

The Distinction Between the Initial Two Commandments: An Exegetical Study of Exodus 20:2-6

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Abstract

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The dissimilarity between the initial two commandments within God's law (Exodus 20:3-6) serves to affirm the theological principles presented in the Bible. This research paper employs fundamental methodologies, such as analysing the textual structure and literal context of the studied passage. Its primary objective is to investigate the disparity between the two commandments and explore their significance within Christian theology. After a meticulous examination of the syntax and contextual connections, this paper draws three conclusions. Firstly, the initial two commandments pertain to two distinct facets of biblical theology. The first commandment emphasizes the worship of the Lord as the primary subject, while the second commandment focuses on the proper way to worship Him. Secondly, the purpose of the first commandment is to protect Israel against external threats, particularly the worship of "other gods." Thirdly, the second commandment aims to safeguard Israel against internal threats, manifested using images as objects of worship. The utilization of images has the potential to undermine the covenant relationship between God and Israel. In summary, the worship of gods other than Yahweh and the incorporation of images in worship are two separate laws with crucial disparities. These differences hold great significance in Christian theology, as they anticipate the presence of modern idolatry and various attempts to materialize the worship system

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INTRODUCTION

The commands found in Exodus 20:2-3 and 20:4-6, which state, "You shall have no other gods before me" and "You shall not make for yourself an idol and worship it," respectively, have been the subject of much debate among Biblical scholars. Traditional Jewish adherents, such as Gunther Plaut, assert that the statements in verses 2-3 are considered the first law, while the statements in verses 4-6 are considered the second law of the ten commandments (Plaut, 1981). Despite being different laws, they are still related to one another. Paul E. Capetz (1998) argues that the first commandment was created to anticipate polytheistic and syncretistic beliefs, while the second commandment pertains to the prohibition against making visual representations of God's existence through idols and using them as objects of worship. This argument is supported by the basic presupposition that the first commandment serves as the foundation for obeying the pragmatic and theological values of the other nine commandments. John Barton emphasizes the difference between the first two laws by stating that "worshipping gods other than YHWH and using images in worship are two different laws." (Barton, 2004).



The second view, as expressed by Jay W. Marshall (2003), which asserts that the two sections (Exod. 20:2-3 and Exod. 20:4-6) have an identical theological substance. Thus, it's considered as a single law. This view is adopted by the Catholic and Lutheran churches throughout history. In addition to that, when John Barton study Exod. 20:4-6 he discovered the numbering system of the ten commandments adopted by these two denominations. According to his analysis, verses 2-6 is the first commandment, while verse 7 regarding "taking the name of the Lord" is considered the second commandment. If this system is accepted, then verse 16, which prohibits bearing false witness, is the eighth commandment. To complete the total of ten commandments, verse 17 should be two separate commandments, namely the ninth commandment prohibits coveting one's neighbor's wife (cf. Deut. 5:21a), and the tenth commandment prohibits coveting one's neighbor's house, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey (cf. Deut. 5:21b) (Barton, 1956). This division system assumes that verses 2-3 and verses 4-6 focus on the same theological aspect, namely idol worship. Conversely, verse 17 stresses that "coveting another's wife and coveting another's property" are two distinct commands.

The two perspectives previously mentioned have different underlying principles that lead to a divergence in their understanding of the Ten Commandments, particularly the first and second commandments. This division is reinforced by the fact that the text's composition does not clearly define the boundaries of each commandment. Although Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, refers "ten words" or "ten commandments" in Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13, and 10:4, however, he does not explicitly specify the numbering of each commandment in Exodus 20. Furthermore, the Hebrew text does not contain a numbering system to assist in determining the wording of each commandment. The issue at hand is whether to treat the commands in verses 2-6 as a single commandment or to consider the commands in verses 2-3 and 4-6 as two separate commandments, which has theological implications for the Christian Church (Sarna, 1991). The basic presupposition of this research is that Exodus 20:2-6 consists of two different commands of God's laws. With this presupposition in mind, the goal of this research is not to address of various arguments defending the two different perspectives, but to present textual prove through syntax analysis and literal context study to fortify the above basic presuppositions.

