

# Deuteronomy 32:15-18

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*The Israelites rejected the Suzerain God because He has blessed them to the point of excess.*

Moses continues to set forth the Song of Moses for Israel to sing and remember their covenant with Him. This is just prior to the time when Moses will die, and Joshua will lead the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land.

This section begins the elaboration of the second major theme of the poem, namely, Israel's rejection of the Suzerain God. Israel's father, Yahweh (the LORD), had blessed them to the point of excess, providing milk, honey, fats of lamb, rams, fruits, and oil for them (vv. 13-14). Yet, Israel displayed rebellion and disobedience toward their Suzerain God. So, the imagery here changes from excessive divine provision (vv. 13-14) to excessive human rebellion.

This part of the song includes a prophetic word about Israel's future, at the time this song is provided to Israel. But it is stated in the past tense to show the certainty with which it will come to pass.

Beginning with the conjunction "but" to make the contrast vivid, Moses stated, *But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked* (v. 15). The term *Jeshurun* ("upright one") is a name of endearment and here is used ironically for Israel. The Israelites were supposed to be upright because they belonged to a Suzerain (Ruler) God who was upright (v. 4). But they proved that they were anything but upright because they lived in continuous rebellion to God's covenant stipulations. God's commands were only for their good, but they foolishly refused to follow them, to their own ruin.

The verb *grew fat* often refers to affluence and prosperity, as seen in [Nehemiah 9:25](#). It explains how the people of God lived in prosperity and abundance after the Suzerain (Ruler) God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt to bring them to the Promised Land. However, the verb is used ironically both to refer to Israel's affluence and also to describe Israel's lack of response (like an obese animal) toward the goodness of the LORD.

So, Jeshurun become *fat*, and rather than being thankful and remaining faithful to the covenant, he *kicked*. Though the verb “to kick” (Hebrew “ba’at”) usually literally means to strike violently with the foot, here it has the sense of despising something (1 Samuel 2:29) and forsaking that which was good (Jeremiah 2:17). This was a picture showing that, although *Jeshurun* had become *fat* with prosperity, he still *kicked* (forsook) the Giver of that prosperity.

Moses then addressed *Jeshurun* directly, saying, *You are grown fat, thick, and sleek*. As if to emphasize the fact that the Israelites had become unresponsive to the LORD’s blessings, Moses again called them *fat* (Heb. “shāmēn”) again. The verb *thick* (Heb. “āba”) is synonymous with the verb “to be fat.” The verb *sleek* (Heb. “kāsa,” used only here) literally means “to be gorged with food.” It has the idea of being obstinate. These verbs together describe just how intense the rebellion of *Jeshurun* had become, especially in light of being blessed by the LORD.

Since this is all part of the Song of Moses, it serves as a warning to each generation that this is in their future if they do not heed the LORD, and remain grateful and obedient to His ways. Once they become entitled, they will begin to be lazy and expect others to do their work. They will become exploitative, and stop loving their neighbor. This will sow the seeds of their own destruction.

In spite of being so blessed, *he (Jeshurun) forsook God who made him*. To *forsake* (Heb. “nāṭash”) can also be translated “abandon” (Judges 6:13), “leave” (Ezekiel 32:4), or “neglect” (Isaiah 32:14). The word implies the discontinuation of performing certain required actions. In the context of the song, *Jeshurun* forsook God by not abiding by His precepts. Yet, it was *God who made Jeshurun (Israel)* as a nation, such as when He invited Israel into a covenant relationship after their exodus from Egypt. Thus, *Jeshurun* violated the terms of God’s covenant by discontinuing to perform his duties to the Suzerain (Ruler) God. As a result, Israel will choose to gain the cursing provisions of the covenant, as they had agreed. These cursing provisions are set forth just a few chapters prior (Deuteronomy 27:11-26).

