

Exposition of 2 Kings 17:15-16

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<1r>

in the mean time I have sent you a vicegerent which I hope you will accept of to hang up in your closet for a remembrance of me

<2r>

2 Kings 17.15, 16.

They followed vanity & became vain & went after the heathen that were round about them concerning whom the Lord had said that they should not do like them. And they left all the commandements of the Lord their God & made them molten images even two calves & made a grove & worshipped all the host of heaven & served Baal.

Having had formerly occasion to discourse of these words I told you how the designe of the place was to describe the captivity of the ten tribes by the Assyrians & the abominations for which they were captivated & the religion of the nations which the assyrians placed in Samaria in the seats of the captivated Israelites: which religion was that these nations joyned together the worship of the true God in the Calves of Iereboam & the worship of the fals Gods of the Gentiles round about in their several Idols even as the Israelites had joyned them before. ffor the better understanding the tenour & force of the place I laid down these six particulars. 1st That the Israelites acknowledged & worshipped the true God at the same time that they worshipped the Gods of the Gentiles. 2 That they & the nations which succeeded them in the Cities of Lanaria worshipped the true God in the calves of Ieroboam 3 That this worship was Idolatry notwithstanding that it was performed to the true God: & by parity of reason that the worship of the true God by any Image which he has not commanded, (as indeed he has commanded none) is Idolatry. 4 That generally the Israelites & Gentiles worshipped not mere Images as Gods themselves but only as dedicated to their several Gods. 5 That the ancient Idolaters, as many of them as acknowledged the true God, did not esteem any of their other Gods equal to him but accounted them only finite beings & for the most part the souls of men deceased, who for the eminent passage of their life here they supposed were after death rewarded with power more or less over this world, to do good or hurt therein subordinately not only to the supreme God but even to some others of their imagined Gods. Lastly <3r> that the glory of the true God which Idolaters gave unto their Idols, was not any of his attributes as some are ready to suppose, but only this: To love, to fear, to trust in, & to seek unto those Gods for the temporal blessings of this life, for which the true God has appointed us to love fear trust in & seek unto none but himself immediately. And consequently to do any of these things in a religious way to any other then the true god, is so far to depart from him & give his glory to another: the great crime of which Idolaters stand accused.

ffor evincing the first of these particulars * < insertion from f 2v > * that the Israelites acknowledged & worshipped the true God at the same time that they worshipped the Gods of the Gentiles. < text from f 3r resumes > I produced several places of scripture which I shall not repeat: only the last of them I named, I shall remind you of that I may explain it a little further. It was in Ier 44.25, 26 where a hand of Iews which in the time of Nebuchadnezzars captivity fled into Ægypt, vowed in the name of the Lord to worship the Queen of heaven. The words run thus. Hear the word of the lord all Iudah that are in the Land of Egypt: Thus saith the Lord of hosts the God of Israel, saying Ye & your wives have both spoken with your mouth & fulfilled

