

Deuteronomy 29:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them:

Analysis

For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them (וְלָכֹוּ וַעֲבָדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים)

—The sequence va-yelkhu va-ya'avdu ("they went and served") indicates deliberate pursuit. Avad ("serve") denotes cultic worship and practical devotion—the verb Israel should reserve for Yahweh alone (Deuteronomy 6:13).

And worshipped them (וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לָהֶם)—Yishtachavu means prostrate oneself, bow down in homage. This compounds the offense: not merely acknowledging foreign gods' existence but rendering them covenant service and worship homage belonging exclusively to Yahweh. These are elohim acherim ("other gods"), violating the first commandment (Exodus 20:3).

Gods whom they knew not (אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדָעוּם)—Lo yeda'um ("did not know them") contrasts with knowing Yahweh through covenant relationship. These foreign deities had no history with Israel, performed no mighty acts, made no promises. The phrase **whom he had not given unto them** (וְלֹא הָלַק לָהֶם) uses chalaq ("allot, assign"), suggesting Yahweh sovereignly assigns nations their deities (Deuteronomy 4:19, 32:8-9), but assigned Israel to himself. Worshiping unassigned gods violates cosmic order.

Historical Context

Israel's idolatry took multiple forms: Egyptian gods during exodus (Ezekiel 20:7-8), golden calf at Sinai (Exodus 32), Moabite Baal-Peor (Numbers 25), and pervasive Canaanite Baal/Asherah worship after settlement (Judges-Kings period). The phrase 'gods whom they knew not' emphasizes these deities' foreignness—not ancestral gods but imported cults. Solomon's foreign wives introduced their gods (1 Kings 11:1-8); Ahab institutionalized Baal worship (1 Kings 16:31-33). By Jeremiah's time, Jerusalem had altars to foreign gods on every street corner (Jeremiah 11:13). This systematic idolatry triggered the exile covenant curse.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What 'other gods' (wealth, success, relationships) might we be serving alongside or instead of Christ?
2. How does covenant relationship with God through Christ exclude syncretistic worship of other 'lords'?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹכֹחַ	וַעֲבָדוּ	אֱלֹהִים	אֲחֵרִים	וַשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ	לָהֶם	אֱלֹהִים
H1980	and served	gods	other	and worshipped	H0	gods
	H5647	H430	H312	H7812		H430
אֲשֶׁר	לֹא	יָדָעוּם	וְלֹא	הָלַק	לָהֶם:	
H834	H3808	whom they knew	H3808	not and whom he had not given	H0	
		H3045		H2505		

