

# Deuteronomy 32:19-22

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*The Suzerain (Ruler) God says He will reject His chosen people because they have abandoned Him.*

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.

The song predicts with certainty that the Israelites will abandoned their covenant God, speaking of future events in the past tense. They will abandon their *Rock* by worshipping foreign gods and provoking Him to anger (vv. 15-18). The foreign gods provide a moral authority for exploitation, which leads to degradation of the society.

Responding to this unfaithfulness, the *LORD saw this, and spurned them, because of the provocation of His sons and daughters* (v. 19). To *spurn* (Heb. "naʿas") can mean to treat with contempt, despise, or abhor. The Suzerain God responded to Israel's *provocation* and said He would judge them measure for measure, treating them just as they treated Him. This is a consistent theme in scripture, that we reap what we sow ([Galatians 6:7](#)). This means that we choose our own consequences. God often judges by giving to us what we wished upon others, for good or ill ([Galatians 6:8](#)). Israel's Suzerain (Ruler) God made clear to Israel what choices would lead to flourishing. Israel chose not to listen, and instead followed their own appetites, justified by foreign gods.

Thus, God spoke to Israel and said, *I will hide My face from them* (v. 20). For the LORD to hide His face means that His support and help would no longer be available to them. He would, in effect, ignore and neglect His people, as they had ignored and neglected Him. He would allow them to be exploited, as they sought to exploit others. The LORD said He would ignore Israel to allow "many evils and troubles" to fall on them ([Deuteronomy 31:17](#)). The LORD then would see *what their end shall be* as a result of Him hiding His face. The warning is that Israel should not take their blessing for granted. To continue to

have harmony and prosperity requires ongoing obedience to God's command to love their neighbors as themselves. If they begin to exploit, their blessings will come to an end.

All of this would happen because the Israelites were a *perverse generation, sons in whom is no faithfulness*. Moses's song predicts this future with certainty, speaking in past tense. In the future, generations may sing the song who have experienced this in their own past.

The Suzerain (Ruler) God, however, was faithful to the Israelites. He always kept His part of the covenant and commanded them to do likewise. However, the Israelites were unfaithful to God's covenant. They were perverse and corrupt because of their pagan practices (v. 6). As a result, they gained the adverse consequences to which they had consented (Exodus 19:8).

Israel's level of corruption is further clarified when the LORD said, *They have made Me jealous with what is not God* (v. 21). The word *they* is emphasized in Hebrew. To be *jealous* is not a petty emotion. Here, it means that the LORD desired to protect and preserve the precious marital bond between Himself and His people. Israel is often pictured in the Bible as God's bride. The ceremony on Mount Sinai can be viewed as a marriage, with the people and God both giving their vows. The cause of the jealousy was that they allied themselves *with what is not God*. Just as a husband would seek restoration of the relationship, so God seeks restoration with Israel His bride.

The next line clarifies this. The LORD stated that *they have provoked Me to anger with their idols*. The word *provoked* (Heb. "kā'as") can mean "to irritate" or "to grieve." The term translated to English as *idols* (Heb. "hebel") is translated in Ecclesiastes as "vanity." It means "vaporous". It can picture something temporary, as a wisp of vapor (as in Ecclesiastes 9:9, where "hebel" is translated "fleeting"). It can also refer to the ungraspable nature of vapor, like one's breath on a cold day. This is the primary way "hebel" is used in Ecclesiastes. Accordingly, many English translations render it "vanity." Here the picture seems to be similar, because trusting an idol is useless. It is vain. The idol cannot accomplish what is promised. The people of God associated themselves with foreign gods, irritating their Suzerain God with their worthless idols.

Consequently, the LORD said He would respond in kind, and give them over to their desires in order to bring them back, and restore His relationship with

them. He would *make them jealous with those who are not a people*. This is probably a reference to Gentiles. It could refer to the exile of Israel to foreign nations. The northern kingdom of Israel or Samaria will be conquered and exiled by Assyria in 722 BC, and the southern kingdom of Judah will be conquered and exiled by Babylon in 586 BC. It could also refer to the Gentiles receiving the gospel, and provoking Israel to jealousy (causing them to want what they don't have) as predicted in Romans 11:11.

