

# The Seductive Appeal of Ba'al

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I have, what I think is a really fun subject to talk about today. I asked myself a couple of questions.

'What was the big deal with bull worship, with calf worship, with idolatry and especially with Ba'al worship?'

"Why was Israel so attracted to this form of idolatry that they left Yehovah over and over again?"

So, I did quite a bit of research and after doing that research, I did learn—I learned the answer to the question. I now know what the pull was. But that led me to extracting the lessons from that knowledge and that is what I'm going to be talking about today.

Let me start with a little Encyclopedia speak. There was a cult that was called Apis which originated from Egypt. This is from The Encyclopedia Britannica and it says *that this was the first deity from the first dynasty in Egypt*. So, it goes way back. This Apis bull deity is kind of interesting because it was a real live bull. It had priests and a temple, but there were certain things about the Apis bull that I want to share. This was one of the most important and highly regarded bull deities of ancient Egypt.

Worship of the bull is recorded as early as the first dynasty. There were a lot of ceremonies associated with the bull. You have heard of "the running of the bulls", well they had a 'running of the bull'. This bull was originally a fertility god. He represented eternity of self and the harmonious balance of the universe. Apis was depicted throughout Egyptian history as a striding bull, usually with a solar disc between the horns. The Apis bull was always associated with the king and the king's power.

Whenever an Apis bull died, they would go on a search for the perfect bull. It had to be black and white with a triangle on its forehead and had to be a certain kind of bull. When they would find the bull, they would bring it into the temple area where it would go through the rituals of being inaugurated as the official Apis bull. It was quite a deal; it was when all the crowds would come in. This Apis bull would be put in a pen with a number of gates around it and they would put food in all the gates. The people were allowed to ask the bull questions. The bull would then answer the question by which gate he would exit through. So, divination was involved.

If the bull died, then certain parts of the bull were eaten by the priests and the rest of the bull was mummified and buried in an underground area for the Apis bulls. It was treated just like a king and so it would go through mummification. There are a couple things which are interesting about their worship of the bull. They did all this adoration of the bull but they did not think the bull was the god. They thought the spirit of the god

entered the bull. Therefore, while the bull was the Apis bull, they worshipped the bull. But they weren't really worshipping the bull, it was what was in the bull, which is kind of an interesting distinction. If, after twenty-five years the bull didn't die, it was ritually slaughtered. Then they would go through the same process again—mummification and find the new bull.

Another interesting thing is, once the bull was slaughtered, any children he had were also ritually slaughtered and its mother was ritually slaughtered. The next Apis bull could not even come from that particular line. This goes way, way back to the first dynasty in Egypt. The bull's death was not considered a death, it was considered to be a moment of transition of the spirit that was in that bull, and was leaving and getting ready to enter the next bull. So that's a lot of bull.

What does all this bull worship have to do with Ba'al? Ba'al is interesting all in itself, and they are all linked. I'm going to try and share some of the story quickly; as I don't want take up the whole sermon time. These encyclopedia articles are just absolutely fascinating but we are going to move through this quickly.

The word "Ba'al", or in Semitic language, it's just BL. Ba'al is the way you pronounce it. It's Semitic for *owner or master or husband*, it means "the lord". Ba'al is the great weather god of the western Semites. There was a city in northern Syria called Ugarit that was discovered in 1928 and in the Ugarit text a whole lot of information about Ba'al worship was discovered. As well as the name of Ba'al and Hadu, the Ugarit text furnished a variety of other titles such as Mighty Ba'al, the Prince, Lord of the Earth. The latter title has a biblical echo in the corrupted form of Ba'alzebub or in the New Testament it's Baalzebul, so kind of interesting.

