

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

Psalms 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

לֹא H3808	תַּעֲשֶׂה ה' H6213	לְךָ H0	פֶּסֶל H6459	כָּל H3605	תְּמוּנָה ה' H8544
	Thou shalt not make		thee any graven image		or any likeness
אֲשֶׁר H834	בַּשָּׁמַיִם יֵם H8064	עַל H4605	אֲשֶׁר H834	לְאֶרֶץ H776	
	of any thing that is in heaven	above		beneath the earth	
חַת H8478	אֲשֶׁר H834	בַּמַּיִם יֵם H4325	חַת H8478	לְאֶרֶץ H776	
	beneath or that is in the waters			beneath the earth	

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:

