

Deuteronomy 30:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but
shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them;

Analysis

But if thine heart turn away קִיְּפָתָה לְבָבֶךָ—panah means to turn or turn aside, while levav (heart) represents the inner will and affections. Apostasy begins internally before manifesting in external idolatry. **So that thou wilt not hear**—the Hebrew shema means not just auditory perception but covenantal obedience and allegiance. Refusing to "hear" God's voice means rejecting His authority.

Be drawn away, and worship other gods—shadach (drawn away) suggests seduction or enticement, picturing idolatry as spiritual adultery. The progression is clear: heart turns → refuses to hear → gets drawn away → worships false gods → serves them. This diagnostic sequence exposes how apostasy unfolds incrementally, beginning with subtle heart-drift long before open rebellion. Paul echoes this in Romans 1:21-25, showing the devolutionary spiral from rejecting God to idolatry to moral chaos.

Historical Context

Moses addresses the second generation on the threshold of Canaan (1406 BC), warning against the syncretism that would plague Israel throughout the conquest and monarchy periods. Canaanite fertility cults (Baal, Asherah) would prove a constant temptation, mixing Yahweh worship with pagan ritual. This warning proved tragically prophetic—Israel's persistent idolatry led to exile exactly as

Moses predicted. The verse's psychological insight (heart turning precedes action) reflects Moses' pastoral wisdom.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What subtle 'heart turning' from God might be occurring in your life before outward compromise becomes visible?
2. How does the progression described here (heart turns → won't hear → drawn away → worship idols) help you identify spiritual drift early?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵם הַבָּבֶר אֵל תִּשְׁמַע
H518 turn away H6437 But if thine heart H3824 so that thou wilt not hear H8085

תַּעֲבֹד תְּמִם: אֶחָר יִם לְאֱלֹהִים וְהַשְׁתַּחַווּ יִתְּנַחֲתָה
but shalt be drawn away and worship gods other and serve H5080 H7812 H430 H312 H5647

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 3:12 (References God): Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

Proverbs 1:32 (Parallel theme): For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

2 Timothy 4:4 (Parallel theme): And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

