

Exodus 20:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Analysis

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

The first word is singular 'Thou' (תְּאַתִּי, lo yihyeh lekha)—God addresses each Israelite personally. 'No other gods' acknowledges rival claimants exist but denies their legitimacy. 'Before me' (עַל-פָּנָי, al-panai) literally 'before my face' or 'in my presence'—since God is omnipresent, this means 'anywhere, ever.' The command establishes monotheism as covenant foundation. It's not philosophical monotheism ('only one God exists') but covenantal monotheism ('YHWH alone is YOUR God'). The New Testament expands this: our God is money, comfort, approval, self—whatever commands ultimate allegiance. Jesus declares serving two masters impossible (Matthew 6:24). The first commandment is also greatest (Matthew 22:38).

Historical Context

In a polytheistic ancient Near East where every nation had patron deities, this radical monotheism set Israel apart. The command doesn't deny other gods' existence but their authority—YHWH alone deserves worship.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What rival 'gods' compete for ultimate allegiance in your life (money, comfort, approval)?
2. How does Jesus' declaration that we cannot serve two masters apply this commandment today?

Interlinear Text

אַל־יְהוָה־לֹכֶד־אֶחָד־עַל־פְּנֵיכֶن

H3808 H1961 H0 gods Thou shalt have no other H5921 before me
H430 H312 H6440

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 5:7 (References God): Thou shalt have none other gods before me.

Matthew 4:10 (References God): Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Psalms 81:9 (References God): There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god.

Isaiah 46:9 (References God): Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,

Deuteronomy 6:5 (References God): And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Jeremiah 25:6 (References God): And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt.

Deuteronomy 6:14 (References God): Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you;

Jeremiah 35:15 (References God): I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from

his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me.

1 Corinthians 8:6 (References God): But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

Revelation 19:10 (References God): And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

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