

13 Tishrei, 5779 (22/09/18) **How Good Are You at Listening to G-d?** J. M. Terrett

**Ha'azinu**      Give Ear!      How Good Are You At Listening to G-d?

**Torah:**      Deuteronomy 32:1-52

**Haftarah:**      2 Samuel 22:1-51

**Brit Chadashah:**      Romans 10:17-11:12; 12:19; 15:9, 10

Reading Hanna: p. 135 and Ps. 71. Jewish Hero: Esau (Edom). Torah Carrier: Jack Connect pot luck BBQ 2-5 pm upstairs hallway and Fellowship area.

Today, I will be combining the Torah portion with my sermon so we can be finished a little earlier and help with the set up for the BBQ. We will set up our Sukkah tomorrow afternoon, from 12-2 pm, when the weather is supposed to be better.

This is the 53rd weekly Torah portion and it is given in the form of a song which Moses sang or recited before the Children of Israel, as he prepared to end his leadership and turn things over to Joshua. He begins with an exhortation to give ear, which is a way of saying both pay attention and to listen. As believers, we need to learn to listen to both the voice of His Word and to the voice of His Spirit when He speaks to us in our hearts. We have to take it one step further and learn to actually hear what He is saying. Has He got your whole attention?

In the past, I have said that as believers, we only have four trustworthy friends that we can consult whenever we want guidance from the L-rd. Some people want the thundering voice to shout at them and they want to see signs and wonders and they feel they have to work themselves into a semi trance, instead of learning to listen for the still, small voice.

When G-d spoke to Elijah, He was not in the fire, nor in the wind, nor even in the earthquake. He may use many means to get our attention, but if we give it to Him willingly, then here is a guide for evaluating what you are hearing. Your four trustworthy friends are: your head, your heart, the Bible and your community. Are you in the habit of listening to these friends?

Lets deal first with your head. G-d will never say things to you which are beyond your ability to grasp, unless He is sharing mysteries which are meant to inspire us with awe and great confidence, even if we can never fully comprehend them in this life. When G-d has a message for us, He will also speak to us directly, before He confirms it from a secondary source. We have to beware of second hand messages because G-d will always speak to us directly and not indirectly. Don't let people claim to hear from G-d for you and manipulate you.

Next we have our heart, which is not to be confused with our fleshly nature. Our heart is where both the image of G-d and His Word are engraved and you could also call it your soul or your spirit, because it refers to our core spiritual life force where we are stirred by the deeper and greater things of life. The apostles said that their hearts burned within them when the resurrected Messiah spoke to them. Our inner heart senses things our flesh never can.

John the Baptist stirred within his mother's womb when Mary came to visit while she was carrying the Messiah inside of her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit and delight, because her spirit and her preborn child had recognized the Messiah in Mary's womb.

Our heart is the deepest part of us and it is where the L-rd, by His Spirit dwells in our innermost being. It is also the part of us which groans and longs to be finally set free from the flesh and

be clothed with our new man when we rise from our graves on that final day. If you learn to listen to the deep spiritual yearnings that are churning in your inner man, you can discern things and receive warnings when something does not feel quite right. We could also call it your spiritual gut which can sense things far beyond what your mind can initially grasp.

I say if something doesn't feel right, it is not right and when we sense a yellow warning flag, we need to slow down and when we sense a red flag we need to stop and move away from the dangerous direction we are taking. Are you listening to what your heart is telling you?

Next we have our grasp of His Word. It needs to be the supermarket where we shop for both inspiration and for spiritual nurture. It can also heal us, warn us and especially teach us, so we need to be constantly recycling our way through its pages so we know where we need to find what we need, when we need it. The Mormons once claimed that their biggest growth group were Baptists who did not know their Bibles very well. Don't be duped by those who want to twist and overthrow the teachings of the Bible. We have to personally own His Word.

I go on line frequently, but whenever anyone claims to be speaking in the name of the L-rd, I have my Bible at hand and I evaluate what they are teaching, to see if it conforms with this singular source of guidance for faith and practice. Bible knowledge is essential for victory over the flesh, the world and the enemy and we have to rightly handle the Word of truth so that we are not cut to ribbons by those who would use it against us. Learn to be a victor, not a victim.

Anything which rises up and challenges this Word, needs to be avoided and defeated and not be allowed to pollute our lives or drag us away from the rock upon which our house of faith is built. Are you a workman who does not need to be ashamed? Do you know how to rightly divide the Word of Truth? Are you feasting on its contents and allowing it to prune you and cause spiritual strength and spiritual life to flow through your life? What are you feeding on?

Last of all, there is your community of faith which should be a group of people whom you trust and who trust you and whom you can bounce things off of. We are not looking for our community to tell us what to do, we are asking our community to help us to evaluate what we are doing, so that we do not get led down the garden path into carnality and error. Godly counsel is a great privilege, both when we give it and when we receive it. Back to our portion.

And now, just before he is done leading the people, Moses gives them the first of two last poetic exhortations so they would learn to walk on the straight and narrow and not fall for any of the snares that will be set for them as they move to take possession of the land.

