

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Thesis

This study discussed the Decalogue construct in Exodus 20:2-6: its introduction and the first two commandments. The prohibition on making any image of God in the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6 is important as it not only refers to the phenomenon of prohibiting divine images in the Pentateuch, but also serves as the explicitly traceable provenance of aniconism in the rest of the Old Testament. The aniconism in Exodus 20:2-6 is also found in Exodus 32:1-6 and Isaiah 40:18-20. This study proposed that the construct found in Exodus 20:2-6 was not only the phenomenon of aniconism but was also the explicitly traceable provenance of the prohibition of making any image of God in the rest of the Old Testament.

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

In chapter 2, the problem was discussed whether Exodus 20:4-6 can be considered as the basis for the prohibition of making any image of God and was, moreover, the provenance of aniconism in the Old Testament. It was pointed out that God's incomparability demands not only the prohibition of the use of any images of other gods for cult worship, but also entails the prohibition of making any image of God himself whatsoever. The second commandment is interwoven with the first commandment of the Decalogue in the context of the exclusive loyalty to God and the introduction of the Decalogue in context of God's incomparability.

The prohibition expressed in the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6 must be seen in conjunction with the first commandment in Exodus 20:3 and against the background of Israel's experience in history that Yahweh is incomparable in Exodus 20:2. The introduction in the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2 is the foundation of the Ten Commandments that follow. The first commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:3 has absolute priority over other commandments as the first and fundamental requirement of those who desire to enter into the covenant relationship with Yahweh. As the first commandment forbids any association with other gods for those who are part of Yahweh's covenant, the second commandment, along with the other two commandments that follow, describes the special dimensions of that relationship with the Lord. The people of Israel are not to worship any other gods at all. Following this most fundamental of requirements are three specifications of how Yahweh *is* to be worshiped. The first of these specifications is the prohibition of the use of any image of Yahweh in worship.

In Exodus 20:4, the making of a פֶּסֶל, (“idol”) is prohibited. The exact meaning of verse 4, however, is not quite clear and therefore the following questions can be raised: Is this a separate commandment or only an elaboration of verse 3? If it stands in direct relationship verse 3, the next question would be: Does “idol” in verse 4 refer to an idol of one of other gods referred to in verse 3, or does it intend any sort of representation of Yahweh?”, namely, whose image is being forbidden to Israel in the second commandment, Yahweh's, or those of other gods in rivalry with Yahweh?

On the one hand, those who view verses 4-6 as an elaboration of verse 3 encounter problems when they include images of Yahweh here. This is an apparent move beyond verse 3. This can be overcome when worshiping images of Yahweh is understood to be idolatry as well. On the other hand, those who view verses 4-6 as a separate commandment tend to regard it as a prohibition of making any image of Yahweh. In the first commandment of the Decalogue it is clearly stated that not only the making of other gods and their images but also paying homage to them was strictly forbidden. The prohibition in the second commandment in verses 4-6 should be understood against the background of Yahweh's incomparability stated in the introduction in verse 2. The second commandment excludes any iconographic representation of Yahweh. Images of other deities are automatically excluded as a consequence of the first commandment. A separate prohibition, however, was required to ban images of Yahweh as well. Basically the meaning of the prohibition in the second commandment is that one shall not make for himself for the purpose of serving God, any image, any carved object, such as is commonly found among the heathen peoples. Neither is he to make anything in the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth – in a word, of any creature or any created thing in the world. This absolute prohibition of any likeness emanates from the absolute transcendental concept of the Godhead. This means that making any image of God would result in God finding Himself standing in the company of idols being in competition with other gods' images referred to in Exodus 20:3. The second commandment therefore commands as follows: no worship of God through image. Would this happen, the incomparable God of Israel, would have to compete on a level with the idols for his rights

The in-textuality of Exodus 20:2-6 can confirm the thesis of this study. First, it is God who speaks to his people, Israel (v. 1) and who brought them from the bondage of Egypt (v. 2). The formula in Exodus 20:2 “I am Yahweh your God (אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ) is used to express God’s incomparability. Furthermore, the combination of the phrase אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ with אֲנֹכִי gives decisional use to the meaning of the name of God.