The focus of this paper is to examine the content, structure, and message of Exodus 20:2-6 in order to understand the rationales why the two sections (vv. 2-3 and 4-6) are regarded as two separate commandments. This inquiry seeks to explore the significance of God's communication to the people of Israel and its implications for Christians. To achieve these objectives, this paper implements the exegetical method, which entails a syntax analysis of the text and the study of literal context. The paper is structured into five main sections: (1) Introduction; (2) The study of literal context; (3) Textual analysis of Exodus 20:2-6 and its theological implications; (4) Synthesis; and (5) Conclusion. Through this analytical framework, this paper aims to provide a well-rounded understanding of the significance and relevance of Exodus 20:2-6 to contemporary Christian theology.

Literal Context

The passage in Exodus 20:1-2 serves as an introduction to the Ten Commandments. Childs (1974) asserts that the introduction emphasizes God's motive in giving His laws, which is to promote the worship of the one true God. However, the passage reveals that God's introduction is intertwined with the historical aspect of His salvific action for Israel. In verse 2b, the narrator uses the *hiphil perfect* verb (הוֹצֵאתִיךָ, "I brought you"), affirming that God is the external agent who redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. Therefore, adhering to the Ten Commandments is empirical evidence of Israel's faith in God's salvific action. Furthermore, Mario Veloso presents two points of information about God based on his study of verse 2. Firstly, God introduces Himself as אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ "I am the Lord your God" (vs. 2a), emphasizing His existence as Saviour. This statement corresponds to the idea of the first commandment (vs. 3). Secondly, God focuses on His redemptive action by stating, "I am the one who brought (הוֹצֵאתִיךָ) you out of the land of Egypt" (vs. 2b). Overall, the introduction of God in Exodus 20:1-2 provides a historical and theological framework for understanding the Ten Commandments. It highlights God's motive for giving His laws, and His salvific action in Israel's history (Velso, 2000).

The information about God as a Savior in Exod. 20:2 provides the rationale for why God gave the Ten Commandments (vv. 3-17). Thus, the Ten Commandments in this context function as an apparatus for the redeemed Israel. This presupposition is evident in two literal contexts in the book of Exodus. First, Israel as a minority group was enslaved by the Egyptians (1:8-14). In this context, God commissioned Moses to lead them out of Egypt (cf. Exod. 3:7-8). This action is seen as an expression of God's love and redemption. Second, God made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, saying "I have brought you to myself...and you shall be my special treasure among all peoples" (Exod. 19:3-6). This statement emphasizes the historical aspect of salvation in the form of retrospective information (vs 4). The purpose is that to remind Israel that God's salvific action was solely motivated by His profound love (cf. John 3:16).

The above two literal contexts serve as motifs for Israel's loyalty to the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:3-17). Israel, whom God redeemed from Egyptian slavery, had encountered God at Mount Sinai. Therefore, the Ten Commandments in that context function as pragmatic guidelines to actualize the *modus operandi* of how to love God. Consequently, the Ten Commandments deal with two issues. Firstly, they elucidate the existence and character of God as the Compassionate One and the Savior of Israel from slavery. Secondly, God provides practical instructions on how Israel should express love towards God and fellow human beings. These two points reinforce the foundational presupposition of monotheistic adherents in the pragmatic and theological life of Israel. The principles of monotheism are expressed through two statements: "You shall have no other gods before me" (verse 3) and "You shall not make for yourself an idol... and worship it" (verses 4-6). These two statements institute the belief that God is the sole subject who saves all believers and the only object of worship for those who believe in Him.

The First Commandment

(Exodus 20:2, 3)

Text and Analysis

אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּיַת עַבְדִּים:	I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
לֹא יִהְיֶה-לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי:	<i>You shall have no other gods before Me.</i>

As emphasized in the literal context, verses 1 and 2 contain the "self-identification" of God as the Redeemer. The name of God, יְהוָה "Yahweh" in the first sentence is represented using relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר "who" in the second sentence. This not only confirms the syntactical relationship, where the second sentence functions as an explication regarding the God mentioned in the first sentence, but also reinforces the role of God as the primary agent in the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery. Furthermore, in that pericope, God emphasizes the locus from which the Redeemer deliver Israel, namely "from the land of Egypt, from the place of slavery."

