

# Superstition, Idolatry and God's Glory

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Our Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that your word used by your Holy Spirit searches us out, tells us about yourself, reveals to us things about that we need to do and steps that we need to take.

And Father tells us most importantly about your son. And we pray today that you would be at work in us, that all these things might be accomplished. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our friends, I'm a little older than most of you, which means I can remember some actors that probably you may never have even watched, but maybe some of you might know of an actor called Jack Nicholson.

And I like a particular, I like him as a character because he, well, he's quite quirky, but there was one movie that he occurs in, which is called As Good As It Gets.

Now, it's a very interesting movie. Nicholson features as a writer who is obsessive compulsive. And one of the things that he's most obsessive compulsive about is cracks in the pavement.

[ 1 : 0 9 ] And so in the movie, you see him walking down the street, keeping a keen eye on cracks on the pavement, in the pavement so that he can negotiate them. And one of the funniest moments in the movie occurs when he goes to the house of this woman that he is keen on.

And it's been a mammoth effort to get there because he's had to have dodged all the cracks in the pavement as he goes. But he knocks on the door and he opens the door and there he is.

And there is the, ahead of him he sees the door to the woman's apartment that he wants to visit. And all of a sudden, terror strikes him because the floor is made up of tiny ceramic tiles.

And therefore, there are cracks he has to get across. There is a mass of cracks. And Nicholson is utterly confused.

He struggled to get here. But his superstitions about cracks in the pavement seem to have captured him at the very last hurdle. Now, I think Nicholson is an extreme example. But people in the modern world are very superstitious people.

[ 2 : 1 4 ] Though they say they don't believe in God and all those sorts of things, they are very superstitious. They believe in the power of things such as Friday the 13th, breaking mirrors, astrological readings, black cats, everything you can imagine.

Superstition is a belief or a practice that operates on the boundaries between religion and magic. And many of you, I suspect, are probably superstitious.

It arises because we have this sort of sense of helplessness in our world. And we are ignorant of its processes. And so we become superstitious of certain things. We think that if we can do this or that, then we'll be okay.

We see the world and its apparent randomness. And we use superstitions to give it some order and some explanation. Superstitions give us the ability to somehow control our circumstance or protect future events or predict future events or establish chains of cause and effect.

And we think, if I can do that, I will feel safe. Most of us have superstitions of one sort or another. Some of them are homemade and have to do with our own experiences of life. Whereas others have to do with the culture in which we were brought up.

[ 3 : 23 ] No matter what they are, superstitions operate as a sort of mechanism for handling the unknown and seeking to manipulate or control our circumstances. Now, in our Bible passage for today, we're going to wander into the world of ancient superstition.

We're going to see two groups of people who act in a superstitious manner. And we're going to get a glimpse of what God thinks of such conduct, what he thinks of superstition. And as we do, we'll get some advice from God about how we should think about superstition.

So I want you to have your Bibles open. One Samuel chapter four. What happens in this particular section is that we are introduced to a new and exciting section of the book of Samuel.

Samuel himself disappears from the scene at this point. And we are told about a series of incidents in the life of God's people. These incidents occur around something called the Ark of the Covenant.

Now, many of you will know about the Ark of the Covenant. If only from movies. Let me tell you a bit about it. The Ark of the Covenant was a large, well, not that large, but a reasonable size, large wooden box.

[ 4 : 33 ] A chest that God had told the Israelites to build when they came out of Egypt. It was gold plated and it had rings through which you would pass long poles so that people could carry it on their shoulders.

And the stones in which the on which the Ten Commandments were written were kept inside that Ark of the Covenant. And then on the top of the Ark, there was a plate of gold that was called the Mercy Seat.

And it represented how God was present among his people to dispense mercy and forgiveness. At either end of the top of the Ark were these two cherubim whose wings stretched out to cover the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat.

And the Ark of the Covenant represented, as I said, the presence of God among his people. And after the people of Israel arrived in the Promised Land, they kept it in sanctuaries such as the one at Shiloh where Eli was.

Now, that's the Ark of the Covenant. Now, let me introduce you to the Philistines. During this particular period in Israel's history, the Philistines were the main opposition. The Philistines were a small nation.

