Parashat Haazinu: Saving Them From Fools

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Devarim 32:1	
הַאֲזִינוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וַאֲדַבֵּרָה וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי־פִי:	Give ear, O heavens, let me speak; let the earth hear the words I utter!

1. Lifetime Witnesses

Rashi on Devarim 32:1	
האזינו השמים. שֶׁאֲנִי מַתְרֶה בָּהֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וְתִהְיוּ עֵדִים בַּדָּבָר, שֶׁכָּךְ אָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם שֶׁאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ עֵדִים, וְכֵן **ותשמע הארץ.** וְלָמָּה הֵעִיד בָּהֶם שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ? אָמַר מֹשֶׁה: אֲנִי בָּשָׂר וָדָם, לְמָחָר אֲנִי מֵת, אִם יֹאמְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא קִבַּלְנוּ עָלֵינוּ הַבְּרִית, מִי בָּא וּמַכְחִישָׁם? לְפִיכָךְ הֵעִיד בָּהֶם שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ — עֵדִים שֶׁהֵן קַיָּמִים לְעוֹלָם. וְעוֹד, שֶׁאִם יִזְכּוּ יָבֹאוּ הָעֵדִים וְיִתְּנוּ שְׂכָרָם, הַגֶּפֶן תִּתֵּן פִּרְיָהּ וְהָאָרֶץ תִּתֵּן יְבוּלָהּ וְהַשָּׁמַיִם יִתְּנוּ טַלָּם, וְאִם יִתְחַיְּבוּ תִּהְיֶה בָהֶם יַד הָעֵדִים תְּחִלָּה — "וְעָצַר אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלֹא יִהְיֶה מָטָר וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת יְבוּלָהּ" (דברים י"ז), וְאַחַר כָּךְ "וַאֲבַדְתֶּם מְהֵרָה" (שם י"א) עַל יְדֵי הָאֻמּוֹת:	האזינו השמים that I warn Israel, and be ye witnesses to this matter; for so I have told them that ye will be witnesses. Similar is the meaning of ותשמע הארץ. And why did He call heaven and earth as witnesses against them? Moses thought: "I am a being of flesh and blood (mortal); tomorrow I shall be dead. If the Israelites will once say, 'We have never accepted the covenant', who can come and refute them?" Therefore he called heaven and earth as witnesses against them — witnesses that endure forever (Sifrei Devarim 306:15). And a further reason was that if they should act worthily, the witnesses might come and give them their reward: the vine might yield its fruit, the ground give its increase, the heaven bestow its dew; while if they should act sinfully, the hand of the witnesses might first be against them (Rashi uses a phrase similar to that used of human witnesses; cf. e.g. Deuteronomy 13:10): "and He will restrain the heaven, that there be no rain, and the earth will not give its increase; and you shall perish quickly" (Devarim 11:17) — through the attacks of other nations (Tanhuma 5:10:1).

Ibn Ezra on Devarim 32:1	
וכבר הודעתיך שהגאון אמר כי טעם **השמים.** המלאכים וטעם **הארץ.** אנשי הארץ. או עדות הגשם היורד מן השמים והארץ תתן יבולה והנכון בעיני כי העיקר בעבור היותם עומדים לעולם וכן שמעו הרים גם אבן יהושע ושם כתוב כי היא שמעה וכבר רמזתי לך על נשמת האדם שהיא אמצעות בין הגבוהי' לשפלי' והיא תדמה הכל על צורת היכלה. ואף כי להבין גם היושבת בהיכל. על כן תגביה השפלי' ותשפיל הגבוהים:	I have previously informed you that the Gaon says that the meaning of *heavens* is the angels and the meaning of the *earth* is the people of the earth. On the other hand, its meaning might be that the rain that comes down from heaven and the fruit which the earth produces are called to bear witness. I believe that the correct interpretation is that Moses called heaven and earth to witness because they last forever. Similarly, *Hear, O ye mountains* (Micah 6:2), and also Joshua's stone. Scripture there writes that the stone heard. I have hinted to you that man's soul is intermediary between the upper and lower worlds. The soul

[1] All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

	compares all things to its body. It certainly does so when speaking to other human beings. It therefore elevates the low and lowers the high.

