

Contemporary Worship in the Old Testament Scriptures

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Serving the Living God

If you were to ask the average American Christian to define idolatry, he would probably describe it as the worship of statutes like they did in Old Testament times. Most likely he would associate it with pagan worship that sometimes crept into the worship life of the people of Israel. He might even refer to the problems that St. Paul addressed in Corinth. He might even quote from First Thessalonians in which the Apostle writes, "For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, ESV) In other words, the temptation of statue worship is not a real threat to Christians in America.¹

However, St. John closes his first epistle with this warning, "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:19-21, ESV) If the pagan Gentiles turned from their idols and the Jews knew that it was forbidden, why should the church worry about the threat of idolatry? Is the worship of statues a real temptation? Let us not treat the word of God with contempt. Let us heed the warning. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

Martin Luther the Blessed Reformer wrote about the threat of idolatry in his prefaces to the Old Testament. Luther writes about the reception of the prophets' warning by the people of God. He states,

They [the Israelites] simply would not believe that they were idolatrous; the threatenings of the prophets therefore had to appear as lies, and the prophets themselves had to be condemned as heretics. The children of Israel were not such mad saints as to worship mere wood and stone. This was especially true of the kings, princes, priests, and prophets, and yet they were the most idolatrous of all. Their idolatry, however, consisted in letting go of the worship which had been instituted and ordered at Jerusalem—and wherever else God would have it—and of trying to do it better somewhere else. They instituted and established it elsewhere, out of their own notions and opinions, and without God's command.

¹ American Christians tend to associate money as an idol. Here there is a complete disconnect between the "worship service" and the "worship" of the mighty dollar. However, the temptation to make God into an idol that wants to give us more monetary possessions than we already have can be plainly seen in the so-called "prosperity gospel." Once again, we must learn to heed the warning about being like the Pharisees who were lovers of money (Luke 16:14-15). They misinterpreted their financial prosperity as God's favor upon them. This was the same perspective of the northern kingdom that was condemned by the prophets.

They concocted new forms and persons and times for worship, even though Moses had strictly forbidden this, especially in Deuteronomy 12[:4, 8, 28, 32] and was always pointing them to the place that God had chosen for his tent and tabernacle [Deut. 12:5, 11, 13–14, 17–18, 21, 26]. This false thinking was their idolatry. Yet they regarded it as a fine and precious thing and relied upon it as if they had done it well, though it was outright disobedience and apostasy from God and his commands.²

Luther goes on to comment on the reception of the prophet’s warning by the church in his day,

“Of course,” they say, “with their worship the children of Israel served idols, and not the true God; but in our churches we serve the true God and the one Lord Jesus Christ. For we have nothing to do with idols.” I answer: That is what the children of Israel said too. They all declared that their entire worship was devoted to the true God. They certainly would not allow anyone to call it the worshiping of idols any more than our clergy would allow it. On this account they killed and persecuted all the true prophets.³

To be clear, the people of God were never tempted to worship statues instead of the Living God as if they actually thought that a statue was the True God. The temptation was to worship in the style of their contemporaries and reject the means of grace instituted by Yahweh their God. They boasted in maintaining Yahweh substance while adding Canaanite style.

Through the mouth of the prophet Hosea, Yahweh condemns the idolatry of Israel as spiritual adultery. They used the grain, the wine, the oil, the silver, and the gold that had come from the hand of Yahweh for their service to Baal. Yahweh makes a distinction between the feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths that they instituted and the ones that He instituted. Yet, in their service to Baal, they actually thought they were worshiping Yahweh their God. Thus after condemning their idolatry, Yahweh speaks these words of promise to His people. “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more.” (Hosea 2:16-17, ESV)

They were calling the True God their Baal. The Hebrew word **בַּעַל** means husband, owner, or lord which of course would “seem” to be synonymous with the Hebrew word **יְהוָה** which means lord, master, or husband. One wonders how helpful it is that our English translations use the words Baal (**בַּעַל**) and Lord (**יְהוָה**).⁴ On the same note our translations use the words God and gods for the same Hebrew word **אֱלֹהִים**.

² AE 35:268

³ AE 35:270

⁴ The more typical form of **יְהוָה** used in connection with the divine name is **יְהוָה** which is typically translated in English as Lord GOD (**יְהוָה יְהוָה**). However, in such places as Joshua 3:11, 13; Psalm 97:5;

In a very simplistic way, the American Christian doesn't understand why it was so difficult for the Jews to know that there is only One True God and all other gods are false. In this one-dimensional way of thinking, false gods are idols and thus the worship of idols is idolatry. Idols are statues and thus idolatry is the worship of statues. Therefore, we have nothing to fear because we are smarter than that. However, the Holy Spirit warns us, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21, ESV)

You Shall Not Serve Other Gods

At this point, it would be beneficial to meditate upon the Ten Commandments in its proper context. Moses writes,

And God (אֱלֹהִים) spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "You shall have no other gods (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים) before me. (Exodus 20:1-3, ESV)

