

Deuteronomy 28:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

Analysis

Thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left—the condition for covenant blessing is comprehensive obedience, not deviating (lo tasur) from God's commands in any direction. The imagery of **right hand or left** depicts total fidelity to the covenant path, neither through addition (legalistic rigor) nor subtraction (licentious compromise).

The phrase **to go after other gods to serve them** (lalechet acharei elohim acherim le'ovdam) identifies the primary covenant violation: idolatry. The verb halak acharei ("go after/follow") suggests spiritual adultery—abandoning YHWH to pursue other lovers. The issue isn't merely adding foreign deities to Israel's pantheon but transferring allegiance, serving (avad) gods who didn't redeem them from Egypt.

This verse concludes the blessing section (28:1-14), setting up the lengthy curse section (28:15-68) that follows. The stark either/or structure—blessing for faithfulness, curses for apostasy—reflects covenant's binary nature. There's no neutral ground: Israel either walks YHWH's path or abandons it for idols. Deuteronomy's history validates this warning: Israel's persistent idolatry eventually brought the curses to fruition in exile.

Historical Context

The "right hand or left" metaphor appears elsewhere in Scripture for unwavering obedience (Deuteronomy 5:32, Joshua 1:7, 23:6). Israel's subsequent history tragically fulfilled Deuteronomy 28's warnings: the divided kingdom practiced syncretistic worship (mixing YHWH worship with Canaanite Baal worship), leading to Assyrian conquest (722 BCE, northern kingdom) and Babylonian exile (586 BCE, southern kingdom). The prophets consistently identified idolatry as covenant violation meriting judgment (Jeremiah 2:5-13, Hosea 2:2-13).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What "other gods" tempt you to divide your allegiance—money, success, relationships, comfort?
2. How does Jesus's teaching that no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24) echo Deuteronomy 28's demand for exclusive loyalty?

Interlinear Text

אַנְכִּי אֶשְׁר	פְּדָבָרִים	מִקְלָה	תַּסְוֵר	אֵל אֶל
H3808 And thou shalt not go aside	H1697 from any of the words	H3605	H5493	
				H834 H595
מִצְוָה הָיָה אֶתְכָּמָה	יְמִינְךָ	יְמִינְךָ	וְשָׁמְאַל	
which I command	H853 thee this day	H3117	H3225 to the right hand	H8040 or to the left
H6680				
לְעֹבֶדֶם אֶחָר יְמִינְךָ אֶחָר יְמִינְךָ לְלִכְתָּה				
H1980 after	H430 gods	H312 other	H5647 to serve	
H310				

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 30:21 (Word): And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

Deuteronomy 5:32 (References God): Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

Deuteronomy 11:16 (References God): Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;

Joshua 23:6 (Word): Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left;

2 Kings 22:2 (Parallel theme): And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.