Secondly, the first commandment in Exodus 20:3 makes clear and emphasizes that in contrast to God who brought Israel from the bondage of Egypt (v. 2) and thereby became her king, these אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים in verse 3b are not those who brought Israel from the land of Egypt. God is the only one who brought them from the bondage of Egypt (v. 2). The phenomenon that the plural אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים (other foreign gods) (Ex 20:3) is used here, not the singular form, אֵל אֲחֵר, (‘another god’), makes it clear that it is not only forbidden to associate with any specific single deity, but with all the deities in general, whoever they may be.

Thirdly, the ground for the prohibition of an image, (לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ פֶּסֶל) in verse 4a is motivated by “I am Yahweh your God, (אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ) in verse 5. This phrase functions as the motive for the prohibition of making any image of God. Thus, the prohibition of making any image of God has to be understood within the context of God’s incomparability indicated in verses 2-3. אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא in verse 5 confirms that making any image of God stand in stark contrast to God’s incomparability. Thus, making an image of God is prohibited for his covenant people.

In sum, there was prohibited forming images of Yahweh for purposes of the cult in the second commandment (vv. 4-6) against the prohibition of making any image of anything in the creation for the purpose of worship in the first commandment in Exodus 20:3 and the idea of Yahweh's incomparability as found in the introduction of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2.

The question was posed whether the Decalogue came from the early stage of Israel's history or later. This was discussed in terms of the provenance of the prohibition of making an image of God found in the Decalogue. It is supposed in this study that the dating of the prohibition of making an image of God of the Decalogue should be literally attributed to Moses' time as it is literally stated in the text. It appears that Israel's historiographers were fully aware of the fact that the contrast between the true God and the other gods became apparent only during the time of the exodus. The idea of Yahweh's incomparability clearly emerged through the event of the exodus. An investigation into the possibility that the prohibition on making images of God existed before the promulgation of the Decalogue at Sinai was, however, also done. Nevertheless, since the events at Sinai, idolatry explicitly became unacceptable, condemned, and judged by God, this study proposed that the explicitly traceable prohibition on making any image of God can be traced back to the promulgation of the second commandment of the Decalogue at Sinai as stated in Exodus 20:4-6. The hypothesis was posed and argued that the prohibition of making any image of God in the Decalogue of Exodus 20:1-6 served as the provenance for all later prohibitions found in the rest of the Old Testament. As a result of the research done, the thesis of this study, therefore, stated that the aniconism expressed in the second commandment of the

Decalogue in Exodus in the Hebrew Bible explicates the explicitly traceable provenance of the prohibition of making any image of God from the Sinai event onwards.

In chapter 3 Exodus 32:1-6 was discussed as a key text in the Pentateuch for the prohibition of making any image of God. It was used as an example that the second commandment was interpreted as a prohibition of making any image of God in the context of God's incomparability. Exodus 32:1-6 can be considered as an interpretation of the older prohibition in the second commandment in the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6 prohibiting any image of God.

The issue raised in chapter 3 was whether Exodus 32:1-6 deals with other gods whom Israel was seeking to follow, or rather with an attempt to make any image of the one true God. It was formulated as follows: "Does the golden calf episode represent polytheism or idolatry?"

The events of the golden calf occurred because of Moses' absence. Moses played a role in the ratification of the covenant (Ex 19-24). In Exodus 32:1 the **אֱלֹהִים**, which is requested to serve as a substitute for Moses doesn't necessarily imply that Moses himself has been to the people as an **אֱלֹהִים**. The people's request is for a substitute to take Moses's place in leading them. The substitute, however, is not Aaron, but the golden calf, although Aaron was appointed as Moses' substitute in Exodus 24:14. The calf functions as a challenge to Moses. It also seems clear that the calf was actually intended to be a symbol of the divine presence in a more real and direct way than Moses himself was. The calf was seen as the real embodiment of the presence of the Lord. In

verses 4ff. the acclamation of the calf as the divine agent of the exodus may seem slightly discordant with the concern for having אֱלֹהִים to go before the people.

