

.....for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.

Jeremiah 10:3b-5 KJV

To Tree *Or* Not to Tree

A Biblical Examination of the
Christmas Tree

Kenneth W. Seremak Jr

Dedicated to:

Sheila, my dear wife, who has made such great sacrifices and has been a tremendous support to myself in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ

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Few people today believe the Bible to be the word of God. Of those, few believe the Bible is without error. Among those, a tiny minority is willing to allow the things said by God in His word to change their lives. Nowhere is the disrespect of the professing Christian, for what is written in the scripture, more evident than in the way those claiming to be Bible-believers adamantly refuse to abandon their dearly held participation in the way of the heathen come the time to celebrate the winter solstice. For those few who wish to honor God by living in accord with His word, for those who intend to stop co-mingling light with darkness or Christ with Belial, this study will be most welcome and quite helpful.

Pastor James W. Knox

A Message to the Reader

I am fully aware of the fact that the contents of this publication may seem to be extremely foreign to many within the body of Christ, but my intention is not to start any sort of controversy or set forth some strange doctrine among the brethren, but instead to challenge each one who may read this to examine these things in light of the Scriptures. If we claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, then it is our responsibility to search out those things that would bring him the most glory and honor. So, the purpose of this publication is to simply provoke your thinking to study the Word of God to determine for yourself whether the custom of the Christmas tree truly belongs in the worship we offer to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In this publication, we are going to look at the issue of the Christmas tree, strictly according to the Scriptures. There is much material available that examines this issue in light of the history and customs of ancient peoples, but this publication's purpose will be to simply examine the doctrine of the Christmas tree according to the Bible. We have no intention of deviating from the teachings of the Holy Bible as we seek to determine whether or not the custom of the Christmas tree has any place in the life of one who has determined to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

this vain tradition. Just cut it off. It is a vain conversation.

Verse 19-21: ...***But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.***

I encourage you to take some time, pray about this issue, and search the Scriptures to prove this issue of the Christmas tree. Israel was reprov'd for having groves... reprov'd for evergreen tree worship... reprov'd for that which is called vanity. God told them to not go after the ways of those heathen. God has made it clear he does not want to be worshipped that way. So, just figure out why you are doing it. If you are doing it because the Holy Bible has convinced you that it's right, then go buy the biggest tree you can afford and have a great time, but if you are just doing it because you are unwilling to forsake the vain traditions of the world, and traditions that you have received from your fathers, then you need to examine that thing in light of the Scriptures.

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.

1 Thessalonians 5:21,22

God Bless,

Pastor Kenneth Seremak Jr.

I only ask of you one thing, and that is that you be willing to read this entire publication before you make a determination of the truth or errors of its contents. I cannot guarantee that your mind will be changed by doing so, but at least you will be aware of the entirety of the doctrine I am presenting here and therefore can make a more informed and proper judgment as to whether or not you will receive it.

He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.
Proverbs 18:13

May the Lord Jesus Bless you all,

Your Brother in Christ,

Pastor Kenneth Seremak Jr

To Tree or Not to Tree

A Biblical Examination of the Christmas Tree

We have several stops as we journey through the Bible, as we examine this issue of the Christmas tree. First, let's look at Deuteronomy 7:1,2: *When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:* These are the passages that people use to accuse the God of the Bible of being "the murderous God of the Old Testament." It will become clear, as we go through these passages, that it is not even close to a correct conclusion to say that God was committing "murder" on innocent people. These people were far from innocent, and deserved, then received the correct judgment from God. God judged them; He did not murder them.

the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

Verse 15-18: *But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation....* What does the Bible say you were before you got saved? VAIN! You had a conversation, a life, a way of carrying yourself that could only be defined as vainity. We have already seen that the word vain is contrary to truth. What you did before, you did in ignorance, but that is what you did before you were saved. Now you are a blood bought child of God and the Lord says, "Don't go after those things from your life before, *received by tradition from your fathers;*"

"But I've always done it..."

