

Study Aids

Discussion Questions for “What’s the Message?” Lessons

Lesson 37

It is important to keep history in context, and to remember what religion was like and the role it played during these early years of Israel’s existence. If you were a Greek you prayed to Zeus and his cohorts; if you were a Roman your choice was Jupiter and his clan; if an Egyptian then the sun-god Ra; and if a Canaanite, then to El and the Baalim. All of these were, ultimately, fertility cults that utilized orgiastic ritual with temple prostitutes of both sexes to manipulate the gods and produce fertility in animals and people. The Baal’s of Canaan along with their consorts (Asherah and Astarte) were a great trap for the Israelites for centuries. In contrast, Yahweh demanded loyalty to Him and complete rejection of Baal. It was a battle without compromise, and Baal was a major cause of the downfall of both the Northern and Southern parts of Israel.

Questions:

Do you see irony in the name of the fortune-teller, Balaam? Do you see irony in God’s choice of a donkey to teach this man a lesson? Have you thought about why God included the story of this man in the Old Testament? What was the lesson of this story for Israel? For us today?

We may not be idolaters, per se, but if we have put other things first in our lives, then we have created a “god” and have raised up a “Baal”. To what extent can greed, wealth, position and power, or lust become our gods? Do we recognize the danger of such behavior?