Worship The True God
Jeremiah 10:1-25

Introduction

In chapter 7 Jeremiah began a sermon near the gates of the Temple in Jerusalem. The sermon was a condemnation of the people who had deceived themselves; deceived themselves over their false and hypocritical worship (7:1-15); their prayers did them no good (vv.16-20); their sacrifices did them no good (vv.21-26); the false prophets had lied to them; the false prophets assured them the covenants made with Abraham and Moses would keep them from harm or judgment; the false prophets opposed Jeremiah’s ministry and led the people astray. Jeremiah had warned them about their false confidence in the covenant (chapter 9:1-26); that the covenant was no excuse to continue in sin; the fact they were God’s covenant people would not spare them the inevitable judgment brought on by consistent and persistent disobedience (chapter 9:7-16); the people had refused spiritual understanding and no Jeremiah will contrast and compare the false pagan man made religion and the true and living God.

Abraham was an ex-pagan/idol worshiper (Joshua 24:2-3). In Egypt constant exposure to gods of Egypt had infiltrated the thinking and living of many of Jacob’s offspring. When the children of Israel left Egypt much if Egypt remained in their hearts. When people come to Christ some hold on to the passions and affections that once enslaved them.

The children of Israel witnessed the deliverance of God, the miracles of God, the glory of God, heard the voice of God, accepted the Law of God--but like the Psalmist wrote; “they changed their glory into the image of an ox that eats grass” (Ps. 106:20).

In other words--when Aaron constructed the golden calf--he did so--because the people wanted a god, a golden god, a valuable god, a nourishing god, a visible god. But they were wrong.

Moses instructed the people to separate themselves from the wicked and evil practices of Egypt and the nations that surrounded them. But Israel would watch their neighbors and embrace their practices, because idolatry was still deeply rooted in their hearts!

A.W. Tozer wrote; “the essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him”. Paul wrote that idolatry was worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom.1:25); the gifts rather than the giver of the gifts. The Psalmist wrote that we become like the thing we worship (Psalm 115:8); “Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.”

Augustine made the comment; “Thus does the world forget You, its Creator, and falls in love with what You have created instead of You”!
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Now Jeremiah will declare how worthless idols are (vv.1-5); the incredible and incomparable value of the true and living God (vv.6-16); and the inevitable consequences of worshipping something that is not real, not valuable, not eternal, not there (vv.17-26).

Idols Are Not Valuable (vv.1-5)

(NKJV) 1 Hear the word which the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel.
2 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.

The passage contains two warnings; the children of Israel are not to embrace the pagan idol worship of the Gentiles; they must not be seduced into thinking or believing that astrology or heavenly bodies or celestial signs in the sky determine their future!

The rules and rituals of man made religions stress a works based righteousness. In the ancient world people were astonished and amazed by comets, meteors, planetary movements and solar and lunar eclipses. Some ancient peoples believed they were powerful messages sent from the heavens.

People believed the heavenly bodies were or represented powerful deities; and they worshipped the sun, the moon and the stars. Some believed these bodies exerted enormous control on the affairs of men.

We know all life on earth is dependent on the sun. We know the ocean tides are governed by the gravity exerted by the moon on our planet. We do not deny that the sun and the moon and the solar system of our galaxy makes life possible. We believe this is God’s universe, God’s solar system, God’s sun and God’s moon. We believe God created this universe and sustains this universe.

3 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.

Jeremiah builds his case that idols are worthless, useless, and helpless. People cut down trees and carve the wood into images.

4 They decorate it with silver and gold;
   They fasten it with nails and hammers
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So that it will not topple.

5 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.”

The expression “like a palm tree” means the idol sticks straight up.

Idols are nothing. “Their wooden gods overlaid with gold and silver are like a scarecrow in a field of cucumbers--protecting nothing” (Jeremiah 6).

Later (16:20) Jeremiah writes; “Will a man make gods for himself, which are not gods?”

In Psalm 81:9 we read; “There shall be no foreign god among you; nor shall you worship any foreign god. (10) I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it”.

