

## Deuteronomy 32:28-33

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-32/deuteronomy-3228-33/>

*Moses then commented on the LORD's decision to judge Israel. His covenant people lack wisdom and understanding, leading them to worship the pagan gods of their enemies. This resulted in the LORD's severe judgment upon His people.*

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.

In this section, Moses explained the LORD's reason to judge His covenant people. The rationale for Israel's judgment is because *they are a nation lacking in counsel, and there is no understanding in them* (v. 28). The word *counsel* (Heb. 'êṣōwt) means "advice." It consists of His plans and His will for His people. In this song, Israel knew the LORD's counsel—they simply chose not to follow it.

The word *understanding* (Heb. "tebūna) is based on the preposition (Heb. "beñ") translated "between." It refers to the ability to discern between truth and falsehood, sham and reality, etc. It is a key ingredient of biblical wisdom ([Proverbs 1:2](#), where the related Hebrew word "bînâ" is used). The LORD gave them reality, they chose illusion. It is our fallen nature to believe that our best interest is to extract and exploit others to satisfy ourselves. This leads to death of relationship, death of community, and death of purpose ([Romans 6:23](#)). God created humans to rule the earth in harmony and service ([Psalm 8](#)). When we follow the LORD's command to love our neighbors, and serve their interest as well as our own, it leads to life, a vibrant community, team, family, or organization. God's covenant with Israel advised them to love. Instead they chose self-seeking and exploitation.

Again this song speaks of future events in the past tense, showing the certainty that they will come to pass. Future generations will sing this song and these events will actually be in their past.

God's people had no insights or wisdom because they neglected the God of their salvation (v. 18). They lost the perspective that the LORD was the One who saved them from slavery in Egypt and led them through the wilderness journey to give them the Promised Land, *a land flowing with milk and honey* ([Deuteronomy 26:9](#)). This should have shown them God's benevolence, and made them realize that following God's ways would be in their best interest. But they ignored God, and followed their own ways. In doing this they were following the same basic temptation that caused the fall of humanity in the first place, the desire to follow our own ways rather than that of God ([Genesis 3:6](#)).

The LORD then pointed out that *would that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would discern* (a word related to *understanding* in the previous verse) *their future* (v. 29). In other words, had the Israelites retained some degree of wisdom about the LORD's will for them, it would have enabled them to understand God's intention to bless them beyond measure if they were to simply obey His covenantal laws ([Deuteronomy 28:1-14](#)). The covenant clearly spelled out that building their society based on love rather than exploitation of one another would lead to their greatest blessing. But they did not listen. If they heard God's warnings of the loss they would experience for breaking the treaty/covenant, they did not heed them.

They forgot that all they had to do was to remain obedient to His words. They neglected the concept that this *wisdom* was founded on the fear of the LORD ([Proverbs 1:7](#)). Refusing to fear God and His word is like refusing to fear gravity; you ignore it at your peril. The same is true with God's moral laws. The ways of exploitation create death, and the ways of love create life.

Rather than making their top priority following God's advice, they followed false ways. Thus, they were fools (opposite of being wise), forgetting the paths of blessing, and instead choosing the ways of cursing that the LORD had clearly laid out for them. This song was to be a constant reminder that their choice would have consequences. They would decide. God made clear how to gain the greatest benefit. They chose not to listen.

To help Israel understand God's judgment, Moses asked, *How could one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight?* (v. 30). Moses used a rhetorical question to emphasize his point. In human terms, it would be impossible for one enemy soldier to defeat one thousand enemy soldiers. How could this be?

The question was meant to show Israel that their defeat was a direct consequence of their unfaithfulness to the LORD's covenant.

In the book of Leviticus, God had already made that clear to Israel when He said that "Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall before you by the sword" ([Leviticus 26:8](#)). This would happen if the Israelites walked according to God's covenantal laws because God would be the One to fight for them ([Leviticus 26:3](#); [Joshua 23:10](#)). However, failure to follow God's covenantal precepts would result in God handing Israel over to their foes ([Leviticus 26:17](#)).

Moses' explanation told Israel that a superior army should not be defeated by an army smaller and weaker *unless their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had given them up*. One enemy could chase a thousand Israelites, and two could cause ten thousand of them to flee because Israel's Rock, Yahweh, would give them over, as prescribed in the treaty/covenant. This song is a reminder that the consequences of Israel's choices are real.

Moses then shifted the discussion to describe Israel's enemies, especially their gods. He stated that *indeed their rock is not like our Rock* (v. 31). Israel's Rock, Yahweh (the LORD), is faithful, perfect, and just in all His ways; He was and is righteous and without injustice (v. 4). However, the enemy's so-called *rock* (their heathen gods) were nothing but useless idols made with human hands (v. 21). They were a mere moral excuse to justify immorality/exploitation. Israel's adversaries had gods that were powerless and insignificant, indeed nonexistent.

The Suzerain (Ruler) God decided to judge Israel, pursuant to the terms of the treaty. He would use their enemies as the instruments of His judgment, as He had promised ([Deuteronomy 8:19-20](#)). He allowed Israel's enemies to defeat them. Such a victory did not show the power of Israel's foes. Rather, it displayed the power of the true God of Israel in contrast to the weakness of the false gods to whom Israel had turned. Such an observation was so obvious that *even our enemies themselves judge this*.

To describe how corrupt and worthless the pagan enemies were, Moses related them to the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. He stated that *Their vine was from the vine of Sodom, and from the fields of Gomorrah* (v. 32). The *vine* is a reference to the pagan deities of the cities called *Sodom and Gomorrah*, located on the plain of Jordan ([Genesis 10:19](#), [13:10](#)).

Because of the gross immorality and wickedness of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, “the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground” ([Genesis 19:24-25](#)). The people in and around Sodom and Gomorrah lived extremely perverted, immoral lives ([Genesis 13:13, 18:20](#)), and the LORD completely destroyed them because of it. That should serve as an example, but Israel did not pay attention.

In this song, Moses told the people of Israel that the *grapes* of their enemies’ gods were *grapes of poison, their clusters, bitter grapes, full of bitter poison* that destroyed life. Their *wine* was *the venom of serpents, and the deadly poison of cobras* (v. 33) because they were corrupt and wicked. These are pictures that say that the consequences of following in the ways of self-seeking exploitation lead to death. Death is separation, and sin leads to death. People will be separated from harmony with God, with one another, and even with themselves.

Just as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, their wickedness led to their complete destruction. The wages or consequences of sin is death ([Romans 6:23](#)). But the gift of God is eternal life. God gives eternal life as a gift that can neither be earned nor lost, just as God chose Israel to be His people ([Deuteronomy 7:7-8](#)). But to experience that life, and gain the benefit of that relationship requires walking in obedience to His ways. This was true of Israel, and it is true for New Testament believers ([Galatians 6:7](#)).

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>28</sup> For they are a nation lacking in counsel,  
And there is no understanding in them.**

**<sup>29</sup> Would that they were wise, that they understood this,  
That they would discern their future!**

**<sup>30</sup> How could one chase a thousand,  
And two put ten thousand to flight,  
Unless their Rock had sold them,  
And the Lord had given them up?**

**<sup>31</sup> Indeed their rock is not like our Rock,  
Even our enemies themselves judge this.**

**<sup>32</sup> For their vine is from the vine of Sodom,  
And from the fields of Gomorrah;**

**Their grapes are grapes of poison,  
Their clusters, bitter.**

**<sup>33</sup> Their wine is the venom of serpents,  
And the deadly poison of cobras.**