

Deuteronomy 32

Songs

= celebrate, lament, express desire, but also aids to teaching/learning/remembering.

Our hymns and songs state and remind us of what we believe about God, and salvation etc. E.g. Amazing Grace, And Can it Be, The king of Love ... Great source of comfort and strength in times of need... as suffering church attests.

Testimony to others, re our identity/who we are , e.g. National Anthem

So too, Songs in Bible = gave vocal expression to faith:

- Songs of victory celebrated God's power (Exod 15; Judg 5)
- Songs of trust recalled God's faithfulness (e.g. many Psalms)
- Songs of distress appealed for God's help (Lamentations, passages in Jeremiah, many Psalms).

Moses' Song partially resembles the ANE lawsuit pattern; that is, an overlord's accusation that a vassal has infringed the conditions of the treaty between them." (Huffman) An "exposure of offence" (Brown).

- Call of witnesses (v.1)
- Accusation (vv.3-7, 15-22, 28-33)
- Account of the overlord's benevolence (vv.4, 9-14)
- An affirmation that the covenant has been broken (vv. 3, 15-18)
- An announcement of punishment (vv.19-35)

Where it diverges is in continuing after the announcement of punishment.

- pulling back from a final judgment
- the turning of his wrath against Israel's oppressors (themselves the instruments of his punishment), and
- announcement of vindication and restoration of his people.

Re purpose of this song: to be learnt, passed down and recited regularly to instruct and to convict -

- a. To evoke praise of God and call Israel to faithfulness (vv.1-14, 43)
- b. To be a witness against Israel when go after other gods/abandon the covenant – see 31.19,21; 32.46.

And it is meant to be a blessing:

v.2 Prayer that his teaching/speech will bless/bring life. Dew, gentle rain and showers = gentle. The message itself is blunt/brutal at points, but its purpose is not to harm but to do good – to direct Israel to choose life.

Brings together many of the great themes of Pentateuch: the LORD, Israel, idolatry.

The LORD – *the* Rock and Israel's Rock

v.4 In praise of **the ROCK**.

- Permanence/immovability
- unchangableness.

In wilderness rocks provide shelter, protection, shade, and even food (honey, olives cling to the side of rocky outcrops).

Cf. Isa 17.10

For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge

Later in poem he contrasts *the Rock* with the illusory rock-powers/character of other gods (v.37).

Perfect – Just – Faithful – without Iniquity - Upright

v. 18 "... the Rock that bore/fathered you".

cf. Isa 51.1

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD:
Look to the Rock from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug.

Contrasted with 'their rock' i.e. enemies:

vv.30-31 "How could one have chased a thousand, and two have put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had given them up? For their rock is not as our Rock..." i.e. worthless/helpless

vv.8-9 God's **choice** of Israel recalls Exod 19.5-6, but goes back further to creation when God apportioned the nations' inheritance. It was then that he chose Israel and arranged boundaries to provide a portion for Jacob.

v.10 God 'found' them in the wilderness – both of Egypt and Sinai.

His tenderness in caring for them is likened to

- Being kept as the apple (pupil) of his eye
- V.11 Being protected and reared by an eagle. Eagle flutters over nest to encourage eaglet out, to learn to fly, but flies under it to catch when falls/fails. Many of life's best lessons are learnt through trials, but underneath are always the everlasting arms (33.27)
- Being suckled (v.13b)

Israel

v.5 His faithless children. It beggars belief that they should turn away from their Rock. In contrast to his strength and righteousness and uprightness, they are corrupt, blemished, crooked and twisted.

v.6 Castigates God's people. Vv.6-7 play on the image of father. God is their Father who created them; if they have forgotten they should ask their own fathers whether it is not so, attested in generations past.

vv.7-14 "Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father and he will tell you..."

vv.15-18 Jeshurun (= 'upright one', God's nickname for his son) becomes bloated with pride (self-reliant, self-contented opulence [Brown] cf. Deut 6.11-12; 8.11-14) and

scoffs at/rejects the ROCK, worshiping idols, i.e. a violation of the terms of the covenant: exclusive loyalty to YHWH

McConville: "The people reject Yahweh even as they over-indulge in his gifts."

Brown: "The self-satisfied life becomes so small and full that there is little room for God."

They don't just 'forget' God, they actively ascribed to idols/other gods the qualities and great acts of the LORD (as their fathers did in Exod 32. Cf. Rom 1.18ff).

Primary sin = Idolatry, which is

- **forbidden** (1st and 2nd commandments) . "Idolatry dishonours God's person, ignores his word, and disregards his generosity" (Brown), It gives to another the praise and worship that is God's. Covetousness, i.e. having undue/acquisitive affection for something, is also idolatry according to Paul – Eph 5.5. Jesus in Matt 6.24&33 declares that you cannot worship two masters, and must seek the Kingdom of God above all else.
- **detestable** – God hates it.

- **demonic** (v.17a). Satan has always sought to deflect/distract humans from worshipping God. See Jesus' wilderness temptations. Idol worship is ultimately worship of Satan himself.
- **novel** (v.17c-d). "They no record of saving deeds to authenticate themselves."
- **futile** (v.37-38. Worse than nothing, they have to be made and carried!

