ezekiel 20:24 Because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers' idols.

Ezekiel 20:31 For when you offer your gifts and make your sons pass through the fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols, even to this day. So shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live," says the Lord GOOD, "I will not be inquired of by you.

Ezekiel 20:39 "As for you, O house of Israel," thus says the Lord GOOD: "Go, serve every one of you his idols—and hereafter—if you will not obey Me; but profane My holy name no more with your gifts and your idols.

Just out of curiosity, this morning I decided to count the number of times that the word "idols" appears in the book of Ezekiel, which is written to the people of modern Israel. The word "idols" appears 36 times in the book of Ezekiel. It is very easy to tell what modern Israel's number one sin is. It is idolatry, brethren.

Now in terms of commandment-breaking, Israel's major sin, anciently and modern as well, is idolatry. But the harlotry, in actual day-to-day conduct, was idolatry, of which Sabbath-breaking was a primary example. Did you know that Sabbath-breaking is idolatry? You know now, because if we do not keep the Sabbath, we must be submitting to another god. God says to keep the Sabbath. That is *His* commandment, and to not keep it is to obey another god that says you do not have to keep it. Sabbath-breaking is idolatry. This theme runs all the way through the book of Ezekiel; it is idolatry that we mainly have to be concerned about.

The word "idol" or "idols" does not appear very often in the book of Deuteronomy. It appears one or two times. Do you know what *does* appear often? In a book shorter than Ezekiel, the word "false god" appears 38 times. That is the term Moses chose to use. It is the same thing, but Moses used "false gods."

What is interesting is that my comparison continued, except for chapter 5, in which all of the commandments are named. Other sins are barely mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy. Five of the commandments deal directly with it, and the sins of breaking the other five most certainly touch on idolatry in their spirit. Once the first commandment is directly broken, the breaking of the remainder will follow. The First Commandment is rejecting God. If you reject God, then you will reject the other commandments too. It just follows that suit.

Let me ask you another question. What is the great commandment of the law? "You shall love the Lord thy God with all your heart and soul." Does that touch on idolatry? It most certainly does. The importance of this commandment expresses God's concerns, because where does that law first appear? In the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6.

Idolatry truly does not take on much seriousness for a person unless one desires a close personal relationship with God through His calling and obedience to the truth. A relationship is what Israel said they desired, but they did not follow through on their part.

Knowing truth is very important to keeping the First Commandment, because God is the source of truth. If the First Commandment is kept, it produces a good relationship with Him and prepares us for salvation.

You might recall that during the Ninth Commandment message I gave on that series on the Ten Commandments, I spent a little bit of time in John 17:17. I want you to turn there. I want to touch on this again. Jesus requested this of His Father.

John 17:17 Sanctify them [meaning you and me] by Your truth. Your word is

truth.

During that message, I stated that the Greek word translated into the English word "truth" is *aletheia*. Transliterated it is spelled aletheia. *Aletheia* is a noun, and according to *Vines*, *aletheia* denotes the reality of a thing. It denotes something open, manifest, clear, and unhidden. It is by God's truth, by God's reality, that we are sanctified. 'Sanctified' simply means to be set apart, to be made different. It is the realities of God in His word that set us apart and make us different.

Now we are going to go to I Corinthians 8. I want to go through this because this series of verses is not always the easiest to understand. Paul wrote some things that are difficult to understand. Even Peter said that.

I Corinthians 8:4-7 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), . . . [That is where the contradiction seems to come in. There is only one God, yet there are many gods and lords.] . . . yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Now is there truly only one God and one Lord, or are there many gods and lords? What I am going to give you is what I believe the Apostle Paul meant, so that we can understand. He meant that most of the world's people sincerely worship sculptures. We will use that word. They worship sculptures or statues, and pictures even of gods (small "g") and lords (small "l").

We might, at this point, also insert demons, and Satan as well, because Satan is clearly called in the Bible "the god (small "g") of this world." In addition, he is the leader of, what Paul refers to as, "the principalities and powers" who are co-rulers *under* Satan. These demons, including Satan, are worshipped, and thus those gods (small "g") and lords (small l) truly exist in the minds of those worshipping. But there is no truth, no reality in them as gods and lords. Again small "g" and small "l."

