

## **Theological Meaning Don't There Any Other God Before Me In The Exodus 20:3**

### **Makna Teologis Jangan Ada Allah Lain Dihadapan-Ku Dalam Keluaran 20:3**

**Anjai Silalahi,<sup>1</sup> Bobby Kurnia Putrawan<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Sekolah Tinggi Teologi STAPIN Majalengka, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Moriah, Tangerang, Indonesia

*Email: bkputrawan@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>*

#### **Abstract**

*Basically, there are still many Christians who do not have a correct understanding of the monotheistic God and what it is related to the first Law of God. Because this lack of understanding often occurs among Christians who practice polytheism, syncretism and others who do not please God. Do not have other gods before Me (Ex. 20: 3), which is a very basic thing that must be understood well, in order to carry out true worship of the true God. This study aims to provide a concrete explanation of the importance of knowing the correct understanding of there should be no other God before Me (Ex. 20: 3). This study uses the (library research) method using books and other reading materials. The approach used is descriptive which focuses on the meaning of the phrase do not have another god before Me according to Exodus 20: 3.*

*Keywords: god; monotheism; polytheism; worship*

#### **Abstrak**

Pada dasarnya masih banyak orang Kristen yang belum memiliki pemahaman yang benar tentang Tuhan yang tauhid dan apa kaitannya dengan Hukum Tuhan yang pertama. Karena kurangnya pemahaman ini sering terjadi di antara orang-orang Kristen yang mempraktikkan politeisme, sinkritisme, dan orang-orang lain yang tidak menyenangkan Tuhan. Jangan ada tuhan lain di hadapan-Ku (Keluaran 20: 3), yang merupakan hal yang sangat mendasar yang harus dipahami dengan baik, agar dapat melaksanakan penyembahan yang benar kepada Tuhan yang benar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan penjelasan yang konkrit tentang pentingnya mengetahui pemahaman yang benar bahwa tidak ada Tuhan yang lain di hadapan-Ku (Keluaran 20: 3). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode (studi pustaka) dengan menggunakan buku dan bahan bacaan lainnya. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah deskriptif yang menitikberatkan pada makna kalimat tidak memiliki tuhan lain dihadapan-Ku menurut Keluaran 20: 3.

Kata kunci: allah; monoteisme; politeisme; menyembah

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Book of Exodus is the second book of the Old Testament. Where in the Book of Exodus tells about his exit. The Israelites from Egypt went to the land of Canaan which was brought by Moses. And also about the Law that God gave to Moses. The word Exodus is a translation of the Greek "exodus" which means "to come out" (Ex. 19:1), the name given to it in the Septuagint.<sup>1</sup> In the exodus, Egypt was probably the most powerful country in the whole world, and therefore the idol it worshiped was considered the strongest. When God called Israel out for a new life, and for their national mission, namely to re-establish the true knowledge of the Oneness of God, at the same time He also intends to expose the falsehood of all man-made idols.<sup>2</sup> The first commandment that you have no other gods before me is contained in (Ex 20:3), which is the basis of all other words or laws that can guide them, so that they can worship and worship Him. However, in reality the act was carried out by the Israelites. Disgruntled, they asked Aaron to make them a visible and form god on the assumption that a form god could lead them, so they worshiped and worshiped him, Exodus 32:1 reports this:

When the people saw that Moses was pulling back down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Come, make for us gods who will go before us because of this Moses, the one who led us out of the land. Our Egyptians don't know what has happened to him." (NASV)

You shall have no other gods before me (Ex 20:3). It is a command and stipulation from God to the Israelites not to worship other gods, and if that nation commits a violation then the consequence is punishment, the offense committed by the Israelites is very serious. Exodus 32:26-28 describes how God's wrath descended on the Israelites by worshiping their statue of the Golden Calf:

So Moses stood at the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is on the side of the LORD, come to me!" Then all the Levites gathered to him. He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Let each one of you tie his sword to his waist and walk to and fro through the camp from gate to gate, and let each one kill his brother and his friend and his neighbor. Levi did as Moses said and that day about three thousand men of the people died. (NASV)

The background behind the Israelites worshiping other gods was the Israelites were attracted and influenced by the nations around them even the influences they saw and that of Egypt when they still lived there. The worship of nations outside of Israel

---

<sup>1</sup> WS Lasor, *Pengantar Perjanjian Lama I* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2004), 190.

