

# ISAIAH

## ISAIAH 44:6-17, GREATNESS OF GOD; FOLLY OF IDOLATRY, PART 1

God pronounces His greatness and the fact that Israel will be His witness to the world by means of the proclamation of His greatness. The very existence of Israel as a nation is a visible manifestation of God's greatness to the world. The satanic world system knows that, and that is part of the reason why the world wants to destroy the Israelites and their nation. There is a contrast set up here in the first part of these Scriptures between Israel as God's witness and man's idols who have no witnesses that can see or know anything. There is nothing true about idols to which any witness could testify. These are really worldview issues. Does a person believe in and worship the Creator God of the universe, or does a person believe in and worship the created order which is powerless to do anything at all? In the final analysis, worshiping the creation is based on worship of self; man becomes his own god and empowers himself to make up other gods that suit his own wicked heart. Man appoints himself the ruler of his own world, makes up his own god or gods, and makes up his own rules for worshiping that god or gods who do not even exist in the first place. It is important to remember that the adversary, Satan, is behind all of this false worship; therefore, while idols are not real, the dark spiritual power they represent is very real and very dangerous. In Isaiah 44:3-5, spiritual transformation awaits the remnant of Israel. The end of this chapter discusses the spiritual transformation that takes place in the lives of idolaters, but is a negative transformation into darkness and out of the light.

Isaiah 44:6 <sup>6</sup>"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts [יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ]: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.

"Thus says the LORD" is a marker that demands attention for what follows.

This section of Scripture on the greatness of God begins with the proclamation that Yahweh is the only God. There is none other. Not only is He the only God, but He is specifically related to Israel in personal, familial ways in which He is not related to the rest of the world. He is the King of Israel and He is the Redeemer of Israel. He is also the King of the world and the redeemer of the world, but that is not the point being made here. He has a special relationship with Israel because He specifically created them to be His representative nation to the world (Ex. 19:5-6).

As the King, He is proclaiming that He is the ruler of Israel. The role He fills as King is similar to the role that human kings and rulers fill. That is not surprising since man was created to be the Mediatorial Ruler for God over His creation from the very beginning. God's rule must therefore be the pattern for all human rule. "... God identifies himself as the 'King of Israel,' a title that includes the roles of ruling over Israel, giving laws and customs for his people, insuring [sic] that justice is carried out, serving as the military commander-in-chief, protecting the nation from its enemies, and judging people" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 225]. Because He is the King of Israel, and a God King at that, the Israelites should be paying attention to the revelation He is placing before them.

Redeemer, which is rooted in the concept of the kinsman-redeemer which has been revealed to us in the Scriptures, is the One who can deliver His kinsmen, the Israelites, from danger and, if necessary, restore them to their rightful place in world society. The concept of kinsman-redeemer has special meaning for the Israelites because it was God their Redeemer who brought them out of Egypt (Ex. 6:6) and entered into unconditional covenant promises to and with them.

Lord of hosts, יהוה צבאות, means "Yahweh (of the) armies." Some people want to say this means "God Almighty," but I am unsure about that since that is אֵל שֶׁדַּי, *El Shaddai*. The thought here is one of military combat. Yahweh is the One who not only will fight for His people, He is the only One who can defeat what they are up against. As the Lord of hosts, He is the commander of the heavenly army in whatever form that takes. This army is divinely guided to protect Israel.

He has also revealed Himself to be the first and the last. The grammatical structure of this sentence places the emphasis on God by placing the first-person personal pronoun first in the sentence. Normal Hebrew grammar places the verb before the subject; therefore, placing the subject first denotes special emphasis. The sentence literally reads, "I first and I last, and no God apart from Me." "As *first* he does not derive his being from any other, but is self-existing; as *last* he remains supreme at the End" [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 277]. God was before creation; He created everything that exists. Idolatry is based on the creation; the concept of pagan gods did not exist before creation, and they cannot exist without the creation. Not only did God exist in eternity past, but He will continue to exist on into eternity future. Because He is the only true God, He is reliable, trustworthy, and able to do all things. No one and no thing is comparable to Him. Israel can completely trust Him to act on their behalf.

"He is the first in that He is before all creation as well as in the beginning of human history, but He is also the last in that He is above human history. The two expressions are designed to show His eternity and His complete independence of the creation. Before human history began He is, and when it shall finish, He is, the unending, eternal, and true God. All the gods of the nations are but idols, those that are called gods, but these possess no independent existence" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:170].