Ba'al is considered to be the son of El. Think about that—El is Ba'al's dad. There are a lot of myths about that. Ba'al's abode is on Mount Sapan, identified as Jebel el-Aqra, which means Mount Baldy, some thirty miles north of Ugarit. Ba'al, one of the sons of El became famous and gained power with his victory over the sea god Yam. There was another god that Ba'al tangled with whose name was Mot. This conflict between Ba'al and Mot has quite a story. For a while Mot wins and then for a while Ba'al wins and then Mot wins and Ba'al wins. This has to do with the fact that the god Mot represented famine, drought and death. Ba'al represented rain, fertility and lushness. Whenever they had drought in the land, they considered Mot was responsible and so they needed to support Ba'al, because when Ba'al was in charge they received rain, vegetation and everything growing well.

In Syria they have a lot of rivers, so they have a lot of irrigation. If you remember the story of Naaman the leper who was told to go dip in the Jordan. He looked at the Jordan and basically said that it was a creek compared to Syria where they had real rivers. He was saying,

"If I just needed to dip in a river I could go and use a real river, I wouldn't use this little creek."

That is true, that there are not any big rivers in Israel, so Israel is highly dependent on rain. If it doesn't rain, they have big problems because they don't have any big rivers from which they can irrigate everything. It's very important because that is the pull. When you are a farmer and your crops are not coming in and you have no rain and it's a drought, then people are going to get hungry. You start thinking about how to control this? How do we deal with this? So that's one of the things that we know. We are going to get into some stories in the Bible. But notice that Ba'al brings rain. Whenever you have a drought, the wrong god is in charge and you have to fix that by bringing Ba'al back in. (by the way, El was considered to be a bull too and in mythology Ba'al is said to have mated with a heifer. So you have these gods that all have to do with this bovine stuff).

There was a lot of conflict between Yehovah-ism and Ba'al-ism but it was related to drought—to weather and things that we can really connect with. With that, I want to ask the question:

We know about Ba'al worship, bull worship so what was the big deal with this?

I think that one of the important things to realize is that they didn't think the bull was the god. They also probably didn't think that the statue Ba'al was the god. As a matter of fact, how many images of Buddha have we seen in our lives? The Buddhists don't think that the statue is the god, they think that if they look at the statue and meditate on the right things, then the statue helps them realize what Buddha did. This is what they connect with, but they don't think that the statue is the god.

Look at Catholicism, they don't think that the statues of Mary or Jesus are God, rather they are looking at it as a way of thinking about right things. It reminds them of things, such as the crucifixes of Christ do, which you see in Catholicism. It helps them to get their minds in the right place so they can worship.

The Ka 'bah is this big cube over in Mecca where Muslims are supposed to go on a pilgrimage at least once in their lives. If you see pictures or videos of this you will see crowds of people going around the Ka 'bah. They don't think that the Ka'bah is Allah, they don't even think Allah is in the Ka'bah, but they have mythology associated with it. This is all looked at as idolatry, but in their minds, they are not idol worshippers. In their minds the idols just remind them of where their minds need to be and what they need to be thinking about.

Over in Exodus 20:3, you've got the first and second commandment so let's look at that.

**Exodus 20:1** *And God spoke all these words, saying:*

*2) I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*

*3) You shall have no other gods before Me. [So that's the first commandment.]*

- 4) *You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;*
- 5) *you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,*
- 6) *but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (NKJV)*

I want to point something out here that the second commandment is not an extension of the first commandment.

The first commandment is “You shall have no other God’s before me”.

The second commandment is “Don’t make any carved images”.

But God has already said not have any gods before Him. A lot of translations say, “don’t have any other god except Me” and that is really more accurate. Because if you say, “don’t have any gods *before* Me”, it’s like you line up all the gods and then you put Yehovah in front; that’s not the case. The problem is, the second commandment is actually addressing worshipping Yehovah with other idols and images. We see that in Exodus 32, this is right after Pentecost when they made the golden calf.