I get it! But that doesn't mean it's not vanity; and it does not mean that just because you got it from great-grandpa and great grandma, grandpa and grandma, and mom and dad that God is somehow okay with that stuff. Look – there are people in Italy that have been in Catholic families since 325 A.D. It would be great if some people would go over there and tell them to quit doing that and teach them how to properly serve Jesus. "Well, my family has always had a tree." Great! But YOU don't have to continue

in your ignorance: Some people... well, most people just don't know. I get that. I really do. Some people have never heard any of this before, and I am sympathetic to that fact.

Many people will claim that idolatry is not a sin if we are doing it in ignorance or if we do these things for a different reason. In Acts 17, Paul the Apostle told the Athenians that they were IGNORANTLY worshipping. Ignorance of the sin does not mean God is still not displeased with it. The purpose of this publication is to just shed a little light on this issue from the Scriptures so we can escape the possibility of idolatry we are partaking in through ignorance.

The Bible condemns all idolatry... That dear lady who takes that rosary and prays with that rosary, is more than likely just ignorant that it is in violation to God's word. Do you realize that most people that go to church don't hear any Bible preached, they don't hear any teaching about this, they just do what their church has taught them. They set up the things that they are taught and they celebrate the things the church tells them to celebrate, and mostly it is due to simple ignorance. I understand that.

My aught is not with someone who wants to learn or someone who's trying to work through these things. I want to be patient towards that. I have been and by God's grace, I will be. That's how we are supposed to be. *The servant of the LORD must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of*

Verse 3,4: ***Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.*** So, God told them, "Go in there, destroy them; get rid of them; do not make friends with them; do not make a covenant with them; do not let them marry your kids." Where do we find a good illustration of this in the Scriptures? Do you remember Samson? Samson was in the promised land and had been raised up to be a judge. What is the first thing you see Samson do? He went down to the land of the Philistines; he saw a woman there; he told his parents, "Get her for me to wife" (Judges 14:2). Then you see him spending nights with harlots in the land of the Philistines. He was conquered while he was down there with Delilah, and he just ruined his life with those strange women. The Bible says he was not to do that, and Samson truly manifested why God was warning his people of mingling with the heathen. It would lead to the moral and spiritual destruction of these people. God has always commanded his people to abstain from the practices of the children of this present, evil world.

Verse 5: ***But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars...*** (Isn't it amazing that Islam is more obedient to the word of God, without realizing it, than we are? Watch Islam roll into a nation. You will see everything non-Muslim go away. If it doesn't glorify the Mohammad or Allah, it goes away.) The Laodicean Christian, shamefully, is always looking to justify why he or she can join in the sins of this world.

...ye shall destroy their altars and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. So not only were they to get rid of the people, but also the groves, the altars, the images, and anything else that they were using to worship their gods. So here is what we have so far:

- ***Ye shall destroy their altars...*** the word *altar* in your Bible never has to do with three stairs up front by the pulpit (you can go up there and pray if you want to, but that's not considered an altar in the Scriptures). An altar is a place where they made a physical sacrifice to a god. Israel was to take stones and not hew them, and make an altar out of them to bring sacrifice to their God in worship (Exodus 20:15). The nations in the land were doing the same thing before Israel's arrival to their gods. They were making sacrifices to a god on an altar and God didn't say, "Go in there, kick them off the altar, and take control of the altar," He told them to just get rid of the whole altar and start brand new.
- ***and break down their images....*** Get rid of the pictures; get rid of the images; get rid of the lookalikes; get rid of it all. God didn't want it there. He didn't even want any remembrance of it.
- ***and cut down their groves....*** What is a grove? A grove is a place where trees are growing. It is not an archaic term. Go to Florida. Do you know what you'll see if you drive through the middle of Florida? You

can walk through a grove and the fir tree is going to say, "Hey, don't you touch me... The god of this world has been destroyed and the God that is ruling now doesn't want any trees cut down for His worship."

