

The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 10:1-16

Topic

Jeremiah shows the futility of apostate Judah worshipping dead idols adorned by their metalsmiths

Title

"MetallicApostate"

Introduction

What kind of a terrible father would name his son "Sue" only to abandon him?

That's the psychosocial dilemma Johnny Cash explored in his 1969 recording, *A Boy Named Sue*.

After suffering ridicule and harassment everywhere he goes, Sue eventually locates his father at a Gatlinburg, Tennessee tavern and confronts him by saying, "My name is Sue! How do you do? *Now you're gonna die!*" This results in a vicious brawl that spills outdoors into a muddy street. After the two have beaten each other almost senseless, Sue's father explains that the name was given for his own good, as an act of love. Because Sue's father knew that he would not be there for his son, he gave him the name to make sure that he grew up strong.

Sue forgives his father and they reconcile. With his lesson learned, Sue closes the song with a promise to name his son "Bill or George, anything but Sue! **I still hate that name!**"

Sixth century Judah would be overrun by the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar. The Jews would be exiled in Babylon for seventy long years. Why would a loving heavenly Father treat His sons and daughters that way?

It was for their own good as an act of love!

We rarely consider all the good that came out of the Babylonian exile. By its end the Jews repented of their sins and returned in their hearts to the Lord. But there were other significant spiritual benefits:

- They became purely monotheistic, giving up idolatry completely.
- They became a separate people who did not want to become like their neighbors ever again.
- During this time God placed a longing for the coming of the Messiah in their hearts.

The benefits of being in Babylon got me thinking about our own situation as believers. In one of his letters the apostle Peter greeted his readers from “Babylon.” He may have been in Babylon, but a lot of commentators think he was referring to the world in general as ‘Babylon’ in a figurative sense. By that reasoning, **anywhere you are is ‘Babylon.’** And anywhere you are is a place where your loving heavenly Father is doing a work in you.

I’m going to approach this text as if we are exiles in ‘Babylon’ learning an important lesson about our Father in Heaven. I’ll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You See How Futile It Is To Make A ‘god,’ and #2 You See How Faithful God Is To Make A Man.

#1 You See How Futile It Is To Make A ‘god’ (v1-10)

“Since the beginning of recorded history, which is defined by the invention of writing by the Sumerians around 6000 years ago, historians have cataloged over 3700 supernatural beings, of which 2,870 can be considered deities. Those numbers are probably a very conservative estimate because we have no accurate information before 4000BC.”

Mankind likes to make gods! We are prone to idolatry. Although stone and wooden idols are one representation of a god and one form of idolatry, a person does not need to bow down before them to be an idolater. For example, “covetousness” is said to be idolatry in Colossians 3:5, and in First Timothy 6:10 we’re told that the “love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

Whether it is represented by some physical object or not, idolatry is still practiced as mankind puts power or pleasure or possessions in the place of God in their lives.

Our text doesn’t rebuke you for idolatry. It takes a different approach. It’s a satire about idolatry. It shows you the stupidity of it!

Jeremiah 10:1 Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel.
Jeremiah 10:2 Thus says the LORD: "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; Do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, For the Gentiles are dismayed at them.

Think of this as a warning to the Jews to remember when they found themselves captive in Babylon. One of the things Babylon was noted for, one of her “ways,” was astrology - “the signs of heaven.” They were pretty good at it, or at least renowned for it. The Magi who followed the star that led them to Jesus were Babylonian astrologers.

One reason to not learn “the way of the Gentiles,” of nonbelievers, is that regardless their much knowledge, they are left “dismayed.” It means *terrified*. Most of the explanations of the universe that philosophers and scientists have suggested are simply terrifying. Ignore or remove the God of the Bible and you are left with a random, cruel universe in which the survival of the fittest is the prevailing rule. There would be no basis, not really, for morality and justice. There would be no standard for government or laws.

To put it another way, without God there can be no peace - not with other men or within your heart. “Dismayed” is the nicest way we could state all that, and it’s quite an understatement.

Even though exiled, the individual Jew would know that his or her life had purpose and meaning. They would know there was a flow of history and that God was providentially overseeing it to bring about His promised end.

The Bible provides the only worldview that makes perfect sense and that can satisfy the longings of our heart for answers to life's most difficult questions and circumstances.

Jeremiah 10:3 For the customs of the peoples are futile; For one cuts a tree from the forest, The work of the hands of the workman, with the ax.

Jeremiah 10:4 They decorate it with silver and gold; They fasten it with nails and hammers So that it will not topple.

Jeremiah 10:5 They are upright, like a palm tree, And they cannot speak; They must be carried, Because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, For they cannot do evil, Nor can they do any good."

Men fashion physical objects to represent their gods. It's stupid. First of all, it's made by a man. If you can make your own god then you are more powerful than it is.

Beyond that, it's ugly, needing to be decorated. It needs to be propped-up. And it can't communicate.

It's hard for us to see our idolatry when we are covetous of power or pleasure or possessions. We don't literally bow down before idols and worship them. But these, too, are represented by objects we make.

Generally speaking, the wealthy represent their wealth with objects that are more expensive and more elaborate to communicate their status.

It doesn't matter how beautiful some representation is; it's made from commonplace materials. It's just decorated better by the metalsmiths. While I agree that a Ferrari is an amazing automobile, it is essentially no different from my Scion xb. Still, one is a status symbol, communicating an interest in power, pleasure and possessions while the other is a clown car!

