

### The Futility of Idolatry

#### Jeremiah 10

**Jeremiah 10:1-16** - *"Hear the word which the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel.*

<sup>2</sup> *Thus says the Lord:*

*"Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them.*

<sup>3</sup> *For the customs of the peoples are futile, for one cuts a tree from the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. <sup>4</sup> They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not topple.*

<sup>5</sup> *They are upright, like a palm tree, and they cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor can they do any good."*

<sup>6</sup> *Inasmuch as there is none like You, O Lord (You are great, and Your name is great in might). <sup>7</sup> Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due. For among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like You. <sup>8</sup> But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish; a wooden idol is a worthless doctrine. <sup>9</sup> Silver is beaten into plates. It is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the craftsman and of the hands of the metal smith. Blue and purple are their clothing. They are all the work of skillful men.*

<sup>10</sup> *But the Lord is the true God. He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, and the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.*

<sup>11</sup> *Thus you shall say to them: "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens. <sup>12</sup> He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens at His discretion. <sup>13</sup> When He utters His voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasures."*

<sup>14</sup> *Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge. Metalsmiths are put to shame by an image, for his molded image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. <sup>5</sup> They are futile, a work of errors; in the time of their punishment they shall perish.*

<sup>16</sup> *The Portion of Jacob is not like them, for He is the Maker of all things, and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance. The Lord of hosts is His name."*

#### Background Notes

Chapters 7-10 form a sub-unit of Jeremiah that could be entitled *"False Religion and its Punishment."* Chapter 7 and 8:1-3 is known as the "Temple Sermon," but the whole sub-unit of chapters 7-10 could be considered as Jeremiah's "Temple Address." The content of all four of these chapters was probably given at about the same time, in the Temple area of Jerusalem.

Verse 11 is the only verse in Jeremiah that was written in the Aramaic language. Aramaic was the common language or trade language of that day. Some commentaries say that verse 11 is the summary of a letter that Jeremiah sent to the Jewish captives who already were in Babylon, where they spoke Aramaic. Others say that this verse is in Aramaic because Jeremiah directed this message to the pagan idolaters in and around Jerusalem. Some of them may even have heard Jeremiah speak this verse in the Temple area. If so, they heard it in the language they could clearly understand, so they could not have missed the point: ***“The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens.”***

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The construction of idols is foolish and futile.

Verses 1-16 were a sharp and stinging denunciation of idolatry. In verses 1-2, Jeremiah denounced the heathen practice of worshipping astral bodies - the sun, moon and stars. He told the people that they didn't have to fear "signs in the heavens," such as comets or meteors, or eclipses, or the corrupted "signs of the zodiac," or even lightning, that the people thought was controlled by the false god Baal. No! God controls all these things - then and today! We don't have to be terrified or controlled by these "signs," as are some unbelievers today.

In verses 3-5 Jeremiah elaborated on the folly of idolatry. Idols are **man-made**. They are nothing but wood and stone. They have to be nailed down so they don't fall over – like Dagon, the Philistine idol that fell over and had to be propped up (1 Samuel 5). Idols have to be carried because they cannot walk. They are like dead scarecrows.

Jeremiah's denunciation of idolatry in verses 6-16 is very similar to Isaiah's description of the futility of idolatry.

**Isaiah 44:9-20** – *“Those who make an image, all of them are useless, and their precious things shall not profit. They are their own witnesses. They neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed. <sup>10</sup> Who would form a god or mold an image that profits him nothing? <sup>12</sup> The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms. Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. <sup>13</sup> The craftsman stretches out his rule, he marks one out with chalk; he fashions it with a plane, he marks it out with the compass, and makes it like the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house. <sup>14</sup> He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak. He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it. <sup>15</sup> Then it shall be for a man to burn, for he will take some of it and warm himself. Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread, and indeed he makes a god and worships it. He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it. <sup>16</sup> He burns half of it in the fire; with this half he eats meat - he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, “Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire.” <sup>17</sup> Then the rest of it he makes into a “god” – his carved image? He falls down before it and worships it, prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!”*

*<sup>18</sup> They do not know nor understand, for He has shut their eyes so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. <sup>19</sup> And no one considers in his heart, nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire; yes, I have also baked bread on its coals. I have roasted meat and eaten it. Shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?"*

*<sup>20</sup> He feeds on ashes. A deceived heart has turned him aside. He cannot deliver his soul, nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"*

In Jeremiah 10:6-16, the great contrast is shown between the false and dead idols and the true and living God. ***The Lord is great and powerful and King over all the nations!*** The gods of the nations were only costly decorated pieces of wood and metal. Anyone involved in such idolatry was stupid and foolish (v8 & 14)! Why worship inanimate man-made objects that will perish, when you can worship the living and eternal God who made the earth and the heavens (v12)? The God who controls His creation, including the waters and clouds and the lightning and the wind (v13)?

