

**Jer. 9:23-10:25, False and True Worship  
9:23-24; 10:1-16: False and True Gods  
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**A. Overview**

1. 9:23-10:25 is an amplifying alternation, abAB:

9:23-24 -> 10:1-16, glory in the Lord, not in man-made idols.

9:25-26 -> 10:17-25, judgment will fall on Jew and Gentile alike who forsake the Lord.

2. Consider first 9:23-24; 10:1-16. This section discusses the need to glory in the Lord, and shows the glory of the Lord in contrast to pagan gods. The entire structure is one of cascaded amplifications:

a) 9:23-24 is amplified in 10:1-16

b) Within 10:1-16, 1-5 is amplified in 6-16.

c) Within 1-5, 5b is amplified in 2-5a.

d) Within 1-5a, 3a is amplified in 3b-5a

9:23-24 -> 10:1-16

1-5

-> 6-16

2-5a

<- 5b

3a -> 3b-5a

**B. 9:23-24** Glory in knowing the Lord

These verses contrast glorying in man with glorying in the Lord. The later section (10:1-16) sets the Lord alongside idols. But in doing so it makes the point that the idols are no better than those who make them; to glory in an idol, after all, is just to glory in the craftsman who made it, and the impotence of the idol shows the ultimate impotence of its maker.

Where do we seek our sense of contentment and achievement? This section contrasts the false and the true sources of such satisfaction. Real contentment comes from knowing the Lord, and the next chapter tells us much more about him.

1. False sources of contentment: wisdom, might, and riches. This is a common trio. Consider other examples of it in the Bible:

a) 1 Cor. 1:26, God has not called many "wise, mighty, noble." Paul probably has this passage in mind.

b) John analyzes "all that is in the world" as "lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life" (1 John 2:16). These three areas surface in the temptations both of Eve and of the Lord Jesus. They also lie behind this trio.

1) Lust of flesh: Eve saw that the apple was "good for food." Satan urged the Lord to turn stones to bread, to satisfy

hunger. The "mighty" man glories in his body.

- 2) Lust of the eyes: Eve saw that the apple was "pleasant to the eyes." Satan offered Christ all the kingdoms of the earth. The rich man places value in things that are pleasant to behold.
- 3) Pride of life: The fruit of the tree was desired to make one wise. Christ could have been popular immediately had he ridden angels down from the pinnacle of the temple. The wise man magnifies his own ego.

2. True contentment comes from having real understanding, which in turn results from knowing the Lord.

- a) "Knowing God" is different from "knowing about God." the emphasis here is on a personal relationship. We can have such a relationship through faith in Jesus Christ.
- b) Knowing God brings real happiness BECAUSE (not "that") of three characteristics of the Lord, to be contrasted with the "wisdom, might, riches" of the previous verse. The God who delights in these characteristics will be a sure refuge for his people.

- 1) lovingkindness, *xesed*. Faithfulness to covenant. In contrast with "wisdom" that reflects pride in dealings with others, God's dealings are marked by keeping his commitments. Thus those who trust in him will never be ashamed. He will certainly fulfill that which he has promised to do.
- 2) judgment, *mišpa+*. In contrast with "might" that seeks to take vengeance on those who oppose us, the one who is rightly related to God can trust in God to judge those who do wrong. "'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' saith the Lord."
- 3) righteousness, *cedaqah*. The world values accumulation of riches. That which is of value in the eyes of God is righteousness, conformity with his standards. And God is the one who "works righteousness," producing it in the lives of his children. Thus if we know him, he will enrich us with something more valuable than gold and jewels.

**C. 10:1-5, Summary: Do not fear the impotent pagans and their gods.**

If we truly glory in the Lord rather than in men and their creations, we will reject the gods that men make.

1. Start with 5b, the summary: Don't be afraid of the pagan gods, for they can do neither good nor evil. NB: fearing and glorying (9:23-24) are two sides of the same coin. Both are terms of respect, and even of worship; cf. the expression "fear God." God's repeated word to his children, in the face of opposition

and strife, is "Fear not; I am with you."

