

**Shayla:** Does the Bible prohibit sculpture?

**Meforshim:**

Let's examine the three passages you referred to.

- **Exodus 20:4-5 HCSB** Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. (5) You must not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' sin, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,
- **Deuteronomy 4:15-19 HCSB** "Be extremely careful for your own good--because you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire-- (16) not to act corruptly and make an idol for yourselves in the shape of any figure: a male or female form, (17) or the form of any beast on the earth, any winged creature that flies in the sky, (18) any creature that crawls on the ground, or any fish in the waters under the earth. (19) When you look to the heavens and see the sun, moon, and stars--all the array of heaven--do not be led astray to bow down and worship them. The LORD your God has provided them for all people everywhere under heaven.
- **Deuteronomy 27:15 HCSB** 'Cursed is the person who makes a carved idol or cast image, which is detestable to the LORD, the work of a craftsman, and sets *it* up in secret.' And all the people will reply, 'Amen!'

These well-known mitzvot do not altogether prohibit ALL sculpture. We were not forbidden to make ANY image. This is made clear in the fact that even in Yahweh's sanctuary, the ark of the covenant was adorned with cherubs.<sup>1</sup> The same image was apparently worked into the 10 curtains of the Tabernacle.<sup>2</sup> We know that this was all right because Yahweh commanded their fabrication and later sealed the matter by regularly allowing His voice to be heard from between the angelic statuary.<sup>3</sup>

Flower work was worked into the ornamentation of the golden candlestick. The large brazen sea was covered in sculpted figures and rested on the backs of twelve brass oxen.

- **1 Kings 7:23-26 HCSB** He made the cast *metal* reservoir, 15 feet from brim to brim, perfectly round. It was seven and a half feet high and 45 feet in circumference. (24) *Ornamental* gourds encircled it below the brim, 10 every half yard, completely encircling the reservoir. The gourds were cast in two rows when the reservoir was cast. (25) It stood on 12 oxen, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east. The reservoir was on top of them and all their hindquarters were toward the center. (26) The reservoir was three inches thick, and its rim was fashioned like the brim of a cup or of a lily blossom. It held 11,000 gallons.

One should also consider that even Moses used sculpture in the wilderness to good effect and it even had prophetic meaning! I'm referring of course to the bronze serpent.<sup>4</sup>

Then you have the Philistines sending a guilt offering of five gold "tumors" and five gold "mice" as they returned the Ark of the Covenant they had taken in battle from Israel.<sup>5</sup> You may say "well that's the godless Philistines". Yes, but the offering was accepted by the Lord.

Further, King Solomon's throne had two lions standing beside the armrests and twelve lions were standing on the six steps leading up to the beautiful chair.<sup>6</sup> It was not until much

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 25:18-20, 22; 37:7-9

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 26:1, 31; 36:8, 35

<sup>3</sup> Numbers 7:89

<sup>4</sup> Numbers 21:8-9

<sup>5</sup> 1 Samuel 6:3-5, 11, 15-18

<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings 10:19-20; 2 Chronicles 9:18-19

later, after the exile, that stricter prohibitions were put in place, forbidding the representation of ANY image of ANY living being. Those laws were developed by common men, not commanded by Yahweh through His prophets.

So, what are we to make of the Halakhic prohibition? First, note that the context is always idolatrous. We cannot make any image of any kind with the purpose of worshipping it. Second, we are forbidden even the attempt to have any given object represent transcendent, omnipresent God the Father. That was Aaron's mistake with the golden calf.<sup>7</sup> The Danites made the same mistake when they set up for themselves Micah's carved image that he had made in Shiloh.<sup>8</sup> The result in both cases was anarchy and mind-boggling sexual promiscuity.<sup>9</sup> This consequence is only confirmed by the fact that when Jereboam made two gold calves and induced the people to worship them, it immediately led to sin.<sup>10</sup>

There is only One who is worthy of that role; of representing the transcendent God to us: Jesus who is,

- [Colossians 1:15 HCSB](#) ...the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation;

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<sup>7</sup> Exodus 32:4

<sup>8</sup> Judges 18:30-31

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 32:6, 19, 25-28; Judges 19; Romans 1:22-27

<sup>10</sup> 1 Kings 12:28-30