

THE SONG OF HAAZINU - A SURVIVAL GUIDE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Moshe's long oration to the people of Israel enters its final phase in the parsha of Haazinu. Moshe speaks to his generation about to embark on the conquest and settlement of the Land of Israel - and he speaks to all of the later generations of the Jewish people, thousands of years later.

The song of Haazinu represents the full pattern and destiny of Jewish history. And as the two opinions of Midrash and Talmud quoted by Rashi make abundantly clear, the message involved is not localized to the Jewish people alone but it has universal consequences as well.

Anyone familiar with the flow of general human history will immediately recognize that the Jews are disproportionate in their effect upon that history. The world's story is dependant to a great extent on the story of the Jews. Oppressors of Jews continually arise but they are eventually defeated, but only after having caused tremendous damage to the Jews, to their own nations and to the world at large.

The Jews survive, as is promised in the prophecy and song of Haazinu, but in the process of rebuilding Jewish life, new enemies reappear. No one learns anything from past history and events, not the Jews or their enemies - and thus the pattern suggested in the parsha continues almost eternally. And in essence that is the substance of the Torah's warnings against worshipping strange gods. These strange gods have already proven themselves false earlier in history. Yet, they are still worshipped albeit in a "new" nomenclature and garb.

The main question in Jewish history, the one that faces us today, beleaguered and isolated as we feel we are, is how to break this cycle. In the song of Haazinu, Moshe suggests that only a full hearted return to the values and traditions of the covenant between God and Israel can end this vicious cycle of hate and destruction.

The rebellion of Jews against God's covenant brings with it the rebellion against decency and common sense that reflects itself in the continuance of persecution from the rest of the world. Moshe makes that abundantly clear in his words in the parsha. The truth of the matter is that even though this song of Haazinu is the one that Moshe commands the Jewish people to commit to memory and to regard as the eternal witness of Jewish history, the Jews have never quite believed Moshe's admonition.

And, we in our time stumble through the fog of current events groping for an innovative way out of our problems. Moshe calls the people of Israel "children who have lost my trust." This is because of

the terrible tendency to repeat past errors and to constantly search for the Jewish penchant to adopt the latest cultural and societal fads. Trust is built on wisdom and tenacity. The song of Haazinu provides us with an ample supply of both of these necessary traits that alone will guarantee our future survival and success.

Shabat shalom and Shana 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