<sup>2</sup> J. Baxter Sidlow, *Menggali Isi Alkitab 1:Kejadian -Ester*. (Jakarta: Yayasan Komunikasi Bina Kasih, 2001). 79

had a strong appeal like the pagan nations who believed that worshiping several gods was better. Belief in gods did not require obedience as the God of Israel required. For example, many pagan religions included sexual immorality with temple prostitutes as part of their religious ceremonies. This custom greatly attracted the attention of the Israelites. Why does this interest them, because on the other hand, God requires His people to obey all the high moral codes as outlined in His Torah in order to maintain a saving relationship with Himself.

The human tendency to make things real results in fatal mistakes if they are done against God. Realizing God as a thing or form would make idols in reality. Seen in the life of the nation of Israel. This was done by the Israelites when their desires and their hearts were dissatisfied with the reality that God is Spirit and has no form that can be seen by human eyes, invisible and cannot even be formed with any shape. God with His will gave the Law as instructions to the Israelites at Mount Sinai how to live a life of true worship or worship to Him with an attitude of full obedience. The commandment that you have no other gods before me (Ex. 20:3) is a prohibition against realizing God or the gods they worship and worship him.

### **Polytheism and Monotheism**

To understand the meaning of polytheism and monotheism properly, the researcher will explain as follows, polytheism literally comes from the Greek poly and theoi, which means many gods. Polytheism is belief in gods. The purpose of religion in polytheism is not only to make offerings or offerings to the gods, but also to worship and pray to them to keep their anger away from the people concerned. Monotheism (derived from the Greek words (*monos*) which means singular and (*theos*) which means God) is the belief that God is one or single and has full power over all things.<sup>3</sup>

Among Old Testament scholars there has been debate on the question, is monotheism (admitting the existence of only one God) the implication of the first word or not? Is the existence of other gods denied or simply said that the Israelites could not honor and serve him.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Chris Klassen. "Research Note: Rejecting Monotheism? Polytheism, Pluralism, and Battlestar Galactica." *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol.23, Iss.3 (2008): 355-362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537900802373205>

<sup>4</sup>Robert M. Paterson, *Kitab Keluaran* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2011), 261.

However, the researcher saw Ex. 20:3 this is not a question of which gods the Gentiles can serve. What was important was that the Israelites were free from the fear of other gods. According to polytheist belief (belief in the existence of many Gods), there are some gods whose wills are contradictory and they should try to serve in a way that is pleasing to all of them. They must remain afraid of the wrath of every god. Perhaps there is a very powerful god that they have not noticed and that god will destroy them. Therefore, the researcher sees this first word as good news. Although monotheism is not stated as clearly here as in other Old Testament books, the researcher sees here the seeds of monotheism.

### **EXEGESE ON EXODUS 20:3**

Hebrew Text (BHS)<sup>5</sup> לֹא אֲחֵרִים אֱלֹהִים עִלְיָהּ פָּנֵי

#### **Text Context**

#### **General Context**

#### Source of Yahweh (Y)

The social situation of the Ummah in the context of Source Y is the people trying to develop harmonious relations between the native Israelites and other nations. Politics: the government of the nation of Israel was in its heyday because in this context the Kingdom of Israel was in its heyday. In the economic field, the Israelites had come out of Slavery in the Land of Egypt so they had the freedom to work, so their economic situation began to improve. In the religious field, the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt because of God's grace so that they began to abstain from idol worship.

#### Source of Elohist (E)

In this social context, this is the time when the Israelites were called, but they were exiled from other nations so that their relationship was not good. In the political field this source arose in the kingdom of Northern Israel where there arose a movement of prophets protesting against Syncretism. In the economic field, there is a recovery in the Economy because God called prophets for the nation of Israel and they began to work hard to be able to provide for their lives. While the religion of the Israelites was

---

<sup>5</sup> John Barton. *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016).

faced with a baistic syncretism in Israel's religion, God called the prophets to convince the Israelites that they would continue to believe in God.<sup>6</sup>

### **Close Context**

*The outline of the Book of Exodus, as follows:*

Exodus chapters 1-12: about Israel in Egypt

Exodus chapters 13-18: on the Journey from Egypt to Sinai

Exodus chapters 19-40: about the Covenant (Covenant) and the law at Sinai.

