

Deuteronomy 29:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them:)

Analysis

And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them (וְתִרְאָו אֶת־שְׁקָנִים)—The Hebrew shiqqûš ("abominations") denotes detestable things, particularly idols that provoke divine disgust. The term's root suggests filth or dung, expressing God's contempt for false worship.

Moses catalogs idol materials in descending order of perceived value—wood and stone (common, carved images), silver and gold (precious metals). This progression exposes idolatry's fundamental folly: whether crude or costly, all false gods are equally powerless. Israel witnessed Egyptian idolatry (animal worship, sun cults) and Canaanite abominations (Baal, Asherah poles) during their journey. The verb *ra'ah* ("have seen") emphasizes firsthand experience—they were eyewitnesses to pagan futility.

This verse establishes the covenant warning's basis: Israel knows from observation that idolatry is spiritually bankrupt. Paul later echoes this in Romans 1:23, condemning those who exchange God's glory for images of created things. The physical materials themselves aren't evil—God's tabernacle used gold and silver—but fashioning them into objects of worship corrupts both material and worshiper.

Historical Context

This passage occurs in Moses' third sermon (Deuteronomy 29-30), delivered on the plains of Moab circa 1406 BCE. Israel stands poised to enter Canaan, having spent forty years observing Egyptian paganism, encountering Midianite syncretism (Numbers 25), and defeating Transjordanian kingdoms. The covenant renewal ceremony recalls past experiences to fortify future obedience. Ancient Near Eastern idolatry pervaded daily life—household gods, national deities, fertility cults—making Israel's exclusive Yahweh worship radically countercultural.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What modern 'idols' (career, wealth, relationships) appear valuable but are spiritually worthless?
2. How does eyewitness exposure to worldly emptiness strengthen our commitment to Christ?

Interlinear Text

וְתַرְאוּ אֵת שְׁקָעָה מִן אֵת גָּלְלִים מִן עַץ
And ye have seen H853 their abominations H8251 and their idols H1544 wood H6086

עַמְּקָם: אֲשֶׁר בְּזָהָב וְבָזָק
and stone silver and gold H834 H5973