

MOSHE'S FINAL SONG

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The final song of Moshe is the main subject of this week's parsha. It is a dark one to contemplate. Though it promises a happy ending for Israel, at the end it outlines a long list of travail and challenges, tragedies and losses on the way. Moshe raises but does not answer the underlying question of Jewish history: Why are the people of Israel apparently fated to suffer such continuing calamities?

The underlying reasons seemingly are connected to Jewish behavior itself, but to our finite and seemingly rational minds this reason is often deemed to be insufficient to justify the disproportionate troubles of Israel. Factoring our permanent and never ending minority status in the world population, it still seems to be highly unfair for the Jewish people to bear the downturns that Moshe accurately forecasts for them in the song of Haazinu.

It is no accident of chance that the parsha is always read in public in the Yom Kippur season of the Jewish year. It - the Torah reading - combines within it the awe and dread of the day of Yom Kippur coupled with its message of hope, forgiveness and healing. The parsha fits the season of the year with its mood of solemnity - as well as confident hope. The parsha reflects the Jewish story and mood perfectly. Troubles and hope, trepidation and optimism combine to define our personal and national lives. Haazinu speaks to us as a timeless gem of commentary on our current situation and circumstances.

Rashi on Haazinu quotes the two opinions of Rabi Yehuda and Rabi Nechemia regarding who is the main subject of the bulk of the middle part of the parsha - is it the Jewish people or the nations of the world generally? Like many apparent differences of opinion that appear in Talmud and Midrash, here also it is possible to say that both opinions are correct and accurate.

History has shown us time and again that the Jewish people are the canary in the mine and that the fate of other nations and even of the world as a whole is tied to the Jewish story and its happenings. Europe was destroyed in the twentieth century because of the story of the Jews. The Soviet Union disappeared coincidentally and not accidentally because of Soviet Jewry, the State of Israel and Jewish dissidents and refuseniks.

The troubles of the world are many and bitter, dangerous and threatening. Yet they somehow seem to have a connection to the Jewish people, their problems and status in world events, no matter how forced and tenuous it may appear. So both opinions in Midrash are correct. Moshe's song applies to

Israel and to the nations of the world as well.

Their fate is bound up with our destiny and our challenges. And the eventual settling of accounts that Moshe describes at the end of his song of Haazinu affect the general world no less than they do the people of Israel. May the comforting end of the song be the beginning of our great and good new year.

Shabat shalom.

Gmar chatima tova,

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com