

Exposition of 2 Kings 17:15-16

Author: Isaac Newton

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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 commandments of the Lord their God, & made them molten images even two Calves, & made a grove & worshipped all the host of Heaven & served Baal.

This whole Chapter is spent in describing the captivity of the ten Tribes by the Assyrians; the abominations of the Israelites 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 your worship of the true God in the Calves of Ieroboam, & the worship of the fals Gods of Gentiles round about in their several Idols, even as the Israelites had joyned them before. But the words I have chosen to discourse on are a part of the description of the abomination of the Israelites which these nations imitated. complaining how they followed vainly & became vain by forsaking the commandments of the Lord to make molten images even two Calves, & worshipping all the host of Heaven & serving Baal. & going after the heathen that were round about them. Now this comprehending both the worship of Ieroboams Calves dedicated (as I shall shew) to the trew God, & also the worship of other Idols dedicated to the Gods of the Nations round about: we have here an opportunity to consider Idolatry in its full latitude & to discourse of its nature in general : ffor which end I shall in the first place propound the six following particulars.

ffirst that the Israelites acknowledged & worshipped the true God at the same time that they worshipped the Gods of the Gentiles. Secondly that they & the nations which succeeded them in the cities of Samaria worshipped the true God <2r> in the calves of Ieroboam. Thirdly 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. ffourthly that generally the Israelites & Gentiles worshipped not mere Images as Gods themselves but only as dedicated to their severall gods. ffiftly that those Idolaters who 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 soules 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 subordinatly not only to the supreme God but even to some others of their imagined Gods. Lastly 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, fear, trust in, & 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. To celebrate God for his eternity immensity omniscieny & omnipotency is indeed very pious & the duty of every creature to do it according to capacity, but yet this part of Gods glory, as it — — — almost transcends the comprehension of man so it springs not from the freedom of Gods will but from the necessity of his nature. And as the wisest of men delight not so much to be commended for their height of birth strength of body, bewty, strong memory, large fantasy, or other such gifts of nature as for their wise good & great actions the issues of their will so the wisest of beings requires of us to be celebrated not so much for his essence as for his actions, the creating preserving & governing all things according to his good will & pleasure. The wisdome power goodness & justice which he always exerts in his actions are his glory which he stands so much upon, & is so jea <3r> lous of. These are that glory which the

Prophets & Apostles from one end of the scriptures unto the other & especially the Psalmist so much celebrate, the only glory by which God manifests himself to his creatures, & which his Creatures are able to behold in him, the reason why his creatures worship him, & the life & soule of all the worship we can give him: & therefore no wonder he is so extreemly jealous of his honour in this point even to the least tittle. As for his attributes he knows those can scarce be given to any other, because so soon as men do ascribe any of his attributes to any thing they worship, they doe thereby mean the supreme God; though perhaps in other respects they may have a deformed notion of him, as indeed the best notions any of us have of him are imperfect enough: but for his works, many of those may & have been & still are too frequently ascribed to his creatures, the deified Heroes with their Idols among the Gentiles, & the saints with their reliques & images among too many Christians. And therefore they that think the Idolatry of the Heathens to consist in giving any other part of God's honour & glory than that of his works to their Idols are mistaken, & they that begin to give any of this his glory to angels or saints, or to their images or the reliques of martyrs or the like, begin to give God's glory to another to whom it belongs not after the same manner that the Idolatrous Israelites & those Gentiles did who worshipped the true God & fals Gods together.

These are the six heads I intend to discourse of, & When I have run through them I intend for a conclusion to lay down out of scripture the notion of a fals God, of an Idol, & of Idolatry: To do which is my chief designe because men are so much wanting in this notion that they scarce know what to apply Idolatry to besides those particular cases of the Heathens to which the Prophets themselves applyed it. But before I do this I have thought it not amiss to premise the six preceding particulars: which I do, not as if I intended them for necessary foundations of <4r> what I chiefly aim at but only as convenient to prepare the way.

