

## CONSTRUCTIVE SIBLING RIVALRY

### A Devotional Meditation on Ha'azinu (Give Ear)

Deuteronomy 32:1-52; Hosea 1:7-9, 14:1-9; Joel 2:15-27;  
Isaiah 65:1-2; Amos 8:10; Zechariah 12:10; Romans 10:19-21, 11:11-20

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From what I recall of my younger years, I was the good child. It's not that my brother was bad, or any more disobedient than I, but I could play the game of compliance better than he. In time, thanks to the wisdom and perseverance of our godly parents, aunts and uncles, and teachers at church and school, we outgrew our childish tendencies to go our own ways. It took a while, of course, and throughout the process we experienced a measure of sibling rivalry, but we did grow up eventually.



Photo by Eric Dickman, July 7, 2007, [via Flickr](#).

Even our sibling rivalry was an important part of our growing up. Each of us grew jealous of the other at times, especially when the affections of our parents and other authority figures was at stake. Jealousy usually provoked me to compliance, but my brother was provoked to noncompliance and even rebellion. That's why I had the reputation as the good child.

I can't say exactly what brought the change, but as our high school years drew to a close, we each began to see the wider horizons of life, and understood that our God had greater purposes for us than affirmations from others. That's when we began to understand and appreciate the different qualities He had built into us. Now, instead of being jealous, we look on one another with respect and admiration for the great things our Creator has done in and through us.

This is what our God has always intended for His Covenant family. Paul explains it this way:

But I say, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,

“I will provoke you to jealousy  
by those who are not a nation,  
with a nation empty of understanding  
I will vex you.”

And Isaiah is so bold as to say,

“I was found by those who did not seek Me;  
I became visible to those who did not ask for Me.”

But about Israel He says,

“All day long I stretched forth My hands  
to a disobedient and contrary people.”

Romans 10:19-21 TLV

Paul quotes from the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, and from God's indictment of Israel in Isaiah 65. These have become bywords for Christians over the centuries, but do we understand their context? Paul provides it a few verses later:

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their false step salvation has come to the Gentiles [nations], to provoke Israel to jealousy. Now if their transgression leads to riches for the world, and their loss riches for the Gentiles [nations], then how much more their fullness! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles [of the nations]. Insofar as I am an emissary to the Gentiles [nations], I spotlight my ministry if somehow I might provoke to jealousy my own flesh and blood and save some of them. For if their rejection leads to the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Romans 11:11-14 TLV

Paul's context is the sibling rivalry that caused Israel to divide into two kingdoms. Both kingdoms provoked God to anger. The Jewish southern kingdom played the role of the outwardly compliant good child, but their disobedience was just as great as the non-compliant northern kingdom of Israel. In time, God declared to the northern kingdom, "you are not My people, and I am not yours." (Hosea 1:9) In contrast, He said to the Jewish southern kingdom:

But on the house of Judah I will have compassion  
and deliver them by *Adonai*, their God,  
yet not by bow, sword or battle,  
nor by horses and horsemen.

Hosea 1:7 TLV

We are conditioned to accept that Israel means only the Jewish people, and therefore we conclude that "making Israel jealous" is acting in a way that will cause Jewish people to accept Jesus and be saved. That's a problem when the Jesus we have preached has been divorced from His Jewish context. That's why Jewish people have resisted the Christian gospel. Jewish cultural memory, carried for centuries in the synagogues, yeshivas, and Sabbath evening prayers around the family table, remembers the same Song of Moses Paul referenced:

They made Me jealous with a non-god.  
They vexed Me with airy idols.  
So I will make them jealous with a non-people.  
With a foolish nation I will vex them.

Deuteronomy 32:21 TLV

Christian persecution of Jews through the ages tells us one way God allowed a non-people to vex rebellious Israel. That's why Paul warned us disciples of Messiah Yeshua from the nations not to boast about having been grafted into the olive tree of Israel in the place of those branches that were broken off, and certainly not to forget that the root of the tree supports us, not the other way around. Sadly, the church as a whole has disregarded the apostle's counsel. That, perhaps, is part of the fulfillment of God's discipline on His Covenant people – or at least the Jewish part.

And yet, the Jews are still here, and they are once again reborn into a people with a nation-state on their own ancestral land. Perhaps that is how the Jewish part of Israel's Covenant commonwealth has vexed the non-Jewish Christian part. God did this even though many Jewish people are secular, and the observant Jews continue to cling tightly to the Torah which Christians maintain is no longer relevant. Most Jews, regardless of their spiritual status, continue to remain aloof to the Messianic claims of Yeshua's followers, and yet God still blesses them. Why is that?

Perhaps Jewish observers are wondering why Christians, who disregard much of the Torah, are blessed of God by expanding across the entire world, embracing believers from every tribe and tongue and nation, and remaining true to the light they have received from the same God of Israel whom Jews worship.

It is as if we have been talking past each other for two millennia. We each strive to do our best to serve God in the way He has revealed to us, while demeaning our siblings' service to God.

We Christians look to the day when Messiah returns and, "They will mourn for him as one mourns for an only son and grieve bitterly for him, as one grieves for a firstborn." (Zechariah 12:10) We rightly interpret "they" as the Jewish people in the land of Israel. What we miss is that all of us are to mourn for Him whom we have pierced. That's what Amos says in his prophecy given exclusively to the non-Jewish part of Israel:

I will turn your festivals into mourning  
and all your songs into a dirge.  
I will pull up sackcloth on every waist  
and baldness on every head.  
I will make it like the mourning for an only son—  
its end a bitter day.

Amos 8:10 TLV

That mourning happened when the northern kingdom of Israel was abolished as God had decreed. Then, in the fullness of time, the people who were not God's people came back to life through the spiritual descendants redeemed by the Messiah God sent to bring back the lost sheep of the House of Israel. He has turned our mourning into dancing, just as He is turning the mourning of our Jewish siblings into dancing. It's still a mystery how this is happening, but we know that Messiah is the agent who makes it happen. We also know that one day, after we have finished making each other jealous, we will rejoice together in His presence.