Why Would Christians Sing the Song of Moses?

Intro: One of the popular songs of our generation is "On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand." Of course, it uses ancient Israel's journey over the Jordan River into the Promised Land as a type of our journey over the "river" of death to our eternal inheritance in heaven.

But there is an unusual and interesting statement made in the song: "*We will rest in fair and happy land by and by, just across on the evergreen shore, sing the song of Moses and the Lamb by and by and dwell with Jesus evermore*."

It makes sense why Christians would sing the song of the Lamb, since Jesus, the Lamb of God, died as a sacrifice to save us; but why would Christians sing the Song of Moses? For an answer let's take a more in-depth look at the Song of Moses in Deut. 32.

You remember from our Wednesday study in Deuteronomy that the Song of Moses was given to God's prophet Moses to teach to the people of Israel before his death. Its purpose was to bear witness through song to the Lord's faithfulness to Israel and Israel's future apostasy. When in the future Israel fell away from the Lord, this song would stand as a "witness" to the Lord's foreknowledge and warning that such would happen.

But that may make our modern song even more puzzling. Why would Christians sing about Israel's apostasy? What relevance would that have to us? A brief survey of the message of the Song of Moses will help.

The Message of the Song of Moses (Deut. 32)

> ***Moses begins by calling heaven and earth as witnesses to the truths he is about to reveal. They are to listen as he likens the words of his prophecy to the rain and dew that water the earth:***
> *GIVE ear, O heavens, and let me speak; And let the earth hear the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, As the droplets on the fresh grass And as the showers on the herb.*
> ***Moses begins by proclaiming the name of the Lord. In other words, he describes the character of God.***
> *For I proclaim the name of the LORD; Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He.*
> ***Yet in spite of the Lord's great character, Israel has not given Him what He deserves as the true God and their spiritual father:***
> *They have acted corruptly toward Him, They are not His children, because of their defect; But are a perverse and crooked generation. Do you thus repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people?*

Moses reviews all that the Lord had done for Israel. He begins by affirming that the Lord reserved a special place for Israel among the nations of the world, designating a special place for them to dwell:

Is not He your Father who has bought you? He has made you and established you. Remember the days of old, Consider the years of all generations. Ask your father, and he will inform you, Your elders, and they will tell you. When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, When He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the sons of Israel. For the LORD'S portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance.

Moreover He took them from a place of dire need and brought them into a place of abundance.

He found him in a desert land, And in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded him as the pupil of His eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, That hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions. The LORD alone guided him, And there was no foreign god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, And he ate the produce of the field; And He made him suck honey from the rock, And oil from the flinty rock, Curds of cows, and milk of the flock, With fat of lambs, And rams, the breed of Bashan, and goats, With the finest of the wheat— And of the blood of grapes you drank wine.

But in spite of the Lord's abundance provision, Israel forsook the Lord. He failed the test of prosperity, and turned to idolatry.

But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked— You are grown fat, thick, and sleek— Then he forsook God who made him, And scorned the Rock of his salvation. They made Him jealous with strange gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons who were not God, To gods whom they have not known, New gods who came lately, Whom your fathers did not dread. You neglected the Rock who begot you, And forgot the God who gave you birth.

Consequently the Lord's wrath came upon the whole nation from the youngest to the oldest. He would visit upon them the covenantal curses, the curses of natural calamity and foreign invasion.

And the LORD saw this, and spurned them Because of the provocation of His sons and daughters. Then He said, 'I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be; For they are a perverse generation, Sons in whom is no faithfulness. 'They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation, For a fire is kindled in My anger, And burns to the lowest part of Sheol, And consumes the earth with its yield, And sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. 'I will heap misfortunes on them; I will use My arrows on them. 'They shall be wasted by famine, and consumed by plague And bitter destruction; And the teeth of beasts I will send upon them, With the venom of crawling things of the dust. 'Outside the sword shall bereave, And inside terror— Both young man and virgin, The nursling with the man of gray hair.

Yet the Lord would not totally destroy them, lest the nations He used for their punishment would imagine that it was through their power and that of their gods that they had succeeded in conquering Israel. In fact, nothing that their gods gave them could begin to compare with what the Lord had done for His people. Concerning Israel the Lord declares:

'I would have said, I will cut them to pieces, I will remove the memory of them from men, Had I not feared the provocation by the enemy, Lest their adversaries should misjudge, Lest they should say, Our hand is triumphant, And the LORD has not done all this.' For they are a nation lacking in counsel, And there is no understanding in them. Would that they were wise, that they understood this, That they would discern their future! How could one chase a thousand, And two put ten thousand to flight, Unless their Rock had sold them, And the LORD had given them up? Indeed their rock is not like our Rock, Even our enemies themselves judge this. For their vine is from the vine of Sodom, And from the fields of Gomorrah; Their grapes are grapes of poison, Their clusters, bitter. Their wine is the venom of serpents, And the deadly poison of cobras.

