

Song of Moses

Devotional Reading: Exodus 14:21–31

Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:30–32:47

Deuteronomy 32:3–6, 10–14, 18

- 3** I will proclaim the name of the LORD.
Oh, praise the greatness of our God!
- 4** He is the Rock, his works are perfect,
and all his ways are just.
A faithful God who does no wrong,
upright and just is he.
- 5** They are corrupt and not his children;
to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation.
- 6** Is this the way you repay the LORD,
you foolish and unwise people?
Is he not your Father, your Creator,
who made you and formed you?
- 10** In a desert land he found him,
in a barren and howling waste.
He shielded him and cared for him;
he guarded him as the apple of his eye,
- 11** like an eagle that stirs up its nest
and hovers over its young,
that spreads its wings to catch them
and carries them aloft.
- 12** The LORD alone led him;
no foreign god was with him.
- 13** He made him ride on the heights of the land
and fed him with the fruit of the fields.
He nourished him with honey from the rock,
and with oil from the flinty crag,
- 14** with curds and milk from herd and flock
and with fattened lambs and goats,
with choice rams of Bashan
and the finest kernels of wheat.

You drank the foaming blood of the grape.

¹⁸ You deserted the Rock, who fathered you;
you forgot the God who gave you birth.

Key Text

Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law.

—Deuteronomy 32:46

God's Exceptional Choice

Unit 2: Out of Slavery to Nationhood

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recall ways that the Lord had blessed his people.
2. Determine the identity of “they” in Deuteronomy 32:5.
3. Compose a personal song of thankfulness to the Lord.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

A. Sing and Remember

B. Lesson Context

I. God's Faithfulness (Deuteronomy 32:3–6)

A. Because of His Greatness (vv. 3–4)

B. Despite a Crooked Generation (vv. 5–6)

II. God's Goodness (Deuteronomy 32:10–14)

A. Through Protection (vv. 10–12)

Apple of His Eye

B. By Provision (vv. 13–14)

III. People's Apostasy (Deuteronomy 32:18)

A. Disregarding Their Rock (v. 18a)

Maternal Care

B. Forgetting Their Birth (v. 18b)

Conclusion

- A. Creative Praise
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Bashan *Bay-shan*.

Deuteronomy *Due-ter-ahn-uh-me*.

Zephaniah *Zef-uh-nye-uh*.

Introduction

A. Sing and Remember

A friend spent years caring for his mother as she experienced the debilitating effects of Alzheimer's. Over time she lost her recollection of events and decades-old relationships—even relationships with her own children.

Despite the loss of certain memories, my friend's mother retained some ability to sing. As a devoutly religious woman, she had sung hymns all her life. Those hymns were deeply embedded; so even as she experienced the dramatic symptoms of Alzheimer's, she could still sing of her comfort and hope in God. Her faith—and the faith of her children—was strengthened by hymns and songs of worship. The destructive nature of Alzheimer's could not dismiss the eternal truths found in hymns, deeply instilled through years of singing and recitation.

Worship, lament, praise, and joy are reflected through the songs of Scripture. These songs give voice for people of God to express complex feelings about life and the nature of following God. In the concluding chapters of Deuteronomy, the Israelites were taught a song for their future.

B. Lesson Context

As the book of Deuteronomy comes to a close, Israel's leader, Moses, was on the verge of death. As a result of the impending change of leadership, Moses spoke publicly for the final time. The result is several smaller speeches and songs (found in [Deuteronomy 29:2–33:29](#)) that serve as the dramatic conclusion to his ministry.

At first Moses reminded the Israelites to remember and accept the stipulations of God's covenant ([Deuteronomy 29–30](#)). This covenant was based on God's love for his people and their responding love and commitment to him (see [4:37–40](#); [5:2–3](#); [6:5–6](#); [7:9](#); [11:1](#); [13:4](#)). A failure to adhere to God's requirements would result in dramatic negative consequences for Israel (see [28:15–68](#)). In addition, Moses' speech included a statement on his successor ([31:1–8](#)), a recitation of the law ([31:9–13](#)), and a prediction of the future ([31:14–29](#)).

In the midst of Moses' speeches, he presented a song for the people ([Deuteronomy 31:30–32:43](#)).

The song is reminiscent of psalms that celebrate the people’s relationship with God (examples: [Psalms 78; 105; 106](#)). Just as the psalms were meant for singing, so was this song of Moses ([Deuteronomy 31:19, 21–22](#)).

