



Deuteronomy - Chapter Thirty Two

VI Deuteronomy 31:1-34:12 Succession of Leadership (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirty Two

The chapter commences with the full song of Moses, which he teaches to the entire nation and instructs them to teach it to their children so that they too may obey God's Law.

God then instructs Moses to ascend Mount Nebo so that he may view the Promised Land, a land he is forbidden to enter. It will be on that mountain that Moses shall die.

VI.b Deuteronomy 31:30-32:47 - The Song of Moses

This section provides the words of the song that Moses has written to act as a witness against the people when they forsake God's Law. Moses recites it before all the people and instructs them to teach it to their children.

^{31:30} Then Moses recited the words of this song, to the very end, in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel:

Deuteronomy 31:30

Then Moses recited the words of this song. Moses song is delivered in the hearing of the entire nation of God's people.

- 1 Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak;
let the earth hear the words of my mouth.
- 2 May my teaching drop like the rain,
my speech condense like the dew;
like gentle rain on grass,

like showers on new growth.

³ For I will proclaim the name of the Lord;
ascribe greatness to our God!

⁴ The Rock, his work is perfect,
and all his ways are just.

A faithful God, without deceit,
just and upright is he;

⁵ yet his degenerate children have dealt falsely with him,
a perverse and crooked generation.

Deuteronomy 32:1-5

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; let the earth hear the words of my mouth. Moses began by asking for attention, not only from Israel, but from all of creation, as also seen in: <<*Hear this, all you peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world*>> (Psalm 49:1), and: <<*Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it; and let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple*>> (Micah 1:2).

May my teaching drop like the rain. Moses wants his words to be received and soaked up like rain falling on dry ground.

For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! He then gave praise to God, both for who God is: he is the Rock, just and upright is he; and for what God does: his work is perfect, all his ways are just. God is also described as a rock by David: <<*The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold*>> (Psalm 18:2), and: <<*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer*>> (Psalm 19:14).

His degenerate children. Moses spoke as a witness against a rebellious Israel. A later prophet demonstrates how God feels about such people: <<*Then the Lord said, 'Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God'*>> (Hosea 1:9). Refer to the comment made on Deuteronomy 14:1-2.

A perverse and crooked generation. The faithless were accused of this: <<*Jesus answered, 'You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here'*>> (Luke 9:41), and Paul writes: <<*Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a*

crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world>> (Philippians 2:15).

- 6 Do you thus repay the Lord,
O foolish and senseless people?
Is not he your father, who created you,
who made you and established you?

Deuteronomy 32:6

O foolish and senseless people? Their sin is even more foolish and unwise in light of what God has done for them: <<*Understand, O dullest of the people; fools, when will you be wise?>>* (Psalm 94:8), and: <<*Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears, but do not hear>>* (Jeremiah 5:21). It is foolish and unwise to rebel against the God who has did so much for them.

Is not he your father. Although rare in the OT, the notion of God as father of his people is not totally new in the NT: <<*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son>>* (Hosea 11:1).

- 7 Remember the days of old,
consider the years long past;
ask your father, and he will inform you;
your elders, and they will tell you.
- 8 When the Most High apportioned the nations,
when he divided humankind,
he fixed the boundaries of the peoples
according to the number of the gods;
- 9 the Lord's own portion was his people,
Jacob his allotted share.

Deuteronomy 32:8-9

Remember the days of old. Considering that this song was meant to be a witness against a rebellious Israel, Moses reminded Israel of all God's goodness to them. This was to both bring a greater conviction of sin, and to remind them of God's love and grace they could return to. Refer also to Deuteronomy 5:15 and the associated comments.

When the Most High apportioned the nations. It is the Lord that establishes nations and gives them a land allocation. Examples are Edom, Moab, and Ammon in Deuteronomy 2:1-23, as well as Israel throughout the book.

According to the number of the gods or **Sons of God** may suggest that certain angels are responsible for specific nations, whereas the Lord himself cares for Israel. Angels or heavenly beings are often the translation from the Hebrew for ‘sons of God’ as in: <<*Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them*>> (Job 1:6 ESV).

