

NJPS ²I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: ³You shall have no other gods besides Me.

OJPS ²I am the LORD thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. ³Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

RASHI **2 Your God.** "Your" is in the singular in Hebrew, and why? To give Moses something to use in Israel's defense when they made the Golden Calf. He said, "Let not Your anger, O Lord, blaze forth against Your people" (32:11). You did not command them not to have other gods, you commanded it to me alone. **Who brought you out of the land of Egypt.** That alone is enough for you to be enslaved to Me. Another reading: He had to identify Himself because He appeared at the sea as a warrior, but here as an old man, full of mercy. "Though I have changed My appearance, I don't want you to think that there are two powers in heaven. I am the one who brought you out of the land of Egypt and saved you at the sea." Another reading: "Thunder" of v. 15 is literally "voices." Though you heard so many voices, coming from every direction, don't think that there are many divine powers. **From the house of bondage.** From the house of Pharaoh, to whom you were slaves. Or perhaps it means what the Hebrew literally says, "from the house of slaves," and that the Israelites were the slaves of slaves? No, "the LORD ... rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut. 7:8). They were not the slaves of slaves, but of the king.

3 You shall have no other gods. I might take v. 4 to mean merely that they cannot make idols in the future; from this verse I know that ones that already exist must be

RASHBAM 20:3 You shall have no other gods besides Me. For I alone brought you out of Egypt.

IBN EZRA 2 I. It is He whom one must know, love, and cleave to, be ever mindful of His presence, and the fear of Him must never leave one. **Who brought you out of the land of Egypt.** Judah Halevi (may he rest in peace) once asked me why God did not say here, "Who created heaven and earth, and who created you." My reply (in brief) was that "I the LORD" was enough for the enlightened; but the unenlightened needed tangible proof of why they should serve Him. **The house of bondage.** For you were like a slave living in a house of slavery. Compare Lev. 26:13, "I the LORD am your God who brought you out from the land of the Egyptians to be their slaves no more."

3 You shall have no other gods. One must not believe those who say that God has given the Angel of the Presence [N] power over the world, nor make images to channel the power of the constellations. Negative commandments always involve the

[N] This term refers to a being who some thought ruled the world in God's stead, preventing Him from having to (as it were) "get His hands dirty" with the material aspect of existence.

*2 אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים *3 לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי

נרפס טעם התחנות בלבד והוא למערבאי, והפסוקים נספר לפי מהדורת לעטעריס למערבאי לא נספר בסכום הפסוקים ז. 3.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ What is the meaning of the first commandment, "I the LORD am your God" (v. 2)? ♦ Why do some of the first five commandments mention "the LORD" and some "the LORD your God," while none of the last five mention God at all?

NAHMANIDES 20:2 I the LORD am your God. This is a positive commandment, both teaching and commanding them that they must know and believe that the Lord exists and that He is their God. He preexists everything, and everything comes from Him by His will and His power, and He is the God whom they must serve. **Who brought you out of the land of Egypt.** His bringing them out of Egypt teaches about His existence and His will, for we came out of Egypt through His knowledge and His providence. It also teaches about creation, for if the world had existed for all eternity, nature could not be changed and miracles would be impossible. It also teaches about His unlimited power, which teaches about His unity: "In order that you may know that there is none like Me in all the world" (9:14). Those who came out of Egypt are the ones who know and can testify to all these things. **The house of bondage.** For they had been Pharaoh's captives. This reminds them that now it is the great, glorious, and awesome Lord whom they are obligated to serve as their God, for He redeemed them from Egyptian slavery: "For it is to Me that the Israelites are servants: they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt, I the LORD your God" (Lev. 25:55).