[ 5 : 40 ] They were well advanced. They're quite advanced. They're well organized. They were technologically advanced and they were energetic and they were aggressive. They were sea people, probably. They'd originally come, maybe, some people think, from the Greek islands.

They were experienced. They were well equipped in terms of military might. And their territory lay on the western plains of Palestine. However, during this time, they had their eye on going up the hill country and into the place where Israel lived, into the hilly areas where the Israelites lived and took shelter.

And because of their expertise, their military prowess, the fact that they had metal and they could forge metal, which the Israelites couldn't do, they were a very real threat to Israelites who were largely farmers and peasants.

Now, there's the background information for our story. Let's see what happens in 1 Samuel 4, verses 1 to 11. Have a look at verse 1. We're told that the Israelites and the Philistines are lined up for battle.

Verse 2 tells us that the Israelites were defeated and that 4,000 men who stood their ground on the battlefield were killed. Then in verse 3, we find Israelites reflecting on why they might have lost in the battle.

[ 6 : 52 ] And they come to the conclusion that it was because God was not present with them. And so they engage in the first step of superstition. Have a look at verse 3.

They say this. When the troops came to the camp, I may have a slightly different version from you, but you'll survive. When the troops came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, Why has the Lord put us to rout today before the Philistines?

Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh here so that he may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies. Now, can you see what's going on here? The Israelites see their defeat.

They know God is responsible. They associate the ark of the covenant with God. And so they engage in superstition and an attempt to manipulate God. Their whole thinking is mechanical and it's theologically flawed.

It fails to recognize that God is the God who has always had the best interests of his people in mind. It fails to recognize that God is the God of all creation and of all history and that he is well and truly able to look after his people from 30 kilometers away, which is about how far away this was.

[ 8 : 04 ] From the ark. Anyway, the ark of the covenant is sent for in verse four and the sons of Eli accompany it back to the battlefield. And verse five tells us that when it arrives back at the battlefield, the the adrenaline begins to run.

And the Israelites give this great war shout and they can be it can be heard by the Philistines. And from verse then in verse six, we are led into the Philistine camp and we get a sort of insider's view about what's happening in the Philistine camp.

Just as the Israelites had engaged in a bit of reflection, so do the Philistines. Now, they are not quite historically correct in that they talk about plagues in the wilderness rather than in Egypt.

And although that although they display their own superstitious bent here, the Philistines do it a little bit better than the Israelites do. For a start, they don't talk about the ark so much as about God himself.

That's quite different. In other words, they don't treat the ark as a sort of magic talisman. They know that the ark represents a God or gods and that this God or gods is the one that was renowned for the great victory over the Egyptians.

[ 9 : 10 ] But there's even more. Unlike the Israelites, they don't seem to assume that the ark guarantees success. Look, look at verse nine. Take courage and be men, O Philistines, in order to not become slaves of the Hebrews as they have been to you.

Be men and fight. You see, they may be slightly superstitious, the Philistines, but they are going to put up a good fight. And so they do. And in verse 10 and 11, we're told what happens.

Have a look. So the Philistines fought. Israel was defeated. And they fled everyone to his house. There was a very great slaughter for there fell of Israel 30,000 foot soldiers.

The ark of God was captured. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. Now, friends, the defeat this time is huge. They lose seven or eight times as many soldiers with the ark of the covenant present as they'd lost without the ark of the covenant.

The ark of the covenant is captured. The sons of Eli are killed. God had given his word about Eli and his sons. You might remember a few chapters back. And here in chapter four, God not only deals with Israel superstition, but he deals with the priestly family of Eli, just like he promised he would.

[ 10 : 27 ] But now let's move to the second half of the chapter. Verses 12 to 22 tell us how the defeat is reported. And the narrative is really quite poignant. In verse 13, we find the blind and old and heavy Eli sitting and watching.

He knows that they've taken the ark. And he appears not to be affected by Israelite superstition. He knows the ark is at risk and his heart trembles for it. And the news reaches the city.

The Israelites cry out. Eli wants more information. So the messenger comes to Eli and tells him the story. And the messenger tells him the awful news. First, there is the defeat of Israel.

Then there is the death of his sons. And then there is the capture of the ark of the covenant. And it's that last item of news that devastates Eli. After all, you see, the capture of the ark is not just a great loss.