- Exodus 32:1** *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.”*
- 2) *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.”*
- 3) *So, all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron.*
- 4) *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!”*
- 5) *So, when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.”*
- 6) *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. [Which means they were doing stuff they should not have been doing.] (NKJV)*

But notice they called the golden calf Yehovah. They attributed the acts of Yehovah to the golden calf. Keep that in mind as we go through this. Idolatry goes way, way back—before Moses, before the Ten Commandments. We can read about that in Genesis 31. You have Jacob who had to flee from his brother. He had served Laban for fourteen years and now he is in the process of getting out of that situation.

**Genesis 31:19** *Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father s. (NKJV)*

They are up in Syria at the time—that's where Abraham was from.

*20) And Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee.*

*21) So, he fled with all that he had. He arose and crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead. (NKJV)*

They had idols, right? Go to Genesis 30:27.

**Genesis 30:27** *And Laban said to him, Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the LORD has blessed me for your sake.”*

*28) Then he said, Name me your wages, and I will give it.” (NKJV)*

The reason I want to bring this up is that in some translations, instead of “experience” it says, “I have learned by *divination* that Yehovah has blessed me for your sake.” Then he said, “name your wages and I'll give it”. They were involved in idolatry. (One of the translations I have that has the word “divination” is the JSP—[The Jewish Publication Society](#).) As they flee, Jacob is going back home to where Isaac is, so look at Genesis 35:2, just to continue the story.

**Genesis 35:2** *And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments.*

*3) Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.”*

*4) So, they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem. (NKJV)*

Just think, this is the second time we have had earrings mentioned. I was wondering—kind of connecting that—to whenever in Israel if someone became a voluntary slave, they had their ear pierced and the earring showed who they belonged to. I just wonder if these earrings, which are associated with idolatry didn't link to who these people saw as their god. That is pure speculation but I thought it was interesting.

On the way back to Israel, Jacob has his little motley crew and he's going to get rid of all the idols and everything associated with idolatry before he gets to where his parents are and before he gets passed the point of Bethel. Another question to ask,

“Was Israel ever involved in something that could be viewed as idolatry by the pagans? How did the pagans view Israel and their religious practices?”

One of the things I want to point out is in 2 Samuel 6:2. I was really surprised when I learned this.

**2 Samuel 6:2** *And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name, the LORD of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. (NKJV)*

It was called Yehovah Sabaoth; that's a lot clearer when you look at some other translations, especially Jewish translations. That was the name of the ark. You remember the story when God had cursed Israel with the snakes coming into the camp and then Yehovah had told Moses to make a bronze serpent. He made it and anybody who looked at the bronze serpent would then be cured of the snake bites. That stayed there for a long time. During the time of Hezekiah Israel was worshiping the bronze serpent. They were burning incense to it just like they would to any other idol. It had just become like any other idol. So, Hezekiah had that relic destroyed. An interesting question to ask is,

“What would you do if you could predict the future? If you had the ability to predict the future?”

A friend and I were talking about the movie, Back to The Future. In the second episode where Biff had found a sport's magazine that showed the outcome of all the games. He then knew what to bet on and what was going to happen. Remember Israel had, as part of the priestly garb, the Urim and the Thummim with which they could ask questions. Should we go to battle? Should we not go to battle? Are we going to win? Are we not going to win? It was divination. It was connected to Yehovah and He had put it in place. But think, to the outside pagan world, it didn't look any different to what they were doing. They just had different gods that they used these relics of divination for.

When the Urim and Thummim were important—you remember the story where Saul is facing the Philistines and he is camped at Gilboa and Saul seized the army of the Philistines and he is afraid. His heart is troubled and then it says that when Saul inquired of Yehovah, He did not answer him by dreams or by Urim or by prophets. So, divination was a part of how kings knew what to do and when to do it.

