

PARASHAH: Ha'azinu (Hear)
ADDRESS: D'varim (Deuteronomy) 32:1-52
READING DATE: Shabbat
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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-O’lam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

Our yearly Torah reading cycle is nearing its conclusion. To be sure, the next parashah known as **V'zot HaBrachah** will bring our yearly reading to an end. I want to encourage you to actively read and study God's Word. Whether it is a continuing of the Jewish reading schedule, perhaps venturing off into the book of Joshua next, or starting a new cycle from the Apostolic Scriptures. The key point is to **maintain your regular time in the Bible. Establish a schedule and discipline yourself to stick to it. As his children, it is absolutely necessary to feed yourself regularly in his Truth.**

One other thing before I get started: the Torah is full of wonderful passages about the goodness of HaShem, and the loving mercy that he freely lavishes on his children. But the Torah is a balanced book also. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that also within the Torah is the record of men's failures and lack of discernment, where the things of the LORD are concerned. As faulty humans, we simply miss the mark of HaShem on the simplest level sometimes. **The rebuke and correction that we consequently receive from our Heavenly Father, should be accepted by us as an attempt to bring us back on course when we stray from his loving hand.** With that in mind, I must fore-mention that this week's commentary contains some words of rebuke, both for the Church, as well as for the Jewish Community.

This week's parashah is called **Ha'azinu**, which means, "[you] Hear," stemming from the word "azan" אָזַן.¹ In fact, the word "azan" as it used in this verse is a true "Hebraism" since the root word "ozen" means "ear!"² Thus the pasuk (verse) instructs us quite literally to "lend an ear!"

The title comes from Moshe's opening statement in verse one, addressed to the heavens and the earth:

הָאֲזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאִדְבַּרְהָ וּתְשַׁמַּע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי-פִי

"Ha'azinu hashamayim va'adaberah vetishma ha'arets imrey-fi."

(Hear, oh heavens, as I speak! Listen, earth, to the words from my mouth!)

This portion, like the previous portion, is only one chapter long. Scholars have noticed that the format of this particular parashah follows a peculiar structure, not similar to most passages. In modern writing, it could be likened to a legal agreement that a master and a servant would make. It details the stipulations of what will happen to the servant if he fails to obey his master's commands. In ancient, extra-biblical writings, we would call this type of relationship "suzerain" (master) and "vassal" (servant). It is not entirely unlike the blessings and curses that we read about earlier in the book of Deuteronomy, chapters 27-30. Sadly, like the previous mentioned chapters, the bulk of material provided for us is in the form of chastisement and punishment.

"The Good News... and the Bad News"

"Why," we might ask, "does HaShem seem to constantly emphasize our shortcomings? Is he so enamored with how we will fail him that he fails to see the good in us? In the case of the Jewish People, was he so positive that they would forsake him and follow after false gods, that he needed to stand poised like an executioner, ready to bring down his blade in swift punishment?" Much as this may seem to be the case, fortunately, for our sake, it not true. **HaShem is a God of undeserved-mercy and loving-compassion.** Most accurately, Moshe predicted and expected how easily Am Yisra'el (the people of Isra'el) would fall into gross idolatry. It is simply amazing that he didn't give up on them! The unexpected response from HaShem culminates in verse forty-three. Let's see what the Torah has to teach us about the goodness of HaShem's nature.

If I were to conduct a paraphrased, verse-by-verse overview, it would read something like this:

¹ Brown, Driver, Briggs (BDB) אָזַן.

² Ibid, אָזַן.

Moshe proclaims, up front, the greatness of their God (vv. 3, 4)
But within the people themselves lies defect (vs. 5, 6)
HaShem takes unto himself this undeserving people (vs. 7-11)
He alone provides for all of their needs (vs. 12-14)
But their greed and lust overtake them (vs. 15-18)
HaShem administers fatherly correction, to “woo” them back (vs. 19-25)
Again, recognizing their defect, he compares them to their enemies (vs. 28-33)
When HaShem’s judgment consequently comes upon those who hate him, his
own people begin to consider him once again as the only source of all
sustenance (vs. 34-42)
This righteous judgment from HaShem elicits a proclamation from Moshe to the
nations, **“Sing out, you nations, about his people! For he will avenge the
blood of his servants. He will render vengeance to his adversaries and
make atonement for the land of his people”** (vs. 43).