The first was that the Israelites worshipped the true God together with the Gods of the Gentiles. Now this is very plain by the history of this chapter: for so soon as the Israelites were carried away captive, & the other nations placed in their stead in the cities of Samaria, it's said that at the beginning of their dwelling there they feared not the Lord & therefore the Lord sent Lyons among them which slew some of them. Wherefore they spake to the King of Assyria saying The nations which thou hast removed & placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the Land: therefore he hath sent Lyons among them & behold they slay them because they know not the manner of the God of the Land. Then the king of Assyria commanded saying carry thither one of the Priests whome ye brought from thence, & let them go & dwell there & let him teach them the manner of the God of the Land. Then one of the Priests whome they had carried away from Samaria came & dwelt in Bethel & taught them how they should feare the Lord. Howbeit every nation made Gods of their own — — — So they feared the Lord & served their own Gods after the manner of the nations whome they carried away from thence. [Now the Lord which these nations were here taught to fear was most plainly the true God: first because the name by which he is called in the hebrew is Iehovah a name given to none but the true God: ffor in vers 28 it is said that one of the Priests whome they carried away from Samaria came & dwelt in Samaria & taught them how they should fear Iehovah, & in vers 32 So they feared Iehovah & made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests, & in vers 33 they feared Iehovah & served their own Gods & lastly in vers 41 So these nations feared Iehovah & served their graven <5r> ^[Editorial Note 1] principal places of Idolatry, & yet when they came up to these to perform their Idolatrous worship, they used to swear The word liveth, that is the true God of Israel liveth for the Hebrew word which we here translate Lord is Iehova, a word which never signifies any other then the true God, & which it seems was hitherto commonly used not only by the Prophets (as we find it in their writings) but {now} by the people, though after the Captivity if the Rabbies say true it became so superstitiously revered, that it was made death for any to name it but the high Priest, & he too did it only in the Temple once a year in a solemn benediction of the people: which superstition might rise from the Prophets interdicting here the use of this name as it might seem absolutely, though I suppose he meant only that evil use of it which Israel then practised. But however, seing Israel used to swear by the true God Iehovah when they came up to do their abominations at the said cities Gilgal & Bethaven its plain that they acknowledged & respected the true God in the midst of their abominations in the time of the Prophet Hosea, which was a little before they were captivated by the Assyrians, for Hosea wrote about 50 or 60 years before that captivity.

Now because God is so much offended at their swearing Iehova liveth as to mention it emphatically as a grand crime which Israel committed when she went up to her cities of worship, & to forbid Iudah to do the like, & yet they were not interdicted under the law to make solemn oaths or vows in his name, but only to break them once made: one may presume there was some further grand mystery in these oaths, & what that was will I conceive appear by comparing this place of Osea with Ier 44.25, 26, where a <6r> hand of Iews^[1]

which in the time of Nebuchadnezzars captivity fled into Egypt 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. Now concerning this place you may note first that these Jews when they were in the Land of Egypt worshippers of the Queen of heaven, used to invoke & swear by the true God as the Israelites did before at Gilgal & Bethaven saying the Lord God liveth: And therefore in the midst of their abominations in Egypt retained a memory of & respect unto the true God. And so we have here an example of the Jews falling into gross Idolatry without forsaking the true God as we had before of the Israelites. And such an example too as makes it probable that Iudah never forsook the true God seeing these men lived when Idolatry was grown to the height, & quoted the practice of their forefathers for what they did, & seeme to have been as degenerate as any, obstinately refusing to obey Ieremiah whom God sent unto them, & not desisting till God cut them off in Egypt as he had newly done their idolatrous brethren at Ierusalem of whom they were an escaped remnant. Secondly it is to be noted that the vowes here made were not extemporary oaths or protestations but solemn vows: for upon being reproved for their Idolatry they said, surely we will perform our vows which we have vowed to burn incense to the Queen of heaven. Thirdly by Gods threatning that his name should be no more named by any man of Iudah in all Egypt is not meant a withdrawing of the remembrance of his name from them but a cutting them off for their abominable prophaning his name, for in the next vers he adds the manner of it saying Behold I will watch over them for evil & not for good, & 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. Fourthly it is to be noted that the reason why God threatned that his name should be no more thus named in Egypt by them was because they vowed to burn incense to the Queen of heaven. Because while they swore by his name they made such execrable vows as these, therefore God threatens they should swear by his name no longer but be cut off. Their swearing by Gods name has here a special relation to their vows to commit wickednes: for God does not say in general: Because ye worship the Queen of heaven therefore I will be no longer your god; but because ye have made such wicked vows as these are therefore ye shall be cut off that ye may use my name no longer to swear by. This therefore was their sin of swearing by his name that they swore solemnly by it to commit their abominations: when it is evident that they accounted him their proper & principal God.^[2]

To proceed on to some further considerations: the truth of the assertion that Israel worshipped the true God & fals Gods together may appear by considering the designe of Ieroboams proceeding when he set up the calves to be worshipped. for the worship which he instituted continued till the time of the Captivity, that short persecution of Iezebel perhaps only excepted, & therefore was the same with that exercised next before the persecution, only with this difference that they were then become more abominable by adding foreign Gods to the calves. For in the history of their Captivity it is said that the Children of Israel walked in all the sins of Ieroboam which he did, they departed not from them till he removed Israel out of his sight. Now I would have you consider that when Ieroboam made this change in religion he had no further design in it then to confirm the kingdom to himself & for that end to keep the people from going up to Ierusalem to worship there least their hearts should turn again toward their brethren there & so they should slay him & return again to Rehoboam. This is the reason set down in the history, & therefore it is not likely that he should go about to make any further change in religion then was requisite to stay the people from going up to Ierusalem it being against all rules of policy for a king to make any unnecessary changes in his kingdom. But the fundamental change of their God was no way requisite for this, & therefore it is not at all likely that he should go about to attempt that, especially, since that being the greatest change that could be made in religion, it could not but have been a very dangerous & scarce feasible attempt to do it so on a sudden, as we may easily apprehend by the obstinacy with which all nations adhere to their perswasions. To have attempted it by force might have put all into confusion & rebellion, especially in a nation so unsettled, & to have attempted it by perswasive arguing against their God, would more probably have made them stone the disputers for blasphemers of their God then convinced them. It is not likely therefore that he went about to change any more than the place & so much of the mode of their worship as might make them disaffected to the way of worship at Ierusalem & so confirm their worship to other places. And this he might do by sophistry causing it to be put into their heads, that to worship at Ierusalem was but an innovation seeing their forefathers worshipped in other places, & Iacob in particular at Bethel where he put one of the calves. That their Temple also was but a

new device of Solomon, & that the calves might be the place of Gods special presence as well as the Cherubins over the Ark at Ierusalem whoselower parts had the same figure & that there was as much reason why God might be worshipped before the one as before the other. With some such sophistry as this I am the more apt to think that they maintained all along their worship against the Iews because I find the woman of Samaria (one of the posterity of them & of the nations which succeeding them continued their worship) I find I say this woman arguing after this manner with our Saviour: Our fathers worshipped in this mountain & ye say that in Ierusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

Further as it is improbable on the account of policy that Ieroboam should change their God, so also by this circumstance of the history that God reckons it among his crimes that to these Calves he made Priests of the lowest of the people which were not of the sons of Levi: for (as I have said of the like Priests which the heathen successors of the Israelites made to the true God in Samaria) had these Priests been dedicated to any other God then the true one in the calves, the crime would have been to make Priests of the highest of the people & of the tribe of Levi because the first would have been a giving the greater honour to a fals God, the last a sacrilegious violation of Gods special institution & privilege to have that Tribe Priests to himself.

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Much after the same manner one may argue from Amos 4.4 where their worship is reprehended for deviating in some things from the ceremonies of the law. Come to Bethel, & transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgression, & bring your sacrifices every morning, & your tithes after three years, & offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven & proclaim & publish the free offerings: for this liketh you o ye children of Israel saith the Lord God Here you may see that Israel retained the worship of the Law at Bethel & Gilgal, the chief places of their transgression, but not exactly: for they offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, which was instituted to be without Leaven as you may see in Levit. 7.12. Now whereas God upbraids them for this, certainly he would never have upbraided them for not observing the circumstances of his law towards any other God then himself.

But to make the business yet more plain, there is in the next chapter an express declaration of their performing this their worship to the true God & his refusal to accept of it. Tis the 5^t Ch. of Amos the 21th vers, which I pray you mind. The words run thus. I hate, I despise your feast days & I will not smell in your solemn Assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings & your meat offerings I will not accept them, neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fatt beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs, for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. This respects the national worship of the ten Tribes during the standing of the calves: for the discourse begins with a lamentation against Israel for what they did at Bethel Gilgal & Beersheba, & ends with a threatening them the captivity by the Assyrians which happened about three or four score years after

To all these things I might yet add more were it necessary^[3] As the great number of the Lords Prophets that were in Is <11r> rael. For in Ahabs reign besides the many Prophets which Iezebel slew, there were an hundred saved in a cave: & it's not at all likely that Prophets should abound so very much in a kingdom in which the name of the Lord by which they prophesied was not acknowledged. The comparison of the greatnes of the sin of worshipping the calves with that of worshipping the Gods of the Gentiles might be also considered. ffor the sin of the calves though great enough is yet represented less then that of worshipping Baal. ffor of Ahab, (the first king of Israel that added the Idolatries of the Heathens to the sin of Ieroboam) it is said that he did evil above all before him, & as if it had been a light thing to walk in the sins of Ieroboam, he went & served Baal & worshipped him. And afterward of Iehoram the son of Ahab, for abolishing Baal it is said that he wrought evil in the sight of the Lord but not like his ffather, for he put away the Image of Baal that his ffather had made, nevertheless he cleaved to the sin of Ieroboam. Tell me now on what account the sin of Ieroboam should be thus esteemed less then that of worshipping Baal, unless it be this that in the former case the Idol was dedicated to the true God, in the latter to a fals one? ffor certainly the sins are equal, to worship any of the Gentile Gods.

Again the history of Iehu is very remarkable. for this king destroyed Baal out of Israel, & that in vindication of the worship against Baal. ffor when he had gathered the Priests of Baal together to slay them he caused a search to be made to see if any of the Priests of the Lord were among them, for fear they should perish with the rest,& for this his zeale in God's cause, & for destroying also the house of Ahab for their worshipping

Baal, God was so well pleased with him, that he said, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, <12r> thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel: And yet all this while Iehu continued in the sins of Ieroboam like the rest of the Kings of Israel. as 'tis expresly testified of him.

Thus much may suffice to manifest the first particular That Israel worshipped the true God together with their fals ones. The next particular was that the true God was worshipped in the Calves of Ieroboam And of this I have occasionally said something already in arguing from Ieroboam's policy in the institution, from the reprehension of his making Priests to these calves out of the lowest of the people which were not Levites, from their observing the legal ceremonies in their worship at Bethel where the calf was, & being upbraided by God for not observing them fully, & from the sin of the Calves being less then that of worshipping the Gods of the Gentiles.

<13r>

[Editorial Note 2]

I say rather pas on to say a word or on my second & 3^d Proposition that I may not leave my discourse altogether imperfect The second was that the true God was worshipped in the calves. And of this I have occasionally said something already in arguing from Ieroboam's policy in the institution from the reprehension of his making Priests to these calves out of the lowest of the people which were not Levites, from their observing the legal ceremonies in their worship at Bethel where the calf was, & being upbraided by God for not observing them fully; from the sin of the calves being less then that of worshipping the Gods of the Gentiles. I may add that the worship of the calves was their national religion & consequently the same with the worship of the true God which was also their national religion. But the proclamation of Ieroboam Behold thy Gods o Israel which brought the up out of the land of Egypt makes it plain. For hereby it's certain that they worshipped none other for the true God then him whom they worshipped in these calves. The expression indeed runs as if they meant the very calves to be that God but this was but according to a mode of speaking familiar among them ffor as they used to call all Images Baal which were dedicated to Baal & all other Images by the names of the Gods to which they were dedicated, so they called these Calves by the title of their own God because dedicated to him. Thus you may see in the 17 chapter of Iudges though Micah's Mother (as tis expresly said) dedicated eleven hundred sheckels of silver to make a molten Image & a graven Image to Iehovah for her son Micah & accordingly made two images thereof & placed them in the house of Micah & Micah worshipped Iehovah in them getting a Levite to be his Priest & saying Now I know Iehovah will do me good seeing I have a Levite to be my Priest: yet the history calls these Images his Gods saying that he had a house of Gods: And Micah himself also calls them his Gods <13v> saying to the Danites who took them away, Ye have taken away my Gods which I made. The case is much like one familiar with all the world. When We say behold this or that man who did any action, nothing can be beheld but his body & yet we speak it with reference to his soule the principle of the action: And so when they said Behold thy God which brought thee out of the Land of Egypt though nothing could be beheld but the Calf, yet their calling it a god must refer to the special invisible presence of the God which they supposed in it especially seeing all Israell knew that their God brought them out of the Land of Egypt long before the Calf was made.

The third Proposition was that the worship of those calves was Idolatry notwithstanding that the true God was worshipped in them, though not so heighnous Idolatry. as the worshipping Baal & other Gods of the Gentiles. Now this will sufficiently appeare out of these two or three places. Hosea 8.4 Of their silver & their Gold they have made them Idols that they may be cut of. Thy calf o Samaria hath cast the off. the workman made it therefore it is not God. But the Calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces Here God tells them first in general that they made Idols to cut them of & then instances in the Calf telling them it was a fals God. So Hosea 13.2 They have made them molten images of their silver & Idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen, they say of them let the men that sacrifice kiss the Calves; they say of them that is of the Idols they made let the sacrifices kiss the Calves. So that here you see calves with other images altogether called Idols. which is all one as to call their worship Idolatry. Again in Hosea 4.15 Though thou Israel play the Harlot yet let not Israel offend come not ye unto Gilgal neither go ye up to Bethaven. Here Israel is called a Harlot which is as much as to say a committer of Idolatry & the places where she did it are Gilgal & Bethaven whereof Bethaven I shewed you was Bethel the city called Bethaven that is the house of the Idols because Ieroboam had placed one of the Calves. there † < insertion from f 14v > vers. pag. † there. And so in Hos. 10.8 when the Prophet had newly mentioned the calves of Bethaven or Bethel, he subjoynes The high