2. 1-5a amplifies this.

a) 2b amplifies "Fear not." The pagans do fear the false gods, and tremble before the signs of heaven, that they think are sent by these gods. They interpret eclipses as the moon dragon eating the sun dragon, and feel that the patterns of the stars determine their destinies. Jeremiah gives two instructions against this:

1) Don't learn the way of the heathen. This is not condemning an interest in foreign cooking or clothing styles. The point is, "Don't follow their devotion to their gods."

This was at the root of Israel's problem. Israel didn't invent idolatry; she copied it from the inhabitants of Canaan!

2) *Even though* (concessive) the heathen tremble at the signs of heaven, don't you do it. That would be to give the reverence of fear where it is not due.

b) 3-5a amplifies "They can do neither evil nor good." Yet again, we have statement then amplification. 3a is the statement: "The customs of the peoples are vanity." Their very rhythm of life is empty, nothingness. Then we learn why, by considering their gods in detail.

1) In essence, they are nothing more than tree trunks, chopped out of the forest, decorated with gold and silver.

2) Consider their weakness:

a> They would fall over if you didn't nail them down.

b> "upright as a palm tree," better, "like a palm tree of beaten work." *mq\$h* is "beaten work" in Exod. 25, etc., in the tabernacle; cf. the palm ornaments with gold plating in Sol's temple, 1 Kings 6:31-35. These idols are no better than the wall decorations in the temple. Like those decorations, "they do not speak."

c> They need to be carried, because they cannot walk.

**D. 10:6-16 Chiasm contrasting YHWH and idols**

Here Jeremiah gives us a detailed example of glorying in the Lord, rather than in men by way of the idols that they make. The section is chiasmatic, alternating layers of comparison of the Lord and idols until we reach the center, where idols are once more decried in a verse written in Aramaic, the imperial language of the period (like an announcement to everyone in the area).

Administrative	Creative
Power	Power
over Men	over Earth

YHWH	6-7	16	Comparison; "name"
Idols	8-9	14-15	Brutish, vanity, artificial
YHWH	10	12-13	Earth, cosmic
Idols		11	

*Technical note:* Change in speaker signals end of previous section.

1. 6-7: YHWH is incomparable in his awesomeness.

a) The basic idea, repeated at beginning and end of the verse, is that YHWH is incomparable. This incomparability is said to lead to two results.

b) 6, he is great. Amplification: his name (reputation) is great in might; he is renowned for heroic, warlike deeds.

**Illustration:** The attitude of Rahab the Harlot before the spies in Josh. 2:9-11, "we have heard . . ." Also the Gibeonites, Josh. 9:9, "Your servants have come from a very far country *because of the name* of the Lord your God, for we have heard his fame and all that he did in Egypt."

One gains a reputation because one is incomparable. If I ask you, "Have you heard of Wilbur Jones?", you're likely to reply, "No, what did he do?" One must be distinctive to have a reputation. Our God is unlike any other, and thus he is renowned.

c) 7, he is to be feared, for that is fitting to him. When we begin to understand who God is, what he requires of us, and how far we have failed, our first response is one of fear. Repentance must come before faith. His incomparable power and holiness combine to threaten us in our sin, and we must tremble before him before we can understand what he offers us in forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

d) *Technical note:* M)YN appears in the construct before nouns; absolute before predicates. Suggest that here KMWK is virtually a noun; note also parallel with common Jeremianic M)YN YW\$B to reflect exile; in 30:7, KMWHW is not thus frozen into a noun.

