

Jeremiah 10 concludes Jeremiah’s commentary on the temple sermon in Jeremiah 7.

Last time we looked at the problem with Israel – and with us –  
as a problem of *knowledge*.

“My people do not know the rules of the LORD” (8:7)

“They do not know me, declares the LORD” (9:3)

“They refuse to know me, declares the LORD” (9:6).

And in 9:24, God gave the solution to the problem of Judah’s lack of knowledge:

“Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me,  
that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.”

We have a knowledge problem.  
And the only solution is to *know God*.

We also have a stupidity problem.  
You can see how the passage fits together – organized around the word “stupid”:  
v8 – the idols of the nations are both stupid and foolish  
v14 – every man is stupid for making and trusting idols  
v21 – the shepherds of Israel are stupid for failing to inquire of the LORD.

The word translated “stupid” can also be translated “brutish” –  
as in Psalm 73:22 – “I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast before you.”

I want you to think about the problem of stupidity.  
We were created in the image of God – *in knowledge, holiness, and righteousness...*  
Knowledge – and particularly, knowing God – is part of what it means to be human.  
When man exchanges the knowledge of God for idols, man is stupid –  
or, to say it another way, when man fails to know and love God,  
man becomes like a beast.

Stupidity is not the same as ignorance.  
Ignorance may simply be a lack of knowledge.  
The solution to ignorance is usually education.

But stupidity is a different sort of problem.  
No matter how much you teach a stupid person, they *won’t* get it.  
When you call somebody stupid  
you are saying that in some sense they are “brutish” –  
they are *less than fully human*.

That’s why it is generally not very polite to call people stupid.

But Jeremiah goes so far as to say that *every man* is stupid.

Humanity has become brutish.

And, worse yet, when the *shepherds* of Israel are stupid – when they become like beasts – then the flock is scattered.

How did this happen?

Well, as Mark likes to say, “Sin makes you stupid.”

### **1. Idols Are Stupid (v1-10)**

*Hear the word that the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. <sup>2</sup> Thus says the LORD:*

Remember, Jeremiah has already been told – “they will not listen to you.”

But he was called to preach to them anyway!

#### **a. Idols Cannot Speak or Do Anything (v2-5)**

*“Learn not the way of the nations,  
nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens  
because the nations are dismayed at them,  
<sup>3</sup> for the customs of the peoples are vanity.<sup>[a]</sup>”*

Who are you learning from?

Are you listening to the voice of Jesus and learning from him?

Or are you listening to the way of the nations and learning from them?

The nations are dismayed at the “signs of the heavens.”

They are troubled by comets or eclipses –  
but the LORD says that such customs are *vanity*.

And yes, this is the Hebrew word *hebel* – vapor –  
which is also translated “vanity” in Ecclesiastes.

This idea of vanity/vapor is closely associated with idolatry.

The customs of the peoples are vanity –  
what customs?

Keep reading:

*A tree from the forest is cut down  
and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman.*

<sup>4</sup> *They decorate it with silver and gold;  
they fasten it with hammer and nails  
so that it cannot move.*

<sup>5</sup> *Their idols<sup>[b]</sup> are like scarecrows in a cucumber field,  
and they cannot speak;  
they have to be carried,  
for they cannot walk.*

*Do not be afraid of them,*

*for they cannot do evil,  
neither is it in them to do good.”*

Isaiah 44 uses a similar picture of the futility of idols.

The gods of the nations are literally *fashioned* by man.  
They are like scarecrows – they cannot move – they cannot speak.

You spent all this money constructing your idol.

You devoted so much of your life and treasure –  
but what good is it?

It’s like a scarecrow in a cucumber patch.  
You could have spent \$5 on it, and it would have worked just as well!

What makes an idol an idol?

Notice that Jeremiah does not attribute any *independent existence* to the idol.

What makes an idol an idol?

Man does.

You don’t need a demonic being to have an idol.  
You don’t need some exotic religious ideas to have an idol.

All you need is something that *really matters* to you.

In the ancient world, people really wanted to have babies.

Fertility is really important.

Without babies, society will cease to exist.

So gods and goddesses of fertility are all over the ancient world.

Having rain at the right time – and not at the wrong time – is really important.

So storm gods are common as well.

Notice also that idols are *costly*.

Crafted wood, silver and gold, fashioned with care.

After all, if it *really matters to you*, then you will pay dearly for it.

You can easily see how science and technology have become essential to the idols of today.

The way that we construct our idols has changed –

but we still want power, pleasure, and peace.

We still seek to manipulate our gods in order to get what we want.

You can make anything into a god.

What is it that you think will bring you happiness?

What is it that you pour your time and money into?

Where your treasure is – there will your heart be also.

### **b. The Stupidity of Idols vs. the Power of the LORD (v6-10)**

Verses 6-10 then contrast the LORD with idols:

<sup>6</sup> *There is none like you, O LORD;  
you are great, and your name is great in might.*  
<sup>7</sup> *Who would not fear you, O King of the nations?  
For this is your due;  
for among all the wise ones of the nations  
and in all their kingdoms  
there is none like you.*

There is no comparison!  
There is none like you, O LORD.  
The gods of the nations are impotent – they cannot do anything.  
Who would fear a block of wood?  
But the King of the nations – the LORD our God – is great and powerful.

We *should* fear the King of the nations – the one true God.  
Of course, the reason why we don't is because we *prefer* stupid gods.  
We want to be in control – and the true God is uncontrollable.  
A great and powerful God is only a *comfortable* thing  
if we could somehow control God.

C. S. Lewis helps us with his famous line – “of course he's not *safe* – but he's *good*.”  
The true God – the King of the nations – is great and powerful –  
you cannot control him.  
Rather, you should *fear him*.

The fear of the LORD is a good thing.  
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.  
And when we say “fear” we really do mean “fear.”  
The LORD is great, and his name is great in might.  
He is not safe.  
You should fear him!

In contrast, the idols of the nations:

<sup>8</sup> *They are both stupid and foolish;  
the instruction of idols is but wood!*

Notice again the theme of knowledge, instruction, learning.  
The idols of the nations are both *stupid and foolish*.  
Their instruction is but wood.

The stupidity of the idols should be clear from v9:

<sup>9</sup> *Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish,  
and gold from Uphaz.*

*They are the work of the craftsman and of the hands of the goldsmith;  
their clothing is violet and purple;  
they are all the work of skilled men.*

God made man in his own image.  
But man makes idols in his own image.

There is a good use for wood and gold.  
You can use your skill – your craft – your wisdom –  
for the glory of God and the good of others.  
God made you for himself – and so the use of your skill and wisdom  
should reflect God’s wisdom and love and justice.

<sup>10</sup> *But the LORD is the true God;  
he is the living God and the everlasting King.  
At his wrath the earth quakes,  
and the nations cannot endure his indignation.*

The idols are made by skilled men – but they cannot speak or act.  
On the other hand, the earth quakes at the wrath of the LORD.

In the same way, our idols are stupid.  
We trust in the work of our own hands to save us.  
I understand why.  
We can control the work of our own hands!  
We cannot control the true God!

Of course, this trust in the work of our own hands *is stupid*.  
And our second point in verses 11-16 shows how the stupidity of idols  
becomes the stupidity of idolaters.  
Those who make idols become like them – so do all who trust in them.

## **2. Idolaters Are Stupid (v11-16)**

### **a. The LORD Made the Heavens and the Earth (v11-13)**

<sup>11</sup> *Thus shall you say to them: “The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall  
perish from the earth and from under the heavens.”*

If you trust a god who will perish, then you are stupid.

Jeremiah has already identified how man crafts idols by his wisdom (or skill – same word)  
and by his power.

In contrast, the LORD is the one who made the heavens and the earth:

<sup>12</sup> *It is he who made the earth by his power,  
who established the world by his wisdom,  
and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.*

<sup>13</sup> *When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens,  
and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth.  
He makes lightning for the rain,  
and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses.*

If the LORD made the heavens and the earth,  
that means that idols are all *creatures* –  
they are created things.  
They have no power – they have no wisdom – they are *stupid*.

But the LORD made the earth by his power.  
He established the world by his wisdom.

The LORD speaks and it happens.  
When God utters his voice, creation responds and obeys.

And because this is the case:

**b. The Stupidity of Every Adam (v14-15)**

<sup>14</sup> *Every man is stupid and without knowledge;  
every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols,  
for his images are false,  
and there is no breath in them.*

The word “man” in verse 14 is “adam” –  
and given the language of creation in this passage,  
it should make us think of creation and fall.

God created Adam in his image.  
And he breathed the breath of life into Adam.

Now, every adam is trying to play god.  
Man is making his own image –  
the problem is that man is *not* God,  
and so there is no *breath* in the images that man makes.  
The word “breath” is *ruach* – “wind, breath, spirit.”

Man cannot breathe the breath of life into his idols.  
Sure, we can clone God’s work.  
We can mimic and imitate.

But images made by man are *lower* than man – not higher!

The creator is greater than his creature.  
Therefore, when we imitate God in creating things  
we are greater than our own creations.

For this reason, when man makes an image and bows down to it –  
every man is stupid and without knowledge.

Every man is stupid – every adam is brutish – like a beast and ignorant.  
We were created to worship and serve the living and true God.  
When we worship a creature instead of the Creator,  
we become less than man.  
We become a brute.

