

# Jeremiah

## Chapter 10

### *Idols and the Living God*

Hear the word that the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. 2 Thus says the LORD: “Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them, 3 for the customs of the peoples are vanity. A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. 4 They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. 5 Their idols 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.” 6 There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might. 7 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. 8 They are both stupid and foolish; the instruction of idols is but wood! 9 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. 10 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. 11 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.” 12 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. 13 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. 14 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. 15 They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish. 16 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. 17 Gather up your bundle from the ground, O you who dwell under siege! 18 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.” 19 Woe is me because of my hurt! My wound is grievous. But I said, “Truly this is an affliction, and I must bear it.” 20 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. 21 For the shepherds are stupid and do not inquire of the LORD; therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered. 22 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. 23 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. 24 Correct me, O LORD, but in justice; not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing. 25 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.

**10:1–25** Jeremiah concludes his series of temple messages with a poetic section that focuses primarily on the vast difference between idols and the Lord (vv. 2–16). Idols and their worshipers are condemned in vv. 2–5, 8–9, 11, 14–15, while the one true God is praised in the alternate passages (vv. 6–7, 10, 12–13, 16). See Isa 40:18–20; 41:7; 44:9–20; 46:5–7. (CSB)

**10:1–16** Jeremiah’s longest and most scathing exposé of Israel’s trusting in idols. Similar in tone and content to Isaiah’s satires on idolatry (Is 40:18–20; 41:7; 44:9–17; 45:20; cf Ps 115:3–8; 135:15–18). (TLSB)

**10:1** *Hear*. A common divine imperative in prophetic writings, summoning God’s people—as well as the nations—into his courts to remind them of their covenant obligations to him and, when necessary, to pass judgment on them. (CSB)

**10:2** *Do not be dismayed*. To not be filled with the fear which caused the Gentile nations to associate various perils with the movements of comets, with the occurrence of eclipses, and other phenomena. (Kretzmann)

*way*. The Hebrew for this word is singular and refers to the religious practices of the nations. The early Christians often called their distinctive beliefs “the Way” (see Ac 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). (CSB)

Conduct or lifestyle; one of Jeremiah’s characteristic expressions (e.g., 2:36; 3:21; 4:18; 5:4; 6:27; 7:3, 5, 23). (TLSB)

*signs of the heavens*. The heavenly bodies were created by the Lord for purposes other than idolatrous worship. (CSB)

Eclipses of the sun and moon were considered omens of disaster. Superstitious idol worshipers were dismayed at them, but still they did not fear the true God, maker of heaven and earth. (TLSB)

*nations are dismayed*. Not only by the heavenly bodies themselves but also by unusual phenomena associated with them (such as comets, meteors and eclipses). (CSB)

Since they revered supernatural powers in the various constellations, this warning is now further substantiated by a description of idolatrous customs. (Kretzmann)

**10:3** *vanity*. A term that Jeremiah often applies to idols. (CSB)

One of Jeremiah’s favorite terms for idols; also translated “worthless” (v 15; 51:18), “worthlessness” (2:5), “foreign idols” (8:19), and “false gods” (14:22). Isaiah does not use the word in this sense. (TLSB)

Literally, “the precepts of the nations,” what they fix for people to follow, “are breath, nothingness.” (Kretzmann)

*a tree...cut down*. See Isa 44:14–15. (CSB)

Literally, “for wood is it,” that is what the object of their worship amounts to, “hewn out of the forest.” (Kretzmann)

*craftsman*. The word is often used of idol-makers who work usually—but not always (see Isa 40:19)—with wood (see Isa 41:7). (CSB)

*chisel*. Cf. Isa 44:13. (CSB)

**10:4** *silver and gold*. Wooden idols were plated with precious metals to beautify them (see Isa 30:22; 40:19). (CSB)

*fasten it ... so that it cannot move*/. See Isa 40:20; 41:7; cf. 46:7; contrast 1Sa 5:2–4. (CSB)

That is the only way in which the idol, supposed to be a god, can retain his upright position. (Kretzmann)

**10:5** The impotence of idols is described in classic form in Ps 115:4–7; 135:15–18. (CSB)

*cannot do evil ... good*. Idols can do nothing at all (see Isa 41:23). (CSB)

They cannot bring blessings or benefits upon any of their worshipers, since they are simply dead. Cp. Is. 41, 7-10. 23. (Kretzmann)

**10:6** *None*. Among the gods (see Ps 86:8). (CSB)

Literally, "not a particle of anything," this being the strongest possible denial of any power in any other god besides Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

*your name is great in might*. His essence is made known in works of His almighty power. (Kretzmann)

**10:7** *King of the nations*. See Ps 47:8–9; 96:10. Unlike the tribal deities, limited to their own territories, the Lord is King over all. (CSB)

*This*. Reverence. (CSB)

