

Week of November 27, 2011

Adopt the Right Perspective

Passage Outline

1. **God Is Worthy** - Deut. 32:1-4
2. **Humanity Is Willful** - Deut. 32:5-9
3. **God's Ways Are Wonderful** -Deut. 32:36-39,43

What This Lesson Is About:

We will examine the song Moses recited at the end of his life, a song that centers all of life in knowing and living under the greatness and graciousness of God.



How This Lesson Can Impact Your Life:

This study will help you center your life under the gracious and loving rule of God.

1. God Is Worthy - Deut. 32:1-4

**1 Pay attention, heavens, and I will speak;
listen, earth, to the words of my mouth.**

**2 Let my teaching fall like rain
and my word settle like dew,
like gentle rain on new grass
and showers on tender plants.**

**3 For I will proclaim Yahweh's name.
Declare the greatness of our God!**

**4 The Rock—His work is perfect;
all His ways are entirely just.
A faithful God, without prejudice,
He is righteous and true.**

A. Setting the Scene:

- i. Moses had grown old and the end of his life neared. Moses also knew that when Israel crossed the Jordan they would need some type of abiding testimony to remind them of the covenant they had made with God at Sinai.
- ii. So, God told Moses to write down the song and teach it to the people.
- iii. God knew the people would worship other gods and break the covenant.
- iv. But by remembering the song, they would repent and seek forgiveness.
- v. The song would give them the right perspective in living in a new land. We need to study this covenant song carefully because it will help us learn to live before a holy and gracious God.

B. Moses' poem/song is one of the most beautiful and eloquent compositions in the Old Testament.

- i. It describes Israel's anticipated apostasy from a just and faithful God;
- ii. It also describes a God who stands willing to forgive and redeem.

C. The song is didactic, that is, its main purpose is to teach.

- i. God, the great **Rock** (vv. 4,15,18,30,31), has been **entirely just** in His treatment of Israel;
- ii. Israel, in contrast to God, has been "a devious and crooked generation;"

The poem begins with Moses calling upon the **heavens** and **earth** to **listen ... to the words** that he would

speak. Two literary issues need to be pointed out here. First, the song follows the common practice of Hebrew poetry in repeating the basic meaning of one line in the following line or lines. This technique we call parallelism. It gives beauty and depth to the song. Hence, Moses said “**pay attention**” to the heavens and “**listen**” to the earth. **Pay attention** and **listen** are parallel, as are **speak** and **the words of my mouth**. Many examples of parallelism occur throughout the song.

Second, the song uses simile to draw attention to the poem’s thought. So, for example, the **teaching** of the song falls **like rain**, and the words **settle like dew**. *Like* signals a simile, a figure of speech where one thing is compared to another. This verse suggests that what Moses will teach is as nourishing to the soul as **rain, dew, gentle rain**, and **showers** are to the **plants** of the earth. The beauty comes when we realize that Moses used four different words to describe the life-giving nourishment of water for the earth. For believers, this is a powerful image. Longing for God waters our souls (Ps. 42:1). His Word, the Bible, refreshes and nourishes us as we grow in Him.

Moses desired to **proclaim** the name of Yahweh and to **declare His greatness**. The parallelism of this verse means proclaiming the Lord’s name equals declaring His greatness. The public proclamation of **Yahweh’s name** announces His reputation and character (see Ex. 33:19; 34:5-6). Hearing what God had done for Israel would lead to no other response than to acknowledge His power and might.

In verse 4 Moses listed specific expressions of God’s power. To begin with, He is **The Rock!** This theme continues throughout the song (Deut. 32:4,15,18,30,31,37). God’s **work** (or deeds) are **perfect** (or unblemished). That is, God is blameless in His dealings with Israel. **His ways are justice**. He is a reliable and **faithful God**; He can be trusted. Furthermore, no **prejudice**, injustice, or dishonesty reside in Him. God is the **righteous One**, totally upright or **true**.