The role of God as the Redeemer in vs. 2 has a consequential relationship with God's command in the first law that is "You shall have no other gods before Me" (v, 3). It means that the motive why the entity "the Lord your God" the only object of worship is because of His role as the Redeemer. It reinforces the presupposition that אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים ("other gods") lack of capacity to save Israel from slavery except Yahweh. Therefore, the syntactical relationship of the phrase אֱלֹהֶיךָ יְהוָה ("I am the Lord your God") in verse 2 is contrasted with the antagonistic entity in verse 3, which is אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים. (Mendenhall, 1967). This reinforces the main presupposition of Moses in verse 3 that the "Lord God" is the Redeemer of Israel, not "other gods," and He is the only worthy object of worship. Hence, the statement in verse 2 stand as a declaration about God who deliver Israel. The same God prohibit Israel to worship other gods in verse 3. The grammatical form of the *hiphil-perfect* verb (הוֹצֵאתִיךָ, vs. 2) reinforces this presupposition, that God plays the role of an active and external subject who deliver Israel from slavery.

The Hebrew phrase אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים ("other gods") is followed by the prepositional phrase עַל-פְּנֵי ("before me") appears in a nominal clause. In the context of verses 2 and 3, the nominal clause emphasizes the existential dimension of two entities that are choices for worship, namely "Yahweh" or "other gods." The primary motive behind the commandment "You shall have no other gods before Me" is to prevent Israel from falling into syncretism or polytheism. Based on this motive, the preposition עַל in the prepositional phrase עַל-פְּנֵי, syntactically serves two functions: Firstly, a *spatial/locative* function, emphasizing the relationship between God and Israel, which requires a commitment to dwell within God (*locus*). This implies that Israel must forsake all other objects of worship (spatially). Secondly, an *adversative* function, wherein worshiping "other gods" opposes

"Yahweh" as the subject who redeemed Israel from Egyptian slavery (see Exod 15:11; Deut. 6:14, 15; 2 Kgs 17:35). Based on this presupposition, God emphasizes in His commandment that there should be no "other gods" in His presence besides Yahweh.

The phrase in plural form **אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים** ("other gods" or "foreign gods"), first appears in the Old Testament in Exod. 20:3. Out of the 46 occurrences in the Old Testament, it is only twice in the book of Exodus (i.e., Exod. 20:3; 23:13) and 17 times in the book of Deuteronomy, the most frequent usage compared to other books in the Old Testament. There are three important facts in the book of Deuteronomy that leads readers to understand the purpose of God's command in Exodus 20:3. First, the idea of "other gods" refers to the deities worshipped by the surrounding nations (Deut. 6:14; 11:28; 13:13). Second, "other gods" refers to material objects, both celestial objects such as "the sun, moon, and stars" (Deut. 17:3) and terrestrial objects such as "wood and stone" (28:36, 62) that serve as objects of worship. Third, worshiping "other gods" means opposing the reality of God as a Redeemer (Deut. 8:19; 11:16; 13:2; 29:26; 31:20). This three information are supported by historical facts (Pritchard, 1969). For instance, during the 3rd millennium BC, various gods were worshipped by the surrounding nations of Israel, such as *Anu* (the god of the sky), *Ki* (the goddess of the earth), *Enlil* (the ruler of the air), *Enki* (the god of fresh water), *Nanna* (the god of the full moon), and many others such as Utu, Gilgamesh, and Neti. Hence, the purpose of prohibition in Exodus 20:3 was to prevent Israel from making "other gods" as the objects of worship.

Based on the syntactical relationship and historical indication mentioned above, it can be asserted that the first legal command formulated in the imperative form is a logical consequence of the declarative statement in verse 2, namely that God is the sole redeemer of Israel. These two statements elucidate the interconnection of three crucial points in Biblical theology, namely love, salvation, and obedience. The human being is redeemed through God's gracious love (vs 2), but obedience to God's law serves as an empirical demonstration of human love and loyalty to God (vs 3). At this juncture, the first commandment functions as a divine institution intended to evaluate the human loyalty and love towards God's redemptive work. Based on this premise, Israel has no rationale to substitute Yahweh with any "other god" as object of worship.

