‘God's second commandment’

The Lord has commanded saying:

(“You shall not make for yourselves an idol, nor any image of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them, for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and on the fourth generation of those who hate me, and showing loving kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.) Exodus 20 : 4

With this commandment, the Lord has commanded us not to make idols or images of anything He has created in heaven and on earth. The Lord points to the idol and the image separately, so the two are to be regarded as being completely different from each other, although an idol can sometimes be an image of something that is the work of God, while an image can sometimes also be an idol.
If the Lord has indicated them separately, then it is right to regard them as two different things.
In reference to these He speaks to us first of bowing down and then of worship, making us realise that we are not to make them objects of worship, nor are we to serve them.
If He had said the opposite, i.e. 'You shall not worship them or bow down to them,' it would not have made sense, because if we do not worship them, then we cannot bow down before them, whereas when we bow down before these things, we are already worshipping them.
To fully understand the meaning of this commandment, we can ask ourselves the following:

1) What is the idol to which the Lord refers?
2) To which images is the Lord referring?
3) Before what should we not bow down?
4) What are we forbidden to serve?
5) Of what is the Lord jealous?
6) What might be the punishment of children of which the Lord speaks?
7) Why does the Lord consider the transgression of the commandments to be hatred of Him?
8) How does the Lord show His goodness for a thousand generations?

‘Answers to the different questions’

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1) What is the idol to which the Lord refers?

The idol referred to by the Lord is primarily that object we make with our hands, which we venerate, attributing to it a holy nature and divine power that it cannot have.
In the Holy Scripture there are many references to these idols that we mistakenly make for ourselves and worship to our misfortune. Three reference citations in brackets follow:

(“You shall have no other gods before me.) Exodus 20 : 3

These gods are the idols or false gods that we make as objects of worship, which we place, for example, inside churches before the Lord.

(Yahweh said to Moses, “This is what you shall tell the children of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall most certainly not make gods of silver or gods of gold for yourselves to be alongside me.) Exodus 20 : 22

Since God is a living spiritual Being everywhere in the heavens, we cannot make gods in gold or silver and then place them beside the Lord and worship them in His place.

(The rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues, didn't repent of the works of their hands, that they wouldn't worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood, which can't see, hear, or walk. They didn't repent of their murders, their sorceries, their sexual immorality, or their thefts.) Revelation 9 : 20

Idols, whatever the material used to make them, are only the work of our hands.
By worshipping an idol we are worshipping the devil by means of it. In fact, the worship of demons is linked to the worship of idols, because we could not worship Satan voluntarily, not being able to see him and not even believing in his existence, but indirectly through an idol, made at his will for the purpose of inducing us into a false worship of God.
In the above quotation, the Lord also makes us realise that the more valuable the material used to make our idol, the greater Satan's deception becomes. In fact, the materials indicated by God are mentioned in descending order of value, of which gold is the worst of all.

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2) To which images is the Lord referring?

When God says no 'image in the form of anything', he is referring to all the images we make for ourselves, which represent something the Lord has created in heaven or on earth, wherever made.
The word 'no' in fact means 'no' image.
Sometimes the Lord calls these images by the name of graven images.
Even though the images we make may seem beautiful or nice to us, it does not mean that it is right to make them, because our way of thinking is not God's way of thinking.
What may be beautiful or pleasing for us may be hateful for the Lord, and what may be hateful for us may be necessary for the Lord.
God, through the prophet Isaiah said:

(Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to Yahweh, and he will have mercy on him, to our God, for he will freely pardon. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways," says Yahweh. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.) Isaiah 55 : 7

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3) Before what should we not bow down?

With regard to prostration, the Lord speaks in the plural, saying 'You shall not bow down to them', so we must not prostrate ourselves either before an idol or before an image, even if that image is not an object of worship or adoration.

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4) What should we not worship?

With regard to worship the discourse is the same as prostration, the Lord says you shall not 'worship them', so we are not to serve either an idol or an image of all that the Lord has created in heaven and on earth.
By rendering worship to the idol, we mean the veneration we render to the idol, from its making and public display, to our bowing down to it and the invocation to obtain some benefit, as if the Lord needed the insensitive ears of a material idol made with our own hands to grant our requests. By image worship, on the other hand, we mean any use of the image, always starting from its creation.

