

1 High Places . . .

- The most overlooked sin of the Old Testament.

2 Part One - Review

- Last week I shared that High Places were sacred places—usually on a hill top, where people would come to offer their sacrifices and burnt offerings.
- But when the LORD brought his people into the Promised Land, he commanded them to destroy these High Places, break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, and burn the idols and altars. (See Deuteronomy 7:5)
- However, since the Israelites didn't drive out all the inhabitants from the land, pagan practices and patterns of worship became a temptation and a snare for God's children.
- According to the Mosaic Law, the Israelites were suppose to worship the Lord according to His pattern and instruction.
- The point being, that it is not enough to worship the right God, but also according to the prescribed pattern as well.

3 Part One - Review

- However, the most of the kings of both Judah and Israel were unfaithful enforcing God's commands.
- Instead, of making sure all sacrifices and burnt offerings were made in Jerusalem, they allowed the people to sacrifice at the pagan High Places.
- In fact, several of the righteous kings of Judah, while commended for their faith, were nevertheless highly criticized for permitting religious activity at these High Places—even though worship was made to the Lord.
- The first king to actually remove these High Places was Hezekiah.

4 Hezekiah

- Hezekiah ruled in Judah from 716 - 697 BC.
- He is known for enacting sweeping religious reforms during his reign, where . . .
 - he ended the worship of foreign deities from the temple, and was
 - the first king to remove all the High Places from Judah.
- The reason for his reforms was simply the acceptance that all of Judah's current problems was the direct result of their corrupted worship and turning from the Lord.
- And to understand why this happened, we have to look no farther than Hezekiah's father, Ahaz.

5 Ahaz

- According to 2 Chronicles 28:1-4,
 - [Ahaz] did not do what was pleasing in the sight of the LORD, as his ancestor David had done. Instead, he followed the example of the kings of Israel.

- He cast metal images for the worship of Baal. He offered sacrifices in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, even sacrificing his own sons in the fire.
- In this way, he followed the detestable practices of the pagan nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites.
- He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the pagan shrines and on the hills and under every green tree.

6 Ahaz

- Because of all this, the LORD his God allowed the king of Aram to defeat Ahaz and to exile large numbers of his people to Damascus. (2 Chr 28:5 NLT-SE)
- The armies of the king of Israel also defeated Ahaz and inflicted many casualties on his army. In a single day Pekah son of Remaliah, Israel's king, killed 120,000 of Judah's troops, all of them experienced warriors, because they had abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors. (2 Chr 28:6 NLT-SE)
- The armies of Israel captured 200,000 women and children from Judah and seized tremendous amounts of plunder, which they took back to Samaria. (2 Chr 28:8 NLT-SE)

7 Ahaz

- In response to this huge defeat, Ahaz doesn't repent of his idolatry, instead he double-downs.
- In his time of trouble King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the LORD. He offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus, who had defeated him; for he thought, "Since the gods of the kings of Aram have helped them, I will sacrifice to them so they will help me." (2 Chr 28:22–23 NIV)
- Ahaz gathered together the furnishings from the temple of God and took them away. He shut the doors of the LORD's temple and set up altars at every street corner in Jerusalem. In every town in Judah he built high places to burn sacrifices to other gods and provoked the LORD, the God of his fathers, to anger. (2 Chr 28:24–25 NIV)

8 Ahaz

- What Ahaz does next is also astonishing as well. He takes the gold and silver from the temple and sends it to the King of Assyria.
- King Ahaz sends messengers to King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria with this message: "I am your servant and your vassal. Come up and rescue me from the attacking armies of Aram and Israel." (2 Kings 16:7 NLT-SE)
- Tiglath-pileser does as Ahaz requests and delivers Ahaz from his enemies.

9 Assyria

- So when Ahaz ends his reign, Judah has been
 - humiliated by her enemies,

- the temple worship has become defiled,
- the country is now is a vassal state of a foreign power, and
- idols are worshipped everywhere and high places are all over the place.

