



# God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World

*Mark S. Smith*

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The Hebrew Bible has long been understood as condemning foreign deities. While many biblical texts do condemn other deities, many other passages show how early Israelites sometimes accepted the reality of deities worshiped by other peoples. Looking closely both at relevant biblical texts and at their cultural contexts, Mark S. Smith demonstrates that the biblical attitude toward other deities is not uniformly negative, as is commonly supposed. He traces the historical development of Israel's "one-god worldview," linking it to the rise of the surrounding Mesopotamian empires.

Smith's study also produces evidence undermining a common modern assumption among historians of religion that polytheism is tolerant while monotheism is prone to intolerance and violence. Drawing both on ancient sources and on modern, theoretical approaches, Smith's *God in Translation* masterfully reveals the complexity of attitudes in ancient Israel toward foreign deities and makes a case for an ecumenism based on respect for local traditions and not based on a western notion of universal religion.

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