I have mentioned in the past that the God-man, God the Son, is the person interacting with mankind in the Old Testament, particularly Israel. He is Yahweh. "The first and the last" is a description of Christ Jesus applied to Him four times in Revelation (Rev. 1:17, 2:8, 22:13, 21:6 in the form of "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end").

Yahweh is a completely unique being; there is nothing else and no one else in existence that can compare to Him.

Isaiah 44:7 <sup>7</sup>Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time that I established [שׁוּבִים] the ancient [עוֹלָם] nation [עַם]. And let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place.

God issues a challenge here. He says to anyone who dares to challenge Him to proclaim their knowledge, but additionally, He says to go back to the founding of Israel, the ancient nation that He established or appointed, and recount what He has done throughout history in the order in which it has occurred. Prove that you understand what is going on in history. Not only that, but then predict the future as well. If there is anyone who is like Him, then they should be able to do all those things, but only God is the one who controls history and knows exactly where history is headed. We know some of the details of history because they are revealed in the Word of God, but we do not know all the details, and we are incapable of knowing all of them, and only God knows them. Furthermore, He is challenging anyone to prove they are like Him, but they cannot for He is incomparable. There is no one like Him, and there is no one who can do what He does.

Established, **שׁוּם**, means to put, to place, to set, and it may also mean to appoint.

Ancient, **עוֹלָם**, can mean everlasting or eternal in reference to the future, but it may also refer to past times or states of affairs, often referring to the distant past.

Nation, **עַם**, can mean nation or people. This may not be a reference to Israel, but to the creation of mankind. This comports with the challenge to “anyone” which does not have to be restricted to an Israelite.

When God established the nation, He appointed Israel to His service as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). Given the context here in which God is asking them to accurately predict the future, could He be referring to Israel as an everlasting or eternal nation, and is He therefore challenging someone, anyone, to return to the time of the appointment of the nation to God’s service and then predict what is ahead for Israel from the present time and on into eternity? Using everlasting or eternal is a bit more definitive in terms of scope than is “things that are coming” or “going to take place.” Either interpretation works; I’m suggesting an alternate way to view them.

Some theologians believe there is a difference between the two categories of future events, one being the near future and one being far into the future. “The *coming things* point to the future, possibly, as Delitzsch suggests, to the absolute future; and *those which will come* may refer to things soon to come to pass. If the gods can tell both the near and the remote future, let them make it known to Yahweh, the true God. This is the challenge” [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:170-171]. I don’t know that to be the case, but it could be possible.

In the next verse, God again declares that He is the only true God.

Isaiah 44:8 <sup>8</sup>‘Do not tremble [פָּהַד] and do not be afraid [יָרֵא]; Have I not long since announced *it* to you and declared *it*? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any *other* Rock [צוּר]? I know of none.’”

God reassures the Israelites not to be afraid; He is, after all, their King and their Redeemer. We know that the curses Israel earned for disobedience would instill a great deal of fear in them, and rightfully so (Dt. 28:65-67). The discipline God decreed for them to undergo for their rebellion has been horrific.

Tremble, פָּחַד, means to dread, to be in dread, to be in trepidation, to be in terror, or to tremble. Most translations translate this word to be somewhat stronger than tremble. "Fear not" (YLT), "Fear ye not" (KJV; ASV), and "Don't panic" (NET Bible).

Afraid, יָרָה, means to be very afraid, or to be paralyzed with fear. This word is universally translated to be "afraid," with the single exception of the Lexham English Bible which translates it "you must not be paralyzed with fear."

These two words are in the jussive form, which is a milder form of imperative, meaning they express a wish, a request, or a command. In this case, it seems to be a command, because God is telling them that He is Israel's God, Israel is His witness, and there is no other God which implies that He alone is able to keep them and they therefore should not be afraid.

They should be unafraid because God has already revealed truth to them, and they can affirm that truth. Israel by its very existence has God's truth revealed to them, because He has promised to preserve them to the end, and through them His existence and His truth is revealed to the world. "Before all the world Israel will be a living witness to the fact that God had predicted all of this far in advance, and that he had the power to make his promises come true. Just as God was predicting devastation to a heedless people who trusted human pomp and might instead of their God, at the same time he was predicting an unheard-of return from that devastation for all those who would allow him to do so" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 172-173]. Oswalt was talking about the return from the Babylonian captivity, which is true, but this is an enduring truth that has been and will continue to be an enduring truth throughout history.