*Among all the wise ones... no one like you*. See Isa 19:12; 29:14; 1Co 1:20. (CSB)

No matter where a person searches for a god who might stand a comparison with Jehovah, the quest will be useless: He alone is the one becoming object of worship. (Kretzmann)

Sarcastic allusion to the superhuman knowledge attributed to the idols. There were so many of them that they were ranked according to authority and power so as to constitute kingdoms or hierarchies. (TLSB)

**10:8** *stupid and foolish*. The heathen are all alike in their stupidity, they have sunk to the level of brutes because they have severed their connection with the true God. (Kretzmann)

*instruction of idols*. Instead of by the Lord (see Dt 11:2; Job 5:17; Pr 3:11, where the Hebrew word for "taught by" is translated "discipline"). (CSB)

"the instruction of vanities is - wood"; the very idols from whom, according to their lights, they hope to receive instruction are wood and therefore unable to give understanding. (Kretzmann)

**10:9** *silver ... from Tarshish*. From Tartessus in Spain, whose gold mines were well known in the ancient world. (Kretzmann)

*Uphaz*. Mentioned only here; location unknown. (CSB)

Location unknown. Perhaps it is the same as Ophir, renowned for its gold. (TLSB)

*craftsman...goldsmith*. See Isa 40:19; 41:7. (CSB)

Beaten into the form of a thin covering by the goldsmith. (Kretzmann)

*clothing is violet and purple.* To make it look regal. (CSB)

The idols were regally clothed, like dolls. (TLSB)

*all.* The idols. (CSB)

No matter how the idolaters strive to give their statues the semblance of living and mighty beings by ornamenting them in this fashion, they still remain idols and cannot be elevated to the position of gods. (Kretzmann)

**10:10** Everything that idols are not, the Lord is. (CSB)

*true.* See 1Th 1:9. (CSB)

His whole essence being truth over against the nothingness of the idols. (Kretzmann)

*living.* See Dt 5:26. (CSB)

Ambr: “We ought to believe that God is good, eternal, perfect, almighty, and true, such as we find Him in the Law and the Prophets, and the rest of the holy Scriptures, for otherwise there is no God” (*NPNF 2* 10:203). (TLSB)

*but... wrath.* See Ps 97:5; Na 1:5. (CSB)

To endure even the smallest expression of His anger. (Kretzmann)

**10:11** The other major Aramaic passages in the OT are Ezr 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; Da 2:4–7:28. This verse is in prose. (CSB)

Verse composed not in Hbr but in Aram, the language of international diplomacy already at the time of Isaiah. Jeremiah anticipated the needs of the people in exile, which he describes so graphically. If the Israelites would say these words to their captors, who tempted them to worship idols in Babylon, their answer in Aram would be understood. (TLSB)

*them.* Pagan idolaters, who would have been more likely to understand Aramaic (the language of diplomacy during this period) than Hebrew. (CSB)

The Jews being given an argument in the very tongue of Aramaic idolaters who were trying to seduce them to commit idolatry. (Kretzmann)

*did not make* – Those upon whom the heathen relied in their foolishness. (Kretzmann)

*shall perish* – The import, then, of the Lord's warning is this: not only should the Jews feel no fear of the heathen idols, but they should declare to the Gentiles that their supposed gods would soon be forgotten. Over against the weakness and nothingness of the heathen idols the almighty power of the one true God is now once more proclaimed. (Kretzmann)

**10:12–16** Repeated almost verbatim in 51:15–19. (CSB)

**10:12** *stretched out the heavens.* Like a tent or canopy. (CSB)

**10:13** *tumult of waters...makes mist.* Repeated in Ps 135:7, where the one true God is contrasted to false gods (see Ps 135:5, 15–17); cf. Job 38:22. (CSB)

Figurative language. Cf Ps 33:7; Jb 37:9. (TLSB)

or, "a heaving of waters in the heavens," as the clouds come rolling along in heavy masses, and He causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth, to form the clouds of the storm; He maketh lightnings with rain and bringeth forth the wind out of His treasures, out of His storehouses. Thus thunder, lightning, clouds, rain, and storm are named as evidences of Jehovah's almighty powers in the tempest. (Kretzmann)

**10:14** *without knowledge.* They are all stupid in their skill and understanding, as they fashion their idols. (Kretzmann)

*goldsmith is put to shame* – Every artist who makes idols is put to shame by the work of his own hands. (Kretzmann)

*images.* Cast in metal; the Hebrew for this word is translated “metal god” in Isa 48:5 and “metal images” in Da 11:8. (CSB)

*no breath.* See Ps 135:17. (CSB)

**10:15** *work of delusion.* Found also in 51:18 but nowhere else in the OT; Jeremiah coined this phrase to brand idols as objects of derision. (TLSB)

Of deceit and mockery, causing their worshipers to be mocked and derided when the nothingness of the idols becomes evident. (Kretzmann)

