

Deuteronomy 16:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee.

Analysis

Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee—The asherah (אֲשֵׁרָה, sacred pole or tree) was a Canaanite goddess symbol, often wooden posts near Baal altars. Planting trees (especially evergreens) near YHWH's altar syncretized pagan worship with true worship—mixing light with darkness.

Paul echoes this: **What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?...Come out from among them, and be ye separate** (2 Corinthians 6:14, 17). The warning applies today: combining Christian faith with New Age spirituality, prosperity gospel materialism, or therapeutic deism creates hybrid religion—aesthetically appealing but spiritually toxic. **No man can serve two masters** (Matthew 6:24). Worship must remain pure, undiluted by cultural idolatries.

Historical Context

Canaanite high places featured groves (sacred trees) where fertility rituals and cultic prostitution occurred. By forbidding trees near YHWH's altar, God distinguished His worship from sexualized pagan practices. Reformer kings like Hezekiah and Josiah cut down Asherah poles (2 Kings 18:4, 23:6, 14).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What modern 'Asherah poles' (worldly values, cultural idols, secular philosophies) are you tempted to 'plant near' your worship of God?
2. How does syncretism (mixing Christian faith with other worldviews) create spiritually toxic 'hybrid religion'?
3. What specific compromises must you 'cut down' to maintain worship purity?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	תַּמְפִּע	לְבָנָה	כָּל	אֲשֶׁר	עַל	אֵל
H3808	Thou shalt not plant	H0	thee a grove	H3605	of any trees	near
	H5193		H842		H6086	H681
עַל	מִזְבֵּחַ	יְהֹוָה	אֲשֶׁר	אֱלֹהָה	תַּמְפִּעָה	לְבָנָה
	unto the altar	of the LORD	thy God	H834	which thou shalt make	H0
	H4196	H3068	H430		H6213	

Additional Cross-References

2 Chronicles 33:3 (Sacrifice): For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

2 Kings 17:16 (References God): And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

Exodus 34:13 (Sacrifice): But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves:

2 Kings 21:3 (Sacrifice): For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

1 Kings 16:33 (References God): And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.

1 Kings 14:15 (References Lord): For the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the LORD to anger.

Judges 3:7 (References God): And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgat the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.