But there is another problem with idols.

Idols are not just useless – they are “a work of delusion” –  
they lie and deceive and destroy:

<sup>15</sup> *They are worthless, a work of delusion;  
at the time of their punishment they shall perish.*

Think about this:  
idols invariably fail us.

“They suck the life and treasure out of a nation (the cost of idolatry is stupendous),  
but they always fail when you need them most.

Idolatry is fundamentally a fool’s game,  
but we never learn until it is too late.” (Wright, 137)

But verse 16 reminds us:

**c. The LORD Our Portion Is NOT Like These (v16)**

<sup>16</sup> *Not like these is he who is the portion of Jacob,  
for he is the one who formed all things,  
and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance;  
the LORD of hosts is his name.*

Notice how Jeremiah uses the language of inheritance in both ways:

The LORD is the portion of Jacob.  
But Israel is the tribe of his inheritance!

In other words, God himself is our portion.  
God himself is our inheritance.  
The Creator of all things is the *portion* of his people.

The only inheritance that you can receive from a false god is death.  
And yet, in our stupidity, we run after the very things that we should have hated!

That’s why Jeremiah concludes that even the Shepherds are Stupid.

**3. The Shepherds Are Stupid (v17-25)**

**a. Therefore Exile Is Coming (v17-18)**

<sup>17</sup> *Gather up your bundle from the ground,  
O you who dwell under siege!*  
<sup>18</sup> *For thus says the LORD:  
“Behold, I am slinging out the inhabitants of the land  
at this time,  
and I will bring distress on them,  
that they may feel it.”*

Jeremiah has been told that disaster is coming from the north.

In verses 17-18, the LORD says that he is “slinging out the inhabitants of the land” – he is bringing distress upon them, “that they may feel it.”

We have often seen that Jeremiah blends his own voice with the voice of the LORD, both in his preaching and in his lamenting.

We see that again in verses 19-21,

**b. The LORD Grieves Over the Stupidity of the Shepherds (v19-21)**

<sup>19</sup> *Woe is me because of my hurt!  
My wound is grievous.*

(Last time, we heard the LORD lamenting over the wounds of his people  
Now, again, we hear Jeremiah lamenting over his grievous wound).

*But I said, “Truly this is an affliction,  
and I must bear it.”*  
<sup>20</sup> *My tent is destroyed,  
and all my cords are broken;  
my children have gone from me,  
and they are not;  
there is no one to spread my tent again  
and to set up my curtains.*  
<sup>21</sup> *For the shepherds are stupid  
and do not inquire of the LORD;  
therefore they have not prospered,  
and all their flock is scattered.*

Verse 20 is probably referring to the temple as “my tent” (remembering the tabernacle).

The nations have taken captive the people of God.

And, most tragically of all, even the shepherds are stupid and do not inquire of the LORD

Jeremiah counseled the last two kings of Judah to submit to Babylon.

The first obeyed – and lived at the king’s table.

The second refused – and the last thing he saw was his sons being killed before his eyes – before his eyes were plucked out!

**c. Desolation from the North – for the Jew First and also for the Greek (v22-25)**

<sup>22</sup> *A voice, a rumor! Behold, it comes!—  
a great commotion out of the north country  
to make the cities of Judah a desolation,  
a lair of jackals.*

Desolation comes against the cities of Judah from the north.

Jeremiah had been told, “Do not pray for this people.”  
So Jeremiah prays instead for himself:  
Jeremiah first acknowledges the sovereignty of God:

<sup>23</sup> *I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself,  
that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.*

You are not the master of your own life.  
You do not control your own destiny.  
Even from a human perspective we understand this:  
you cannot control what happens to you.  
You may be driving your own car – but someone else can run into you.  
You may choose a career path – but maybe no one will hire you.

If we recognize the sovereignty of God –  
that God is God – and we are not –  
then we will see that we do not control our lives.

It is not in man to direct his steps.  
We need to listen to the LORD!

<sup>24</sup> *Correct me, O LORD, but in justice;  
not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing.*

The LORD had told Jeremiah, not to pray for this people.  
So Jeremiah pleads only for himself!

“Correct me, O LORD, but in justice – not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing.”

And Jeremiah asks God to bring judgment *against* the nations  
because of what they have done to Israel.

<sup>25</sup> *Pour out your wrath on the nations that know you not,  
and on the peoples that call not on your name,  
for they have devoured Jacob;  
they have devoured him and consumed him,  
and have laid waste his habitation.*

As we've seen throughout Jeremiah so far,  
there is very little hope yet for the Gentiles.

But then again, there is very little hope for the Jews either!

Our hope is that God has poured out his wrath *on Jesus*.  
When Jesus took our sin upon himself,  
Jesus became *sin* for us.

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