Implication

The self-introduction of God in Exodus 20:2 has theological implications, namely that God, who redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt, is the same God who redeems humanity from the slavery of sin. The core motif of God's salvation of humanity is because of His love for those who have been enslaved by sin (John 3:16). Based on this presupposition, some Christian denominations, such as the Presbyterian Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, believe that God's role as Redeemer in the time of Israel and modern Christian Church is the primary rationale for obedience to God's law (Presbyterian Church, 1999). Therefore, Paul E. Captez (nd) reaffirms the argument that the Holy Scriptures, especially the first five books, contain the history of God's salvation and His instructions on how to live out

salvation practically. This concept has been emphasized by Jesus and the New Testament writers (read John 14:14; Rom. 7:7; Rev. 4:13).

The primary objective underlying God's command in Exodus 20:2-3 is to establish and ensure Israel's unwavering faith in the sole Creator and Savior, thereby fostering monotheism. This command bears significant implications, explicitly prohibiting the emergence of polytheistic and syncretistic practices throughout the eras of Israel and Christianity. Mark Smith's (2001) historical analysis presents undeniable evidence of the adverse influence of polytheism and syncretism on Israel, epitomized by the downfall of both the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah), directly resulting from their embrace of syncretistic beliefs. Moreover, this argument gains further credibility from the historical reality that Israel, during the reigns of prophets and kings, tragically succumbed to the lure of idolatrous worship. Elijah, in his admonishment to Ahab, articulately conveyed, "You have forsaken the LORD's commandments and followed the Baals" (1 Kgs 18:18).

During the era of the New Testament, the significance attached to the practice of idol worship underwent a notable shift, wherein objects created by God were elevated to the status of worshiped entities. For example, at the outset of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul remarked, "they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man-- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things" (Rom. 1:23 NKJ). According to Capetz's analysis, this phenomenon contradicts the theological aspect derived from God's command in Exodus 20:2-3 (Capetz, nd). Long before the apostle Paul, during an encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus was posed a question regarding the paramount commandment, to which He responded by expounding on the concept of the law through love, stating, "You shall wholeheartedly love the Lord your God with the entirety of your being—your heart, soul, and mind" (Mat. 22:36-40). As elucidated by James Sanders and Douglas Ottati, this declaration was taken from Deut. 6:5, and it served to reaffirm the foundational principle of monotheistic adherent as originally intended by God in Exodus 20:2-3 (Sanders, 1987).

In order to illustrate the phenomenon of contemporary idol worship, Marthin Luther postulated that the expressions "other gods" or "idols" within the initial commandment of the modern age signify the pursuit of protection and reassurance in material possessions, rather than wholeheartedly relying on God (Luther, 1959). H. Richard Niebuhr, on the other hand, defines the act of worshiping "other gods" as placing faith in the power of created objects instead of the Creator, namely Yahweh (Niebuhr, 1987). Based on this perspective, Jesus' instruction to love God "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37) is considered the central focus of human life and conduct, spanning from the time of Israel to the contemporary Christian era (Sanders, 1987). The crucifixion of Jesus aims to inspire His followers to renew the covenant commitment between God and Israel at Sinai (1 Cor, 3:6; cf. Jer. 31:31-34).

The Second Commandment (Exodus 20:46)

Text and Analysis

HEBREW (BHS)	ENGLISH (NAS)
<p>לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ: 5 לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קָנָא פֹּקֵד עֹן אָבֹת עַל־בְּנִים עַל־שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רְבָעִים לְשָׁנָא׃ 6 וְעִשֵׂה חֻסֵּד לְאֲלֹפִים לְאֹהֲבָי וּלְשֹׂמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי׃ ׀</p>	<p>⁴You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.</p>

The second commandment of God comprises two primary sentences, both formulated as imperative sentences. The initial main sentence entails the prohibition command, "You shall not make for yourselves an idol" (vs. 4a) (Hunt, 2003). This sentence is succeeded by three subordinate clauses, distinguished by the presence of the Hebrew relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר, which provide supplementary information about the idol in the phrase פֶסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה "image or any likeness," employing the subsequent construction:

Main Clause	Relative Pronoun	Subordinate Clause
לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה	אֲשֶׁר	בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ
	וְאֲשֶׁר	מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם
	וְאֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת	לָאָרֶץ׃