The Lord’s own portion is a term of special affection. Refer to the comments made on Deuteronomy 4:20 and 18:1-2.

- 10 He sustained him in a desert land,
in a howling wilderness waste;
he shielded him, cared for him,
guarded him as the apple of his eye.
- 11 As an eagle stirs up its nest,
and hovers over its young;
as it spreads its wings, takes them up,
and bears them aloft on its pinions,
12 the Lord alone guided him;
no foreign god was with him.
- 13 He set him upon the heights of the land,
and fed him with produce of the field;
he nursed him with honey from the crags,
with oil from flinty rock;
- 14 curds from the herd, and milk from the flock,
with fat of lambs and rams;
Bashan bulls and goats,
together with the choicest wheat —
you drank fine wine from the blood of grapes.

Deuteronomy 32:10-14

He sustained him in a desert land is a reminder of the forty wilderness years. God provided food and water, their clothing did not wear out and their enemies did not defeat them.

As an eagle portrays the power of this mighty bird, a simile that God has used before for bearing his people: <<*You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself*>> (Exodus 19:4).

Bashan was a particularly fertile area, where Og had been king; refer to Deuteronomy 3:1-11. The prophet speaks out against its people: <<*Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, 'Bring something to drink!'*>> (Amos 4:1).

- 15 Jacob ate his fill;
Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked.
You grew fat, bloated, and gorged!
He abandoned God who made him,
and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.
- 16 They made him jealous with strange gods,
with abhorrent things they provoked him.
- 17 They sacrificed to demons, not God,
to deities they had never known,
to new ones recently arrived,
whom your ancestors had not feared.
- 18 You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you;
you forgot the God who gave you birth.

Deuteronomy 32:15-18

Jeshurun means the upright one, a poetic name for Israel used sarcastically here: <<*Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you in the womb and will help you: Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen*>> (Isaiah 44:2).

They made him jealous with strange gods. This was despite the clear commandment not to worship other gods: <<*You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who*

reject me>> (Exodus 20:5); refer also to Deuteronomy 4:23-24 and the associated comments. As throughout Deuteronomy, idolatry is the key sin of and threat to Israel (v.21). God, the Rock, has redeemed and provided for Israel, whereas idols or false gods have no real existence or track record (v.17).

They sacrificed to demons. In forsaking God, Israel turned to the pagan idols of the nations around them and actually worshipped demons, as Paul also states: <<**No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons**>> (1 Corinthians 10:20). There was a dark spiritual reality behind the idols of the nations, and Israel embraced that dark spiritual reality.

19 The Lord saw it, and was jealous;
he spurned his sons and daughters.
20 He said: I will hide my face from them,
I will see what their end will be;
for they are a perverse generation,
children in whom there is no faithfulness.

Deuteronomy 32:19-20

I will hide my face from them. When God's people forsake him, he withdraws the intimacy of his presence. At first, this is sometimes seen as a relief, because the conviction of sin is not so great. But then the darkness and desperation sets in. Often God's punishment of sin is his withdrawal: <<**Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour**>> (Isaiah 45:15), and: <<**Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done**>> (Romans 1:24-28).

21 They made me jealous with what is no god,
provoked me with their idols.
So I will make them jealous with what is no people,
provoke them with a foolish nation.

Deuteronomy 32:21

They made me jealous with what is no god. In Romans 10:19 Paul quotes from this verse to show that Israel will need a remedy for their unbelief regarding Jesus. In Romans 11:11-14, Gentile faith is the remedy.

22 For a fire is kindled by my anger,
and burns to the depths of Sheol;
it devours the earth and its increase,
and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.

Deuteronomy 32:22

The depths of Sheol is the place of the dead: <<*O that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath is past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me!*>> (Job 14:13), <<*Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going*>> (Ecclesiastes 9:10), and: <<*Moreover, wealth is treacherous; the arrogant do not endure. They open their throats wide as Sheol; like Death they never have enough. They gather all nations for themselves, and collect all peoples as their own*>> (Habakkuk 2:5). However, the faithful have hope that God will rescue them from such a fate: <<*For great is your steadfast love towards me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol*>> (Psalm 86:13), and: <<*Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, 'I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice*>> (Jonah 2:1-2).

