

Deuteronomy 32:39-42

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-32/deuteronomy-3239-42/>

Moses quoted the Suzerain God who says that He alone is God and that there are no other gods besides Him. Because of this, He will avenge Israel by inflicting punishment on the pagan nations.

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.

Although the Suzerain (Ruler) God threatened to destroy His covenant people because of their rebellion, He decided to limit their punishment. He would show compassion on Israel and avenge Israel by punishing the foreign nations, lest they boast in their accomplishments (vv. 26-35). In this section—the conclusion to the Song of Moses—the LORD described Himself as an avenging warrior who fights against His foes on behalf of Israel.

This final part of Moses's song is apparently a direct quote from the LORD. It invites people everywhere to pay careful attention to His message. The phrase *See now* is designed to get and keep the hearer's attention because what follows is very important. It hearkens the singer to dwell on the certain judgment God rendered because of their breach of the terms of the covenant, as well as the certainty with which God would judge the enemies of Israel.

What Moses's hearers needed to hear was the LORD declaring to them *that I, I am He!* (v. 39). This should have reminded the hearers of what He told Moses many years earlier—*I AM WHO I AM* (Exodus 3:14). Here, the word *I* (Hebrew "ānî") occurs four times in this verse. The LORD was emphasizing the fact that *there is no god besides Me*. The LORD is incomparable.

The LORD's incomparability can be clearly seen when He Himself declared, *It is I who put to death and give life*. He demonstrated that He is the sovereign LORD of life and death in the seventh plague on Egypt (Exodus 12:12, 29-30).

Israel's God has the power to inflict death and to restore life because He is the Creator of all things, including human life (Genesis 1:26).

The second statement of incomparability can also be seen in the LORD saying *I have wounded and it is I who heal*. To *wound* means to "to smite," and the verb to *heal* is commonly used by medical doctors or physicians treating patients' diseases or injuries. The LORD is sovereign over health and sickness, as seen in the plague of boils (Exodus 9:8-12). The Suzerain God had the power to wound people and then heal them (Jeremiah 30:17). In other words, He is both the giver and sustainer of life.

The LORD summarized this thought by saying, *And there is no one who can deliver from My hand*. The term *hand* is used figuratively to evoke the image of power and strength (Genesis 3:22). The verb translated as *deliver* means "to rescue" or "to snatch away." That is, when the Suzerain God decides to take actions such as inflicting punishment on disobedient people, no god can possibly stop him.

This sovereign Creator-God then took an oath, saying, *Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven, and say, as I live forever* (v. 40). It was a common practice for people in the ancient world to lift their hands when taking an oath to fulfill a promised obligation. This oath-taking usually involved calling on the name of a deity. In this song, however, the Suzerain God swore by His own existence that He was the divine Warrior who would defeat His enemies.

After taking the oath, the LORD provided details about how He would prepare Himself for battle and what He would do to His adversaries. First, He said *If I sharpen My flashing sword* (v. 41). The verb *sharpen* (Heb. "shaṇan") means "to whet" and is used metaphorically to picture how the Suzerain God would prepare His sword for battle. The term *flashing* (as with lightning) describes the power of His sword used as His instrument of judgment.

The next line, which is in parallel to the previous line, states that the LORD's *hand takes hold on justice*. The word *justice* (Heb. "mishpāt") states that He would punish those who ignore His covenant. The result was that God would seize judgment as though it were a weapon to *render vengeance on His adversaries*. He would punish the enemies according to what they deserved. He would do so to *repay those who hate Him* and His covenant people, Israel. The use of the word *hate* here, as in other places in the Old Testament, means "reject" (Romans 1:13, referring to Malachi 1:2).

Finally, the LORD described the devastating effects of His judgment as being so severe that He *will make My arrows drunk with blood, and My sword will devour flesh* (v. 42). The terms *blood* and *flesh* means physical lives would be lost to the point where the enemy would be brought down to a bloody defeat.

The extent of the judgment would be so great that no one would escape His judgment—the *blood of the slain and the captives* as well as the blood of *the long-haired leaders of the enemy*. The phrase *long-haired leaders* is a figurative expression describing leaders that are strong warriors. Samson was an example of this (Judges 16:17). Yet, despite the extraordinary strength of the enemy, the Suzerain (Ruler) God would defeat them because He alone is all-powerful. They all would be made to bow down before the LORD.

The Suzerain God is unique because all knowledge, wisdom, and power belong to Him. No other god possessed all knowledge, and that is why these false gods were regarded more as superhumans than sovereign deities. Only the God of Israel is the true God, and He is incomparable.

Biblical Text:

³⁹ **See now that I, I am He,
And there is no god besides Me;
It is I who put to death and give life.
I have wounded and it is I who heal,
And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.**

⁴⁰ **Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven,
And say, as I live forever,**

⁴¹ **If I sharpen My flashing sword,
And My hand takes hold on justice,
I will render vengeance on My adversaries,
And I will repay those who hate Me.**

⁴² **I will make My arrows drunk with blood,
And My sword will devour flesh,
With the blood of the slain and the captives,
From the long-haired leaders of the enemy.**