

WARNINGS AGAINST IDOLATRY

BIBLE TEXT : Deuteronomy 4:14-31; Romans 1:18-25

LESSON 119 **Junior Course**

MEMORY VERSE: "For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God" (Deuteronomy 4:24).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Deuteronomy 4:14-31 (KJV)

¹⁴ And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it.

¹⁵ Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day *that* the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire:

¹⁶ Lest ye corrupt *yourselves*, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female,

¹⁷ The likeness of any beast that *is* on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air,

¹⁸ The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that *is* in the waters beneath the earth:

¹⁹ And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, *even* all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.

²⁰ But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, *even* out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as *ye are* this day.

²¹ Furthermore the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance:

²² But I must die in this land, I

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

The Commandments

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). This is the first of the ten commandments that were given by God. The Children of Israel were required to keep all the commandments if they were to enter into the land of promise. God had warned them to be obedient. Emphasis was made on this first commandment. If the Children of Israel had kept the first commandment, the others would have been easily kept.

God is faithful to warn people concerning sin. His Spirit will check even before one commits sin. He told Moses to teach the Children of Israel the commandments. He showed them what would be the result if they turned to worship idols.

A Graven Image

In words very plain the Children of Israel were told to make no image or likeness of anything for the purpose of worshiping. In times past they had done that. When Moses was upon the mountain receiving the commandments of God, they had made a molten calf of gold (**Exodus 32:4** ⁴ And he received *them* at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. **Deuteronomy 9:16** ¹⁶ And I looked, and, behold, ye had sinned against the LORD your God, *and* had made you a molten calf: ye had turned aside quickly out of the way which the LORD had commanded you). Then they made sacrifices unto it in worship. They suffered for that sin against God. Even then, they did not learn a lesson.

They were again warned against making a likeness of anything — beast, bird, fish, or creeping thing — as God did not want them to worship the creation of His hand. God, the Creator, is He who should be worshiped, lest they change the truth of God into a lie (**Romans 1:25** ²⁵ Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen) and His glory into shame. The Children of Israel were told to take heed lest they make an image. The next step would be worshiping that image, then serving it rather than the true God. The Bible teaches man to shun the appearance of evil (**1 Thessalonians 5:22** ²² Abstain from all appearance of evil).

The land into which they were going contained heathen people who worshiped the handiwork of God — the sun, moon, and stars. The Children of Israel were cautioned against the customs of the other nations. God made the heavens. They give service to us. We admire them for they show the greatness of God. As we appreciate the beauty of God's creation, we give glory to Him to whom it is due (**1 Chronicles 16:29** ²⁹ Give unto the LORD the glory *due* unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.). In Romans 1:21 we

must not go over Jordan: but ye shall go over, and possess that good land.

²³ Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, *or* the likeness of any *thing*, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee.

²⁴ For the LORD thy God *is* a consuming fire, *even* a jealous God.

²⁵ When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long 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:

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you.

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.

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.

³⁰ 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;

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

read that they who did not glorify God, neither were thankful, became vain in their imaginations with darkened hearts for they thought themselves wise when they were foolish.

Even though there were some who worshiped false gods, the Children of Israel were expected to serve the true and living God who had brought them out of bondage into the inheritance of Canaan. "And it shall **be**, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land . . . then beware lest thou forget the LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

Idols

There are other things besides graven images which are idols. Because the hearts of some people are corrupt, they are given to uncleanness and sin (**Romans 1:24** ²⁴ Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves). Anything in the heart which comes before and ahead of the love for God could be called an idol. For example, one is taught to love others; but when that love is marked with undue reverence or excessive admiration, it can become idolatry. An idol is not always a person. Any thing or even an idea could become an idol.

Some people are not saved because they love the pleasures of the world more than they love God. Others are afraid of what their friends might say, so they think more of their friends than they think of God. Do you love God more than anyone and anything, or is there an idol between you and your Maker? God is a jealous God. He should have first place in our hearts. "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

God or an Idol?

There is a great advantage in giving God first place in your heart: "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" (Deuteronomy 4:40). We have but to compare the idolatrous nations with those of the Children of Israel who were faithful, to see the advantage of worshiping God. The heathen serve the work of men's hands, gods who cannot see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.