2. 8-9: Idols. Here is the link with 9:23-24. To glory in an idol is to glory in its maker. So we have first a description of the idol-makers, then the influence of idols on them, and finally the idols that they create, in a chain of reasons.

a) 8a, The idol makers are "altogether brutish and foolish." I have not found any place where these adjectives (verbs in Heb.) are applied to idols. They describe the men in whom we are not to glory.

b) 8b. "Stock" (lit. "wood") is not the subject, but the predicate. "The instruction of vanities [given by vain idols]

is wooden." That is, the people are brutish because their gods are unable to teach them anything.

- c) 9, In turn, the reason that the idols can't teach anything is that they themselves are only the work of man.

**Application:** The basic premise here is that man cannot teach himself. There is no "bootstrap." We cannot gain any real knowledge through the things we construct ourselves. This conclusion is in direct conflict with the spirit of modern research, which in effect says that the only way for man to know anything is to build more powerful instruments and more subtle mathematical schemes, and let these teach him.

Of course, our artifacts do increase the set of predicates we can affirm about the world, but Jeremiah's point is that of 1 Cor. 1:21. The knowledge that really matters, knowledge of God, is accessible only through revelation. God has set up a wall that our research cannot penetrate; only to the extent that he comes through to us can we know him.

3. 10: YHWH's truth, life, and eternity command our respect. 6-7 set forth the Lord's greatness and our resulting fear. Here both of these are elaborated.

a) God's Greatness: three attributes brought forward.

1) Truth. Not just that he is the real God, in contrast to the false idols, but also that he is the God who is truth, the epistemological cornerstone of the universe. Cf. John 17:17.

2) Life. The emphasis of the syntax (identifying clause) is that he alone (unlike the idols) is the living God. As he is the source of truth, so also he is the source of life: John 5:26, the Father has life in himself and gives this life to others.

3) Eternal rule. He is the source of authority; all other authority is derivative from him, Dan. 4:17.

b) The fear that results from these attributes: the wrath of such a one is unbearable. Here, "earth" is metonymy for the people who live on the earth, as the parallelism with "nations" in the next line shows. The amplification of this couplet over "fear" in v.7 is in making the matter of his wrath explicit. We fear him because to displease him is to invite the most severe sanctions, against which there can be no defense.

4. 11, Idols. Center of the chiasm; in Aramaic, the language of Mesopotamia, rather than in Hebrew. This is perhaps the earliest example of a traveler's phrase book. What is the most important thing for one of the exiled Jews to be able to say? Not, "Where is the train station?" or "How much does it cost?", but "Your

gods aren't worth a plugged nickel." The standard by which they are tested is their ability to create, thus introducing the theme of the second panel of the chiasm.

Note the chiastic structure:

The gods  
    who heaven  
        and earth  
            did not make ((*abadu*)  
            shall perish (*y"badu*)  
            from the earth  
        and from under heaven,  
    these [gods].

5. 12-13: YHWH's power in weather and creation. First he creates the earth, the habitable land, and the heavens. The attributes that enable him to do this are his strength, his wisdom, and his understanding. Then he controls the weather upon it. He not only creates the world, but also operates it once it's there.
6. 14-15: Idols: They show the folly of their makers (back to 9:23-24). The same three points here as in vv.8-9.
  - a) Idol-makers are brutish, beastly, stupid, even in their supposed "knowledge"!
  - b) They are put to shame because of their idols. The idol does not convey any benefit to them, but rather shame and confusion.
  - c) Those idols are deceptive, lifeless, vain, artificial things. They will be powerless to defend themselves, and will perish (*bd*, as in 11b) in the time of God's judgment. (Perhaps Jeremiah intends the last clause to be ambiguous between the idols and the men who make them.)
7. 16: YHWH is incomparable in his creative power and care of his people. Here God's creation and administration are mingled together: ABAB. In his relation to his people, he is their portion and they are his inheritance; they belong to one another. In view of his power, he is the one who has created everything, and thus is the Lord of (the heavenly) hosts. None among the pagan gods can compare with him.

Hymn: "Who is Like Unto Thee," Exod. 15:11; Ps. 86:8-10.