I have already alluded in my comment to 19:20 to the True reason for the use of the two holy names. In rabbinic tradition this commandment is called "accepting the sovereignty of heaven." For "the LORD" and "your God" are the qualities of a king with regard to his people. That is why the Mekilta opens its discussion by asking, "What is the justification for 'You shall have no other gods besides Me'? It is 'I the LORD am your God.' A parable: A king once entered a certain province. His courtiers said to him, 'Issue decrees for us to obey.' He replied, 'No. When you accept my sovereignty over you, then I will issue decrees for you. For if you do not accept my sovereignty, what will make you follow my decrees?' That is what God said to Israel. "I the LORD am your God"—I am the one whose sovereignty you accepted when you were in Egypt." They replied, 'Yes.' 'Now that you have accepted My sovereignty, you must accept My decrees.'" That is to say, having acknowledged that I am the Lord and that I have been your God since Egypt—now, accept all My commandments. Note that—unlike the way He began His address to them, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians" (19:4), [M] where "you" is in the plural—all the commandments are given in the singular, to the individual "you," to warn them that each and every one of them will be individually punished for violating the commandments. They should not think that God will judge them as a group and that each individual will be saved along with the majority. Moses will explain this to them at the end of the Torah, in Deut. 29:17-19.

3 You shall have no other gods besides Me. Rashi's comment (based on the Mekilta) that this statement demands the destruction of idols that already exist would make this a separate commandment from v. 5, which carries a more severe punishment. But would this less severe prohibition against owning idols be included here, before the prohibition of idol worship? In any case, this interpretation is the

[M] In the version that we have, Nahmanides says He "began" with "You yourselves saw" from v. 19. The two verses begin with the same Hebrew words, so this is probably a copyist's error.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 2 I the LORD am your God. "Your" is singular. Just as an image can be made so that everyone thinks the eyes are looking directly at him, so too when God spoke, everyone thought He was talking directly to him. After all, if the taste of manna could have the taste best liked by every individual, how much more so God's word (Hizkuni). Do not think that our Sages are unanimous in their opinion of this utterance. I, for one, am not too shy to say that it is not a commandment, but an introduction to the commandments (Abarbanel). **Who brought you out of the land of Egypt.** God might have told them, "I the LORD am your God who created you," but they could have answered, "You created everyone! Why put the burden of Your Torah on us?" (Bekhor Shor). Judah Halevi asked Ibn Ezra why this does not say "who created heaven and earth." He himself had already provided the answer in the *Kuzari*: God wanted to identify Himself to them by an instance that they had seen with their own eyes (Abarbanel).

3 Other gods. Rabbi Eliezer says, They are "other" gods because, whatever substance they are made of, if necessary they can always

NJPS 4You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth.

5You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the LORD your God am an

RASHI destroyed. The other "gods" are not real gods, but ones whom others have made gods over them. The verse cannot be read to say, "You shall have no gods other than Me," for it would be an insult to God to call the others "gods" with respect to Him.

Another reading: "Other" gods. They are "other" to their worshipers. When they pray to a god like this, he doesn't answer them, but acts as if he is someone "other," who has never met them before. **Besides Me.** The OJPS translation is preferable here: "Before Me." More literally it is "in My presence," that is, "while I exist." This proviso was added so that you should not think the commandment against idolatry applied exclusively to the generation that heard it.

5 An impassioned God. Impassioned to punish, refusing to waive His rights when it

NAHMANIDES opinion of R. Jose alone. The correct interpretation, even according to the straightforward sense of the text, is that none of the angels or the divine host of heaven are to be our gods. This is the opinion of Onkelos, as well, who translates "other gods" literally here rather than as "the strayings of the nations," as he does in 23:19 and elsewhere. Know that when the text says "other gods," it always refers to these beings; idols are never referred to as if they could be "other" gods (God forbid), but only as "molten" gods—gods only from the perspective of those who make them, "for they are not gods, but man's handwork of wood and stone" (Isa. 37:19). Thus the second commandment is that we accept none other than the Lord as our God, and then that we should not worship graven images. The warnings against *making* idols come in v. 20 and elsewhere. **Besides Me.** Rather, "to My face," as the expression is used in Job 1:11, "But lay Your hand upon all that he has and he will surely blaspheme You to Your face." "Do not make other gods, for they are 'in My face'—I am looking and watching those who make them, at every moment and in every place." According to the True interpretation, you will understand the mystery of "face" from what we have written about "face to face" in our comment to 19:20, and you will understand the mystery of "other gods"; and the whole verse will come out in its straightforward, literal meaning, just as Onkelos has it. [N]

4 In the heavens above. The sun, moon, stars, and constellations, as well as the angels. This is what happened in the incident of the Golden Calf, as I shall explain, with God's help. **The waters under the earth.** This is to include the demons; as Job 26:5 says, "The shades tremble beneath the waters and their denizens." The Mekilta adds that it also includes one's image reflected in the water.