Here the Hebrew word אֱלֹהִים is used for both the True God and other gods. Now we know that there is only one God. All so-called gods do not exist. Yet, at times, the authors of the scriptures talk as if they do. It is forbidden for the Israelites to make a covenant with them.⁵

The Psalmist writes in Psalm ninety-five, "Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods." (Psalm 95:1-3, ESV) And again in Psalm ninety-six, "For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens." (Psalm 96:4-5, ESV) Also in Psalm ninety-seven, "All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods! Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O LORD. For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods." (Psalm 97:7-9, ESV) The Psalmists write in a mocking way commanding that the other gods worship the one True God. Note that the Psalm were used in the liturgical life of the Temple in which the pure worship of God was to be found. Thus, a distinction is made between the God of the Israelites who is Yahweh and any other God who is not Yahweh. Yahweh is the one who took them out of Egypt and any other god did not take them out of Egypt. To confess the name of Yahweh is to confess the work of redemption.

Zechariah 4:14, 6:5; and Micah 4:13, God is given the title of Lord of all the earth (אֱדֹנָי כֹּל-הָאָרֶץ). In Exodus 23:17 and 34:23 God is called the Lord Yahweh (אֱדֹנָי יְהוָה). In Isaiah 1:24; 3:1, 10:33; and 19:4, God is referred to as the Lord Yahweh of Hosts (אֱדֹנָי יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת).

⁵ Exodus 23:32

At this point, the Calvinist will note that we have recited the Ten Commandments in the Lutheran way and have forgotten the command not to worship statues. Thus, we continue with the Ten Commandments. Moses goes on to write,

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or 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. You shall not bow down to them or serve them for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:4-6, ESV)

Now we know that this is not a prohibition against all images and statues. It is the LORD Himself who commanded the people of Israel to place the image of cherubim upon the Ark of the Covenant and upon the curtain in the tabernacle. Also, the LORD instructed Moses to place the image of pomegranates upon the hem of the priestly robes. Later, Solomon would construct twelve oxen upon which the water basin would rest in front of the Temple.

The people of Yahweh were called to bow down⁶ to Him alone and to serve⁷ Him in the way in which He instituted with His word. In this passage, Moses writes, “You shall not bow down to them or serve them for I the LORD your God am a jealous.” The “them” is a reference to other gods (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים). An Israelite was forbidden to bow down or serve another God (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים). One cannot serve two Masters.

Later in the same chapter, Moses will continue to discuss the forbidden types of worship include images and altars not commanded by God. The LORD declares,

You shall not make (לֹא תַעֲשֶׂוּן) gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make (לֹא תַעֲשֶׂוּן) for yourselves gods of gold. An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it. And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it.” (Exodus 20:23-26, ESV)

The use of images and altars were commonly used in the ancient world in ritual service to one’s God. Yahweh makes it clear that the Israelites are not to serve Him as other serve their gods. They will make altars according to the word of Yahweh and they will not make the images that the pagans make. The Hebrew verb for make is עָשָׂה which is the same word used in *Genesis* chapter one verse twenty-six. “Then God (אֱלֹהִים) said, “Let

⁶ The Hebrew word for “bow down” is the famous Hishtaphel verb הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה. See *Fundamental Biblical Hebrew* by Andrew H. Bartelt, p. 205.

⁷ עָבַד

us make (נִעֲשֶׂה) man in our image, after our likeness.””(Genesis 1:26, ESV) There is a pointed irony in the idea that man can make an image and likeness of God based upon creation whereas God is the one who made man originally in His image and likeness. All false gods are created by the minds of men. Such a god does not exist.

The Biblical authors and prophets make a mockery of man made gods.⁸ Who can forget when Elijah mocked the false worship of the false prophets of the false god Baal. "And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”" (1 Kings 18:27, ESV) Moses refers to man made gods in reference to the material of which they are made from. Thus, they are gods of silver (אֱלֹהֵי כֶסֶף)⁹, gods of gold (אֱלֹהֵי זָהָב)¹⁰, or gods of cast metal (אֱלֹהֵי מַסְכָּה)¹¹. Moses also sharply distinguishes these false gods from the one True God who brought the Israelites out of Egypt.¹² Thus they are called other gods (אֱלֹהֵים אֲחֵרִים)¹³, another god (אֱלֹהֵי אֲחֵר)¹⁴, their gods (אֱלֹהֵיהֶם)¹⁵, or even "little gods" (אֱלֹהִים קְטָנִים)¹⁶

The Psalmist writes, "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them." (Psalm 115:4-8, ESV) Likewise, the Prophet Jeremiah states,

Hear the word that the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them, for the customs of the peoples are vanity. A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good.”" (Jeremiah 10:1-5, ESV)

⁸ Habakkuk mocks the idol of the Babylonians which is their own strength and ability. "Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich." (Habakkuk 1:16, ESV) It's not that they actually set up their nets and treated them as their god; rather, their own strength and ability became an idol. As we typically say, "An idol is anything that we fear, trust, or love more than God." They did not recognize their victories as coming from the hand of the one True God who was using them to execute judgment upon the southern kingdom. They credited their military victories to their own hands.

