

Psalms 115:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

Analysis

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. The psalm pivots from defending Israel's invisible God to exposing pagan idolatry's absurdity. The Hebrew *atsabehem* (אֲצַבֵּיהֶם) means their 'idols' or 'images'—literally 'shaped things' or even 'sorrows' (the word can denote both idol and grief). Made of precious *kesef* (כֶּסֶף, silver) and *zahav* (זָהָב, gold), idols impressed with material value but lacked divine life.

The work of men's hands (ma'aseh yedei adam, מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אָדָם) is the devastating critique. Humans craft objects, then worship their own craftsmanship. The creator (human) bows before the created (idol)—an ontological inversion. This echoes Isaiah's mockery: the carpenter uses half a tree for firewood and carves the other half into a god (Isaiah 44:14-20). Romans 1:25 calls this exchanging 'the truth of God for the lie' and worshipping the creature rather than the Creator.

The irony intensifies: pagans mock Israel's invisible God while bowing to visible metal. Which is more rational—trusting the unseen Creator who made heaven and earth, or trusting manufactured objects that cannot see, hear, or act?

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern idolatry was sophisticated and pervasive. Temples housed elaborate cult statues overlaid with precious metals, believed to be dwelling places for deities. Daily rituals included feeding, clothing, and entertaining these images. Babylonian mythology described gods creating humans to serve them, with statues

functioning as the gods' earthly bodies. Israel's aniconic worship (no images) was radically countercultural, provoking pagan incomprehension and mockery. The temptation to adopt visible idols was constant, leading to repeated prophetic denunciations and national judgments.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What modern 'works of men's hands' command devotion and trust in contemporary culture (technology, wealth, political systems)?
2. How does recognizing that idols are human creations help you identify and resist idolatry in your own life?
3. Why is the invisibility of the true God both a stumbling block to unbelief and a safeguard against reducing Him to human projections?

Interlinear Text

אֱלֹהֵיהֶם	כֶּסֶף	וְזָהָב	מֵעֹשׂ הַיָּד	אֲדָמָה:	
Their idols	are silver	and gold	the work	hands	of men's
H6091	H3701	H2091	H4639	H3027	H120

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 4:28 (Parallel theme): And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.

Isaiah 44:10 (Parallel theme): Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing?

Isaiah 37:19 (Parallel theme): And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

Acts 19:26 (Parallel theme): Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:

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