

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

וְלֹא	תָסּוּר	מִכָּל	הַדְּבָרִים	אֲשֶׁר	אֲנִי
H3808	And thou shalt not go aside	H3605	from any of the words	H834	H595
	H5493		H1697		
מִצִּוִּי הַ	אֲתָךְ	הַיּוֹם	יָמִין	וּשְׂמֹאל	אוֹלָם
which I command	H853	thee this day	to the right hand	or to the left	
H6680		H3117	H3225	H8040	
לְעִבְדָם:	אֲחֵרִים	אֱלֹהִים	אֲחֵרִים	אַחֲרַי	לְלֵךְ
	after	gods	other	to serve	
H1980	H310	H430	H312	H5647	

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.