The right perspective on life begins when we recognize the greatness of God and place Him at the forefront of all we do and say. God is worthy! He is The Rock. He should be our Rock. Let us declare His name, His glory among the nations (Ps. 96:3).

We cannot fully comprehend our infinite God, but He has revealed His character to us through Scripture (including in Moses’ song). In the space below, list several adjectives (such as *perfect* or *loving*) that describe God and make Him our Rock and worthy of worship!

Humanity Is Willful (Deut. 32:5-9)

**5 His people have acted corruptly toward Him;
this is their defect—they are not His children
but a devious and crooked generation.**

**6 Is this how you repay the LORD,
you foolish and senseless people?
Isn’t He your Father and Creator?
Didn’t He make you and sustain you?**

**7 Remember the days of old;
consider the years long past.**

**Ask your father, and he will tell you,
your elders, and they will teach you.**

8 When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance

**and divided the human race,
He set the boundaries of the peoples
according to the number of the people of Israel.
9 But the LORD's portion is His people,
Jacob, His own inheritance.**

In verse 5 the song of Moses picks up on the second great theme of the poem: in stark contrast to God's faithfulness, Israel has acted like a **devious and crooked generation**. The context of the song suggests that this indictment is to be recognized in two ways. First, the song reminds God's **people** that they have already **acted corruptly toward Him** (see v. 7). They had shown their disobedience in the wilderness by worshiping the golden calf, murmuring and complaining, and challenging the leadership of Moses and Aaron.

But also, in the second case, the song points prophetically to the future when Israel would turn their attention to pagan gods, breaking the covenant at Sinai and turning their backs on the Lord. In doing so they would not be acting like **His children**. Instead, they would exhibit the traits of willful and rebellious children. By acting in a perverted way, Israel would risk breaking the kinship relationship set forth by God in covenant. Only the gracious forgiveness of God could restore it.

God knew the Israelites would turn at times to false gods. What false "gods" do you see worshiped in your community? Check any that apply:

Fame	Self	Nature	Leisure
Power	Sex	Popularity	Money

Scholars have long noted that the second line of verse 5 is difficult to translate. The Hebrew word translated **defect** by the HCSB is rendered elsewhere as "spot" (KJV), "blemish" (American Standard Version) or "shame" (NIV). This word **defect** and the term perfect or unblemished (v. 4) are used to designate sacrificial animals that are unacceptable or acceptable for worship (Lev. 22:21; Num. 19:2). Unlike God's deeds or actions (Deut. 32:4), which are "perfect" (or unblemished), Israel's are defective and unsuitable. The moral blemish or **defect** is Israel's willfulness: a desire to reject God as Father and act as disobedient and willful children.

Moses directly addressed Israel in verse 6 and continued the indictment in a series of rhetorical questions. How dare they treat God this way! They were a **foolish and senseless** nation. They failed to recognize God as their **Father**. They did not realize God's requirements were not wearisome burdens, but were the result of God's covenant love. The Hebrew word rendered **Creator** also occurs in the song of Moses and the Israelites following their deliverance at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:16, "purchased"), and was possibly used here to point out that Israel as a nation was created by God's deliverance in the exodus and His covenant at Sinai. God had made them—He would **sustain** them.

In the song Moses urged Israel to **remember the days of old**. He encouraged them to ask their fathers and **elders** to recount the history of their patriarchs and ancestors. But this was not just for nostalgia's sake; Moses wanted them to understand that the God who had acted in the past would continue to act on behalf of His people.

The use of the title **Most High** (*Elyon*) at the beginning of verse 8 may be a deliberate attempt to recall a particular person and a promise of Israel's early history. **Most High** in the Old Testament usually designates Yahweh. It first occurs in Genesis 14 when Abram met Melchizedek after delivering Lot and his family from the Mesopotamian kings. Abram became the primary ancestor of Israel, and the Lord specifically promised that He would make of him a great nation (Gen. 12:2).