It is a great humiliation of God. And so perhaps I think the trembling heart of Eli just packs it in at this point. There's a massive heart attack. No matter what it is, he falls over and he breaks his neck.

[ 11 : 33 ] And again, God's promised judgment on him and his family is carried out. And with this, the narrator of the story just flips to another scene. And this time is a nameless woman.

The daughter-in-law of Eli and the wife of Eli's son, Phinehas. She's pregnant. She's about to give birth. And she hears the news about the ark and about Eli and about her husband.

And she goes into labor. And she begins to die in childbirth. And the midwives, they see her state and they try and comfort her by telling her, look, you've given birth to a son.

But instead of responding to this good news, she grasps what Eli grasped. The thing that matters is not life nor the life of her newborn son. The thing that matters is God and his glory.

And God's glory, God's splendor, God's greatness amongst his people is decimated. But even here, she still hasn't grasped the full truth. She has grasped that God's glory has departed from Israel.

[ 12 : 35 ] But she's wrong in thinking that it has departed from Israel because the ark of God has been captured. Rather, the ark of God has been captured because God's glory had already departed from Israel.

Israel no longer knows God. That's the great and awesome God who inhabits eternity and yet who lives among his people ready for mercy and forgiveness. His eternal glory has been reduced to mindless superstition and a mechanistic understanding of God.

He has long gone from the hearts of his people and is simply a magic toy that they can drag out in times of trouble and strife. So there's the story of the ark of the covenant.

And before we move to the next chapter, I just want you to think for a moment about superstition and Christian faith. You see, my view is that we Christians are often not much better than the Israelites.

Let me explain. Just I want to take one example. Let me reflect for a moment on how on superstition in one area of Christian existence, the area of prayer. And what I'd like to do is challenge you to take what I say and apply it to other areas of Christian life.

[ 13 : 42 ] So let's think about it for a moment. I wonder if you've ever reflected on how God doesn't appear to be answering your prayers and reflected on the fact that he might if you only got the mechanism right.

That is, you know, you think maybe I'm not doing something right and maybe I ought to tweak the way I do things. And if I do that, it'll work. In other words, God will answer my prayers if only I did certain things.

If only I focused on him in my mind in a particular way. Or if only I believed hard enough. Or if only I used certain words or in a certain order. Or if only I prayed in this way or that, then God would be sure to answer.

Or we think that if only we could muster enough people to pray for something, then God would have to give an answer. And so what we do is we think, well, perhaps, perhaps if I conducted a prayer vigil where we had people praying every moment of the day and night.

Even better if we had Christians across the whole nation praying every moment of every day and night. Then God would have to hear us, wouldn't he? He would have to hear us at that point.

[ 14 : 46 ] He would see our earnestness and surely then he would be forced to act. Friends, there's nothing wrong with praying. But there's nothing wrong with praying earnestly and constantly.

There's nothing wrong with having lots of people doing it. But please don't be like pagans. Please don't treat prayer like some superstitious talisman that you wave before the face of an unwilling and unhearing God in order to make him hear and respond.

That is a ludicrous view of God. God is not like this. God is a God who loves his children and, as his son says, loves to give generously and wholeheartedly to them.

You see, he's not like some unrighteous judge, Jesus says, who has to be begged and cajoled in order to hear his people and give them justice. God is not like that. If you think God is like that, you are wrong.

That's not what Jesus teaches. And I know that in this story from 1 Samuel, that God uses these events to judge the house of Eli. But I really wonder whether he's doing something else as well.

[ 15 : 56 ] I wonder if he's acting in this way, that he might act toward us if we were like the Israelites. I wonder if we do similar things, if we begin to treat him as some sort of magical charm that we can harness and tame with certain mechanisms, whether he might have to confront us in a similar way.

I wonder if at times he might refuse to act on our behalf simply because we've used tricks and superstitions in order to try and command him to do something.

In other words, sometimes I wonder if God's response to our machinations, our manipulations might be to distance himself from us. Anyway, let's have a look now at chapter five.

Look at verses one to five. In verse one, we're told that when the Philistines capture the ark, they take it from the battlefield to Ebenezer in Ashdod. And the Philistines operate as a sort of tribal confederacy or confederacy of city states.

There were five key cities in Philistines with the Philistines and Ashdod was one of them. Anyway, verse two tells us that they carry the ark of into Dagon's temple and they set it up beside Dagon.

[ 17 : 12 ] Now, from other parts of the Bible, we know this was a fairly common practice. When one nation conquered another nation, they took the objects connected with the deities of those nations that they'd conquered in battle.

And they placed them in the temples of their gods. It was a sort of way of saying symbolically, our God is better than your God. Our God has defeated your God.

And we want to show that by putting the things that belong to him in the temple of our God. The whole idea was that it was a symbol that not only the nation had been defeated, but their God or their gods had been defeated as well.

Anyway, verse three tells us what happens between the seemingly defeated God and the apparently victorious one. Can you see it there? What happens is when the people of Ashdod get up the next morning, they find that poor old Dagon has fallen flat on his face before the ark.

In other words, the apparently victorious God has assumed a position of worship, bowing down before the symbol of the God of Israel.

[ 18 : 20 ] Anyway, the Philistines, they come to the rescue of their God. So, you know, you can imagine, can't they? Can't you? They go to poor old Dagon and they pick him up, stand him up again. Poor fella. And they wait to see what happens.

Anyway, the Philistines visit the temple again the next day. And this time, well, Dagon has had another more dramatic mishap. This time he's fallen on his face again.

But this time he's lost his head in his hands. The point is, can you see that where the Philistines attack Israel and win, the Israelite God attacks the Philistine God and wins.

And the story is clear. By the way, I wonder if you can remember any other occasion in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, where the representative of the Philistine God is confronted by the representative of the true God.

And in the end, the representative of the Philistine God ends up flat on his face, minus a head. It's predicted here.

[ 19 : 28 ] It's a very interesting story. You think about it. Read chapter 17. Anyway, can you see what God is telling his people here? Israel may think that God has departed from Israel.

They may think that God is powerless in the face of the Philistine gods. But God is far, far from that. Which in turn, you see, he can take on the gods of the Philistines wherever he likes, whenever he likes.

Which in turn means that he was responsible for their defeat in the battle of Ebenezer. He's the God who's capable of looking after himself. And he can look after himself outside Philistine territory.

He could look after himself on the other side of the world if he wanted. He's the God who's capable of looking after himself. And he will not be manipulated. He's a God who's in control. So verses 1 to 5 close with this little comment by the author about some ancient practice of the Philistines about what they do at the door of their temple.

I'm not sure what it means. But anyway, let's now take a look at the rest of the passage before we pick up the key ideas from it. If verses 1 to 5 tell us about how God interacts with the main God of the Philistines, verses 6 to 12 tell us how God interacts with the people themselves.

[ 20 : 44 ] Just as the Philistines linked God with the Egyptians in chapter 4, so they link him with the Egyptians again in verse 6. Can you see it there? And God does very similar actions as he had done in Egypt.

He sends some sort of plague with some very nasty consequences. Now there's been lots of debate about what this plague might be. The mention of rats in chapter 6 verse 4 has led some people to think that we're dealing with some sort of bubonic plague here.

In this case, the tumors would be swellings that occur with bubonic plague in the lymph glands of the armpits, the groins and the side of the groin and the sides of the neck. But there's another train of thought that finds some support in Psalm 78 verse 66 and other places which says that the plague has to do with the backsides of the Philistines.

It's very nasty and very humorous. In this case, the options are that the Lord afflicts them with hemorrhoids or even dysentery.

It's not very pleasant. But no matter what it is, God's hand is heavy on the Philistines and they suffer badly in some nasty parts of the body.

[ 22 : 00 ] And so they get the ark and they treat it like some sort of undefused bomb. Do you notice what they do? They sort of pass it from city to city. So, you know, here they are in Ashdod and they think, let's move it on to one of the other five cities.

And they move it from place to place. And by the time they get to city number three, they realize that some more drastic action is going to be needed. Look at verse 10. So they sent the ark of the God of Israel to Ekron.

And when the ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, Why have they brought around to us the ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people? In other words, I don't want it. They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel and let it return to its own place that it may not kill us and our people.

For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city and the hand of God was very heavy there. Those who did not die were stricken with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

Now, Psalm 78 verses 60 to 66 summarizes it in this way. Then the Lord awoke as from sleep. As a man awakes from the stupor of wine and he beat back his enemies and he put them to everlasting shame.