When the word "Elohim," אֱלֹהִים ( *'ēlô·hîm* ), is used in the Bible, it is often translated "God" even though it is a plural word. In Isaiah, this word is singular in only this verse אֱלֹהִים ( *'ēlô·hî* ). The context of these verses relates to Yahweh's declaration that He is the one and only true God. It seems likely that the rare use of this word in the singular tense is designed to highlight His existence as the one true God as opposed to the plethora of idol gods that are in existence.

Yahweh knows of no other god who can be a rock as He is Israel's Rock. Rock, צוּר, means a rock or a boulder referring to a rock or a mass of hard consolidated mineral matter. In this context, the Lord is referring to himself as a rock which is a metaphor for a strong, impregnable safe harbor that cannot be overcome by adversaries. No one can overcome the Rock of Israel, and He is the only foundation Israel has. "The imagery of God as a rock creates images of a solid foundation that is an immovable source of protection and an impregnable solid foundation. Rocks provide security, deliverance from attack, and a hiding place; rocks do not change. Since God does not know of any other being who has the stature, knowledge, power, temporal control over all history, and the leadership of the heavenly armies, the prophet's audience can be assured that their God is the only one who deserves their trust" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*,

227]. Deuteronomy 32 is a good revelation of what it means for God to be the Rock of Israel.

Through the prophet, the Lord addresses the issue of the foolishness of idolatry. Idols are nothing and idol worshipers are blind to the truth; they have no knowledge nor do they have any understanding. Ultimately, Idolatry is spiritually fatal; idolaters cannot deliver themselves. They need God, but they knowingly reject Him. This verse expresses movement from the one who makes an idol, to the idol itself, and on to the one who worships the idol. Another way to look at the structure of this verse is to see that idolatry is spiritually empty, it provides no tangible benefit, and it takes blind faith to support idolatry because it cannot do anything worthwhile. “[T]hose who bow down to the work of their own hands reduce themselves to nothing. They worship themselves and testify that nothing beyond themselves can save them” [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 175].

Idols are man created images of something with materials that were created by the Creator God before man existed; therefore, the things man creates cannot possibly possess any divine attributes or powers. In itself, that is not good or bad; that is just a fact—man is not divine. The created creature or thing cannot be equal to or greater than the Creator. Nothing in the creation, including man, has any divinity at all. Man has knowledge of the divine, because God has granted man that knowledge (Rom. 1:18-20), but man is in no way himself divine. Word of Faith Pentecostal/Charismatics claim that being made in the image of God means that man is a “little god” are false. “Thus the Achilles’ heel of all paganism is idol making. If it can be shown, as Isaiah does, that it is folly to believe that supreme power resides in a block of wood that was a tree until someone cut it down and with great effort made it into a god, then a deathblow has been struck at the root of paganism. If the gods are coterminous with this world, as idol making demonstrates, then it is folly to think that they can radically reshape the world according to some transcendent purpose. They are blind, deaf, and dumb, locked into the cycles of nature, and those who worship them reduce themselves to nothing, meaningless blobs of protoplasm, which live, propagate, and die, all to no end” [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 175-176].

Isaiah 44:9 <sup>9</sup>Those who fashion [יִצְר] a graven image [פְּסֶלִים] are all of them [כָּל הֵם] futile [תְּהוּ], and their precious [חֲמֻדָּה] things are of no profit [יִנְעֵל]; even their own witnesses [עֵד] fail [בָּלִי] to see or know, so that they will be put to shame [בוּשָׁה].

Graven image, פְּסֶלִים, means an idol, an image that is graven, molten, or carved referring to an idol, that is, to a pagan and material effigy that is worshiped as a representation or in lieu of a deity. The basis of the word is to hew or to cut which refers to the creation of an idol.

Fashion, יִצְר, means to form, to fashion, to shape, to create, or to devise. It refers to forming or creating something as an entity. The word comes from the concept of cutting or framing.

The Creator God of the universe is an eternal, uncreated Being. No other so-called god exists except as it has been created at the hands of man by using God-created materials.

Furthermore, the personal entity that is behind idols is himself a created being. i.e., Satan and his angels are created beings, and they are the unseen, dark, spiritual forces energizing idolatry.