with your hands, saying, We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed to burn incense to the Queen of heaven & to pour out drink offerings unto her: Ye will surely accomplish your vows & surely perform your vows. Therefore hear ye the word of the Lord all Iudah that dwell in the Land of Egypt, Behold I have sworn by my great name saith the Lord that my name shall be no more named in the mouth of any man of Iudah in all the Land of Egypt saying; The Lord God liveth. In the 42th Chapter the remnant of the people which scaped the hands of the king of Babylon, & remained in the land after the captivity & burning of Ierusalem, came to Ieremiah & said to him: Let, we beseech thee our supplication be accepted before the & pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant, that the Lord thy God may shew us the way wherein <4r> we may walk & the thing that we may do. After a few days Ieremiah returned them answer from the Lord that if they went into Egypt, as they designed, they should surely be cut off there by the armies of the king of Babylon, but if they stayd in their own land it should be well with them. But this answer being contrary to their inclination, they replied to Ieremiah, Thou speakest falsly, The Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there. Here you see the people acknowledged the true God, the God of Ieremiah whom they called their own God, & made their applications to him to know whether they should go into Egypt or stay in their Land. And when they received answer that they should stay they did not thereupon reject their God, & say we will not obey him but only blamed the Prophet as if he had feigned unto them, & not spoken to them from the Lord. Vpon this therefore they went into Egypt, & what they did there you have described in the 44th Chapter, the 7th & following verses, where Ieremiah is sent to reprove them for their Idolatry, with this message. Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls to cut off from you man & woman child & suckling out of Iudah to leave you none to remain: In that ye provoke me to wrath with the works of your hands burning incense unto other Gods in the land of Egypt, whether ye be gone to dwell. – Have ye forgotten the wickedness of your fathers & the wickedness of the kings of Iudah & the wickedness of their wives, & your own wickedness & the wickedness of your wives which they have committed in the land of Iudah & in the streets of Ierusalem? They are not humbled even unto this day Neither have they feared nor walked in my law nor in my statutes that I set before you & before your fathers. Therefore thus saith the lord of hosts the God of {Israel} <5r> Behold I will set my face against you for evil, even to cut of all Iudah. These men you see then were Idolaters in their own land before the captivity & in Egypt after it. In the midst of their abominations it was that they came to Ieremiah to enquire of the Lord, & now when Ieremiah was sent to em to denounce Gods judgments on 'em for their doings & exhort them to repentance & they replied that they would not hearken to him but keep to that worship which they & their fathers had used before in Ierusalem, the Prophet answers: Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, saying ye & your wives have both spoken with your mouth & fulfilled with your hands saying: We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed to burn incense to the Queen of heaven & to pour out drink offerings unto her. Ye will surely accomplish your vows & surely perform your vows Therefore heare ye the word of the Lord all ye that dwell in the Land of Egypt: Behold I have sworn by my great name saith the Lord that my name shall be no more named in the mouth of any man of Iudah in all the land of Egypt saying the Lord God liveth Hitherto then notwithstanding their Idolatry, the name of the Lord continued among them, & because they vowed by it to worship the Queen of heaven & upon Ieremiahs reproving them replied that they would perform their vows therefore God threatens that his name should be no more named among them to say, the Lord God liveth. You are to know that this saying the Lord God liveth was their usual way of invoking God when they would solemnly sweare by him. An evident instance of this you have in Ier. 38.16, where Zedekiah the king of Iudah demanding the word of the Lord of Ieremiah, & Ieremiah fearing least the King should put him to death for telling it him it is said that the king sware secretly to Ieremiah saying <6r> As the Lord liveth that made this soule, I will not put thee to death. So; (as I told you formerly,) the Israelites when they went to worship the Calves at Bethel & Gilgal used to swear after this manner, & therefore in Hosea 4.15 God commands that Iudah do not imitate Israel in this point: Though Israel, saith he, play the harlot, yet let not Iudah offend, & come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Bethaven, nor swear, The Lord liveth. This then was their solemn way of swearing, & as the ten Tribes used it in their religion toward the calves so the Iews in Egypt used it in their religion towards their Idols ffor had not their vows to worship the Queen of heaven been done in the name of the Lord it would have been incoherent to say, Because ye have vowed to worship the Queen of heaven & say ye will perform your vows therefore my name shall be no more named among you, saying, the Lord liveth. Tis certain therefore that these vows were done in Gods name & consequently that in the midst of their Idolatry they retained a religion toward the true God & thought the worshipping other Gods well pleasing to him: yea that they retained a more especial regard to the true God then to any other & performed their worship to others, with reverence to him. ffor why els did they not in the worshipping the Queen of heaven vow by her name rather then by the

name of the Lord? Why did they plead their vow in such a manner as if they should be wanting in their duty to the true God if they did not according to their vow worship the Queen of heaven? But how ever it be, this I have plainly shewed that these Idolaters both before they went into Egypt & when they were there retained a religion towards the true God, & if you further consider the way by which <7r> God threatened to put an end to their vowing by his name you may perceive they continued it till, for their Idolatry, they were destroyed. Because, says God, ye have vowed to worship the Queen of heaven & say ye will perform your vows therefore my name shall be no more named in the mouth of any man of Iudah in all the land of Egypt saying the Lord God liveth: – for all the men of Iudah that are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword & by the famine untill there be an end of them. This was the means by which God foretold them he would put an end to their swearing by his name & consequently they retained a religion to the true God & false Gods together all the while they lived in Egypt.

Having thus at large given you the import of this place I shall now pass on to another. In Ezek 14. in the former part of the Chapter you have the Elders of Israel in the midst of their Idolatries committed before the captivity coming to enquire of the true God & God rejects them because of their Idols. The place runs thus. Then came certain of the Elders of Israel unto me & sat before me. And the word of the Lord came unto me saying Son of man these men have set up their Idols in their heart, & put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them & say unto y^m Thus saith the Lord God, Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his Idols in his heart & putteth the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face & cometh to the Prophet, I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his Idols. That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart because they are all estranged from me through{h} <8r> their Idols. This place seems so evident as to need no explaining. But yet because there may be some scruple about their setting up Idols in their heart as if that expression might imply that they were not Idolaters in their external acts of worship but only in their heart, I shall hereafter say something to clear that expression & then add an observation or two upon the place together with some other passages of scripture to the same purpose: by which I hope to make it appear that the Jews & Israelites scarce ever so followed other Gods as to forsake their own unless perhaps in the reign of Ahab when Jezebel a foreign woman endeavoured to extirpate the religion of the Israelites & bring in that of her own Country.