God would *provoke them to anger with a foolish nation*. The word *foolish* (Heb. "nabal") refers to something or someone who makes choices that are destructive to themselves and others, often while believing what they are doing is beneficial. It can refer to an unbeliever, who refuses to acknowledge God (Psalm 14:1). That seems to be the case in this context, as the LORD says He will use faithless Gentile nations who had no spiritual understanding to carry out His judgment on Israel. The prophet Habakkuk asks God why He is delaying judgement to Judah/Israel because they are breaking their covenant with God, and He answers that He is raising up the Babylonians to invade and chastise them (Habakkuk 1:5-6). Habakkuk then asks how it is just to use an even more wicked nation to judge His people. God answers with the verse used by Paul as the theme of his letter to the Romans:

"Behold, as for the proud one,  
His soul is not right within him;  
But the righteous will live by his faith."  
(Habakkuk 2:4)

This is God's standard that He applies to all people.

The reason He would use a foolish people to judge Israel was because *a fire is kindled in My anger* (v. 22). Fire often has many good uses:

- To cook food (Exodus 12:8; Isaiah 44:15-16)
- To serve as light for people (Isaiah 50:11)
- To refine metals (Isaiah 1:25)
- To burn refuse (Leviticus 8:17)

Here, however, it is a symbol of the wrath of the LORD and His judgment (Exodus 3:2; Hebrews 12:29). God is described in scripture as a "consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29). His judgement fire refines His people, and consumes His enemies.

The LORD further explained that His anger *burns to the lowest part of Sheol*. The term *Sheol* refers to the place of the dead, and the context determines which place. Here it may refer to the lowest and deepest place imaginable. It is the underworld, the realm of the dead. Sheol sometimes refers to a physical grave. But it can also mean the spiritual place of the dead, as indicated in Acts 2:27, 31, where Psalm 16:10 is quoted and “Sheol” is translated from Hebrew to Greek as “Hades.” (See Tough Topics article on “What is Hell? Hades and Tartarus in the Bible”).

Not only would God’s divine wrath ravage the realm of the dead, it would consume *the earth with its yield and set on fire the foundations of the mountains*. That means, the Suzerain (Ruler) God’s judgement would permeate to everywhere. His wrath would consume the earth and all its produce and would destroy even the deepest roots of the netherworld and the mountains.

This is predicted to be the literal outcome of this earth, prior to God creating a new heaven and earth, that the earth would be destroyed with fire (2 Peter 3:7,10). This same mighty judgement would apply to the unrighteousness of Israel when they adopted the same exploitative practices of the pagan nations they had displaced, as God clearly set forth in Deuteronomy 9:4 and Deuteronomy 8:19-20.

These expressions of hyperbole that will ultimately apply to the complete destruction of the physical world here refer to the application of the LORD’s judgment applying to His people. This occurred in 722 BC (the Assyrian invasion) to the northern kingdom of Israel/Samaria, and then again in 586 BC (the Babylonian invasion) to the southern kingdom of Judah. Later, it will be the entire physical universe. Just as God will restore Israel, He also promises to create a new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1).

### **Biblical Text:**

<sup>19</sup> **The Lord saw *this*, and spurned *them*  
Because of the provocation of His sons and daughters.**

<sup>20</sup> **Then He said, ‘I will hide My face from them,  
I will see what their end *shall be*;  
For they are a perverse generation,  
Sons in whom is no faithfulness.**

<sup>21</sup> **They have made Me jealous with *what* is not God;**

**They have provoked Me to anger with their idols.  
So I will make them jealous with *those who* are not a people;  
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,  
<sup>22</sup>For a fire is kindled in My anger,  
And burns to the lowest part of Sheol,  
And consumes the earth with its yield,  
And sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.**