

DEUTERONOMY

Chapter 32

“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth.
2 May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb. 3 For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! 4 “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. 5 They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation. 6 Do you thus repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?
7 Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you. 8 When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. 9 But the LORD’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. 10 “He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.
11 Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, 12 the LORD alone guided him, no foreign god was with him. 13 He made him ride on the high places of the land, and he ate the produce of the field, and he suckled him with honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.
14 Curds from the herd, and milk from the flock, with fat of lambs, rams of Bashan and goats, with the very finest of the wheat—and you drank foaming wine made from the blood of the grape. 15 “But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation. 16 They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. 17 They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. 18 You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth. 19 “The LORD saw it and spurned them, because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters. 20 And 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 is no faithfulness. 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. 22 For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. 23 ““And I will heap disasters upon them; I will spend my arrows on them; 24 they shall be wasted with hunger, and devoured by plague and poisonous pestilence; I will send the teeth of beasts against them, with the venom of things that crawl in the dust. 25 Outdoors the sword shall bereave, and indoors terror, for young man and woman alike, the nursing child with the man of gray hairs. 26 I would have said, “I will cut them to pieces; I will wipe them from human memory,” 27 had I not feared provocation by the enemy, lest their adversaries should misunderstand, lest they should say, “Our hand is triumphant, it was not the LORD who did all this.”” 28 “For they are a nation void of counsel, and there is no understanding in them. 29 If they were wise, they would understand this; they would discern their latter end! 30 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? 31 For their rock is not as our Rock; our enemies are by themselves. 32 For their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of

Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of poison; their clusters are bitter; 33 their wine is the poison of serpents and 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; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.’ 36 For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free. 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 drink offering? Let them rise up and help you; let them be your protection! 39 “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand. 40 For I lift up my hand to heaven and swear, As I live forever, 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. 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 heads of the enemy.’ 43 “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 him and cleanses his people’s land.” 44 Moses came and recited all the words of this song in the hearing of the people, he and Joshua the son of Nun. 45 And when Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, 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 words of this law. 47 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.”

32:1–4 Both a confession of faith in and an exaltation of the one true God. Chem: “The works which God performs in Himself (*per se*) are holy and perfect, ... since God is without any iniquity, He is just and righteous. But those things which the Holy Spirit works in our body of sin and death in the regenerate, these things the Spirit Himself affirms are imperfect because of our flesh which has not yet been completely destroyed, Rom. 6:6” (*LTh* 2:341). (TLSB)

32:4 *the Rock his work is perfect.* A major theme of the song of Moses. (CSB)

Any one who’s seen the rugged hills of Palestine and the Sinai peninsula would add that the Lord is as dependable and immovable as those rocks. We can count on him to be there for us, and never change. Add to that, the Lord is entirely just. He rules the world with perfect justice, and he always does what he says he’ll do. Human beings leave a trail of broken promises as they go through life; God never does. (PBC)

perfect. Hbr *tamim*, “complete,” “sound.” Iren: “God recapitulated [brought together] in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true” (*ANF* 1:448). (TLSB)

32:5 Viewing Israel through prophetic eyes, Moses wrote this indicting song as if Israel had already occupied the Promised Land and “dealt corruptly with” the Lord. Daniel’s prayer signals the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy (Dn 9). Ps 78 provides a thorough treatment of Israel’s apostasy and the Lord’s repeated attempts to turn them back. *no longer His children.* Gr Naz: “How shall we bear His convictions; or what reply shall we make, when He reproaches us not only with the multitude of the benefits for which we have continued ungrateful, but also with His chastisements, and reckons up the remedies with which we have refused to be healed? Calling us His children indeed, but unworthy children, and His sons, but strange sons who have stumbled”

(*NPNF* 2 7:250). Cyr Jer: “Not according to nature, but according to God’s grace, and by adoption, we call Him Father” (*NPNF* 2 7:46). (TLSB)

32:6 *created ... established.* “Scripture testifies that God has created human nature not only before the fall, but that it is God’s creature and work also since the fall” (FC SD I 34). Iren: “[Moses] indicates that He who from the beginning founded and created them, the Word, who also redeems and vivifies us in the last times, is shown as hanging on the tree, and they will not believe on Him” (*ANF* 1:474). (TLSB)