The central idea presented in verse 4 revolves around the prohibition of producing an image, referred to as פֶסֶל in Hebrew. This term generates related words like פֶסֶל and פֶסֶל, generally meaning "image" or "idol." These words encompass the materials employed for sculpting, such as "stone, clay, wood, or metal" (cf. 2 Kings 21:7) (Holladay, nd). In the King James Version, this term is rendered as "graven image," which Danker defines as a "symbol of worship entity." (Danker, 1992). The grammatical structure of the *qal-imperfect* verb in the phrase לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ ("you shall not make") followed by the prepositional phrase לְךָ ("for yourself") subtly

emphasizes the imperative nature (Faur, 1978). The Septuagint translation renders the phrase "for yourself" as εαυτοῦ, derived from the root word σεαυτοῦ, carrying a reflexive dative case. This grammatical form indicates that the Hebrew phrase לך conveys a semantic tone contradicting the prepositional phrase in the first commandment, לְפָנַי ("before me"). Consequently, this further strengthens the assumption that in the first commandment, God prohibits the syncretistic belief of worshiping "other gods" apart from the "God who redeemed Israel." In the second commandment, God specifically forbids Israel from redirecting their worship from the "redeeming God" to any "deity" visualized through various forms of sculptures, including those representing God Himself (Curtis, 1985).

The locus reference of diverse forbidden idols is manifested through three Hebrew subordinate clauses. Firstly, the clause אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מֵעַל "that is in heaven above" encompasses a range of avian creatures and celestial bodies (moon, stars, sun) that God strictly forbids from being represented as idols and worshipped (Marrassini, 2012). Secondly, the clause בְּאֶרֶץ מַתְּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר "on the earth below" pertains to various carved wooden or tree-based objects, crafted idols made from precious metals (gold, silver, bronze), and different terrestrial animals that are fashioned into idols and used for worship (Salih, 2015). Thirdly, the clause בְּמַיִם בְּתַת־לְאָרֶץ "in the water under the earth" encompasses a variety of aquatic creatures or marine life. The depiction of these beings as idols and their use as objects of devotion are explicitly prohibited by God in the second commandment. Hence, these three references establish the locations where diverse object entities are visualized and employed for worship (Sheehan, 2016). The veneration of such idols was prevalent in the Ancient Near East, including regions like Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt (Faur, 1978). The account of the six-day creation in Genesis 1 reaffirms that all these entities are creations of God (Collins, 1890).

The second primary assertion encompasses a commanding prohibition concerning the act of "worshiping" or "serving" molten figures, explicitly conveyed as לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם "You shall not worship them or serve them" (Exodus 20:5). The verb תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה "bow down deeply" signifies an act of reverence performed within ritualistic ceremonies linked to the worship of idols (Fox, 1990). The identical verb is employed in the surrounding verses to depict the act of idolatrous worship:

Exodus 23:24	“You shall not <i>worship</i> (לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה) <i>their gods</i> , nor serve them,…”
Joshua 23:7	“you may not associate with these nations, … or serve them, or bow down (לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה) to them.”
2 Kings 17:35	“You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down (לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה) yourselves to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them.”

The act of תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה, commonly translated as "worship" or "bow down," towards a specific object implies a hierarchical relationship between the worshipper and the worshipped object, with the former in a position of inferiority (servant) and

the latter in a position of superiority (master). This verb is derived from the root חׁוה in the *hishtaphel* imperfect form and conjugated in the reflective voice, originating from the *hiphil* form (Holladay, nd). The subsequent Hebrew verb, עָבַד , is derived from the root עבד meaning "work" or "serve as a slave" and belongs to the *hophal* imperfect form with the reflective voice, also originating from the *hiphil* form. Although the first verb appears in the *hishtaphel* imperfect case and the second verb appears in the *hophal* imperfect case, they both fall under the same category, representing the passive and reflective forms of the *hiphil* (causative) verb. The primary function of the *hiphil* verb form is to describe active-causative actions, illustrating actions driven by external forces (Choi, 2003). Consequently, idol worshippers are motivated by the fundamental belief that gods possess power and is personified in the form of an idol. Building upon this point, the implicit purpose of the second commandment, "you shall not worship idols" (Exod 20:5b), asserts that idols crafted by humans and used for worship hold no inherent power (Driver, and C. Briggs 2007).