10 Hezekiah

- So when Hezekiah takes the throne from his father Ahaz, the temple is so defiled that it is not even being used.
- The first order he gives is this command.
 - Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the LORD, the God of your fathers. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary. (2 Chr 29:5 NIV)
 - Our fathers were unfaithful; they did evil in the eyes of the LORD our God and forsook him. They turned their faces away from the LORD's dwelling place and turned their backs on him. (2 Chr 29:6 NIV)

11 Hezekiah

- Therefore, the anger of the LORD has fallen on Judah and Jerusalem; he has made them an object of dread and horror and scorn, as you can see with your own eyes. This is why our fathers have fallen by the sword and why our sons and daughters and our wives are in captivity. (2 Chr 29:8–9 NIV)
- Now I intend to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger will turn away from us. My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before him and serve him, to minister before him and to burn incense. (2 Chr 29:10–11 NIV)

12 Hezekiah

- He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.) (2 Kings 18:3–4 NIV)
- Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. (2 Kings 18:5–7 NIV)

13 Summary

- Ahaz did evil in the eyes of the Lord and the Lord gave him over to his enemies.
- Instead of repenting, Ahaz expanded his worship of foreign gods, and built altars for them everywhere.
- In his desperation for help, he even offered up his sons as human sacrifices to pagan gods.

- He gave up the independent status of Judah to a foreign country and took the gold and silver from the temple to gain help from Assyria.
- Hezekiah, on the other hand, trusted in the Lord and worshipped him accordingly. God delivered him from his enemies and worked wonders and miracles in his life.
- While Hezekiah was tested on many occasions, the Lord's grace was sufficient.

14 **Manasseh**

- While you may think that everything in Judah would now run well and everyone would live happily ever after, there is something you may want to consider.
- The next king of Judea was Hezekiah's son Manasseh who was twelve years old when he took the throne.
- According to the Bible, He did what was evil in the LORD's sight, following the detestable practices of the pagan nations that the LORD had driven from the land ahead of the Israelites. He rebuilt the pagan shrines his father, Hezekiah, had destroyed. He constructed altars for Baal and set up an Asherah pole, just as King Ahab of Israel had done. He also bowed before all the powers of the heavens and worshiped them. (2 Kings 21:2–3 NLT-SE)

15 **Manasseh**

- He built pagan altars in the Temple of the LORD, the place where the LORD had said, "My name will remain in Jerusalem forever." He built these altars for all the powers of the heavens in both courtyards of the LORD's Temple. Manasseh also sacrificed his own son in the fire. He practiced sorcery and divination, and he consulted with mediums and psychics. He did much that was evil in the LORD's sight, arousing his anger. (2 Kings 21:4–6 NLT-SE)
- Manasseh also murdered many innocent people until Jerusalem was filled from one end to the other with innocent blood. (2 Kings 21:16 NLT-SE)
- Jewish tradition says he sawed the prophet Isaiah in two.

16 **Manasseh**

- According to one Bible commentator,
 - His reign was a time of religious retrogression, caused by terror of Assyria and a fascination for her cults.
 - This resulted in a syncretism of Baalism, a cult of Astarte at the 'high places,' astral worship, with spiritism and divination.
 - His long reign was bloody and reactionary, and notorious for the introduction of illegal altars into the Temple courts, and 'the passing of his sons through the fire' in the valley of the son of' Hinnom.

17 **Manasseh**

- So the LORD sent the commanders of the Assyrian armies, and they took Manasseh prisoner. They put a ring through his nose, bound him in bronze chains, and led him away to Babylon. (2 Chr 33:11 NLT-SE)
- But while in deep distress, Manasseh sought the LORD his God and sincerely humbled himself before the God of his ancestors. (2 Chr 33:12 NLT-SE)
- And when he prayed, the LORD listened to him and was moved by his request. So the LORD brought Manasseh back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh finally realized that the LORD alone is God! (2 Chr 33:13 NLT-SE)

18 Manasseh

- Upon his return, Manasseh began a series of actions attempting to undo the spiritual devastation he had caused.
- He began building projects, constructing a huge wall outside Jerusalem. He assigned officers to all the fortified cities of Judah. Then he removed all the idols from the temple, and demolished altars on the hills around the city.
- He repaired the altar of the Lord and appointed priests to offer sacrifices, including offerings of peace and thanksgiving.
- Manasseh commanded the people to return to worshipping the one true God. The people cooperated to some degree, but still sacrificed at the high places, except instead of offering to idols, they sacrificed to the Lord. (See 2 Chr 33:14–17)

19 Josiah

- When Manasseh died Amon his son succeeded to the throne of Judah.
- According to 2 Kings, Amon reintroduced idolatry in Judah and did evil in the Lord's sight.
- However, after only three years, his own officials conspired against him and assassinated him in his palace.
- At the age of 8 years old, Josiah his son became king and he reigned in Jerusalem 31 years.
- He did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. He did not turn away from doing what was right. (2 Kings 22:2 NLT-SE)

20 Josiah

- In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah undertook a renovation project to restore the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem.
- In the process, Hilkiah the high priest, finds what scholars believe is the book of Deuteronomy.
- When the king heard what was written in the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes in despair. (2 Kings 22:11 NLT-SE)

