

Deuteronomy 32

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[0 : 00] I do turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 32, if you will. This gives a bit all read. Hopefully it'll save me reading some more of it as we go through. It's a great chapter with much to say. Now, in a few weeks time the Rugby World Cup begins. I'm looking forward to it, even though Scotland will have a nightmare. That's alright. I know the Rugby World Cup at the start of every game, what will happen? National anthems will be sung, of course.

National anthems. Why do we have them? Well, it's still some national pride. Hence Flower Scotland, unofficial national anthem that it is. Still talks about the defeat of Edward Longshanks many centuries ago. There's not been that much to sing about, apart from... Well, anyway, let's move on.

So national anthems are there to instill pride, aren't they? There's also a critic of national unity and bonds. Hence, the South African national anthem. Nicos yisikalele africa, verses in every language, all the five major languages in the nation. Why? To kind of bring a sense of unity, as well as national pride.

Well, here, in Deuteronomy 32, we have a national anthem. An anthem God himself wrote. We read that back in chapter 31. And it's an anthem that Moses was to teach the people, but not so they could take pride in it. In fact, quite the reverse.

Look at chapter 31, verse 21 for a minute. Here we see the reason God gave it to Moses. When many evils have come upon them, this song will confront them as a witness, for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring.

[1 : 42] For I know what they are inclined to do, even today, before I have brought them into the land that I swore to give. So Moses wrote this song that God had given him that same day and taught it to the people of Israel.

This was their national anthem. And it wasn't about pride or about unity, but it was to be a witness against them. Now what does a witness do? A good witness is to testify to truth, isn't it?

A good witness is to show us what really happened, or to show us what we're really like. A certain man told the police in an interview, I am proud that in 83 years I've never done anything wrong. I think I've probably told you this one line before. That certain man was Jimmy Savile. Since then, many witnesses came out to correct him. Although sadly too late, he was already dead.

They bore witness to the child abuse he had perpetrated over the years. But actually all of us need witnesses in our lives, don't we? In our culture, we generally like to be a blame culture, don't we?

[2 : 47] There's always an excuse for everything. It wasn't me, it was my parents, it was my background, it was the way I was brought up, it was what the other person did. And so often that catches us, don't we?

We get to apologise for something. I'm very sorry, but... Which actually means we're not really sorry, we're blaming someone else. And so we need a witness, don't we? We need something which will call us back to the truth.

The truth about who we are. And so that's what this song is there for. It's to teach Israel who they are and who God is. And it's not just a song for Israel.

It's a song for us. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 talks about the Israelites in the desert as being our fathers. And you and I, who are Christian believers, are engrafted into Israel.

Israel's story becomes our story. And see that as this song goes on. This is our anthem as well. It teaches us who God is, who we are, and where history is going.

[3 : 49] Where this story is going. So let's look at it under those three headings. First of all, who do you think God is? Who do you think God is? Of course, to many people, God is a work of fiction, or an ego, a cause of many problems in the world.

But look what Moses says in verse 2. May my teaching, this song he's singing, may my teaching drop as rain. My speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, like showers upon the herb.

In other words, why? For I will proclaim the name of the Lord. What is the name of the Lord? The character of the Lord? It brings refreshment.

It brings life. To know what God is like is to bring true hope and life. And what is his character?

Verse 4. The rock. His work is perfect, and all his ways are just.

The rock is a recurrent image for the Lord in this psalm. Verse 4, verse 15, verse 18, verse 30, verse 31. What is a rock like? Unchanging, isn't it?

[4 : 56] It's dependable. A safe place as the waves crash in. As a teenager, I lived by the sea. It was great to go out in the storm and stand on a solid rock, looking down at the majesty and powers, the waves breaking in.

Well, this Lord is a rock. He is a God of faithfulness, without iniquity, just and upright is he. He is the dependable ground of all morality and all justice.

In a changing world that rejects truth, God is the rock. The other major image in this psalm for the Lord is that he is the gracious father. You see that in his good acts towards Israel.

Here at verse 8, for example. And from then on. Verse 8 tells us how the Lord created everything. He set the peoples in their places. He gave other nations to the sons of God, to other angels, to angels to look after.

But, verse 9, the Lord's portion is his people. Jacob is his allotted heritage. He chose Israel for himself. And he acted for Israel in history, verses 11 to 14.

[6 : 05] And all these pictures referring to the exodus. But he alone guided them. Well, verse 11, like an eagle, he stirs up his nest. He flutters over his young, spreading his wings, catching them, looking after the little chicks, looking after his people.

