

Statues and Images

by Sebastian R Fama

"You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:4). And thus, we are told that the making of statues and holy images is idolatry. But if we read the next verse this argument evaporates into the ether. There we read: "You shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Exodus 20:5). So, the commandment is not prohibiting the making of statues and images, The commandment is prohibiting the making and worshipping of statues and images.

We know this prohibition does not include the making of all images because God required those same Jews to make images for other purposes. In Exodus 36:8 concerning the tabernacle curtains we read: "The various experts who were executing the work made the dwelling with its ten sheets woven of fine linen twined, having cherubim embroidered on them." And Exodus 37:7, concerning the Ark of the Covenant: "Two cherubim of beaten gold were made for the two ends of the mercy seat..."

In 1 Kings we read some of what was in Solomon's Temple: "In the sanctuary were two cherubim, each ten cubits high, made of olive wood" (6:23). "This rested on twelve oxen" (7:25). Finally, "On the panels between the frames there were lions, oxen and cherubim" (7:29).

In Numbers 21:9-11 Moses is commanded by God to make a brass serpent. He was to hold it up for the people of Israel to see. And all those who were bitten by the live serpents looked upon it and were saved.

Eusebius wrote the only surviving early history of the Church. He talks of color portraits of Peter, Paul and Jesus that remained to his own time (325 AD). He also mentions a statue of Jesus and the woman cured of a hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34). He relates that the statue was in front of the woman's home (*The History of the Church* 7:18). Now if such practices are wrong but were common in the first century, why is there no condemnation of them in the New Testament? Certainly, such a "blasphemy" would not have been overlooked.

Even in our own day, most Christians have photos of family members. Statues of great men and women can be seen everywhere. Children play with dolls. What is that you say? That is different. Those images and likenesses are not made for worshipping. Exactly! But if the strict interpretation of Exodus 20:4 was a reality, you would not be allowed to produce any of those things.