

Judges 6:25

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it:

Analysis

And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it:

God's first command to Gideon addresses idolatry before military deliverance. 'The same night' (balailah hahu, הַהֲוָא בָּלַילָה) after commissioning indicates immediacy—deal with sin before confronting external enemies. The command involves two actions:

1. destroy Baal's altar
2. cut down Asherah pole (asherah, אֲשֶׁרָה, 'grove/wooden pole' representing Canaanite mother goddess).

These belonged to Gideon's father Joash, showing idolatry penetrated even Yahwist families. The 'second bullock of seven years old' may indicate the bullock's age matched the oppression's duration—seven years of suffering under judgment for seven years of idolatrous worship.

This command prioritizes spiritual reformation over military deliverance. God could have defeated Midian without addressing Baal worship, yet insisted on

covenant faithfulness first. This pattern repeats throughout Scripture—God demands holiness before blessing (Joshua 7, achan's sin; 1 Samuel 7:3-4, Samuel demanding idol removal before deliverance). External enemies often represent divine discipline for internal sin. Removing discipline (defeating Midian) without addressing sin (idol worship) would enable continued apostasy. God's mercy includes confronting sin, not ignoring it.

Theologically, this illustrates sanctification's priority in Christian life. Before significant ministry or spiritual victory, God often addresses besetting sins requiring elimination. The Corinthian church's divisions and immorality needed correction before effective witness (1 Corinthians 1-6). Peter's racism required confrontation before inclusive gospel ministry (Galatians 2:11-14). Personal holiness precedes effective service—not sinless perfection but serious pursuit of purity. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me' (Psalm 66:18) reminds believers that unaddressed sin hinders prayer and service.

Historical Context

Baal worship dominated Canaanite religion. Baal (meaning 'lord, master') was the storm-fertility god, believed to control rain, crops, and reproduction. Canaanite agricultural religion involved ritual prostitution, drunken orgies, and child sacrifice to ensure fertility. Asherah, Baal's consort, was mother goddess represented by wooden poles or living trees. Archaeological excavations reveal numerous Baal and Asherah figurines, altars, and temples throughout Canaanite sites.

Israelite syncretism combined Yahweh worship with Baal practices. People likely rationalized: 'We worship Yahweh for national identity but use Baal rituals for agricultural prosperity—covering all bases.' This theological compromise violated the first commandment ('no other gods') and covenant exclusivity (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Prophets repeatedly condemned such syncretism (1 Kings 18, Elijah vs Baal; Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel all confront idolatry).

Joash maintaining Baal altar while naming his son Gideon (from root meaning 'hew down') creates irony—his son would 'hew down' the father's idol. Whether Joash practiced nominal Yahwism alongside Baalism or completely abandoned Yahweh

worship remains unclear. His later defense of Gideon (v. 31-32) suggests retained Yahwist sympathies, perhaps indicating his idolatry resulted from cultural pressure rather than theological conviction. Nonetheless, maintaining Baal altar made him culpable for covenant violation.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What 'Baal altars' (idols, worldly dependencies) require destruction before God grants deliverance from external struggles?
2. How does God's insistence on spiritual purity before military victory challenge pragmatic approaches prioritizing results over holiness?
3. What family or cultural patterns of compromise need confronting despite personal cost?

Interlinear Text

וַיְהִי	בְּלֹא	לֹא	לֹא	וְיֹאמֶר	הָיָה
H1961	And it came to pass the same night	H3915	H1931	said	H0
				H559	that the LORD
					H3068
עַל	רָאשָׁךְ	לֹא	בְּ	לֹא	בְּ
unto him Take	H853	bullock	bullock	that thy father	bullock
H3947	H6499	H7794	H834	H1	H6499
בְּעֵשֶׂב	שָׁנָה יָמִין	וְנִזְבְּחַת	מִזְבֵּחַ	בְּעֵל	מִזְבֵּחַ
even the second	of seven	years old	and throw down	the altar	of Baal
H8145	H7651	H8141	H2040	H853	H1168
תְּכַרְתָּה:	עַל	יְהִי	בְּאֵשֶׁב	בְּעֵל	תְּכַרְתָּה:
that thy father	H853	H842	the grove	H834	hath and cut down
H834	H1			H5921	H3772

Additional Cross-References

Judges 3:7 (References Lord): 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.

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

Matthew 10:37 (Parallel theme): He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Acts 5:29 (Parallel theme): Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Matthew 6:24 (Parallel theme): No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

1 Kings 18:21 (References Lord): And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

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