

November 17, 2019 - Deut. 4:25–49 - More Warnings
Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 4:25–49 - More Warnings
Psalm 112
Haftarah: Jeremiah 31:20, Joshua 20:8 – 21:8

Warnings Against Idolatry

Deuteronomy 4:25-26 - "When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long ("slumbered" a word used of grain that has gone bad) in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed."

Rashi - "remained long" - He hinted to them that they would be exiled from it at the end of 852 years, the gematria, numerical value, of the word וְנִשְׁכַּחְתֶּם (remained long), but He exiled them earlier, at the end of 850 years. He did this two years earlier than the numerical value of וְנִשְׁכַּחְתֶּם in order that the prophecy about them should not be fulfilled "that you shall utterly perish." (verse 26) This is the meaning of what is said: "And the Lord 'hastened' with the evil and brought it upon us, for the Lord our God is charitable (צַדִּיק) (Dan. 9:14). He was charitable with us for He hastened to bring it [the exile] two years before its time (San. 38a; Gittin 88a).

"slumbered" - Thus the cry of Rosh Hashanah: "Awake, thou that sleepest!"

Deuteronomy 4:28 - "And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell."

The rabbis understood this to mean that as a punishment for willingly worshipping idols, they would also later in exile be forced to worship idols against their will, knowing they were vain, either out of the bonds of habit or to escape persecution and death.

("which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell." - On idolatry, see **Psalm 115:5-8**, which is one of next week's readings).

But if you Repent...

Deuteronomy 4:29 - "But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them."

Rashi says, "As the Targum [Onkelos] explains: Since you serve those who worship

them [idols], it is as though you [yourselves] serve them [i.e., the idols]."

Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego are examples of those refused to bow down and whom God protected from persecution.

See also Peter and John, **Acts 4:20** - "...we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

But what about those of us whose faith may not be that great?

"if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul" - The rabbis explained that even if they were forced on pain of death to worship idols outwardly (as during the Inquisition), if they inwardly had faith, they would be saved. The Marranos in Spain were Jews who were forcibly converted to Christianity but who secretly retained their Jewish faith.

Bottom Line - in our society we are not forced to worship idols, but we become habituated to a culture that is based on them - on values opposite to the teachings of Jesus - i.e. gain is godliness, self-indulgence, hatred, fear and divisiveness, etc.

God is Doing Something Unique

Deuteronomy 4:31 - "(For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them."

Fulfillment:

- **Romans 11:26** - "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob"

Deuteronomy 4:32 - "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?"

Rashi - "from the one side of heaven unto the other" - its midrashic explanation is: [This] teaches [us] about Adam's height, that it was from the earth to the heavens, and that this is the very same measurement as from one end of the heavens to the other end (San. 38b).

Deuteronomy 4:35 - "Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him."

Rashi - "You have been shown": Heb. תָּרָאָהְךָ As the Targum [Onkelos] renders it: תָּרָאָהְךָ, you have been shown. When the Holy One, blessed is He, gave the Torah,

He opened for Israel the seven heavens, and just as He tore open the upper regions, so did He tear open the lower regions, and they saw that He is One. Accordingly, it is stated, "You have been shown, in order to know [that the Lord He is God-there is none else besides Him]."

Deuteronomy 4:36 - "Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heard his words out of the midst of the fire."

"Out of heaven" -

- **Matthew 3:17** - "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

"hear His voice" - Said R. Levi: The Holy One blessed be He appeared to them like a picture which is visible from all angles. A thousand people may gaze on it and it gazes on all of them. So is the Holy One blessed be He. When He spoke, every individual Israelite maintained: TO me the word spake! "I am the Lord your God" is not written here, but "I am the Lord THY God." Said R. Yose: In accordance with each and everyone's personal capacities did the word speak to him. Do not be astonished at the manna which came down on the Israelites - each one tasting the flavor he was capable of appreciating - the infants in accordance with their capacities... the young men in accordance with their...and the old men in accordance with theirs. If that was so in the case of the manna, that everyone tasted the flavor he could appreciate, the word (the sacred word of divine revelation), all the ore so! - (Yalkut Shimoni: Yitro 286)

Deuteronomy 4:37 - "And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt"

Rashi - Do not be astonished by the fact that [Scripture] refers to them in the singular [using בְּפָנָיו instead of בְּפָנֵיהֶם], for it has already written about them in the singular, "And he chose and chose their seed (בְּזָרְעוֹ) after them (אֶחָדָיו)," [lit. his. seed after him].

Israel is a type of Christ, and Paul has a similar rabbinic explanation of God's promise to Abraham's seed:

- **Galatians 3:16** - "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

Deuteronomy 4:39-40 - "Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever."

To believe that God reigns in heaven AND on the earth, we need to see He is in control,

although things may look chaotic.

Cities of Refuge

Deuteronomy 4:41-49 - Moses, in response to God's command (**Numbers 35:1-14**), establishes the cities of refuge in the areas of the Transjordan already controlled by the Israelites.