The song exposes **three tragic aspects** of human sinfulness. It makes God's children:

- **Haughty/arrogant** – Jeshurun "scoffed at the rock of his salvation... stirred him to jealousy... provoked him to anger" (vv.15-16)
- **loveless** – i.e. cut off from the love of God (though God still loves them – see v.36), who hides his face from them, denies them his presence and saving power. He withdraws his provision (v.22), protection (vv.23-24) and peace (v.25) - to bring them to their senses.
- **senseless** – recall that one of the hallmarks of Israel was to have been their wisdom - – Deut 4.6-8

BUT They have rejected the Torah which was to have been the mark of their wisdom, and the wisdom of their God

MOREOVER they fail to understand why they are beaten by weaker enemies, and what God is doing to them (by withdrawing his presence/hiding his face) – vv.28-30.

They do not understand that God has given them over to the gods they worship, to their enemies whose gods these idols are.

They foolishly have exchanged 'the foaming wine made from the blood of the grape' (v.14) for "grapes of poison; their clusters are bitter; their wine is the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of asps" (vv.32-33).

"The devil's blessings are disguised curses" (Brown).

What will happen when the Rock is mocked by his crooked, corrupt children

a. God's initial reaction is

I. to abandon them to their own folly.

vv.19-20 Withdraw his presence: turn away/hide his face, spurn them.

“Those who abandon the LORD shall be abandoned by the LORD”

(Miller)

v.30 Israel does not fall because the rock/s of their enemies are more powerful than the Rock of Israel, but because he has hidden his face from them, ‘given them up’, ‘sold them’.

Let them find out for themselves the foolishness, futility and consequences of their own choices – of rejecting him and going after the idols and gods of other peoples/nations.

- to bring them to their senses – see vv.37-38

Then he (Yahweh) will say, “Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering?

Let them rise up and help you;

Let them be your protection!”

i.e. when disaster comes and Israel cries out to their new gods, then they will realise that they are no rocks at all!

Sadly, it's not till Israel suffers these disasters that she will wake up to her faithlessness and folly and repent – turning back to Yahweh.

II. He will make them feel as he does – v.21:

They have made me jealous with what is no god;

They have provoked me to anger with their idols.

So I will make them jealous with those who are no people;

I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation

b. But he is angry too and will invoke the covenant curses to bring them to their senses (vv.23-25)

- famine
- pestilence
- wild animals and snakes
- war

c. Yet he will **hold back from destroying them** (vv.26-27) for his own name/reputation's sake: he didn't want Israel's enemies taking the credit for what he had done – thus thinking they had defeated Israel's God.

(cf. Moses' prayers in Exod 32.11ff and Num 14.13ff. appealing to God to consider his reputation)

ALL this = amounts to discipline: He does not destroy or forget his covenant

v.36 here the formula deviates from that of the ANE treaty-breaking indictment: **the LORD will have compassion and vindicate his people.** They are loveless because they have rejected him/shut out his love; but he has not stopped loving them.

They are crooked, but he remains upright.

They are disobedient but he remains loyal.

They are senseless/foolish but he remains perfectly wise/truthful.

vv.37-42 The LORD **will deal to those who are his enemies**, the ones his people went after, and finally – when they hit rock bottom (v.36) – his foolish children will come to their senses.

Then the LORD will act as judge (v.36), lover (v.36), healer (v.39) and victor (vv.40-42).

He will demonstrate, and the world (even the heavens and other gods, v.43) will “see now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me” (v.39)

v.43 A **call to the heavens and all gods to rejoice and bow down** to the LORD. All creation, including his ‘enemies’ (gods) must then bow down to him – cf. Phil 2 – “At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess...”

Yahweh will then “cleanse (or atone for?) his land/”. His forgiveness and deliverance are assured, because of who he is.

i.e. **The LORD will vindicate himself** (cf. Moses' prayers for him to do so)

Song bracketed by praise and witness

“C.S. Lewis pointed out that believers praise God because there can be no proper enjoyment without the element of appreciation. Lovers praise their partners, readers extol the skill of their favourite writer, walkers magnify the beauty of the countryside.” Brown.

“Just as men spontaneously praise what they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: ‘Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent?’ ... I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.” (C.S.Lewis)

This Song invites its hearers to join Moses in grateful adoration. (Brown) Yet Moses knows that his future hearers, like those in Israel’s recent past, will abandon their God. He is therefore at pains to remind them just who he is.

Prose conclusion: “Take to heart all the words... commend them to your children... For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.

Same theme repeated as in Deut 4.1 – LORD, law, land and life.

Conclusion: we too must

- take God’s word seriously (choose life)
- be wary of idolatry – possible even in Christian community – see 1 John 5.19-21

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true;

And we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Little children, keep yourself from idols.

- give God the praise and glory due his name – and no other

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Moses’ last gift/exhortation to Israel was in the form of a song (other than God’s directing him to do this)?

2. Is there a song/s that you find particularly helpful in times of challenge? You might like to share why.
3. In what ways has God been the Rock in your life?
4. We are to pass on our faith to the next generation. In your own experience, have particular prayers or songs you learnt as a child been helpful to you? Have you passed them on to others, e.g. children, grandchildren, nephews or nieces? Is it something you've thought about and could do?
5. What forms does idolatry take in NZ society today? In what ways do these idols harm people/society?
6. John closes his first letter (1 John) rather abruptly with the charge: "Brothers and sisters, keep yourself from idols." These are Christians, so it is unlikely he is referring to literal idols (statues of gods). The point is that even Christians and churches can slip into idolatrous behaviour. In what ways might we as individuals, and WHCC as a church, be prone to slip into idolatrous behaviour? How might we guard ourselves?
7. Moses anticipates that when Israel reaches rock bottom (is powerless and utterly defeated, vv.36-39), she will come to her senses. Is this true of people today, in your experience? Is it relevant when thinking of strategies to evangelise, and where/on whom we focus our efforts?