The sovereign Creator of the universe gave each nation an **inheritance** (Amos 9:7). It was He who divided the human race, and when He did so, He **set** their **boundaries**. But even among the division of all these nations, God chose **Jacob** (a poetic synonym for Israel) to be His allotted **inheritance** (see also 4:20). The children of Israel would be His **portion**, His share. Out of all the peoples on the earth, Yahweh wanted Israel to be **His own**

special possession (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2). They belonged to Him!

With such a lofty position and role, the betrayal and corruption of Israel starkly highlights their wickedness. Despite Yahweh's nourishing care, Israel became fat and bloated and abandoned God (32:14-15). They rejected the Rock, their Savior, and followed other gods (vv. 15-18). In this way, Israel willfully provoked God to anger, and as a result, He promised to pile disasters upon them (vv. 19-25).

Israel was to become "a nation lacking sense" (v. 28). They just did not understand. Blessings and satisfaction came through the God who had brought them up out of Egypt and had made a covenant with them at Sinai. He would even redeem them with the ultimate sacrifice of His only begotten Son in the new covenant! But Israel, and all of humanity, chose to be willful, disobedient children. If we were wise, we "would figure it out" (v. 29). Humanity is willful (Rom. 3:10-12,23).

God's Ways Are Wonderful (Deut. 32:36-39,43)

**36 The LORD will indeed vindicate His people
and have compassion on His servants
when He sees that their strength is gone
and no one is left—slave or free.**

**37 He will say: "Where are their gods,
the 'rock' they found refuge in?"**

**38 Who ate the fat of their sacrifices
and drank the wine of their drink offerings?**

**Let them rise up and help you;
let it be a shelter for you.**

**39 See now that I alone am He;
there is no God but Me.**

**I bring death and I give life;
I wound and I heal.**

No one can rescue anyone from My hand.

**43 Rejoice, you nations, concerning His people,
for He will avenge the blood of His servants.
He will take vengeance on His adversaries;
He will purify His land and His people.**

Several points in this passage of the song of Moses need careful study. The main purpose of these verses is to establish the truth of God's grace: despite Israel's arrogant rebellion God still loved His people and would willingly have compassion on them. The Lord did not want to break the covenant with them and, given certain conditions, would forgive them and restore them as His people. In contrast to Israel's willful actions, "God's Ways Are Wonderful."

Verse 36 begins by declaring that the Lord would eventually **vindicate** (lit. "judge") Israel. The idea that the Lord would judge in their favor comes from the fact that Israel is referred to as God's **people** and **servants** (see Ps. 135:14). The parallel line stating that God will **have compassion** on them also supports it. The verb **compassion** can also mean to relent or repent (see Ex. 32:14). The Lord graciously decided not to visit upon Israel the full force of their just punishment. Instead, He would show compassion for them and stay His hand.

God's promised acts of mercy would not come until Israel's **strength** to rebel was **gone**. Israel had to be fully emptied of their willful behavior. Their sin had been, and would be, expressed in believing their human strength could carry the day. Israel's might had to be totally demolished before they would recognize their need of God's

directive power.

They also sought to worship and serve foreign **gods** from the nations around them. They had to lose all trust in counterfeit gods and leaders as well. The rhetorical questions raised in verses 37-38 point out that trust in any other possible source of strength, real or imagined, would prove useless. **Where** were **their gods**? Israel had rejected the real Rock (v. 4) for a phony **rock**. Ironically, Israel would find no **refuge** or trust in these fake stones.

Such **gods** might *eat the fat* of Israel's sacrifices and *guzzle* the **drink offerings**, but they could not help. Israel's neighbors commonly viewed sacrifices as offering food and drink for nourishment to the gods. But God Himself rejected this view of sacrifice (see Ps. 50:7-15). Instead, the Lord here mocked the idea that these gods who helplessly needed food and drink provided for them would ever be able or adequate to deliver anyone.

Three previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "Egypt's Many gods" (Fall 1996), "Old Testament Offerings" (Spring 2010), and "Old Testament Sacrifices and Offerings" (Winter 1975) relate to this lesson and can be found on the Fall 2011 *Biblical Illustrator Plus* (CD-ROM).