⁹ Exodus 20:23

¹⁰ Exodus 20:23; 32:31

¹¹ Leviticus 19:4

¹² Yahweh is called our God (אֱלֹהֵינוּ), your (singular) God (אֱלֹהֶיךָ), or your (plural) God (אֱלֹהֵיכֶם).

¹³ Exodus 20: 3

¹⁴ Exodus 34:14

¹⁵ Exodus 23:24; 34:15

¹⁶ Leviticus 19:4; 26:1

He goes on to mock them saying, “Thus shall you say to them: “The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.””(Jeremiah 10:11, ESV) And also he states, “Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them.” (Jeremiah 10:14, ESV) In this way, there is a distinction being made between the only God who created all things and made man in His own image, and the false gods who were made by man from creation. These gods are not living. They do not exist. They are figments of a man’s imagination. Thus, any form of worship created to serve them is a man made invention. These false gods cannot hear, they cannot speak, and they have no power to do anything. These gods of the pagans have done nothing for the Israelites and thus there is no need to serve them. It is forbidden for the Israelites to make the True God into an idol.

It should be noted that in the traditional Calvinistic way of thinking, the use of creation in the worship of God is considered idolatry. Thus, the use of statues, stained glass windows, altars, incense, candles, and vestments are all seen as idolatry to them. This understanding was carried over into American Protestantism. In fact the Lutheran teaching on the sacraments in itself is seen as idolatry, because we attribute miraculous things to water, bread, and wine. Even the thought that the body of Jesus and the blood of Jesus are actually given to us in the sacrament is seen as idolatry.¹⁷ This understanding eventually leads to Unitarianism since Jesus took upon created flesh and blood. To them, the finite cannot contain the infinite. With this in mind, it would be in our best interest not to ask the American Protestants how they worship.

Later in chapter twenty-three of the book of *Exodus*, Moses further explains the prohibition against idolatry. Yahweh declares,

Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. “But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. “When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces. You shall serve the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. (Exodus 23:20-25, ESV)

Not only are images and altars used in the ritual services of the ancient people, but also pillars are used. Again, the prohibition is not against images, altars, and pillars, but rather the pagan use of them which does not have God’s word of promise. In fact, the patriarch Jacob set up a pillar next to the altar at Bethel. It marked the place where Yahweh made

¹⁷ Ironically, we have always viewed the supreme idolatry of the Roman church to be the misuse of the Sacrament of the Altar. See Smalcald Articles Part II Article II.

His presence manifest to Jacob.¹⁸ Likewise, Moses sets up twelve pillars next to the altar when he sprinkles the people with the blood of the covenant.¹⁹ Yet, in this passage, Yahweh commands His people saying, “you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces. You shall serve the LORD your God,” (Exodus 23:24-25, ESV) The people of God are forbidden to “do as they do.” They are not to serve Yahweh their God as the people of Canaan serve their God. Their pillars were tied to their form of worship. Thus, their pillars must be destroyed so that the Israelites will not be tempted to worship the True God in that way. Later, the Israelites will be commanded to destroy the pagan altars for the same reason that it is a temptation to worship as they do. The Israelites are forbidden to worship like their contemporaries. Later on, they will be forbidden to even make a pillar (מַצְבֵּה) next to the altar.²⁰

The Angel of the LORD

Images and pillars mark the invisible presence of God. It is significant to note that the Angel of the LORD is the visible form of the invisible God. In the previous passage from *Exodus* chapter twenty-three, the Israelites are promised that the Angel of the LORD would lead them into the Promised Land.²¹ This is the same Angel that revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush and said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (Exodus 3:6, ESV) In the book of *Genesis*, Moses teaches and confesses that Yahweh is the same God who created all things and the same God of the patriarchs who revealed Himself to the patriarchs. At the bush, Yahweh promised to lead the Israelites into the land of Canaan.

This is the same Angel of the LORD that appeared to Jacob at Bethel. Before the death of Jacob, he will call upon the Holy Trinity to bless Joseph saying, “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys; and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” (Genesis 48:15-16, ESV)

Likewise, before the death of Moses, he will bless the tribe of Joseph by calling upon the name of this same Angel of the LORD saying, “Blessed by the LORD be his land... and the favor of him who dwells in the bush.” (Deuteronomy 33:13, 16, ESV) He is the second person of the Holy Trinity and the visible form of the invisible God. He has the Divine name. He is Yahweh. He is the face of Yahweh to the people. The Evangelist John writes about Him saying, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” (John 1:18, ESV) With the Angel of the LORD at their side their will be no need to create an image of the invisible God.

¹⁸ Genesis 28:18, 22; 31:13; 35:1, 14

¹⁹ Exodus 24:4

²⁰ Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 16:22. It should also be noted that the Hebrew word for a pillar (מַצְבֵּה) set up next to the altar is different from the Hebrew word for the pillar (עַמֻּדָה) of cloud and the pillar (עַמֻּדָה) of fire which was a visible form of the invisible divine essence of God during the exodus.

²¹ Exodus 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2

The LORD promises to dwell in their midst. The LORD Himself will lead the people into the Promised Land and fight for them.