He chose Israel. He cared for them. He led them. He was like a father to Israel. He gave them birth, we read later on. So God is a rock and a gracious father.

That's who he is. That's who he is. Which brings us to a question. Who do we think we are? Who do we think we are?

Who do you think you are? As a human being. Who do we think we are as a church? Well, of course, to most people, we are basically good people, aren't we? That's the message in our culture all the time.

We are basically nice people. We are good. If we have got hang-ups, they are caused by someone else. That is someone else's fault. A few years ago, Nick Hornby wrote a novel called *How to Be Good*.

[7 : 10] And the opening sentences of that were very revealing. It is written from the point of view of a female doctor. And she writes it saying, I am a good person. I am a doctor after all. However, I am currently in bed with someone who is not my husband.

How did this happen? And it says that's what people are like, isn't it? I am a good person. If I do something wrong, that's not really like me. And yet this song, this national anthem, is to be a witness against Israel, and therefore against us as a church, to show that we're not naturally, basically good.

And we see that as we see how people have treated God. We go back to verse 4, really, at the start of it. The Lord is a God of faithfulness without iniquity. Just and upright is he.

But how have God's people treated him? Verse 5. They have dealt corruptly with him. They are no longer his children because they are blemished. They are a crooked and twisted generation.

Do you thus repay the Lord, you foolish and senseless people? See, Israel are naturally foolish. God is so good. Yet naturally, they treat him badly.

[8 : 17] It's folly. Sin, rebellion against God, never makes any sense, does it? It's absolutely irrational. It is foolish. Not only that, Israel is fickle. Go down to verse 15.

There's a glorious description in verses 11 to 14 of the Lord's provision for them. But how do they respond? Verse 15. But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked. Jeshurun is like a diminutive, a familial, loving name for Israel that God uses.

It's like many families have pet names to their children, don't they? I was visiting someone the other week who kept on referring to their child as Bear. It's a cute name. It's a little bear.

That's a lovely thing. And God is accentuating the fickleness and rebellion of his people by saying, Jeshurun, my loved one, grew fat and kicked.

You grew fat, stout and sleek. In other words, I gave you so much, you just grew fat. And then he forsook the God he made him and scoffed at the rock of his salvation.

[9 : 19] To this beloved, gracious father, Israel rejects because they're foolish and fickle. And how like us is that? When life is hard, when we're out of work, when health problems kick in, when we face difficulties in relationships, we pray, don't we?

And then when the sun is shining and all is well, how quickly we forget, we grow sleek and fat, as Jeshurun did. So Israel, fickle, foolish, also unfaithful.

Verse 16, they stirred him up to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations. They provoked him to anger. See, Israel was constantly unfaithful, chasing these false gods around them. Now it's important here we understand the difference between jealousy, which can be very positive, and envy, which is always wrong.

Now envy is wanting something that somebody else, that belongs to something else, to someone else. Envy is wanting for yourself what is rightly someone else's. So you're envious of their car, their job, their figure, their clothes, their computer, whatever it is, their friendships.

That's envy. And that's always sinful. Jealousy, on the other hand, is not wanting what is rightfully somebody else's, but it is wanting back what is rightfully yours.

[10 : 42] So a husband should be jealous, shouldn't he? When his wife is being, goes after somebody else, or somebody else is hitting on his wife. It is right to be jealous, because the wife is rightfully his.

So if the Lord was not jealous when Israel was unfaithful, then actually he would be deeply unloving. It is a good thing for us that the Lord is jealous.

It's a terrible thing that we are naturally unfaithful. Well, Israel is faithless, foolish, fickle. And underneath all that was forgetfulness. Look at verse 18.

You are unmindful of the rock that bore you. You forgot the God who gave you birth. This gracious parent, this perfect rock. Yet Israel forgot. So here's the question.

Who are we? How do we think of ourselves as a church, first of all? Faithful? Sound? Gospel-centered?

[11 : 41] Concerned with outreach? United? Well, praise the Lord that those things are true. But let us not be complacent. Because those things are God's gift.

They come from the rock. Our perfect Father. And how do we think about ourselves personally? Nice person?

Committed Christian? Good parent? Good colleague? There may be some truth in all those things. But without God's grace, our hearts like Israel will naturally be faithless, fickle, forgetful.

And of course that's why we need the Lord's Supper, isn't it? We do this in remembrance of the Lord Jesus that we should not forget, that we cannot forget. And so regularly in our worship, we come back to be reminded to you who we are, sinners who have no hope without the Lord Jesus. And who our God is, the faithful and true God. So this song is a witness against us. Reminds us who God is, the faithful rock and perfect Father.

