

READING PLAN WEEK 9 for The Epic of Eden – Isaiah
The Book of Isaiah and the Idol

Word from the Author: The other drama of the book of Isaiah is that the hero (the Servant) is juxtaposed with a villain; a character who at one stage of Israel's history was *believed* to be a hero, but proved himself otherwise. This villain is the idol – in other words, the polytheistic gods of Israel's world, who claimed to have the keys of fertility, wealth, and security. Monotheism was a new idea in Moses' day. Most would have been baffled by the idea that there was only one god. Consider the gods of Canaan; when the Israelites entered Canaan, they came into the territory of Baal (the Canaanite god of the mountains, fertility and the storm and Baal's consort Asherah, a fertility goddess. The cultural and religious contrast became a central theme in undermining Israel's faithfulness to Yahweh, and, indeed, leading to their ultimate exile.

Day #1: Read Exodus 24:12-18; 32:1-6, 21-24. Consider what the people saw when Moses was on top of the mountain and what they asked Aaron to do. Give thought to Aaron's response. Is there significance in the image he made? Juxtapose **Exodus 20:2** and **Exodus 32:4**. Remembering the treaty format between a greater power (suzerain) and a lesser power (vassal), we recall that this establishes a singular relationship on the basis of the suzerain's providence for the vassal. These two verses define a sharp break from that treaty, which God established in Exodus 24. It is hard to overestimate the depth of this treaty violation.

Day #2: Read Exodus 20:1-3. What is Yahweh's unambiguous command regarding Israel's monotheism? **Read Deuteronomy 12:1-5.** What does Yahweh command Israel to do to the other nations' places and symbols of worship? **Read Deuteronomy 6:1-5.** This is the famous *Shema* prayer of Israel and modern Judaism. What is the result of the Israelites keeping Yahweh's commandments? **Read 2 Kings 21:1-9.** Do any of these readings indicate Yahweh is compatible or not emphatically in conflict with the gods of the Nations encountered or indwelt by Israel?

Day #3: We look at profound contrasts today. **Read Isaiah 40:18-20, 41:21-24, 48:3-5.** Focus on who creates the idol, what Yahweh asks of the idols, how He observes their inabilities over his abilities and how he appraises those who chose to worship them. Now **Read Isaiah 44:6-20.** Take to heart the great irony Yahweh describes and the extreme failure of the worshipper of the idol to apprehend the truth of the living God.

This week's reflection question: History and archeological evidence show the incredible degradation that overtakes those who worship idols – even to the point of child sacrifices (which were even documented into 235 AD by Tertullian). Observing this week's readings and outstanding contrasts between idols and Yahweh, it is easy to look at the idolaters and scorn their defiance and chosen ignorance. But today, give thought to how even we may be influenced in incremental ways by the nonbelieving and hedonistic world in which we clearly live. What would Yahweh say to *us* as a word of warning and clarity about the One who provides for us and how we are to regard and revere and, indeed, worship only Him?

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