

Jeremiah 10:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

This verse mocks idols' helplessness: 'They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not.' The Hebrew *tomēr miqshah* (תֹמֶר מִקְשָׁה) may mean 'scarecrow in a cucumber field' (NIV) or 'palm tree' (KJV)—rigid, immobile, decorative but lifeless. 'They must needs be borne, because they cannot go.' Idols require carrying (*nasa*, נָסָא); they cannot walk (*tсад*, תָּסַד). 'Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.' The conclusion is reassuring: these objects have no power—neither to harm nor help. They are impotent, irrelevant, non-beings. Fear of them is irrational; hope in them is futile.

Historical Context

Babylonian religious processions carried divine statues through city streets on festival days. The Akitu festival involved elaborate processional carrying of Marduk's statue. Israel witnessed these impressive displays during exile. Yet Jeremiah reduces these ceremonies to absurdity: gods who must be carried, who cannot walk, who have no power whatsoever. Isaiah 46:1-7 similarly mocks Babylonian gods that must be carried on beasts.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the image of a god that must be carried contrast with the true God who carries His people (Isaiah 46:3-4)?
2. What contemporary objects of devotion similarly promise power but deliver nothing?

Interlinear Text

כֶּתֶר תָּר	מִקְשָׁה	וְלֹא יֵדְבָרוּ	וְיָנֹשׂוּ	
as the palm tree	They are upright	but speak	be borne	
H8560	H4749	H1696	H5375	
וְיָנֹשׂוּ	לֹא כִי	יֵצְעוּ דָו	אֵל	תִּירָא וְ
be borne		because they cannot go		Be not afraid
H5375	H3588	H6805	H408	H3372
לֹא	יֵרָעוּ	וְגַם	הֵיטִיב יֵב	
	of them for they cannot do evil		neither also is it in them to do good	
H3808	H7489	H1571	H3190	
אֹתָם: יֵא				
H369	H854			

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 46:7 (Parallel theme): They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove: yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.

1 Corinthians 12:2 (Parallel theme): Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.

Isaiah 46:1 (Parallel theme): Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy loaden; they are a burden to the weary beast.

1 Corinthians 8:4 (Parallel theme): As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

Habakkuk 2:19 (Parallel theme): Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.

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.