- Preparations for the Covenant (19),
- Ten Commandments (20:1-17),
- Tabernacle (25-40).

In the interpretation of the Book of Exodus chapters 20:10-13 we can learn about the ten Laws that God gave to the Israelites through Moses on Mount Sinai.

In the book of Exodus chapters 20:1-7 it tells about God bringing the Israelites out of the land of Egypt through Moses, on the way, God came out to appear to Moses on Mount Sinai and gave the 10 Laws to be given to the Israelites so that they would be obedient and faithful. to worship the Lord God, and do the things he pleases in the 10 Laws that God gave through the intercession of Moses, the Laws that God gave were:

1. Don't have any other God in front of me
2. Do not make for yourself an image that resembles anything and do not bow down to worship him
3. Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain

In verses 1-7 these three Laws were given by God to the Israelites so that they would realize that it was God God who brought them out of the land of Egypt and he wanted the Israelites to bow down to worship Him because He is a jealous God, and God wanted the Israelites to hold on to them. at His commandments.<sup>7</sup>

### **Text Analysis <sup>8</sup>**

לְךָ : preposition, Second person, masculine, singular.

יִהְיֶה : verb, Qal, imperfect, third person, masculine, singular: to be.

---

<sup>6</sup>Victor Furima, "TAFSIRAN KELUARAN 20:1-8" (2016). 14

<sup>7</sup> Robert M. Paterson, *Tafsiran Alkitab Kitab Keluaran* (Jakarta: BPK-GM, 2006). 261-262

<sup>8</sup> Agus Santoso. *Dabar: Tata Bahasa Ibrani*. (Bandung: Bina Media Informasi, 2011).

- לֹא : adverb, particle, negative : none.  
אֲחֵרִים : adjective, masculine, plural: other.  
אֱלֹהִים : noun, plural, masculine: ruler.  
עַל- : Preposition: above, on.  
אֲנִי : Noun, construction, plural, masculine, first person, common, singular: god.

Literally, the above text can be translated "to be no other ruler above God." To get a better understanding of some of the words from the text that has been analyzed above, the following explanation describes how the words and their meanings are used based on the Lexicon (dictionary) so that they can give a better meaning, the explanation is not carried out as a whole for each part of the word in the text. text, but only words or phrases that are considered important and need to be stated for their meaning and meaning:

The word אֲחֵרִים (*'ă·hê·rîm*) is a plural masculine adjective meaning other, gods before Me (NASB "other gods before Me").<sup>9</sup> The Torah was not given as a means of attaining salvation. The law given to the saved nation (Ex. 19:4; 20:2) to teach them about God's will that could fulfill God's purpose for them as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation". The revelation was given "not to give life but to guide life". Many Christians have a misunderstanding of essence (Ex. 20:3), this first commandment is not just a statement of monotheism. This commandment forbids worship or reverence for anything other than God, whether in thought, word or deed, "so that He may be first in all things" (Colossians 1:18).<sup>10</sup>

This law prevented the polytheism (belief in the existence of many Gods) which was a feature of ancient Near Eastern religions. Israel was not to worship or appeal to any of the gods of other nations, but was commanded to fear God and serve Him alone (cf. De 32:39; Jos 24:14-15). When applied to believers or Christians, this commandment means at least three things:

1. The worship of believers should be directed to God alone. There must be no worship, prayer offered to, or seeking of guidance and help from "other gods," any spirits, or the dead (cf. Le 17:7; De 6:4; 32:17; Psalm 106:37; 1 Cor 10:19-20). This

---

<sup>9</sup> Francis Brown, 1849-1916. *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew And English Lexicon: with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Tafsiran Alkitab Wyclife Volume 1* (Malang: Gandum Mas, 2004). 200-202.

