

## Is the Year 2020 the Year of Baal?

Elijah approached all the people and said, “How long will you straddle the issue? If the LORD is God, follow him; if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him. Elijah said to the people, “I am the only remaining prophet of the LORD, and there are four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. Give us two young bulls. Let them choose one, cut it into pieces, and place it on the wood, but start no fire. I shall prepare the other and place it on the wood, but shall start no fire. You shall call upon the name of your gods, and I will call upon the name of the LORD. The God who answers with fire is God.” All the people answered, “We agree!”

Elijah then said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one young bull and prepare it first, for there are more of you. Call upon your gods, but do not start the fire.” Taking the young bull that was turned over to them, they prepared it and called upon Baal from morning to noon, saying, “Baal, answer us!” But there was no sound, and no one answering. And they hopped around the altar they had prepared. When it was noon, Elijah taunted them: “Call louder, for he is a god; he may be busy doing his business, or may be on a journey. Perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” They called out louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears according to their ritual until blood gushed over them. Noon passed and they remained in a prophetic state until the time for offering sacrifice. But there was no sound, no one answering, no one listening.

Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” When they drew near to him, he repaired the altar of the LORD which had been destroyed. He took twelve stones, for the number of tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the LORD had said: Israel shall be your name. He built the stones into an altar to the name of the LORD, and made a trench around the altar large enough for two measures of grain. When he had arranged the wood, he cut up the young bull and laid it on the wood. He said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it over the burnt offering and over the wood.” “Do it again,” he said, and they did it again. “Do it a third time,” he said, and they did it a third time. The water flowed around the altar; even the trench was filled with the water.

At the time for offering sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came forward and said, “LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, LORD! Answer me, that this people may know that you, LORD, are God and that you have turned their hearts back to you.” The LORD’s fire came down and devoured the burnt offering, wood, stones, and dust, and lapped up the water in the trench. Seeing this, all the people fell prostrate and said, “The LORD is God! The LORD is God!” Then Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Let none of them escape!” They seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the Wadi Kishon and there he slaughtered them.

The sins of idolatry and of worshiping false gods (not that there really is a difference between these two terms) is something all Jews and Christians are guilty of at least in some measure. Anytime one sins, one is placing something above and before God. Therefore, any sin is a form of idolatry and false worship. Even the holiest of us here on Earth are guilty of this in some degree. Of course, some forms are much worse and/or more obvious than others. But I am not going to discuss culpability in this document, I merely wanted to point out that one does not need to be a pagan to follow gods other than Jehovah.

Knowing that we all have our false gods, the next question any good Jew or Christian should ask is, which gods do I worship? In truth, quite a few to some degree or another. But for this paper I want to focus on which god is the main god we follow. Sooner or later, we all worship the gods of Hedonism, Materialism, Avarice and others. But for most of us who consider ourselves "good," such worship is infrequent and short lived. Often times, we even admit to this minimalist idolatry, using names such as "guilty pleasure" or phrases such as "what can I say, I'm human too."

Yet there is one god that we long for more than any other, one that is on our minds much of the day, every day. It provides the motivation (directly or indirectly) for most of what we do, and it sets the goals and concerns of our lives. And it need not be a god of benefits. Many pagan gods were not worshiped for desire of gain, but out of fear of retribution. Even the most "benevolent" of pagan gods were not to be trusted with wishes beyond ordinary expectations. But whoever this god is, it is the god we defend at all costs. Normally calm people become suddenly irate when it is mentioned. Intelligent people become irrational. Attentive people refuse to listen. When this happens, we have entered their "holy ground" with shoes on our feet.

In *Arguing Religion*, Bishop Robert Barron (taking his lead from Saint Augustine) suggests that there are four main altars that we build to false gods to: power, wealth, pleasure and honor. And, like the priests of Baal, we will do anything to appease the god of this altar, even to the point of harming ourselves. And when the gods turn silent, we are destroyed by our own making. But note how I include "us" in this accusation. This is not a paper of "we" versus "them," but what I hope will be a tool to look honestly at ourselves before our blind devotion to one god or another leads to such destruction.

As I said before, what we want (or fear) most in life is the god we follow. As a result, it's easier to see this god for what it is in times of *need* instead of times of *plenty*. It's like convincing oneself that one does not have a drinking problem when looking around at other people in a bar. It's only when alcohol is completely denied that one's dependency can truly be measured.

Speaking for myself, the year 2020 A.D. has opened my eyes to something I never saw in me before. I have been horrified as to how easily so many Americans have, not just willingly, but aggressively, given up their 1st Amendment Rights, and how little the new generation of young adults cares for the greatness of our nation. I have even said that I was never ashamed to be an American until this year. But I won't elaborate on this any more. It is not my intent to present a political argument, but rather to point out that I discovered a god I was unknowingly worshiping my whole life.

I see now that I worshiped at the Altar of Honor, and made the Constitution of the United States my Savior. I have to accept that, no matter how well our Constitution was put together, and no matter how honorable the service of those who died to protect were, it is still a construct of man. The United States is not the New Jerusalem, no matter how hard we tried to make it so. I've always known that the

U.S. will one day fall, but it wasn't until 2020, when so many freedoms I honored in spirit and through service came under attack that my worship was finally revealed to me.

While I cannot speak for specific people, even a cursory look at what has happened this year makes it clear that many altars have been busy with worshipers. There are clearly those whose greatest god is Revenge. Even now they gather at the Altar of Power, convinced that whatever wrongs they believed they have suffered can be made good by the messiah Anarchy. There are those whose greatest god is Death (specifically, the fear of). They are gathering at the Altar of Pleasure, so desperate are they that to hold on to what life brings that they seek a Messiah in paper napkins, handkerchiefs and untested biological material. Finally, we have growing numbers of those who seek the god Entitlements. They gather at the Altar of Wealth, demanding things they do not want to work for in the name of their Savior: Equality.

I find it heartening that so many people, seeing Baal 2020 for what he is, are indeed turning even closer to God. I hope God will count me in that number. There are those who will blindly follow Baal 2020 under whatever name they choose to call him (Baal does not care for trivialities such as names, as long as he can turn us away from God). But I also believe that there are those who are still confused as to what is going on. As Christians, we all have a duty to seek them out. But we need to know how to do it. I hope I can shed a little light on this here.

The first thing we need to remember is that we are treading on Holy Ground for them. We need to do what Moses did in Exodus 3:5, and remove our metaphorical sandals from our feet. It's easy to run wild when shod, but we are careful and slow when barefoot. Rather than force ourselves in their emotional "safe space," draw them out with questions based on genuine concern. Let them speak their part. Look for what they have right and use that as leverage to show them where their facts are in error. We must not be discouraged if it fails, remember the parable of The Sower: not all seeds will produce fruit, but those that do will make up for the lost. It is one of only two parables that are found in all three synoptic Gospels, so it must be important.

The other thing we need to know is if we are up against a lost cause. The greatest enemy is Voluntarism. It has a long and complicated history that I will not detail here, but the most current and dangerous form of it came from Foucault, who built on Nietzsche and Sartre's works. The current form can best be described as "one believing something is true because one wants it to be true." At one time, this would have been described as a form of insanity (the "minority of one" definition), but now it might be (and increasingly is) a hate crime if the objective truth winds up offending someone. Sadly, while one might be saved from outside forces, one can never be saved from oneself. The Bible has no shortage of such examples. We can pity them and pray for them, but in the end: Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words—go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet. (Matthew 10:14) We must not let the unwilling keep us from those who might benefit from the objective truth.

Raymond Mulholland  
Original Publication Date: 14 January 2021