

Deuteronomy 32:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.

Analysis

They sacrificed unto devils, not to God—the Hebrew *shedhîm* (שְׁדִים) appears only here and Psalm 106:37, referring to demonic powers behind idols. Paul explicitly connects this verse to New Testament theology: 'the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils' (1 Corinthians 10:20). Idolatry is never merely superstition—it involves real demonic deception.

To new gods that came newly up (וְלִשְׂמֵימָהּ הַחֲדָשִׁים)—the irony is devastating: Israel abandoned the eternal God (הַצֹּר, the Rock, v.18) for fashionable novelties. **Whom your fathers feared not** emphasizes these deities had no historical claim, no proven faithfulness, no covenant history—pure innovation divorced from revelation. This critiques religious pluralism and theological novelty.

Historical Context

Written before Canaanite conquest, this verse prophetically describes Israel's syncretism. Archaeological evidence confirms widespread demon worship in ancient Near Eastern religion, including Mesopotamian *šēdu* (protective demons) and Canaanite underworld deities. The practice of child sacrifice to Molech in the Valley of Hinnom (2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 7:31) exemplifies the demonic horror Israel embraced.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing demonic reality behind false religion affect your understanding of spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:12)?
2. Why are 'new' religious ideas particularly dangerous when they lack roots in historical biblical revelation?

Interlinear Text

יָזְבַח ו	לְשֵׂדִים	ל א	אֵל ה	אֱלֹהֵי ים	ל א	יָדַע ום
They sacrificed	unto devils	H3808	not to God	to gods	H3808	whom they knew
H2076	H7700		H433	H430		H3045
ב הַדָּשִׁים	מִקֵּר ב	בָּ אֵו	ל א	שָׁעַר ום	אֲבֹתֵיכֶם:	
not to new	newly	gods that came	H3808	feared	whom your fathers	
H2319	H7138	H935		H8175	H1	

Additional Cross-References

Judges 5:8 (References God): They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?

Deuteronomy 28:64 (References God): And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.

Leviticus 17:7 (Sacrifice): And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils, after whom they have gone a whoring. This shall be a statute for ever unto them throughout their generations.

1 Timothy 4:1 (Evil): Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

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