23 I will heap disasters upon them,
spend my arrows against them:
24 wasting hunger,
burning consumption,
bitter pestilence.
The teeth of beasts I will send against them,
with venom of things crawling in the dust.

25 In the street the sword shall bereave,
and in the chambers terror,
for young man and woman alike,
nursing child and old grey head.

26 I thought to scatter them
and blot out the memory of them from humankind;
27 but I feared provocation by the enemy,
for their adversaries might misunderstand
and say, 'Our hand is triumphant;
it was not the Lord who did all this.'

Deuteronomy 32:23-27

I will heap disasters upon them. When the hiding of his face does not draw God's people into repentance, God then sends his hand of correction, and allows calamity to bring the attention of his people back upon him.

For their adversaries might misunderstand. The reputation of God is the driving force behind the switch from punishment of Israel to salvation for Israel. Refer to Deuteronomy 9:28 and Ezekiel 36:21-38.

28 They are a nation void of sense;
there is no understanding in them.
29 If they were wise, they would understand this;
they would discern what the end would be.

Deuteronomy 32:28-29

If they were wise. The ideal of Deuteronomy 4:5-8 is far from realised in this song: <<*See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!' For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?>>.*

They would discern what the end would be. This can be a remarkably effective preventative to backsliding. When people are in a backslidden state, they should consider where it will lead them: <<*The perverse get what their ways deserve, and the good, what their deeds deserve*>> (Proverbs 14:14).

30 How could one have routed a thousand,
and two put a myriad to flight,
unless their Rock had sold them,

the Lord had given them up?

- 31 Indeed their rock is not like our Rock;
our enemies are fools.

Deuteronomy 32:30-31

Israel's Rock is God; the rock of the enemies refers to the so-called gods of other nations. Their gods are impotent and nothing, hence the enemies are fools for they can only stand and fight by themselves. Therefore any victory over Israel must be attributed to God's giving up Israel into their hands.

- 32 Their vine comes from the vine-stock of Sodom,
from the vineyards of Gomorrah;
their grapes are grapes of poison,
their clusters are bitter;
- 33 their wine is the poison of serpents,
the cruel venom of asps.
- 34 Is not this laid up in store with me,
sealed up in my treasuries?
- 35 Vengeance is mine, and recompense,
for the time when their foot shall slip;
because the day of their calamity is at hand,
their doom comes swiftly.
- 36 Indeed the Lord will vindicate his people,
have compassion on his servants,
when he sees that their power is gone,
neither bond nor free remaining.

Deuteronomy 32:32-36

Vengeance is mine, and recompense. Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30 quote the Septuagint version which states: <<*Vengeance is mine, I will repay*>>.

Have compassion on his servants. When a Christian is in a backslidden state, they should also see the compassion of God they could receive.

Indeed the Lord will vindicate his people. Beyond defeat and exile, God will restore his people: <<*When all these things have happened to you, the*

blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the Lord your God has scattered you>> (Deuteronomy 30:1-3).

37 Then he will say: Where are their gods,
the rock in which they took refuge,
38 who ate the fat of their sacrifices,
and drank the wine of their libations?
Let them rise up and help you,
let them be your protection!
39 See now that I, even I, am he;
there is no god besides me.
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
and no one can deliver from my hand.

Deuteronomy 32:37-39

I, even I, am he. The emphasis on 'I' highlights the sovereignty of God: <<God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you"'>> (Exodus 3:14), and that of his Son: <<Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am'>> (John 8:58).

There is no god besides me. When Christians are in a backslidden state, they should see the greatness of God. The backslidden man needs to know more of God's character and nature. Refer to Deuteronomy 4:35 and 5:7; and the comment made on Deuteronomy 4:35-36.

40 For I lift up my hand to heaven,
and swear: As I live for ever,
41 when I whet my flashing sword,
and my hand takes hold on judgement;
I will take vengeance on my adversaries,

and will repay those who hate me.

