

Jeremiah 10:1-10

This passage expands on **Leviticus 18:3** - "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances."

This is repeated in **Leviticus 20:23** - "And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them."

Jeremiah 10:1-3 - "Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain..."

To "learn" = *lamad* - from a root "to goad" or strike with a rod, being the way of teaching children, hence to discipline or train.

This is not to say we can't learn about Canaanite practices or study anthropology or comparative religions. It means we do not train ourselves to be disciples of the way of the world system.

In fact, a counter effect is promised if we do and teach God's commandments...

- **Deuteronomy 4:6** - "Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

This is remarkable passage!

Judaism was intriguing to many Romans who were seeking something more than the lifeless idolatry and myths of the time, who would attend rabbinical teaching and become "God-fearers" in Jesus' time. Then the church expanded this outreach further into Gentile nations, eventually dominating the Roman Empire and ultimately the West. Today there are more than 67 million Christians in China, and Africa is home to the world's most dynamic Christian expansion. Principles that originated in the Torah and were fulfilled and expanded by Jesus led to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Idolatry is Stupid

Jeremiah 10:3-5 - "For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good."

Jeremiah is warning against the Babylonian beliefs in astrology specifically. But the powerlessness of idols is emphasized.

Isaiah agrees with Jeremiah, speaking to Babylon:

- **Isaiah 47:13-14** - "Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them..."

The Uniqueness of God

Jeremiah 10:6 - "Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might."

Better, "O Lord, thou art great, so that there is none like unto thee, and thy name is great, because of thy might. Who would not fear thee?"

Jeremiah 10:7 - "Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like unto thee."

Targum - "...O king of all people, thine is the kingdom"

Or as the NET has it: "Everyone should revere you, O King of all nations, because you deserve to be revered. For there is no one like you among any of the wise people of the nations nor among any of their kings."

Jeremiah 10:8 - "But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock is a doctrine of vanities."

The Talmudists seem to take the word "vanities" (which can mean smoke or vapor) to have the signification of burning; for the sense of these words being asked, it is replied, "there is one thing that burns the wicked in hell; what is it? idolatry; as it is here written, "a doctrine of vanities is the stock." - Gill's Exposition

Jeremiah 10:9 - "Silver spread into plates is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder: blue and purple is their clothing: they are all the work of cunning men."

i.e. cunning men, using the best of their knowledge, talents, expertise and reasoning, and using the finest resources from all over the known world, can only come up with a lifeless deity that is powerless.

Jeremiah 10:10 - "But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation."

Rashi points out that God is the only one who can execute his plans and keep his vows:

Probably with Isaiah's challenge to the idols in mind:

- **Isaiah 41:23** - "Tell us the things that are to come, so that we may know that you are gods. Yes, do something good or evil, that we may look on together in dismay."

Rashi - "But the Lord God is true": Why? Because He is a living God and the King of the world. Therefore, He can make His words come true. A mortal person, however, plans to do something and dies or becomes weak or loses his property, and has no ability to execute his plans.

God is the only one who is able to do either good or evil - to either bless or bestow mercy, or enforce His judgments.