

# Idolatry... worship of a tree or an image carved from it?

by

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There are few studies about the worship of wooden idols in the Old Testament. However, it is a worthwhile subject of study to avoid taking verses out of context which relate to a tree, and an image carved from it. It could also save embarrassment.

Quite some years ago it was advocated that Jeremiah 10:3-4 described a decorated Christmas tree, and that bending over to put articles under it, constituted worship. When these verses were drawn to a person's attention, invariably they were amazed. Occasionally, however, someone would have a Center Reference Bible and read the related verses cited there in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Psalms. One should examine those verses and comments and the thrust of the context.

In summary, the verses describe a tree which was cut down and a short portion of the trunk carved into an image. The carved image variously had painted features, appendages, was overlaid with thin sheets of silver and gold, and were draped with colored cloth. The scriptures do not describe these same things being done to the remaining portion of the tree with branches and foliage.

The misapplication of Jeremiah 10:3-4 comes when those verses are taken out of context and incorrectly applied to a Christmas Tree. Instead, it is the SEASON and the DAY which should be dwelt upon as idolatrous.

The verses which follow are from *The Scriptures* bible, a holy name version. Author's comments are in brackets ( [] ); bold font is for emphasis.

Keep the thrust of the subject in mind when reading the following scriptures:

Isaiah 40:19 “And to whom would you liken to El? And what likeness would you compare to Him? 19 The workman moulds a graven image, and the goldsmith overspreads it with gold, and the silversmith casts silver chains. 20 He who is too poor for such an offering chooses a tree that does not rot. He seeks for himself a skilled craftsman to prepare a carved image that does not totter...”

[The wording does not initially say the tree is cut down but that is ultimately apparent. It is clear that the tree is the source of the wood which is made into a carved image. The inference is that the carved image must be braced to keep it upright. This shows it is not a live tree which has been carved into an image, or upon which an image has been carved.]

41:7 “And the craftsman encourages the goldsmith. He who smooths with the hammer inspires him who strikes the anvil, saying of the joining, “It is good.” And he fastens it with nails, so it does not totter...”

[Ancient goldsmiths used a hammer to pound gold and silver metal into thin sheets. The malleable sheets were then formed over a carved image with a small hammer. Today, the same effect is achieved by putting gold through a set of highly polished rollers. This produces gold foil and very thin gold leaf. Again, the inference is that a blacksmith makes nails. The nails are used to secure the carved image with braces to keep it from toppling.]

44:9 “Those who make an idol, all of them are emptiness, and their delights do not profit. And they are their own witnesses; they neither see nor know, so that they are put to shame. 10 Who would form a mighty one or cast an idol that is of no value? 11 See, all his companions are ashamed, and the workmen, they are but men. Let them all be gathered together, let them stand up, let them fear, let them be put to shame, altogether. 12 The craftsman in iron with the tools works one in the coals, and fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms. Even so, he shall be hungry, and has no strength; he drinks no water and is weary.

[Here the word translated ‘mighty one’ is Strong’s 410 *’êl*, and could have been translated ‘god’ or ‘idol’]

13 The carpenter stretches out his rule, he outlines it with chalk; he fashions it with a plane, and he outlines it with the compass, and makes it like the figure of a man, to remain in the house. 14 He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes cypress and oak, which he raised among the trees of the forest. He has planted a pine, and the rain nourishes it. 15 And it shall be for a man to burn, for he takes some of it and warms himself. He also makes a mighty one and bows himself to it - has made it a carved image and falls down before it. 16 Half of it he shall burn in the fire; with this half he eats meat. He roasts a roast and is satisfied, He also warns himself and says “Aha, I am warm. I have seen the fire.” 17 And the rest of it he makes into a mighty one, his carved image. He falls down before it and worships, prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my mighty one. 18 They do not know nor understand, for he has smeared their eyes from seeing, and their hearts from understanding. 19 And no one recalls it to his heart, nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say I have also baked bread on its coals; I have roasted meat and eaten it. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Should I fall down before a log of wood? “

[In the book of Isaiah the above four chapters and verses clearly describe how a tree is cut down and becomes the source of wood which is carved into an image. The First commandment forbids the worship of ANYTHING, especially the making and worshipping of a carved or graven image. The verses show that part of the powerless tree is burnt for fuel, proving the nonsense of worshipping the other part as a ‘god’ assumed to have power to deliver the worshiper, yet can’t keep itself from being burnt.]

