

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

פָּ	תִּשְׁחָתוּן	וַעֲשִׂיתֶם	לָכֵן	פָּ סֵל		
H6435	Lest ye corrupt	yourselves and make	H0	you a graven image		
	H7843	H6213		H6459		
תְּמוּנַת	כָּל	סֶמֶל	תְּבַנֵּי יֵת	זָכָר	אִוָּ	נִקְבָּה:
the similitude	H3605	of any figure	the likeness	of male	H176	or female
H8544		H5566	H8403	H2145		H5347

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: