

# THE WORD OF GOD

FOR THE

# PEOPLE OF GOD

THE SERMONS IN DEUTERONOMY

## Lesson 10: Sing the Message

Deuteronomy 32:1-43

### Lesson Summary and Objectives

#### Summary

Moses writes a song that sums up the main themes of Deuteronomy, and he performs it for the people as a final act before they leave him behind and enter the Promised Land.

#### Learning Outcomes

- Participants can explain the covenant between God and his people.
- Participants can explain the relationship between love/faith/obedience.
- Participants can describe the proper role of the past in determining our choices for the future.
- Participants can identify with the ancient Israelites and the issues they faced.
- Participants can evaluate the importance of individual vs. communal responsibility to God.
- Participants can discuss with clarity what it means to be the people of God.

### Teaching Outline

#### Invite

- What is the first thing you remember learning by way of a song?

#### Inform

##### Read Deuteronomy 32:1-43

- This is part of Moses' final words to the people of Israel before they enter the Promised Land without him.
  - It is a retelling of God's history with Israel, and it anticipates the future happenings in Joshua-Kings, as Israel abandons God and eventually lands in Assyrian and Babylonian captivity.
  - G. Ernest Wright has argued that this song belongs in a genre called "covenant lawsuit," which is a judicial case prosecuting Israel's actions that lead to a broken covenant.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> G. Ernest Wright, "The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenberg* (ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 26-67.

- The basic message is that the punishment and abandonment Israel will face is not because of God being arbitrary or capricious, but because Israel ignored God's warnings and violated the covenant.<sup>7</sup>
- The song opens with a prologue, hoping for an effective message and giving praise to God (1-3).
- Next, Moses contrasts the "perfect" God (here imagined as a rock) with a "degenerate," "perverse and crooked" people (4-5).
- Moses recalls the "days of old" when God first called his people out of the nations (6-9).
- Moses continues by remembering how God took care of this particular people he called as his own (10-14).
  - The people were safe and well-fed, and this was because God watched over them.
- Things take a turn in the next section. Moses imagines Israel becoming "fat" and "bloated" as they abandon God (15).
  - The particular crime is turning to "strange gods," but the overall theme of complacency is in place too (16-18).
- God has a fierce response: in his anger and jealousy, he decides to hide his face (i.e., take away his presence) from his people (19-20).
- God decides to bring disaster, hunger, and pestilence on the people (23-24).
- In a final act of vengeance, God wants to "blot out the memory of them from humankind," but he fears "provocation by the enemy" so he relents (26-27).
  - In this passage, God spares Israel not because of any great love for them, but because it would make God look bad in the eyes of the other nations.
- The next section turns from anger and vengeance toward Israel to anger and vengeance toward the *other nations* (28-38).
  - The rock of those nations is not like the rock of Israel (31).
  - In the end, God will vindicate his people and have compassion on them (36).
- The end of the song proclaims that the future is not determined by Israel's decisions or by the arrogant nations, but by God (39-43).<sup>8</sup>
  - God kills and makes alive, not *humans* (39).
  - Judgment ultimately comes from the sword of God, not *other humans* (40-41).
  - God keeps score, not *humans*. In the end, the righteous will win (43).

## Investigate

The contrast between the faithfulness of God and the fickleness of God's people is laid out in stark terms in this song.

Take some time to look through the song for descriptions of God and the people. Look especially for the *verbs* attributed to God vs. the *verbs* attributed to the people, and the *adjectives* that describe God vs. the *adjectives* that describe the people.

Below is a starter chart with an example row for these. You can take some time to flesh it out with your class.

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 280.

<sup>8</sup> Brueggemann, 281.

| Adjectives                 |                              | Verbs                                     |                          |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| God                        | God's people                 | God                                       | God's people             |
| Perfect, just, upright (3) | Corrupt, warped, crooked (5) | Shielded, cared for, guarded, led (10-12) | Abandoned, rejected (15) |
|                            |                              |   |                          |

- What contrasts do you notice between God and God's people?
- Which adjective or verb is most striking to you?
- Are the descriptions of God's people fair? Or do they seem too harsh?
- How might the people of Israel, when they later fall under God's judgement, describe God?

