

The Joy of Torah

In this week's reading from Parashat Haazinu (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 32:1-32:52*), Moshe calls upon heaven and earth to testify against the people of Israel. The reason is so that they might reform their ways at a future time. The Scriptures tell us the history of Israel and how they sinned through heaven and earth, by ascribing divine powers to them and giving them divine honors. These are the things the nations were doing in the land of Canaan and over time the people of Israel adopted their practices and worshiped the created thing.

ספר דברים פרק לב *Devarim / Deuteronomy 32:1-4*
א האזינו השמים ואדברה ותשמע
הארץ אמרי-פי: ב יערה כמטר לקחי
תנול כטל אמרתי כשעירים עלי-דשא
וכרביבים עלי-עשב: ג כי שם יהיה
אקרא הבו גדל לאלהינו: ד הצור
תמים פעלו כי כל-דרךיו משפט אל
אמונה ואין עול צדיק וישר הוא:

32:1 'Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; And let the earth hear the words of my mouth. 32:2 '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. 32:3 'For I proclaim the name of the Lord; Ascribe greatness to our God! 32:4 'The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He. (NASB)

Studying the history of Israel we ask ourselves, “*how could someone be so naive to ascribe divine attributes to the heavens and the earth?*” This is an important topic because today there is a modern belief system in place that is based in the idea that stone (minerals), earth (carbon, hydrogen, water), the sun, lightning, and wind in the past have combined to give rise to life here on earth. The idea is that there is no Creator God; life as we know it developed by chance on its own. Is this a modern form of ascribing divine attributes to the heaven and the earth like what was going on in the land of Canaan thousands of years ago? The modern theory of evolution, or Darwinism appears to follow this type of belief system. The theory of Evolution teaches that life came by random chance from the combination of the elements. The “*creation of the heavens and the earth*” by God has been called into question with regard to the biblical definition. Did God really create by speaking into existence all life as we know it? The reasons behind why this has been brought into question is multifaceted, a poor foundation in the Scriptures, poor understanding of the scientific method, and our modern culture opinion that scientific authority has greater authority than God's Word (the Bible). The point is that many times we are told things that are considered as fact whereby upon closer examination we learn all of the facts are not quite right. In order to sort out the truth we need to take an objective view of what is being said or of what is written. Many times this requires us to set aside our presuppositions and examine all of the evidence and weigh the consequences of what is being taught as truth. This is a very important approach to have, especially with regard to matters of theology, salvation, and God.

Our approach (and our presuppositions) to understanding who God is and to understanding the Scriptures can have a significant impact upon life. For example, having the

faulty understanding of the Torah, we lose the concept that we serve a loving, righteous, holy, and just God who created the heavens and the earth. Without the knowledge of God who is holy, righteous, and just, we lose the ability to have an objective perspective with regard to human rights, freedoms, and civil liberties. Contained within the concept of evolution is the idea that the elements become the creator which suggests that the elements, earth, wind, lightning, etc function as a god or a creator (pantheism). In the absence of a moral God there is moral decline which leads to all kinds of harmful thoughts and actions against one another and people's civil liberties are violated (slavery, death, corruption, etc). On the other hand, when we believe in a loving creator God, His mercy, His compassion, His lovingkindness, there is a significant paradigm shift in our view of life, in relationships amongst people and even in our understanding of this world and the Scriptures. Have you ever been taught that the Torah teaches love, compassion, justice, and righteousness, all of which we should be following in order to serve God in the way He wants to be served? Or, have you been taught that the Law is bad, horrible, and a burden none can bear? Within the Law of God we find the Torah principles of Love, compassion, justice, and righteousness, we learn about who God is, and we learn that He is loving, merciful, long suffering, and kind. Because of these things, His commandments are viewed and understood historically from this perspective and that the Torah has a positive influence upon our lives, to be loving, kind, merciful, and long suffering towards others. For example, in the command on the Shabbat, we are told to rest, to do good, to be at peace, and to fellowship with the Lord and one another on this wonderful day. The concept of doing good on the Shabbat comes from the example that God Himself has given us.