The three divisions of the song speak to the scope of the Israelites’ relationship with God. God’s loyalty is contrasted with their sinfulness ([Deuteronomy 32:1–14](#)). As a result, negative consequences are certain ([32:15–35](#)). However, forgiveness, healing, and protection can still be attained ([32:36–43](#)).

I. God’s Faithfulness ([Deuteronomy 32:3–6](#))

The song begins by calling the heavens and the earth as witnesses to the unfolding word of warning from God ([Deuteronomy 32:1–2](#)).

A. Because of His Greatness (vv. 3–4)

3. I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!

For the people of God, the centrality of *the name of the Lord* was crucial for their worship ([Deuteronomy 12:5–6](#)). God’s name reflected the very nature of his being (see [Exodus 33:19](#)). To misappropriate his name brought great consequences ([Deuteronomy 5:11](#)).

As God’s name was proclaimed, his *greatness* would be celebrated. God’s greatness is not an abstract principle, but is a specific reality. The people of Israel experienced divine greatness firsthand as they saw how *God* treated them during their most vulnerable moments ([Deuteronomy 3:24; 9:26](#); see [Psalm 150:2](#)). Even the angels in Heaven will sing of God’s greatness upon seeing his victory over evil ([Revelation 15:1–4](#)).

4a. He is the Rock,

Because of God’s greatness, he is the anchor for his people—the one and only *Rock*, the Savior and ruler of his people (see [Deuteronomy 32:15, 18; 2 Samuel 23:3](#)).

Other biblical texts describe God a “R/rock,” referring to his stability and unchanging nature (see [1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 22:3, 32, 47; Psalms 18:2, 31; 28:1; 62:2, 6–7](#)). Later parts of this song contrast the Rock of Israel with the weak gods of Israel’s enemies ([Deuteronomy 32:31, 37](#)). The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was “the Rock of Israel” ([Genesis 49:24](#)), steadfast for his people.

4b. his works are perfect, and all his ways are just.

The people of God can take refuge in God as their Rock because *his work* in the world is *perfect* (see [2 Samuel 22:31](#)). Even when humans act unfairly and unjustly, God is flawless. His law “is perfect, refreshing the soul” of humans to walk in his ways of righteousness ([Psalm 19:7](#); see [23:3](#)).

Even when humans question, God’s acts of judgment are *just* and right (see [Job 34:12; 37:23; Psalm 33:5; Isaiah 5:16](#)). As a result, God requires that his covenant people live with the same high regard for just living in the world (see [Deuteronomy 16:19; 24:17; Isaiah 1:17; 56:1](#); etc.).

4c. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

The song continues to laud the greatness of *God*. He is *faithful* to his people ([Isaiah 25:1](#); see [Psalm](#)

33:4). His faithfulness is demonstrated as he is holy and *does no wrong* in all that he does (Zephaniah 3:5).

This song makes clear that God is worthy to be worshipped because of his holiness and perfection. These attributes are displayed through his *upright and just* ways. His ways are to be imitated by his people (Hosea 14:9; see Exodus 23:1–9).

What Do You Think?

What are some attributes of God's greatness that you can discern?

Digging Deeper

How might Psalms 90:1–2; 147:5; Isaiah 66:1–2; Jeremiah 10:10; Mark 4:35–41; John 4:24; 5:26; Acts 17:24–25; and Revelation 21:6 inform your answer?

B. Despite a Crooked Generation (vv. 5–6)

5. They are corrupt and not his children; to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation.

God's people would be noticed for their lack of spiritual blemish (see Leviticus 21:17–23 for a physical reality). This implied that God desired that they live upright and righteous lives. They would live in this manner through their relationships with each other and the land, and their worship of the one true God.

However, as the people of God allowed unholy influences (Exodus 32:7; Deuteronomy 4:16, 25; 9:12), *they* became *corrupt*. As a result, they ran the risk of being excluded as *children* of God.

The opposite of God's just ways are the *warped and crooked* ways of humans. When a person is unable to make sense of the way he or she should go, wickedness thrives (see Proverbs 2:12–15). Israel had placed itself in a self-destructive position from which it could not easily escape. Despite all of Israel's experiences of God's divine redemption, the people of Israel had abandoned their redeemer (compare Jeremiah 32:30).

While this song refers to a specific *generation*, the song's truths are timeless and applicable to God's children in all eras. Jesus used a similar phrase to describe the unbelieving nature of some people in his audience (Matthew 17:17).

Ultimately, the children of God are tasked with living in an upright manner—obedient to the commands of God. Believers can do so as they are redeemed by the blood of Christ, the “lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19). As a result, their lives can shine in the dark, crooked ways of the world (Philippians 2:14–16).