Jeremiah 10:3 “For the prescribed customs of these peoples are worthless, for one cuts a tree from the forest, work for the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. 4 They

adorn it with silver and gold, they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it does not topple.

[Verse 3 and 4 only, taken out of context, are offered as proof that the modern day Christmas tree is an idol. That is NOT what the verses say in context.]

5 They are like a rounded post, and they do not speak. They have to be carried, because they do not walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they do no evil, nor is it in them to do any good. 6 There is none like you, O Yahweh. You are great, and great is your name in might. 7 Who would not fear you, O Sovereign of the nations? For this is you due, for among all the wise men of the nations and all their reigns, there is none like you. 8 They are both brutish and foolish, and instruction of worthlessness is the tree. 9 Silver is beaten into plates; it is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the craftsman and the hands of the smith; draped in blue and purple; all of them are the work of skilled ones...”

[Verse 5 shows that the tree was only the source of the wood, which was then carved and adorned with hammered silver and gold. Evidently these idols were draped with colored cloth. It is the carved image which is adorned and decorated, not a tree. The resulting idol is described as a rounded pole upon which an image was carved and appendages attached. It may have been portable and similar to a ‘Totem Pole’ as found in the Northwest USA and Canada.]

14:22 “Are there among the worthless idols of the nations any causing rain? and do the heavens give showers? Are you not he, O Yahweh our Elohim? And we wait for you for you are the one who does all this.

[This verse condemns ALL idols whether the image is made from wood, cast in metal, carved in stone, drawn, etc.]

Psalms 115:4 “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. 5 They have mouths, but they do not speak; They have eyes, but they do not see; 6 They have ears, but they do not hear; They have noses, but they do not smell; 7 They have hands, but they do not handle; They have feet, but they do not walk; They make no sound through their throat. 8 The ones who make them shall become like them -“

[Again, it is carved or cast idols which may have appendages attached, that are being described, not trees.]

Those that do not observe Christmas commonly cite Jeremiah 10:3-4 as an example of worship accorded to a Christmas Tree. The bending down to put articles under the Christmas Tree is commonly cited by some as ‘bowing down’ and by extension, worship of the tree itself.

The context of the above scriptures show the trunk of the tree was only the source of the wood which was subsequently carved into an image. Afterward it was adorned with precious metals. The tree portion is not decorated or adorned. Accordingly, none should claim that Jeremiah 10:3-4 is a condemnation of a modern day Christmas Tree.

Instead, emphasis should be drawn to all the NON-SCRIPTURAL, PAGAN, and COMMERCIAL aspects of that called ‘Christmas,’ of which the tree is but a part.

For example:

- The date of our Savior’s birth is not December 25<sup>th</sup>. His birth date can be proved to be close to the scriptural Feast of Trumpets as in Leviticus 23. This is when the shepherds were in the field, not December 25<sup>th</sup>, which is the rainy season in Israel. The sheep are brought in and penned in the time of the year corresponding to November, even now.
- Christmas is the same time as the pagan Roman Feast of Saturnalia. It is steeped in Sun worship of the god Mithra, and others, not the birth of our Savior.
- The date of December 25th is very close to the date of the Winter Solstice when the period of daylight increases and darkness decreases, hence the term ‘Des Sol Invictus’ (the invincible sun). It was the ‘rebirth of the Sun’ although the observance was syncretized by the early western church to have the Pagan hordes to focus on the ‘Son’ instead.
- We are to memorialize the death of our Savior on Passover, not his birth. Only the birth date of reprobate people is mentioned in the scriptures.
- Christmas is not one of the Annual Sabbaths in the Old Testament.
- Christmas is a non-scriptural, manmade, commercial tradition which separates the unwary from their money.

It would be interesting to know who first misapplied Jeremiah 10:3 & 4.

Modern day ‘idols’ can be work, sports, etc. They can also be crafted words.

Years ago eyebrows were raised when the news reported some Lesbians were worshiping, praising, and singing songs to a goddess called ‘Sophia.’ Nothing is heard about this subject now.

No eyebrows are similarly raised about another word: ‘Jehovah,’ which appears in the King James Version bible and about which there worship, praise, and hymns DAILY by one religious group that espouses the word in the name of its organization.

Adoration is accorded to both of these words. Is that not IDOLATRY ?

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