- first commandment was specifically directed against the worship of spirits (ie, demons) through spiritism, sorcery or other forms of idolatry (cf. De 18:9-22).
2. Believers must devote themselves completely to God. Only God through His revealed will and His inspired Word can guide their lives (Matthew 4:4).
  3. The aim of a believer's life should be to seek and love God with all their heart, soul, and strength, while relying on Him to provide what is good for their lives (Deut 6:5; Psalm 119:2; Matthew 6:33; Phil. 3:8).<sup>11</sup>

### **The Theological Meaning of Exodus 20:3 Today**

Attitudes and challenges that Christians should have in terms of applying the meaning do not have other gods before Me (Ex. 20:3): pluralism, moral degradation, worship.

#### ***Pluralism***

Pluralism, which views all religions as equally valid paths to the core of religious reality. In the view of Religious Pluralism, no religion is seen as superior to other religions. All of them are considered as equally valid paths to God. Its influence in religion, including Christianity, is that there are many ways to get salvation, and all religions have their own messiah (Savior).<sup>12</sup> And this is contrary to the Christian faith, that is, only through Jesus Christ can humans be saved (John 14:6).

#### ***Moral Degradation***

Moral in its development stated that "human goodness is an activity of the soul and conformity with virtue". Christians are followers of a religion that views God as the giver of law, because God's Law (which is included in religious law) and morality are an inseparable unity, the law must serve and uphold morality. Morals pay attention (priority) to the goodness or badness of a trait or character, or the difference between right and wrong with regard to human behavior, the source and definition of moral obligations is God's Law. Therefore, "virtue" can be seen as a character trait that

---

<sup>11</sup>s.n. *Alkitab Penuntun Hidup Berkelimpahan* (Malang: Gandum Mas, 2011); lih. Bobby Kurnia Putrawan. "Pengantar Latar Belakang Kitab Kisah Para Rasul." *QUAERENS: Journal of Theology and Christianity Studies*, Vol.1, No.2 (2019): 176-83. <https://doi.org/10.46362/quaerens.v1i2.8>.

<sup>12</sup>Sunggu Yang. "Exodus 20:1-17." *Interpretation* 75, no. 1 (January 2021): 56-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964320961663>; Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*. (Ada, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011).

appears in a person's daily good life. Virtue is a disposition of character that is permanent and enables a person to behave morally well.

So, what is meant by moral degradation is a decrease in attention to the virtues of noble and right morals and character. And when it is associated with the Christian life, then what is meant by moral degradation in Christianity is the decrease in the attention and priority of Christians to the values of belief based on God's Law contained in the Bible which is a provision given as a moral standard for him.

So it is necessary to know that at this time is a time that shows a state of moral degradation, and it is a warning for Christians to understand how important it is to maintain their morality according to God's standards. The Bible provides an explanation of the moral degradation that occurs in humans.<sup>13</sup>

Know that in the last days difficult times will come. Human will love himself and become slave for money. They will brag and boast, they will become slanderers, they will rebel against their parents and are ungrateful, do not care about religion, do not know love, do not want to make peace, like to speak ill of people, can not restrain themselves, fierce, do not like good, likes to betray, doesn't think long, pretends to know, follows his lust more than obeys God. Outwardly they carry out their worship, but in essence they deny its power. Stay away from them! (2 Tim. 1-5).

And this situation may occur in the Christian life, so that it becomes a strong warning for Christians if it becomes a part of their life, for that concern or priority of people who have been redeemed to become Christians is to have morality according to the law that God has established.

## **Worship**

How can a person prove the validity of his knowledge of God? How does a Christian know that the God he is worshiping is really the true God, not a reflection of his own soul? J.I. Packer correctly asked,

Are we sure that the God whom we seek to worship is the God of the Bible, the Triune Yehovah? Do we whorship the one true God in truth, or are our ideas of God such that in reality we do not believe in the Christian God, but in some other.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>Nissim Amzallag, "Beyond Prestige and Magnificence: The Theological Significance of Gold in the Israelite Tabernacle." *Harvard Theological Review*, 112, no.3 (2019): 296-318.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000130>.

<sup>14</sup>Yakub B. Susabda, *Mengenal & Bergaul Dengan Allah* (Yogyakarta: ANDI, 2010), 43.

These are the questions that should be on the heart of every believer who in his honesty and sincerity wants to live true faith in the true God. The courage to ask questions like this is a sign for believers to start entering the dimension of a more mature relationship with the God they worship.

