

Psalms 96:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens.

Analysis

For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens.

The psalm's polemic against idolatry reaches its climax: the so-called gods of the nations are merely elilim (אֱלִילִים), a contemptuous term meaning worthless things, nothings, or idols. The word plays on elohim (gods) but reduces them to insignificance. These gods have no reality, power, or being—they are human-crafted vanities.

"But the LORD made the heavens" (va-Yahweh shamayim asah, וַיַּעֲשֵׂה שָׁמָיִם) provides the ultimate contrast. While idols are made by human hands (Isaiah 44:9-20), Yahweh made the heavens—the cosmos itself. The verb asah (עָשָׂה, made/created) recalls Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The Creator-creature distinction is absolute: God creates; idols are created (by humans who themselves are God's creatures).

This truth demolishes idolatry's foundation. Why worship what humans made when we can worship Him who made humans? Paul echoes this in Acts 17:24-25: the God who made the world and everything in it "dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing." Idols depend on humans; humans depend on God.

Historical Context

Ancient idol worship wasn't merely reverence for statues but belief that gods inhabited images, requiring feeding, clothing, and care. Temples employed priests to serve idol-gods' daily needs. This cult practice dominated the Ancient Near East, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, Greece, and Rome. Israel's iconoclastic monotheism was radically countercultural—no images of Yahweh were permitted (Exodus 20:4-6) because He is transcendent Creator, not a creature requiring human sustenance. The early church's refusal to worship Roman emperor-idols led to persecution, yet believers remained faithful to the one true God.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What modern idols (career success, political ideology, self-image, consumerism) function as 'gods of the nations' today?
2. How does creation itself (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20) testify against idolatry and reveal God's eternal power?
3. In what ways does recognizing God as Creator-of-the-heavens reshape your understanding of worship?

Interlinear Text

שְׁמָם יְמָם תְּהִלָּה אֱלֹהִים בָּעֵם יְמָם אֱלֹהִים בָּעֵם יְמָם
H3588 H3605 For all the gods of the nations are idols but the LORD the heavens
H430 H5971 H457 H3068 H8064

בָּעֵם:

made

H6213

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 115:15 (Creation): Ye are blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth.

Isaiah 42:5 (Creation): Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

Psalms 135:18 (Parallel theme): They that make them are like unto them: so is every one that trusteth in them.

1 Corinthians 8:4 (References God): 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.

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