As we can see, far from being cruel and unmerciful, HaShem desires to maintain a loving, lasting relationship with his children! The Torah clearly states that the problem is not found within HaShem or his righteous ways. Rather, the problem lies within us! This is repeated in the Apostolic Scriptures, in the book of Hebrews. It tells us in 8:7-8 that the New Covenant was necessary because of the fault that was within them—indeed the same one that is within us! We have an inherited defect, which causes us to lack wisdom. This lack of wisdom (of HaShem’s ways) brings us into conflict with his holiness, thereby leaving us hopeless to reach the goal that the Torah outlines for us. In our utter desperation we have no choice but to concede that he alone can make the necessary corrections in our sinful makeup. This correction is sometimes defined in the “judgment” of God.

The Torah Standard - God’s Equity Among Jews and Gentiles

As children of an all-loving God, we must realize that sin is unacceptable to HaShem. His righteous standard demands that a price must be paid in order to, as a child might say, “make the sin go away.” Sometimes we don’t think of it in those terms, but that is essentially what happens when atonement is made for sin. HaShem sees the sacrifice instead of the sin, and the punishment is meted out on the substitute. Am Yisra’el’s whoring attitude towards alien gods demanded a righteous verdict on the part of their covenant partner—HaShem! It has been stated that God blesses Isra’el directly, but uses the nations of the world to punish her indirectly; similarly, he punishes the nations of the world directly, but when it comes time to bless them, he indirectly uses Isra’el. To an extent, that is precisely what is happening in this chapter, as HaShem seeks to win back the affection of his children from idolatry, through the use of a “non-people” (vs. 21b).

“But Ariel,” you may object today, “I don’t practice idolatry; I am not at all like the Jewish nation that I read about in the Torah. I follow God and his ways. I love

him and would never consider falling into gross disobedience like some other people have done. How does any of what you're telling me apply "practically?"

The answer is this: I believe that the Torah teaches us that as believers, Jew and non-Jew, we all constitute the community of the "Called out Ones" (Ephesians chapter two). To use modern vernacular, "We're all in this together." The time for viewing the body as a disconnected unit with two families, 'one as the church and the other as the synagogue' is coming to an end. Indeed, it should have never been conceived! Historically, we Christians have had no problem identifying with Isra'el when it comes to the blessings. But when we see the hand of HaShem in their punishment, we turn a deaf ear to their cries. Yeshua our great sacrifice taught us to have genuine, heart-felt love for one another and that in this way, all of the world would know that we are his. The book of Romans, chapter 11 speaks about the time when HaShem shall finally look upon Isra'el as a sin-free nation (vs.25-27). The context of the chapter deals with the Gentile participation of that final atonement. Although it is true that Yeshua has already made provision for their sins to be atoned for, corporately they haven't realized it yet!

"How can I help?"

If you are a Christian reading this today, you can play an active part in helping the Jews recognize their need for the Messiah Yeshua. Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh) carefully in prayer. Find out how your genuine love for the Jews can be effectively communicated to them personally. Get actively involved in studies that explain the current move of God for the Church to rediscover her Hebraic roots. Have an honest chat with a rabbi and ask him to explain to you his concerns for the Jewish Community.

Remember, at this time of the year, many Jews worldwide are genuinely seeking the forgiveness of HaShem. He has already provided the forgiveness they seek, in the person and work of the Greatest Jew who ever lived—Yeshua HaMashiach! We the Church need to recognize the importance of our active involvement in their corporate salvation process.

Lest we become too blind to our own sins, we also need to search within ourselves and determine to completely drive out the root of error that has sprung up over the last two thousand years or so. Yes, even the Church needs the mercy of HaShem as never before! If we fail to recognize our need for his "cleansing judgment" (1 Peter 4:17-19), we may find ourselves wondering, like so many Jewish people do today, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The answer might just be found in verse fifty-one of our parashah: **"You failed to demonstrate my holiness there among the people of Isra'el."**

Oh, Sovereign LORD, have mercy on us all during this Season of Repentance!

The closing blessing is as follows:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-O’lam,
asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v’chay-yeh o’lam nata-b’tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you O’ LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

“Shabbat Shalom!”

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