

Deuteronomy 12:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God.

Analysis

Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God. This terse prohibition immediately follows the command to destroy Canaanite altars, pillars, Asherim, and idols (12:3). The lo-ta'asun ken (shall not do so) forbids adopting pagan worship methods even when redirected toward Yahweh. God's holiness demands worship according to His revealed will, not human innovation or syncretistic borrowing from surrounding cultures.

The danger isn't merely worshiping false gods but worshiping the true God falsely. Israel must not combine Yahweh worship with Canaanite forms—setting up pillars, planting sacred groves, or adopting fertility cult practices. This principle establishes the regulative principle of worship: God alone determines acceptable worship, and humans cannot legitimately 'baptize' pagan practices. The second commandment (Exodus 20:4-6) likewise prohibits not just other gods but unauthorized representations of Yahweh himself.

Historical Context

This command introduces Deuteronomy's altar law (12:1-28), centralizing worship at the place God would choose (eventually Jerusalem). Ancient Near Eastern religion featured multiple shrines, high places, and localized deities. Israel's temptation would be to maintain these structures while nominally worshiping Yahweh—the syncretism that plagued Israel throughout the judges and monarchy periods (Judges 6:25-32; 1 Kings 14:22-24; 2 Kings 17:7-23). The prohibition anticipates and forbids the very compromises that would later corrupt Israel.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. In what ways might you be tempted to worship God according to cultural preferences rather than biblical revelation?
2. How does this verse challenge the modern assumption that sincerity matters more than conformity to God's prescribed worship?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	תַעֲשֶׂה וְ	יְיָ	לִיהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:
H3808	Ye shall not do so	H3651	unto the LORD	your God
	H6213		H3068	H430

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 20:23 (Parallel theme): And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them.

Deuteronomy 20:18 (References God): That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God.