The prohibition in verse 5b is grounded in the use of the Hebrew adjective קָנָן , which etymologically signifies "jealous, envious, zeal" (cf. Deut. 4:24; 5:9; Exod. 34:14) (Marpay, Giawa, nd). This term appears nine times in the Hebrew Bible, primarily as an adjective describing the attributes of God, with seven instances found in the Pentateuch (Exod. 20:5; 34:14 (2x); Num. 25:13; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15) (BibleWorks nd). Within the Hebrew Bible, קָנָן carries a broader semantic range. When applied to human attributes, it conveys "jealousy" (Prov. 6:34; 14:39; 27:4), "suffering" (Song 8:6), and "enmity, anger, wrath" (Num. 5:14-30; Isa. 11:13). Concerning the attributes of God, the term encompasses two meanings. Firstly, it signifies "activity in a punitive sense," evident in various texts such as Num. 25:11, Deut. 29:19, and Ps. 79:5. Secondly, it denotes God's opposition to foreign nations, akin to the English term "zeal" conveying "enthusiasm, passion" (e.g., 2 Kings 19:31; Isa. 37:32) and "pugnacity," implying a readiness to engage in conflict or argument (Baumgartner, nd).

Based on the definition, the term קָנָן in the context of Exodus 20:5, with God as the subject, signifies God's act of retribution against those who defy the commandment "You shall not make for yourself a carved image... and worship it." (Gross, 1997). This notion is reinforced by the subsequent statement in verse 5b, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children." The punishment is bestowed upon Israel if they "fashion an idol and worship it," an act synonymous with the expression "who hate Me" or "those who do not love Him." The consequence of this punitive nature, ascribed to God's קָנָן , is at odds with God's conduct in verse 6, which entails $\text{וְעָשִׂהָ לְעַמּוּדָה}$ or "showing loving kindness" (verse 6a) towards "those who love Me and keep My commandments." The syntactical relationship between these verses aids readers in comprehending that the essence of the second commandment revolves around "loving God" (cf. Mat. 22:37-40). The ensuing table encapsulates the contrasting characteristics embodied by the two parties within this syntactical relationship found in the text:

The Commandment of God		The Character of God	
לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פִסֵּל	do not make for yourself an <i>idol</i> "	אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא	I the Lord God, am <i>jealous</i> God
לֹא תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם	do not <i>worship</i> or serve them	וְעָשִׂה חֶסֶד וְלִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתַי	I show <i>loving</i> <i>kindness</i> to thousands
יְהוָה וְלִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתַי “Love me and keep my commandments”			

This table serves as a visual representation that demonstrates the comprehensive nature of God's laws, which are inseparable from His very character. This correlation is further strengthened by three specific points outlined within the above table. First and foremost, the rationale behind God's commandment prohibiting the creation and worship of idols (vs. 4, 5) originates from His boundless "lovingkindness." This quality of God's love is conveyed through two distinct terms in the text: חֶסֶד, meaning "lovingkindness" (a noun/adjective), and אָהַב, meaning "love" (a verb). The semantic equivalence of these terms affirms a cause-and-effect relationship, where acts of love inevitably produce "lovingkindness." (Abin, 2015) In essence, "lovingkindness" stands as the very essence of love itself. Secondly, the attribute of jealousy attributed to God in this context is intricately connected to חֶסֶד, or "lovingkindness." This signifies that God's act of "visiting the iniquity" is not to be understood as an act of vengeance, but rather an integral aspect of God's loving character. Thirdly, as human beings, our response to God's commandments entails both "loving God" and "obeying His commandments."

The author of the Gospel of John reaffirms the theology that the adherence to commandments serves as tangible proof of one's love for God (cf. John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 4; 2 John 1:6) (Blanco, 1992). Consequently, considering the context of God's commandment in Exodus 20:4-6, the act of engaging in idolatrous worship by means of statues is deemed a form of resistance or rejection of God's love. In the introduction to the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2), God explicitly declares Himself as the entity responsible for redeeming Israel from the enslavement of sin. This redemptive act, as confirmed in Exod 19:4-6), was exclusively carried out by God out of His profound love. The Gospel of John echoes this same notion (John 3:16). Consequently, the creation and veneration of idolatrous statues are seen as actions that devalue the significance of God's love and sacrifice as the Redeemer.

