

Deuteronomy 5:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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:

Analysis

The second commandment prohibits making 'any graven image, or any likeness' of created things. This guards God's transcendence and prohibits reducing Him to manageable, visible forms. The comprehensive list 'in heaven...earth...waters' covers all creation realms, emphasizing no creature may represent the Creator. This commandment regulates worship's form, while the first regulates worship's object. The Reformed tradition insists this prohibits religious images, icons, and representations used in worship. God reveals Himself through Word (Scripture), ultimately through the incarnate Word (Christ), not human-crafted images.

Historical Context

Ancient religions relied heavily on idols and images for worship. Pagan temples housed deity statues believed to contain divine presence. Israel's imageless worship was revolutionary. Yet Israel repeatedly violated this command: golden calf (Exodus 32), Micah's idol (Judges 17-18), Jeroboam's calves (1 Kings 12:28), Manasseh filling Jerusalem with idols (2 Kings 21:3-7). The second commandment protected true worship from pagan corruption and maintained God's transcendent otherness.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 – Judging others

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the prohibition of images protect both God's transcendence and the primacy of Word-based worship?
2. In what subtle ways might modern worship incorporate visual elements that distract from Scripture's centrality and God's invisible glory?

Interlinear Text

ל א	תִּשְׁעַשׂ	ה	לְבָ	א	סָלִ	כָּל	תִּמְוֹן	ה
H3808	Thou shalt not make		H0	thee any graven image		H3605	or any likeness	
	H6213			H6459			H8544	

רָאשׁ	רָאשׁ	מִתְעַל	בְּשָׁמָן	בְּשָׁמָן	רָאשׁ	רָאשׁ
H834	of any thing that is in heaven	above	H834	beneath the earth	H8064	H4605

לֹא, רֹאֶשׁ	מִתְחַת	בְּמִזְבֵּחַ	מִתְחַת	מִתְחַת	מִתְחַת	מִתְחַת
H8478	H834	beneath or that is in the waters	H4325	H8478	beneath the earth	H776

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 20:4 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not make unto 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 water under the earth:

