

Deuteronomy 31:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For when I shall have brought them into the land which I
sware unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey;
and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen
fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and
provoke me, and break my covenant.

Analysis

For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swear unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat—God predicted prosperity would become a spiritual trap. **Then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant**—wealth and satisfaction, rather than producing gratitude, would breed spiritual complacency and idolatry. The phrase *veshaman* (וַשְׁמָן, 'grown fat') appears as metaphor for dangerous prosperity throughout Scripture (Deuteronomy 32:15, Nehemiah 9:25-26, Hosea 13:6).

This verse articulates one of Scripture's most sobering paradoxes: blessing can become curse if it displaces God as the focus of affection. Material abundance doesn't automatically produce godliness; often it fosters self-sufficiency and forgetfulness of dependence on God. Jesus warned similarly: 'It is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 19:23). Prosperity requires vigilant gratitude and intentional God-centeredness to avoid the predicted outcome.

Historical Context

Prophesied circa 1406 BC before Israel entered Canaan's agricultural prosperity. The prediction proved devastatingly accurate: Solomon's reign brought unprecedented wealth, followed immediately by idolatry under his son Rehoboam. The northern kingdom especially embraced Baal worship during prosperous periods. Hosea 13:6 diagnosed the problem: 'When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me.' Only catastrophic judgment (Assyrian and Babylonian conquests) temporarily broke the wealth-apostasy pattern.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. Why does prosperity often lead to spiritual decline rather than gratitude?
What's the psychological mechanism?
2. How can Christians steward wealth and comfort without falling into the 'waxen fat' trap God predicted for Israel?
3. What spiritual disciplines guard against prosperity-induced complacency and self-sufficiency?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	אָבִיָּא נֹו	אֶל	הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת	אֲשֶׁר	נִשְׁבַּע עִמִּי
H3588	For when I shall have brought	H413	them into the land	H834	which I swear
	H935		H127		H7650
לְאֲבֹתָיו	זֶבֶת	חֶלֶב	וְדֶבֶשׁ	וְאָכְלוּ	
unto their fathers	that floweth	with milk	and honey	and they shall have eaten	
H1	H2100	H2461	H1706	H398	
וְשָׂבַע	וְדָשׁוּ	וּפָנּוּ	אֶל	אֱלֹהֵי יָם	אֲחֵרִים
and filled	themselves and waxen fat	then will they turn	H413	gods	unto other
H7646	H1878	H6437		H430	H312
וְעָבְדוּ	וְיִגְדֹּעַ וְיִגְדֹּעַ	וְיִפְּקֹד	אֶת	בְּרִיתִי	
and serve	them and provoke	me and break	H853	my covenant	
H5647	H5006	H6565		H1285	

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 13:6 (Parallel theme): According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me.

Exodus 3:8 (Parallel theme): And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Jeremiah 5:28 (Parallel theme): They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.

Ezekiel 34:20 (References God): Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD unto them; Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle.

Psalms 17:10 (Parallel theme): They are inclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly.

Psalms 119:70 (Parallel theme): Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law.

Psalms 73:7 (Parallel theme): Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.

Jeremiah 50:11 (Parallel theme): Because ye were glad, because ye rejoiced, O ye destroyers of mine heritage, because ye are grown fat as the heifer at grass, and bellow as bulls;

Nehemiah 9:35 (Parallel theme): For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works.

Exodus 3:17 (Parallel theme): And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.