

Deuteronomy 4:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female,

Analysis

The warning 'lest ye corrupt yourselves' reveals that idolatry defiles and distorts covenant relationship. The Hebrew 'shachat' (corrupt) implies moral and spiritual ruin. Creating any 'graven image' or 'similitude' violates God's revealed will, reducing the transcendent Creator to created forms. 'Any figure' emphasizes the comprehensive prohibition—no representation whatsoever, whether male, female, animal, or celestial. This absolute ban protects God's uniqueness and prevents reducing Him to manageable, controllable objects. Idolatry always diminishes God and exalts human autonomy, the essence of sin.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures routinely depicted deities anthropomorphically—Zeus/Jupiter as male, Artemis/Diana as female, Egyptian gods with animal forms (Anubis as jackal, Horus as falcon). Israel constantly battled temptation to syncretize Yahweh worship with Canaanite practices, as evidenced by repeated warnings (Exodus 20:4-6, 23:24, 34:13-17) and tragic failures (golden calf, bronze serpent worship, 2 Kings 18:4).

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does idolatry 'corrupt' not only worship practices but the worshiper's very character and relationship with God?
2. What modern equivalents to ancient idolatry (career, family, entertainment, self-image) threaten to usurp God's rightful place in your affections?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	שְׁחַתְּ	תִּשְׁחַת	אֱלֹהִים	תַּעֲשֵׂה	תַּעֲשֵׂה	לְכָל	לְכָל	תַּעֲשֵׂה	תַּעֲשֵׂה	לְכָל	לְכָל
H6435	Lest ye corrupt	yourselves and make		H6213		H0		you a graven image		H6459	
	H7843			H5566		H8403				H2145	

תְּמִימָנָה	אֲלֵהָה	אֲלֵהָה	אֲלֵהָה	תְּמִימָנָה	תְּמִימָנָה	רָאשָׁה	רָאשָׁה	תְּמִימָנָה	תְּמִימָנָה	רָאשָׁה	רָאשָׁה
the similitude	H3605	**of any figure**		**the likeness**		**of male**	H176	**or female**		H5347	
H8544		H5566		H8403		H2145					

Additional Cross-References

Acts 17:29 (Parallel theme): Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

Deuteronomy 4:23 (Parallel theme): Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee.

Deuteronomy 5:8 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth:

Exodus 32:7 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: