

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Twenty-Fourth Week - Wednesday

BAAL

"Now it came to pass the same night that Yahweh said to him [Gideon], 'Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that is beside it; and build an altar to Yahweh your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down.' So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as Yahweh had said to him. . . . Then the men of the city said to Joash, 'Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it.' But Joash said to all who stood against him, 'Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down'" (Judges 6:25-31).

We now become acquainted with the lamentable fact that the worship of the gods of the heathen was freely practiced in Israel, and among the very family from which the appointed deliverer was chosen.

The very night after the Divine appearance to Gideon, a message came well calculated to test his faith and the extent of his obedience. He is commanded to throw down the altar of Baal that his father had and to cut down "the grove" that was by it. Although the altar belonged to Gideon's father, Joash, it seems it was destined for the common service of the town. Apparently Joash was the prime leader, if not the actual priest, of this idolatry. After tearing down the altar and cutting down the grove, Gideon was to build an altar to Jehovah and offer sacrifice there.

Gideon was well aware of the danger this task imposed upon him. To a man of weaker faith it would have seemed like tempting certain destruction; but he wavered not. He had a command and was determined to obey it. His only concern was to do it effectively. Therefore, aided by his servants, he executed his commission in the night in order not to be impeded.

The next morning when the inhabitants came to render their customary service at Baal's altar--lo! the altar was demolished, and the trees that grew around it were cut down; and conspicuous upon the rock at some distance was the altar that Gideon had erected to Jehovah together with

the marks thereon of a recent offering. This devastation was first regarded with stunned amazement, but it was soon followed by eager and angry inquiry as to the perpetrator of the deed. It soon became known that this had been the work of no other than Gideon, and instantly a hundred clamorous voices cried to Joash, "Bring forth your son, that he may die."

Paternal affection, strengthened perhaps by some internal conviction that his son was right and must have acted with sufficient authority, prompted Joash to stem or divert the torrent of barbarous wrath. It may even be that Gideon, aware of what was likely to come, had earlier apprised his father of what had taken place and of the commission he had received. There was no reason why Gideon should not have done this and every reason for his being likely to do so. But be this as it may, Joash executed his part with consummate ability and tact. His argument was: "Do nothing rashly against my son. If Baal be really a god, he will know how to avenge this affront; but if he be not a god, then it is they who plead for him who deserve to die, and not my son."

This reasoning was sufficiently convincing; and it put Gideon in the position of one standing forward not to excuse but to vindicate his act, defying to the utmost wrath the god he had treated with so much contempt. What could they say to this? They knew that Jehovah had often vindicated his own honor by manifest and signal judgments. No reason could be urged, then, why Baal should not do the same if he were a god; and they perhaps looked on in expectation that Gideon would be smitten down dead. But nothing followed, and the people dispersed with thoughtful faces to their houses.

As to the Baal whose worship had been adopted from their heathen neighbors, it has been rightly observed that the word means "lord" and is hence applicable to any of the different gods worshiped in this part of the world, and is in fact so applied in Scripture. But on the other hand, it seems to be generally agreed that when the word has the definite article in the original language (which is not preserved in translation), a particular idol is meant, namely, the one worshiped by the Phoenicians of Tyre and Sidon. It was this worship that reached its height in Israel after the marriage of king Ahab with the king of Tyre's daughter, Jezebel; and it continued only in Judah during the usurpation of Athaliah. The Baal of our text has the definite article and therefore denotes this Phoenician idol.