[12 : 52] It reminds us who we are. Unfaithful fools without God's grace. So what hope is there? What hope was there for Israel in the Old Testament? What hope is there for us now, living later in God's great story?

Well, let's look at the conclusion first. And then we'll quickly walk back on how we get the conclusion. The conclusion is in verse 43 of chapter 32.

Look at that. Rejoice with him, O heavens. Bow down to him, all gods. For he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate them and cleanses his people's land.

How can the heavens rejoice? How can people bow down to this God? Well, because, and here's the big point, the one true God will display his perfection in his judgments.

He will show that he is the perfect rock and so will be worshipped. That's where this story goes. God will display his perfection in his judgments and so will be worshipped by the universe and by his people.

[13 : 57] But what's the story to get us there? How do we get back? Well, there are three phases with it. There are three phases. First of all, the Lord will display his perfection by judging his people.

Then by judging his enemies. So judging his people is verses 19 to 25. By judging his enemies, verses 26 to 35. And finally by showing compassion on his people.

Verses 36 to 42. Let's get a few things briefly, shall we? So first of all, the Lord will display his perfection by judging his people. He couldn't just ignore this faithlessness, this fickleness, this forgetfulness.

And so you probably know the story of the Old Testament. As Israel grew fat and comfortable in the land, so they rejected God. They worshipped other idols. They did what the world around them did. And so the Lord had to judge them. It came eventually, 722 BC. Israel, the northern kingdom, and carried into exile by Assyria. Then 586 BC.

[14:58] Babylon comes and conquers Jerusalem. And the remaining kingdom of Judah, destroyed and taken into exile. God kept his promise to give judgment on his people.

And actually that warning, the warning that is here in Deuteronomy 32, is also picked up in Hebrews chapter 11. Because it is not just a warning, or Hebrews chapter 10 rather.

It's not just a warning for God's people then, it's a warning for God's people now. The writer of the Hebrews puts it like this. Quoting from Deuteronomy 32. For we know him who said, vengeance is mine, I will repay.

And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. The writer was saying, if we end up being covenant breakers, those who just appear to be part of the church, but have no true faith, whose hearts have not been changed by God's grace, then judgment is coming.

And so he warns the people he's writing to in the New Testament, do not turn away, do not give up on Jesus, cling to him, for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[16:18] And yet there is a positive truth, a helpful truth, an encouraging truth that comes out from the fact that the Lord would judge his people. Paul in Romans sees God's judgment that came on his Old Testament people as being, in actual fact, for the good of God's general purposes.

Look at verse 21 of 2 Chronicles 32, will you? They have made me jealous with what is no God. They have provoked me to anger with their idols. So what will God do?

I will provoke them, I will make them, Israel, jealous with those who are no people. I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. Paul sees that in Romans 10, 19, says this, quotes this verse, and uses it to say, the Lord rejected Israel then, but to further his purposes.

He makes Israel jealous by calling the Gentiles, by showing grace and mercy to people who are outside the covenant, so that in turn they will turn back to him.

Romans 11, verse 11. Israel stumbled. Did they stumble in order they might fall? By no means. Rather, through their trespass, through Israel's rejection in the Old Testament, salvation has come to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous.

[17:38] Now if their trespass means, if their trespass means riches for the world, if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean? Paul is saying God's judgment on his people there, which will be good of people like you and I, that we can come to experience God's salvation, but ultimately will cause more people, more Jews, to turn back to Christ.

So God will display his judgment, firstly, or display his perfection, first of all, in the judgment of his people, which he did in the Old Testament. But secondly, also, by judging his enemies.

Look at verse 30. We see that in verses 26 to 35. Look at verse 26. I would have said, I will cut them to pieces, cut Israel to pieces. I will wipe them from human memory.

Had I not feared the provocation by my enemy, lest their adversaries should misunderstand, lest they should say, our hand is triumphant. It was not the Lord who did this.

See, God will not destroy his people completely, because his own reputation is at stake. God will display his perfections in destroying his enemies, ultimately.

[18:49] And that should give us courage. Courage to pray, shouldn't it? Think about God's people suffering in places in the world, in Nigeria, under Boko Haram, in the Middle East, under ISIS, in India, under unjust government, in Malaysia.

How do we pray? How do we pray for them? We pray that God will act for the glory of his name. He will vindicate his people. How do we pray in this country?

As a nation can sometimes get, seems to get more secularized, more opposed to the gospel, more opposed to Christian morality. We can pray that God will vindicate his name, will glorify his name,

show that he is God.

The church is not failing because secularism is triumphing. We can pray. But also on a personal, individual level, the fact that the Lord will bring judgment, the fact that he says, vengeance is mine, I will repay, means we can pray for God to do justice in our lives individually.