You might say, "*I don't like all of that. I think it's okay to have a decorated tree..*" Does the Bible not show you God's thoughts? Doesn't it show you how God feels about that thing? Doesn't it show you how to worship? If we could have a tree then surely we can have anything else, right? I mean, if we can have a tree then let's set up an image... or set up an idol. You can't have just one and not the other. You can't say you are going to bow down to one thing and it will be okay, and then condemn the bowing down to everything else.

So why are we bowing down to an ever-green tree? Why are folks bowing down to a Christmas tree? You may say, "*But, we don't bow down to our tree.*" Really? So on Christmas morning all the gifts are sitting on the kitchen table waiting on you? Or do you run in and get the thing out from underneath the tree? Every Christmas morning, millions of men, women, and children bow in front of their tree to receive the gifts that are waiting for them there. The devil is sneaky, isn't he? He has been trying to steal the LORD's worship for thousands of years now.

1 Peter 1:13,14. ***Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts***

Verse 7: ***The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing.*** The whole earth. The passage is not talking about people; it is talking about the earth. The Bible says that ***we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now*** (Romans 8:22). Because of the sin mankind has put on this planet, there is a curse put on this earth that affects all of nature, even the animals. You say animals can't talk. Really? Don't we read how a donkey talked to Balaam when he was about to cut her head off (Numbers 22:28-30)?

Jesus said when he was here "If you would not praise me, the stones would cry out." (Luke 19:40) The Bible says in Isaiah 55:12 that when He comes back the trees of the field will clap their hands for joy. Verse 8: ***Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee,*** (fir trees – no oak trees, no palm trees, etc.) ***Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us.*** A feller is somebody that cuts trees down. He *fells* trees for a living. He's a *feller*. Do you know what the trees say when Satan is destroyed at the end? The whole earth finally has some rest and the trees.... the fir trees and the cedars, those ever-green trees, they cry out and praise God. "Praise the Lord!! Nobody is cutting us down anymore. We can get a December of some rest." You may say "*It is not saying that,*" well, what is it saying then? Are the trees not thanking Him? Are the trees not praising Him? Yes they are, they are rejoicing. They see Satan destroyed and they sing out, "Woo-hoooo! Hallelujah!! Nobody's gonna cut me down." You

will see orange grove after orange grove with other citrus groves along the way. It is just a place where trees are growing. But here it is different. They are not growing a grove for the purpose of having oranges. They are building a grove for WORSHIP's sake. They had trees growing for the purpose of worship. It is NATURE worship. So, He said, "get rid of it." Get a chainsaw and cut them down.

- ***...and burn their graven images with fire.*** Cut down the groves and burn the images. That is incredible.

But, why did the Lord give such strict orders? Let's continue reading:

Verse 6: ***For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God:*** He tells them they are holy; so they had to get rid of that stuff. If they kept that stuff around it would mess up that holiness thing. ***For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.*** Verse 25: ***The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the LORD thy God.*** He says, "When you get there, the gods that they've got and all that stuff we just talked about, don't keep any of it; burn it all... and if there's any gold or silver around that is associated with these gods, just get rid of it all!" It's an abomination. Pagan altars, pagan images, and pagan trees were all considered to be abominations.

Deuteronomy 7:26: ***Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house,*** Can they have graven images in their house? Nope, can't do it. Any altars in the house? Any images in the house? What about trees from the groves? What about those? Can I have a tree in my house? Nope!! ***Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing.*** Do you remember what Galatians 3:13 says? ***Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:*** He says not to bring an idol into your house, not to bring an image into your house, and not to bring a tree into your house.

Now here's where someone (who has already determined that what we are going over here is not relevant to them) says everything in the Old Testament doesn't apply to them. Those are the same people that will fight to keep the Ten Commandments on a courthouse. You have to understand that God is against idolatry and always has been, so therefore we need to examine what He has told us he opposes.