1 Corinthians 10:20 <sup>20</sup>No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.

Of course, people do worship the images themselves because they are living by sight, and they want something to see. The images and the theology of the images is designed to conform to what they see—the world, i.e., the created order. Believers and unbelievers have very different worldviews concerning creation and spirituality. “[W]here better to attack paganism than at the point of its addiction to image making? It is at this point that the fundamental difference between the biblical and the nonbiblical religions is the clearest. The Bible insists that the supreme power in the universe is utterly other than the universe. Thus he cannot be represented by any of the forms of the universe, and even more to the point, cannot be manipulated through any of those forms. The inevitable result of such a belief is monotheism, whose single original representation in the world is in the Hebrew Scriptures. By contrast, the nonbiblical religions insist that power in the universe is coterminous with the universe, is inherent in it, and does not exist apart from it. The inevitable result is polytheism, which prevails everywhere that the Hebrew Scriptures have not been proclaimed” [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 175].

Everyone who engages in idolatry from the people who create the idols to the people worshiping them is living in futility. Everyone! No exceptions! In terms of the text, all of them, כָּלֵהֶם, means all of them!

Pagans think of these graven images as precious. They are important to them, but importance does not equate to value or efficacy. Idols are impotent even though pagans assign great spiritual powers to them that they think controls the events of life according to the natural rhythm of the earth or by whatever means their spiritually deficient minds assign to the idols. Idolatrous worship is entirely dependent on the mind of the worshiper. Whatever they think about these things, they are precious to them. People do not readily give up what is precious to them.

Precious, חֲמִידָה, means to desire, to take pleasure in, to be desirable, to be pleasing referring to delighting in something in order to take a high degree of pleasure or mental satisfaction in. This is an intense desire for something. “Delightful things” (LEB) or “desirable things” (YLT) are probably better translations.

All of the work that goes into the making of physical representations of pagan entities that are called gods is futile and of no profit. Not only the work is useless, but the time spent doing it is wasted in a futile pursuit of humanistic, material ends, and the worship given to idols is useless because a false god is no god and cannot help anyone in any way. It is counterproductive and harmful because it is actually satanic worship.

Futile, חֲזָקָה, means formlessness, confusion, unreality, emptiness; it may refer to a wasteland or a desert. The sense is that of a worthless thing, i.e., something that is worthless or

unsubstantial. This is the same word translated as “formless” in Genesis 1:2 causing some theologians to refer to “elemental chaos” in the use of *tōhū*. This word could easily have been translated as “nothing.” “All those who form an idol are nothing ...” (LEB).

“It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this word has been used purposely in connection with this diatribe against the gods. A continuing theme in the myths is the function of the gods to maintain order against the constant encroachment of chaos. But Isaiah asserts that far from finding order, those who choose the gods not only find chaos but they themselves become part of it! The beings on which they lavish time and attention cannot do anything for them, and as a result their laboriously built-up picture of the universe is a complete fiction. They have created a lie and are part of that lie” [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 176].

Profit, יָעַל, means to profit, to benefit, to have value so that something has a use or provides a gain or a benefit in some way. In this verse, it is referring to spiritual benefit. In the text, the word is negated meaning that there is no profit to idolatry. Isaiah’s argument is that idolatry is not just futile and unprofitable, it is dangerous to the well-being of the person engaging in it resulting in being put to shame. Idols represent deception which is Satan’s primary weapon against mankind by denying and changing the Word of God (Gen. 3:1-7). Idols are lies which is no surprise because the spiritual force represented by idols is Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44). Yet, people are deceived by them and assign value to them when they should know better (Rom. 1:18-20); they are self-deceived.

Witness, עֵד, means a witness, i.e., a person who testifies in a legal setting, sometimes extended to refer to inanimate objects serving as witnesses. It may also refer to the testimony of a witness. It refers to someone who will be accepted to bear a true testimony in various situations for various reasons.

Fail, בָּל, is a negation meaning not, no, not even, cannot, scarcely, or hardly. “Do not see” (LEB) or “cannot see” (NET Bible) would have been the more literal translation, although “fail” certainly conveys the appropriate meaning.

People who engage in idolatry cannot see and they cannot know, because there is nothing there to see and know. Nothing plus nothing always equals nothing. I realize the world likes to think that nothing equals something, but the world is delusional and insane just as the world system’s leader, Satan, is delusional and insane. People who have no knowledge cannot be witnesses to what they do not know. They may think they see and know, but when what they see and know is founded on something that does not exist; they are left with nothing. We will see further on in this pericope that those who engage in idolatrous pursuits become blinded to the truth (v. 18). The more they willingly engage in these pursuits, the more they are unable to discern the truth and gain knowledge.