I had an interesting experience about a month ago. I belong to a group of business people who are from all over the world and we get together and talk about our businesses. I was surprised to see a young Chinese man there and he was asked “what's your business?” He said it was Chinese divination. He said, Chinese divination goes all the way back to the Emperors of China. They have always used Chinese divination. He had studied under a master. This guy has a lot of this stuff computerized but that now he understands by looking at the stars and looking at your birthday and certain things, and he can tell the future with about 75% accuracy. I can demonstrate this to business people if they need to know whether they should buy stock or buy this; I'm an advisor to corporations. That's what he does—this is a real business with a real guy. If this guy had shown up at a business meeting or had had black mascara on his

face or had looked weird and bizarre, you would think, Danger! Danger! But he's a sharp, clean cut, young man who just learned how to do Chinese divination. It's been around for 4,000 years from his standpoint and it's just a science just like any other science.

Another person, not in this same group, was talking about how they had been to a horoscope seminar and they were really fascinated with that and that they were going to go to a horoscope school and learn how to predict the future. This is real stuff—this is today, 2021. This isn't 2000-3000 years ago. People want to know the future and they are willing to do some pretty crazy stuff.

If you talk to the Chinese divination guy who claims he is 75% accurate—he doesn't claim 100% accuracy—that's enough to make a killing in the stock market. If you talk to him and he gives you an answer and says, you do this and you're really going to prosper. You have to look out for this thing called the placebo effect. We know this placebo effect of just thinking something is going to work. You could take a sugar pill and think it is medicine that's going to make you well and you get well anyway. This is a scientific, documented fact. It's easy to see how people can get sucked into this. "I got my horoscope and it said I was going to meet somebody and I met somebody". People want to know the future?

I can see the pull for that. Especially if your crops are all drying up and you need rain really, really badly and you're really looking for answers. Everything you have done is not working. Then somebody says,

"Do you remember the rain god? The people who lived here before us, they had rain like crazy. The land was flowing with milk and honey and all this good stuff. Maybe we have ignored the source of all that blessing."

So, you can see how Israel could get sucked into that.

In 1 Kings 12:26 is the story of Jeroboam. He created a couple of calves, if you remember.

**1 Kings 12:26** *And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now the kingdom may return to the house of David:*

*27) If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem ... (NKJV)*

God had talked to Jeroboam and told him He was going to give him the kingdom but now Jeroboam is afraid he was going to lose it.

*27 continued) ... then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah." (NKJV)*

Jeroboam's fears were bigger than the experience of what he had heard from Yehovah.

*28) Therefore, the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!"*

*29) And he set up one in Bethel [interesting place, remember that when Jacob was coming back], and the other he put in Dan.*

*30) Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan.*

*31) He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.*

*32) Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So, he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made.*

*33) So, he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense. (NKJV)*

We are going to get back to talking about following the leader, but you have to ask, why did the people follow Jeroboam? Why did they do that? Look at 1 Kings 17:1, this is the big show down between Yehovah and Ba'al.

**1 Kings 17:1** *And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."*

*2) Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,*

*3) Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.*

*4) And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."*

*5) And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."*

*6) The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook.*

*7) And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. (NKJV)*

If you read the rest of chapter 17, there were a lot of miracles. He goes and stays with a woman and God miraculously takes care of them. It's a fun read because there are a lot of stories imbedded in that. Go to 1 Kings 18, the next chapter.

**1 Kings 18:1** *And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth."*



2) *So, Elijah went to present himself to Ahab; and there was a severe famine in Samaria. (NKJV)*

It hadn't rained for a long time.

3) *And Ahab had called Obadiah, who was in charge of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly.*

4) *For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water.) (NKJV)*

The story is that Elijah is told to go talk to Ahab. So, Elijah suddenly appears to Obadiah and says,

“Obadiah go tell Ahab that I want to talk to him. I have been sent to Ahab so tell him to come here.”

Obadiah says, “Are you kidding me? If I go and tell Ahab that you're here, when I come back and you're not here, I'm toast—I'm dead meat. Do you hate me? Why are you doing this to me?”

Elijah assures him that he's on a mission from Yehovah and wants to talk to Ahab. So, Obadiah went and got Ahab and told him and Ahab went to Elijah—verse 16,

and now in verse 17.