In the days of Elijah, 450 prophets of Baal called upon their god to send fire. From morning until noon they called upon the name of Baal (**1 Kings 18:26** ²⁶ And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But *there was* no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made), but there was no answer. When Elijah told them that maybe their god had gone on a journey, was talking, or was asleep, they cried aloud and cut themselves until the blood gushed out. None of this attracted the attention of their god, for it was an idol which could not hear. There was no answer although they prayed all day. The Prophet Elijah prepared his sacrifice in the proper order. When he called upon the true and living God whom he served, he received an answer: fire fell and consumed the sacrifice (**1 Kings 18:38** ³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench).

In the time of need, God had answered the prayer of Moses in behalf of the Children of Israel. They had called upon God for deliverance from slavery in Egypt. God delivered them. He opened

which he sware unto them.

Romans 1:18-25 (KJV)

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

¹⁹ Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.

²⁰ For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

²¹ Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

²² Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

²³ And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

²⁴ Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

²⁵ Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

the Red Sea as a way of escape from their enemy. God used that same Red Sea to destroy those who pursued the Children of Israel. He had led them through the desert. Bitter water was made sweet. Quails and manna were sent by God to feed the Children of Israel. At Moses' prayer, God healed their bodies (**Numbers 21:7-9** ⁷ Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. ⁹ And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived. **Numbers 12:13** ¹³ And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee). Never did they find that God was too busy to help them. "The LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." Could anyone say these things or even one of these things concerning an idol or false god that they worshiped? By serving the true and living God, the Children of Israel had all these privileges. Does a Christian today have an advantage over a sinner? In every way, he is better off than they who do not serve God.

There have been men whose idol was money. When they were very sick, all their money, and more too, could not heal them. Some people have made an idol of another person. When death came to their "idol," they had nothing. Even education, a good job, and success cannot give the peace **that** comes by knowing and serving God. Nothing can take the place of the knowledge of sins forgiven. Everything else has been known to fail, but Jesus never fails. He is the "same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

**"Nothing satisfies but Jesus,
All the world is emptiness,
All its glitter and its glory
Cannot satisfy or bless;
All its gayety and splendor
Have to me distasteful grown;
Nothing satisfies but Jesus,
I am His and His alone."**

God promised the Children of Israel that He would be with them so long as they served Him. He warned them that they would be scattered by their enemies if they turned to idols; God would no longer fight for them. To turn to idols would mean ruin and death (**Joshua 23:8-15** ⁸ But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day. ⁹ For the LORD hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but *as for you*, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. ¹⁰ One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he *it* is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you. ¹¹ Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God. ¹² Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, *even* these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: ¹³ Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out *any of* these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you. ¹⁴ And, behold, this day I *am* going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, *and* not one thing hath failed thereof. ¹⁵ Therefore it

QUESTIONS

- 1 What is idolatry?
- 2 Name some false gods.
- 3 What happened to the Children of Israel who turned away from God to idols?
- 4 What will happen to a Christian if he should turn away from God?
- 5 What part of God's creation do some people worship?
- 6 What does this passage of Scripture mean: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24) ?
- 7 What promise is given to those who seek God?

shall come to pass, *that* as all good things are come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you). Obedience to God meant that the Children of Israel would live, possess the land of promise (**Deuteronomy 4:1** ¹ Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do *them*, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you), and all would be well with them and their children many years (**Deuteronomy 4:40** ⁴⁰ 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).

Forgiveness

Whom are you serving — the living God or an idol? Perhaps some, like the Children of Israel, have turned from God to serve the work of men's hands. Spiritual ruin and death is the judgment pronounced upon them. Even yet, "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" (Deuteronomy 4:30, 31).

God is ever listening for the prayer of a backslider and every sinner. He has promised that He will be found when one seeks with all his heart and with all his soul (**Deuteronomy 4:29** 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). There is hope for those who are not serving God. If they "shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin" (II Chronicles 7:14).

If Satan should come to tempt you to serve another besides God, you can use the same weapon against him that Jesus used, when He was tempted of Satan: "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10).