6. Is this the way you repay the LORD, you foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?

The relationship between *the Lord* and Israel was based on Israel's loyalty and trust (Exodus 19:5–6; Deuteronomy 7:6–16). However, the *people* of Israel would betray the relationship by their reliance on foreign gods (31:16). The people would be *foolish and unwise* when they disregarded God's faithfulness. As a result of their foolishness, this song described how God would respond with a harsh warn-

ing and disastrous consequences (32:21–27, not in our printed text).

God cared for Israel as a father would care for his child (Deuteronomy 1:31; Hosea 11:1–2). The song’s tenderness at this point contrasts the monstrous nature of Israel’s ingratitude to God’s covenant love.

Israel’s whole identity came into existence because of the love of the *Father* as he bought them into his inheritance (Exodus 15:16). He *made* and *formed* Israel to be his own covenanted people (Genesis 17:7–8; Exodus 6:7–8). The song reminded Israel of the source of their high value: the God who established his covenant with them.

What Do You Think?

How do believers disregard God’s commands and live foolishly and unwisely?

Digging Deeper

How should your response to sin in others differ depending on whether the person is a Christian or a non-Christian?

II. God’s Goodness (Deuteronomy 32:10–14)

The intervening verses describe how God would “set up boundaries” for his people (Deuteronomy 32:8). God brought his people—his “portion” (32:9)—into safety.

A. Through Protection (vv. 10–12)

10a. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him;

This song depicts God’s people — referred collectively as *him*—as being lost in an inhospitable, barren *land*. In a metaphorical sense, the Israelites’ slavery in Egypt served as a *desert*, an inconducive place for their flourishing. Following their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites wandered in an actual wilderness.

Yet in these trying places, God was always present for his people. He *cared* for them as he led them to places of care and rest (see Hosea 13:4–5; Jeremiah 31:2). The deserts in the Sinai peninsula, south of Judah, are quite inhospitable to travelers. The ancient singer knew the dangers to someone lost in the desert.

10b. he guarded him as the apple of his eye,

The eye is one of the smallest and most sensitive parts of the human body. Yet it is also one of the most important parts. Eyelashes, eyelids, eyebrows, blinking reflexes, nearly invisible membranes, and the eye socket all serve to protect the sensitive organ. Israel’s importance is reflected in the way the song describes God protecting his people as though protecting *the apple of his eye*.

The phrase addresses a certain level of intimacy and care between God and his people (see Psalm 17:8–9; Zechariah 2:8–9). God gave attention to Israel’s needs and took the necessary steps to protect

and provide for them, all out of his love for them. Though Israel was like a wandering traveler, they would no longer fear—because God provided through the inhospitable wildernesses of life.

Apple of His Eye

If there is adequate lighting, clear vision, and appropriate proximity, I might see my reflection in the eyes of another person. By no means is this reflection clear—it’s only a glimmer. Some details in the reflection may be lacking, and clarity may linger for only a few seconds.

Rarely do I stand close enough to another person to see my reflection in their eyes. My children, however, are among the few people whose eyes I get close enough to gaze into. I wonder if they see their reflection in my eyes—for they are the apple of my eye.

The intimate relationship between God and his people leads the songwriter to speak of God’s people as the apple of God’s eye. God’s people reflect a sliver of God’s character to the world. In order for that to occur, God’s people must be close to him. What prevents you from being close to God? You are the apple of his eye!

—L. M. W.

11. like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft.

The second metaphor relates God’s care for his people to *an eagle* caring for *its young*. As the eaglets grow up, the parent eagle will protect them with the expanse of *its wings* over the *nest*. By describing God’s care and protection of his people in this manner, this song reflects the sentiment of the psalmist regarding God’s protection ([Psalm 91:4](#)).

Further, when eaglets learn to fly, they glide behind their mother’s wings as she *carries them aloft* in flight. The young birds learn as they express their own autonomy with the safety of the mother’s wings to catch and carry them should they fail.

By using this imagery, not only does the song highlight God’s protection but also his guidance for his people. God brought them out of Egypt and to a place where they might flourish (see [Exodus 19:4](#)). They were “flying solo,” but their hope for survival was in relying heavily on the Lord God ([Isaiah 40:31](#)).

What Do You Think?

How might analogies and metaphors help readers better understand God?

Digging Deeper

What are some weaknesses or dangers of using analogies and metaphors to describe God?

