

## Sermon – 17/09/2006 pm

### Song of Moses – Redemptive Judgment

Study Text: Deuteronomy 32:26-43

*Ascribe greatness to our God the Rock* is the initial exaltation in this song of Moses. God is great. God is good. Let not the followers of Mohammed hijack this great truth and apply to their god. YHWH, the Lord, reigns from his throne in heaven over all his creation and over all the nations of the earth.

The Lord made known his ways to the children of Israel, whom he chose. He made a covenant with them after delivering them from bondage – ‘I will be your God and you will be my people’. Under the terms of this covenant he gave them commandments to obey – ‘do this and you will live’!

But his people did not obey his commands. They rebelled, they turned their backs on the God who saved them and brought them into the good land of Canaan. They provoked the Lord to jealousy by worshipping foreign gods. In his anger, yet justly, God punished his people. He invoked the sanctions of the covenant to deprive them of rain and heap disasters on them.

Eventually he would give them into the hands of their enemies. If they preferred the gods of the other nations then let them go and live in those nations reasoned the Lord. Israel would be scattered among the nations; they would again live in bondage, having broken the covenant and despised the Lord their God.

The passage before us today brings us to a turning point in this song. Would this punishment be the end? Would the Lord forget Israel and raise up another nation? He considered doing this when they made the golden calf back in the desert. *I will destroy this nation and I will make you a great nation* he said to Moses (Exodus 32:10). But Moses pleaded with the Lord, arguing that the Egyptians would have reason to mock and feel vindicated if Israel was destroyed by the God who rescued them.

A similar dilemma confronts the Lord in this song, if we can reverently put it this way. The nation God used to punish Israel, by carrying them off into exile, would turn around and exalt themselves before God. They would say *our hand has triumphed, and it is not the Lord who has done all this* (32:27). So while Israel deserved the full wrath of God and total destruction, God reconsidered his judgment in the light of this pagan exaltation, and also because of compassion for his own people.

### Judgment of the Nations

God is jealous for his own glory. After all, he alone is God. He alone is the Rock. *There is no God besides me* (32:39). When these other nations started claiming that they had captured the people of God by their own hand, and started giving praise to their own gods, the Lord’s name would be dishonoured.

They of course lacked understanding (32:27). They did not realise that the Lord had allowed them to capture his people, that he was using them to punish his people. Such misunderstanding and such misplaced glory, the Lord would not tolerate.

The *nation void of counsel* (32:28) could be either Israel or their enemy, although the latter seems preferable. That nation should realise that unless the Rock, unless the Lord, had sold his people (32:30) they would not have been captured. Surely it was obvious that one or two could not conquer an army of thousands, unless the Lord allowed it. Gideon understood that the Lord could do this – but here the position is reversed with Israel suffering defeat by a smaller army. Israel was defeated by a smaller nation not because their rock was greater than our Rock (32:31), but because the Rock of Israel so ordained it.

God will judge the nation that exalts itself above him. He will judge the nation that taunts him in this manner, and the nation that gloats over the defeat of God's people. Such gloating is like bitter poison. It is the fruit of the fields of Sodom and Gomorrah (32:32). It is the fruit of those who have no fear of God, nor faith in him. The Lord pronounces judgment on such nations. He warns them to *consider their latter end* (32:29). *Their foot will slip in due time* (32:35).

*Vengeance is mine; I will repay* says the Lord (32:35). This declaration echoes throughout Scripture, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The prophet Isaiah has the Lord saying *for my name's sake I will defer my anger, and for my praise I will restrain it from you* (Isaiah 48:9). For the sake of his own glory the Lord would not allow his people to be totally destroyed, He would not have his name profaned among the nations.

Ezekiel expresses the same thought. The Lord's holy name would be profaned when the nations said *'these are the people of the Lord and yet they have gone out of his land'*. *I had concern for my holy name* said the Lord (Ezekiel 36:20, 21). In due time the Lord would judge these pagan nations. Having used them to judge Israel he would in turn judge them for their pride and arrogance.

We might call this redemptive judgment. It is judgment by which the Lord's people are saved. This vengeance will show God's justice and also be the means by which he will deliver his people. Such redemptive judgment is seen supremely in the death of Jesus on Calvary's Cross. God's wrath was upon Jesus, even as he was saving us.

In the New Testament book of Hebrews we find verse 35 quoted as a warning to those who, by wilful sin, trample the Son of God underfoot. God is still jealous for his glory. He still says *'vengeance is mine, I will repay'* to those who exalt themselves above him. His judgment is still *sealed up*; it is kept in reserve for the time of his choosing (32:34).

Paul teaches a complementary lesson from this same verse (Romans 12:19). If vengeance belongs to the Lord then it is not the prerogative of the Christian. He tells us to live at peace with all people, and not to seek revenge, because revenge belongs to the Lord. He will take care of our enemies. Similarly in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek rather than seek revenge, trusting ourselves as he did into the hands of our heavenly Father.

## Compassion towards His People

The Lord would preserve a remnant of his people for the glory of his own holy name, and also because of *compassion for his servants* (32:36). These were the children to whom he gave birth (32:18). As their Father he would have pity on them *when he sees that their power is gone* (32:36). He would hear when they cried for mercy from these foreign lands. He will of course point out to them the error their ways and warn them of ultimate judgment.

*There is no God besides me* says the Lord, as the song turns to first person speech. *I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal* (32:39). In his compassion the Lord would save his people. He would restore them for he has the power to heal and bring to life. The song ends with the promise that the Lord will make *atonement for his land and his people* (32:43). ‘God is here pictured as clearing the way and covering over the guilt of his people and his land. He not only forgives his people but covers over their offence’.

This song has lessons for us today as we live under the new covenant. It points forward to the time of Jesus Christ when atonement was provided not only for his land and his people but for all the world, for all whom the Lord our God will call. *Rejoice, O Gentiles with his people* (32:43). Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, found these words fulfilled in the ministry which Jesus gave him – *he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before the Gentiles* (Acts 9:15 *cf.* Romans 15:10).

God’s just judgment and his compassion (or love), were both supremely demonstrated in the Cross. Jesus, his only Son, suffered as an enemy of God because he bore our sins. His suffering, his death, was our salvation. *God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God* (II Corinthians 5:21).

God’s judgment was in no way set aside or suspended at the Cross. The wrath of God was exhausted on his own Son and the just requirements of God’s law met for us who believe. For those who do not believe in Jesus, for those outside of Christ, God’s wrath remains (John 3:36). He will take vengeance on his enemies, which includes you if you have not yet repented of your sin and believed in Jesus.

The vengeance of God is portrayed in bloody horror in this Song of Moses, as it is throughout Scripture, culminating in the book of Revelation. The final judgment is pictured as a trampling of the winepress with rivers of blood flowing out from it to the depth of a horse’s bridle (Revelation 14:20).

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