What Aaron and the people did was in many ways in agreement with what Yahweh has specified in his covenant. Yet the people's attempt to identify the calf with Yahweh by echoing Exodus 20:2 is to be seen as a parody of the true nature and purposes of Yahweh.

Although Moses brought Israel up from Egypt, it was actually Yahweh who brought them from Egypt. Therefore, when Aaron made the gold calf and said to Israel, the people, אֱלֹהֵי אֲלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם (“these are your gods, O Israel, who brought up Israel from Egypt”) it is evidently indicating the change of loyalty from Yahweh to others. It is evident that this phrase was borrowed from the expression, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם (“the God who brought you up Israel from Egypt”) in Exodus 20:2. It illustrates a parallel with the idea that it is only God who rules the history, referring to Yahweh as “I am He”. Aaron may have intended to present the people with a palpable symbol, a kind of empty throne. The Israelites, however, went astray after the concrete representation, and treated it as an actual deity. They regarded the calf as an emblem of the Lord, and they considered this emblem itself worthy of divine honour, thus making the calf a partner, as it were, of the Lord. Hence the plural. Other “gods” are not named, but Israel attributed characteristics to the golden calf using a Yahwistic pronominal clause, “the God who brought up Israel from Egypt” (Ex 20:2). Their “new religion” is virtually “a parody on Yahwism.” The calf does not represent any new god, but is identical with Yahweh, who has brought the people to

Sinai and entered into a relationship with them on the basis of which he will continue to go with them in future.

The people received the calf accompanied by Aaron's confession "these are your gods, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." (Ex 32:4). Aaron, in response, declares a sacred day to Yahweh, not to the calf, or to any other god or gods. Aaron proclaimed, "tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord, not to the calf" (Ex 32:5). The word of Aaron in verse 5, *לַיהוָה*, characterized the altar and its sacrifices during the festival as something done for Yahweh confirming that this is a renewal of the covenant. This is made clear in the composition by identifying the calf with the rescue from Egypt, by Aaron's construction of an altar for sacrifices, by his declaration of a *מִנְחָה*, "feast" for Yahweh, and finally, by the people's worship the next morning with the very offerings Yahweh has specified for himself in verse 6. This scene reminds us that the elders of Israel sat down to eat and drink after making a covenant with God in Exodus 24:11.

It is evident that the emphasis in Exodus 32:1-6 is primarily on the second commandment. Israel has violated Yahweh's own unambiguous requirement about how he is to be worshipped. The Israelites saw the calf as a representation of the Lord, rather than one of another deity. The composite of Exodus 32:1-6 is not an account of the abandonment of Yahweh for other gods. It is an account of the transfer of the center of authority of faith in Yahweh from Moses and the law and the symbols he has announced, to the golden calf without a law, and without any symbols beyond itself. Moses is the representative of a God invisible in mystery. The calf is to be the representative of that same God, whose invisibility and mystery is compromised by a visible image God has

forbidden. It was, therefore, not only just against the first commandment, but also against the second commandment they transgressed. They deformed God in the image of his creation, fashioning an image of Yahweh and declaring that this creation is the god who brought them out of Egypt. The calf is, thus, not only the equation of an idol with God, but also the pagan representation of the true God.

The result of an investigation into the in-textuality of Exodus 32:1-6 confirms that the people replaces God's servant Moses by the golden calf, by which Israel have really given up on Yahweh.

אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ (Ex 32:1aβ).

זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלֵנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם (Ex 32:1bα).

The god is the one who walks and leads them (v. 1aβ). It stands in contrast to Moses who brought them from Egypt (Ex 32:1bα).

אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ (Ex 32:1aβ)

זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלֵנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם (Ex 32:1bα)

אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלֹךְ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם (Ex 32:4b)

While Exodus 32:1bα depicts Moses as the servant of Yahweh who brought Israel up from the land of Egypt, Exodus 32:1aβ says that it is the golden calf who brought Israel from the land of Egypt, being in accordance with the statement in Exodus 32:4b that designate the golden calf as “Your God, O Israel, who brought Israel from the land of Egypt, and attributing the redemptive grace to the golden calf” (v.4b).

אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יִלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ (Ex 32:1aβ)

זֶה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הָאֵשׁ הָעֵלִינוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם (Ex 32:1bα)

אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלֹדָה מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם (Ex 32:4b)

From a stylistic point of view, firstly, references to the event of bringing Israel up out of the land of Egypt (Cassuto 1967:411; cf. Morberly 1983:46) can be seen in parallelism with verse 32:1aβ and with verse 1bβ. A similar implication can be seen in the parallelism of verse 1bβ with verse 4b. An antithesis in verses 7-8 also points to the supplanting of Moses by an אֱלֹהִים (Cf. Ex 32:1, 4, 7, 8, 11, 23, 33:1).

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶהְרֹן פָּרְקוּ נְזָמֵי הַזֶּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵי נְשֵׁיכֶם (Ex 32:2)

בְּנִיכֶם וּבְנִתֵיכֶם וְהָבִיאוּ אֵלַי

וַיִּתְּפְרוּ כָל-הָעָם אֶת-נְזָמֵי הַזֶּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל-אֶהְרֹן (Ex 32:3)

וַיִּקַּח מִיָּדָם וַיִּצַר אֹתוֹ בַּחֶרֶט וַיַּעֲשֶׂהוּ עֵגֶל מִסָּכָה (Ex 32:4a)

Verses 2-3 and verse 4a refer to the procedure of making an image of God. Aaron took what the people handed over to him and made it into an idol casted in the shape of a calf (v.4) and fashioned a molten calf - a calf overlaid with molten gold. It was only one golden calf, which was intended to represent one god/God and not many gods.

וַיֵּרָא אֶהְרֹן וַיִּבֶן מִזְבֵּחַ לְפָנָיו וַיִּקְרָא אֶהְרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר חַג לַיהוָה מָחָר (Ex 32:5)

וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ מִמָּחָרָת וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת וַיִּגְשׂוּ שְׁלָמִים וַיֵּשֶׁב הָעָם לֶאֱכֹל (Ex 32:6)

הָעָם לֶאֱכֹל וְשָׂתוּ וַיִּקְמוּ לְצַחֵק

Verses 5-6 depict a ceremony for making a covenant between God and Israel as indicted in Exodus 19-24. Thus, it can be considered as a renewal of covenant with Yahweh, not making a covenant with some other god.

Secondly, from a stylistic point of view, as soon as an אֱלֹהִים is made as a substitute for Moses (Morberly 1983:46), who delivered God's word speaking to his people, it turns out to be only a image of God, who is not able to deliver God's word to his people. As Moberly (1983:46-47) contends, "the first is that Moses is the one who uniquely mediates Yahweh's guidance and leadership to the people. It is in and through Moses that Yahweh is known and his saving deeds experienced. The second is that the calf is a challenge to Moses' leadership. It is a rival means of mediating Yahweh's presence to the people."

Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that the golden calf is an image of God. As a result of making an image of God, Yahweh was compared with a god and degraded into a god.

Inner-biblical interpretation evinces that Exodus 32:1-6 can be linked to Exodus 20:2-6. The people forces Aaron to make a god. The god is the one who walks with them and leads them (v. 1: עֲשֵׂה-לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ). It is contrasted with God who just speaks to his people (Ex 20:1) and his word is delivered by his servant Moses to his people (Cf. Ex 32:1b α).

עֲשֵׂה-לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ (Ex 32:1a β)

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים (Ex 20:2)

It was Yahweh himself who brought Israel from the land of Egypt (Ex 20:2). While it is in accordance with the statement in Exodus 20:2 that it is Yahweh himself who brought Israel from the land of Egypt, by depicting Moses as the servant of Yahweh who brought Israel from the land of Egypt (Ex 32:1b α), it stands in contrasted to the statement in Exodus 20:2 that it was the golden calf who brought Israel from the land of Egypt, by designating the golden calf as Yahweh who brought Israel from the land of Egypt and attributing the redemptive grace to the golden calf (Ex 32:4b).

זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם (Ex 32:1b α)

אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלֹף מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם (Ex 32:4b)

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים (Ex 20:2)

On syntactical level, the same syntactic structure is shared by the two passages. In Exodus 20:2, the name of God is Yahweh, your God, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ (Ex 20:2) who brought Israel from the bondage of Egypt. Yahweh, your God, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ (Ex 20:2), however, is replaced by the servant of God, Moses whom God used as a his tool to bring his people from Egypt (Ex 32:1). Moreover, Yahweh, your God, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ (Ex 20:2) is eventually substituted by the golden calf. Although the same name of Yahweh, your God, (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ) is used (Ex 20:2; Ex 32:4b), it now has an absolutely different reference: one is God, the other is the golden calf, the image of God. Each of them has the subordinate following clause by which God identifies himself in relation to a peculiar history. The phrase זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ (Ex 32:1b α) is not identical word with יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ in Exodus 20:2, while the phrase אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Ex 32:4b) is the same

as יהוה אלהיך (Ex 20:2). However, the phrase זֶה מוֹשֶׁה הָאֵלֵּים (Ex 32:1) can be regarded as identical with יהוה אלהיך (Ex 20:2) in its designating reference, while the phrase אלהיך ישראל (Ex 32:4) is reverting to the fact that Yahweh, your God brought Israel from the land of Egypt (Ex 20:2), that is, in reality, the phrase in Exodus 32:4b attributes the work of salvation to the golden calf, not Yahweh.

Exodus 32:2-4 gives a description of the process of the making of the golden calf. When the people saw the golden calf, they identified it as God “who brought Israel from the land of Egypt, אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים” (Ex 32:4b).

A possible direction of the allusion between the two passages can be suggested. Having made a linguistic inventory, it was necessary to inquire whether any inner-biblical allusion or influence (borrowing) can be indicated. The linguistic correlation between Exodus 20:2-3a and Exodus 32:1, 4 satisfies the conditions for inner-biblical allusion or influence. Text dependence as well as direction of this allusion can therefore be illustrated.

The phrases used in Exodus 32:1 and 4 are evidences that these passages used another text, i.e. Exodus 20:2. The expressions of God’s self-predication like “I am Yahweh, your God” in Exodus 20:2 is almost directly found in Exodus 32:1-6. However, the phrases, “who brought us up out of Egypt” (32:1aβ, 32:1bα and 4b) commonly agree with Exodus 20:1, but both are slightly different in details. While Exodus 32:1bα is the same as Exodus 20:1 in its designating reference that Moses represents Yahweh,

Exodus 32:1aβ and 4b are not identical with Exodus 20:1, but replaced Yahweh by the golden calf.

Exodus 20:4-6 and Exodus 32:2-3, 5-6 also show similarity in theological themes. The phrase *וַיִּשְׂתּוּ וַיֵּאָכְלוּ* in Exodus 24:11 agrees with *וַיִּקְמוּ לְצַחֵק* in Exodus 32:6. Both indicate an element of the Sinai Covenant. *וַיִּקְמוּ לְצַחֵק* was probably added in Exodus 32:6b. Thus, this similarity gives a hint that Israel identified the feast with its eating and drinking as an integral element of making a covenant at Sinai. As a result, what they actually did was to perform a renewal of the Sinai Covenant with God Yahweh during the golden calf event.

Thus, the result of exegesis of Exodus 32:1-6 and the inner-biblical interpretation of Exodus 20:2-6 by 32:1-6 confirms that Exodus 32:1-6 explicated the meaning of the prohibition in Exodus 20:4-6. This indicates that Exodus 32:1-6 is an interpretation of Exodus 20:4-6 and alluding to Exodus 20:4-6.