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5) Of what is the Lord jealous?

Regarding the Lord's jealousy, the commandment does not specify what the Lord is jealous of. He is surely jealous of His glory and we can understand this from the following quotation from the prophet Isaiah:

("I am Yahweh. That is my name. I will not give my glory to another, nor my praise to engraved images.) Isaiah 42 : 8

The Lord, however, is not only jealous of His glory but also of the nature He has bestowed on everything He has created in heaven and on earth, otherwise how would one explain His feeling of hatred towards the images that we make, even if they are not the object of worship or adoration that the Lord also calls by the name of graven images? These graven images are not idols, although they sometimes are, but images representing something the Lord has created in heaven and on earth, which we effectively serve through their use.
The following six quotations from the Holy Scripture with reference to God's second commandment make us realise that the Lord hates these images that we make:

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(1)

(You shall not plant for yourselves an Asherah of any kind of tree beside Yahweh your God's altar, which you shall make for yourselves. Neither shall you set yourself up a sacred stone which Yahweh your God hates.) Deuteronomy 16 : 21

(2)

(Yahweh spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them, "When you pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their stone idols, destroy all their molten images, and demolish all their high places. You shall take possession of the land, and dwell therein; for I have given the land to you to possess it.) Numbers 33 : 50

(3)

(But you shall deal with them like this: you shall break down their altars, dash their pillars in pieces, cut down their Asherah poles, and burn their engraved images with fire. For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God. Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, above all peoples who are on the face of the earth.) Deuteronomy 7 : 5

(4)

(These are the statutes and the ordinances which you shall observe to do in the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess all the days that you live on the earth. You shall surely destroy all the places in which the nations that you shall dispossess served their gods: on the high mountains, and on the hills, and under every green tree. You shall break down their altars, dash their pillars in pieces, and burn their Asherah poles with fire. You shall cut down the engraved images of their gods. You shall destroy their name out of that place.) Deuteronomy 12 : 1

(5)

(Observe that which I command you today. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. Be careful, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be for a snare among you; but you shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and you shall cut down their Asherah poles; for you shall worship no other god; for Yahweh, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.) Exodus 34 : 11

(“Behold, I send an angel before you, to keep you by the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Pay attention to him, and listen to his voice. Don’t provoke him, for he will not pardon your disobedience, for my name is in him. But if you indeed listen to his voice, and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies, and an adversary to your adversaries. For my angel shall go before you, and bring you in to the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Canaanite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite; and I will cut them off. You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor follow their practices, but you shall utterly overthrow them and demolish their pillars. You shall serve Yahweh your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. No one will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will fulfill the number of your days.) Exodus 23 : 20

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6) What might be the punishment of children of which the Lord speaks?

The punishment for the children of which the Lord speaks may certainly consist of any ailment inflicted on a child because of the sin of a parent, just as it happened to the descendants of Adam and Eve, that is, to all of us, having inherited death as a consequence of the disobedience of our progenitors.

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7) Why does the Lord consider the transgression of the commandments to be hatred of Him?

Just as keeping the commandments is for the Lord an attitude of love towards Him, because we exalt His Law and therefore his righteousness, the transgression of His commandments is, on the other hand, an expression of hatred towards Him and also of contempt for His Law and sovereignty.

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8) How does the Lord show His goodness for a thousand generations?

With regard to God's goodness, by keeping His commandments we put the Lord in a position to bestow His blessings upon us, even though apparently the wicked on earth enjoy the same blessings as the good. If we do the calculation, it turns out that a thousand generations correspond to about 100,000 years, and since the Lord is a Spirit with eternal life, we cannot doubt what He said with the commandment about His goodness. For when a man is resurrected by God to eternal life in endless bliss, he is continually benefiting from God's goodness through the blessing he has received, namely the resurrection.
The following quotation from the Holy Scripture gives us an insight into the discourse of blessing and cursing towards us, to be understood as projected for eternal life:

(Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of Yahweh your God, but turn away out of the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.) Deuteronomy 11 : 26