That is why Paul says here that to us there is only one God and one Lord. Where is *that*

reality? It is in our mind, and what we have in our mind is indeed true, because that God is the Father, and that Lord is Jesus Christ, and they really do exist. They really *are* God and Lord.

Those other ones with the small "g" and the small "l"... Paul said to us they are nothing. They are something to the people who worship them, but they are reality only in their own mind. They really are not gods and lords, but that is the way they look at them and so we acknowledge it.

Brethren, this is a sanctifying truth, because those worshipping the reality will submit to the Father's and the Son's commands, thus providing them with sanctification. But as for gods named Baal, Chemosh, Molech, Easter, Apis, Zeus, Diana, Venus, and perhaps a thousand more, they are worshipped as gods and lords, but there is no reality to them. They do not exist. So if you do not exist, how can you really be a god or a lord? All they are, brethren, is a figment of somebody's imagination. They are real to those people, who have the figment of imagination in their mind, but we know the truth, and that is why they are nothing to us.

Let us see in the book of Psalms how false this false reality is that these people have. We are going to go to Psalm 115:2-9.

Psalm 115:2-8 Why should the Gentiles say, "So where is their God?" But our God is in heaven; [He is a reality.] He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear, noses they have, but they do not smell; they have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them.

They are as good as dead. That is sobering. Those false gods are dead. There is no life in them, and those who trust in those things that have no life, they are as good as dead too. That is thought-provoking.

You see, an idol is nothing but wood and metal. They cannot speak their will to man, nor see the plight of those who worship them. They do not hear the prayers offered, and they cannot smell the sacrifices and incense. They cannot touch and give sympathy and empathy. They cannot walk about, and even though they may literally exist as do Satan and his demons, they are subject to God's sovereignty. In effect, they are merely

ornamental by comparison to the true God's reality.

I am going into this, brethren, so you will see there is no alternative. Do you get that? It is the Father and the Son, because there is nothing else. God has us backed into a corner. If we are concerned at all about a relationship with Him, the reality is there is no alternative that will produce life, and so we, like them, would be just as good as dead. We would be transferring allegiance.

I want you to see an example of how quickly human nature can revert to what it has lived with for many years. This is a very familiar example, but we are going to go back to the golden calf incident in Exodus 32. The first thing I want us to understand about this event is that it took place within six weeks of Israel's encounter with God at Mount Sinai, when the ground was shaking in a terrifying earthquake and the whole top of the mountain was on fire. I mean, it was really an awesome mind-boggling experience that made them say, "Moses, go talk to that God that He stops!"

Exodus 32:1-6 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LOORD." Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Exodus 32:9-10 And the LOORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

That was a very interesting experience. We are going to go back now to Exodus 24, and we are going to work our way back to Exodus 32 just so that we touch on what occurred here. In the first eight verses of Exodus 24 the covenant is ratified by the children of

Israel, and notice the statement in verse 8.

Exodus 24:8 And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LOORD has made with you according to all these words."

Now what were "all these words"? Part of it was (verse 7) "All that the LOORD has said we will do, and be obedient."

Exodus 24:9-11 [They have made the covenant.] Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank.

God had a meal with them. He was right there! What a privilege was given to them!

Exodus 24:13-16 So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. And he said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Indeed, Aaron and Hur are with you. If any man has a difficulty, let him go to them [for any kind of counsel they might need]." Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain. Now the glory of the LOORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.

It seemed like God had all the time in the world. Moses had to wait there six days for God to show up. God was right there, as it were.

Exodus 32:18 So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Now back to chapter 31, verse 18. This is at the end of that period of time.

Exodus 31:18 And when He had made an end of speaking with him on

Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

Now what do we have here? Immediately after the covenant was made, Moses, Joshua, and seventy of the elders went up the mountain and into God's presence. Moses and Joshua remained there while Moses received the pattern for the Tabernacle that was yet to be built. That was one of the things God gave to him. He gave him all of the drawings. Whether He impressed it into Moses' mind, or gave him drawings, I do not know, but He impressed everything into Moses. When that was done, it was the noise of what was going on down in the camp that triggered their return to the camp.