12. The LORD alone led him; no foreign god was with him.

The identity of the Israelites was based in their core confession ([Deuteronomy 6:4](#)), their covenant, and the stipulations for life that resulted ([5:1–10](#); see [Exodus 20:1–6](#)). This song celebrates the Israelites’ unique identity and relationship with *the Lord*; they were like a flock of sheep that their

shepherd *alone* did lead.

As a part of this unique identity, Israel was not to follow any *foreign god*. As the people followed the one true God, they maintained their freedom. However, they would not always stay on this path (see [Deuteronomy 31:16](#)).

B. By Provision (vv. 13–14)

13a. He made him ride on the heights of the land

The song transitions to refer to Israel’s hope for their future and the many blessings that followed. If the people followed God, they would experience safety from destructive forces. They would dwell *on the high places*, safe from an enemy’s invasion.



Visual for [Lessons 6 & 9](#). Allow learners one minute to silently reflect on situations when they have not given God first place in their hearts.

Other texts describe high places as being significant locations where an interaction with God occurred (see [1 Samuel 9:12–13, 19](#); [1 Kings 3:2–3](#)). However, many of these so-called high places became locations of improper worship for Israel (see [Leviticus 26:30](#); [Numbers 33:52](#); [1 Kings 11:7](#); [2](#)

Kings 23:19; Psalm 78:58; Hosea 10:8; etc.).

13b. and fed him with the fruit of the fields. He nourished him with honey from the rock, and with oil from the flinty crag,

From this advantageous location, the people of God could be positioned above good farmland. *The fruit of the fields* would be so bountiful, they would never experience famine (see [Ezekiel 36:30](#)).

God had promised the Israelites that they would live in “a land flowing with milk and honey” ([Exodus 13:5](#)), a land of agricultural blessing ([Deuteronomy 8:7–9](#)). That *oil* and honey flowed *from the flinty crag* implied abundance and satisfaction, even in inhospitable terrain (see [Psalm 81:16](#)).

14. with curds and milk from herd and flock and with fattened lambs and goats, with choice rams of Bashan and the finest kernels of wheat. You drank the foaming blood of the grape.

Both the land and the livestock would provide sustenance for the people. The livestock would provide enough extra *milk* to produce *curds* and perhaps cheese for the people (see [2 Samuel 17:29](#)).

A certain breed of *rams* from the *Bashan* region was highly prized. This region was likely located northeast of the Sea of Galilee and east of the Jordan River ([Deuteronomy 4:47](#)). During the time of Moses, the region consisted of 60 cities (see [3:4–6](#)). In addition, the region was known for its other livestock ([Ezekiel 39:18](#)) and oak trees ([Isaiah 2:13](#); [Ezekiel 27:6](#); [Zechariah 11:2](#)).

The song returns to celebrate the agricultural blessing of the land (compare [Deuteronomy 32:13b](#), above). The best quality of *wheat*—*the finest kernels*—would be accessible to the people. Further, the vines would produce *foaming blood*: unfermented *grape* juice. The land would produce abundant blessing, beyond the bare necessities needed. This section of the song describes God’s care for his people. Provision and sustenance were celebrated.

What Do You Think?

How can God’s people honor God as the source of all provisions?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take in the coming week to share God’s provision with your neighbors?

III. People’s Apostasy ([Deuteronomy 32:18](#))

A. Disregarding Their Rock (v. 18a)

18a. You deserted the Rock, who fathered you;

Despite the promises of vast blessing and numerous provisions, the song details how Israel would grow comfortable and careless. Their prosperity would lead them to become “fat ... filled with food, ... [and] heavy and sleek” ([Deuteronomy 32:15](#)). In their complacency, they ignored God as the source of their blessing. Their comfort and willful ignorance would lead them to worship false gods instead of the one true God who provided for them and blessed them ([32:16–17](#)).

The song refers again to two previously used metaphors: God as *the Rock* (see commentary on

Deuteronomy 32:4, above) and God as a parent, this time one *who fathered* children (compare commentary on 32:5, 11, above). This verse is a mixed metaphor—rocks do not have children! The resulting point is the scope of God’s relationship with Israel. He was their source of life and their sustainer.

What Do You Think?

How can believers ensure that they do not disregard God as their Rock, the source of salvation and blessing?

Digging Deeper

Who will you invite to provide accountability in this regard?

Maternal Care

As children, my sister and I had a cat named Fluffy. Some of my fondest childhood memories revolve around Fluffy and her kittens. I remember watching her care for her kittens by protecting, cleaning, and nursing them.

One afternoon a stray kitten wandered into our yard. I wanted to keep the kitten, but my parents reminded me that Fluffy would often chase away other cats—even stray kittens. Albeit with warnings, my parents agreed to let the stray cat stay. The next morning we found Fluffy sprawled out, nursing and caring for the kitten. Fluffy’s maternal instincts had replaced her territorial tendencies.