⁴² I will make my arrows drunk with blood,
and my sword shall devour flesh –
with the blood of the slain and the captives,
from the long-haired enemy.

⁴³ Praise, O heavens, his people,
worship him, all you gods!
For he will avenge the blood of his children,
and take vengeance on his adversaries;
he will repay those who hate him,
and cleanse the land for his people.

Deuteronomy 32:40-43

Praise, O heavens, his people, worship him, all you gods! The Hebrew Masoretic text, followed in most translations, presents problems in v.43. So here the Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint variants have been followed, as they represent an earlier stage of textual transmission. The verse brings the song to a triumphant conclusion affirming that, despite Israel's sin and exile, God will ultimately restore them. The quotation from this verse in Romans 15:10 uses a phrase found only in the Septuagint <<*Rejoice O Gentiles, with his people*>> to convey the expectation that God would one day bring the light to the entire Gentile world.

⁴⁴ Moses came and recited all the words of this song in the hearing of the people, he and Joshua son of Nun. ⁴⁵ When Moses had finished reciting all these words to all Israel, ⁴⁶ he said to them: 'Take to heart all the words that I am giving in witness against you today; give them as a command to your children, so that they may diligently observe all the words of this law. ⁴⁷ This is no trifling matter for you, but rather your very life; through it you may live long in the land that you are crossing over the Jordan to possess.'

Deuteronomy 32:44-47

He and Joshua son of Nun. Moses clearly felt it important to have Joshua at his side during this momentous occasion as it would be he and not Moses who would need to ensure the people kept to the statutes of God as they entered and took the Promised Land. After that, it would be for subsequent leaders to pick up the baton and guide the people.

I am giving in witness against you today. The song was a witness against Israel. Refer to Deuteronomy 31:19 and the associated comment.

This is no trifling matter for you. The future of the entire nation both then and throughout the generations to come was dependent upon them remaining obedient to God. Their lives and the lives of their children were literally at stake: <<*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob*>> (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

One of Satan's great lies is that it is a trifling matter to serve God and obey his Word. It often seems that those who are against God prosper more than those who are for him. Yet, people need to see and understand from an eternal perspective that it is not a trifling matter to love and obey God.

VI.c Deuteronomy 32:48-33:29 - The Blessing of Moses

Like a patriarch, Moses blesses Israel before his death. This is most clearly demonstrated by a dying Jacob blessing his sons in Genesis 49:3-27.

VI.c.i Deuteronomy 32:48-52 - Moses' Death Foretold

God passes instruction to Moses, showing grace and mercy by allowing him to view the Promised Land from the top of Mount Nebo before his death.

⁴⁸ On that very day the Lord addressed Moses as follows: ⁴⁹ 'Ascend this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, across from Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites for a possession; ⁵⁰ you shall die there on the mountain that you ascend and shall be gathered to your kin, as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his kin; ⁵¹ because both of you broke faith with me among the Israelites at the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, by failing to maintain my holiness among the Israelites. ⁵² Although you may view the land from a distance, you shall not enter it – the land that I am giving to the Israelites.'

Deuteronomy 32:48-52

Abarim, Mount Nebo. Moses, as the last act of his 120 years, will climb Mount Nebo, and die at the summit of the mountain. This final act is recorded in Deuteronomy 34:1-8.



View from Mount Nebo

Your brother Aaron died in Mount Hor. The death of Aaron is recorded in Numbers 20:24-28.



View from Mount Hor

Because both of you broke faith with me. Moses and Aaron sinned against God by not obeying his command to them at Meribah: *<<Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the*

Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.' These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarrelled with the Lord, and by which he showed his holiness>> (Numbers 20:11-13).

Although you may view the land from a distance, you shall not enter it. Although Moses will not be allowed to cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land, he can at least see the land of Canaan. This was the land given to the Patriarchs and it would have meant a great deal to Moses to be able to see it at last for himself: *<<Go up to the top of Pisgah and look around you to the west, to the north, to the south, and to the east. Look well, for you shall not cross over this Jordan>> (Deuteronomy 3:27).*