He first expresses his complete faith in the L-rd whose name is wonderful and who is worthy of all worship and obedience (32:1-4). He then warns the people not to blame the L-rd if they should become corrupt and wander away from His words (32:5). He calls YHVH their Father and Master, the one who has formed them and affirmed them (32:6). He truly is our Maker.

He moves on to encourage the people to look backwards and see how the hand of the L-rd has even directed the nations and established them upon the face of the earth (32:7, 8).

In doing all of this, the L-rd did not give Himself a portion among the nations, because His people are His portion and Jacob is YHVH's inheritance. The passage goes on to describe the amazing care and protection the L-rd has exercised when He brought His people out of the wilderness, to lead them into a land of rich abundance (36:10-14). He is amazing!

The next section of the song is a dirge which laments the future spiritual condition of a people which is too prone to rebel and seek after other gods and thus provoke the mighty wrath of the G-d they have forsaken (32:15-33). Unfaithful Israel is being compared to Sodom and Gomorrah and the people must have really begun to wince as they heard this horrible prophetic warning against their future backsliding. Lip service is not the same as real service.

The song ends with a powerful expression of who the L-rd is and what He wants for His people, because there is truly no other god like YHVH. He is the only One who lives forever – who has always been alive and who will always stay alive. He will take vengeance against those who move against His people, but will always have pity on His servants when they call out to Him in their distress. YHVH alone is G-d and the vain idols of the nations are nothing and will amount to nothing. This includes the modern idols of evolution and the silly materialistic and relativistic notions of modern secular science.

The passage ends with a messianic reference to YHVH making atonement both for the land and for His people and Moses reminds the people to heed and put into practice all the words of this law. He is both referring to the Ten Words and to the exhortations he has made for the people to have faith and to walk in obedience.

He says that placing our faith in the Word and learning to walk according to its teaching is not something without importance in our lives. This way of living is our life and it is the way the people can prolong their days in the land which they are going to take possession of. He wants them to have the best time in the land and the L-rd wants us to have the best time as we walk with Him in our generation.

Life will always be full of struggles, but struggling with the L-rd and His Word doesn't have to be one of them. Sowing and reaping in the L-rd is the only lifestyle worth living and living a life full of spiritual abundance remains the only life we are called to live, no matter what else we are facing as we wander through this life on our pilgrimage to our Father's Home in glory.

Are you letting the L-rd teach you about who He really is? Are you letting Him teach you how to live in response to this realization? Do you really know who He is and just how incredibly worthy He is to be served and to worshipped?

With each passing year, the noisy, carnal folly of this world seems to keep turning up the volume, and getting louder, because it wants to drown out the voice of G-d and the voice of those who have put their faith in Him. We need to listen to His voice, not to the noise.

As long as we learn to listen to Him through His Word and also learn to hear Him when He speaks to our hearts and our minds, then we will grow up into the fullness of an overcoming community, full of light and love and grace and wisdom. It will always come at a price, but it remains one which is always worthy of paying. He will teach us to be overcomers.

This sentiment of joyful, reverent worship of our amazing G-d is reflected in both the Haftarah Portion and the New Testament portion, where the only response to the wonder of all He is and all that He does – and that all He will one day do, remains twofold: faith in Him through His Word and obedience to His commandments, for there is no other way to be happy, except to trust and obey. There is no one else worthy of putting your faith in.

We are not called to try and make sense of everything that is going on around us, we are called to place our faith in G-d through our Saviour and let Him guide us so that we never lose our way spiritually. Israel lost her way spiritually when she did not recognize the Messiah of Promise, but that does not mean that G-d has rejected His people. That is something He will never do.

There remains a remnant in Israel which will one day wake up and own the Gospel, because it is essentially a Jewish mandate – to be a great nation and a blessing to all the nations. Even in the world around us, there is also a remnant which is groaning in the darkness and longing for the light and once these two remnants have fully entered into the fold of the one new man, then the Kingdom will come at G-d's appointed time.

Our job is to be aware of what His Word teaches and to be about the Master's business as we remain Sabbath powered and festival driven and never allow the noise and confusion of the world to pull us away from our four trustworthy friends. We are called to be salt and light in the world, but we must never allow ourselves to be of the world. We need to remain strangers and pilgrims travelling through this fading world.

He can and will equip us for this mighty task, as long as we remain willing and seek for His guidance in everything that is happening in our lives. The Promised Land was intended to be a beacon to the nations to bring them back to their creator and L-rd. May our lives and our community also be bright beacon to lead many back to light and away from the encroaching darkness of this drowning world. In all of this, may we always be good at listening to G-d.

Tomorrow night is Erev Sukkoth and tomorrow afternoon, we are going to set up our Sukkah in the courtyard, from 12-2 PM. Join us for the Connect BBQ today after service today, but first let us put the Torah back into the ark and celebrate Kiddish – you know, even though this is the busiest time of the year for us, it is also the most wonderful time of the year.

The L-rd is King, the L-rd was King, the L-rd shall forever be King and may the reign of His Kingdom through His Son, our glorious Messiah, soon be established forever, over all the nations and generations of mankind, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. But even if He should tarry, let us serve Him daily and fully as we seek for both His Kingdom and His righteousness in every area of our lives. This is our calling and our task and there ain't no life like it!

Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.