32:7 *ask your father.* Elderly were esp respected because of their wisdom. The Lord God charged parents with the sacred duty of passing on the covenant history and God’s acts of deliverance to their children. Jn D: “If we read once or twice and do not understand what we read, let us not grow weary, but let us persist, let us talk much, let us enquire” (*NPNF* 2 9:89). (TLSB)

32:8 *Most High.*† The only occurrence in Deuteronomy of this name for God. It emphasizes the Lord’s control of all creation. (CSB)

gave the nations their inheritance. Iren: “He did also make one race of men to dwell upon all the earth” (*ANF* 1:433). (TLSB)

according to the number of the sons of Israel. Perhaps referring to the Lord’s grant of Canaan to Israel as sufficient to sustain their expected population. (CSB)

In this context, the phrase signifies the tribes of Israel (Nu 26:52–56). (TLSB)

32:9 *LORD’s portion is His people.* Cf Ex 19:3–6; 1Pt 2:9–10. 1 Clem: “Our gracious and merciful Father ... made us partakers in the blessing of His elect” (*ANF* 1:12). (TLSB)

32:10 *He found him.* God found His people; they did not find Him—they were not even looking for Him (cf 7:7–8; 9:6–7). (TLSB)

apple of his eye. Lit. “little man of his eye,” referring to the pupil, a delicate part of the eye that is essential for vision and that therefore must be protected at all costs. (CSB)

32:11 *flutters over.* The Lord bore His people on eagles’ wings. (TLSB)

32:12 *the LORD alone.* There is only one true God, and He is jealous (5:6–9). (TLSB)

32:13–14 *honey ... milk.* Underscores God’s promise to bring His people to a good land (Ex 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Lv 20:24; Nu 14:8 Dt 6:3). See “flowing with milk and honey,” p 6. During their rebellion, Abiram and Eliab employed this phrase to mock Moses, thereby mocking God (Nu 16:12–15). (TLSB)

32:13 *on the high places.* When God sets His people on the high places, they have security (see note, Hab 3:19), in contrast to the wicked, who presume in their pride that no one can bring them down from their high places (Ob 3–4). (TLSB)

honey out of the rock. See Ps 81:16. In Canaan, bees sometimes built their hives in clefts of rocks (cf. Isa 7:18–19). (CSB)

oil from the flinty rock. Olive trees often grew on rocky hillsides, as on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. (CSB)

32:15 *Jeshurun.* Name for Israel derived from Hbr word for “straight” or “right,” used to describe God in v 4 (“upright”). Applied ironically to Israel here, it describes how the chosen nation was to have been; instead it was “crooked.” Cf 33:5, 26 for its use as a complimentary title of how Israel could be by the grace of God. V 5 intimates the use of this nickname. Cf Mt 3:3, the message of John the Baptist. 1 Clem: “Every kind of honour and happiness was bestowed upon you.... So the worthless rose up against the honoured, those of no reputation against such as were renowned, the foolish against the wise, the young against those advanced in years. For this reason righteousness and peace are departed from you” (ANF 1:5–6). (TLSB)

32:17–43 Since the twofold purpose of this song was to prophesy Israel’s apostasy and serve as a witness against them (31:19–22), the two titles “Jeshurun” and “Rock” establish a pattern for the remainder of the song: Jeshurun, i.e., Israel, forsook God, committed idolatry and abominations, and forgot God. The Rock, i.e., God, was stirred to jealousy, provoked to anger against them, would hide His face, and would stir them to jealousy by employing foreign nations to turn them back to Him. (TLSB)

32:17 *demons.* Chem: “The prophets taught that men of this kind, who out of good intention had gone off on their own into their own forms of worship, were not serving God but the devil” (LTh 2:576). (TLSB)

32:18 *you forgot the God.* Forgetting and remembering serve as key indicators of the covenantal relationship between God and humankind. When we forget God, we stand in danger of God forgetting us and of being cut off forever. Sinful human beings, like rebellious Israel, will forget God. God’s grace is the controlling principle for the covenant and for remembrance: we are enabled to remember God’s promise because He does not forget us. (TLSB)

