

Deuteronomy 32:1-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-32/deuteronomy-321-4/>

Moses called on all creation to be a witness to a lawsuit the LORD brings against His covenant people. It also contains a proclamation of the name of the LORD.

The Song of Moses begins with Moses's call to all of creation to be witnesses to what he was about to say. He said, *Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth* (v. 1). Because of its importance, the *heavens* and *earth* (a figure of speech called a merism, meaning all creation) were called to listen to this song in order to serve as a witness to what the Suzerain LORD had to say to His people ([Isaiah 1:2](#)). This call for witnesses supports the idea that this poem was in the form of a lawsuit. The *heavens and earth* will serve as lasting witnesses, witnesses that will survive long after Moses or any other person alive at the time of this writing.

The lawsuit was based on the Suzerain-Vassal treaty He made with Israel. The treaty is a covenant or contract between Israel and God. The song is a testimonial relating to that treaty, covenant, or contract.

Moses wanted the Israelites to *let his teaching drop as the rain, his speech distill as the dew* (v. 2). The word for *teaching* (Hebrew "leqah," "doctrine") is used often in the book of Proverbs (see 1:5; 9:9; 16:21, 23), so this *teaching* contains wisdom. Wisdom is the skill to live effectively. This, along with his *speech*, entails all of what the LORD revealed to Moses in the previous forty years concerning His nature and the requirements to be His covenant people. God's treaty with Israel specifies actions that will bring them the greatest benefit in living. At the core is God's assertion that loving and caring for their neighbors will lead to thriving communities, and therefore a thriving nation, both spiritually as well as materially ([Leviticus 19:18](#)).

Along with the *rain* and the *dew* (symbols of blessing), Moses wanted his utterances to be to the people *as the droplets on the fresh grass and as the showers on the herb*. These images convey the idea that Moses wanted the Israelites to welcome his *teaching* just as the *rain* or even the *dew* (light rain)

is welcomed by farmers after a long dry spell. God's teaching is nourishment to the human soul. Just as *droplets* of water cause *fresh grass* to green, grow, and thrive, so does God's teaching of wisdom to the human soul. Just as rain *showers* cause *the herb* to grow and prosper, providing flavor, healing, and nourishment, so does God's teaching of wisdom do for the human soul.

Moses's message was to be received *as droplets on fresh grass* or showers falling *on the herb*, in other words gratefully received, causing growth and enjoyment. He wanted his audience to be nourished by the message of the song and to receive it with the same eagerness the *grass* or *herb* would receive life-giving moisture.

In a sense, Moses then presented himself as a character witness for the LORD. He told the people he proclaims *the name of the LORD* (v. 3). The word *name* refers to His character as He revealed it to His people. Moses's connection of the LORD's name with *rain* and *dew* was meant to show the people that the blessings of life come only from following in the ways defined by their Suzerain (Ruler) God.

God's covenant asserted that blessings would flow to them if they would self-organize around the principle of loving their neighbors as they loved themselves ([Leviticus 19:18](#)). This is common sense, since highly cooperative organizations thrive. But our fallen human nature is to seek for others to organize around us. Following in the fear of the Lord, honoring His *name*, allows humans to set aside selfishness and find the path to our greatest blessing.

Because of this, the people were to *ascribe greatness to their God*. It is their *God* who knows the path to the greatest flourishing.

Moses also described their Suzerain (Ruler) God as *the Rock* (v. 4). This is the first time in the Old Testament that God is called the Rock. Moses used this expression later in vv. 15, 18, 30, and 31 of this chapter. This pictures the LORD as a place of security, a refuge ([Psalm 18:2](#)), and a reliable foundation for His people. This conveys to the people a sense of safety. It pictures that their LORD was on their side and would take care of them in every way. They could rest on a firm foundation, assured that His ways are the ways of life and peace.

Moses described what made this Rock that is the LORD such a wonderful refuge.

First, *His work is perfect*. The word for perfect (Heb. “tāmīm”) has the idea of that which is blameless, reliable, and has integrity. The LORD could always be counted on to honor His promises, and keep the things He had committed to them in His covenant with Israel, the tenants of which were just set out, and recorded in [Deuteronomy 4:44](#) through Chapter 30.

His works are perfect because *all His ways are just*. The path set forth for Israel by God in His covenant will get them to their desired destination, a place of prosperity and flourishing. Like the green grass and fruitful herb, *His ways* lead to great benefit. The self-governing ways of caring for and serving others leads to communal harmony and benefit. The pagan ways of tyranny of the surrounding nations lead to human exploitation, death, and destruction.

Second, He is a *God of faithfulness and without injustice*. The word for *faithfulness* (Heb. “’ēmuṇa”) emphasizes that which is trustworthy, firm, and certain. It can be translated as “true” or “upright.” It conveys the picture of the strong arms of a parent holding a tiny infant. In fact, the first occurrence of “emuna” in the Bible is in [Exodus 17:12](#) and refers to Moses’s hands being held upward and made “steady” (“emuna”) by Aaron and Hur so that Israel could prevail in battle.

The words for *without injustice* (Heb. “wə’ên ‘āwel,” literally “there is no injustice”) emphasize His righteousness and complete lack of dishonesty. In other words, *righteous and upright is He*. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the adjective translated to English here as *righteous* is translated to Greek as “dikaios.” The Greek idea of “dikaios” is one of harmony, where all parts work together for a common purpose. The noun form “dikaiosune” is often cited in the New Testament as well, appearing thirty-six times in the book of Romans alone.

The true meaning of dikaiosune was the primary point of investigation in the Greek classic *Plato’s Republic*. In the *The Republic*, “dikaiosune” is translated as “justice.” The key character, Socrates, concludes that the true nature of “dikaiosune”/righteousness/justice is for each person in a Greek city-state to do what they do best for the mutual benefit of all. In his letter to the Gentile Roman believers, the Apostle Paul asserts something similar, that

“dikaiosune” is a body where all the parts work in harmony for the greatest benefit of the body. (Where Socrates and Paul greatly differ is the nature of the body’s head, with Socrates claiming the head should be philosopher kings, and Paul asserting it is Jesus Christ).

God is righteous, and His ways lead to righteousness. That is to say that God is harmonious with all He created, and all He created was good ([Genesis 1:31](#)). Everything had a purpose, and the purpose of all was mutually beneficial. However, due to the fall of man, sin entered the world. So now it requires humans to set aside their fallen nature and choose to follow in God’s original design in order to restore harmony to all things. Thus this song sets forth a reminder that the way to recover harmony and human flourishing is found in following the righteous ways of their righteous God.

Biblical Text:

**¹Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak;
And let the earth hear the words of my mouth.**

**²Let 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.**

**³For I proclaim the name of the Lord;
Ascribe greatness to our God!**

**⁴The Rock! His work is perfect,
For all His ways are just;
A God of faithfulness and without injustice,
Righteous and upright is He.**