Only forty days had elapsed when the golden calf incident occurred. Israel had not budged one inch further on their pilgrimage after they made the covenant. That quickly Israel's faithlessness, their idolatry, appeared in this dramatic gut-wrenching event that should serve to warn all of us that we must be on guard.

Notice the elements that God points to that triggered this outburst of idolatry that was really lying in them. It was buried within their heart all the while, but it reached a critical mass before they even moved another inch toward the Promised Land.

From what the Israelites said and did we can learn this. First, they wanted something they could see. Now they already had a God who would go before them, and He was doing it by means of the Cloud and the Pillar of fire. But even that was not good enough. They wanted something else that they could see. It is obvious, because God was hidden in the Pillar of fire and in the Cloud, that they were not living by faith. This becomes obvious with the second thing.

They had attributed their being there at Mount Sinai to Moses; not God, Moses. They were carried along by Moses' faith as long as they could see *him*. Now we would call that "a personality-driven cult." How quickly they overlooked the fact that it was God who destroyed Egypt. It was God who killed the firstborn. It was God who split the Red Sea, not Moses.

The third thing is that their impatience added a motivating decisive edge of emotionalism, inducing them to complaining once again, and the attitude spread like wild fire through the entire community. I think, then, we can safely conclude from this event that God is showing us that ignorance, which was caused by the Israelites' failure to meditate on what they experienced in Egypt and since then, and then their failure to connect the right dots, was why they did not believe the evidence that was given to

them.

God is requiring us to look at evidence and reach conclusions regarding our faith, based on the evidence He provides. That, combined with a truly faulty memory, triggered by impatience, produced this faithless idolatry. How quickly the love they expressed in Exodus 24 evaporated when that combination of circumstances came together, and in short, brethren, they did not fear God.

There are some more lessons here. Look at verse 15.

Exodus 32:15-17 And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp."

Exodus 32:19 So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

I am going to suggest something to you. We all know from other places that Moses did have a temper that flared up every once in a while. What I am suggesting to you is that his breaking of the stone may have been a deliberate act, and not something he did in an emotional rage. Because the people had done this and had done this so quickly, his breaking of the stone may have symbolized, as far as Moses was concerned, that the covenant was already broken, and so he broke the terms of the covenant to illustrate that, showing the very serious consequence of idolatry, and especially serious, because it was just so close to them pledging their love to God.

The next thing Moses did was that he threw the golden calf into the fire, thus showing how impotent and weak it was. It could not even defend itself because it had no life of its own. Its life, as it were, existed completely and totally in the minds of the people worshipping it, but it was not reality. All it was, was an idol.

Next, he made the people stand around and watch as their so-called god melted right before their eyes into a shapeless lump, and thus all of its beauty they beheld with their eyes was reduced to a mere blob. It could not protect itself from the fire either.

Next they had to stand around and watch that shapeless blob of their god systematically ground into a powder, poured into water, and then he made them drink it. There is a good bit of symbolism there. Their god disappeared inside of them, which is where it was all the time—just a figment of their imagination.

And then there is a possibility it made them sick, and they vomited it up. That is a strong possibility. Then he took the leaders of the rebellion and had them executed. So much for idolatry.

One of the lessons for us is it is part of human nature to do this, and it can burst out so easily like it happened with Moses when he struck the rock. It was there all the while.

I think that understanding this event in that manner teaches us what idolatry encompasses and what it is going to end as. Nothing. Absolute nothing. It is truly vanity. That is all that it is. It reaches out, as we learned again, in the sermon on the Tenth Commandment, that two times Paul says that covetousness *is* idolatry. The reasoning is actually very simple. This definition assumes that what the person desires, what the person covets, goes beyond simply wanting something. What they want is not lawful for the person to have.

I went through those things just very quickly the other day, but here is the process. How does the Tenth Commandment form itself, as it were, as a sin into bowing before a statue? Well, here is what happens inside of us. The desire motivates disloyalty to our pledge to keep the New Covenant and evolves into self-centeredness.

Thus covetousness becomes vanity just like a statue that produces nothing good toward the Kingdom of God. Then we are transformed into the god we serve, because we are just serving ourselves. Our unlawful desire for a thing other than God becomes the god we serve. We bow down and submit to it rather than to what God commands. You can apply this process to the Fifth Commandment, the Sixth Commandment, the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth, and you will see that it fits every one of them.