In the opening verses to Parashat Haazinu, Moshe declares to heaven and earth this song which begins with a proclamation of the greatness of our Father who is in heaven. Moshe proceeds to tell us the Name of the Lord is great, He is our Rock and His work is perfect because all of His ways are just. He remains faithful to his people without injustice, and He is righteous and upright. Within these few verses we find Moshe's understanding of the Lord who is the loving creator God, who is full of grace, mercy, compassion, and lovingkindness. Based upon this understanding of the Torah, of a loving God, in the narrative and the prophetic statements throughout the five books of Moshe, we learn that the Lord God will one day send His Messiah into this world to Save and Deliver His people. This Savior would have the same characteristics of our Father in heaven, He would be loving, kind, merciful, and forgiving. Studying the life of Yeshua the Messiah, that is exactly who he is as the Messiah of God. This Torah principle of doing good, living righteously, and loving one another is an important concept, so much so that Yeshua called upon this concept after having healed a man on the Shabbat. Those teachers of the law missed this important Torah principle. Because of their misunderstanding of the Torah, Yeshua asks the question in *Mark 3:4* "*And He said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?'*" *But they kept silent.*" (NASB) Yeshua in the first century struggled with explaining to the people and the teachers of the Law these Torah principles that we are supposed to base our lives upon, to be loving, kind, merciful, and forgiving towards one another. The command to love God and to love one another is so great that all of the commands in the Torah

rest upon them and find their summation. There are no commands that might supercede these commands. This idea may be illustrated in the Sabbath day commandment to rest. According to *Midrash Rabbah Devarim, Parashat 10, Part 1* (מדרש רבה דברים פרשה א' י' סימן א) we read the rabbis making the same conclusions about these principles and the Torah.

Midrash Rabbah Devarim, Parashat 10, Part 1

1. Halachah: Is it permissible for a Jew suffering from earache to heal it on the Shabbat? The Sages have taught thus: Where there is the least question of danger to life, the Sabbath Laws are suspended. And therefore in the cast of earache, if it is dangerous it may be healed on the Sabbath. The Rabbis say, If you desire not to suffer earache or pain in one of your limbs, then incline your ears to the Torah, and you will inherit life. Whence is this? For it is said, Incline your ear, and come unto Me; hear, and your soul will live (Isaiah 55:3) Rabbi Khanina son of Papa said, Whosoever turns away his ear from the Torah, his prayer is rejected, as it is said, He that turns away his ear from hearing the Torah, even his prayer is an abomination (Mishley / Proverbs 28:9). Rabbi Levi said, The ear is to the body what the fumigating vessel is to garments; for many garments may be placed upon it and if spices are put under it, all are fumigated, and so too a man has two hundred and forty eight limbs, and they all function on account of the ear (i.e. by listening to the word of God). Whence is this? For it is said, Hear and your soul will live. The Holy One blessed be He, said, If you incline your ear to the Torah, then when you come to being speaking the Words of the Torah all will remain silent before you and listen to you, in the same way as you have inclined your ear to listening to you, in the same way as you have inclined your ear to listen to the words of the Torah. And whence do you learn this? From Moshe our teacher. Because he inclined his ear to the Torah, when he came to being speaking the words of the Torah, both the heavenly and the earthly beings remained silent and listened to his words. Whence is this? From what we read in our text, Give ear, You Heavens, and I will speak (Devarim / Deuteronomy 32:1).

Midrash Rabbah Devarim, Parashah 10, Part 1 opens making a halakhic ruling upon whether it is lawful to heal on the Shabbat. The Sages teach that if there is the least question of danger to life, the Sabbath Laws are suspended. The example that is given is one of an earache. The question is if an earache is life threatening (*in which case it is most likely not*) then you may go and take care of the earache. The rabbinic response to the question on the earache is “*If you desire not to suffer earache or pain in one of your limbs, then incline your ears to the Torah, and you will inherit life.*” The idea is that inclining the ear to the Torah, is reminiscent of the purpose of the Torah. What is the purpose of the Torah? I mentioned earlier that historically the Torah reveals to us who

God is, He is the creator, loving, kind, merciful, and long suffering and full of grace. Through the study of the Torah we plant these seeds within our hearts to be merciful, loving, kind, and long suffering with one another. In addition to this, through the study of the Torah, we realize that we all fall short of the commandments and are guilty before the Creator God. The Torah speaks of repentance, turning from sin, and seeking the Lord God in heaven. According to the Midrash, the person with the earache is directed to seek the Lord for healing within the statement *“incline your ears to the Torah.”* Or in other words, *“incline your ear to the teaching of the Scriptures, seek the Lord God Almighty and His Messiah Yeshua for healing.”* If we consider all of Scripture God’s instruction for our lives, this is the meaning behind the phrase *“incline your ears to the Torah.”* The rabbis comment further saying if one turns his ears away from the Torah, his prayer is rejected and such a person’s prayer is considered an abomination before God. Think about how the Lord would consider a person who rejects His written Word but yet tries to communicate to Him through prayer. Would such a persons prayer not be an abomination? The ear is compared to a fumigating vessel. What goes into the ear permeates the entire body, just like the fumes permeate a garment. If the ears are filled with sin, the entire body will be filled with sin. Note also the same concept can be applied to the eyes (*Matthew 6:23*). The concept being illustrated here is inclining one’s ears to the Torah causes the entire body to be filled with the Torah principles of love, kindness, mercy, and forgiveness towards others. *Midrash Rabbah Devarim, Parashah 10, Part 1* concludes saying of the one who inclines their ears to the Torah, *“when you come to speak the Words of the Torah all will remain silent before you and listen to you, in the same way as you have inclined your ear to listening to you, in the same way as you have inclined your ear to listen to the words of the Torah.”* This concluding phrase is very important, because it is drawing in the concept that if we listen to God’s word and obey Him (*remember listening is synonymous to obeying*), our entire bodies will be permeated with God’s Word, and we will be filled with love for one another, filled with kindness, filled with mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Because of these things others will see and know who we are by our fruits and they will be willing to listen if we are speaking. According to God’s Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit we are enabled to live that kind of life and literally we will have the Torah written upon our hearts (*Jeremiah 31*) and most importantly, the Lord will write these important principles of mercy, grace, and forgiveness upon our hearts. Because these things are written upon our hearts, and they are written in the Torah commands, as the people of God we are to practice mercy, grace, and forgiveness towards others and in doing so we bring glory to our Father in Heaven and to His Messiah Yeshua.