In chapter 4, this study dealt with Isaiah 40:18-20 where forbidding the worship of an image of God stands in relation to the proclamation of God's incomparability, as well as the worship of other gods and their images.

This chapter, firstly, sought exegetically to confirm the conclusion that God's incomparability requires the prohibition of "worshipping God through an image" by studying Isaiah 40:18-20 within its macro-unit as the context of the passage. Isaiah 40:18-20 was therefore analyzed in the context of its macro units in Isaiah 40:12-31.

This in turn was investigated in terms of the rhetorical questions used forbidding idol-fabrication in Isaiah 40-55: Isaiah 41:1-7, 44:6-20 and 46:5-7, and Isaiah as a whole.

Isaiah 40:18 stated the fact that God is not comparable with other gods and their images and clearly indicated that He cannot be replaced by any image.

The process of making an idol is described in Isaiah 40:19-20. It gives a description of the process of manufacturing a single object by two or three craftsmen: Casting an image of bronze in a mould; hammering out thin plates of gold as plating for the bronze statue; soldering these plates of the gold to join with silver-solder; choosing the wood, finding a craftsman capable of working it, and fastening the idol to its base in a permanent way.

The real purpose of Isaiah 40:19-20, however, is not the description of how to make an idol. The immovability of the idol is an important element in Isaiah's polemic. It brings out the absurdity of the reliance on idols, putting them in sharp contrast to God's incomparability. The mocking songs on the fabrications of idols commence each time with a rhetorical question, describing the process of fabrication and end with a mocking of the immovability of the idols. The statue of the god is firmly established-but this means that it cannot be moved either; that is the irony of it, an irony that we can see is taken up again later in the further polemic against idols in the rest of Isaiah 40-55.

Isaiah 40:18 and Isaiah 40:19-20 is structured according to the scheme of God's incomparability and the prohibition of making any image of God. The structure of the unit in Isaiah 40:18-20 can be read as the answers to parallel the rhetoric questions in

verse 18. The rhetorical question in Isaiah 40:18 is “to whom will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?” It can be said that the theological point of departure in Isaiah 40:18-20 is the rhetoric self-assertion of God in verse 18. The answer to this rhetorical question is presented in verses 19-20. The meaning of Isaiah 40:19-20 in relation to God’s incomparability in verse 18 is the insistence on the prohibition of making any image of God.

It has been amply demonstrated in chapter 4 that Isaiah 40:18-20 fits perfectly into the larger context, and proceeds from the preceding verses with the theme of Yahweh’s immeasurability and incomparability. To speak here in verse 19-20 in terms of the nothingness of the idol is a different way of speaking about Yahweh’s incomparability. Isaiah 40:18-20 should be understood in the light of the context in which it stands.

In relation to God’s incomparability, the prohibition against making idols and images of other gods is always tightly bound up with the prohibition to worship God through images. Isaiah 40:18-20 putting some rhetorical questions regarding idol-fabrication in the context of God’s incomparability forbids not only making images of other gods, but also the use of any image of God himself to serve Him. The meaning of the passage with its rhetorical question regarding idol-fabrication in Isaiah 40:18-20 is, thus, not only a critique on serving other gods, but also implies the prohibition against serving God by using any image, as is pertinently forbidden by the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2-6.

Secondly, the theological-thematic consideration of Isaiah 40:18-20 was also discussed. In Isaiah 40:18-20 the prophet declares Yahweh to be the only God all over the world,

who can never be compared with anything represented in the form of an image. Therefore, in Isaiah 40:18-20, the proclamation of God's incomparability demands the prohibition of worshipping him through images. Israel's affirmative and fair response to God's self-predications would have been to abandon not only the idols of other gods and their images, but also worshipping God through images. Isaiah saw Israel as the covenant community that had the obligation to follow the religious and ethical tenets of the Sinai covenant. In a very careful, and tactful ways - such as the use of the formula "I am Yahweh, your God", he reminded his audience that they were called to live responsibly as the community of the covenant in his prophetic covenant disputation. When Isaiah asks the question, "to whom can God be compared", reminding Israel of their covenant responsibility, he is employing a kind of self-predications in the way that he reused the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue construct given to Israel at Mt. Sinai. Isaiah's references to the covenant responsibility, in connection with this God's self-predication in Exodus 20:2-6, is seen in Isaiah 40:18-20.

