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MINISTRIES

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Parashah Points: Ha'azinu - Word of Life

Welcome to another episode of Parashah Points—short thoughts from the weekly Torah Portion.

This week's Parashah Point comes from Ha'azinu, which is Hebrew for “Listen,” and it goes from Deuteronomy 32:1 to Deuteronomy 32:52.

This Torah Portion consists mostly of the Song of Moses, a prophetic warning about Israel's punishment for their sins as well as a promise of God's ultimate redemption. The parashah concludes with Moses' death foretold.

There's a lot we can talk about in this Torah Portion. Today we're going to talk about the value of God's law, the Torah:

Deuteronomy 32:45-47

And when Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. **For it is no empty word for you, but your very life**, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”

In this passage, Moses reminds Israel of the value of the Torah. He exhorts the people to “**take to heart**” everything he had been teaching them throughout the book of Deuteronomy. We are to study these words, meditate on them, and teach them to our children, for they are the very words of God.

Moses goes on to say, “**For it is no empty word for you, but your very life.**” The words of the Torah are not empty or trivial; they guide us into living a life of blessing that God intends for us.

Sadly, throughout history and even today, much of Christianity has taught the opposite message: the Torah is irrelevant, or worse, a legalistic burden that should be thrown away. Where did this misunderstanding come from?

A big reason many Christians don't see the value of the Torah is that they misunderstand certain statements from Paul. In several passages from his letters, particularly Romans and Galatians, Paul appears to characterize the Torah as a word of death instead of a word of life as Moses understood it. How do we resolve this apparent tension?

Old Testament scholar, Dr. Daniel Block, gives us some helpful tips:

[F]rom a hermeneutical and theological perspective, later revelation cannot correct earlier revelation, as if there were some defect in it. Later revelation may be more precise and more nuanced, but it cannot be more true. Accordingly, Paul cannot be interpreted as correcting Moses, as if Moses was wrong or there was some kind of error in his teaching. If Paul appears to declare something different from Moses, who celebrates the life-giving/sustaining function of the law (cf. Lev 18:5), then we need to ask whether or not he is addressing the same issues as Moses was. **His statements must be interpreted both in the light of Moses and in the context of particular arguments.**

-Daniel Block, *The Gospel according to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), p. 131

So, since Paul can't contradict Moses, we must ask if Paul and Moses are addressing the same issues. When we examine the context of his letters, we discover that Paul was responding to a very specific argument put forward by his opponents. False teachers in Paul's day were *misusing* the Torah to be something God never intended it to be. Dr. Block continues:

In both Romans and Galatians Paul was responding to those who insist that salvation comes by the works of the law, as represented by circumcision. To those who represent this view he replies that **if one looks to the law as a way of salvation, it will lead to death**. On the other hand, if one looks to the law as a guide for those already saved, it yields life (cf. Gal 5:13-25). On this matter Moses and Paul are in perfect agreement.

- Daniel Block, *The Gospel according to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), p. 131-132

So, in the statements where it appears Paul speaks negatively about the Torah, in reality he is addressing a *misuse* of the Torah. This clears up the apparent contradictions between not only Paul and Moses but also Paul and himself! After all, Paul called the Torah "holy and righteous and good" (Romans 7:12), "spiritual" (Romans 7:14), and said he "delights" in it (Romans 7:22)!

Isn't that the attitude toward the Torah Moses admonished us to have in our Torah portion? The Torah is our very life, and we ought take it to heart!

Thank you for joining us for another Parashah Point!

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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