

Jeremiah 51:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Every man is brutish by his knowledge; every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them.

Analysis

Every man is brutish by his knowledge—the word "brutish" (ברעָה, ba'ar, be stupid, be brutish) means becoming animal-like, lacking spiritual discernment. The phrase "by his knowledge" is ironic: human wisdom apart from God produces stupidity. Romans 1:22 echoes this: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Worldly learning without divine revelation breeds spiritual ignorance.

Every founder is confounded by the graven image—the idol-maker (צְרוּר, tsoref, goldsmith, refiner) is "confounded" (בָּשָׁה, bosh, ashamed, disappointed) by his own creation. The craftsman knows the idol's origin yet worships it anyway—ultimate irrationality. **For his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them**—idols are "falsehood" (שְׁקָרֶה, sheqer, lie, deception) because they claim deity while being lifeless metal. The phrase "no breath" (רוּחָה, ruach, breath, spirit) emphasizes idols' inability to give life—they're inanimate. Only God breathes life (Genesis 2:7).

Historical Context

Babylon's idol-making industry was extensive, crafting images of Marduk, Ishtar, Nabu, and other deities. Archaeological discoveries include numerous Babylonian idols—gold, silver, stone statues. Isaiah 40:19-20 and 44:9-20 satirize the idol-making process: craftsmen using part of wood for cooking fire, part for carving a

god. Babylonian religion invested enormous resources in idol worship, temple rituals, and divination. Yet when Cyrus conquered Babylon, these gods proved powerless to save their worshippers—vindicating prophetic mockery of idol impotence.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does human knowledge apart from divine revelation produce spiritual 'brutishness' rather than wisdom?
2. What contemporary 'graven images' do people craft and then worship, despite knowing their human origin?
3. In what ways does Romans 1:18-25's description of idolatry's irrationality parallel Jeremiah's critique of Babylonian religion?

Interlinear Text

צָרָר	רְבָרָבָר	כָּל	הַבְּרִישָׁה	מִתְּעִתָּה	אָדָם	כָּל	נִבְעָרָה	רְבָרָבָר
is brutish	H3605	Every man	by his knowledge	is confounded	H3605	every founder		
H1197		H120		H1847		H3001		H6884
בְּרִישָׁה	מִתְּעִתָּה	אָדָם	נִבְעָרָה	כָּל	רְבָרָבָר	כָּל	צָרָר	רְבָרָבָר
by the graven image	H3588	is falsehood	for his molten image	H3808				
H6459		H8267		H5262				
רְבָרָבָר	מִתְּעִתָּה	אָדָם	נִבְעָרָה	כָּל	צָרָר	רְבָרָבָר	בְּרִישָׁה	מִתְּעִתָּה
and there is no breath	H0							
H7307								

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 10:14 (Parallel theme): 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.

Psalms 14:2 (Parallel theme): The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.

Jeremiah 50:2 (Parallel theme): Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces.

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