

**ANICONISM IN THE SECOND COMMANDMENT OF THE  
DECALOGUE IN EXODUS 20:4-6 AND ITS INNER-BIBLICAL  
INTERPRETATIONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

**An Exegetical and Theological Study  
of Exodus 20:4-6, Exodus 32:1-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20**

by

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**A Thesis**

**Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements**

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**The Department of the Old Testament Science**

**The Faculty of Theology**

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## Declaration

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Summary

**Title: Aniconism in the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6 and its inner-biblical interpretations in the Old Testament: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Exodus 20:4-6, Exodus 32:1-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20**

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The aim of this study is to highlight the significance of the prohibition of making any image of God as found in the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6 with its inner-biblical interpretations in Exodus 32:1-6 and in Isaiah 40:18-20. This study has discussed the close connection between the prohibition of making any image of God in the second commandment of the Decalogue, the idea of Yahweh's incomparability in the introduction and the command to worship God only in the first commandment. God's incomparability prevents Israel from worshipping any other god by making images of them or making any image of God. The 'construct of the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue' serves as a linchpin concept in our understanding of the prohibition of making any image of God. The aniconism matriculated in the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6 in relation with the introduction and the first commandment in Exodus 20:2-3 forms the basis for the prohibition of making any image of God from the Sinai event onwards.



This construct in Exodus 20:2-6 is shared with Exodus 32:1-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20. There an inner-biblical interpretation of the aniconism of the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6 in relation with the introduction and the first commandment in Exodus 20:2-3 explicates and applies the meaning of the command in a new situation.

Chapter 1 deals with the statement of the problem and the hypothesis of this study, its methodology, theological rationale, and the aim of this study.

Chapter 2 discusses that the prohibition of making any image of God in the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6 is important, not only as a phenomenon in the Pentateuch, but also as the provenance of aniconism in the rest of Old Testament. Exodus 20:4-6 can be considered as the explicit traceable provenance of the prohibition of making any image of God in the Pentateuch and the rest of Old Testament. The ‘introduction and first two commandments of the Decalogue construct’ provides a framework within which the meaning of the prohibition of making any image of God in the second commandment can be understood in the context of the introduction of the Decalogue in Exodus and the first commandment of the Decalogue. The second commandment of the Decalogue is sometimes backed up by only the first commandment of the Decalogue and sometimes by both of them.

The origin of the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6 as the prohibition of making any image of God whether it comes from the early or later stages of Israel’s history is discussed with the discussion on the arrangement of the Decalogue in the Sinai pericope (Ex 19:1-24:11) and the relation between the two Decalogues in

Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21. The sharp differences of opinions on the provenance of the prohibition in the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6 is dealt with. This study supposes that the dating of the prohibition on making any image of God of the Decalogue should be attributed to Moses' time as stated in the text of the Pentateuch.

Chapter 3 deals with one key Pentateuchal text for the prohibition of making any image of God, Exodus 32:1-6, as an example that the second commandment represents the prohibition on making any image of God in relation with the introduction and the first commandment of the Decalogue proclaiming God's incomparability, which is called 'the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue construct' in this study. Exodus 32:1-6 is regarded to be an interpretation of the prohibition of making any image of God in the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6.

Chapter 4 deals with Isaiah 40:18-20, which forbids idol-fabrication and the worship of an image of God in its relation with the proclamation of God's incomparability, as well as with the worship of other gods and their images. This chapter deals with the similarity of the negative attitude toward worship of God through images found in the legal and prophetic parts of the Hebrew Bible. Theologically speaking, Isaiah's message is in line with the Pentateuch, and flows from the office of the prophet as a plenipotentiary of God to condemn the transgression of the covenantal law. This similarity of the idea between them is seen in respect of its linguistic aspects. Considering the rules of the nature of analogies between texts, there can be seen a correlation between the introduction and first two commandments of the Decalogue in

Exodus 20:2-6 and the passage dealing with the incomparability of God and the idol-fabrication in Isaiah 40:18-20.

The final chapter summarizes the flow of the argument in this thesis dealing with three phenomena of aniconism in the Old Testament and suggests the conclusion of this thesis based on the result of the exegetical and thematic study on the three passages.



## Key words

- Aniconism
- Decalogue
- Golden Calf episode
- I am Yahweh your God
- Idol-fabrication
- Inner-biblical interpretation
- Introduction and first two commandments construct
- Isaiah
- God's incomparability
- Prohibition of making any image of God
- Prophetic covenantal lawsuit
- Rhetorical question
- Second commandment
- Sinai pericope
- Worship

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*Soli Deo Gloria.*

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## Abbreviations

### Commonly Used Sources

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
<i>AJSL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANETS	Ancient Near Eastern Texts Studies
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ARTU	An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit,
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
<i>AusBR</i>	<i>Australia Biblical Review</i>
AV	Authorized Version, King James Version
BA	Biblical Archeologist
BAR	Biblical Archeology Review
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BD	The Egyptian Book of the Dead
BEvT	Beiträge zur Evangelische Theologie
BET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie.
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum Iovaniensium
<i>BI</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BK	Bibel und Kirche