Jeremiah 10:7 Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due. For among all the wise men of the nations, And in all their kingdoms, There is none like You.

The Jews in the midst of all that idolatry in Babylon would have a relationship with the “King of the nations.” They would understand His “rightful due” was to be feared, to be revered. Though held in exile, the Jews would remain at the center of God’s plan for the ages. You could successfully argue that there wouldn’t have been a Babylonian Empire unless God had needed a nation to discipline His wandering children.

Jeremiah 10:8 But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish; A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine.

Jeremiah 10:9 Silver is beaten into plates; It is brought from Tarshish, And gold from Uphaz, The work of the craftsman And of the hands of the metalsmith; Blue and purple are their clothing; They are all the work of skillful men.

Jeremiah 10:10 But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, And the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.

The very finest “silver” and the very finest “gold” in the hands of the world’s greatest “metalsmith” enhanced by the very finest fabric woven by the most “skillful” designers cannot substitute for a relationship with the living God. My mythical Ferrari could be described that way; it remains an object that will break down and become obsolete.

You can and should enjoy good things. God is not opposed to beauty or art or literature or architecture or any of those things. But read the Book of Ecclesiastes to understand that all those things, **everything**, is vanity if pursued apart from God.

I said earlier that this wasn’t a rebuke for idolatry. It’s a revelation of how dumb it is to be drawn away by the things of the world. Look at a nonbeliever and what he or she idolizes and you see ‘dumb and dumber’ - the idol is dumb but certainly someone who props it up, who seeks after it, must be dumber still.

#2 You See How Faithful God Is
To Make A Man
(v11-16)

The Jews would be exiled; they would be held captive. It looked as though Babylon had the power, did it not?

Not at all! My favorite illustration for this kind of thing is the story of Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch. From the world's point of view, the Ethiopian had wealth, power and authority. Phillip was an itinerant minister sitting by the side of the road, homeless for all practical purposes. But as the story unfolds, who has the real wealth? Who has the real power? Who has the real authority? It's the child of God who is led by the Holy Spirit to share the treasure of the Gospel with all the authority of Heaven.

We must quit looking at things - *especially our own lives* - from a purely earthly, temporal perspective. We are eternal beings and God is working in us and on us to mold us and shape us into the image of something awesome and wonderful.

Jeremiah 10:11 Thus you shall say to them: "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens."

Do you remember when it was popular for Christians to say, "it's all going to burn?" I haven't said or heard that in a while. It means that everything the world has to offer is going one day to be burned away; it will be gone.

That is our message to those who, though they seem wealthy and powerful, are really "dismayed" because there is eternity in their hearts and they cannot be satisfied by anything other than God.

Jeremiah 10:12 He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, And has stretched out the heavens at His discretion.

Jeremiah 10:13 When He utters His voice, There is a multitude of waters in the heavens: "And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasures."

Theologians and pastors debate the extent to which you can know God through His creation. One thing is clear: **You can know there is a God!** And, knowing that much, you can begin to seek Him. He's promised to be found by those who do.

Read the creation account in Genesis and you come to one great conclusion. God created the universe in order to have an environment within which to make man in His image.

Jeremiah 10:14 Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge; Every metalsmith is put to shame by an image; For his molded image is falsehood, And there is no breath in them.

Jeremiah 10:15 They are futile, a work of errors; In the time of their punishment they shall perish.

While men are trying to fashion 'gods,' **God is at work making men!**

By the way. Every few years it seems there is a report that scientists somewhere have created life in the laboratory. Not true; it will never happen. God created everything, including 'life,' **out of nothing**. Scientists are not in the same league at all. As soon as you say they created something in the laboratory you've shown they have 'something' to start with.

God's greatest work is the making of a man or a woman. If you are a Christian, you are a new creature in Jesus Christ. Salvation is only the beginning, though, of what God has planned for us.

1 Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written: "EYE HAS NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."

The psalmist declared, "...I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Psalm 17:15). You and I are predestinated to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We are God's workmanship and He who began this good work has promised to complete it.

Jeremiah 10:16 The Portion of Jacob is not like them, For He is the Maker of all things, And Israel is the tribe of His inheritance; The LORD of hosts is His name.

God considers Himself, in this verse, "the Portion of Jacob." Having redeemed the Jews, God was their Portion; He belongs to them by love and by covenant.

The "maker of all things" was, even in Babylon, working out the promised "inheritance" of "Israel."

He was “the Lord of hosts,” meaning at any moment a heavenly host could overthrow Babylon and free the Jews.

He *would* overthrow Babylon, but He wouldn’t need angels to do it. God was already raising up another world empire, the Medes and Persians, to do His work. The casual observer of history thinks the Jews are a tiny blip on the timeline of history. In fact, the flow of history is all about God’s dealings with them - right up til today’s headlines.

God, for His part, is faithful to make **you**. He requires, however, your cooperation. Between your salvation and your final state, your glorification, there is what is called *sanctification*. It is the daily molding and shaping of you into the image of Jesus.

What kind of clay are you in God’s hands? Are you pliable, moldable, shapeable? Or are you hardened?

Let God make you rather than going after the ‘puny gods’ men make for themselves.

It may sometimes seem as though you are a tiny speck sitting alone as the seemingly powerful world system marches forward. At those times you’ll need to have faith that God will be faithful to perform everything He’s promised and is using your circumstances for your good and to His glory.