

Deuteronomy 4:15-20

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Moses warns the Israelites against making any idols as a way of worshipping Yahweh. Doing so would reduce the creator (God) to the level of His creatures.

This section is built upon the previous one which explained God's encounter with His people at Mount Horeb (Sinai). It will be recalled in that day God manifested Himself to His people from the mountain in a blazing flame. The people could hear a voice but did not see any physical form (v. 12). For this reason, Moses here warns Israel against making any idols to represent God. He said, *"So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire."* Moses taught the people that God has no physical appearance. The New Testament confirms this teaching by telling us that "God is spirit" and no human eyes have seen Him at any time ([John 4:24](#); [John 1:18](#)). Because God cannot be portrayed in any form, the Israelites were prohibited from crafting any image to represent Him.

Moses warned the Israelites against making any image to represent God because He is beyond human comprehension. God has no physical gender — *male or female*. To conceive God as having a physical form not only displeases Him but also misrepresents Him ([Exodus 20:4-5](#)). Making images — such as *the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth* — to portray God would be misleading and inappropriate. The reason is because God is spirit and is the sole creator of everything: the heavens, the earth, the men and the beasts ([Genesis 1](#)). He has created the universe by His "great power" and by His "outstretched arm" ([Jeremiah 27:5](#)). Therefore, He cannot be represented by any of His creatures.

Furthermore, Moses prohibited Israel from worshipping the inanimate objects of heavens such as the *sun*, the *moon*, or the *stars*. He said, *"And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven."* The reason for this prohibition is because these objects had

been allotted by God to be at the service of human beings. As such, they are not worthy of worship. Yahweh gave man dominion over the things He created ([Genesis 1:26-28](#)). Therefore, Yahweh alone is worthy of worship and is sovereign over all His creation. To worship any other god is to be disloyal to the Suzerain Yahweh, and instead serve another superior.

The sovereign God *has taken* Israel for Himself and *brought them out of the iron furnace, from Egypt*. The phrase translated as “*out of the iron furnace*” explains the severity of the suffering Israel endured in Egypt. Having been the dominant economic and military force of the world at that time, Egypt was almost invincible (untouchable) from a human perspective. However, Yahweh rescued His people from Egypt by the “greatness” of His “arm” ([Exodus 15:16](#)), so that they might be *His own possession*. This account once again demonstrates that Yahweh is incomparable. He has supreme authority over His creatures and therefore should not be represented by anything.

Biblical Text:

¹⁵ So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, ¹⁶ so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, ¹⁷ the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, ¹⁸ the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth. ¹⁹ And *beware* not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. ²⁰ But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today.