The point of this chapter is, therefore, that a rhetorical question with a idol-fabrication passage which belongs to a context which emphasizes God's incomparability, requires the prohibition against representing Yahweh with an image to Israel as the covenantal community.

In chapter 4, this study also dealt with the similarity in negative attitude found in the legal and prophetic parts of the Hebrew Bible towards worshipping God using images. Isaiah's message which is in line with the Pentateuch flows from the office of the prophet as a plenipotentiary of God that has to condemn the transgression of the covenantal law.

This similarity of thought can be seen in respect of several linguistic aspects. The rhetorical pattern in Isaiah 40:18-20, which expresses the same theological theme as Exodus 20:2-6 is relevant to the questions mentioned above to determine the direction of the allusion between the two texts.

Isaiah 40:18, presenting no answer to the rhetorical question, because it is self-evident, represents the affirmation of God's incomparability. Isaiah 40:18 also makes the incomparability of God clear. Isaiah 40:19-20 functions as a duplicated answer of the question asked on God's incomparability in verse 18. It shares this idea with Exodus 20:2-6 and gives evidence of the dependence of one text upon the other.

As Leonard (2008:246) mentions, the rhetoric pattern in Isaiah 40:18 is evidence that this passage uses another text, i.e. Exodus 20:2-3. The expression of God's self-predication "I am Yahweh, your God" is not directly found in the context of Isaiah 40:18-20. The rhetorical questions regarding idol-fabrication in Isaiah 40:18-20 read within its macro-unit, also having rhetorical questions in an idol-fabrication context, showing it is used as a compositional device in Isaiah 40-55 and as part of Isaiah as a whole being a *Genre* of prophetic covenant disputation may indicateds the direction of the allusion between the two passages.

From a thematic perspective, the discussion above, on relevant parallels, showed a consistent pattern. There is a close connection between the proclamation of God's incomparability and the prohibition against the worship of God through images. This can be seen in both Isaiah 40:18-20 and the introduction and first two commandments

of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2-6. The Isaiah texts were either a reiteration or a reversal of the Exodus text.

Taking these thematic and linguistic agreements in consideration, showing that Exodus 20:2-6 predates Isaiah 40:18-20, it can be concluded that the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2-6 is the source of Isaiah 40:18-20. It shows the same trend when dealing with the rhetorical question regarding idol-fabrication, to remind Israel of the covenant responsibility that they are not to serve other gods including making their image, even the image of God, because of God's incomparability indicated by the Sinai covenant.

Conclusion of Thesis

This thesis suggests three aspects of the phenomenon of aniconism in the Old Testament.

First, the prohibition of making any image of God in the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6 is directly related to the idea of God's incomparability in Exodus 20:2. This in turn is linked to the introduction in Exodus 20:2 stating God's redeeming of Israel from their bondage in Egypt and the first commandment in Exodus 20:3 commanding to worship only God. This can be seen in the construct of 'the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue' in Exodus 20:2-6. God's incomparability forbids serving other gods, including making images of them (Ex 20:3), even the image of God himself (Ex 20:4-6). The prohibition of Exodus 20:4-6 was also shared in the golden calf episode in Exodus 32:1-6.

Secondly, the rhetorical question regarding idol-fabrication in the passage in Isaiah 40:18-20 shares the view point of the construct of ‘the introduction and the first two commandments of the Decalogue’ by applying the prohibition of the second commandment of the Decalogue to make any image of God.

Thirdly, the provenance of the prohibition of making any image of God in the Old Testament can be traced back to the second commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:4-6.

Summarizing these three statement reducing them to one single thesis: The prohibition of aniconism in the Old Testament is based on the idea that Yahweh is absolute unique and not representable by any image, or something in this vein.