

Acts 7:41

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

Analysis

And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Stephen identifies the essence of idolatry—worshiping self-made objects and taking pride in human religious achievement.

Made a calf contrasts sharply with God's creative work. God spoke creation into existence; humans fashion idols from existing materials. The idol represents human projection onto deity—creating gods in our image rather than recognizing we're made in God's image.

Offered sacrifice unto the idol shows religious activity misdirected. The forms looked correct (sacrifices), but the object was false. This warns against externally orthodox worship directed toward false conceptions of God. Reformed theology emphasizes true worship must align with God's self-revelation in Scripture, not human imagination.

Rejoiced in the works of their own hands exposes idolatry's core—self-worship. Pride in human craftsmanship replaced worship of the Creator. This becomes a paradigm for all false religion: taking glory for what we've produced rather than giving glory to God. Paul echoes this in Romans 1:25—exchanging Creator for creation.

Historical Context

The golden calf worship (Exodus 32:4-6) occurred despite direct, recent experience of God's power. They had witnessed plagues, Red Sea crossing, and Sinai's thundering—yet quickly reverted to pagan practices learned in Egypt.

Ancient Near Eastern religions featured visible deity representations. Israel's demand for tangible gods reflected cultural accommodation—adopting surrounding nations' worship patterns. This becomes a recurring Old Testament theme: syncretism, mixing true worship with pagan elements.

Stephen draws a parallel: his audience maintains temple worship and Torah study, appearing orthodox, yet rejects the Spirit's work through Jesus. External religious activity without internal transformation is idolatry—worshiping the works of our own hands rather than receiving God's gracious work in Christ.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does pride in religious achievement—'works of our own hands'—subtly replace genuine worship?
2. What forms of modern idolatry involve externally religious activity directed toward false concepts of God?
3. In what ways might our worship, though orthodox in form, actually be self-worship?
4. How does the temptation to create 'manageable' gods reflect resistance to God's sovereign, transcendent nature?

5. What role does cultural accommodation play in diluting authentic Christian worship and practice?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἐμοσχοποίησαν ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις καὶ
And they made a calf in G3588 days those And
G2532 G3447 G1722 G2250 G1565 G2532

ἀνήγαγον θυσίαν τῷ εἰδώλῳ καὶ εὐφραίνοντο ἐν
offered sacrifice G3588 unto the idol And rejoiced in
G321 G2378 G1497 G2532 G2165 G1722

τοῖς ἔργοις τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν
G3588 the works G3588 hands G846
G2041 G5495

Additional Cross-References

Nehemiah 9:18 (Creation): Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations;

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