In addition to forsaking his God, *Jeshurun scorned the Rock of his salvation*. The verb translated “to scorn” (Heb. “nābal”) means “to treat as a fool” or “to consider senseless.” Thus, instead of honoring the Suzerain (Ruler) God for

His generosity and love, the Israelites treated Him with contempt, ignoring all His covenantal principles. Yet, the Suzerain God was the *Rock* of Israel's salvation. Simply put, the LORD, the One who delivered Israel and served as a *Rock*, providing refuge for them, was treated as being senseless and foolish. Therefore they turned to their own ways, which are self-destructive ways.

Despite all these good things God provided for Israel, they turned away from Him and *made Him jealous with strange gods* (v. 16). Instead of following all of God's laws, and being blessed, the Israelites gave allegiance to *strange gods* (lit., "strange things") and it was *with abominations they provoked* the Suzerain God *to anger*. The *strange gods* would provide the moral authority for pagan practices of human exploitation, abuse, and depravity (Leviticus 18). The pagan way was for the strong to exploit the weak. In adopting these ways and forsaking the LORD's command to love their neighbors, Israel chose a way of destruction of their self-governing culture, and communal prosperity.

Verse 17 describes the nature of these *abominations*. Instead of sacrificing to the LORD, *they sacrificed to demons who were not God* (v. 17). The word *demons* (Heb. "shēdîm") is used only here and in Psalms 106:37 in the Old Testament.

In other words, the Israelites practiced idolatry and acted perversely in the sight of their LORD by sacrificing to other gods who were not deities, but in reality, were *demons who were not God*. In the ancient Near East in general, pagan or foreign gods were thought of as representing *demons*. Generally the allure of *demons* is the promise of having one's own way, and gaining pleasures at the expense of others (in other words, exploitation).

The Israelites sacrificed *to gods whom they have not known*. These gods were not *known* because they had no covenant relationship with them. This was in stark contrast to the LORD whom they had known for a very long time. Yet rather than follow Him, trusting that His ways were for their best, the Israelites sought the ways of gods they had not *known*.

These *demons* included *new gods who came lately, whom Israel's fathers did not dread* or worship. This is probably a reference to the Canaanite deities. The *fathers* probably worshipped the Egyptian deities in addition to the LORD. They then added deities of the peoples they encountered during the exodus. Now, the generation entering the Promised Land would deal with the gods and goddesses of the groups that made up the Canaanites.

Generally, the promise of idols is a deity that can be controlled in order to get what you want. Such a deity provides moral authority for immoral behavior. The problem with this of course is that once a society begins a competition to see who can best exploit who, the society descends into chaos. God judged the world with a flood because it had filled with violence (Genesis 6:11).

Finally, Moses referred to Israel directly again and said, *You neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth* (v. 18). The verb “to neglect” (Heb. “tešî,” used only here) is synonymous with the verb *forgot* (Heb. “tiškaḥ”) in the second line. It can also mean “to ignore.” These verbs describe Israel’s lack of commitment to their Suzerain (Ruler) God who is their *Rock*. Instead of following the Suzerain (Ruler) God, proven to be the faithful and perfect *Rock*, the Israelites neglected Him, living their lives in such a way as to deny their covenant with Him. In doing so they ignored His existence and His benevolence toward them. Israel’s ingratitude caused them to ignore the *Rock who begot them* and gave them birth in favor of insignificant gods whom they had not known.

Again, at the time of Moses this is all prophetic, spoken of in past tense to show the certainty of its occurrence. Each generation who sings this Song of Moses will be reminded that they can be the generation who falls into this trap of agnostic indifference, and reaps the adverse consequences of their own actions.

They would accordingly pay dearly for this apostasy. They would choose a society bent on exploitation rather than neighborly love, and in doing so sow to their own destruction.

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>15</sup> But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—  
You are grown fat, thick, and sleek—  
Then he forsook God who made him,  
And scorned the Rock of his salvation.**

**<sup>16</sup> They made Him jealous with strange gods;  
With abominations they provoked Him to anger.**

**<sup>17</sup> “They sacrificed to demons who were not God,  
To gods whom they have not known,  
New gods who came lately,  
Whom your fathers did not dread.**

**<sup>18</sup>You neglected the Rock who begot you,  
And forgot the God who gave you birth.**