21 Josiah

- According to Kenneth L Barker, The basis of his grief was twofold:
 - Judah’s guilt and her coming judgment.
 - The nation had sinned grievously in breaking God’s covenant in both its idolatry and its social injustices; therefore, in accordance with the terms of that violated covenant, judgment must come.
- In consulting the prophetess Huldah, she confirms the concern of Josiah and his officials and gives them this message.
- “This is what the LORD says: ‘I am going to bring disaster on this city and its people. All the words written in the scroll that the king of Judah has read will come true. For my people have abandoned me and offered sacrifices to pagan gods, and I am very angry with them for everything they have done. My anger will burn against this place, and it will not be quenched.’” (2 Kings 22:16–17 NLT-SE)

22 Josiah’s Reforms

- The king took his place of authority beside the pillar and renewed the covenant in the LORD’s presence. He pledged to obey the LORD by keeping all his commands, laws, and decrees with all his heart and soul. In this way, he confirmed all the terms of the covenant that were written in the scroll, and all the people pledged themselves to the covenant. (2 Kings 23:3 NLT-SE)
- Josiah rolled up his sleeves and did the following . . .
 - Removed from the LORD’s Temple all the articles that were used to worship Baal, Asherah, and all the powers of the heavens. (2 Kings 23:4 NLT-SE)
 - He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem. (2 Kings 23:5 NIV)
 - He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the LORD to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. (2 Kings 23:6 NIV)
 - He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the LORD and where women did weaving for Asherah. (2 Kings 23:7 NIV)

23 Josiah’s Reforms

- Continued reforms by Josiah . . .
 - Josiah brought all the priests from the towns of Judah and desecrated the high places, from Geba to Beersheba, where the priests had burned incense. (2 Kings 23:8 NIV)
 - He desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire to Molech. (2 Kings 23:10 NIV)

- He pulled down the altars the kings of Judah had erected on the roof near the upper room of Ahaz, and the altars Manasseh had built in the two courts of the temple of the LORD. He removed them from there, smashed them to pieces and threw the rubble into the Kidron Valley. (2 Kings 23:12 NIV)
- The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption — the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the people of Ammon. (2 Kings 23:13 NIV)
- Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones. (2 Kings 23:14 NIV)

24 Josiah's Reforms

- Continued reforms by Josiah . . .
 - Josiah also got rid of the mediums and psychics, the household gods, the idols, and every other kind of detestable practice, both in Jerusalem and throughout the land of Judah. He did this in obedience to the laws written in the scroll that Hilkiah the priest had found in the LORD's Temple. (2 Kings 23:24 NLT-SE)
 - Never before had there been a king like Josiah, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and soul and strength, obeying all the laws of Moses. And there has never been a king like him since. (2 Kings 23:25 NLT-SE)

25 Moral of the Story

- There were three great kings of Israel—David, Hezekiah, and Josiah. They followed the Lord with all their hearts and worshipped Him according to the Word of God.
- When they learned what pleased the Lord they prospered—even though from time to time their faith was put to the test.
- Several other kings of Israel were good, but their faith wasn't as strong and their obedience was partial and incomplete.
- Then there were others who were so faithless that they corrupted the worship of God and turned to idols for their protection and security—provoking the Lord to anger—bring judgment upon themselves and the whole nation.

26 Moral of the Story

- During the time of Jesus' ministry on the earth, idolatry wasn't a problem at all in Israel.
- There were no "High Places" or shrines to other gods.
- All sacrifices were brought to Jerusalem and offered up at God's temple.
- Nevertheless, according to Jesus, ritualistic and ceremonial righteousness was not enough.

- In fact, he gets into an discussion with a Samaritan woman and redefines worship and how place will no long be important.

27 Jesus at the Well

- Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.” (John 4:21–22 NIV)
- “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.” (John 4:23 NIV)
- “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24 NIV)

28 Jesus at the Well

- When Jesus is talking about worshipping God in “spirit” and in “truth,” he is basically saying this—
- The true worshipers that God is seeking are those who will worship him not in form (rituals, religious ceremonies, or observances) but in function.
- According to Jesus, the worshipers that the Father is looking for are those who don’t replace obedience with sacrifice or vain self-serving piety like the Pharisees.
- The worshipers that God is looking for are those that carry out the righteous intent of the law and out of faith and love for Him—serve and care for His body.
- So in other words, if we limit our worship to just singing hymns or choruses, we may be missing something that is very important.
- As the Apostle John says, “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:18 NIV)