

Journey through Jeremiah Part 12 The Way of the Heathen

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Th.D. – Wednesday, March 08, 2017

† Jeremiah 10:1-25

- (1) Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel:
(2) Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.

This seems to be addressed to Israel at large, all 12 tribes. Remember, the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom had already been led away into captivity by the Assyrians and the last 2 tribes of the Southern Kingdom were taken into captivity by the Chaldeans. Some of these were exiled into Egypt such as was Jeremiah.

All of these pagan, heathen cultures practiced astrology and signs, particularly what they called “*signs of heaven*.” These would have been things such as the sun, moon, stars, planets, constellations, and such. They made gods out of all of these things. So, when there was any occurrence in nature that seemed out of the ordinary or unusual they would attribute it to one of these gods.

For example:

1. A bolt of lightning from the sky and a loud thunderclap might be seen as a sign from **Anu – the sky god**. Or **Adad – the storm god and controller of lightning**.
2. If the sun or fire was involved they would attribute it to **Baal, the sun god**, or **Moloch the fire god**.
3. If a child died they may attribute it to **Ishtar – goddess of love and procreation**.
4. If their crops failed, they might see this as a sign from Ishtar’s son, **Tammuz, god of vegetation**.
5. If they went into war with someone they would pray to **Ashur, the Assyrian god of war**.

Of course, if we start listing Egyptian gods and goddesses we could be here all night.

Here the LORD is warning His people not to learn the way of the heathen. Don’t look at these signs that they look at and attribute them to their pagan gods. Of course, we know that is exactly what they ended up doing. That is why they are in the mess they are in because they ran after the gods of their heathen neighbors. But you can only imagine the difficulty they would have being in bondage to these countries where that is the normal practice – it would be draw to them.

(3) For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. (4) They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. (5) They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.

All of this is a description of the senseless way the heathen cultures would spend time building their idols of wood and erecting them to worship as if they were gods. The LORD says that it is all in vain. They do all of this work, cutting it, shaping it, decking it out with finery, nailing to stand erect but all they are doing is bowing down to a piece of wood. It is not alive, it cannot speak, it cannot even move. They have to move it themselves. He tells them not be afraid of these worthless idols.

(6) Forasmuch as *there is none like unto thee*, O LORD; thou *art* great, and thy name *is* great in might. (7) Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise *men* of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, *there is none like unto thee*.

These are the words of Jeremiah concerning the LORD. He compares the greatness of the LORD with the impotence of the heathen gods and idols. The idols and heathen gods are non-existent and are unable to perform any action or deed, but the God of Heaven, the “**King of nations**” as Jeremiah calls Him, is powerful and everyone should fear Him.

(8) But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock *is* a doctrine of vanities. (9) Silver spread into plates is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder: blue and purple *is* their clothing: they *are* all the work of cunning *men*.

Again, how all of these idols are just objects that were created by men. They use the finest silver and finest gold to adorn their idols with but it is for nothing. Their gods are not real and cannot do anything.

(10) But the LORD *is* the true God, he *is* the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.

Here is a great description of the real God. The LORD is “**true**” He is “**living**,” He is “**everlasting**,” His wrath will cause **the earth to tremble**. No one in any nation will be able to escape his “**indignation**” meaning His **wrath**.

(11) Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, *even* they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.

All of their gods and idols of wood, gold, metal, stone, or whatever they build them out of will all perish from the face of the earth. Nothing will be left of them. They are not true, living, or everlasting.

(12) He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. (13) When he uttereth his voice, *there is* a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures.

Again, a description of the power of the LORD God of Heaven in contrast to the powerlessness of the heathen gods.

- The LORD made the earth by HIS power – it wasn’t Baal or Anu.
- The LORD established the world by HIS wisdom – it wasn’t Nabu
- When the LORD utters his voice it is a sound as a multitude of waters – you will never hear Adad, or Ninlil.
- The LORD created the lightning, rain, and wind – it wasn’t Anu, Adad, or Enki.

(14) Every man is brutish in *his* knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image *is* falsehood, and *there is* no breath in them. (15) They *are* vanity, *and* the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish.

This is further descriptions of the hollowness of these heathen gods and the folly of those that bow down and worship them. They are empty, dead objects. That phrase, “in the time of their visitation they shall perish.” That word “**visitation**” is used 15 times in the Bible and out of those 15 times the Prophet Jeremiah accounts for 8 of those. It’s only used twice in the New Testament, once by Jesus and once by Peter. It means “the act of visiting or being visited for any purpose, usually with the notion of inspecting conduct, inflicting punishment, or conferring favors.

Here in Jeremiah 10:15 it is referring to when God will come to dole out punishment on these heathen nations and destroy them because of their wickedness and idolatry.

(16) The portion of Jacob *is* not like them: for he *is* the former of all *things*; and Israel *is* the rod of his inheritance: The LORD of hosts *is* his name.

“The portion of Jacob” is speaking of the LORD God Jehovah, or Yahweh. He is not like the gods of the Assyrians, Chaldeans, or Egyptians. He is “former of all things.” He has always been. As Pastor Sexton often said in my studies at Crown College, “God is always first.” He also rules over His people, Israel, with a rod.

(17) Gather up thy wares out of the land, O inhabitant of the fortress.

(18) For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this once, and will distress them, that they may find *it so*.

Here Jeremiah is calling for the people to gather up their wares, whatever they can carry, and get prepared to flee because they are going to be slung out of their land into captivity. The word “**sling**” implies it will be a very swift and violent reaction.

(19) Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this *is* a grief, and I must bear it. (20) My tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth of me, and they *are* not: *there is* none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains.

This is the grief of Jeremiah seeing everything that is happening to his people. It’s like a wound that hurts but he must bear it because the people of his nation have rebelled against God and He must punish them.

The Tabernacle of the LORD has been spoiled, the people are scattered, the land is barren, no one lives in Judah anymore.

(21) For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered.

Even the pastors, Judah’s shepherds, have forsaken the LORD. They do not pray to Him and seek His face and because of it their flocks have scattered. It reminds me of **Mat 9:35-36**: And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. (36) But when he saw the multitudes, he was

moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

The people of Judah have no shepherds anymore either.

(22) Behold, the noise of the bruit *is* come, and a great commotion out of the north country, to make the cities of Judah desolate, *and* a den of dragons.

This is another description of Nebuchadnezzar and his great Chaldean army invading from the North, making Judah and Jerusalem desolate, without human habitation, only the wild animals will live there. It has become a den of dragons.

(23) O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps. (24) O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.

Here is a plea from Jeremiah on behalf of the Nation of Judah. He realizes that they deserve to be punished. He realizes that the LORD has every right to punish them. He pleads that the LORD only deal out punishment through righteous judgement and not by anger.

(25) Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name: for they have eaten up Jacob, and devoured him, and consumed him, and have made his habitation desolate.

Here he asks the LORD to direct his fury upon the heathen that do not know Him. Destroy those that have brought this desolation upon Judah.

We know that the LORD did indeed punish the Chaldeans, the Babylonians. He drove Nebuchadnezzar to the fields to live like an animal for 7-years. His son Belshazzar saw the handwriting on the wall and was slain and then the city was taken by King Cyrus.