

Jeremiah 10:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

This verse exposes idol manufacture: 'For the customs of the people are vain.' The Hebrew *chuqqoth* (חֲקָתִים, statutes, customs) with *hevel* (חָבֵב, vanity, breath, nothing) declares religious practices worthless. 'For one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe.' The idol begins as a tree—created thing—cut down by human labor (*charash*, שָׁרַשׁ, craftsman) using human tools (*ma'atsad*, מָאַטָּשׁ, axe). The manufacturing process is mundane, ordinary, entirely human. What emerges is 'work of hands'—human product, not divine being. The polemic reduces impressive idols to their origin: firewood shaped by workers.

Historical Context

This passage parallels Isaiah 44:9-20's extended satire on idol making. Archaeological discoveries of ancient workshops reveal the idol manufacturing process: wooden cores overlaid with metal, stone carvings, clay moldings. The craftsmen who made these objects knew they were creating statues, yet somehow their products became objects of worship. The prophets expose this absurdity.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 – Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does tracing an idol's origin to a tree cut from the forest expose idolatry's absurdity?
2. What modern 'gods' are similarly human creations that we elevate to objects of devotion?

Interlinear Text

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|---------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|------------|----------|-------|---------------|
| פְּנִים | וְתַּחַת | מִקְרָב | בְּעֵמָה | בְּלִבְנָה | וְאַתָּה | כִּי | עַזְבֵּן |
| H3588 | For the customs | of the people | are vain | | H1931 | H3588 | a tree |
| H2708 | | H5971 | H1892 | | | H6086 | |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| מִ עַר | כְּרָתִים | מְעַשֵּׂה | יָדִים | סְכָנָה |
| out of the forest | for one cutteth | the work | of the hands | of the workman |
| H3293 | H3772 | H4639 | H3027 | H2796 |

בְּמַעַלְתָּה
with the axe

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 18:30 (Parallel theme): Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God.

Jeremiah 10:8 (Parallel theme): But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock is a doctrine of vanities.

Romans 1:21 (Parallel theme): 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.

1 Peter 1:18 (Parallel theme): Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

Isaiah 45:20 (Parallel theme): Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save.

Matthew 6:7 (Parallel theme): But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Jeremiah 2:5 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?