Serving God in the Wilderness and Canaan

While Moses is in the presence of the invisible God, the Israelites become impatient and out of zeal for their God they commission Aaron to lead them in a worship service of Yahweh. Now Aaron is no theological slouch. He has been with Moses in the presence of Yahweh. He has spoken in behalf of Moses before Pharaoh.

We have this initial account in *Exodus* chapter five:

Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.” Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.” (Exodus 5:1-3, ESV)



Aaron knew that the Israelites were headed to the wilderness in order to sacrifice and have a feast to Yahweh. He knew that after the plague of flies, Pharaoh proposed that they sacrifice to God in the land of Egypt but Moses refused saying that they must do what Yahweh has told them to do. He knew that the Angel of the LORD promised to lead them into the land of Canaan. Yet, the Holy Spirit teaches, “When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods (עֲשֵׂה-לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים) who shall go before us. 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.” (Exodus 32:1, ESV) The Israelites want a visible form of their God who brought them out of Egypt and who would lead them into the promised land. Aaron got a little creative and created his own liturgy. Incorporated the use of an image and an altar.

Moses writes,

So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods (אֱלֹהֵיךָ), O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to

the LORD.” And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” (Exodus 32:2-6, ESV)

Again, neither Aaron nor the people actually thought that a golden statue brought them out of Egypt. They saw the Angel of the LORD deliver them at the Red Sea. This was a worship service dedicated to Yahweh אֱלֹהִים who brought them out of Egypt. As far as they were concerned, they retained Yahweh substance and embraced Egyptian style.



Aaron was trying to make the invisible presence of אֱלֹהִים known. The use of statues and images are incorporated in the worship of one's אֱלֹהִים in order to establish a visible notion of the invisible spiritual realm. In the ancient world, golden calves, bulls, and cherubim statues were used to designate the throne of their gods (אֱלֹהֵיהֶם). In this way, the visible throne points to the invisible אֱלֹהִים who dwells upon it. Archeological finds have brought to life this practice. Typical pictures of Baal show him enthroned upon a bull. Thus, if one is worshipping a false אֱלֹהִים who does not exist, then there is nothing enthroned upon the bull. All the worshiper has is a golden statue. Therefore, all that is being worship is a statue. In this way, they have exchanged the Creator with creation. His אֱלֹהִים is the figment of human imagination and the work of human hands.

At this point it would be beneficial to note that the typical Hebrew word that translates as worship is הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה which means to bow down or prostrate oneself. If a person was bowing down in front of a golden calf, he intended to bow down before the invisible presence of his god. Yet, if there was no god present enthroned upon the visible image of the calf, then he would be merely bowing down to the golden calf. Thus, in the way of mockery, we would say that he is “worshipping” the statue.

Without the word of our אֱלֹהִים instituting this form of worship, there is no promise that Yahweh will be present at this or that location. Without the word and promise, the use of a statue or image will not bring Yahweh's favor. While the Aaron and the Israelites were playing, Moses was receiving the instruction from Yahweh about the form of worship that He is instituting for His people in which He promises to dwell in their midst making them His holy people. Yahweh instituted the visible forms of the altar, ark, and tabernacle in which the people can be certain of His invisible presence for their benefit.

This use of images without the promise of God was the same sin of Jerobaom who copied Aaron and made the giant golden calves. He set one up at Bethel and the other one up at Dan. He should have known better. Likewise, the people of Israel should have known better if they only would have listened to Moses and learned from Aaron's mistake. This account is given to us in *First Kings* chapter twelve,

And Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom will turn back to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the temple of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn again to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.” So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods (אֱלֹהֵיךָ), O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Then this thing became a sin, for the people went as far as Dan to be before one. He also made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites.” (1 Kings 12:26-31, ESV)



Jeroboam gets creative and builds two temples at Dan and Bethel. He then institutes his own priesthood and dismisses the Levitical priesthood instituted by God. In the zeal of the northern kingdom, they maintain that they worship Yahweh their God who brought them out of Egypt. However, Yahweh doesn't see it that way. Rather, Jeroboam has instituted a false priesthood to enact false worship.

In the days of the Reformation, Luther saw the compelling similarities between Jeroboam's priests and the Pope's priest in his writing *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. He writes about the new papal forms of worship saying,

...faith in God is extinguished and idolatry fostered, as we see in our day. As a result we have the same kind of priests today as Jeroboam ordained of old in Dan and Beersheba, ministers of the golden calves [I Kings 12:26–32], men who are ignorant of the law of God, of faith, and of whatever pertains to the feeding of Christ's sheep. They inculcate in the people nothing but their own inventions with fear and violence.²²

He goes on to say,

From this it follows that whoever does not preach the Word, though he was called by the church to do this very thing, is no priest at all, and that the sacrament of ordination can be nothing else than a certain rite by which the church chooses its preachers... . . . Therefore, those who are ordained only to read the canonical hours and to offer masses are indeed papal priests, but not Christian priests, because they not only do not preach, but they are not even called to preach. Indeed, it comes to this, that a priesthood of that sort is a different estate altogether from the office of preaching. Thus they are hour-reading and mass-saying priests—sort of living idols called priests—really such priests as Jeroboam ordained, in Beth-

