

# Jeremiah 2:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?

## Analysis

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God's first accusation follows: 'Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?' This rhetorical question expects the answer 'none'—God charges that Israel abandoned Him without justifiable cause. The phrase 'what iniquity' (mah-avvel, מַה־עָוֹל) means what injustice, wrong, or unfairness. God challenges Israel to identify any failure on His part that would warrant their departure. 'That they are gone far from me' (rachaku me'alai, רָחַקוּ מֵעָלַי) describes deliberate distancing—they didn't drift accidentally but intentionally withdrew from covenant relationship. The indictment continues: 'and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?' The phrase 'walked after vanity' (halkhu acharei hahevel, הֵלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי הַהֶבֶל) means following worthlessness, emptiness, or idols. 'Hevel' (הֶבֶל) is the same word used in Ecclesiastes ('vanity')—meaning vapor, breath, nothingness. It became a prophetic term for idols—gods that don't exist, possess no power, accomplish nothing. 'And are become vain' (vayyehbalu, וַיִּהְיֶה בָלִי) reveals the principle: you become like what you worship. Pursuing empty idols makes you empty. This verse establishes God's innocence and Israel's inexcusable guilt—they had no reason to forsake the faithful God for worthless substitutes.

## Historical Context

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This accusation reflects Israel's history from Exodus to Jeremiah's time (approximately 800 years). Despite God's faithfulness—delivering from Egypt,

providing in wilderness, conquering Canaan, raising judges, establishing monarchy, protecting from enemies—Israel repeatedly pursued Canaanite Baalism and other idolatries. The pattern began immediately after Sinai (golden calf), intensified under Canaanite influence (Judges), accelerated under Solomon (1 Kings 11), became systematic in northern kingdom (Jeroboam's golden calves), and corrupted Judah especially under Manasseh. Archaeological discoveries confirm widespread syncretism—household idols, Asherah figurines, altars combining Yahweh worship with pagan elements. The rhetorical question 'what iniquity have your fathers found in me?' parallels ancient Near Eastern treaty language where suzerains challenged vassals to justify treaty violations. God's faithfulness contrasts with Israel's faithlessness—He kept covenant; they broke it. The phrase 'become vain' by worshipping vanity reflects Psalm 115:8: 'They that make them are like unto them.' Worshipping false gods dehumanizes and corrupts—you become spiritually empty pursuing spiritual emptiness.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

## Study Questions

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1. How does God's challenge—'what iniquity have you found in me?'—expose the irrationality of abandoning faithful God for unfaithful alternatives?
2. What does the principle 'you become what you worship' teach about the spiritual and moral consequences of idolatry in its various forms?

## Interlinear Text

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כֹּה	אָמַר	יְהוָה	מָצָא	וּ	אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם	בִּי
H3541	Thus saith	the LORD	H4100	found	have your fathers	H0
	H559	H3068	H4672		H1	
עַל	כִּי	בָּחֲקוּ	וּ	מַעַל	וְלָכּוּ	אַחֲרָי
What iniquity	H3588	in me that they are gone far		H5921	H1980	after
H5766		H7368				H310
בָּל	וַהֲבָלוּ:					
vanity	and are become vain					
H1892	H1891					

## Additional Cross-References

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**2 Kings 17:15** (References Lord): And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them.

**Romans 1:21** (Parallel theme): Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

**Psalms 115:8** (Parallel theme): They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.

**Jonah 2:8** (Parallel theme): They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

**Isaiah 44:9** (Parallel theme): They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed.

**Deuteronomy 32:21** (Parallel theme): They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will

move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.

**1 Samuel 12:21** (Parallel theme): And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain.

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