Implication

The primary commandment in the initial decree prohibits Israel from engaging in the worship of "other deities" revered by the populace of Egypt (Ra, Re, Osiris, Isis, Horus, Anubis), the inhabitants of Palestine (Anat and Astoret), or the people of Mesopotamia (Enlil, Marduk, Ishtar, Ea/Enki) (Hunt, 2003). It distinctly establishes that the God of Israel, who liberated them from the bonds of Egyptian enslavement, is their sole object of devotion (Hunt, 2003). The subsequent directive within the second law prohibits Israel from crafting idols resembling diverse animals and engaging in their veneration. Implicitly, this commandment affirms that the entities or celestial bodies worshipped are creations of God. Within this framework, Barton argues that the prohibition against worshipping "other gods" apart from the Redeeming God differs from the prohibition against idol worship outlined in the second law (Barton, nd). He maintains that the commandment " You shall not make for yourself a carved image...and bow down to them nor serve them (Exod. 20:4, 5) does not originate from a formal text containing a specific prohibition against the use of idols. Prior to receiving the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, the practice of idol worship was prevalent among the Israelites. Hence, the objective of the second law is to eradicate such practices within the Israelite community (cf. Deut 4:15, 16).

Joshua eloquently conveyed the second commandment of the law to the succeeding generation of Israelites. His declaration resounded with a potent message: "Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, "lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female (Deut 4:15-16, NKJV). This proclamation finds reinforcement in the works of Eugene H. Merrill and Duane L. Christensen, who assert that God's self-revelation at Horeb transpired solely through His resonant voice and the enlivening fire, which embodies the Spirit of God, thereby precluding the utilization of material objects such as idols (Merrill, 2001). Moreover, John Barton expounds on the theological ramifications of Joshua's statement, particularly concerning the prophetic visions depicted in Ezekiel 1-2. Barton confirms that while the radiance of the Lord can be apprehended through His resounding voice, the all-consuming fire, and the presence of the four animate creatures that resemble a human countenance, a lion's visage, an ox's likeness, and an eagle's profile (Ezekiel 1:10; 10:14), there exists no substantial basis to perceive an object (idol) as an embodiment of God's presence (Barton, nd).

Approximately seven hundred years after the Ten Commandments were given by God at Sinai, the prophet Isaiah reminded Israel of the grandeur of Egypt. He declared, Their land is also full of silver and gold, And there is no end to their treasures; Their land is also full of horses, And there is no end to their chariots. Their land is also full of idols; They worship the work of their own hands, That which their own fingers have made. (Isa. 2:7-8). This passage provides retrospective information to the Israelites at Mount Sinai regarding the idolatrous practices they witnessed in Egypt. Isaiah affirms that the golden and silver statues crafted by human hands were turned into objects of idol worship by the Egyptians. Consequently, the second commandment emphasizes that the God of Israel cannot

be visualized through creations of God. Violation of this commandment is considered resistance against the existence of God (Isaiah 3:9-10).

The closer context in which Israel violated the commandment occurred when the Israelites crafted a golden calf statue and worshipped it while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai (Exodus 32) (Hayes, 1990). The text states,

Then all the people tore off the *gold rings* which were in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron.⁴ And he took *this* from their hand, and *fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it into a molten calf*; and they said, "*This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.*" (vv. 3-4, NAS)

The statement "this is your god, O Israel" reinforces the purpose of establishing the golden calf as an object of worship. (Dam, 1997). It is important to note that the worship of the golden calf does not represent any of the gods but rather serves as a representation of God. Although the statue is a representation of God and the festival held to honour God, such actions are considered to be in opposition to God's law: "They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them" (Exod. 32:8) (Bailey, 2013). The same occurred when Jeroboam became king in the Northern Kingdom; he established two places as centers of worship, namely Dan and Bethel. Jeroboam erected statues in these two places as representations of the God of Israel, and the purpose of the festivals held by Israel was to honour the God who brought them out of Egypt (1 Kgs 12:25-13:10; particularly verses 28-32) (Paton, 1998). These actions were against God's law: "Now this thing became a sin" (1 Kgs. 12:30). These two examples of literal contexts affirm that the creation of statues as representations of God is regarded as being contrary to God and His laws.

