



Clanking Chains: What the Israelites Stood up to Play, Ex 32:6 cp/w 1 Cor 10:7; Gen 26:9-11, & Ugaritic Texts; the Discipline: Ex 32:27-35; Numb 25:1-5

To fully understand what Isaac is up to we now turn to the lexicons which will shed more light on the question:

Harris, R. Laird (ed.). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:763:

The simple stem of פָּחַק *sachaq* conveys the idea of laughter. The stronger Piel stem connotes play and sport. Isaac was observed in Genesis 26:8, "sporting with Rebekah his wife" (KJV); "fondling Rebekah his wife" (RSV); "caressing his wife Rebekah" (NIV [NASB]); "to exchange conjugal caresses" (*International Critical Commentary*).

Brown, Francis. *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 850:

פָּחַק *sachaq* ; — Piel infinitive construct: of conjugal caresses (Genesis 26:8).

Pfeiffer, Charles F. and Everett F. Harrison (eds.). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 31:

Isaac revealed something of his human weakness in Gerar, when he let fear betray him into lying about his wife, Rebekah. Just as Abraham had done on two occasions, Isaac sought to pass his wife off as his sister. When Abimelech observed him indulging in conduct toward Rebekah that was more fitting for a husband than for a brother, he rebuked Isaac sharply for his deception.

Genesis 26:9 - Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, certainly she is your wife! How then did you say, 'She is my sister?' And Isaac said to him, "Because I said, "Lest I die on account of her."

v. 10 - And Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us."

v. 11 - So Abimelech charged all the people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

One who was outside the covenant brought a stinging rebuke to one who should have been above reproach.

By comparing the use of *sachaq* in Genesis 26:8 with the context of Exodus 32 we are able to arrive at the conclusion that what the Israelites did when they "rose up to play" was an expression of the phallic cult that was prevalent in Canaan prior to the Egyptian captivity and continued down to the time of Israel's history as a client nation. Details are provided by:

Pfeiffer, Charles F. "The Religion of the Canaanites." Chap. 10 in *Old Testament History*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 69-71:

The reader of the Old Testament is familiar with Baal, the infamous "high places," and other aspects of a religion which was constantly denounced by the prophets of the God of Israel. Further clues to the nature of Canaanite religion were gathered from the writings of the ancient Egyptians, Phoenician records, and Greek literature. The latter were, at best, fragmentary. Discoveries made since 1929 at Ras Shamra (ras sham' ra), however, have completely changed the picture.



Ras Shamra, ancient Ugarit \u-gar' it\, is a small Arab village near modern Latakia \la-te-kē' a\ (Syria). The lowest level of the mound is believed to date from the fifth millennium B.C. It is thought that Amorites and Semitic Canaanites pushed northward from the Arabian Desert and settled in the area during the third millennium B.C., bringing about important ethnic changes in Ugarit. Early in the second millennium an alliance was made with Egypt. Discoveries at Ugarit have shown strong Egyptian influences along with artifacts from the Minoan, Cretan civilizations during this period.

During the heyday of Ugaritic prosperity—the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C.—the poetic epics and myths of the ancient Canaanites were recorded on clay tablets in a cuneiform script. The Ugaritic alphabet is one of the earliest known to man. Our interest in the tablets arises from the relatively complete picture they present of Canaanite religion. We are no longer dependent on second hand accounts of the creed and cult of the Canaanites. Those who worshipped Baal and his associates have left us a first hand witness to their faith.

The nominal head of the Canaanite pantheon was El, a “remote, high god,” who interfered little in the affairs of the world. The consort of El in the Ugaritic texts was named Asherah, “Lady of the Sea.” In the form Asherah, the name appears about forty times in the Old Testament.

When not the name of a goddess, the term Asherah, and its plural, Asherim, denote the wooden poles which stood at Canaanite places of worship. In the Authorized Version of the Bible the word is regularly translated “grove.” The terms “sacred tree” or “Asherah image” would better convey the thought of the original. The Asherah is thought to have been the trunk of a tree with the branches chopped off. It was erected beside the altar of Baal in the fertility cult which was scathingly denounced by the Israelite prophets.

El and his wife Asherah produced a family of seventy Elim, gods and goddesses, best known of whom was Baal. Baal was the god of fertility responsible for the germination and growth of crops, the increase of flocks and herds, and the fecundity of human families.

Baal worship was the most degrading aspect of Canaanite civilization. Devotees brought wine, oil, first fruits, and firstlings of the flocks to the “high places.” Near the rock altar was a *mazzebah* [מַזְבֵּחַ *massevah*] or sacred pillar which represented the male element in the fertility cult, corresponding to the Asherah, or female element. Chambers were maintained for sacred prostitution by *kedeshim* [plural of קִדְּשִׁים *qadash*] (“male prostitutes”) and *kedeshoth* [plural of קִדְּשָׁה *qedeshah*] (“sacred harlots”). It should be noted that the language of the prophets who describe unfaithfulness to the Lord as adultery, and speak of those who forget the God of Israel as going “whoring after idols,” is more than figure of speech. [Their prohibitions were based on three of the Ten Commandments]:

1. No mental or overt idolatry: Exodus 20:3-6.
2. No taking the Lord’s name in vain: Exodus 20:7.
3. No sex outside of marriage: Exodus 20:14.

Although there were many executed for this gross violation of the divine contract, the Israelites as a people were never able to correlate their behavior with their discipline. Some examples:

Numbers 25:1 - While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab.

v. 2 - For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

v. 3 - So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel.



v. 4 - And the Lord said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel.”

v. 5 - So Moses said to the judges of Israel, “Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor.”

This is idolatry in much the same form as the Israelites practiced in Exodus 32 except they exchanged a golden calf for Baal and illicit sexual behavior with Israelite women for Moabite women. Notice the similarities not only in the idolatrous worship but also the discipline:

Exodus 32:4 - Aaron took this (gold) from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it into a molten calf and they said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.”

v. 5 - Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.”

v. 6 - So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink and rose up to play.

However, out of all these violations, the Lord’s stress is on the worship of idols:

Exodus 32:7 - Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.

v. 8 - “They have quickly turned aside from the way [דֶּרֶךְ **derek: wheel-track, the mandates to avoid idolatry**] which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’”

When Moses arrived on the scene, he had somewhat of a different take on what he saw:

Exodus 32:19 -And it came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses’ anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.

v. 20 - And he took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water, and made the sons of Israel drink it.

It turns out Moses was a Baptist. Nevertheless, he did mention the idolatry first and carried out a similar process of capital punishment in Exodus 32:27-35 as was later executed in Numbers 25.

The golden calf incident reflected not only the entire package of cultic worship that was common throughout the Levant and Mesopotamia but also revealed the fact that the first generation had facilitated wheel-tracks of garbage in their souls. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, it was a condition they were never able overcome.



The condition their condition was in was a result of disobedience to what the Lord requires of His people. It is the one characteristic common to all who fail to execute the plan of God. As the Lord put it:

Exodus 32:8 - "They have quickly turned aside from the way [דֶּרֶךְ **derek:** **wheel-track, the mandates to avoid idolatry**] which I commanded them.