Scripture describes how God cares for his people like a mother’s comfort (see [Isaiah 66:13](#)). What steps are you taking to remember the one who has promised to never forget you ([49:15](#))?

—L. M. W.

B. Forgetting Their Birth (v. 18b)

18b. you forgot the God who gave you birth.

Corporate memory can create a community identity as it allows group members to recollect, rehearse, and codify their most important experiences together. From the remembrance the community can draw conclusions regarding how its members should act, think, and feel in the future.

Throughout Deuteronomy, the Israelites are told to remember their history and how God brought them out of slavery ([Deuteronomy 5:15](#); [7:18](#); [8:2](#); [15:15](#); [16:12](#)). The people were to go to great lengths to not forget their history. This would ensure that future generations would not have forgotten the ways God formed and maintained them (see [11:2–7](#); [18–21](#)).

Conclusion

A. Creative Praise

Throughout church history, believers have expressed their joys, doubts, fears, and hopes in songs. These songs of worship have shaped believers into spiritually mature disciples of Jesus. Singing should not be a kind of sedative that numbs us. Rather, our singing should include repentance with

praise and self-examination with satisfaction. Only in that way can singing shape us as people of God.

On the surface, the nature of the song in today's text is rather cynical; it highlights the failure of the people of Israel. Yet the song's pointed nature leads to a declaration of hope. God's salvation will transform and sustain, if only people remember his steadfast commitment to them. As a result, God's people can sing of his mighty deeds, all while confessing our their own failure to appreciate them.

That same sort of forgetfulness can plague Christians today when we forget that our salvation is a gift from God as he draws us into his kingdom. We did not earn that citizenship; it was given to us freely. God sustains us when we recite the story of our faith and live out its implications in our lives.

B. Prayer

God, you are the Rock in whom we can find provision and protection. Lead us in your ways so that we will not turn away from you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's people sing of his provision and protection!

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class, prepare a set of five index cards for each anticipated small group. (Each group should consist of no more than five students.) Each set of five index cards should show the following prompts, one per note card:

My earliest memory is ...

A person I'll always remember is ...

A past experience that still affects me is ...

What I'd like others to remember about me is ...

A moment that I want to always remember is ...

As the class convenes, put students in small groups. Give a set of the premade index cards to each group, but tell the group members not to look at the prompts on the index cards.

Once you have distributed all the sets of cards, say, "Each person in your group should choose one of the index cards at random and provide an answer to the prompt." After no more than five minutes, allow volunteers to share their responses.

Alternative. Write on the board, “What role does memory play in the Christian life?” Allow for whole-class discussion.

Lead into the lesson by saying, “Today’s lesson is about the importance of memory and remembrance. Let’s see how Moses told the entire congregation of Israel what they must never forget.”

Into the Word

Help students understand the setting for today’s Bible study by briefly summarizing material found under the Lesson Context for this lesson. (You may want to recruit a class member ahead of time to prepare this two-minute lecture.)

Before class prepare handouts with the following questions, each as a header of a column: 1—What God’s people were supposed to remember. 2—Signs of the people’s disobedience. 3—Evidence of God’s faithfulness.

Have students stay in the original groups from the Into the Lesson portion. Have each group read [Deuteronomy 32:3–6, 10–14, 18](#). Then, have each group work together to write down the answers to the prompts on the handout. Allow 10 minutes to complete the activity before reconvening the class for discussion.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Goodness and Rebellion” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have groups work together to complete the activity as indicated before discussing their findings with the whole class.

Into Life

Write on the board the following questions that will serve as headers to three columns: 1—What are we supposed to remember? 2—What signs of disobedience do we see in our world? 3—What evidence do we have of God’s faithfulness? (You may point out that each of the questions corresponds to the questions used earlier during Into the Word.)

Invite class members to work in their original groups to answer the three questions. As they work, encourage the groups to consider how the scriptural truths of the lesson text compel us to live in faithful action today.

After no more than 10 minutes, ask for a volunteer from each group to report their answers to the whole class. Write each group’s answers on the board under the corresponding questions.

Then say, “Now try writing new words to a familiar hymn melody. The new words should contain ideas from these lists. Let’s compose our own songs of praise to God.”

After no more than 10 minutes, reconvene the class and encourage the groups to sing their new songs for the whole class.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Images of Praise” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete the activity as indicated. After five minutes, have volunteers give their answer to the third prompt on the activity.