

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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The Singing of Jeshurun

Charles Fry

The "Song of Moses" in **Deuteronomy 32** is not a delightful, upbeat song. Rather, it was composed as a reminder and warning to God's people of where they had come from, of mistakes they had made already, and of other failures that would inevitably occur in the future. God's mercy and generosity are extolled, but there are also blunt descriptions of the failures of the nations to acknowledge God, from Babel onward, and their tendency to prefer gods reflecting their own character, rather than acknowledge the Creator and the image of his character. However, while the moral failures and idolatry of the nations and their gods are described, the focus of the song is on Israel and her own recurring determination to follow the nations and her own will, rather than follow God who chose them and rescued them to be his own people.

"The Song of Moses" describes God's character and behavior as "upright" (Hebrew: "jeshur"), along with associated attributes that show us what "upright" means.

Deuteronomy 32:4 (ESV), *"The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he."*

Upright refers to being consistent, doing what is right and good, choosing justice over preferences. A few verses later in the song (**Deuteronomy 32**), the same word "upright," used as a proper noun, identifies the people of God, calling them "the upright one" (Hebrew: "Jeshurun").

Deuteronomy 32:15 (ESV), *"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."*

In Moses's song, Israel as Jeshurun, the Upright, is described as coming from desperate circumstances — poverty, oppression, and hardship — into a blessed peace and prosperity provided by God, only to "kick" against divine restraint when he became "fat, stout, and sleek." Those with experience handling calves and cows will readily visualize the scene of the well-cared but ungrateful animal rebelling against necessary restraints, kicking at its stall or handler; the unrestrained cow kicking the milker or kicking over the milk bucket. "The Song of Moses" then describes the many moral and religious failures of Israel, and their disastrous consequences as God let them go the way of the nations, letting them have their own way. (See also **Deuteronomy 33:3-5**,

where again Israel is called Jeshurun, the Upright, the recipient of God's bountiful blessings and loving guidance. A people whose king is God.)

"The Song of Moses," which was to be rehearsed and memorized by Israel, tells of the rebellion of the nations against God, and of his selection of Abraham to build a new nation, a people belonging to himself. That new nation was to be upright – Jeshurun – having the very character of God himself. Instead, when Israel prospered by the grace of God she rebelled in her prosperity, becoming the image of the fallen nations rather than the image of God. *"Jeshurun grew fat and kicked."* How often does prosperity lead to (or at least contribute to) pride, stubbornness, selfishness, moral failure, and worship of gods that are not God? Unfortunately, prosperity and rebelliousness often go hand in hand. Israel is

Selfishness and godlessness, envy and conflict, tend to grow and flourish when people are blessed with prosperity.

by no means a unique example of a people who were upright in their dependency upon God in trials, but then "grew fat and kicked" while enjoying the blessings of prosperity. Selfishness and godlessness, envy and conflict, tend to grow and flourish when people are blessed with prosperity. Prosperity offers no assurance of peace and harmony and goodwill among humans and certainly no assurance of obedience to God.

Upright, of course, is not a descriptive term unique to Israel in the Old Testament, and what is recorded about them is intended to teach us how we should live (**1 Corinthians 10:6-13**). The Lord's saved people now who have received the Spirit of God are called to be Jeshurun, the upright one (see **Isaiah 44:1-5**) and so to live exemplary and productive lives while waiting for the fulfillment of hope when Jesus comes again. Paul in **Titus 2:11-14** described the Christian life in those terms, specifically as "self-controlled, upright, and godly."

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly

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passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (**Titus 2:11-14, ESV**).

Christians, as described by Paul, are "a people" for God's "own possession" which is what the upright (Jeshurun) in the Old Testament were called to be. Learning (we hope) the lesson of Israel in "The Song of Moses," the Lord's people must not "grow fat and kick" even if we might be living in a culture seemingly slipping into the vortex of rebellion in the mist of prosperity, with all the disasters that "kicking" sets in motion.

Nations today are no less accountable to God than they were at Babel or in Deuteronomy when they "get fat and kick." Prosperity might contribute to the inclination to get fat, get stubborn, and make trouble, but whatever happens in the nation(s), Christians must be Jeshurun (upright) and must not "get fat and kick" against divine restraint.

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Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?"

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

James 4:1-7

What Does the Lord See?

Blake Stanley

Throughout the scriptures, God examines and judges communities of people. The first example of this is early in the scriptures in **Genesis 6**, when He examines the hearts of all of mankind. As the Old Testament follows the history of God's people, there are many similar examples where God judges — and not always unfavorably — groups of people: Sodom and

Gomorrah, the Hebrew midwives (see **Exodus 1**), the nation of Israel many times and, more specifically, the northern kingdom of Israel and southern kingdom of Judah. This continues into the New Testament as well: through John the Baptist, the leadership of Israel was proclaimed to be a brood of vipers. Woes were proclaimed against the cities that did not heed the preaching of Jesus or His apostles.

It appears, at times, that God views the character of not only the part (the individual), but also the whole. In the above, there were examples of nations, cities, groups of leaders, and, in one instance, all of mankind. These groups all had characteristics that could be described and judged. Prior to the flood, man had a heart that only looked to evil. Sodom and Gomorrah were characterized by their pride. The Hebrew midwives were faithful to, and fearful of, the Lord. The nations of Israel and Judah were decadent as nations, chasing after idols, disregarding of the poor and guilty, as well as many other sins.

In the beginning of John's vision recorded as the book of **Revelation**, we see another instance of God judging groups of people. John's vision begins with seeing Christ standing in the midst of a group of lamp stands. The lamp stands are each a symbolic representation of a church in Asia. **Chapters two and three** are spent with Christ talking about these congregations: their characteristics, where they have failed and where they have succeeded, what they need to turn away from doing and what they need to turn to doing.