32:20 *I will hide My face.* Reversal of Aaronic blessing (Nu 6:24–26). (TLSB)

32:21 Quoted in part in Ro 10:19 to illustrate Israel’s failure to understand the good news about Christ. (CSB)

God’s discipline would match their apostasy. He would stir them to jealousy by showing them that the gods and nations they put their faith in were not a source of good, but of evil, and were powerless to help them. (TLSB)

no people. Aph: “The holy People [the Church] inherited an eternal Kingdom; the holy people who were chosen instead of the People [Israel]” (NPNF 2 13:360–61). (TLSB)

32:22 *depths of Sheol.* Conveys the sense of the grave, the place where the dead are. (TLSB)

32:24–25 The Lord would provoke them to jealousy by these curses of the covenant. See note, Rm 10:19–21. (TLSB)

32:26–27 The Lord would not unleash the full measure of His wrath on Israel because enemy nations would misinterpret the Lord’s act to mean that they had achieved a victory on their own. Ps 106:8 captures the essence of the Lord working judgment and redemption for His own glory. (TLSB)

32:28 *nation.* Not the Israelites but the nations God selected to discipline His people. (TLSB)

32:30 *their Rock*. Israel's God. (CSB)

32:31 *their rock*. The god of Israel's enemy. (CSB)

32:30–35 Rather than the enemy acknowledging the one true God as their Rock and their source of life, they trusted in other gods. This aligned them with Sodom and Gomorrah and consigned them to “calamity” and “doom” at the hands of the Lord, to whom belongs vengeance. (TLSB)

32:34 *sealed it up in my treasurers*. The Lord's plans for the future are fixed and certain. Sin will be punished in due time. (CSB)

32:35–36 Quoted in part in Heb 10:30 as a warning against rejecting the Son of God. (CSB)

32:35 *vengeance is mine*. Quoted in Ro 12:19 to affirm that avenging is God's prerogative. (CSB)

32:36 *the LORD will vindicate* – To contend, plead, strive or minister. This is so much about making a decision as it is about restoring a relationship. (QV)

Remembering His covenant, the Lord will deliver His people. God does not desire punishment for punishment's sake but for the purposes of discipline and growth in faith (Ezk 18:23; cf. 1 Tim 2:3-4; 2 Pt 3:9). (TLSB)

This will be done by punishing those who are only outward members of His people, and by saving those who are found true worshipers of Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

power is gone – This is when all the earthly props of Israel's power upon which it relied are taken away. (Kretzmann)

have compassion – Hebrew rachamim, “tender mercy,” “compassion” from the term for “womb,” it pictures the tender love a mother has for her children. (CSB)

32:37–38 The Lord God mocks the false gods pursued by His people. Similarly, Elijah mocked the false prophets who called on the name of Baal on Mount Carmel (1Ki 18:1–40). (TLSB)

32:37 *he will say* – God goes to great lengths to show people the folly of not worshiping him. In the OT he would point out the foolishness of so in the texts below:

Judges 10:14 “Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble.”

Jeremiah 2:28 “Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah.”

Jeremiah 11:12 “The towns of Judah and the people of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they burn incense, but they will not help them at all when disaster strikes.”

The Lord mocks the false gods pursued by His people. Similarly, Elijah mocked the false prophets who called on the name of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Kg 18:1-40) (TLSB)

When He has thus brought punishment upon His people and avenged Himself upon His enemies in their midst. (Kretzmann)

32:39 *no god beside me.* Basil the Great says, “In Scripture ‘one’ and ‘only’ are not predicated of God to mark distinction from the Son and the Holy Ghost, but to except the unreal gods falsely so called.” (NPNF2 8:117) Chemnitz says, “There is no other essence, no different in the Deity, than that one and only essence which has thus been revealed. (LTh 1:64) (TLSB)

