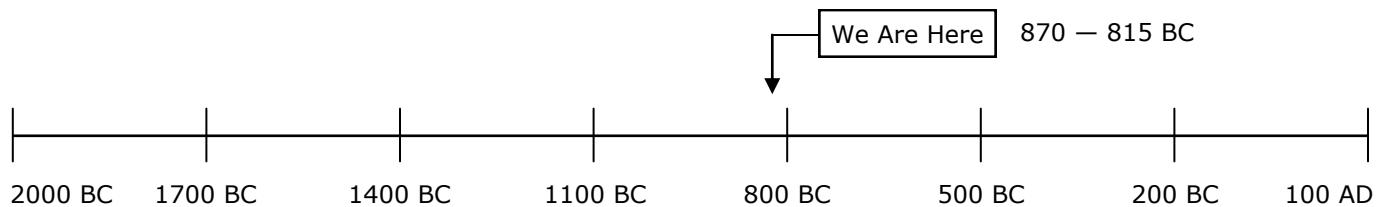


American Idols

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Week 24: June 11-17 — *1 Kings 19-22; 2 Kings 1-12*

45.7% Complete — 197 Days to Go



Helpful Resources

Overview of Bible History (p.37), Kings and Prophets (p.71)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

It has been nearly 100 years since the reign of King Solomon and the tragic split of the nation. We've read about many kings on both sides, who have fallen into a terrible pattern. With the exception of the occasional righteous king, monarchs for both Israel and Judah have followed in the paths of their predecessors, Rehoboam and Jeroboam; as a result, their kingdoms have experienced God's judgment (i.e. draughts, famines, wars, and other disasters).

What was the problem? Why can't kings uphold the covenant? Remember that these kings were just sinners who, by nature, tended to stray from God and chase the world. Their hearts were bent on evil; in their sin, they did not naturally seek after the Lord or desire to love or obey Him. Even the righteous kings had a tendency to wander; the sinful side of human nature is a rule-breaker. Thus, God's people followed their leaders and forced God's hand. However, before we condemn them, let's consider our own tendencies. Our sin nature is no different than the kings of old, even though God has given us power over it through the blood of Christ and the governing presence of the Spirit. In our natural state, we too do not desire to love God or obey Him; we tend to stray and seek after this world. Even the "best" among us must battle his natural tendencies and crucify them daily for the unnatural desires of God.

What was obvious in that day was the foothold that idolatry had on the people. Even though they had a hard time remaining loyal to the Lord, they did not have a hard time remaining loyal to Baal, to Ashtoreth, to Molech, to Chemosh, or to other false gods. Why is that? Why on one hand can people be so unfaithful to the One True God and yet so faithful in their worship of something that's not even real? Here is an example in the life of four kings:

1. **King Jehu** (*2 Kings 10:31*) eliminated Joram, Ahaziah, Jezebel, Ahab's sons, and the priests of Baal, but did not destroy the golden calves and refused to turn from idolatry.
2. **King Joash** (*2 Chron. 24:17-19*) acted right while Jehoiada (priest) was alive, but after his death, Joash abandoned the Temple and worshiped the Asherah poles and other idols.
3. **Jehoshaphat** (*1 Kings 22:43*) was a good king; however, he failed to remove all the pagan shrines and the people continued to offer sacrifices there.
4. **Elijah & Elisha** were sold out to the Lord; pagan idols had no attraction on them.

Definition of Idolatry: The paying of divine honors to any created thing; the ascription of divine power to natural agencies. Idolatry may be classified as the worship of inanimate objects, animals, the forces of nature, living or deceased persons, ideals or concepts, or any man-made image. Each of these forms had its peculiar immoral tendencies (*Unger's*).

Literal Meaning of Idolatry: An empty thing; good for nothing; a shameful thing; a log or block; something filthy or impure; a likeness or image to look at (*Unger's Bible Dictionary*).

In these two definitions, we find the *purpose, power, and problem* of idolatry.

Purpose of Idolatry: "The paying of divine honors to any created thing" — idolatry is when we place anything as equal to or higher than the Creator. When we ascribe honor to a substitute for God, then we have committed idolatry. Therefore, idolatry must be a scheme of our spiritual enemy, for only Satan would attempt to assume the rightful place of God.

Power of Idolatry: "Each of these forms had its peculiar immoral tendencies" — alongside idolatry was some form of worship or immoral action. A man might worship Ashterah, the goddess of fertility, by having sex with priestly prostitutes. A young lady might worship Molech by sacrificing her baby on his altar. The worship of Baal might include indulgent meals, licentious dancing, homosexuality, bestiality, prostitution, sorcery, divination, or harm to the body. The pull of idolatry was that it appealed to man's desire to do what he wanted, to do wrong; in the case of the Hebrews, living under God's strict law, idolatry seemed liberating.

Problems of Idolatry: What Satan causes to seem so right is "empty, good for nothing, filthy and impure, even shameful." What he makes appealing are really logs in our eyes and stumbling blocks to our feet. All of Satan's avenues are dead ends, chasing the wind.

- Personal Application
 - 1. **Satan will do anything in his power to distract your attention away from the things of God.** Idolatry may be Satan's masterpiece; he has derailed millions of lives by offering them other alternatives. Have you ever fallen for his alternatives?
 - 2. **Satan has rigged this fallen world to appeal to your fallen nature.** He knows your weak spots. He doesn't have to devise anything new; you are a sinner, and all he has to do is dangle the right carrot of sin before your eyes and he's got you hooked.
 - 3. **Today's Americans are the kings of idolatry.** We waste our time and energy chasing idols that have no eternal reward — wealth, possessions, promotions, positions, all manner of ungodly sources of pleasure. We are addicted to sex, to substances, to violence, to greed, to entertainment, to ambition, and more, all of which are dead ends or distractions. The common denominator for all idols is a love for self. We are our biggest idols.

The Bottom Line

Idols are intended to *distract* our attention from God, and *you* are your biggest idol.

Question to Consider

1. What is America's most worshiped idol? How does Satan distract you from God's best?