I don't know if Christ continues to examine His churches as He did when John saw Him in this vision. As we have seen, the precedent in the scriptures is that God examines His people not only as individuals, but also as a group. He may very well be looking at our congregations. If He is, what does He see right now and how would it have changed over the last year?

We cannot know the mind of God. There is no way for us to truly and accurately know what God would say, but it is still a useful question to ask in reflection. By the time you are reading this article, it will almost be a year since the COVID-19 pandemic started impacting our lives. It has been challenging, for some more than others. But all of our lives have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, people across the nation, and more locally in our own congregations, have developed strong and varying feelings concerning what is happening in the world and how to respond. There is no doubt this has put strain not just on us as individuals but also on us as congregations.

As we look back at the last year, what has this done to our churches? Are we stronger or are we weaker? Has our faith increased or has it been weakened? Has our love abounded to one another or have we allowed the divisiveness of the world to creep into our hearts? The point of the exercise isn't to encourage criticism. I'm not suggesting we assign some sort of grade or rating to our congregations. I don't believe any of us has the discernment or information to make this kind of a

judgment — we cannot possibly see what Christ saw to judge those congregations. But what we can reflect on is our own behavior, and the question we can ask ourselves is how have our actions impacted what Christ would see if He looked at our congregation as He did with the congregations in Asia?

If we could peer through Christ's judgments of the Churches of Asia what we would see is individual people. Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 12:27**, “*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*” Together we are a body, but that body is made up of each of us. The character of a group does not exist outside of the character of the individuals that make up that group. The judgments that Christ rendered against the congregations in **Revelation 2-3** were a reflection of the individuals who made up those congregations. The lukewarm church had lukewarm members. The church that abandoned its first love was made up of members who had abandoned their first love. The church that kept Christ's words of patient endurance had members who had kept Christ's words of patient endurance.

If Christ is looking at our congregations, the picture He sees is a reflection of each of us. A painted picture is completed one brush stroke at a time. All members adds to the picture Christ sees with their own individual brush and their own individual movements. What each of us should consider is if our contributions would help to paint something Christ would want to see.

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Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

1 Corinthians 11:27-32

Make Every Day Count

Brandon Lee

In **Ecclesiastes 12**, we find Solomon bringing this book to a close. While **Proverbs** is often called the book of wisdom, **Ecclesiastes** might be called the book of foolishness. There is much to learn from both books and we must always remember

that God's word is sufficient, without the need to add more (**2 Corinthians 3:4**).

We will spend our entire lives remembering things, but it's crucial that we keep at the front of our minds that God the creator fashioned us individually. When speaking on Mars Hill, Paul doesn't start with the cross of Christ, but with the creation. After that, he proceeds to the gospel of Christ. While it's easy to forget so many things, let us never forget that the creator God has come to us in the Lord Jesus Christ (see **Acts 17:24-26**).

Solomon also reminds us that life is short and doesn't go on forever. It's difficult to envision as a youth, but we must take the words of James to heart when he writes that “*life is but a vapor, here for a little while*” (**James 4:14**). We must capture opportunities while we can for our days are but a few.

Solomon continues in the final chapter of **Ecclesiastes** describing the reality of growing old. Arms and hands become shaky, legs are no longer upright, teeth are missing. The eyes have grown dim, deafness has set in, and many have insomnia. Yet this same person who can't hear a phone ring, is awakened by the singing of birds. He continues with a fear of heights, hair turned white, desire lost, and ultimately to eternal rest.

The frailty of life is seen in the beautifully-fashioned golden lamp suspended by the silver chain. With one snap, the chain can so easily break, the fragile life comes to an end. I don't believe Solomon is attempting to be morbid; earlier in his book he states that it's better to go to a house of mourning than into the feast of fools (**Ecclesiastes 7:2-6**). At the feast, there is nothing but the superficial and fake -- vanity. However, as people gather to mourn, we can't help but think seriously about things, to refocus our lives. Have you ever left a funeral home and not felt closer to God?

As we all look towards the end of our days, let us consider the words of Jesus, “*What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?*” (**Mark 8:36**). Remember then to seize the opportunities that are before you now.

Throughout this book Solomon has gone down a number of streets, only to see that all but one is a dead end. It's easy to go down the avenue of worldly wisdom in hope of finding something wonderful, only to realize it's elusive. It's sad that on college campuses, the students most likely to commit suicide are the top achievers academically, not the one's barely getting through. Why? While there is surely not one simple answer, could it be that some begin to see the futility of worldly academia? That's not to say school has no place, but it must always be understood that in the big picture God's wisdom is the true wisdom.

As all these streets are traveled, the brevity and futility of them become apparent. So Solomon reminds us that God will bring every deed into judgment (**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**). And

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that's where Paul goes in Athens as well, doesn't he? That God "has appointed a day when he will judge the world, and he has given proof of this by raising Jesus from the dead" (**Acts 17:30-31**).

All of these facts are not to drive us to despair. What are you going to do with this wonderful life of yours that God has given you? Your life is powerful. It's passing. It's purposeful. And the Bible always speaks in the present tense. It always speaks about now—offering our lives to God now.

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See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Ephesians 5:15-17

Glory to God!

The Rock Creek Church of Christ, Ottawa, KS, is excited to welcome back Kyle and Delores Rhynerson who recently relocated back to the area.

Blessed Are the Dead

Jennifer Hall, 70, of Chillicothe, MO, went to be with Jesus on December 29. Sister Jennifer was a faithful member of the church in Meadville, MO.

Special Meetings

The church in Vandalia, IA tentatively plans to hold their annual June meeting. Lord willing, the meeting will take place June 12-13.

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