*they shall perish* – This is, when God shall punish the idol-worshipers, the idols themselves shall likewise perish. (Kretzmann)

**10:16** *Portion of Jacob.* A title for God, used again only in 51:19 (see Ps 73:26; 119:57; 142:5; La 3:24). (CSB)

That is, Jehovah, the Portion of the true Church forever, does not in any way resemble the dead idols against which He warns His people. (Kretzmann)

*tribe of his inheritance.* See Isa 63:17. (CSB)

The tribe or nation which He has chosen as His possession. (Kretzmann)

*the LORD of hosts is his name.* See Isa 54:5; Am 4:13. (CSB)

He alone is the almighty God, to whom the armies of the heavens, the angels and all the heavenly host, are subject, the Lord and Ruler of the whole world from everlasting to everlasting. (Kretzmann)

**10:17–22** Destruction and exile are imminent. (CSB)

**10:17** *gather up...under siege* – Literally, "Collect thy bundle from the earth, thou that sittest in the distress of the siege," the summons being issued to the entire nation of the Jews, in preparation for their being led into exile. (Kretzmann)

*Bundle.* The exiles would be allowed to take with them only a few personal belongings as they set out on the trip to Babylon. (TLSB)

**10:18** *slinging out.* As from a sling. (CSB)

God is about to drive the inhabitants out of the city after it has been under siege by the enemy. (TLSB)

Both the suddenness and the violence of their removal to Babylon being brought out. (Kretzmann)

**10:19–20** On behalf of his countrymen, the prophet bemoans their fate and his own (see 4:19–21). (CSB)

**10:19** *woe.* So the prophet cries out in the name of Judah, bewailing its calamity. (Kretzmann)

*my hurt* – Literally, "sickness." Recovery from it did not come as quickly as the afflicted first thought. (TLSB)

**10:20** *my tent* – The picture being that of a tent which is being ruined, due to the fact that its guy-ropes are torn, all setting forth the desolation of the land. (Kretzmann)

In Is 54:2, the same figure of speech is used for the promise of restoration. (TLSB)

*children.* The people of Judah and Jerusalem (Jeremiah never married or had children; see 16:2). (CSB)

This bereavement being the height of Judah's visitation on the part of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

*tent.* Walls of a tent. (TLSB)

The reference being to the pitching of the tent by extending and coupling its individual covers, a further description of the desolation of the land. (Kretzmann)

**10:21** *shepherds ... flock.* Rulers and people. (CSB)

*stupid.* They have gone down to the level of irrational beasts. (Kretzmann)

*do not inquire of the LORD.* Instead, they consult the heavenly bodies (see 8:2). (CSB)

This fact explains their growing stupidity (Kretzmann)

**10:22** *great commotion.* The sound of the invaders (see 6:23; 8:16). (CSB)

In spirit, the prophet hears the great commotion created by the onslaught of the enemy invading from the north. (TLSB)

*north country.* Babylonia. (CSB)

**10:23–25** On the people's behalf, the prophet prays for divine justice. (CSB)

**10:23–24** People cannot change their ways themselves. Speaking for the people, Jeremiah asks God to temper His anger with justice and mercy in view of the innate weakness of human nature. Chem: “It is not in man’s power, even when he has heard the Word, to undertake any spiritual movements unless God through His Spirit teach him inwardly” (*LTh* 1:234). (TLSB)

**10:23** Only the Lord can direct a man’s steps (see Ps 37:23; Pr 16:9). (CSB)

It is not in the power of any person to determine his way and manner of living nor the trend of his life's vicissitudes. The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord directs it; man proposes, but God disposes. (Kretzmann)

**10:24** *in justice*. Restrained by pity. (TLSB)

With a moderation guided by the exact demands of the case, in order to lead the repentant sinner on the way of righteousness; not in Thine anger, as in the case of obstinate sinners. (Kretzmann)

**10:25** Repeated almost verbatim in Ps 79:6–7, where the context (see Ps 79:1–5) shows that the prayer is not vengeful but is an appeal for God’s justice. The verse is recited annually by Jews during their Passover service. (CSB)

The heaping of synonyms picturing the intense hatred with which they set about to destroy the Lord's people. Believers will at all times humble themselves under the chastisement of the Lord, trusting firmly that He intends not their destruction, but their salvation. (Kretzmann)

**Ch 10** Jeremiah contrasts the one true God with idols. Like scarecrows, idols are inanimate objects crafted by human hands. They have no power to harm or to help. God is all-powerful, so no one can escape His justice and judgment. Because of the people’s apostasy, God will bring His power to bear against them and their leaders. Yet God is so great, He can also do the impossible: save sinners without violating His own righteousness (cf Rm 3:21–26). • Turn our eyes and hearts, O Lord, from the worthless vanities of this world to You, through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)