2. The Declaration of the Heavens

Tehillim 19:2	
הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד־אֵל וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מַגִּיד הָרָקִיעַ׃	The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky proclaims God's handiwork.

Bavli Ketubot 5a	
מֵיתִיבִי: ״הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֵל וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מַגִּיד הָרָקִיעַ״! הָכִי קָאָמַר: מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם שֶׁל צַדִּיקִים מִי מַגִּיד — הָרָקִיעַ, וּמַאי נִיהוּ — מָטָר.	**The Gemara raises an objection: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims the work of His hands"** (Psalms 19:2). The heavens were created by His hands. The Gemara answers that **this** is what the verse **is saying: Who attests to the handiwork of the righteous,** that they are performing the will of God? It is **the heavens. And what is** the avenue through which the heavens do so? It is by means of **rain** that falls due to the prayers of the righteous.

Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei Torah 3:9	
כָּל הַכּוֹכָבִים וְהַגַּלְגַּלִּים יֵשׁ לָהֶן נֶפֶשׁ וְדֵעָה וְהַשְׂכֵּל הֵם. וְהֵם חַיִּים וְעוֹמְדִים וּמַכִּירִין אֶת מִי שֶׁאָמַר וְהָיָה הָעוֹלָם. כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד לְפִי גָּדְלוֹ וּלְפִי מַעֲלָתוֹ מְשַׁבְּחִים וּמְפָאֲרִים לְיוֹצְרָם כְּמוֹ הַמַּלְאָכִים. וּכְשֶׁם שֶׁמַּכִּירִין הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא כָּךְ מַכִּירִין אֶת עַצְמָן וּמַכִּירִין אֶת הַמַּלְאָכִים שֶׁלְּמַעְלָה מֵהֶן. וְדַעַת הַכּוֹכָבִים וְהַגַּלְגַּלִּים מְעוּטָה מִדַּעַת הַמַּלְאָכִים וּגְדוֹלָה מִדַּעַת בְּנֵי אָדָם׃	All the stars and spheres possess a soul, knowledge, and intellect. They are alive and stand in recognition of the One who spoke and [thus brought] the world into being. According to their size and level, each one praises and glorifies their Creator as the angels do. Just as they are aware of the Holy One, blessed be He, they are also aware of themselves and of the angels which surpass them. The knowledge of the stars and the spheres is less than the knowledge of the angels, but greater than that of men.

Rashi on Tehillim 19:2	
הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֵל. הַמְשׁוֹרֵר עַצְמוֹ פֵּרֵשׁ אֶת הַדָּבָר: **אֵין אֹמֶר וְאֵין דְּבָרִים**. אֵינָן מְדַבְּרִים עִם הַבְּרִיּוֹת, אֶלָּא מִתּוֹךְ שֶׁ**בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ יָצָא קַוָּם** וּמְאִירִים לַבְּרִיּוֹת, מִתּוֹךְ כָּךְ מְסַפְּרִים הַבְּרִיּוֹת כְּבוֹד אֵל וּמוֹדִים וּמְבָרְכִין עַל הַמְּאוֹרוֹת׃	**The heavens recite the glory of God.** The Psalmist himself explains the matter: There is neither speech nor words. They do not speak with people but since "their line goes forth throughout the earth" and they give light to the people, thereby the creatures recite the glory of God and give thanks and bless [Him] for the luminaries.

3. Saving Them From Fools

John Muir, "I Only Went Out For A Walk," ***John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir***
Any fool can destroy trees. They cannot run away; and if they could, they would still be destroyed…It took more than three thousand years to make some of the trees in these Western woods---trees that are still standing in perfect strength and beauty, waving and singing in the mighty forests of the Sierra. Through the wonderful, eventful centuries…and long before that—God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand straining, leveling tempests and floods; but God cannot save them from fools…