This brings us to the end of another section of the sermon, and once more I have shown you that fearing God is deeply rooted in the Deuteronomy message regarding the keeping of this Feast, and that idolatry is the main message in the book of Deuteronomy regarding the breaking of the commandments.

I have shown you a very revealing example of how quickly idolatry can erupt from human nature's crypt of evil, and how vain it is. I have also shown you some of God's contemptuousness towards it. You see that in the way Moses handled the situation.

We are now going to look at something here that we have not done too often. We are going to look at God's passionate feelings regarding idolatry. We are going to look at His emotional attitudes towards it.

We are going to go to Deuteronomy 4:28. He is prophesying here.

Deuteronomy 4:28 And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell.

This is God's first expression of concern regarding false gods in the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 5:7 'You shall have no other gods before Me.

This is an awkward translation because it gives the impression that other gods are permissible, but the true God must be first in line. But, rather, it should be understood as, "You shall have no other gods besides Me." God will brook absolutely no competition. The strictness of this is for our good, because a mixture of gods to submit to produces confusion, and it nullifies God's purpose of an un-blurred image of Jesus Christ to be created into. In other words, His purpose cannot be fulfilled if we have other gods competing in our mind.

Deuteronomy 6:14-15 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for the LOORD your God is a **jealous** God among you), lest the anger of the LOORD your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.

We are going to focus on this word "jealous." God is jealous.

Deuteronomy 5:9 You shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LOORD your God, am a **jealous** God,

It is right in the Ten Commandments.

Deuteronomy 7:4 For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LOORD will be aroused against you and

destroy you suddenly.

Deuteronomy 11:16-17 Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LOORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LOORD is giving you.

What we have here is a step-by-step process that eventually leads to chapter 12. With the end of chapter 11, God has completed the basic instruction for the Israelites to put into practice when they enter the land. In chapter 12 we enter into the practical application of the things we have just read regarding God's feelings about idolatry. We are going to read chapter 12, verses 1 through 9. Look at these instructions carefully.

Deuteronomy 12:1-9 "These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the LOORD God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the LOORD your God with such things. "But you shall seek the place where the LOORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the LOORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LOORD your God has blessed you. "You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes—for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the LOORD your God is giving you.

What I want you to pull out of that is this: When Israel went into the land they were ordered to destroy every place where the Canaanitish people worshipped. I mean, as we might say today, they were to burn down all the churches and haul all the debris away, scatter it all over the place. Anything that could be burned, they were to burn. In

fact, they were to rub out the names of those places. God did not want them to be influenced in any way toward attempting to worship Him through those same means and those same places the Canaanites worshipped.

There was to be no union of mind, thought, heart, service, or anything. God was to be worshipped only in one place, in one way. Do I make that clear? That was His instruction. There was to be no joining together with anything pagan. That ought to make sense to you.

But what have people done in the United States? They do Christmas, Easter, and Halloween. Need I go on? They joined it to their version of Christianity. That is an abomination in God's eyes. Those things came right from pagan religion. It was not part of God's way at all. So what have we done in the United States? We have created idolatrous worship by combining some biblical truth together with outright paganism. That is not acceptable to God at all.

Now our forefathers did not follow through with what God said, and the first thing you know, they were joining in with the Canaanites in *their* worship, and they were going right into the Canaanite religion.

I do not know whether you noticed it, and I think you already know it, but as I said it earlier, God would only permit Himself to be worshipped at one place in Israel. Not all over the place. *One* place and that eventually turned out to be the city or the village, or whatever it was, of Shiloh. There He commanded them to erect the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was His dwelling place. He lived, as it were, in the Holy of Holies. He was served by the priesthood who was allowed into the building to carry out their responsibilities, but nobody else was allowed in.

When the Israelites went there with the sacrifice they wanted to be made, they went no farther than, if at best, the altar which was outside the building. They were not allowed in it. In other words, God was signaling that these people really did not have any contact with Him. This did not prohibit them from establishing synagogue-type operations in other parts of the land, but they were not allowed to make any sacrifices anywhere except at that one place. That is how strictly God was going to control this. It worked for awhile even though they began combining God's way with the pagan way.

