

2009 Deuteronomy Series

A Study of the Character of God as He has Revealed Himself vs.
the Substitute Idols of our Neo-Pagan Culture
God's "Lawsuit" – Court Procedure and Accusation

Fellowship Chapel

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SESSION #70 (17 Jan 2012)

Deut 32:1-18

I. INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

1:1-5	Introduction to God's spokesman, the 1 st Prophet Moses
1:6-4:40	1 st Exposition of the Torah = <i>motivation</i> to obey from (1) <u>past gracious actions</u> of Yahweh and (2) sovereign <u>destiny</u> of the nation (<u>future gracious actions</u> of Yahweh)
4:41-49	Editorial comment on context of 2 nd Exposition of the Torah
5:1-26:19	2 nd Exposition of the Torah = <i>proper response</i> to Yahweh in heart and soul
27:1-29:1	3 rd Exposition of the Torah = <i>inauguration of the covenant</i> in the land
29:2-30:20	4 th Exposition of the Torah = prophetic fore view of <i>covenant performance</i>
29:2-29:29	Israel's past, present and (near) future
30:1-20	Moses' closing challenge
31:1-34:12	Handover procedures from Moses to Joshua and the new generation
31:1- 29	Inauguration of Joshua
32:1-43	The Prophetic Anthem of Israel—the investiture of the Covenant witnesses

So far in the "handover" process, Joshua has been inaugurated [publicly] by God in front of all the nation, and a clear warning of Israel's future [defection] has been heard (to frame the historic reality in which Joshua must lead, viz., that the key is the nation's relationship with Yahweh, not the charisma of its leaders)

II. THE PROPHETIC ANTHEM OF ISRAEL: THE INVESTITURE OF THE COVENANT WITNESSES (Deut 32:1-43)

A. Background for this text

- Liberal critics of the Bible have had great difficulty with this Song because it views Israel's defection as past and views the culmination of human history. Thus they have dated it much later (toward the exile years).
- Archeology has discovered various ANE legal documents: Suzerainty-Vassal Treaties, Royal Grants, and "lawsuit"/"Riv" Proceedings dating from the 2nd millennium BC which shows that this literature genre was extant at the very time of the traditional date of Deuteronomy.

Principle: Statements made in lieu of actual eye-witness evidence are speculation and must always be considered as such.

- In 1962 French Scholar Julian Harvey discovered how Suzerainty-Vassal Treaty breaches were dealt with by an Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (ca 1200 BC) who went after an unfaithful vassal king named Kashtiliash.

1. Indictment in accusation: interrogation & formal brief accusation
2. Judicial proof: expose before the gods (witnesses) of the treaty & recitation of the good deeds of the Suzerain.
3. Declaration of sentence: holy war (no mercy)

Other studies have helped formulate a general outline of “lawsuit”/”Riv” procedure

Generalized Riv format

- I. Court Procedure
 - Call for witnesses
 - Introduction of the case
 - Judicial proof of the faithfulness of the Suzerain and unfaithfulness of the Vassal
- II. Accusation
- III. Sentence (announcement of judgment)

[Riv format in **Deuteronomy 32**]

- I. Court Procedure (**32:1-14**)
 - Call for witnesses (**32:1-3**)
 - Introduction of the case (**32:4-6**)
 - Faithfulness of Yahweh (**32:7-14**)
- II. Accusation (**32:15-18**)
- III. Sentence (**32:19-26**)
- *IV. Gracious Ultimate Assurance (32:27-43)*

*Part IV is unique to the Bible ==> we need to focus on this element as a “flag” that shows a major [difference] between theocratic Israel and pagan culture ==> an important feature of special revelation of the Word of God.

This “song” is prophetic and provides the [underpinnings] of later OT prophetic indictments against Israel. Note the unique portions that occur (in italics).

[Riv format in **Isaiah 1**]

- I. Court Procedure (**1:2-4**)
 - Call for witnesses (**1:2a**)
 - Introduction of the case (**1:3-4**)
 - Faithfulness of Yahweh and unfaithfulness of Israel (**1:2b**)
- II. Accusation (**1:5-23**)
 - 1st accusation (**1:5-9**)
 - 2nd accusation (**1:10-15**)
 - Appeal for repentance (1:16-20)*
 - 3rd accusation (**1:21-23**)
- III. Sentence (**32:19-26**)
 - Mercy clause (1:25-27)*

[Riv format in **Hosea 4:1-3**]

- I. Court Procedure (**4:1**)
- II. Accusation (**4:2**)
- III. Sentence (**4:3**)

