

# Deuteronomy 32:36-38

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*The Suzerain (Ruler) God will judge His covenant people and also show compassion to them when they desperately seek 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.

In the last section, God made clear that “in due time” Israel will fall away, and begin to disobey the provisions of the treaty/covenant they had entered into with God. Now Moses resumes the narrative, and comments on God’s speech ([Deuteronomy 32:34-35](#)) to tell Israel that although God will discipline them when they break the covenant, *the LORD would vindicate His people and would have compassion on His servants* (v. 36). This also is in keeping with the treaty/covenant God entered into with Israel, where He promises that when Israel returns to Him after being disciplined, He will restore them from exile ([Deuteronomy 30:1-3](#)).

To *vindicate* (Hebrew “dîn”) means to plead one’s cause or to clear someone of a blame. God will intercede for Israel. To *show compassion* (Heb. “naḥam”) can also mean “be grieved by,” thus to be moved to pity for someone. In the midst of His judgment, the LORD *will have compassion* on His people. His desire is wholly benevolent, and seeks Israel’s best interest. However, Israel will have to learn some hard lessons if they refuse to follow God’s ways. They can either trust God and gain great benefit, or go their own way and learn the lesson the hard way. In either case, God’s intent is for their full restoration and benefit. The same can be said for the human race as a whole ([2 Peter 3:9](#)).

Thus, the Suzerain God would intervene for Israel when they were in desperate need. This would happen precisely at the most critical moment in Israel’s life, *when God sees that their strength is gone, and there is none remaining, bond or free*. This would seem to indicate a future time when all Israel would be exiled, with *none remaining* within Israel who have any *strength*. This might

indicate that a time was coming when all Israel would be under the thumb of foreign rulers. This is in fact what will occur.

In the future the Assyrian empire will dominate the earth, invading Israel/Samaria in 722 BC. They will afterward be conquered by the Babylonians. Then the Babylonians will invade the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 BC. Other than a brief time under the Maccabees, foreign rulers will continue to dominate Israel from these points in time until the modern era.

There is a biblical principle that judgement comes first to God's people, then to the rest of the nations ([1 Peter 4:17](#)). This applies to God judging the sheep before the goats in the parable of the sheep and goats ([Matthew 25:31-36](#)). This Song of Moses predicts that God will judge Israel, but will certainly follow up with judging the nations as well.

When the Israelites reached the point of total helplessness, the Suzerain (Ruler) God would stand up to deliver them from their enemies because He is their Rock. Ultimately, Jesus will return and fight for Israel, delivering them from all their enemies ([Zechariah 14:4](#); [Revelation 19:11-16](#)).

God's vindication will pour out upon His enemies. They will be destroyed. The Lord will then ask Israel regarding their enemies, *Where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge?* (v. 37). The obvious answer is "Nowhere!" The nations' pagan gods are not real, and will not protect them against the LORD's judgment. In this Israel can take solace. This could also apply to God judging the spiritual forces that rule over the nations, removing them from power ([Isaiah 24:21](#); [Daniel 10:13, 20](#)).

God's enemies would lose their strong foundation and thus fall. At times it might appear that they are invulnerable, but their fall is inevitable. As mentioned above, the Assyrian empire will eventually dominate the earth for a time, invading Israel/Samaria in 722 BC, then afterward fall to the Babylonians in 609 BC. Then the Babylonians will invade the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 BC, and fall to the Medes and Persians in 539 BC. Persia will later fall to Alexander the Great, then his Greek empire will break into pieces and be assimilated by the Roman empire ([see commentary on Daniel 2:36-43](#)).

Destruction would fall on Israel's adversaries because they believed in their own strength, and exploited and abused others. As a result of their

exploitation, they were judged. The ultimate judgment on Israel's enemies would take place far into the future ([Revelation 19:11-16](#)).

The foreign nations tried *to seek refuge* in their pagan gods. God taunts them, asking Israel to now tell Him where was *The rock in which they sought refuge?* The expected answer is "crushed." Israel's enemies will be defeated, and God is asking them to take note, and tell Him "Where are their gods now?" It turns out that the gods who were supposed to be a *rock* were instead a pebble of sand.

The nations trusted in their own power, citing their false gods, and found themselves crushed. The verb *to seek refuge* basically means "to flee for protection." When God's judgment comes upon the pagan nations, there will be nowhere to hide. One picture of this is shown in Revelation,

"Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'"  
([Revelation 6:15-17](#))

Moses further taunts the foreign nations, asking Israel *who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering* which the nations made to their fake gods (v. 38). The implied answer is "No one" because these pagan gods did not exist. The word translated *ate* can also be translated "consume." The fat of sacrifices was generally burned as a sacrifice to the deity, and the meat was consumed by the worshippers and priests ([Leviticus 3:16](#)). So the idea is "Who received the offering of fat from the altar?" The expected answer is "No one, because their gods are fake." Also the *wine of their drink offering* whether poured out or consumed by the false priest, did not have any effect, because the god is not real.

Therefore, the LORD mockingly says *Let them rise up and help you, Let them be your hiding place*. This seems to be God taunting the defeated nations. Since God addressed Israel, and asked them *Where are their gods*, it seems here God is now mocking the nations on behalf of Israel, in order to amplify the fact that they are fully defeated.

Through this Song of Moses, the LORD was trying to impress upon His people that those so-called gods were powerless and worthless.

Israel will suffer adverse consequences if they neglect Yahweh, their covenant God, and forsake His commands to love their neighbors and seek to serve others. If Israel instead turns to the pagan ways of exploitation, then they will be turned over to the pagans to be exploited by them. However, God is just, and will also see that the pagan exploiters are judged, and will deliver His people in time. Each generation who sings this Song of Moses will have the opportunity to take heed to this warning and avoid being the generation that breaks the treaty/covenant and incurs the judgment specified in the treaty.

### **Biblical Text:**

<sup>36</sup> **For the Lord will vindicate His people,  
And will have compassion on His servants,  
When He sees that *their* strength is gone,  
And there is none *remaining*, bond or free.**

<sup>37</sup> **And He will say, 'Where are their gods,  
The rock in which they sought refuge?**

<sup>38</sup> **'Who ate the fat of their sacrifices,  
And drank the wine of their drink offering?  
Let them rise up and help you,  
Let them be your hiding place!**