Paul was familiar with the words of Jeremiah.

1 Corinthians 12:2; “You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led”.

“There is nothing in the Bible that either commands or prohibits Christmas trees. It has been falsely claimed by some that Jeremiah 10:1-16 prohibits the cutting down and decorating of trees in the same manner as we do at Christmas. However, even a cursory reading of the text makes it clear that the passage is one in which Jeremiah sets forth the prohibition against idols made of wood, plated with silver and gold, and worshipped. A similar idea appears in Isaiah 44, where Isaiah speaks of the silliness of the idol-worshippers who cut down a tree, burn part of it in the fire to warm themselves, and use the other part to fashion an idol, which they then bow down to. So unless we bow down before our Christmas tree, carve it into an idol, and pray to it, these passages cannot be applied to Christmas trees” (see GotQuestions.org).

The Value Of The True And Living God (vv.6-16)
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6  *Inasmuch as there is none like You, O Lord*  
 *(You are great, and Your name is great in might),*

Contrast the stark reality of idols (nothing, worthless, useless, helpless,) with God. The Lord God Jehovah is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe! Idols are dead. God is alive. God shows His power and His majesty over the Universe and over the Nations!

There is no one and nothing like the Lord Our God.

7  *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.)*

The Hebrew is somewhat difficult; the idea seems to be that no human being is like God. Gather the sum and substance of human intelligence and it is nothing compared to God.

Since human beings are such miserable candidates for worship; don’t bother. Reverence is due to God only!

Babylon had a sophisticated scientific community (the wise men of the nations).

In what way is God the King of the nations?

The fear of the Lord is not superstitious fear.

Thomas Fuller used to say;

“They that worship God merely from fear,  
Would worship the devil too, if he appear.”

The fear of God is that profound sense of awe that washes over the surface of the soul when you consider all that God is and all that God does. In Psalm 25:14 it says; “The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them.”

We must fear God through love; not love Him through fear. Paul put it this way; “Let us purify ourselves from everything that makes body or soul unclean, and let us be completely holy by living in awe of God” (2 Cor.7:1 GNB).

8  *But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish;*
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A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine.

We might say; “as for discipline from such futilities (the idols)--that is nonsense.”
Idols can’t carry out execute judgment.

9 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 metalsmith;
    Blue and purple are their clothing;
    They are all the work of skillful men.

What if the idol is really expensive? What if the idol is expertly crafted and beautifully encrusted with precious metal? Jeremiah is arguing that no matter how beautiful or expensive the idol--it is still man made.

Bible teachers are divided over the exact location of Tarshish. Some have speculated this was one of the outpost cities near the gates of Hercules in Southern Spain.

Uphaz (location unknown). Also translated Ophir where it mentioned by Daniel (10:5).

The word “skillful” translates a word that was previously translated “wise-ones” in verse 7.

10 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.

The Lord God is truth (see John 14:6).

How do we understand the wrath of God? William Barclay said, “The wrath of God is simply the rule of the universe that a man will reap what he sows, and that no one ever escapes the consequences of his sin. The wrath of God and the moral order of the universe are one and the same”.

11 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.”
Verse 11 is Aramaic. Some Bible teachers believe this became a proverb in Babylon where the children were held captive.

Babylon will kill the observant Jews taste for idolatry.

This is a carefully balanced sentence with internal rhyme in what is called chiastic form (x). It says that the gods which did not make the heavens and the earth (Nebo, Marduk, Ishtar, and the other Babylonian deities--shall perish from the earth and from under the heaven (just for your information--they are gone!).

12 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.

Jeremiah says God is the Creator and He made the earth by His power. The universe is the product of God’s mind and imagination and power.

God stretched out the universe.

Stephen Hawking says no He didn’t.

Rich and Tina Kleiss use the illustration that every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. They cite the reality that it takes a mind to build a house. “A home electrical system requires the skilled labor of an electrician who has spent many years learning his trade. The plumbing requires the work of a plumber who has worked for years as an apprentice. The structure of the house requires the skilled labor of a team of carpenters. The heating system, insulation, drywall, roofing, siding, finishing, carpeting, and landscaping all require planning, skill, and intelligence before a finished home results.