Therefore Christians should not be so self-assured and ignorant like the fools who think they can live as they please. He is not a God who will not punish those who turn away from Him. His wrath will continue until the fourth generation until they are completely destroyed. So he wants to be respected and not belittled. He has proved this in various stories and events, as shown in the Scriptures; as well as what is real in everyday experience. From the very beginning after getting rid of all forms of idolatry and that is why He destroyed both the Jews and the Gentiles. Christians must worship Jesus Christ with all their heart, soul, mind, strength and all that is in Him.

## **CONCLUSION**

The human heart is a factory of idols, and it takes revolution to slow it down. Preachers must be trained and sent out, evangelists must accept the call, missionaries must sail across dark seas to unknown lands, translators must bring Scripture into the vernacular, and healthy local churches must grow so that they can serve in the world. this war. Every believer must reject the factory of idols in their hearts by filling their hearts with Christ and feeding themselves with solid knowledge of who God has revealed himself in the Scriptures.

Basically researchers see, all the physical gods of the Old Testament lie about God. That's all they can do: lie. Idols are born of lies. So, in turn, idols can only preach lies to their worshipers (Habakkuk 2:18; Zechariah 10:2; Jeremiah 10:15). And as Luther found in the text of the Bible, the golden calf was made with a stylus, a "chisel tool" that was originally meant to write the truth about God, but was used to form a golden lie (Exodus 32:4).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>Tony Reinke, *"The Nail in the Coffin of Our Hearts Five Hundred Years of Fighting Idolatry"* (2017).

## REFERENCES

- Amzallag, Nissim. "Beyond Prestige and Magnificence: The Theological Significance of Gold in the Israelite Tabernacle." *Harvard Theological Review* 112, no.3 (2019): 296-318. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816019000130>.
- Barton, John. *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016
- Brown, Francis, 1849-1916. *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew And English Lexicon: with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996.
- Furima, Victor. "Tafsiran Keluaran 20:1-8" (Februari 2016). <http://theoprodeo.blogspot.com/2016/02/tafsiran-keluaran-201-8.html>.
- Hamilton, Victor P. *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*. Ada, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Klassen, Chris. "Research Note: Rejecting Monotheism? Polytheism, Pluralism, and Battlestar Galactica." *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol.23, Iss.3 (2008): 355-362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537900802373205>
- Lasor, W.S. *Pengantar Perjanjian Lama I*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2004.
- Mawene, Martinus T. *Perjanjian Lama Dan Teologi Kontekstual*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2008.
- Paterson, Robert M. *Tafsiran Alkitab Kitab Keluaran*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2011.
- Pfeiffer, Charles F. *Tafsiran Alkitab Wyclife Volume 1*. Malang: Gandum Mas, 2004.
- Putrawan, Bobby Kurnia. "Pengantar Latar Belakang Kitab Kisah Para Rasul." *QUAERENS: Journal of Theology and Christianity Studies*, Vol.1, No.2 (2019): 176-83. <https://doi.org/10.46362/quaerens.v1i2.8>.
- Reinke, Tony. "The Nail in the Coffin of Our Hearts Five Hundred Years of Fighting Idolatry" (2017).
- Santoso, Agus. *Dabar: Tata Bahasa Ibrani*. Bandung: Bina Media Informasi, 2011.
- Santoso, Samuel. *Yahwe, El, Dan Nama Tuhan Dalam Buku Berteologi Di Tengah Perubahan*. Jakarta: Jakarta: Komisi Pengkajian Teologi GKI Sinode Wilayah JABAR., 2007.
- Sidlow, J. Baxter. *Menggali Isi Alkitab 1 :Kejadian-Ester*. Jakarta: Yayasan Komunikasi Bina Kasih, 2001.

Simbolon, Tambatua. *Dampak Globalisasi Terhadap Degradasi Iman Suatu Studi Eksposisi*. Majalengka, 2005.

s.n. *Alkitab Penuntun Hidup Berkelimpahan*. Malang: Gandum Mas, 2011.

Susabda, Yakub B. *Mengenal & Bergaul Dengan Allah*. Yogyakarta: ANDI, 2010.

Yang, Sunggu. "Exodus 20:1-17." *Interpretation* 75, no. 1 (January 2021): 56-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964320961663>.