[ 23 : 15 ] You see, the Israelites had thought that God was asleep. They thought he didn't have any care for his people. But now they can see him active.

So there's the story. Now, I want us to dig a bit deeper and examine some of the key ideas here. And I've got three things I want you to notice. Three things. First thing I want you to notice is the reference to hands and to the actions of hands throughout these chapters.

Have a look at verse three again. We hear, we learn that Dagon needs to be lifted up and put into his place by human hands. So here's this great God Dagon, right?

And so poor old Dagon, he can't do anything really. He's pretty hopeless. So his people have to go and pick the poor fellow up, stand him up again and put him in place. You see, he's useless.

He can't do anything. He needs human hands to serve him. Now, look at verse six. What is God's hand like? The hand of the Lord was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and he terrified and struck them with tumors, both in Ashdod and in its territory.

[ 24 : 23 ] Now, what is a real God like? He's got real hands. He doesn't need his people carrying him around. He can act with his own hand. Look at verse nine.

But after they brought it to Gath, the hand of the Lord was against the city, causing a very great panic. And he struck the inhabitants of the city, both young and old, so that tumors break out on them.

Now, look at the second half of verse 11. For there was deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was heavy there. Friends, can you see it?

The implication is very clear. False gods need human hands and have no hands of their own. But a real God has a very active hand.

Next thing I want you to notice is the progress of the chapter. We start off with Philistines having defeated Israel. Clear implication is God himself has been defeated. That's symbolized by the things of God being locked up in the temple of Dagon.

[ 25 : 27 ] But then in verses one to five, the fortunes of the two gods are turned upside down. First, Dagon bows before the symbol of God and therefore recognizes his lordship and his greatness.

Second, Dagon is shown to be a helpless God who needs his worshipers to carry him around. There's a very strong contrast between a real God who can act without any worshippers present and a false God who can do nothing without worshippers to lift him up.

And third, Dagon is defeated in battle and humiliated. He's beheaded, arms cut off, and he's left flat on his face before the victor, before his victor.

And lastly, his people are humiliated and defeated without intervention from the people of God. They're nowhere to be seen. God's active here outside Israelite territory in working his thing.

So my point has to do with asking, why is this passage here, do you think? My own view is that God has put it here for three clear reasons. First, it is to show the nature of God.

[ 26 : 31 ] You see, our God, the God of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is not bound or constrained by such things as a physical ark or the boundaries of the land of Israel.

He is a God who is independent, free, sovereign over all the earth, even over nations that do not worship him. Two, it is here to show us how Israel does not need anyone but him.

In chapter 8 of 1 Samuel, the nation of Israel will look at the surrounding nations. They'll look at the power of the Philistines and the others, and they'll say, what we need to forge our way in the world is a king.

And they'll ask God for a king. And they'll ask because they feel insecure in the face of the growing political and military pressure all around them. And what this passage is here for is to show us that they don't need a king.

God can win against the Philistines without an army and without a king. And his people should know it. And three, this passage is here to reflect on the stupidity of idolatry.

[ 27 : 38 ] You see, I don't think you can read this chapter without finding some humor in it. I think it's designed to be humorous. There's a strong, humorous, iconoclastic bent to this chapter.

There's the humor of poor old Dagon falling flat on his face. Okay? There's the humor of him needing to be lifted up and sort of looked after, mollycoddle put in place.

And poor old Dagon. There's the humor of the Philistines moving the ark from place to place and not even bothering to call upon the headless and handless Dagon to come and rescue them.

Why? Because they know he's useless. And there's the humor in the innuendo of the tumors affecting the sort of nether regions of the Philistines. This passage is clearly designed to make us laugh at the stupidity of idolatry.

It is ludicrous. The display of the stupidity of idolatry is very common throughout the Bible. And one of the places where it comes into its most vibrant form is the book of Isaiah.

[ 28 : 42 ] I want you to turn with me in your Bibles. And whoever finds the page first can yell it out for us. Isaiah 44. So look up Isaiah 44. Middle of the Bible and then slightly towards the back you'll find Isaiah.

Anyone got a page number? Isaiah 44. Isaiah 44. Isaiah 44. 11, 11, 11, 24. 7, oh here we go.

We're everywhere now. 7, 24 ish. 7, 24 ish. Thank you. Now friends, just take a skim read through verses 9 through to 20.