Deuteronomy 12:1-3 ***These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth. Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And ye shall***

lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. That is a pretty incredible God we serve. By His power, the elements can either stop and behave, or the whole thing can go crazy. That's the kind of God I want to serve. Not the tree, but the one who made it.

Verse 14-15: ***Every man is brutish in his knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish.*** One day, the Lord will cause all the vanities of this world to perish!!

Isaiah 14:4. ***That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!*** If you read this chapter in its entirety, do you know who it tells you about? A fellow named Lucifer (Satan) who gets cast out of heaven for his pride. ***(Revelation 17 and 18 show us that the destruction of the city of Babylon and her system of pagan witchcrafts has not happened yet. Babylon's system is so corrupt that the Bible identifies the devil himself as the king of that city.)***

Verse 5,6: ***The LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth.*** The Bible is telling us here of the destruction of Satan himself. If you don't think so, read the whole chapter. He is telling you how that Satan, Lucifer, the king of Babylon is going to be destroyed. Hallelujah!!

idol? What's a stock? A stock is the stem (the main body), or the trunk of the tree.

So, look what He says. ***The stock is a doctrine of vanities.*** "Well, *Jeremiah 10 is an idol...*" I am not disagreeing, but I am just trying to be honest and admit that the Christmas tree is an idol.

The stock is a doctrine of vanities. A doctrine is anything that is being taught. Someone is teaching folks that it is OK to have decorated trees around while we are worshipping. This is vanity and we are commanded not to learn these ways of vanities. We are not to be vain, become vain, or follow after vanities. We are to follow the God of truth, who is without iniquity (Deuteronomy 32:4) Vanity and truth are two different things there. The truth is of the opposite of vanity. Pick one, but you can't have both.

Verse 9-13: ***Silver spread into plates is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder: blue and purple is their clothing: they are all the work of cunning men. But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh***

overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; He said if there's a bunch of green trees around, they have to go. The places that the nations used to serve their pagan gods are under these green trees and on these high mountains and hills. He commanded them to break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire. In Deuteronomy 7 He said just cut the groves down. In this passage He says, burn them....***and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place. Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God.*** He says get rid of all those things because none of those things are going to be used when you worship **YOUR** God. ***Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God.***

- So I walk in and there's an image there; I destroy the image. And I don't build an image to God.
- I walk in and there's a picture there; I destroy the picture. And I don't make a picture of God.
- I walk in, I destroy a grove, I cut down those trees, I get rid of them and I don't set up a tree for God. (I'm not twisting Scripture – it's right there in the Bible.)

The Bible says ***hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.*** So I come into a certain place and I see this place named after a pagan god, and unless God tells me to give it a name after Him I don't mess with it. See how that stuff goes? We like all of it except that tree part. "*I don't think that's what it means about the tree...*" But that's what it means about everything else. So we have to stay consistent. I cannot leave the altars, images, and idols in place and

think I can just rename them something “Biblical,” and it will be acceptable. So, why is this not true in regards to the tree? The command was not to keep the tree and just give it a godly title. The command is to **destroy** it.

Deuteronomy 16:21,22: *Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee. Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the LORD thy God hateth.* Three words. *Thou shalt not...* Do you remember that in Exodus 20? *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images... Thou shalt not have any gods before me... Thou shalt not kill... Thou shalt commit adultery... Thou shalt not bear false witness... Thou shalt not... Thou shalt not... Thou shalt not... Thou shalt not... That sounds pretty familiar. That sounds like God is against it. **Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee.** Now maybe I’m going to connect some dots and you may not think the line is as straight as I do. If He doesn’t want you **growing** the trees next to His altar, what business do we have cutting them down and bringing and **setting them up** next to His altar? I think the issue is the tree being there! *Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the LORD thy God hateth.* “Well, I thought God was a God of love and He just loved everything?” Right – everything righteous and holy and good and sinless and proper and non-heathen and non-pagan. That’s the stuff He loves.*

deck it with silver and with gold; What does *deck* it mean? Like deck-orate (decorate)? Deck the halls with boughs of holly, fa-la-la-la-la-la!! Just a coincidence? Probably not.

They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. Because we don’t want it falling over, since it has no ability to hold itself up. It does not say the workman is carving this into a totem pole, an idol, or an image. It simply says he is cutting it down, fastening it in place, and then decking it. I know we want it to say or mean something else, because we want to justify the decorated tree we have given such a place of prominence in our homes and churches, but we would have to twist plain scripture for this to be the case.

Verse 5: *They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.* Some people will say, “Well see, they can’t do any evil.” Okay – but it is also not in them to do good. And it is also the way of the heathen. And it is also vanity. Has it not been made clear yet that we are NOT to take part in that stuff?

Verse 6-8: *Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might. Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like unto thee. But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock is a doctrine of vanities.* Didn’t we read in Isaiah 44 that they go and pull the **stock** out of that fire after part of it has been burned, and they fashion it into an

how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.

Let's take vanity... let's take trees... and let's see if they end up together. Jeremiah 10:1,2 *Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen*, Have we heard about the ways of the heathen a little bit today? *and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.* The heathen had a festival because the days kept getting shorter and the sun kept setting sooner. So they had a celebration/festival and they said, "We're gonna sacrifice to the sun-god so he will come back." That's what they did! In December of every year they had the Winter Solstice because the days kept getting shorter. The heathen peoples said, "The sun's going away... the sun's going away... let's have a time of worship and sacrifice and get the sun to come back..." I suppose it is ok to partake in those festivities today because we changed the name to something more "Biblical?" Like CHRIST-mas? Probably not. At least not according to the Scriptures.

Verse 3: *For the customs of the people are vain:* What the heathen are doing here is vain. *...for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe.* Verse 4: *They*

First Kings 14:21,22: *And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done.* Judah committed sins that were worse than anyone else before them. What did they do?

Verse 23: *For they also built them high places, and images and groves on every high hill, and under every green tree ... High places...* (Special esteemed places;) *and images...* they weren't supposed to do that. Not only in what we just read but also in the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law they were commanded to not do these things. *Groves...* Why were they doing this? Why were they planting groves? Why did they need a bunch of trees hanging around? They sure weren't doing it for oxygen or fruit – they were doing it for **WORSHIP**.

...on every high hill, and under every green tree. Isn't that interesting? They have high places and images; then you see a grove where they're growing trees (which He told them not to do); then after this *high hill*, the Bible says... *under every green tree.* There is a green tree and **UNDERNEATH** the green tree is where the worship is happening. (Maybe it's just a coincidence that on Christmas morning the kids rush in to discover their gifts **UNDER** a tree. I think that is pretty interesting)

2 Kings 17:6,7: ***In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, Some folks came in, took them captive, and overthrew them. Why? Because they sinned. How did they sin?***

Verse 8: ***And walked in the statutes of the heathen...*** Didn't the LORD say to walk in HIS statutes in Deuteronomy 12? He said, "*When you go to the land... walk in my statutes... follow after the things I'll give you.*" Now we are seeing that they messed up and that is why God put them in captivity. The reason He put them into captivity was because they didn't obey the LORD's statutes, they obeyed someone else's. Therefore we see that it is impossible to not obey someone. You are either going to obey the LORD or you are going to obey somebody else. You are taking orders from somebody. That is how it works.

Verses 8-12: ***And walked in the statutes of the heathen...*** (Remember that phrase – we will come back to that later on.) ***...whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the***

nations, instead of submitting to the Lord as their God and being a peculiar treasure. Here's what Samuel said, "Look, you guys messed up. You guys have sinned. But you still have a chance to serve the LORD. He is still giving you the opportunity. He's still merciful and good." Verse 21: ***And turn ye not aside:*** Follow the LORD. Follow him like you are supposed to. Do what He has commanded you and don't turn aside. ***...for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain.*** He said if you leave off from following the LORD, guess what you will be chasing. You will be chasing **VANITY**. You will be chasing the vain things of this world. He told them to leave off those vanities. There is no place in the service and worship of the Lord for vanities. You choose the LORD; or you will choose vanity. You pick the LORD who is profitable and good for you; or you pick something that's pointless. You can't have both.

Verse 22-23: ***For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way:*** Now, it might be hard to endure some of this stuff we have said so far in this publication, but it is not any easier writing this knowing it will fall under the scrutiny of the church of Jesus Christ. But I sure do not want to sin against God by not doing it. That is my position on this issue. Here's what he says. Verse 24-25: ***Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth...*** Do you know what truth is? It is the opposite of vanity. You are going to have vanity or you are going to have truth. Pick one. ***... with all your heart: for consider***

men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. turn from vanities unto the living God which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

Now watch this. Are you ready? These heathen people had come in and taken over the nation that had been in control before them. The nation before them had a “god” who was in charge of everything and his name was Zeus. They got rid of that name but kept the god and re-named him Jupiter. Same god –different name. Paul and Barnabas walked up and these heathen people began to say, “Look guys, It’s Jupiter, It’s Mercurius, ... here they are in the flesh!” Paul quickly responds... “Whoa! No sir! Cut this vanity out!” He said, “We are not going to have any part of this vanity. Turn from this vanity to the **LIVING** God.” He didn’t say, “Well, you had Zeus, and now you have Jupiter, but let’s just call him Jesus.” There are many a “church” in historically that has bought into this system and done exactly that... and there are many “churches” still today that now are doing this as well, but any true Bible-Believing assembly of believers understands we can **NEVER** mix Christ with Belial.

1 Samuel 12:20: *And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart:* Samuel is here reproving the nation of Israel because they demanded he give them a king so they could be like all the other

tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger: For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing. They are following the statutes of the heathen, setting up idols and images, but we see that these things plainly did not honor the Lord. I think that is pretty obvious. Then there is no way that we can come to the conclusion that when they put up a tree, that this somehow was honoring God. The grove is associated with the rest of that idolatry. The evergreen tree is set up right next to the rest of the abominations. All of it is in the pile together. God didn’t say, “Well, the only thing that they had going for them was that they grew me that grove.” No, because the tree was a part of that idolatry and was right there with it. There is no way you can condemn the use of idols, pagan altars, and images, and then justify the use of a tree in the honor and worship you give to the Lord.

Verse 13: *Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes,* Here’s what the LORD said. “You are following the statutes of the heathen – quit that and follow me!” This very clear Biblical principle says that we cannot serve both God and still be committed to the ways of this world. (*Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13, etc.*)

Verses 13-14: *...according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in*

the LORD their God. It doesn't say they did not believe the LORD their God; they didn't believe IN the LORD their God. So where did their confidence lie? In the other stuff they were doing.

Verse 15: *And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain....* What does the word "*vanity*" mean? It means *pointless; without purpose* (we will come back to this word shortly).

They followed vanity, and became vain and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them. But that is what they people did. They followed after the heathen that were in the land before them.

What so angered God was that they did just like the heathen people were doing, BUT they had a different name attached to it. The practices will always be condemned; the name you slap on them is irrelevant.

Verse 16: *And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves.* Do you remember when they made the calf the first time in the wilderness (Exodus 32)? Well, here they are making two more! The king sent one to Dan and one to Bethel. (1 Kings 12:28,29). He chose 2 places in the nation because he didn't want everybody going down to Jerusalem in Judah. So, we see a calf showing back up after it had already been condemned and destroyed by Moses. You know what they said the first time that thing showed up? "*This be the God that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. Do you see that guy up there Moses is*

...shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? That guy is holding that idol or image in his hand; and the Bible says he doesn't have enough sense to say "This is a lie; this thing is corrupting me, this thing is an abomination before God." He doesn't have the understanding to see that the stock of that tree has no business in his worship.

Do you remember the word I asked you to remember? *Vanity*. Let's put the tree on hold for just a second. Let's look at this word "vanity" and then we will come to back tie everything together.

Acts 14:9-16: *And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are*

couldn't get itself out of the fire pit! That's how silly and dumb idolatry is, and that's why we should be against it.

Verse 18: *They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand.* Whose eyes are being shut? Whose hearts are being messed up? It is the guy bowing down to the image. Not the idol. The idol doesn't have eyes that work. It doesn't have anything – it's a piece of wood! The eyes that are messed up, and the heart that is hindered is the guy bowing down because he is convinced that that this idol will help him. Idolatry is the result of spiritual blindness and a deceived heart.

Verse 19: *And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination?* They don't have enough sense to stop and think "I burned up half of that thing, baked bread on the fire, roasted flesh on that fire and now I'm bowing down to the leftovers." The Lord said, "They don't have enough sense to realize all that stuff and then they fail to recognize they have turned it into an abomination!"

Where am I going with this? Look at the rest of the verse 19 and 20:

getting the law from on the mountain? This cow is what he looks like."(Exodus 32:1-6) They had taken an Egyptian, Satanic idol and slapped Jehovah's name on it. That's what they did.

...and made a grove, What shows up alongside these golden calves, a grove of trees! Why do they need that? Wouldn't the trees just get in the way? I mean, if you're putting a calf in a place of prominence and you want more people to come to worship, the trees would block the view. Just cut the trees down and you will be able to see it better, right? Obviously, those trees are there as a part of the worship.

.... and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. Calves, groves, Baal, serving the hosts of heaven... there is a problem there. So, we see calves – that's a big mistake... we see Baal – that's a problem... we see the worshipping of the host of heaven (the stars, the angels, all of those celestial beings and terrestrial beings) – a bad decision (*Colossians 2:18*). Then why are the trees and groves allowed? They are not! They are part of the idolatry!

Verse 17: *And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire....* What are you doing? They were told to burn the groves. But when they leave the grove in place, the children get burned. If they take and preserve the children, then they end up burning the grove. Isn't that strange how idolatry does that? What is American idolatry blamed on, if it isn't young people and children? Laodicean idolatry always gets blamed on children. Multitudes of parents will say, "*It's all for the kids.*"

We're going to dress them up and we're going to put them in little costumes and they're going to go threaten my neighbors with a trick if they don't give me some treats It's for the kids..." Yeah, sure it is.

Go tell someone Santa is a lie. Tell them he is not coming to town, his reindeer don't fly, and he is make believe. Go ahead, and you tell me who gets upset. It won't be the kids who threaten you, it will be full grown adults. Idolatry is ALWAYS blamed on the children, but it is those same children who will suffer and pay the price for these vanities.

Verse 17: *And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.* Sold themselves – what does that mean? That means you belong to someone else. That's what that means. You say, "I still don't get it." There are people that are going to spend eleven months paying off what they're going to spend in December every year. Do you know what the Bible says about the borrower? He is servant to the lender. (Proverbs 22:7). That's how that works. There may be no debtor's prison; but there is a debtor's workhouse.

Verse 18: *Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only. Also Judah kept not the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made.* Israel sinned and God said "I'm getting rid of you, and keeping only Judah." Then he looks at Judah, and Judah says "We are just going to do what Israel was doing." Now wait a minute. Israel went into idolatry and then the

drinketh no water, and is faint. The Bible says look at these people coming together; taking tongs, sticking that thing in the fire, softening that metal up, pulling it out, beating it, and shaping it in the image of a god. He said there is no purpose for it. That guy has got to stay hydrated. He has got to eat. The guy forming the idol has to replenish himself or else he won't be able to finish the project.

Verse 13-17: *The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god.* It is a stump! In the fire pit! And you had to deliver it from its future destruction in the fire. And then you take the thing and set it up on the table and you say to it, "Deliver me." From what? It

LORD was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not. He smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

Hezekiah said “Look, we are getting rid of all that mess and now we can go fight the enemies of God.” You can’t fight the enemies of God if you’re serving the gods of your enemies. You can’t do it. You can’t go preach the gospel to the world, and fight the good fight of faith when you’re living like this sinful world. You can’t do it.

Isaiah 44:9-11: ***They that make a graven image are all of them vanity;*** (Remember the word “vanity”? This is a key word.) ***...and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together.*** He says, “Let’s get everybody that’s got a hand in making these false gods together and make them all stand up and be ashamed together. Shame on them all.”

Verse 12: ***The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he***

judgment came. Judah saw the judgment on Israel and they said, “Well, Israel got judged... Umm? I guess we’ll just do the same thing.”

How does that apply to us today? The Christian comes to his Bible; he sees the sins; he sees the idolatry; he sees the unrighteousness. And then he says... “Well, I know God overthrew them... but I’ll just do the same thing and He’ll be okay with that... Right? We’re under grace. I can do whatever I want. Right?” Incredible.

Let’s go to II Kings 18:1-4... Let me show you a good guy here. ***Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did.*** What did he do? The explanation is in verse 4. ***He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made:*** Now there was no Perizzite, Jebusite, Hittite, Amorite, or Moabite worshipping that brass serpent. Only the Israelites were even familiar with this souvenir from their wilderness journey. What was wrong with it then? What’s wrong with a piece of brass in the shape of a serpent that delivered some people from death? It’s a religious relic. Why would you destroy it?

For unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. Nehushtan translates into a “piece of brass.” Hezekiah says... “Look – it isn’t anything but a piece of brass, bust it up, and get it out of here. We’re not burning incense to some serpent from the wilderness, when our God has told us He is not worshipped with an image. Get rid of it!!” They had taken something He used to manifest Himself as well as the future spiritual blessing He was going to provide for us (the cross of Jesus Christ, John 3), and they were making it an idol of it.

Do we have an example of that today? Is not ***the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness?*** (*I Corinthians 1:18*) But how many people think they’re something special because they have a cross in their ear or around their neck and they hold on to it as if it is some sort of “lucky rabbit’s foot”? They will say,

“I just got my cross... I just got my cross....”

What does that do for you? *“I hold up the cross... Every time I see something bad happen I hold up the cross...”*

The cross is a good thing – we preach the cross! ***The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness...*** it’s by the shedding of the blood on that cross that we are even saved. You understand that, I hope. The fact that Jesus died for us on a cross is the greatest blessing known to mankind! But I’m not worshipping ANY cross! I’m not putting any

cross up in such a way for people to think that it is our image, or the idol that we worship. We are not doing that stuff. It’s the same idea as the brasen serpent.

“I think the cross is different...” Of course we do, because it is never a sin when we practice idolatry, only when the heathen do it. Wrong! The Laodicean Christian has convinced himself that his traditions somehow escape the scrutiny and criticism of the Scriptures.

The same illustration applies to the piece of brass as it does the cross. We have to be careful where you take things. You have got to be careful with images. Hezekiah told them to get rid of that brasen serpent because they were putting that piece of brass above the Lord himself. God did not say to worship the brass serpent. It wasn’t the serpent that delivered them; it was the God that responded to their obedience that delivered them from those serpents in the wilderness; as a illustration of John 3:14: ***And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up...*** (speaking of how Jesus Christ would die). That was the purpose; not so that you would burn incense to it, put it in a room and have candles around it. See, you’ve got to be careful! That stuff’s right there in front of our faces.

Verse 5-8: ***He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses. And the***