BKAT	Biblische Kommentar: Altes Testament
BN	Biblische Notizen, Bamberg
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BSC	Bible Student's Commentary
<i>BSO(A)S</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, Berlin.
CAD	The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBC	The Cambridge Biblical Commentary
CC	Continental Commentaries
ComC.	Communicator's Commentary
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica, Old Testament
COT	Commentaar op het Oude Testament
<i>CQR</i>	<i>Church Quarterly Review</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Current in Research</i>
CsBC	Cornerstone Biblical Commentary
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
DBS	Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplement
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
<i>ErIs</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel, Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>

FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literature des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FTL	Forum Theologicae Linguisticae
<i>GOTR</i>	<i>Greek Orthodox Theological Review</i>
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HALOT	Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IB	The Interpreter's Bible.
<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
ITC	International Theological Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JHNES	Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies
JPOS	Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society
JPSOT	Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series

JSSM	Journal of Semitic Studies Monographs
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological studies</i>
JTSA	Journal of Theology of South Africa
KTU	Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit
LRS	Leipzig Rechtswissenschaftliche Studien
LXX	Septuagint; Greek translation of the Old Testament
MT	Masoretic Text
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NCB	New Century Bible
NIBCOT	New International Biblical Commentary of the Old Testament
NICOT	New International commentary on the Old Testament
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTESup	Old Testament Essays Supplement
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën
POT	De Prediking van het Oude Testament
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
<i>RB</i>	<i>Révue biblique</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RLA</i>	<i>Reallexikon der Assyrologie</i>
<i>RTP</i>	<i>Review of Theology and Philosophy</i>

SBLDS	Society for Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society for Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bible-Studien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SBTS	Studies in Biblical Theology Series
SEÅ	<i>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</i>
SEL	Studi epigrafici e linguistic sul Vincino Oriente antico, Verona
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semeia</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Study Monograph Series
StBL	Studies of Biblical Literature
StOr	Studia Orientalia
SVT	Supplement to Vetus Testamentum
TBC	Torch Bible Commentaries
TBü	Theologische Bücherei
THAT	Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament
ThSt	Theologische Studiëns
ThT	Theologische Tijdschrift
Thw	Theologische Wissenschaft. Studium und Beruf
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TRE	Theologische Reallencyklopädie, Berlin
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen, Kevelaer</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplement of <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
Vg	Vulgate

WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie, Berlin</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, Berlin</i>
ZThK	<i>Zeitschrift für theologie und Kirche</i>

### **Bible Books with Apocrypha**

Gn	Genesis
Ex	Exodus
Lv	Leviticus
Nm	Numbers
Dt	Deuteronomy
Jos	Joshua
Jdg	Judges
Ruth	Ruth
1 Sm	1 Samuel
2 Sm	2 Samuel
1 Ki	1 Kings
2 Ki	2 Kings
1 Chr	1 Chronicles
2 Chr	2 Chronicles
Ezr	Ezra
Nh	Nehemiah



Es	Esther
Job	Job
Ps	Psalms
Pr	Proverbs
Ec	Ecclesiastes
Can	Canticles, Song of Songs
Is	Isaiah
Jr	Jeremiah
Lm	Lamentation
Ezk	Ezekiel
Dn	Daniel
Hs	Hosea
Jl	Joel
Am	Amos
Ob	Obadiah
Jnh	Jonah
Mi	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zph	Zephaniah
Hg	Haggai
Zch	Zechariah
Ml	Malachi
Mt	Mathew



Mk	Mark
Lk	Luke
Jn	John
Ac	Acts
Rm	Romans
1 Cor	1 Corinthians
2 Cor	2 Corinthians
Gl	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Phlp	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1 Th	1 Thessalonians
2 Th	2 Thessalonians
1 Tm	1 Timothy
2 Tm	2 Timothy
Tt	Titus
Phlm	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews
Ja	James
1 Pt	1 Peter
2 Pt	2 Peter
1 Jn	1 John
2 Jn	2 John
3 Jn	3 John
Jd	Jude



Rv	Revelation
1 Esd	First book of Esdra
2 Esd	Second book of Esdra
Tob	Tobit
Jdt	Judith
AddtEsth	Rest of the chapters of the Book of Esther
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Sir	Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach
1 Bar	First book of Baruch
LetJer	Letter of Jeremiah
Song3	Song of the Three
Sus	Daniel and Susanna
Bel	Daniel, Bel and the Snake
PrMan	Prayer of Manasseh
1 Macc	First book of Maccabees
2 Macc	Second book of Maccabees

### **General Abbreviations**

B.C.	Before Christ
cf.	confer (compare)
ch(s)	chapter(s)
B.C.E.	Before Common Era
ed(s).	editor(s), edited by

e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> (for example)
esp.	especially
ET	English translation
et al.	et alii (and others)
f(f).	folio(folios), that is, f. following page / ff. following pages
i.e.	<i>id est</i> (that is)
tr	translation, translated (by)
v(v).	verse(s)