²² AE 36:87

aven,²⁰⁵ taken from the lowest dregs of the people, and not of Levi's tribe [I Kings 12:31].²³

Luther makes a contrast between the preaching office which was instituted by God and the new priesthood instituted by the pope. The man in the divine office is given the task of administering the means of grace instituted by God. The man in the papal office is given the task of administering the means of grace instituted by the pope.²⁴

In the days of Jeroboam, Yahweh immediately sends a prophet to confront him on his breach of the covenant and instituting new forms of worship. Jeroboam seems to take the message into consideration, but his "repentance" was short lived. An old prophet at Bethel assures the man of God that all is well under his watch. He ultimately leads the man from the south to his death by convincing him to reject the word of Yahweh given to him (1 Kings 13).

There was no promise from God that He would dwell in the temples set up at Bethel (בֵּית־אֵל) and Dan. In fact the prophets mock this idolatry. Rather than call it Bethel which means "House of God," Amos talks of בֵּית אֱלֹהֵיהֶם that is "House of their God." He condemns their altars and mockingly says, "Come to Bethel, and transgress.." (Amos 4:4, ESV) He cries out warning the people not seek Bethel, but to seek Yahweh and live (Amos 5:5-6). The false priest Amaziah rebukes the prophet Amos and rejects his word from Yahweh (Amos 7). As far as Amaziah was concerned, their new services were not idolatrous.

Likewise the Prophet Hosea condemns the idolatry as spiritual adultery. Israel is being unfaithful to her husband. He mockingly calls Bethel בֵּית אֲוֶן which means "House of Nothing." God is not present there for their benefit. Hosea proclaims that the golden calf which is the glory of their temple will be carried off to Assyria. It is only worth its weight in gold. Again, Hosea makes a distinction between their worship at their temples and the true worship at Yahweh's Temple.

Whereas the golden calves of Aaron and Jeroboam were not instituted by God with His word and did not have the Divine promise attached to it, the golden Cherubim upon the Ark of the Covenant did. The Ark was to be a perpetual visible reminder of God's invisible presence among His people for their benefit. Yahweh tells Moses,

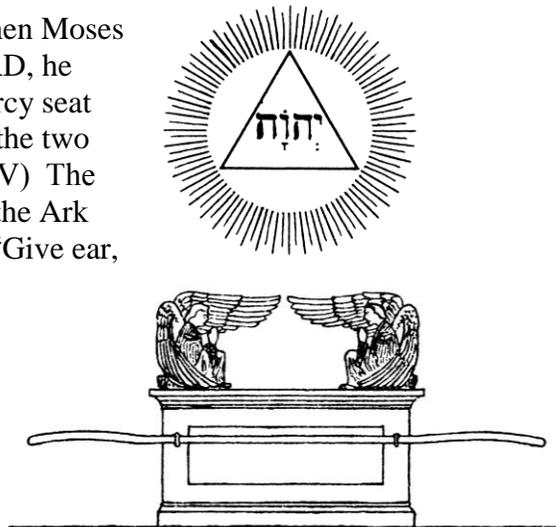
Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and

²³ AE 36:113

²⁴ Luther also talks about this contrast in *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priest* see AE 38:150 and *Concerning the Ministry* see AE 40:19. For an allegorical interpretation of the two calves of Jeroboam as Luther relates it to false teaching in the church of Rome see *The Misuse of the Mass*, AE 36:219-222.

from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. (Exodus 25:19-22, ESV)

Likewise, *Numbers* chapter seven records, “And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the LORD, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and it spoke to him.” (Numbers 7:89, ESV) The liturgical psalms used at the Temple which housed the Ark remind us of God’s promise. The Psalmist writes, “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.” (Psalm 80:1, ESV) And again, “The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!” (Psalm 99:1, ESV) Yahweh has instituted means through which His presence is to be recognized in the midst of His people.



The Role of the Levites

At Mount Sinai, Aaron failed to lead the people in pure worship. Through the intercession of Moses and because of the mercy of Yahweh, Aaron lived to serve another day. After the wrath of God was poured out, the people of Israel were told to depart. In the next chapter Yahweh promises “I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.” (Exodus 33:1-2, ESV) Here the Yahweh promises His presence in the midst of His people in the visible form of the Angel of the LORD. As God’s people, they were called to lend ears to His voice and set their eyes upon His promises.

In chapter thirty-four, Moses gives further instruction about worship style. He writes,

Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. “You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal. (Exodus 34:11-17, ESV)

The Israelites are commanded to destroy the altars and the pillars so that they do not try to mimic the worship of their contemporaries in Canaan. They are to resist the temptation to serve their אֱלֹהֵי־ם in the way that the Canaanites worship their אֱלֹהֵי־ם.

