

Psalms 81:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god.

Analysis

There shall no strange god be in thee (לֹא־יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֱלֹהִים זָר)—El zar (foreign, strange god) echoes the First Commandment (Exodus 20:3) and the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4). The preposition **in thee** emphasizes internal allegiance, not just external idols. **Neither shalt thou worship any strange god**—the prohibition extends from heart (possessing) to practice (bowing down).

This verse stands at the psalm's theological center: God delivered Israel from Egypt specifically to be their exclusive God (Exodus 20:2-3). Idolatry wasn't merely breaking a rule but covenant adultery, rejecting the Husband who redeemed His bride. The New Testament intensifies this: covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5), and 'you cannot serve God and money' (Matthew 6:24).

Historical Context

Despite this clear command, Israel's history is a catalog of idolatry: the golden calf (Exodus 32), Baal worship (Judges-Kings), and syncretism that ultimately caused exile. The very generation delivered from Egypt fell into idolatry within weeks (Exodus 32). The prophets consistently diagnosed Israel's political and moral failures as rooted in broken allegiance to Yahweh.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What 'strange gods' (money, approval, comfort, success) compete for the allegiance God demands exclusively?
2. How does idolatry function as spiritual adultery against the God who 'married' His people in covenant?
3. Why is external religious observance insufficient if internal affections are divided among multiple 'gods'?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	יְהוָה	בְּךָ	לֹא	ל	יְרַ	אֵל	אֵל
H3808	H1961	H0	god		There shall no strange		H3808
			H410		H2114		
תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה			לֹא	ל	יְכָר:		
be in thee neither shalt thou worship			god		any strange		
H7812			H410		H5236		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 43:12 (References God): I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.

Deuteronomy 32:12 (References God): So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.

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