



THE SONG OF MOSES

Deuteronomy 31:1–32:47

God designed music to speak to both our minds and our emotions. The song of Moses demonstrates that truly God-honoring music will communicate the truths of God and call us to act upon them.

If you know something about music, you might recognize the opening measures we play during each broadcast of the Wisdom Journey. It's taken from the "Hallelujah Chorus," composed in 1741 by George Handel. The "Hallelujah Chorus" is recognized all around the world today, as it sings of the glorious kingdom of the coming Messiah, when He shall reign forever and forever, hallelujah!

George Handel was nearing the last chapter in his life when he composed the oratorio *Messiah*, of which the "Hallelujah Chorus" is a part. Handel faced a number of difficulties in life. In fact, at this point, he was struggling with insurmountable debt. Added to that, he had recently suffered a stroke that had paralyzed the left side of his face, causing bouts of intense pain.

Most days, Handel could barely afford rent and food. He was depressed and despondent. One night he went out and just walked around the lonely streets until dawn, when he returned to his shabby apartment. On his table was a thick envelope of Scripture verses his friend Charles Jennens had written out for him. Jennens encouraged Handel to use the verses to compose something new.

George tossed the pages aside and crawled into bed, but he couldn't sleep. Some of the words he had just read rolled over and over in his mind: "the people

that walked in darkness have seen a great light . . . it is the glory of God . . . Hallelujah!"

He got up and went to his piano and began to write. In fact, for days he hardly stopped to eat or sleep. He refused to see anyone. He completed the composition in little more than three weeks. A friend who managed to get inside the apartment found George Handel at his piano, sheets of music lying around everywhere. Having completed the "Hallelujah Cho-



Image of King Chephren with a falcon protecting the king



rus” and with tears streaming down his face, George said to his friend, “I did think I did see all heaven before me and the great God Himself seated on His throne.”

Handel’s *Messiah* is recognized throughout the world as one of the greatest pieces of music ever composed.

There’s something about music that inspires you in a way that you never forget. Even old saints who can’t remember their way home can remember the great hymns and songs of the faith.

We now arrive near the end of Deuteronomy. Moses is going to die in a matter of days. He has lived a difficult life, but more than anything, he wants the nation of Israel to give glory to God and anticipate the day when God reigns over all the nations of the world.

But it’s time now to hand the baton to Joshua, which he does here in the opening verses of chapter 31. He begins by delivering these encouraging words to the nation:

“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them [your enemies], for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” (verse 6)

Moses then addresses Joshua personally with much the same message here in verses 7-8:

“Be strong and courageous . . . It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

Now with that, Moses does something absolutely surprising to me. I would expect Moses to preach one last sermon to the nation, delivered with power and conviction—a sermon they would never forget.

But instead, he writes a song. Maybe it’s because he knows something every preacher out there knows. People may not remember a sermon I have preached, but they remember songs of the faith. So, Moses writes a song for the nation to sing.

Why is this song so important? Well, the Lord knows, and informs Moses, that after Moses’ death, the people of Israel will turn to foreign gods and forsake the Lord. Indeed, apostasy will grip the nation at various times in the centuries that follow.

So, the Lord says to Moses beginning here in verse 19:

“Write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel. . . . this song shall confront them as a witness (for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring).”

(verses 19, 21)

The Hebrew word here for “witness” means that this song will be an affirmation—a testimony of the truth. It will remind the people of the truth of God’s law; it will remind them of His greatness and His many blessings; and it will convict them of their sin against the Lord and call them to repentance.

Then Moses says in verse 28, “Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears.” “These words” refer to the words of the law, which is to be read every seven years to the assembled people, according to verses 10-13. But it also refers to the song of Moses, which follows. Both will confront Israel’s disobedience and encourage them to follow the Lord.

Verse 30 then tells us, “Moses spoke the words of this song until they were finished, in the ears of all the assembly of Israel.” Imagine this nationwide music lesson as several million Israelites are taught, as it were, the “Hallelujah Chorus.” Israel needs to become one gigantic choir, singing an unforgettable song that will



be a testimony to God’s greatness, magnificence, and faithfulness.

Now what we have here in chapter 32 are the lyrics to this amazing hymn of praise. Let me touch on some of the highlights in this composition.

Note these words in the opening lines:

Give ear, O heavens . . . let the earth hear the words of my mouth. . . . For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! (verses 1, 3)

In other words, “I want the entire universe to bend an ear to listen to the music that sings of the greatness of my God.”

Five times in this song, Moses refers to God as “the Rock”—verses 4, 15, 18, 30 and 31. He’s reminding Israel that they may have wandered and been unstable, but God has been a rock of faithfulness, a rock of unchanging truth, their rock of salvation.

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Now this song has some pretty transparent lyrics as well, and the nation is going to be forced to sing about their sin against God, their disobedience, their failure to follow Him. There’s nothing wrong in that remembrance. We sing today of our sin that held our Savior on that cross.

But the song moves on to end in hope. Moses writes in verse 36, “For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants.” That sounds like the “Hallelujah Chorus” to me.

You see, God’s plan for Israel is like His plan for His followers today. He graciously reveals our sin to us but promises that repentance leads to forgiveness and restoration.

And with that, the song ends in verse 43 with a promise that God will one day judge the nations. It is saying, “Don’t worry about what’s going on around you; don’t be afraid that God has somehow lost control of history and of the future.”

God will one day sit upon His throne in judgment. And just as Handel wrote in 1741 and just as Moses composed several thousand years earlier, the Lord shall reign forever and ever—forever and ever—hallelujah!

Why is it important for you to have regular times and ways to rehearse “God’s greatness, magnificence, and faithfulness?” How does Satan work specifically against you to distract you from those rehearsals? What does Satan’s efforts tell you about the rehearsal’s importance?

How has the Wisdom Journey up to and through Deuteronomy expanded your understanding of God’s heart for His people then and now? What misconceptions about God did you begin with as you started the Wisdom Journey and how have they been changed?

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