Based upon this analysis of the Scriptures, the Torah is not a list of rules that are horrible and a burden that none can bear. We actually get a picture of something completely different. Concepts that come to mind are the Law of Righteousness, the Law of Grace, the Law of Mercy, the Law of Forgiveness, etc. C. H. Spurgeon in his sermon number 37 wrote the following:

C. H. Spurgeon Sermon 37

There is no point upon which men make greater mistakes than upon the relation which exists between the law and the gospel. Some men put the law instead of the gospel: others put the gospel instead of the law; some modify the law and the gospel, and preach neither law nor gospel: and others entirely abrogate the law, by bringing in the gospel. Many there are who think that the law is the gospel, and who teach that men by good works of benevolence, honesty, righteousness, and sobriety, may be saved. Such men do err. On the other hand, many teach that the gospel is a law; that it has certain commands in it, by obedience to which, men are meritoriously saved; such men err from the truth, and understand it not. A certain class maintain that the law and the gospel are mixed, and that partly by observance of the law, and partly by God's grace, men are saved. These men understand not the truth, and are false teachers.

Over one hundred years ago Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), a British Baptist preacher in London, spoke of this very same issue with regard to the Torah, the Gospel of Christ, and what we the children of God should do. There is a lot of nonsense being taught today (e.g. *Joel and Victoria Osteen teaching to worship God just for yourself*), just like what was going on one hundred years ago. We absolutely must know the Scriptures. We also must be careful to sort out the truth from an objective point of view. When we examine the facts a little closer, studying the Torah each year, we learn that the Lord God is instructing us to love one another, to have compassion, to live with justice and righteousness, and to serve God with a joyful heart. All of these things are the result of what the our Father in heaven has done in His Son Yeshua the Messiah and the command to be holy because the Lord God has made us holy, to be righteous because the Lord God has made us righteous, etc. This is what Yeshua meant when he spoke about keeping His word in our hearts (*John 14:23*) saying, *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”* (NASB) Keeping God’s word in our hearts, we plant the seeds of love, kindness, mercy, long suffering, and grace toward one another. The Gospel of Christ is commentary on the Torah command to do these things and the revelation of the New Covenant the Lord has made in His Son which is both enabling and empowering in the life of each believer. The point of this weeks study is that in all things the Lord is taking pre-eminence in that He is the One who saves and He is the One who enables us to love, to serve, and to obey. David even said that the Lord is the one who enables his lips to sing His praises (*See Tehillim / Psalms 51, both the Hebrew and Aramaic Targum*). We obey the command simply for the joy of serving God in the way He wants to be served, and we know that the Lord is pleased with us. Our salvation is not based upon our obedience to the Torah, our salvation is in the Lord and our lives should reflect that by obedience to the Torah. The Joy of the Torah is that the Lord makes known His love and His wisdom in His Word (the Bible, Torah, Prophets, and Writings), and Yeshua sends the Holy Spirit to empower us

by writing His Word upon our hearts, His eternal Torah (*Isaiah 40:8*). Halleluia!

If anyone ever says to you that “*you are so caught up in the Torah,*” having a tone with a derogatory meaning. Tell them “*YES I AM*” because the Torah teaches faithfulness, truth, righteousness, love, mercy, grace, and justice towards one another. Just like we read in Parashat Haazinu, Moshe declares to heaven and earth a song proclaiming the greatness of our Father who is in heaven, the greatness of the Name of the Lord, He is our Rock and His work is perfect because all of His ways are just. He remains faithful to his people without injustice, and He is righteous and upright. I am planting the seeds of truth, righteousness, love, mercy, and grace into my heart, I want to be like my Father in heaven and Yeshua His Son. If that means I am all caught up in the Torah, then “*YES I AM!*” Halleluia!