17) *Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, Is that you, O troubler of Israel?” (NKJV)*

I never really connected that before doing this study—that “oh troubler of Israel”. “You're the guy who said it's not going to rain, you're the guy who says we aren't going to have any dew and this is all your fault.”

18) *And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals. (NKJV)*

Now he's going to tell him they are going to have a showdown.

“You think that Ba'al is the one that gives you water; I'm telling you it is Yehovah Who gives you water”. So, they are going to have this showdown. As I go through here, Elijah speaks—verse 22.

22) *Then Elijah said to the people, I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal s prophets are four hundred and fifty men.*

23) *Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it.*

24) *Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” So, all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.”*

25) *Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it.” (NKJV)*

So, they followed; they are going to have the contest. In verse 27, you see they have been calling on the name Ba'al and Elijah starts to mock them.

27) *And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy [the Jewish commentary thinks that means maybe he is going to the bathroom], or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.” (NKJV)*

Elijah is mocking them.

28) *So, they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. (NKJV)*

You think about this, people are not going to be doing this if they are not true believers in Ba'al. They truly think that if they bleed enough and endure enough pain, it will get results.

29) *And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention. (NKJV)*

Then Elijah comes in.

30) *Then Elijah said to all the people, Come near to me.” So, all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down. (NKJV)*

They put the wood on the altar, they poured water over the wood over and over, I think three times and they fill up the pit. Verse 34, they do it second time.

34) *Then he said, Do it a second time,” and they did it a second time; and he said, Do it a third time,” and they did it a third time. (NKJV)*

So that the water ran all around the altar.

36) *And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.*

37) *Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.”*

38) *Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.*

39) *Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!”*

40) *And Elijah said to them, Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!” So, they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there.*

41) *Then Elijah said to Ahab, Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain.”*

42) *So, Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees ... (NKJV)*

This is where he had his servant go back and check—"do you see a cloud yet?" No. Keep praying. "Do you see a cloud yet?" and so forth.

44) *Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!” So he said, Go up, say to Ahab, Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you. (NKJV)*

Remember, it hadn't rained in three years.

45) *Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So, Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. (NKJV)*

Yehovah demonstrated that He is the One Who brings the rain. It is not Ba'al. What are the lessons that we can learn from this? I came up with several. I'm not going to tell you how many because I'm not sure what I can fit in.

The first lesson that I pulled from this:

**The people we allow into our lives have a profound effect on our thinking.**

The people that we associate with. Their beliefs—what they believe to be true—have a lot to do with what we think. We have a need for social interaction. One of the commands in Deuteronomy 7:1.

**Deuteronomy 7:1** *When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you,*  
 2) *and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.*  
 3) *Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son.*  
 4) *For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so, the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.*  
 5) *But thus, you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.*  
 6) *For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. (NKJV)*

That sounds harsh; that is harsh. But the principle is a little leaven leavens the whole lump; just a little bit. If they leave any of that, what are the effects? They are going to be profound. Turn over to 1 Kings 11:1.

**1 Kings 11:1** *But King Solomon [King Solomon was a smart guy, he prayed for wisdom, he talked to Yehovah a few times, Yehovah appeared to him] loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—*  
 2) *from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love.*  
 3) *And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. (NKJV)*

This was the wisest guy who had ever lived.

4) *For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.*  
 5) *For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.*  
 6) *Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David.*  
 7) *Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon.*  
 8) *And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.*

9) *So, the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice ... (NKJV)*

Think about that. Did Solomon think this through? Or did he think...

“I can handle it; they won't affect me. I can handle it. I'm Solomon, the wisest guy in the world.”

In Ezra 10 Israel had gone into captivity and then they had come back, built a second temple or may have been in the process. In Ezra 10:1.

**Ezra 10:1** *Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly.*

2) *And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this.*

3) *Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. (NKJV)*

That's harsh; you're going to put away your foreign wives and children. That was harsh. Why was that necessary? Because they had sinned. If they hadn't put them away, they would have been right back into the idolatry that forced them to go into captivity in the first place. Therefore, they had to take extreme, uncomfortable, difficult, painful measures to set things right. In Proverbs 1, there is a warning if we look.