Furthermore, the one true God of the universe had made Israel His special inheritance, calling Himself "the portion of Jacob" (v16). Oh, the futility of turning away from such an awesome God and wonderful Lord to lifeless idols! The construction of idols is foolish and futile.

## **2. The consequences of idolatry are serious and sure.**

**Jeremiah 10:17-22** – *"Gather up your wares from the land, O inhabitant of the fortress!*

*<sup>18</sup> For thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will throw out at this time the inhabitants of the land, and will distress them, that they may find it so." <sup>19</sup> Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is severe. But I say, "Truly this is an infirmity, and I must bear it."*

*<sup>20</sup> My tent is plundered, and all my cords are broken. My children have gone from me, and they are no more. There is no one to pitch my tent anymore, or to set up my curtains. <sup>21</sup> For the shepherds have become dull-hearted, and have not sought the Lord. Therefore, they shall not prosper. All their flocks shall be scattered.*

*<sup>22</sup> Behold, the noise of the report has come, and a great commotion out of the north country, to make the cities of Judah desolate, a den of jackals."*

Verses 17-18 were a vivid description of the soon-coming fall of Judah. The people would not escape the siege but would be taken away as captives to Babylon, with only a small bundle of what they could carry. With a stone in a slingshot, they would be thrown out of the land.

In verses 19-20, Jeremiah spoke with sadness for the nation. They would be forced to endure the consequences of their idolatry. Their homes would be ruined and their families would be killed or permanently broken up. Jeremiah specifically pointed that this disaster was the fault of Judah's leaders: *"For the shepherds have become dull-hearted, and have not sought the Lord. Therefore... all their flocks shall be scattered."*

Reports of the Babylonians invading the land from the north had reached Jerusalem (v22). This was no idle threat - this was serious. The end was near, and there was no escape.

The consequences of idolatry are serious, and they are sure. This still true today. Although we may not worship carved images, idolatry is **anything** that comes between the Lord and us. **Anything** that is higher than the Lord on our priority list for our personal lives is an idol.

And our idolatries will always take a toll. Lives are ruined. Families become dysfunctional or destroyed. Opportunities to serve the Lord are lost forever. **The consequences of idolatry are serious and sure.**

## Practical Application

**Be willing to pray for “course correction.”**

**Jeremiah 10:23-25** - *“O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. <sup>24</sup> O Lord, correct me, but with justice, but not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing. <sup>25</sup> Pour out Your fury on the Gentiles, who do not know You, and on the families who do not call on Your name, for they have eaten up Jacob, devoured him and consumed him, and made his dwelling place desolate.”*

Verses 23-25 reveal Jeremiah’s heart and prayer for the nation. Again using the first person, Jeremiah identified with the people, acknowledging their sin and admitting that they needed God’s help.

In chapter 7 the Lord told Jeremiah **not** to pray for God’s blessing on the sinful nation. Here, however, rather than asking for God’s blessing, Jeremiah prayed for a **“course correction”** for the nation.

Jeremiah prayed for God’s judgment on the pagan nations surrounding Judah that did not acknowledge the God of Israel, and had attacked God’s people (v25). God certainly answered this prayer. All the surrounding pagan nations were judged. And Israel itself was corrected and delivered from idolatry - as a result of the Babylonian captivity!

Now a personal application. Are we willing to pray for “course correction” in our lives? As Jeremiah did, are we willing to acknowledge that we need the Lord’s help if we are going to walk in the right direction? We must humbly admit that we need direction from the Lord, and that we need constant course correction (v24).

Many Christians are not willing to pray for course correction because they fear that the Lord may call for drastic changes in their lifestyle and the direction of their lives. What about us?

Be willing to pray for course correction!