Just skim through them and have a look at what's going on. I wonder if you can see what's being said here. You see, Isaiah 44 talks about the gods. Makes one thing clear.

In the long run, the gods we worship are made by us. That is, they are crafted by human hands. They are formed by us. They are nurtured by us. They are protected by us.

[ 29 : 44 ] They are carried around by us. And there's this picture of a man who cuts down a piece of wood. Half of it, he cooks his dinner over.

And the other half, he crafts into an idol. And you think, how stupid is that? Cook your dinner over one half. And then worship the other half. How crazy is that?

Now have a look at Isaiah 46 verses 3 through to 13. And I wonder if you can see the same point. Look at verses 3 and 4 in particular. Notice what it says.

What does the real God do? The real God carries his people. Now notice verses 5 to 7. What do idols need? They need people to carry them.

Can you see what is being said by the author of Isaiah? It's fascinating. A real God turns the tables. A real God carries and supports his people. Acts on behalf of his people.

[ 30 : 45 ] Is independent of his people. Now the point that's being made here is the same. Whether you worship, whether gods you worship are images like Dagon. Or ideas or political entities.

Or any other modern deities such as sport and sex and science. That you take in order to give you identity. And to give you some worth in life. In the end, all deities are made by humans.

Or false deities. And will die with humans. They're dependent upon humans. When humans pass away, they won't exist any longer. They need humans to carry them around.

To protect them. To stand up for them. They need humans to look after them. They are not eternal. And they are not independent.

In the long run, no matter how sophisticated they look. They are no better than Dagon. And they're worshippers. And they'll fare no better than the Philistines. But in 1 Samuel.

[ 31 : 50 ] In Isaiah 46. And in the rest of the Bible. We are told that the God we worship. Is not like the false gods. They are empty, vain, non-entities.

That's the words that Israelites used for them. Empty, vain, non-entities. But our God is a God who is worth worshipping. You see, the God of the Bible is not a God who needs to be carried and protected and molycoddled.

Looked after. He's a God who's not under threat by his world. He's the God of all the earth. Who made the earth and who made us. He's not a God who started the world.

But now sits up in heaven sort of helplessly wringing his hands. While he waits to see how things are going to work out. Now he's the God who's sovereign over all the world. And he's at work in his world for his good purposes according to his good will.

He's a God who needs. He's not a God who needs his kingdom to be brought in by earnest Christian people. There's been a shift in songs that have been sung in the last 30 years.

[ 32 : 53 ] And that shift is to shift to songs that sing about what we are going to do and how we're going to bring in God's kingdom. No. No, friends. God can do it without us really. And has done for a long time.

It's not as though in the last 30 years he's finally found a group of people who will be able to do it for him. You see, God's not dependent upon us. He's a God that we see active in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ we see a God who is not like the gods of our world.

He's a God who sees his world and acts in his world. He sees the people of the world. He sees our need. He sees our inability. And he stretches out his hand to save us.

He sends his son. And he allows his son to be paraded before the nations of the world and lifted up to ridicule and humiliation. And he allows that his son to suffer the most degrading death imaginable.

And through the humiliation of his death, he defeats sin, death and the devil. And through that humiliation, he does what we could not do with our hands.

[ 34 : 01 ] He forgives sin. He cancels the power of the written code and nails it to the cross and says, that's it. It's done with. He disarms the spiritual powers and authorities and makes a public display of them, triumphing over them by the cross, as Paul says in Colossians.

And he shows his great worth in his world. Friends, can you see what I'm saying? The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ sees and acts in Jesus as he's done from all eternity. He's not like the gods of our world.

He is free. Independent. Powerful. He alone is worthy of worship. He alone has the credentials of a true God.

And all others are false gods. They're idols. So, friends, I urge you to follow the Apostle John's advice in the very last verse of 1 John, chapter 5.

He says, dear children, keep yourself from idols. Dear children, keep yourself from idols. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you are the supreme God over all the earth.

[ 35 : 14 ] That with your hand you crafted the world. You crafted us even in our mother's womb. You formed us and made us. Father, we thank you most.

That you formed our salvation through sending your son into the world. You did what we could not do. Father, we thank you that your hand is powerful to save.

And, Father, we pray that we trust in no other. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.