We pray instead of getting bitter, instead of getting angry, instead of taking revenge ourselves.

That's how Paul uses this verse in Romans 12. Romans 12, verse 19, he says, as far as it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live peacefully with all.

[20 : 09] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but lead it to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. So the Lord will display his perfection by judging his enemies, as well as displaying his perfection, as he has done, by judging his people.

But the good news is, the Lord will also display his perfection by showing compassion on his people. Look at verse 36. Here we hear the Lord's compassion. The Lord will vindicate his people, He will have compassion on his servants when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free.

That is what God will do ultimately. It's what God is doing now in this world, building up his church, having compassion on his people. That should fuel our prayers for a weak church, fuel our prayers for places where the church seems to be dwindling.

Look at verse 36. 39. Here is our great hope, isn't it? See now, that even I, even I am he. There is no God beside me. I kill and I make alive.

I wound and I heal. There is none that can deliver out of my hand. He is a God who will heal and restore his people because he is compassionate and because he is displaying his perfection in the earth.

[21 : 37] That also means bad news for those who persist in being his enemies. Look at verse 41. If I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand takes hold on judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and will repay those who hate me.

That is where the story goes. That is where the story goes. God will bring judgment to the world and have compassion on his people.

Do you remember when the song started? Verse 1. Moses calls the heavens to be a witness. And he ends in verse 43 calling the heavens to join in with a song. What has God's judgment achieved? Look at verse 43 again. Rejoice with him, O heavens. Bow down with him, all gods. God has shown his perfection to the universe to show that he alone is worthy of praise.

And so he will be praised. He will be worshipped. But this verse also crops up later on in Romans chapter 15. And there Paul quotes it from the Greek version of the Old Testament.

[22 : 45] And there it has an extra line. Let me read it to you. And that's what Paul quotes. Rejoice with him, O heavens. Bow down to him, all gods. Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people. As God displays his perfections, so he calls all nations to come and worship him.

That is what he does as he judges his people and judges the nations and restores. That's the first thing his judgment is achieved. He's worshipped by all. Then we come to line 2 of verse 43.

For he avenges the blood of his children. Earlier on, back in verse 5, God has said they're no children anymore. They're no longer mine. They've rebelled so much. Yet here God has restored his children as well as avenging them.

So we can join in singing his praises for restoring that relationship. Finally, he gets praise, line 3, because of his justice.

He repays those who hate him and cleanses the people's land. That also means the land is not just Israel, but this whole earth that belongs to God. In Revelation, we get this great song of praise as God judges the earth.

[23 : 52] Revelation 11. The whole church, all the New Testament, joined together praising him. Revelation 11.18. This is why. The nations raged, your wrath came, and a time for the dead to be judged and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and those who fear your name, both small and great and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.

See, the Lord will vindicate, will show his perfections by judging the earth and by destroying the destroyers of the earth. That's where the story is going. That's how the song ends.

That's how life on, our current lives will end, stage of history. So why is this anthem here for Israel? Why is it a song for Israel and for the church?

So we know who God is. He is the perfect rock and gracious father. So we know who we are without his grace. Fickle, foolish, unfaithful.

And so we know what will happen. The story ends with God being worshipped by heavens and the earth because he shows his perfections and his judgment and in his compassion with his people.

[25 : 08] Well, that's what the song is. The question is, can you sing it? Can you sing it? Where do you fit in this song? Are you among God's restored people who have by grace come to faith in Christ who gladly acknowledge that the Lord is the one and only God who will one day judge?

when you trust him? Or do you still trust in our own capacities, our own goodness, our own wisdom, our own knowledge, our own morality? And thus we like those who, as verse 15 puts, are those who forsake the Lord who made him, the God who made him.

And if you're one of those who is currently God's enemy, who has not acknowledged that he is the only God, that he is the one who's given us life and breath and everything.

I ask you to look at your own fickleness, your own fallible ideas, to recognise the foolishness of living without this God truly, truly embracing his promises in your heart.

And look at Christ. As we come to the Lord's table, look at him, who was not foolish, who was not faithless, was not fickle, but took the judgment we all deserve on the cross, who took the punishment for all his people so that we can be restored to being God's children, not just faithless wanderers.

[26 : 37] Why not come and bow to the living God through the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting him alone, not your niceness or your knowledge or your experience. Please come now, don't be destroyed as an enemy.

Let's close with Moses' final words, verse 46. He said to them, Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the works of the Lord, for it is no empty word for you, but your very life.

Let's trust God's word as our life. Let's pray.