**Proverbs 1:11** *If they say, Come with us, let us lie in wait to shed blood; Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause;*

12) *Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, and whole, like those who go down to the Pit;*

13) *We shall find all kinds of precious possessions; we shall fill our houses with spoil;*

14) *Cast in your lot among us, let us all have one purse”—*

15) *My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path;*

16) *For their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.*

17) *Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird;*

18) *But they lie in wait for their own blood, they lurk secretly for their own lives.*

19) *So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners. (NKJV)*

Who we choose to hang out with is important. If we think we can hang around with people with poor character and it won't affect us, we are just deluding ourselves.

The second point is:

**What goes into our brain will have a lot to do with what comes out.**

Our input controls our output. You put garbage in, what comes out is garbage. There's also a warning about TV, about movies—what are we putting into our brain. If we think we can expose ourselves to the ways of the world, so to speak, over and over again and not be affected, then we are playing with fire; we are playing a very dangerous game. It affects us more than we know and in ways we cannot comprehend. God gives us His way. Remember Deuteronomy 30:19, a very familiar scripture.

**Deuteronomy 30:19** *I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; 20) that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.*” (NKJV)

God sets it before us, we just have to choose. We have to choose carefully. You have life, then you have death and then you have all this stuff in-between that influences us and we have to be careful.

Where do false beliefs come from? Unfortunately, we are dealing with a Bible that has been rewritten a lot of times and it's gone from this language to this language to this language, so we are dealing with translation errors. We are looking at dozens of manuscripts that, 98 to 99% of the time they agree but in certain areas they don't agree. They are all ancient manuscripts. We have some translation challenges but compared to what is plain and simple and easy to understand, those challenges are miniscule. If we understand history, which we have clearly documented and we are reading God's Word in context. With all of the internet which gives us access to tools to check original languages and check with multiple sources, Bible study is so easy now compared to what it was in the 1970's. Then everything had to be books all over the table. So, we are without excuse.

1 Corinthians 10:1, we can think these stories don't really apply to us today but I tell you, they do apply today and we need to think about them today and we need to ask what can I learn from this? We need to dig because these things are important.

**1 Corinthians 10:1** *Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2) all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3) all ate the same spiritual food, 4) and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*

- 5) *But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.*
- 6) *Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.*
- 7) *And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*
- 8) *Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;*
- 9) *nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;*
- 10) *nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.*
- 11) *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*
- 12) *Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (NKJV)*

When we read over the scriptures quickly, we cannot give them the respect that they deserve. Have we really proven all things? We know....

“Prove all things and hold fast to that which is good”.

But have we proven all things for ourselves? Or are we kind of taking people’s word for a lot of the things we believe.

There’s a concept in psychology which is called ‘lock on, lock out’. It’s an interesting concept because what it means is, when we lock on to a certain belief, then our minds more than anything else, want us to be right. So, our minds will filter information so we build scotomas or blind spots to anything that doesn’t match what we believe to be true. Then our mind wants us to be right more than it wants us to be happy, successful or anything—the carnal mind wants to be right. Then it starts gathering piles of evidence to support what our position is, so that we are not on a search for the truth, we are on a search for evidence that we are right. We are all like that, but, if we recognize that, then we can dig a little deeper and we can prove it 100%. We can, instead of listening to the “authority”, we can listen to God’s Word. Instead of listening to our friends, we can check it out, dig deep and make sure that we have a good reason to believe what we believe. That we have an answer for the hope that lies within us.

I’ve been in the COG’s for quite a few decades and the COG’s had a set of teachings that was warm and it was comfortable. It was good to be in a group of people who were right when the whole world was wrong. We were just right there—we had the truth. But we had to learn something. We have to keep reading. We have to quit reading for conformation that what we have believed is right, because over the past several years we have discovered a lot of big issues where we didn’t have it nailed down. It may have been comfortable but it wasn’t right. When one of those false beliefs fell, then it started a kind of like a domino effect where this one hit the next one and hit the next one; it’s interesting.

