

Deuteronomy 32:28

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them.

Analysis

For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them—Moses shifts focus to Israel's enemies, diagnosing their spiritual blindness. The Hebrew goy oved etsot hemah (גוי אבד עצות הטעה, 'a nation perishing of counsel they') uses oved, meaning lost, perishing, wandering—not merely lacking counsel but fundamentally disoriented, without moral or spiritual compass. Etsot (עצות, 'counsel') refers to wise plans, sound judgment, strategic thinking rooted in truth.

The parallel phrase ve'ein bahem tevunah (ו אין ביהם תבונה, 'and there is not in them understanding') uses tevunah, discernment or insight—the ability to perceive spiritual reality and consequences. This echoes Israel's own indictment (Deuteronomy 32:6), but here applies to pagan nations. Their military victories over apostate Israel don't reflect superior wisdom but God's use of foolish instruments to judge His people. Rome didn't understand it was fulfilling divine purpose when destroying Jerusalem (AD 70); neither did Babylon comprehend its role in 586 BC.

This diagnosis explains why pagans misattribute their victories (v. 27)—they lack theological categories to understand covenant judgment. Natural man cannot discern spiritual realities (1 Corinthians 2:14). Only divine revelation grants understanding of God's purposes in history.

Historical Context

Moses' assessment proves accurate throughout history. Assyria conquered northern Israel (722 BC) but attributed victory to Asshur rather than recognizing Yahweh's judgment (Isaiah 10:13-14). Babylon destroyed Jerusalem (586 BC) but boasted of Marduk's power rather than understanding they executed divine discipline (Habakkuk 1:11). Rome razed the second temple (AD 70) without comprehending they fulfilled Jesus' prophecy (Matthew 24:2). Each conquering power lacked spiritual understanding, seeing only military might and political strategy. The pattern continues: secular historians analyze Israel's defeats through geopolitical lenses, unable to perceive covenant theology operating in history. Only Scripture provides the 'counsel' and 'understanding' to interpret events rightly.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does pagan nations' lack of spiritual understanding prevent them from correctly interpreting their own military victories?
2. What does it mean that God uses 'foolish' nations (lacking counsel) to discipline His own 'wise' people?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	גַּוְיִם	אִבְּדָלָה	עַזְוַת	מִהָּ	הַ	אֵין	בְּ	מִ	בְּ
H3588	For they are a nation	void	of counsel	H1992	H369	H0			
	H1471	H6	H6098						

תִּבְּדָלָה:

neither is there any understanding

H8394

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 4:22 (Parallel theme): For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.

Isaiah 27:11 (Parallel theme): When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come, and set them on fire: for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour.

Job 28:28 (Parallel theme): And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

Proverbs 1:7 (Parallel theme): The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Hosea 4:6 (Parallel theme): My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.

Deuteronomy 32:6 (Parallel theme): Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?

Psalms 81:12 (Parallel theme): So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.