



Shabbat Table Talk

Parashat Ha'azinu – Erev Shabbat 21st September 2018

Week of 17 - 22 September

Torah portion: Deut. 32: 1 - 52

Haftarah: Hosea 14:2 - 10

In my latest commentary on Parashat Balak, I mentioned there how Bro. Jack Driscoll encouraged us to try and read the whole Torah Portion for the week. Now to write a commentary on a Parashat, one is asked to read at least five different versions or editions of the Parashat. If one can find the time, it is very interesting and an eye opening in the excavation of words and the text. I find it very interesting, in my level of learning as each edition is different and unique in its form and style. Parashat Ha'azinu has 52 verses. In the Jerusalem Bible, the heading is, "The Song of Moses" (verses 1-44), "The Law, the source of Life" (verse 45-47) and "Moses' death foretold" (verse 48-52).(JB. Popular Edition pg. 225).

There are two songs ascribed to Moses in the Hebrew Bible. The Song of the Sea, "Hebrew: Shirat HaYam, also known as Az Yashir Moshe" (Exodus15:1-18). The Song of the Sea, commencing with the Latin incipit Cantemus Domino:(Wikipedia) "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea"(Exodus 15:1). The second song, is our Torah Portion for this week, Parashat Ha'azinu.

The very first line to this song, Ha'azinu "Give ear O heavens,... Let the earth hear...", echoes two realities frequently mentioned in the Bible. Heaven and earth are full of your glory, hosanna in the highest. Heaven and earth are both fitting audiences and witnesses of the Ha'azinu. Heaven and earth is mentioned in Psalm 85:11 "faithfulness spring from the earth and justice look down from heaven". The forecast of the song is so colorful. In verse 2, "May my teaching be drenching as the rain, ...permeate gently as the dew". Torah is compared to the rain, water is the source of life, and nothing can grow without rain.

What could be the centrality of this song. Everett Fox has this to say: The "song" emphasis the power and caring nature of God, which is contrasted with Israel's pathetic response of unfaithfulness. God is likened to a nurturing parent and a protecting eagle. God hovers over the Jewish people like an eagle. First she awakens her chicks gently. Then the eagle carries its young on its wings to protect them from predators. On Dt 32:4, "The Rock! - His deeds are perfect, Yes all his ways are just". W.G Plaut commented "The Rock (Ha Tzur), the term denoting rugged steadfastness. Jewish and Christian liturgies frequently use this inscription, Rock of Israel, Rock of Ages, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Plaut pg 1556).

We still have the final Parashat, V'Zot HaBerachah (Dt 33:1-34:12), but in Parashat Ha'azinu, we come to witness the end of this great man of God, Moses. In Dt 32:50-52, "You shall die on this mountain that you are about to ascend,for you both broke faith with Me among the Israelites people ... you shall view the land from a distance, but you shall not enter it - that land that I am giving to the Israelite people". How humble can you get. In verse 51, it refers to the story told in Num. 20 where the failure of Moses and Aaron, during a rebellion, led God to pronounce the judgment of death on the two leaders. I would like to end the portion of Ha'azinu in the book of Davarim (Words)with the memory of the joint mission of Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh in Egypt, in Exodus 4. God asked Moses to go and speak to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Moses replied "never have I been a fluent speaker ... I cannot find words to express what I want to say" (Ex 4:10). Moses, a man with few words in Exodus, to a comprehensive knowledgeable Moses composing the Ha'azinu, in Devarim (Words).

Bibliography: *The Jerusalem Bible-Popular Edition.* Plaut, *The Torah, A Modern Commentary* (UAHC New York 1981). Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (Shocken, Random House New York, 1997).

For Reflection and Discussion: 1. The first song of Moses "Song of the Sea", what can you say? 2. The second song, the Ha'azinu, how does it speak to you? 3. "Moses, you shall not enter the Land, but shall only see it from afar", what is your thinking?

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