In fact, these false gods were unable to **rise up and help**; they were useless in a crisis. When Israel faced difficult situations, these bogus imitations could offer no help or hope. They could not serve as a **shelter** or as protection. In addition, they were worthless in real life. They were incapable of directing and blessing. Not only were these fake gods impotent, they didn't even exist. When finally their confidence in counterfeit deities exhausted itself, their Rock would stand ready to convince them there was **no God** besides Him.

Believers should know better than to trust in false idols. But our culture often places undue trust in self-help gurus, common sense counselors, and popular personalities. We may find ourselves tempted to treat the teachings of these so-called sages as more weighty than God's will for our lives. Even more tempting, we tend to trust our own desires, our own will, and our own strength. We must remember that we live by the Spirit of God and not by our own might (Zech. 4:6). It is God's grace that enables us to do so.

Verse 39 contains a noble declaration of God's nature. In contrast to the inability of the idols, Yahweh, the God of Israel, **alone** is **He**, the living God. **There is no God** but Yahweh! He, and He alone is the only One capable enough to offer help and protection. Israel's neighbors worshiped a pantheon of gods. But Yahweh is not the chief god among many gods—He is God alone with no consort (spousal deity) or any other gods in His presence.

God's hand held the power of **death** and **life**. He alone exercised the power to **wound** and **heal**. God could not be defeated. **No one** could be rescued **from His hand**. No other god could do this; no other god could exercise this kind of power or compete for jurisdiction and authority. Yahweh alone is sovereign.

The final verse of the song boldly proclaims that the Lord **will avenge the blood of His servants** and execute **vengeance on His adversaries**. In addition, He **will purify** both **His land and His people**. The Hebrew verb translated **purify** (KJV: be merciful) actually means "to make atonement." Consequently, beyond the judgment expressed in the song of Moses there exists a hope of reconciliation between God and His people. This atonement would find its fulfillment and fullness in Christ Jesus (Ezek. 16:60-63; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17). As an end result all **nations** would be called on to **rejoice** with Israel for God's wonderful ways.

God's mercy and grace shine through in the final section of Moses' song. Although the Israelites would rebel, God promised to forgive them. This same forgiveness is available to you! What commitment will you make in response to God's love?

I will love Him in return.

I will live with a spirit of gratitude.

I will worship Him.

I will serve Him in all that I do.

I will obey His commands.

___ **I can't help but tell others!**

Biblical Truths of This Lesson in Focus

- Place God at the forefront of all you say and do.
- Both private and corporate praise should focus on God and God alone.
- The first step to repentance is to acknowledge our own sinfulness.
- In light of what God has done for us, why would we want to go our own way and not follow Him?
- Believers must live by the Spirit of God and not by their own strength.
- In spite of our waywardness, we can return to God because He loves us and has compassion on us.
- We must proclaim God's wonderful ways among the nations.

Moses determined to “proclaim Yahweh’s name” (v. 3) and left his song as a testament to God’s greatness. We can declare God’s greatness through both word and deed. How will you glorify God? Complete the following sentence: I will “proclaim Yahweh’s name” by ...

1. Norman P. Grubb, *C. T. Studd: Cricketer and Pioneer* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1982), 132.
2. *Ibid.*, 154.

Concept Study: God as “the Rock” in the Old Testament (v. 4)

Because rocky sites often provided a place of refuge and safety it was natural for the Israelites to use the metaphor to describe God's protective character. “The Mighty One of Jacob” was “the Rock of Israel” (Gen. 49:24). He was the Rock who gave birth to Israel (Deut. 32:18), and the Rock of their salvation (Deut. 32:15; Ps. 89:26). There is no unrighteousness in this Rock (Ps. 92:15). There was no rock like God (Deut. 32:31; 1 Sam. 2:2), the Rock of protection and refuge (Ps. 94:22). Indeed, this Rock was personal, and He would hear our prayers (Ps. 28:1), but He would be a stumbling block for those who rejected Him (Isa. 8:14).