Shame, בוֹשׁ, means to be ashamed or humiliated which refers to being or becoming characterized by feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, or remorse. Shame is an important issue in the book Jeremiah wrote which is set immediately before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, but it is not just shame for the Israelites, it is shame for the idolatrous nations that are in rebellion against God.

Jeremiah 51:17, 47 <sup>17</sup>All mankind is stupid, devoid of knowledge; Every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, For his molten images are deceitful, And there is no breath in them....  
<sup>47</sup>Therefore behold, days are coming When I will punish the idols of Babylon; And her whole land will be put to shame And all her slain will fall in her midst.

Rejection of the Word of God was the basis for Israel's shame when Babylon destroyed the nation. Rejecting the Word of God resulted in idolatry and rebellion against the one true God. There are serious consequences for rejecting God and the things of God with shame being an important consequence.

Jeremiah 8:8–9 <sup>8</sup>“How can you say, ‘We are wise, And the law of the LORD is with us’? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes Has made *it* into a lie. <sup>9</sup>“The wise men are put to shame, They are dismayed and caught; Behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD, And what kind of wisdom do they have?

Those who craft idols are mere men.

Isaiah 44:10–11 <sup>10</sup>Who has fashioned a god or cast an idol to no profit? <sup>11</sup>Behold, all his companions will be put to shame, for the craftsmen themselves are mere men. Let them all assemble themselves, let them stand up, let them tremble, let them together be put to shame.

The point to this question is, why would anyone make an idol when they cannot possibly profit from their labor? That seems kind of silly, but that is exactly what those who craft idols are doing. They profit financially (Acts 19:23-41), but they spiritually perish. Jesus had something to say about that.

Matthew 16:26 <sup>26</sup>“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Those who craft idols are trying to do something that has spiritual benefit by making a god to worship who can presumably help them with their needs, but mere men cannot make a god who can do anything beneficial for them. It is of no help to them to make the fabrication of idols a collective effort; it still a worthless endeavor. Whether this Scripture is referring to the craftsman only or to those who worship the craftsman's idols as well, the end result is the same for both groups.

All the craftsmen, assembled together, will end up afraid and put to shame. They have no exculpatory evidence to present that can confirm their idolatry to be worthwhile. The reason that they will be afraid and put to shame is due to the fact that they can never overcome the one true God with their pagan understanding of the world which is meaningless and rebellious and results in spiritual death.

In the next section (vv. 12-17), the process of crafting an idol is described. This is probably a description of the construction of one idol by two craftsmen, a metal worker and a carpenter, although two different idols could be the subject, one of metal and one of wood. It doesn't really matter, because both are useless hunks of God created matter.



What is being revealed here is the absolute foolishness of mere men thinking they are actually making something that is god. These are weak men who need to eat and drink to keep up their strength; how can they create a god who is all powerful? “[T]he exposure of faulty thinking goes on—not only the folly that the human can create the divine, but also that human strength can create the almighty, and that strength needing outside nourishment can produce the self-existent, self-perpetuating life of God” [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 279].

Isaiah 44:12 <sup>12</sup>The man shapes iron into a cutting tool and does his work over the coals, fashioning it with hammers and working it with his strong arm. He also gets hungry and his strength fails; he drinks no water and becomes weary.

Here, the metal worker is doing his job to construct an idol. Metal working is a hot, laborious job. It takes strength and energy to work metal. In contrast, the uncreated Creator God created everything by means of the spoken Word. He spoke and creation happened. The work of creation was likened to the mere work of His fingers as though it were nothing (Ps. 8:3).

Isaiah 44:13 <sup>13</sup>Another shapes wood, he extends a measuring line; he outlines it with red chalk. He works it with planes and outlines it with a compass, and makes it like the form of a man, like the beauty of man, so that it may sit in a house [בַּיִת].

The carpenter goes about his work which is also laborious and time consuming. It requires planning and preparation. Man is the pinnacle of creation and idolatry is really the worship of self, i.e., man; therefore, man is often the form that is the model for the idol. Other things were also fashioned into idols, in fact, just about every aspect of nature has been turned into an idol. That includes animals, insects, plants, geographical features, and heavenly bodies in addition to man. Idols were also constructed in hideous ways that resemble what we might think of as demonic beings. They could be a combination of an animal and a human being, or they could simply be some demonically inspired image that was awful and frightening in appearance.

