

Dr. David Howard, Joshua - Ruth, Session 23, Why Israel Departed from the Lord Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 23, Why Israel Departed from the Lord, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. David Howard's lecture explores why ancient Israelites abandoned Yahweh for Canaanite gods. He posits three main reasons: **the alluring sexuality** inherent in Canaanite religious practices, **the material wealth** and prosperity associated with Canaanite worship, and **the societal pressure** to conform to neighboring cultures. His argument is supported by biblical examples and the archaeological discovery at Quintiliet Ajrud, which reveals syncretism—the blending of religious beliefs—in Israelite worship. This syncretism, exemplified by the depiction of Yahweh with an Asherah figure, demonstrates the Israelites' desire to integrate their faith with the prevalent Canaanite culture. The lecture concludes by highlighting the enduring relevance of these temptations.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 23 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Historical Books → Joshua-Ruth).



**Howard_Josh_Ruth
_Session23.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 23, Why Israel Departed from the Lord

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided source, "Howard_Josh_Ruth_EN_Session23_WhyApostacy.pdf," with relevant quotes:

Briefing Document: Why Israel Departed from the Lord

Introduction

This document summarizes Dr. David Howard's lecture (session 23) from his teaching series on Joshua through Ruth, focusing on the question of why the Israelites repeatedly turned away from God to pursue other deities. Howard addresses this issue not from a specific biblical passage but as a recurring problem throughout the historical books of the Old Testament. He shifts from a perspective of judgment to one of understanding, acknowledging that there must have been powerful incentives for the Israelites' actions, even when they knew God's displeasure.

Main Themes and Key Ideas:

1. Shifting Perspective:

- Howard admits that as a child he viewed the Israelites' apostasy with judgment, wondering "how dumb could those Israelites be?" and thinking that he "would never succumb to those temptations."
- As an adult, he recognizes the need to consider potential motivations and rewards behind their actions. He states: "As an adult, looking back, I see it with three different eyes. I begin asking a different question. Namely, thinking about there must have been some payoff."

1. Three Key Incentives for Apostasy: Howard identifies three primary incentives that drew the Israelites away from God:

- **Sex:** The sexual practices associated with Canaanite religions were a significant draw.
- Howard notes the practice of cult prostitution, both male and female, linked to Canaanite religious shrines. "These are prostitutes who are somehow associated with some shrine that has a religious veneer around it, where they are practicing prostitution, but in with some sort of religious sanction."

- He highlights Numbers 25 and Deuteronomy 23 as biblical examples of the Israelites' entanglement with sexual immorality within the context of foreign religions.
- He emphasizes that the Canaanite goddess Asherah was portrayed with "breasts and hips," making her a sexual object and integral to fertility worship.
- He presents a scenario where Canaanites might scoff at Israelite worship by saying "you're kidding, look what we do in church, and we can have a lot more fun than you do."
- **Money and Materialism:** The Israelites, recently freed from slavery, were attracted to the wealth and prosperity of the Canaanites.
- He mentions the "great public works, public buildings, great personal wealth" of the Canaanites.
- He references the Israelites' fear when they saw the Canaanites' walled cities, feeling like "grasshoppers" in comparison.
- He suggests a counter-argument from the Canaanites: "you're kidding, look what Baal has done for us. We have all this wealth, you have nothing. So, follow Baal and you'll get stuff."
- He connects this attraction to materialism to the Israelites' desire for a comfortable, secure life, something they didn't have in the wilderness.
- **Peer Pressure:** The Israelites desired to be like other nations, leading to the adoption of pagan practices.
- He mentions Israel asking for a king "like all the nations" to feel less like "outsiders."
- He notes that unlike other religions with tangible representations of their gods, the Israelites had no visible image of Yahweh. They "couldn't picture him, and so they felt maybe a little out of sync with their neighbors in this way."

1. **The Quntillet Ajrud Discovery:**

- A significant archaeological find at Quntillet Ajrud reveals evidence of syncretism.
- Howard describes the findings at Quntillet Ajrud, an Israelite site from the 8th century BC, including inscriptions and drawings.

- He explains how the drawing at this site depicted Yahweh with Egyptian influence, represented as a bull, and his Asherah, a Canaanite goddess represented as a cow. "The inscription reads... I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and by his Asherah."
- This discovery provides concrete evidence of the mixing of Yahweh worship with pagan beliefs, which is described as syncretism.
- He notes that this finding shows syncretism not from the lens of the prophets but "through the lens of the eyes of people who were practicing it," and how they likely saw themselves as faithful to Yahweh.

1. **Syncretism:**

- Howard defines syncretism as the "mixing and merging of different religious traditions, practices and beliefs" and highlights that the discovery at Quntillet Ajrud reveals this in practice.
- He notes that sometimes the merging is "relatively innocuous," but sometimes it involves "a fundamental merging of things that are fundamentally opposite each other."
- The prophets' denouncements of Israel's apostasy are underscored by this archaeological evidence, showing the extent to which the Israelites were integrating foreign religious practices into their own worship.

1. **Universality of Human Nature:**

- Howard emphasizes that these temptations are not unique to the ancient Israelites: "human nature really doesn't change. And human nature at any time, in any place, is attracted by these kinds of things."
- He concludes by acknowledging that the same temptations related to sex, money, and peer pressure are very much present in the modern world.
- He urges his audience to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and not these other things."

Conclusion: Dr. Howard's lecture effectively highlights the complexity of the Israelites' repeated apostasy by focusing on the incentives and cultural pressures that influenced their behavior. By exploring the allure of sex, materialism, and peer pressure, as well as the evidence of syncretism, Howard provides a more nuanced understanding of the biblical narrative. He also draws a connection to modern temptations, making the topic relevant to contemporary audiences. The archaeological discovery of Quntillet Ajrud provides tangible evidence of this ancient syncretism.

4. Study Guide: Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 23, Why Israel Departed from the Lord

Why Israel Departed from the Lord: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What was Dr. Howard's initial reaction to the Israelites' repeated departure from God when he was younger?
2. What was the first incentive that Dr. Howard identified that led the Israelites astray?
3. According to Deuteronomy, how was cult prostitution different from regular prostitution?
4. How did the Canaanite religion use sex to attract followers?
5. What did the Israelites find so overwhelming when they entered the land of Canaan?
6. What was the second incentive that Dr. Howard identified that led the Israelites astray?
7. Why did the Israelites desire a king?
8. What was the unique aspect about the Israelite's representation of their God compared to other ancient Near Eastern cultures?
9. What was the significance of the inscriptions and drawings discovered at Quntillet Ajrud?
10. What is syncretism, and how does it relate to the Israelites' departure from God?

Answer Key

1. Dr. Howard, as a child, viewed the Israelites as foolish and unable to understand their own good. He believed that if he were in their position, he would have never strayed from God's path. He was uninterested in the motivations behind their actions.

2. The first incentive was sexual activity. The Canaanite religion incorporated sex as part of its rituals and worship, including cult prostitutes associated with their shrines.
3. Cult prostitution, involving *kedeshas* and *kadesh*, was associated with religious shrines and was considered a perversion of holiness. Regular prostitution (*zonah*) was more akin to commercial sex work but still deemed inappropriate.
4. Canaanite religion incorporated cult prostitution as a way to appease gods and goddesses of fertility, making it a part of the worship experience. It was a reward for offerings, thus integrating sex into their religious culture.
5. The Israelites were overwhelmed by the wealth and power of Canaan. They saw great cities, public works, and personal possessions that they had never experienced before, making them feel inferior.
6. The second incentive was money and materialism. The Israelites were enticed by the wealth and abundance that the Canaanites seemed to enjoy, lacking that themselves, and they perceived it as a reward for following Baal.
7. The Israelites desired a king because they wanted to be like the other nations. They felt out of sync and wanted the military might a king could provide for them.
8. Unlike other ancient cultures, Israel did not have a physical representation of their God, which made them feel different from their neighbors. Other cultures had impressive statues and figures, while Israel's God was unseen, adding to a sense of being different.
9. The inscriptions and drawings at Quntillet Ajrud revealed an instance of syncretism. They depicted Yahweh with an Egyptian bull and his Asherah, demonstrating how the Israelites merged their faith with other pagan practices.
10. Syncretism is the merging of different religious traditions, practices, and beliefs. In the context of Israel, it refers to their blending of the worship of Yahweh with Canaanite gods and goddesses, which was a key reason for their departure from the Lord.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each question in a well-developed essay.

1. Discuss the three primary incentives Dr. Howard identifies that led the Israelites to turn away from God and how these incentives are presented in the source material.
2. Analyze the significance of the discovery at Quntillet Ajrud, and how it highlights the concept of syncretism and the Israelites' religious practices during the time of the monarchies.
3. Compare and contrast the different types of prostitution described in the text and how they reflect the societal and religious practices of the time.
4. Explore how the Israelites' experiences in the wilderness and the stark contrast with the wealth of Canaan influenced their choices and susceptibility to false gods.
5. Consider the timeless nature of the temptations faced by the Israelites and how those same temptations persist in modern times.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Asherah:** The wife of El and a prominent goddess in Canaanite religion, often depicted in a sexual manner.
- **Baal:** A high god in Canaanite religion, known as the god of rain and fertility.
- **Canaanite Religion:** The religious system practiced by the people of Canaan, characterized by the worship of multiple gods and goddesses, including Baal and Asherah.
- **Cult Prostitute (kedesha/kadesh):** Individuals, both male and female, associated with religious shrines who engaged in prostitution as part of worship practices; often considered a sacred act tied to religious ritual.
- **Kadosh:** The Hebrew word for "holy," used to denote being separate from sin and corruption.
- **Quntillet Ajrud:** An archaeological site in the northeastern Sinai desert where inscriptions and drawings revealed Israelite syncretism.
- **Syncretism:** The mixing and merging of different religious traditions, practices, and beliefs.
- **Yahweh:** The personal name for the God of Israel.
- **Zonah:** The normal Hebrew term for a prostitute, referring to a more conventional form of prostitution.

5. FAQs on Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 23, Why Israel Departed from the Lord, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Israel's Departure from the Lord

- **Why did the Israelites repeatedly turn away from God to worship other gods, despite knowing the consequences?**
- The Israelites' persistent turning away from God wasn't out of a desire for punishment, but rather because they perceived rewards and pleasures in the Canaanite religious practices. They weren't intentionally seeking to be punished. The attractions included the promise of immediate gratification through sexual practices, material wealth, and a desire to conform to the prevailing culture. This suggests that the perceived benefits of the Canaanite religion outweighed, in their minds, the risks of disobeying God.
- **How did sex play a role in the Israelites' attraction to Canaanite religion?**
- Canaanite religion incorporated sexual practices as part of worship, often involving cult prostitution with both male and female prostitutes. This was a departure from the way that the Israelites were supposed to behave, as the act of sex was a part of their religious practice, in an effort to encourage the fertility of their lands. This practice appealed to the Israelites who were drawn to the sexualized nature of the Canaanite religious practices, in ways that were not a part of the traditions and culture that God asked of them.
- **What evidence exists of cult prostitution in ancient Israel and its connection to religious practices?**
- Deuteronomy 23 explicitly forbids cult prostitution (kedesha and kadesh) among the Israelites, distinguishing it from regular prostitution (zonah). Cult prostitutes were associated with religious shrines, and their practices were seen as a perversion of holiness, where sex was used to seek fertility and appease the gods. The archaeological discovery at Quntillet Ajrud included inscriptions that mentioned Yahweh and his Asherah, highlighting how Israelite worship syncretized with Canaanite religious practices which included these cult prostitutes.

- **Besides sexual practices, what other attractions did Canaanite religion offer that drew the Israelites away from God?**
- The Canaanite culture was perceived as wealthy and materially prosperous, which also drew the Israelites away from their religion, since they had just come from a nomadic life and did not have wealth, houses, or material possessions. They saw how the Canaanites lived, and it was also seen as an indicator of how well they were being blessed by their gods. This was also appealing as it could also be interpreted as a reward from their gods. They also felt a sense of peer pressure. They desired to fit in with the cultures around them, and the religious practices and material possessions were a way to help feel more like them.
- **How did the desire for wealth and material possessions influence the Israelites' religious choices?**
- The Israelites, having come from a nomadic existence and slavery in Egypt, were overwhelmed by the wealth and advanced urban civilization of the Canaanites. The Canaanites' material success and prosperity were interpreted as evidence of their gods' favor. This led some Israelites to believe that they would gain the same benefits by adopting Canaanite practices. This is evident in Deuteronomy 6 where God speaks of the wealth that they would find in the promised land that was built by others and not them.
- **In what ways did peer pressure contribute to the Israelites' departure from the Lord?**
- The Israelites felt pressure to conform to the cultures around them, including adopting the religious practices of their neighbors. They wished to be like "all the other nations" and sought things such as a king. This pressure extended to their religious expressions. Unlike other cultures with statues and figurines of their gods, the Israelites had no visible representation of Yahweh, which made them feel different. This led to the syncretism with other gods, as seen in the Quntillet Ajrud discovery, where people wanted to be more "user friendly" to their neighbors by making Yahweh look more like their gods.

- **What is syncretism, and how does the discovery at Quntillet Ajrud illustrate it?**
- Syncretism is the mixing and merging of different religious traditions, beliefs, and practices. The archaeological site of Quntillet Ajrud provides a clear example of this, where an Israelite site had inscriptions mentioning Yahweh alongside Asherah (a Canaanite goddess). The site also had a picture of what appears to be Yahweh as a bull with Bes-like headdress (an Egyptian god) with Asherah as his wife, which would not be within Israelite traditions. This suggests the local community mixed its worship of Yahweh with elements of Canaanite and Egyptian religious practices, seeking to make their faith more appealing and acceptable to their neighbors, indicating a merging of religious beliefs.
- **How do these historical examples of Israel's departure from God relate to modern temptations?**
- While these events occurred in ancient times, the underlying motivations are still relevant today. The desire for sexual gratification, material wealth, and the pressure to conform to the prevailing culture remain powerful temptations. These historical accounts serve as a reminder that human nature doesn't change and that we face similar challenges. Thus, these stories caution against prioritizing these desires above a relationship with God and highlight the importance of seeking the kingdom of God and righteousness above such worldly temptations.