You might wonder why God wanted this to be so strictly observed, besides the fact that it broke the First Commandment. There is a reason for it.

Most nations are formed on the strength of a powerful personality. They receive their

strength and wealth from mineral deposits, good grazing land, good farming land, abundant rains, or whatever. But, brethren, Israel was going to be different from every other nation on the face of the earth. They were going to be formed around God the Creator. They were a nation whose way of life and form of government was dictated by God as their King, as their Ruler. The way of life was their religion. (The Muslims are trying hard to do this. They are a religious nation and are following somewhat after the pattern of Israel. But their religion is really strange. I think you will agree.) But again, that did not work out, because the Israelites would not obey God.

Turn now to Deuteronomy 10, verses 12 through 13. I used these verses in an earlier message. I want to repeat them because they succinctly tell us what God wants from us.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 "And now, Israel, what does the LOORD your God require of you, but to fear the LOORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LOORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LOORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?"

These five responses that He wants from us cover the gamut of our responsibilities, and fulfilling each of them involves a mixture of love and loyalty. But giving love and loyalty does not come easy for us, because human nature is so strongly self-centered. It is right in these issues that keeping our word and being faithful becomes so important. But when coupled with His grace, doing these five things ensures that we will be in His kingdom, created in the image of Jesus Christ.

God gives early indication in His word of His passionate feelings regarding loyalty. We are going to go now to Exodus 34:14.

Exodus 34:14 For you shall worship no other god, for the LOORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God).

Did you know that God's name is "Jealous"?

Deuteronomy 4:24 For the LOORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

Deuteronomy 6:15 For the LOORD your God is a jealous God among you,

Deuteronomy and Idolatry by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

lest the anger of the LORD your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.

You will see this again in Ezekiel 36:6.

Ezekiel 36:6 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and My fury, because you have borne the shame of the nations."

Seven times in the Old Testament God refers to this characteristic of Himself. He is a jealous God; and in several places, He adds to it that He is a "consuming fire." I feel the reason He added that is so that there would be a magnification of the heat of the feeling He has about the relationship we have with Him. He is not going to share us with anybody.

It also appears in the New Testament in Hebrews 12:28-29.

Hebrews 12:28-29 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. **For our God is a consuming fire.**

When this heated, consuming, jealousy characteristic is applied to a man, it is very bad. Why is it very bad? Because human nature cannot control it. It leads to extreme self-centeredness. However, when it is applied to God, it becomes very good because *He* is good. That is His nature. He is good, and He is love personified. His passion is perfectly under control, and therefore it takes on entirely good characteristics that are for our benefit, and that benefit is that we take on an intensity that drives us to be faithful. It is part of fearing Him.

We know He is jealous of the relationship that He has with us, and we know what His feelings are toward us. They are not subtle at all. Man! **He loves us!** That is what He is saying, and He wants us to be loyal and faithful to Him with the same kind of passion and intensity He has for us.

Jealousy describes a passionate intensity to protect or to defend something that is jeopardized, and God's zeal, or jealousy, is to protect His people, His nation, His church, or His honor; and in order to magnify that, the attribute is associated with consuming fire.

You know well that the Old Covenant was a marriage covenant, and you know very well that the New Covenant is a marriage covenant. Now if our feelings are right and balanced, do you really want to share your intended spouse with some competitor? You know you want to marry somebody who will love *you* with the same intensity that you love him, or her.

That is what God is describing, and that is why He will brook no idolatry at all. If He is going to marry us, He wants us to be loyal to *Him*, and that loyalty is not just a legal thing. It is loyalty combined with loving affection. So He is letting us know how He feels about us, that He is jealous to protect us, to defend us. He is jealous because He wants to marry us. He picked us out to be His wife. What could be better than that?

So what does idolatry do? It destroys loyalty. It destroys love, and when love is destroyed, He is letting us know there can be no marriage for those whose hearts are divided between Him and somebody else.

I will end on this verse. Jesus put it this way. We cannot serve two masters. We will love the one and hate the other. Our mind has to be fixed on the One with whom we have made a covenant, and we have made a covenant with Him in return, to love Him and Him only. Anything else is going to fall short and become idolatry. That is Deuteronomy's number one message against sin: Do not let idolatry interfere with the relationship with God.