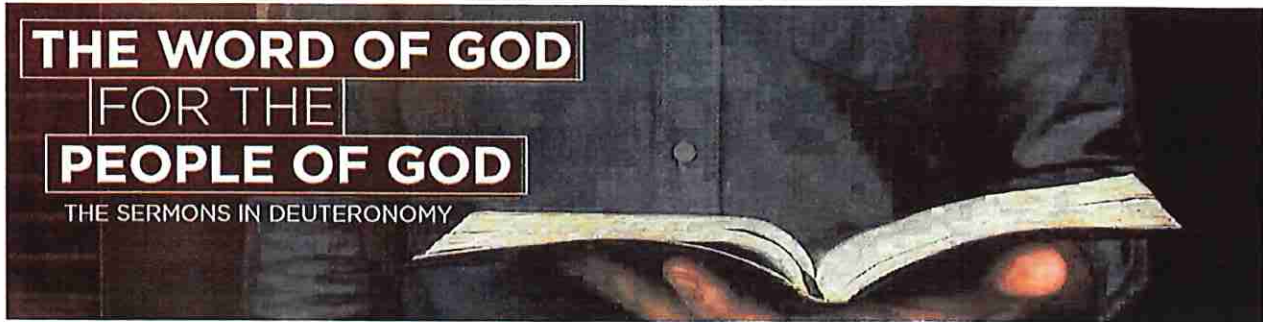
### Illustrate

- Look at the ways God's people are described. How many of those terms can you easily "own," and how many do you think are not as applicable?
- What lessons can we draw about our obedience and God's faithfulness?
- How would the New Testament answer this question: "How can God continue to love and be faithful to such a stubborn, sinful people?"
- How do our actions affect God's reputation with others?
- Does this passage encourage you more or convict you more?
- How would you sum up God's expectations for his people?

### Inspire

Ideas for closing:

- Select a song about God's faithfulness and sing it as a class.
  - Examples: "Great is Thy Faithfulness," "The Steadfast Love of the Lord"



## Passing on the Faith

Ideas for a Wrap-Up Intergenerational Combined Class

### Notes

This lesson is for an optional intergenerational combined class that serves as a wrap-up to this series. You can adapt to fit your context and model.

Below are some questions to use in your facilitation of the class. You can use the questions in the following ways:

- Ask the whole group at once
- Host a panel discussion with 4-6 people representing different backgrounds and generations
- Break the larger group up into smaller groups and have people discuss with people around them.

### Read Deuteronomy 6: 1-12

- Who were some people responsible for your early faith formation – even as a child? What did they do that was important to you?
- What role did your family play in your faith formation?
- Do you have memories of talking about faith-related matters as a family growing up?
- If you grew up in church, what are some of your earliest memories of your experiences there?
- What are some early Bible lessons you remember?
- When is the first time you remember having deep questions about your faith? Who helped you through that?
- Why are you (still) a Christian?

Note: these next questions are for parents, grandparents, and others who have children in their lives. Keep that in mind as you decide whether – or how – to ask these questions in your class.

- What things do you do to pass on the faith?
- How do you see your role and the church's role in teaching your children the faith? In other words, what is *your* responsibility as it relates to the responsibility of the children's/youth ministry, the elders, staff, and other adults? How does this team work together?
- What are your greatest worries about your children and their faithfulness?
- Where and how can you begin to have meaningful conversations about faith with your children?

For those who have raised children:

- What were your successes and failures at teaching faith to your children?
- What advice do you have for today's parents?
- How do you see your role in shaping the faith of children today? What role do you play in the church as we do this together?

For all (to finish up)

- Current research tells us that kids need a mentoring relationship with five adults (in addition to their parents). Do your kids have that? Are you an adult who is mentoring and getting to know kids? How do we create that kind of culture?

End class by reciting Deuteronomy 6:4-5 together:

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*