Because of the intercession of Moses, Aaron was spared. Now Aaron was zealous to make sure that the worship would be pure among the people of Israel. They were forbidden to worship in the ways of their contemporaries in Egypt and in Canaan. In the book of *Leviticus*, Moses continues to make this task clear. In chapter eight, Yahweh declares,

Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD. (*Leviticus* 18:1-5, ESV)

The Levitical priesthood was instituted by God in order to minister at the altar of Yahweh. The Levites were tasked with making sure that the worship was not done in the way that their contemporaries do things. They were commanded not to “do as they do in the land of Egypt” or “as they do in the land of Canaan.” They were called to enact the Divine Service instituted by God.

However, the exciting worship style at Peor was too much for them. Their first taste of Baal style worship brought a plague. Moses writes, “While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.” (*Numbers* 25:1-3, ESV) A Levitical priest named Phineas the son of Eleazar put an end to the innovation.

At this point, the Israelites learned first hand the need to resist marrying pagan women. In the last book of Moses, the people are once again reminded that once they arrive in the land that they are to devote everything to destruction that belongs to the culture of the Canaanites. In chapter seven Moses writes,

You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire." (*Deuteronomy* 7:3-5, ESV)

Not only are the altars of the land a temptation them to sin, but so will foreign wives encourage them to sin. Even though King Solomon built the Temple, he failed to heed

these words and it became the end of him. He was trying to accommodate the untempled and make his multiple wives feel comfortable.

In chapter twelve of the book of *Deuteronomy* Moses goes on to write,

These are the statutes and rules that you shall be careful to do in the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way. But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the Lord your God has blessed you." (Deuteronomy 12:1-7, ESV)

Here it is made very clear that they are to destroy the altars, the pillars, and the images so that they do not attempt to worship Yahweh in that manner. These are forms of worship instituted by men. There is no Divine promise attached to them. These are not the means Yahweh has instituted.

Again Moses writes,

When the Lord your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods?—that I also may do the same.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it." (Deuteronomy 12:29-32, ESV)

There is no need for the people of God to ask how other nations served their gods. Yahweh has given them His word verbal spoken in their midst and written down for posterities sake. When they listen to Yahweh's voice in the words of His prophets they can be certain that they are serving Him. The Prophet Malachi teaches us such a distinction. He writes, "Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him." (Malachi 3:18, ESV) The Prophets were sent to the people of Israel because they refused to listen to the voice of God as found in the written word. Thus, even in their

zeal for worship, they were not serving God. Serving God is directly tied to listening to God's prophets.

Building Another Altar

In *Joshua* chapter twenty-two, we are given the account of a non-authorized altar that was built by the people of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh:

And when they came to the region of the Jordan that is in the land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of imposing size. And the people of Israel heard it said, "Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel." And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them. (Joshua 22:10-12, ESV)

At first glance, this new building program might not seem like that big of a deal let alone a reason to go to war. Now keep in mind that Shiloh was the place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept in those days. Thus, the people gathered for a theological convocation with the Levites to discuss the new worship service that was planned outside of the oversight of the priests of Yahweh.

A delegation was led by Phineas the son of Eleazar the high priest. This is the same Phineas known for putting an end to Baal worship at Peor. The delegation declared to the the people of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh saying,

Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD, 'What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the LORD by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the LORD? Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which there came a plague upon the congregation of the LORD, that you too must turn away this day from following the LORD? And if you too rebel against the Lord today then tomorrow he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel.'" (Joshua 22:16-18, ESV)

The Levites and the other tribes were afraid that worship like the contemporaries had begun at the new altar in the style of Peor. They were concerned that the means of grace instituted by God were being abandoned for new forms of receiving God's favor. However, they convinced Phineas that the altar was not to be used for sacrifices apart from the Levites and the altar they served at Shiloh. In fact, it was to only set up as a testimony that Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh were part of the people of Yahweh brought out of Egypt even though they live on the other side of the Jordan River separated from the Ark of the Covenant and the altar served by the Levites. The Levites rejoiced that the brothers walked in unity.

Later at the Temple in Jerusalem, the Levites would sing Psalm one hundred thirty-three.

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore." (Psalm 133:1-3, ESV)

As the book of *Joshua* closes, the Israelites are dwelling in unity in the Promised Land centered in the sacrificial system instituted by Yahweh their God.

Failure to Destroy the Altars of Canaan

The book of *Judges* picks up the history of the Israelites after the death of Joshua. Again, the Angel of the LORD who is the visible presence of the invisible God comes to the people. Chapter two states,

Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you." As soon as the angel of the LORD spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the LORD." (Judges 2:1-5, ESV)

The text goes on to say,

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. (Judges 2:11-13, ESV)

Although they broke the covenant with Yahweh, He had promised that He would be faithful to the people as a whole for the sake of His promise to Abraham. Thus, He raised up judges to deliver the people and bring them to repentance and faith in His promises. However, when the judge died, they soon forgot the word of Yahweh and turned to the worship style of the land.