Synthesis

The prohibition commandment against "worshipping other gods" apart from Yahweh, and the prohibition commandment against "creating and worshipping idols," are two distinct legal decrees. According to Barton, violating the first commandment is regarded as cultic apostasy, while violating the second commandment is seen as spiritual ignorance (Barton, nd). Concerning the worship of idols, in ancient Israel, idols were initially seen as representations of God (Exod. 32; 1 Kgs. 12). However, as time went on, idols were erected to represent foreign deities (Deut 12:2-3; Jer. 11:13; Ps. 115:4-5). The presumption of the Catholic and Lutheran Church is that if an idol represents a foreign god, then the first commandment (Exod 20:2-3) and the second commandment (Exod 20:4-6) are considered as a single law because both commandments pertain to the worship of idols (Palut, 1981)(Palut, 1981).

To challenge this presumption, Barton argues that idol worship encompasses not only the worship of "other gods" and "idol gods," but also the visualization of God in the form of idols (Barton, nd). This paper agrees with this presumption on one point, specifically that the first commandment (vv. 2-3) and the second commandment (vv. 4-6) equate to idol worship if the intended idols represent false gods (Barton, nd). However, the immediate context suggests that Israel fashioned

idols as representations of the true God, not merely false gods (cf. Exod. 32; 1 Kgs. 12). Nonetheless, such actions were deemed as defiance against God and His law. Consequently, visualizing God in the form of an "idol" (worshipping incorrectly) and worshipping "other gods" (holding syncretistic beliefs) are two distinct laws.

In the prophetic writings, Israel receives warnings about the perils of adopting idolatrous worship practices from pagan nations. An example can be found in the book of Isaiah, where he expresses, "Those who make an image, all of them *are* useless,.... They neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed;... Who would form a god or mold an image *That* profits him nothing?" (Isa. 44:9-10). This rhetorical question serves as a poignant reminder to Israel regarding the idolatrous practices prevalent among pagan nations. In its immediate context, Isaiah confirms the existence of a solitary God in verses 1-8 and proclaims in verses 21-29 that this very God is their Redeemer. As previously explained, the immediate context of the second commandment within the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:4-6) is closely tied to the worship of the "golden calf" (Exod. 32) during Moses' receive of the commandments on Mount Sinai. Bible scholars generally concur that the worship of the golden calf was influenced by idolatrous customs observed in Egypt (Stuart, 2007). However, the distinction, as elucidated by Terence E. Fretheim, lies in the fact that the Egyptians revered the statue as a representation of a deity, whereas Israel fashioned the golden calf as a symbol of God and treated it as an object of worship (31:1, 5) (Fretheim, 1991). Therefore, worshipping statues as divine representations or any gods apart from the God of Israel is deemed as idolatry. Although these two commandments are connected in this context, they encompass two distinct aspects of the overall commandment.

Conclusion

After carefully examining the syntax and studying the literal context, it can be concluded that the first two prohibition commands (Exod 20:2-6) represent distinct yet interconnected laws. The initial command, being the foremost law from God, stands as the fundamental principle among the other nine laws, pertaining to whom one should believe in and worship – either the "Redeeming God" or "other gods" (Exod. 20:1-3). The underlying motivation behind this command is to preclude the influence of idolatrous practices ("other gods") in the land of Palestine, which the Israelites were on the brink of inhabiting. Thus, the primary objective of the first prohibition command is to safeguard Israel from external threats and protect their relationship with God, specifically discouraging the belief in "other gods." It can be understood as an endeavour to dissuade the pursuit of alternative deities for worship, distinct from the God of Israel.

The second command from God, regarding the prohibition of "making and worshipping idols" (Exod 20:4-6), constitutes a law that forbids Israel from worshipping the true God in an incorrect manner. The principal purpose of this law is to prevent Israel from creating idols in the form of various animals as physical representations of God's presence. This command underscores that Yahweh cannot be encapsulated by an "idol" and made an object of worship. The second command serves to counter internal threats to Israel's relationship with God, specifically addressing the way they worship Him. It is worth noting that the first five books of the Old Testament affirm that the Tabernacle is the sole exception to the second

prohibition command. The Tabernacle is an instrument utilized by God to symbolize His presence among the Israelites (Hunt nd), rather than being an idol.

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