

Psalms 135:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

Sharp polemic against idolatry begins: 'The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.' The Hebrew 'atsabim' (idols) derives from a root meaning 'to shape' or 'fashion,' emphasizing their manufactured nature. The irony is devastating - what pagans worship as divine is mere 'silver and gold,' valuable materials certainly, but inanimate. Worse, they are 'work of men's hands' (ma'aseh yedey adam) - the creature worships what it creates. This critique, paralleling Psalm 115:4-8 almost exactly, exposes idolatry's fundamental absurdity. The living God who made heaven, earth, seas, and deep places (verse 6) stands in absolute contrast to gods made by human craftsmen. Isaiah develops this theme extensively (Isaiah 44:9-20), ridiculing idol manufacture. Paul applies this principle broadly: anything we fashion and trust becomes our idol, whether metal images or modern substitutes.

Historical Context

Ancient idol manufacture was a sophisticated craft involving metalworking, woodcarving, and overlay techniques. Temples employed specialized craftsmen. Despite this, prophets consistently mocked these practices (Isaiah 40:18-20; 41:6-7; 44:9-20; Jeremiah 10:1-16). Archaeological discoveries confirm the elaborate nature of ancient idol production and the wealth invested in temple images.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 – Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What modern "idols" are merely human creations with no real power?
2. How do people today craft things to worship instead of the Creator?

Interlinear Text

Additional Cross-References

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 17:29 (Parallel theme): Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

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.

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