Even Gideon who had delivered them from idolatry later led them into false worship. The people wanted Gideon to rule over them as a king bringing unity, but he refused. Instead, Gideon became creative like Aaron and asked for some gold. He should have

known better and the people should have known better. *Judges* chapter eight records the event as follows:

And Gideon said to them, "Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil." (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) And they answered, "We will willingly give them." And they spread a cloak, and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels. And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family." (Judges 8:24-27, ESV)

Again at first the creation of a new ephod might not seem that important. However, it broke unity with the Levitical system instituted by God. This was not the ephod worn by Yahweh's priests. Later, in chapter seventeen another man by the name of Micah made a non-levitical ephod and created his own priesthood at his house. Starting at verse three we read,

And he restored the 1,100 pieces of silver to his mother. And his mother said, "I dedicate the silver to the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a carved image and a metal image. Now therefore I will restore it to you." So when he restored the money to his mother, his mother took 200 pieces of silver and gave it to the silversmith, who made it into a carved image and a metal image. And it was in the house of Micah. And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods, and ordained one of his sons, who became his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 17:3-6, ESV)

Notice that the mother of Micah commissioned a silversmith to make an image dedicated to Yahweh. They "have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." (Romans 10:2, ESV) Later, Micah further fractures the unity with the altar of Yahweh when he promotes a Levite to be one of his priests. The Holy Spirit teaches us, "And Micah ordained the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah. Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because I have a Levite as priest.'" (Judges 17:12-13, ESV) Notice how Micah feels that he is worshiping and pleasing Yahweh with his worship. This creative worship spread to the entire tribe of Dan. The Holy Spirit teaches us in the next chapter:

And the five men who had gone to scout out the land went up and entered and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the 600 men armed with weapons of war. And when these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" And they said to him, "Keep quiet; put your hand on your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest

to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?" And the priest's heart was glad. He took the ephod and the household gods and the carved image and went along with the people." (Judges 18:17-20, ESV)

It is interesting to note that when Jeroboam introduces new forms of worship, he centers them in Dan and Bethel. These two sites cover the far north and the far south regions of the northern kingdom. Dan had a history of innovative worship dedicated to Yahweh and Bethel had a history of being the place where the Angel of the LORD appeared to Jacob before the exodus and also the place where the Ark of the Covenant resided for awhile after the exodus.

While Jeroboam is known for his innovative worship, Ahab is known for completely absorbing the Baal worship style of his contemporaries. Like Solomon, he takes a pagan wife and embraces the type of worship she is comfortable with. The Holy Spirit teaches us,

And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him." (1 Kings 16:30-33, ESV)

Again, the LORD sends a prophet. Elijah confronts the leadership of the north, but they are content with the consultants brought on board by Ahab. The false prophets of Baal assured the people that there is nothing wrong with their new methods.

Eventually, the northern temples were destroyed and the kingdom came to an end. The Holy Spirit teaches us so that we will not repeat their sin saying, "And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practiced." (2 Kings 17:7-8, ESV) While the northern kingdom fully embraced the customs of the people around them creating new staff positions and impressive building projects for the worship life of the north, one would expect more from the land of Judah who prided themselves in maintaining the Divinely instituted offices and the "old hymnals."

Serving God Under the Davidic Kings

During the liturgy at the Temple, the Levites continued to warn the people of God about the temptation of idolatry and the mistakes of the past. Psalm one hundred six declares,

They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD commanded them, but they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, which

became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood. Thus they became unclean by their acts, and played the whore in their deeds." (Psalm 106:34-39, ESV)

Nonetheless, even with the Levitical priesthood, the worship instituted by God at the Temple where the Ark of the Covenant resided and the promise of God's name was placed, the southern kingdom also fell into idolatry. Because they failed to listen to the voice of God, they did not faithfully serve the LORD their God. Instead, they learned to do as the nations did. They served false gods.

King Ahaz coveted the style of worship that the Assyrians were using and he copied it. The following account is given to us so that we learn the reality of the temptations to neglect the instituted means of grace.

When King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus. And King Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest a model of the altar, and its pattern, exact in all its details. And Uriah the priest built the altar; in accordance with all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus, so Uriah the priest made it, before King Ahaz arrived from Damascus. And when the king came from Damascus, the king viewed the altar. Then the king drew near to the altar and went up on it and burned his burnt offering and his grain offering and poured his drink offering and threw the blood of his peace offerings on the altar. And the bronze altar that was before the LORD he removed from the front of the house, from the place between his altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of his altar. And King Ahaz commanded Uriah the priest, saying, "On the great altar burn the morning burnt offering and the evening grain offering and the king's burnt offering and his grain offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their grain offering and their drink offering. And throw on it all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice, but the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by." Uriah the priest did all this, as King Ahaz commanded." (2 Kings 16:10-16, ESV)

Here we have a Davidic king and a Levitical priest failing to teach, believe, and confess the word of God. Again, at first glance it appears that Ahaz is merely renovating the sanctuary and moving furniture. Eventually, the Temple doors were closed and the means of grace instituted by God were no longer offered at the Temple. After the death of Ahaz, Hezekiah took the throne. He reformed the deformed worship. He destroyed the altars not connected to God's command and promise. He brought back the Levites and opened the doors to the Temple. Yet, this too was short lived.