5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them. This refers to everything listed in v. 4. We are to worship none of these in any way, even if there is no intent to remove oneself from the authority of the Holy One. As B. Sanh. 60b puts it, this expression "reserves such worship exclusively to the Ineffable Name." **An impassioned God.** Or, "a jealous God" (OJPS). You will never find this term used except in connection with idolatry. Maimonides (*Guide* 1:36) too says that nowhere in the Bible will you find expressions of God's anger or jealousy except in connection with idolatry. He is wrong about

[N] Nahmanides continues with a long essay on the three kinds of idolatry described in the Bible: worship of angels, of stars and human beings, and of demons. All three kinds are prohibited by this commandment; see his comment to v. 4.

of worship of it. **Under the earth.** For the earth and the waters together make up a single globe.

5 You shall not ... serve them. By sacrificing or offering incense to them. **An impassioned God.** "A jealous God" (OJPS). For I created humans so that they would serve Me: "Whom I have created, formed, and made for My glory" (Isa. 43:7). If he abandons Me and serves another of My creatures, he is doing the opposite of My will. In return I will take revenge on him and not clear him. That is the meaning of "a jealous God." The text is speaking in human fashion, so those who hear it will understand. Lev. 20:5, about the man who idolatrously gives his offspring to Molech, is comparable: "I Myself will set My face against that man and his kin." If his son is evil too,

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS be made of some "other" substance (Hizkuni). **Besides Me.** The Hebrew word should correctly be spelled with a *patah* under the *yud*, for one who is learned in the mysteries (Jacob b. Hayyim). Perhaps it means "before Me," to deliberately anger Me, as in Deut. 32:21, "They incensed Me with no-gods" (Kimhi).

4 You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image. Even for use in worshiping the true God, as the Christians do (Bekhor Shor). Even if you do not intend to worship it (Sforno). **Or any likeness.** The reason is given in Deut. 4:15, "you saw no shape when the LORD your God spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire" (Hizkuni).

5 The fourth generation. God waits for the sinner to repent, but if the fourth generation of a family is still sinning, He stops waiting and punishes him (Bekhor Shor).

OJPS 4Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5thou shalt not bow down unto them, nor serve them; for I the

לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר
בְּשָׁמַיִם מִמֶּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בְּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת
וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ: 5 לֹא־
תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + How can a just God "visit the guilt of the parents upon the children" (v. 5)?

RASHBAM 5 Those who reject Me. If the children reject Me.

IBN EZRA prohibition of actions; this is the only one in the Torah that prohibits a belief. The text uses the word "gods" here from the perspective of those who worship them. There are other verses that similarly repeat falsehoods, representing them from the perspectives of those who believed them. E.g., Jer. 28:10 calls Hananiah a prophet, though he was not one; Josh. 2:7 says the men of Jericho pursued the spies down to the fords of the Jordan, though they were really hidden on Rahab's roof; and 1 Sam. 28:15 says that the dead Samuel spoke to Saul, though it was not so (but this is not the place to explain that). **Besides Me.** Once you know that I created everything and My Glory fills all, you shall have no gods other than Me. It literally means "before My face," but is to be interpreted as that phrase is used in Num. 3:4, where "before the face of their father Aaron" means "in his lifetime." This follows the words of one of the wise—"Do not anger your master by defying him to his face."

4 A sculptured image. Whether of stone or wood. Nor shall you worship **any likeness** whatsoever, made by any form of art. **What is in the heavens above.** The planets, the constellations, the sun and the moon. **On the earth below.** In the form of any beast, creeping thing, or bird. Even birds are considered to be "on the earth," as we see from Gen. 1:22, "let the birds increase on the earth." **In the waters.** In the form of a fish, using the word in the general sense of any sort of creature that is born and grows in the water. "You shall have no other gods" refers to belief, and "you shall not make for yourself" both to belief and to worship. You may not make a sculptured image that you believe is your god, nor may you bow down to one if someone forces you to do so, nor may you perform any sort