Moses reveals that the Lord would at last avenge His people Israel against her enemies when at last they realized that there was no other god to help them. At that time they would turn to the Lord realizing that there was none other to deliver them.

'Is it not laid up in store with Me, Sealed up in My treasuries? 'Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them.' For the LORD will vindicate His people, And will have compassion on His servants; When He sees that their strength is gone, And there is none remaining, bond or free. And He will say, 'Where are their gods, The rock in which they sought refuge? 'Who ate the fat of their sacrifices, And drank the wine of their libation? Let them rise up and help you, Let them be your hiding place! 'See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal; And there is no one who can deliver from My hand. 'Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven, And say, as I live forever, If I sharpen My flashing sword, And My hand takes hold on justice, I will render vengeance on My adversaries, And I will repay those who hate Me. 'I will make My arrows drunk with blood, And My sword shall devour flesh, With the blood of the slain and the captives, From the long-haired leaders of the enemy.' Rejoice, O nations, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And will render vengeance on His adversaries, And will atone for His land and His people.

Moses' song then would serve the important purpose of revealing that Israel's prosperity in the land of Canaan would be their undoing; and that their idolatry would lead them to destruction. They would not be able to blame anyone but themselves when they were taken into captivity, since they had been duly warned.

But they would also know that the Lord would preserve His honor as the one true God by not allowing the nations who served other gods to

ultimately prevail and gloat over Israel's judgment. Instead He would come against them in vengeance and forgive His repentant people.

The Song's Message for NT saints

Interestingly NT writers found in Moses' song principles of divine governance that both warned and encouraged them. Consider these examples:

Paul used the Song of Moses to show that Israel could not plead ignorance in their rejection of the Lord's salvation. Since they had known the Lord, they would be made jealous by the Lord's reaching out to the Gentiles:

> *"But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? At the first Moses says, "I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU."" (Romans 10:19)*

Later in Romans Paul would remind the faithful that they did not need to take vengeance on those who did them evil; for they served a God who would reveal His righteous wrath against the enemies of His people:

> *"Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord." (Romans 12:19, NASB)*

And then finally Paul would remind the Romans that it had been God's plan all along to not only redeem Israel but also to incorporate the Gentiles into His kingdom:

> *"And again he says, "REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE."" (Romans 15:10)*

Paul in 1 Corinthians would remind the church of the seriousness of participating in the events connected with idol temples. He wrote:

> *"No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons." (1 Corinthians 10:20)*

Similarly the Hebrew writer would quote the Song of Moses to support the unique place of Jesus as the risen Son of God and the object of the worship of angels:

> *"And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM."" (Hebrews 1:6)*
> The Hebrew writer quotes from the Greek translation of the OT in which reads quite differently from the Hebrew text.

And he too would remind the Hebrews of the vengeance of God upon the apostate by quoting the Song of Moses:

> *"For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE."" (Hebrews 10:30)*
> Though taking Moses' text in a different direction, the Hebrew writer is focusing on the Lord's justice toward all who do evil, even among those who had been His people.

But even now you may be thinking; but none of these verses speak about Christians singing the Song of Moses. So consider one final verse that builds upon all these other texts. In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, John is given a vision of those who have given their lives for their faith in Jesus.

They were killed by the beast and the false prophet who helped him. But now that the judgment of God upon the beast and false prophet has been announced, those who are now before the throne of God are celebrating God's vindication of their deaths:

> *"And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. And they *sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, "~~G~~reat and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE THEE, For Thy righteous acts have been revealed.""*
> *(Revelation 15:2–4)*
>
> So then these martyred saints sing the Son of Moses because it declares God's justice and His willingness to avenge the deaths of His people by destroyed their enemies—the beast and false prophet.
>
> But what about us?

We can see that the trajectory of the Song of Moses is the declaration of the Lord's faithfulness to His people and His vindication of them in their suffering. He will not only save the righteous, but also punish their enemies. Those principles will find their ultimate fulfillment at the final coming of Jesus when the wicked will be judged and the righteous will be vindicated and blessed. Perhaps this no more clearly made known than in Paul's words to the persecuted Thessalonians:

> "*For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.*" (2 Thessalonians 1:6–10, NASB)

Thus it can truly be said that the faithful could use the words of the Song of Moses to celebrate the Lord's defeat of their enemies and the Lord's deliverance of His people. Indeed "we will rest in the fair and happy land by and by, just across on the evergreen shore; sing the Song of Moses and the Lamb by and by and dwell with Jesus evermore!"

Conclusion: Hopefully we have a greater appreciation of the message of that song and the truths of the Song of Moses upon which it is built.

But let us also thank God for the victory He has promised us over sin and over all who may oppose us and bring suffering to us.