The next thing I wasn't to talk about is the third lesson.

### **God does not tempt us, but He does test us.**

That's an important distinction. James 1:13.

**James 1:13** *Let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*

*14) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.*

*15) Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (NKJV)*

Is there a difference between tempting and testing? Genesis 22:1.

**Genesis 22:1** *Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, Abraham!" And he said, Here I am."*

*2) Then He said, Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (NKJV)*

Then you skip down to verse 11, we know the story here.

*11) But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham!" So, he said, Here I am."*

*12) And He said, Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now, I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (NKJV)*

I want to point out an interesting thing here. In Hebrew, there is no third person. I don't speak Hebrew fluently; I only know a few words but I understand there is no third person. So, if a messenger comes from Yehovah, that messenger is going to speak in the first person. Even though he's just a messenger, he's going to speak in the first person. This then kind of straightens out this dialogue and some of the misunderstandings we had where we thought that Christ was the God of the Old Testament at one time. Go to Matthew 4:1.

**Matthew 4:1** *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

*2) And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry.*

*3) Now when the tempter came to Him, he said ... (NKJV)*

Then you have the tempting. What's interesting about this is if you look at the Hebrew of Matthew, the Hebrew word for "tempted" it's the same word used for "tested" for



Abraham. So, Christ went into the desert to be “tested” by the “tester”. Kind of an interesting thing.

Let’s go to Deuteronomy 13, talking about testing. Verses 1 through 5.

**Deuteronomy 13:1** *If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder,*  
*2) and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known— ‘and let us serve them,*  
*3) you shall not listen to the words of that prophet [this is one who has a dream and the dream actually comes true] or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you [it’s a test] to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*  
*4) You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.*  
(NKJV)

The question is, will we be faithful? Will we be faithful when it doesn’t rain or will we turn to the rain god? The book of Hosea is all about spiritual adultery. We don’t have time to read from there, but if you think about a newlywed couple, who go to some event and the husband is talking to some people and sees someone flirting with his wife. Then he wants to know, is she liking that or not liking that? That’s kind of how Yehovah has looked at flirting with these foreign gods. Are we going to be faithful to Him, just reject it and have nothing to do with it? Kill anybody that has anything to do with that? Or are we going to say that sounds interesting, tell me more. Are we flirting with that?

Lesson number four is:

### **Why do we believe what we do?**

Are we believing it because it’s our idea, because we read it in the Word, or do we believe it because of group think? Or because of what people around us are thinking. This is a really interesting subject because there was an experiment that was done in a college where they had a professor and there were three lines up on the board. They were all different lengths. It was a set up; some of the students in the classroom were part of the test. The question was, which line was the longest? It was clear which line was actually the longest, but then the professor went through and found out what everybody thought and the students who were cooperating with the experiment said the wrong line. They said the middle line was the longest line. Then, after they got the tally, there was only a tiny group who were not part of the test. They were looking at the board and the whole class said that the middle one was the longest. So, you have all this confusion. They started talking about it and asked, “why do you think that is the longest?” “Have you had your eyes checked?” “It’s clear to us.” They would talk about it more and more and then said “let’s take another poll”. When they would go through again to see which line was longest, the people that were not part of the test—the ones

being tested—they now all said that the middle line was the longest line. Even though they knew, the ‘group think’ affected them. Each thought there was something wrong with themselves.

I can definitely sympathize with that because when I first came into the church and started studying the Bible, I wasn’t familiar with the Word so there were a lot of things that were confusing. One of the things that was confusing was when I would read what the Bible said but then hear what was being said from the pulpit and it didn’t match. What I thought was, something is wrong with me; I don’t understand it, I’m defective. If he says it’s right, he knows. What do I know? I’m just starting. So, I would question my judgment when actually, the Bible was clear. I just didn’t have enough faith in Yehovah to just read it and believe it and reject what clearly didn’t match. I totally related to that experiment.