Each part of the human body has corresponding components; our nervous system is far more complex than the electrical system of a house. Our blood vessels, heart, and lungs are infinitely more complex than any home heating and ventilation system. Our digestive track is more intricately designed than any plumbing system. Our body fat insulates far more efficiently than any home insulation. Our skin is far more durable and complex than drywall, siding, paint, or carpentry.

It takes a mind to conceive, design, and build a house. How can we believe that it did not take a far superior creative intelligence to conceive and create the human body?” (see A Closer Look At the Evidence for June 14).
When He utters His voice,  
There is a multitude of waters in the heavens:  
“And 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 treasuries.”

Jeremiah describes the weather. God’s power is revealed in the wind, the rain, thunder and lightning.

Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge;  
Every metalsmith is put to shame by an image;  
For his molded image is falsehood,  
And there is no breath in them.

The word breath is ruach; and can be translated spirit--or no life.

The idol is not really alive. Every person who fabricates the idol is alive. They are alive because God made human beings.

They are futile, a work of errors;  
In the time of their punishment they shall perish.

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.

Jeremiah repeats the utter folly of trusting false idols and man made religion. How wonderful it is to trust in the true and the living God.

Notice the four relationships described of God in terms of relationship with the earth; (1) God is Jacob’s portion; (2) God is the Creator of All Things; (3) God stands in a unique and peculiar relation to Israel; (4) and God is the Lord of hosts--the commander of the armies of Heaven.

One of the many title’s of God is “The Portion of Jacob”. What an amazing title for God!
The title speaks of the reciprocity of Faith! Ephraim belongs to God--Ephraim is God’s inheritance! But God belong’s to Ephraim--that is the true knowledge of God is Ephraim’s portion. When Ephraim became proud, smug, conceited in that relationship; the prophets warned the people, to return to their duty!

The word tribe (shebet) can mean tribe or rod! That is the rod or scepter of rule; the basic meaning of rod--or ruler--begins the notion--of tribe or family. Rod include “measuring rod” or something that is measured off. If word translated “tribe” means tribe--it may mean that Ephraim is not so much a big stick or politically important; but that the knowledge of God has been entrusted to Ephraim--and knowledge of God is the standard whereby all human knowledge is judged or evaluated. The play on the meaning of the words is difficult to translate.

The Inevitable Consequence of Idolatry: Judgment (vv.17-25)

17 Gather up your wares from the land,
O inhabitant of the fortress!

Jeremiah reminds the people that the consequences of disobedience will include exile!

18 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.”

19 Woe is me for my hurt!
My wound is severe.
But I say, “Truly this is an infirmity,

20 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 set up my curtains.
21 For the shepherds have become dull-hearted,  
And have not sought the Lord;  
Therefore they shall not prosper,  
And all their flocks shall be scattered.

22 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.

23 O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself;  
It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.

24 O Lord, correct me, but with justice;  
Not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing.

Conclusion

What is the cure for idolatry?  
You must have a proper vision of the true and living God. That vision must inform your thinking and speaking and living.

W. H. H. Aitken prayed this way;

“Lord, take my lips and speak through them, take my mind and think through it; take my heart and set it on fire.”

In the book of Ephesians Paul wrote “As slaves of Christ do the will of God wholeheartedly” (REB).

Oswald Chambers:

“Whenever we take what God has done and put it in the place of Himself, we become idolaters.”
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D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones; the good Doctor gave us clues--symptoms for those who might be infected with idolatry;

“A man’s god is that for which he lives, for which his prepared to give his time, his energy, his money, that which stimulates him and rouses him, excites and enthuses him”.

You might have a problem with idolatry if you trust people, possessions or positions to do for you what only God can do for you!

Chuck Swindoll;

“It’s easy to get attached to idols, good things inappropriately adored. But when you have Jesus in the center of the room, everything else only junks up the decor.”