

The Attackers: Mandate against Graven Images: 2d Commandment, Ex 20:4–5a; Man Created in the Image of God, Gen 1:27: I am, I ought, I will; Attackers Were Probably Aware Jesus Had a Legitimate Clime to the Throne of Judea; The Roman Denarius: Portrait: Tiberius, Inscription: Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus; Caesar's Apotheosis; the Cult of Emperor Worship in Pergamum

The Mandate against Graven Images

1. The Second Commandment prohibits the production of an idol depicting God or any other thing:
Exodus 20:4 - "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth."
v. 5 - "You shall not worship them or serve them."
2. This commandment, along with the other nine, is central to the Israelite profession of faith to Elohim and is repeated in Exodus 20:23, Leviticus 26:1, Deuteronomy 4:16; 5:8; 27:15 and in the New Testament 2 Corinthians 6:16a and 1 John 5:21.
3. The mandate was interpreted by the priesthood to mean that the Jews were to have no images of any kind that could be or become the object of anyone's worship.
4. The prohibition against idols was to be observed especially in the course of the people's worship. For example, the Pascal lamb was to be prepared for the Passover feast but an image of a lamb was not allowed.
5. No images of humans, any living creature, or objects within the creation were allowed.
6. Genesis 1:27 states that "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them" (NASB).
7. The meaning of *image* in this verse refers to the invisible, immaterial essence of God. The pronoun "Our" describing the image indicates that the essence involved is that which is possessed by the Trinity.
8. The things included in this essence are (1) self-consciousness: They are aware of Their own existence and so is man, (2) moral reasoning power: the innate obligation to one's duty, and (3) self-determination: free will which is independent of divine sovereignty.
9. From this, the essence of God and man may be summarized thusly: I am, I ought, I will.
10. The prohibition against idols was so engrained in the souls of the Jews by the time of the first century A.D., that the writers of the New Testament generally refer to its application rather than as a commandment.
11. Even though Herod the Great and Herod Antipas were Semitic rather than Jewish, they wisely refrained from having their images struck to local coinage knowing the aversion the population had to that sort of thing.
12. Christians that emerged from the Jewish population were confronted with the idolatrous statues of Roman gods, emperors, and soldiers but understood they were not to be worshiped.

13. The Herodians were Jewish but whose interests were strictly political, therefore, avoiding idolatry was both cultural and expedient for their purposes.
14. The scribes and Pharisees were guardians and pedagogues of the oral law whose observation of the Second Commandment was clearly addressed in their teachings.
15. Yet, their complicity with the Herodians in getting rid of the upstart Prophet called Jesus spoke volumes regarding their knowledge and application of the Old Testament prophets regarding the First Advent.
16. Power, position, influence, and approbation were primary concerns for them which trumped their awareness that Jesus was a qualified heir to the throne of Herod Antipas.
17. Therefore, when Jesus asked for the νόμισμα τοῦ κήνσου (*nómisma tou kénσου*): coin of the poll-tax, one of the attackers had an idolatrous denarius on his person eager to provide.

-
4. For the time being, we'll translate *eikón* with the word "image" rather than "likeness" to emphasize the idolatrous nature of the coin in orthodox Jewish theology. Caesar was worshiped as a god and therefore his image on the coin was considered idolatrous.
 5. This is emphasized by what the Lord refers to as the inscription, the noun **ἐπιγραφή (epigraphé)**.
 6. This is a compound noun of *epí* and *grafé* which is correctly translated "superscription" because it is usually above the image.
 7. The study of currency is called numismatics. The vocabulary in that field refers to the "image" of an individual as "portrait" and the "superscription" as an "inscription."
 8. The portrait on the obverse side of the denarius is that of Tiberius and on the reverse that of his mother, Livia.
 9. The inscription on the obverse side of the denarius reads this way in the Latin: TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVSTVS : Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus.
 10. The inscription on the reverse side of the coin reads this way in Latin: PONTIF MAXIM: Pontifex Maximus or High Priest of the Roman religion.
 11. Devotion to emperors started with Julius Caesar but was continued into the first century under Augustus and his successors. It reached Judea during the time of Herod the Great, a close friend of Augustus.
 12. The cult of emperor worship became mandatory throughout SPQR although the Jews were exempted because of their inflexible submission to the First and Second Commandments.
 13. As the Christian faith spread during the first century the Romans put great pressure on them to become involved in the emperor cult. Those who did not faced severe persecution.
 14. The origin of this cult occurred when Julius Caesar declared himself as "god" and posthumously the Senate installed him among the gods:

He died in the fifty-sixth year of his age, and was numbered among the gods, not only by a formal decree, but also in the conviction of the common people. For at the first of the games which his heir Augustus gave in honour of his apotheosis [deification], a comet shone for seven successive days, rising about the eleventh hour, and was believed to be the soul of Caesar, who had been taken to heaven; and this is why a star is set upon the crown of his head in his statue.¹

15. Augustus took advantage of the deification of his father and assumed the Latin title *divus filius*: son of god. The term became an epithet of dead and deified emperors.
16. All of the emperors of the first century subscribed to the cult to a certain degree. By the time of John's writing of the Book of Revelation, the emperor cult was at its peak under Domitian:

The imperial cult, the worship of the spirit of Rome and of the emperor, with its loyalty test of formal incense burnt at the foot of Caesar's statue, found a center, appropriately enough, in Pergamum, and colored the city's life. The first temple of the cult was located there in 29 B.C., and is shown as a device on coins down to the principate of Trajan at the end of the 1st century. In Trajan's honor a second temple was built, and a third was dedicated to Severus. Only the first temple functioned when John wrote his letter from Patmos, but its presence and its ritual was enough to make Rome's authority oppressively apparent in the city. John wrote in reference to the imperial power that challenged Christianity so strongly in this important center of the State religion:²

Revelation 2:13a - "I know where you live, where the throne of Satan is located.

17. Believers lived in Pergamum and attended the church located there. Those who were positive to doctrine were living in a dangerous place but they were not in danger.

¹ Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, *The Twelve Caesars: The Lives of the Roman Emperors* (St. Petersburg, FL: Red and Black Publishers, 2008), 40.

² E. M. Blaiklock, "Pergamum," in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tinney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 4:702.