places of Aven the sin of Israel shal be destroyed that is the high places or Altars of the Idols. For Aven is one of the usual names for an Idol & so the vulgar translation translates. < text from f 13v resumes > Lastly in 1 Kings 14.9 God tells Ieroboam Thou hast done evil above all that were before the, for thou hast gone & made thee other Gods even molten Images to provoke me to anger & hast cast me behind <14r> thy back God here calls these calves other Gods which is all one as to call their worship Idolatry, & good reason. For though Israel supposed Gods special presence in them to heare their prayers & accept their worship yet they were deceived, God was not there, they were mere unprofitable vanities, to which God was a stranger; they were not filled with his presence as Israel supposed out other Gods, mere vanities, & their worship vain & idolatrous. Had God commanded such an Image & promised that he would place his special be present in it & accept of their worship done before it as done to him, such worship would have been necessary profitable & pious, but since they made it of their own heads twas a strange and an empty thing another God which he had nothing to do with, & the worship of it disobedience vanity & Idolatry.

Now if it be Idolatry to worship the true God by an Image you may hence learn these two things first that Idolatry according to the old meaning of the word comprehends not only the worshipping given to an Idol ultimately but also that given through an Idol to the God to which the Idol is dedicated, that is not only worship. of an Idol but also worship by an Idol is Idolatry, Or that an image becomes an Idol so far as we worship either it or any thing by it. And secondly you may learn hence the great extent of the 2^d Commandement ffor if it interdict the making of an image to God him self, much more must it to any thing els. So that comparing both these things I see not how any image worship can be excused. Lastly the excuse of some pleading they are Christians & terminate their worship on God, is hereby cut of. ffor if this would not excuse the Israelites who were Gods people & directed their worship ultimately to him as much as they do, how can it excuse them. Of the two they are the more guilty for they go a step futher out of the way, & double the crime by transmitting their worship first through images to the soules of dead men & then through the soules of dead men to God

<15r>

By this history it is easy to collect that the God of the Land which the new nations were taught to worship in the cities of Samaria was the true God, & that this same God had been worshipped by the kingdom of Israel, even amidst the worst of their idolatries, as the God of their Land, till the very time of the captivity. But this though it be plain enough of it self yet I intend the next time to point at the particular marks by which it is put beyond all cavil; & not only so but to shew out of sacred history by examples in ages before Ieroboam's time that the Israelites & their forefathers used not to forsake the true God when they fell into Idolatry but only to joine to his worship the adoration of the Gods of the Gentiles as these did since Ieroboam. And this I shall do that it may appear that Israel during all her abominations from first to last scarce ever forsook the true God absolutely but only corrupted his worship by mingling their own inventions with it as too many of our neighbouring christians dayly do. Which corruptions if they be at any time called a forsaking of God, no more need be understood by that but a forsaking of his laws.

T. g. o. o. L. I. C. & t. l. o. G. & t. f. o. t. H G. [Editorial Note 3] be with us all evermore. Amen.

The first of the six Propositions which I laid down from hence was that the Idolatrous Israelites worshipped the true God together with the Gods of the Gentiles. And this I told you was plain by the history of the captivity registred in this chapter ffor – – –

<15v>

There is a place also in Ier (ch 44. v. 27) where certain of the Idolatrous Iews being fled from the taking of Ierusalem into Ægypt are reprehended for making solemn vows to perform sacrifices to the Queen of heaven, & threatned that since they did make such vows they should be suffered no longer to swear the Lord God liveth, but be utterly destroyed out of Egypt by the arms of Nebuchadnezzar. And by comparing this place with the former of Hosea one may easily learn that their vows by which they ingaged to perform sacrifices or other duties to their Idols & fals Gods, used to be done in the name of the Lord God saying the Lord liveth.

And no wonder therefore the Lord was so much offended at this oath as to reckon it among their greatest sins, though without doubt they thought they honoured the Lord thereby.

[Editorial Note 1] A page appears to be missing at this point. It is not to be found in the other surviving drafts of this text (Babson Ms. 437 and Harry Ransom Research Center Ms. 130).

[1] Comp with Ier 42.20 & 43.2

[2] See Micah 3.9, 11 &

[3] See Hosea 8.13. Ezek 14.7. Ier 14.

[Editorial Note 2] A page appears to be missing at this point.

[Editorial Note 3] I.e. 'The grace of our Lord Iesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost'.
