

The Ten Commandments for today

2. "Thou shalt not make unto Me any graven image"

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THE SECOND COMMANDMENT springs from the first. Not only were Israel not to have other gods before Yahweh, they were not to make them either. The word translated "make" here is used in Genesis 1:26: "And God said, Let us *make* man in our image, after our likeness". The Apostle Paul alludes to this when he says that man is "the image and glory of God" (1 Cor. 11:7). The purpose of the Almighty is that man should not only be in His image, but should reflect the glory of His character. The Lord Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature" (Col. 1:15), the only one who is the image of the invisible God in every sense, except that he is subject to the Father.

This may help us to see the reason why this commandment not to make a graven image was given to Israel: "for I the LORD [Yahweh] thy God am a jealous God" (Ex. 20:5). Jealousy is important as far as the Almighty is concerned, for He knows that worship of any other thing or person than Himself will only lead to harm and ruin.

Even after this commandment was given by God, when Moses delayed his coming, Israel said to Aaron: "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him" (32:1). When Moses saw the golden calf which Aaron made, he broke the tables of stone beneath the mount. Then, in response to his question, "Who is on the LORD'S [Yahweh's] side?", the sons of Levi went into the camp and slew 3,000 men (vv. 26-28) and Yahweh plagued the people because they had coerced Aaron into making the golden calf (v. 35). Furthermore, the angel of Yahweh's presence was withdrawn and another angel led them through the wilderness (33:2,3). All these things happened to Israel because they broke the second commandment.

When the nation became a kingdom, Solomon's love of "many strange women" (1 Kgs. 11:1) drew him to idolatry, and the continuing practice of idolatry by Israel led ultimately to the downfall of the kingdom and the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. The nation should have trusted in Yahweh, Who said of these idols that they were but "the work of men's hands" (Ps. 115:4).

There were idols in the time of the apostles, and many in the ecclesia had "turned to God from idols" (1 Thess. 1:9). But there were temptations to go back to idolatry, especially in such cities as Athens and Corinth, hence the apostle's words in 2 Corinthians 6:16,17: "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate".

The article dealing with the first commandment pointed out that covetousness is idolatry, and that no "covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5). The word translated "covetous" derives from a word which means 'desiring more', 'eager for gain'. The danger is that we can be pressurised by the world and its advertising to accumulate possessions. We need to examine our motives in accumulating goods, remembering that we are strangers and sojourners, as the faithful of old were (Heb. 13:13,14).

As we have said, Christ is "the image of the invisible God". But there is another to whom millions bow, namely the pope, described by the Apostle Paul in these words: "... who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4). In Revelation we read of the pope as the image of the beast: "And he [the earth beast representing the Holy Roman Empire] had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed" (13:15).

Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image, and he had them cast into the fiery furnace; but the angel of Yahweh delivered them. May we follow their example, refusing to bow down to the image of the beast, whatever the consequences, taking great care not to allow worldly possessions to come before our worship of Yahweh, that we might reflect His character in our lives. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 Jno. 5:21).