House, בַּיִת, means a house or a dwelling, but it may also mean a temple understood as the local residence of a deity. In this case, it is referring to a shrine (HCSB, NET Bible, LEB). This human image is placed in a shrine which becomes then, whether inadvertently or overtly, an acknowledgment of man's self-worship which is what idolatry is all about. People cannot stand in the awesome presence of Yahweh (Rev. 1:17; cf. Is. 6:5), but they can stand in the presence of their lifeless idols with no problem because they have no inherent aura of holiness and they silently affirm whatever lifestyle is chosen.

Isaiah 44:14 <sup>14</sup>Surely he cuts cedars for himself, and takes a cypress or an oak and raises it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow.

Man plants the trees that he plans to cut down and use for making idols, among other things. I wonder what happens if he doesn't plant any trees? Does god die out when there are no trees? What if there is a forest fire? Can the tree save itself? Can the tree survive without the God given rain it needs? If the tree is god in the formative state, why can't the tree make it rain? What kind of god can come from a tree that is dependent

on man for its birth and on Yahweh, the one true God, for its survival? The answer is that a tree is not a god.

Trees are all created things that are literally rooted in the earth. Besides being the basis for creating an idol, these trees will be used in various mundane ways that arise out of the necessities of living life on this earth. Part of it will be used for heating and cooking and part of it will be used for making the idol god.

Isaiah 44:15 <sup>15</sup>Then it becomes *something* for a man to burn, so he takes one of them and warms himself; he also makes a fire to bake bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it a graven image and falls down before it.

This highlights the blind condition under which the pagan, spiritually dead mind operates. The same tree is used as fuel to burn for warmth and cooking food, and, at the same time, it is used as a god in the form of a graven image that man worships and prostrates himself before. What differentiates one part from the other? Who decided which part is which? Did the god part cry out for its own deliverance? Did the part to be used for warmth and cooking unsuccessfully cry out for deliverance from the fire? Who exercised the divine judgment that decreed one part was god and therefore was delivered from the fire and the other part was destined for the fire and destroyed?

Isaiah 44:16 <sup>16</sup>Half of it he burns in the fire; over *this* half he eats meat as he roasts a roast and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, "Aha! I am warm, I have seen the fire."

Obviously, the craftsman decided which half was god and which half was for cooking food and fuel for warmth. In this situation, man gets to decide what and who is his god. Fallen man probably does not make very good decisions about who and what god is when he, man, gets to determine who and what the god is that he wants.

When he eats and gets warm, he thinks he is happy. The problem is he is spiritually dead and where he is going to go matters little that he once was warm in cold weather and had food to eat. His eternal existence is going to be very unpleasant!

Isaiah 44:17 <sup>17</sup>But the rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, "Deliver [נָצַל] me, for you are my god."

Notice the innate understanding of his fallen spiritual condition the idolater displays when he implores the piece of wood that he just fashioned into a god to save him. Men know God, but men deem it fitting to disregard what they know and exchange their knowledge for the lie (Rom. 1:18-32). Deliver, נָצַל, means to draw out, to pull out, to deliver, rescue, or snatch away referring to being freed from harm or evil, and in some cases, from imprisonment. It is a word used at times in the Old Testament to refer to God's deliverance of His people whether from enemies or from their sins. Samuel counseled the people not to turn away from the Lord and turn to futile things which could not deliver, which seems to be a reference to idols because it involves turning away from Yahweh.

1 Samuel 12:21 <sup>21</sup>"You must not turn aside, for *then you would go* after futile things which can not profit or deliver [נָצַל], because they are futile.

It is interesting to note that the part of the tree the man burns for fuel is of more worth to him than the part is that he fashions into a worthless idol! How can something that is the product of man's mind and depends on the laborious work of man to fashion it out of created materials into something recognizable as resembling a man have any worth? This is simply foolishness.

Paganism is still with us today in the form of human idols. "Isaiah demonstrates how incisively he understands the nature of paganism. Above all else, it is an attempt to cast eternal reality into the shape of humanity. We have not progressed beyond that today. The doctrine called humanism is only an abstract form of this age-old effort. We will be God, and God will be us" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 180-181].