[Riv format in **Micah 6**]

- I. Court Procedure (**6:1-6**)
 - Call for witnesses (**6:1-2**)
 - Faithfulness of Yahweh (**6:3-4**)
 - Reaction of Micah (6:5-8)*
- II. Accusation (**6:9-12**)
- III. Sentence (**6:13-16**)

Summary of background material:

1. God is not casual in His relationships; He frames His relationship with contracts in order to define, measure, and evaluate the relationship
2. History of Israel as the public “model” reveals a personal relationship with “dynamic” interaction involving prophetic indictments of contract violations
3. Final outcome is that Yahweh is glorified and fallen man shown his need of a Savior-God
4. Remarkable difference between the Yahweh-Israel relationship and pagan suzerain-vassal relationships is God’s grace in finally restoring the relationship.

B. Court Procedure (32:1-14)

1. Call for witnesses (32:1-3)

32:1 heavens. . .earth

Not just a simple metaphor for the “environment”. We know that angelic beings are profoundly involved with nature. While pagans worshipped nature, Scripture keeps nature in its place.

32:2 my teaching as dew. . .raindrops. . .showers

Continues the environment of Israel as a metaphor of the power of the Word of God in spite of what appears to transpire. The truthfulness of the Word penetrates everywhere as the standard to measure the relationship—total saturation, no escape

32:3 greatness to our God

The glory of God is the end-all of this relationship’s history and the witnesses are called upon to focus on this point.

2. Introduction of the case (32:4-6)

32:4 He is. . .

When you discuss “justice” you deal with the ethical question. The option is either God or man. Since man is finite and fallen, only God can be the [transcendental], non-subjective standard. The case begins with the standard. Pagan gods and goddesses were mere projections of fallen man.

32:5 corrupted themselves

NET Bible translation: *he is fair and upright. 32:5 His people have been unfaithful to him; they have not acted like his children – this is their sin.*¹

They have denied reality (like the Prodigal Son).

32:6 deal thus with Yahweh

All men are in a relationship with God at all times—either one of [enmity] or [harmony].

Summary: the case is defined properly—deliberate violation of God’s character.

3. Faithfulness of Yahweh (32:7-14)

32:7 remember

Testimony of history is revelation of God’s faithfulness just as a history of contract performance is testimony of compliance. Unbelief is always at war with history--erasing it, perverting it, and re-writing it.

32:8 Most High

The pre-Israelite name for God among all people groups.

¹ Biblical Studies Press. (2006; 2006). *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Dt 32:4–5). Biblical Studies Press.

divided their inheritance to the nations

- Genesis 10 division lists 70 nations
- Sons of Jacob in Gen. 46:27: 70 sons
- Years in captivity Jer. 25:11; 29:10: 70 years
- Elders on Moses' "board" in Num 11:16f: 70 elders
- Lord's disciples in Luke 10:1: 70 disciples

Such "order" seems artificial to modern readers who don't reflect on the order seen in creation (Fibonacci numbers, DNA 4-letter alphabet, etc.)

Israel was designed from the start to minister to all nations.

Like **Eph 2:10** "*we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*"

32:10 found him in a desert land

Wilderness wanderings & Mt. Sinai—Israel became a nation there

32:12 Yahweh alone. . .no foreign god

Yahweh alone led and supplied logistical grace as no pagan deity has ever done (unique history as revelation of the truth)

32:13-14 produce of fields

Written from the future viewpoint looking [backwards] at Yahweh's historical performance. Summary: Yahweh's pre-ordained design & faithfulness establishes the standard of performance. The setting for the accusation and judgment is established.

C. Accusation (32:15-18)

32:15 Jeshurun (Heb: derivative from "yashar" = be upright; hence "upright one")

Contrast between what Israel was chosen to be and what it became.

forsook. . .scornfully esteemed

Failed the prosperity test (remember Lessons 23 and 24 on **Deut 8**)

32:16-17 foreign gods. . .demons. . .

Cf **Ps 106:37** and **1 Cor. 10:20**. Idols were crafted by demonic inspiration such that the finished product "revealed" the demon who inspired it.

fathers did not fear

New deceptions post-dating the establishment of the theocracy so emphasis here on the "departure" from known truths.

32:18 begot. . .fathered. . .

Family role of both mom and dad once again showing both the masculine and feminine nature of God (cf. **Matt. 23:37**).

The court case so far:

1. Witnesses called to examine the historical record
2. Yahweh has complied with all aspects of the contractual relationship
3. Israel has deliberately chosen to reject Yahweh's lordship