I kill and I make alive. The Lord kills and wounds so that sinners blinded by pride might see the reality that they are wounded and dead in their sin and trust the Lord, who alone heals and makes alive. “When they are idle, negligent, and rebellious in this matter because of the flesh, He rebukes them through the Law. So the Spirit carries out both offices together: He slays and makes alive. He leads into hell and brings up again. For His office is not only to comfort, but also to rebuke (FC SD VI 12) Luther states, “God wants us to regard the evils that we experience as coming to us with His permission....God permits evil to come to us; for it is His will that, when we have been chastened, we cast ourselves at His mercy.” (AE 13:135) (TLSB)

Only through the life, death and resurrection of Christ is there a restoration of a relationship with God. (CSB)

none that can deliver – Aphrahat “My beloved, have no doubt as to the Resurrection of the dead.... Believe that in the day of Resurrection, your body shall arise in its entirety, and you shall receive from our Lord the reward of your faith, and in all that you have believed, you shall rejoice and be made glad.... When Death heard all these things, amazement seized him, and he sat him down in mourning” (NPNF 2 13:383, 402–3). (TLSB)

To Him, as the almighty God, pertains the absolute power over the creatures of His hand. (Kretzmann)

32:40–41 *lift up My hand.* A threat to execute judgment with sword and arrows from the divine armory. *hand.* (TLSB)

32:42 *My sword shall devour flesh.* Bern: “Let divine fear transfix your flesh, that the desire of the flesh may not deceive you. It flatters, but under its tongue is suffering and sorrow; it weeps, but betrays” (SLSB, p 184). (TLSB)

long-haired heads. Refers to those who brandish a sense of invincibility. Warriors styled their hair to look more fearsome. (TLSB)

32:43 *Rejoice with him.* † One of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint add a clause here, and the clause is quoted in Heb 1:6. (CSB)

bow down. Philistine statue of the god Dagon “bowed” before the ark of the covenant (1Sm 5:1–4). (TLSB)

all gods. Cf v 17. (TLSB)

32:44 Joint recitation of the song validated the transfer of authority from Moses to Joshua and validated the message of the song. The one true God ordained Joshua and inspired the words of the song. (TLSB)

32:46 *Take to heart.* “Where the heart is rightly set toward God [Deuteronomy 32:46] and this commandment is observed, all the other commandments follow” (LC I 48). (TLSB)

32:47 *no empty word for you.* Upon completion of the song, Moses puts Israel on notice that this song is not just some clever ditty. (TLSB)

your very life. Illustrates the covenant of grace God established with His people. (TLSB)

31:30–32:47 Moses’ song prophesies Israel’s apostasy and professes the one true God. Employing enemy forces and the elements of nature, God would bring His calamity upon them. Yet, for His name’s sake and in His compassion, He would vindicate His people and vanquish the enemy. • Father, I am ashamed to say that I am no better than Israel. Through Your Spirit and Word, take away my heart of stone and create in me a new heart—a heart that yearns to live with You forever. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen. (TLSB)

Moses’ Death Foretold

48 That very day the LORD spoke to Moses, 49 “Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel for a possession. 50 And die on the mountain which you go up, and be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother died in Mount Hor and was gathered to his people, 51 because you broke faith with me in the midst of the people of Israel at the waters of Meribah-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, and because you did not treat me as holy in the midst of the people of Israel. 52 For you shall see the land before you, but you shall not go there, into the land that I am giving to the people of Israel.”

32:49 *Abarim.* Region east of Jordan and south of Bashan; its mountains overlook the Jordan River and the Salt Sea. (TLSB)

Mount Nebo. A 2,643-ft summit in the Pisgah of Abarim range in Moab. (TLSB)

32:50 *gathered to your people.* Euphemism for death; phrase was used for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not for Joseph. (TLSB)

32:51–52 Though Moses disqualified himself from entering the Promised Land by breaking faith with the Lord, the Lord would allow him to see it from a distance. (TLSB)

32:48–52 The Lord reminds Moses that he has disqualified himself from entering the Promised Land due to breaking faith with Him. Yet, in His mercy, God permits Moses to see the Promised Land from a distance. He received Moses into the eternal promised land so that he might also stand on another mountain with the Messiah during His transfiguration (Mt 17:1–13). • Father, forgive my breaking faith with You. Work mightily within my heart that I may live my Christ-redeemed life by faith in all I think, do, and say. Amen. (TLSB)