The prophet Jeremiah came to announce that the Davidic king would be dethroned and the Levitical Temple would be destroyed just like what was seen in the north. Jeremiah declared, "And when your people say, 'Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?' you shall say to them, 'As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your

land, so you shall serve foreigners in a land that is not yours.” (Jeremiah 5:19, ESV)
 The people of God refused to serve Yahweh their God as He told them to do. Instead, they wanted to be like their contemporaries, so Yahweh gave them over to their desires just like Moses had warned them. They wanted an אֱלֹהִים that was not their אֱלֹהִים. They became just like the nations who did not know Yahweh.

Serving God in Land of America

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul warns us by referring to the failure of the Israelites to hear the voice of God after the exodus. He teaches us, "Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” (1 Corinthians 10:6-7, ESV) We should take these words of Apostle Paul along with the words of the Apostle John very seriously. “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” (1 John 5:21, ESV)

The temptation to be like the nations is always before the people of God as long as we dwell on this earth. The people of God have been challenged with the issue of worship style since the days of the Exodus. This struggle continued into the land of Canaan and into the early church. It continues in our own land. America has a pattern of innovation in worship forms and rejection of God’s instituted means of grace administered through the one divinely instituted office of the New Testament.

In the early 1700’s, the so-called First Great Awakening was promoted by such non-Lutheran figures as Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, and John Wesley. They wanted individuals to be zealous and pious for God. They felt that the way to do this was to promote a life changing personal experience with God apart from the instituted means of grace. A new form of worship service was introduced in order to obtain this goal of a religious experience. The proof of an individual's experience was seen in a changed life. The focus was placed upon sanctification.

In the late 1700’s, the founding fathers of our nation felt that the freedom of religion was a natural right belonging to all men. However, this understanding was forged out of a belief that the individual has the right to choose what is acceptable worship and pleasing sacrifices to God. In addition, this feeling was based upon the idea that any religion that teaches man to be good is a good religion and therefore good for society.

In his book *Rights of Man*, Thomas Paine describes religion as “...man bringing to his maker the fruits of his heart; and though these fruits may differ from each other, like the fruits of the earth, the grateful tribute of every one is accepted.” Paine also says, “Why may we not suppose, that the great Father of all is pleased with variety of devotion.” For Thomas Paine acceptable worship is a fruit of the heart. In other words, if the person is sincere, then the worship is acceptable. Likewise, Paine concluded that God must be pleased with a variety of devotion which shows individual sincerity and creativity.

After the American Revolution, the so-called Second Great Awakening moved across the land. The central figure of this movement was Charles Finney. He too wanted to give individuals a personal experience with God. He decided that new measures must be taken. His new method was the anxious bench. He makes it clear that it was to serve the same purpose of baptism in the early church. An unconverted person would come to one of these camp meetings and seat in the anxious bench until he was converted. The proof of the individual's experience was complete enthusiastic fervor such as barking, running around, rolling on the ground, uncontrollable laughter, and unstoppable shaking.

These movements developed methods to engage the individual with an encounter with God. The people were supposed to feel God's presence. These techniques were used for the purpose of conversion because the gospel and the sacrament of baptism were seen as empty rituals. They denied the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. This is a different gospel.

In the Old Testament scriptures, God makes it clear what type of worship is acceptable to Him and what sacrifices He is pleased with. He definitely did not accept the worship of the Egyptians or the Canaanites nor was He pleased with their sacrifices. Their religion was based upon the created realm just like that of the Deist in the days of Thomas Paine. Their religious services tried to invoke the presence of the divine apart from the instituted means of grace. Acceptable worship is not determined by what is pleasing to the worshiper, but rather by the One who is worshiped. When Israel tried to copy the style of their contemporaries, they were not accepted and they did not please God. God alone determines what is pleasing and acceptable to Him. He institutes the means through which He will bestow His grace and dwell in the midst of His people.

Under the Old Testament, the high priest was appointed to act in behalf of men to offer gifts and sacrifices as Hebrews chapter five tells us. (Hebrews 5:1, ESV) However, these gifts and sacrifices that they offered could not perfect the conscience of the worshiper as Hebrews chapter nine tells us. (Hebrews 9:9-10, ESV) These sacrifices offered were shadows of the reality to come which would make us perfect as Hebrews chapter ten teaches us. (Hebrews 10:1, ESV)

Jesus is the reality both as the true High Priest and as the true sacrifice. For this reason, the Son of God took upon a body in order to die and cleanse us with His blood. Through His sacrificial death we have been sanctified. He put away sins once and for all. Only the sacrifice of Jesus removes sin, makes perfect, and purifies the conscience. By his blood we have been freed from our sins and made into a kingdom and a royal priesthood. (Revelation 1:5-6)

As His people we are called to offer acceptable worship and pleasing sacrifices. The life of the church is rooted in the means through which God has instituted and promised to bestow His favor. With His gospel He gives and strengthens faith. We have the promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Through the waters of Holy Baptism, we have been marked as the children of God and heirs of the kingdom. He has made us holy. Through the gospel written and proclaimed, we are declared righteous. Through the body and the

blood given to us in, with, and under bread and wine we receive life, salvation, and the forgiveness of our sins. God is present among us with His word. We need not look for new methods and techniques to invoke the presence of God. Let us not forget nor neglect the means of grace through which the Lord Jesus promises to bestow His favor and dwell with us.
