

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" (בָּעַר, 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 (צֹרֵף, tsoref, goldsmith, refiner) is "confounded" (בוּשׁ, 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" (שֶׁקֶר, sheqer, lie, deception) because they claim deity while being lifeless metal. The phrase "no breath" (רוּחַ, 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

נִבְעֵר is brutish H1197	כָּל H3605	אָדָם Every man H120	בְּיָדוֹ by his knowledge H1847	הֵבִישׁ is confounded H3001	כָּל H3605	צֵרָה every founder H6884
מִפֶּסֶל by the graven image H6459		כִּי H3588	שֶׁקֶר is falsehood H8267	בְּסֹכֶל for his molten image H5262	וְלֹא H3808	
וְאֵין and there is no H7307		נְשָׁמָה breath H0				

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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