We need to be part of a group—that’s a part of our make-up. We want to belong. When we talked earlier in 1 Kings 18 about the story of Elijah facing the prophets of Ba’al. Even after that, if you go over to chapter 19, you have Jezebel who threatened to retaliate. She said, “I’m going to kill Elijah, all my prophets, I’m not happy about that, I’m going to kill Elijah.” So, Elijah runs and hides, but he is also seriously depressed because he is talking to Yehovah and says, I’m the only one, I’m all by myself; I’m the only one who will stand up. He’s praying to God to just kill him. This is too miserable, too painful. So Yehovah was very gentle with him and sent a messenger—an angel—who tapped him on the shoulder, gave him some food and did that a couple of times. Then he told him to go on and eat because he had a mission for him. Then he sent him on the mission and he had to anoint three different people. It’s hard to be alone and to be isolated and feel like you are the only one. It is very, very difficult.

Another thing I want to ask is, “Are we following the leader?” We’ve talked a little about this. But if you look at the kings of Israel as a whole overview, you see a good king is doing things right, Temple services are going right, the nation is blessed and the people are fine. But as soon as a bad king comes in and he brings in Ba’al worship and Asher worship, the people just follow the leader. Where does that come from and what would we do if we were in that situation? My parents had sort of a ranch, about 100 horses. In dealing with horses, stallions and fillies are totally different. Stallions can run those filly’s to death. They don’t move until that stallion says they can move. He herds them all together and controls them. But there is safety in that because that same stallion will face down a cougar, a pack of coyotes, he will protect the herd. Its nature telling us, that if you are in tune with the leader, the leader is going to protect you. We have to ask ourselves, have we proven all things and are we believing what we believe because Yehovah has told us what to believe. Or are we believing what we believe because it’s comfortable, it feels good, it’s warm and fuzzy. We are in a dangerous situation there.

In Ezekiel 34, you have this blast against the shepherds of Israel on how they misused and abused the people of Israel—the flock. Why did the people continue to follow them? Because it was more comfortable being part of the herd than it was not to be.

Lesson Number five is:

### **Don't hedge your bets.**

Go to James 1:2; the craziest scripture I have ever heard in my life.

**James 1:2** *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. 5) If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6) But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7) For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (NKJV)*

We were talking earlier that when the land is parched are you going to have faith in God? Are you going to pass that test? Are you going to worship Yehovah? Are you going to do everything or hedge your bets? Let's just do a little bit of Ba'al. Let's keep Yehovah but just a little bit of Ba'al so we have everything covered. That is synchronism and there are a lot of stories I could tell in the Word about the dangers of synchronism. God is jealous and doesn't want to share the stage with anybody. So, adding Ba'al to "hedge your bet" is not a thing to do. It's like Elijah said,

"If Yehovah is God, worship Him. If Ba'al is god, worship him."

Don't do both.

So, wrapping this up, James 4:17—a memory scripture.

**James 4:17** *Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. (NKJV)*

Brethren, as you read God's Word and as you understand more and more, not everyone will agree with you. Not everyone learns everything at the same time, so we have to be patient with each other. John 16:12, let's remember this.

**John 16:12** *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13) However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14) He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. 15) All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore, I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you. (NKJV)*

It is the Holy Spirit that leads us into all truth. So, we need to be mindful of that. Matthew 5:14.

**Matthew 5:14** *You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.*

*15) Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.*

*16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (NKJV)*

We are to be the light. We are not to fall for the counterfeits. How do you know if something is counterfeit or whether it's the real deal? We have to be very familiar, even intimate, with the original. Our eternal life depends on our ability to recognize and surrender to the truth. That is all dependent on how well we know Yehovah's Word. All I can say is, keep reading.