

September 27, 2014

HA'AZINU (Hear)

Today's *parashah* - *Ha'azinu* - is filled with conflicting emotions. There are prophecies of betrayal and hurt, yet, in the end, there is the possibility of redemption and renewal. The old generation of Israelites had been slaves in Egypt who were not accustomed to the notion of freedom. When they were freed, they became a rebellious lot who tested HaShem time after time. They took every opportunity to complain about the food and water, and were in the habit of accusing Moshe of bringing them out into the wilderness to die - and they were right, but they brought it upon themselves. Many of them thought it would have been better to remain as slaves in Egypt. But as their numbers dwindled in the desert, a new generation of Israelites arose, and this new generation was different. They were young, and eager, and willing to take risks. I am sure that they must have been eager to take possession of the land flowing with milk and honey that God had promised their forefathers. But, on the other hand, they were about to lose their beloved Moshe who had been their teacher and leader for forty years while they wandered in the wilderness. What a strange message Moshe delivered to the assembled tribes. They needed to hear words of love and devotion, but Moshe told them about betrayal, vengeance, and punishment. They longed to hear words of encouragement, but what they heard was about their weakness and vulnerability. They must have been terrified at hearing such a message. They were told that they would endure suffering, but that it will be justified because of their wrongdoing. This meant that they had some control over their destiny based on how they acted. After all, God was righteous and just in His dealings with them. We are not surprised at HaShem's promise of punishment for disobedience, but He still offered restoration and redemption.

The *haftarah* selection written by the prophet Micah asks, "Who is a God like You who pardons iniquity?" For many, many years after the death of Moshe, the prophets were still impressed by HaShem's loving-kindness and compassion for poor sinners - us included. Let us always thank God for being the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The *B'rit Chadashah* scripture exhorts us to serve God in an acceptable manner with reverence and fear. We must not refuse God, for He is all powerful and shakes the heavens and the earth. He is a consuming fire, but He still offers restoration and redemption.

Hebrew	Deuteronomy 32:20
English	Deuteronomy 32:20-22
Haftarah	Micah 7:18-20
B'rit Chadashah	Hebrews 12:28-29