

# THE ESSENCE OF JEWISH HISTORY

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The special nature and all of the events of Jewish history are outlined for us in this week's parsha. Ramban in the 13th century comments that anyone who can, so many centuries earlier, accurately foretell the later fate of a people is an exceptional prophet. Moshe certainly fits that description and test. And what more can we add to this phenomenon, now seven hundred-fifty years after Ramban!

The rabbis of the Talmud attributed the crown of wisdom to the one who has a vision of the future. Even though Moshe is the greatest of all prophets, his title amongst the Jewish people is Moshe the teacher, indicating his wisdom and knowledge are translated into his ability to view the future.

Moshe lays down the basic pattern of all of Jewish history – the struggle to remain Jewish and not succumb to the blandishments of current cultures and beliefs, the illogical and almost pathological enmity of the world to Judaism and the Jewish people, the awful price paid by Jews throughout history and the eventual realization of Jews, and the non-Jewish world as well, of God's guidance in history and human life.

This entire, very complex story is foretold to us in this week's most remarkable parsha. It is no wonder that Jewish tradition dictated that Jewish children should commit this parsha to memory, for within it is recorded the entire essence of Jewish history.

Though we never really know the exact details of the future of the Jewish people, the broad outlines of the story have been known to us for millennia. Just read and study the words of this parsha.

Moshe establishes heaven and earth as witnesses to the covenant and the historical fate of the Jewish people. Rashi explains that not only are they honest and objective witnesses but most importantly they are eternal witnesses. Human witnesses are mortal and passing. Later generations cannot hear their testimony, and even though current video technology attempts to correct this deficiency, much of the personal nuance and force, which colors all human testimony, is lost.

So we rely on heaven and earth to reinforce our belief and commitment to the eternal covenant. It is the very wonders and mysteries of nature itself that point to the Creator. And it is all of human history that rises to testify as to the uniqueness of the Jewish story and the special role that the Jewish people played and continue to play in human events.

The witness testimony of heaven is found in the wonders of the natural world. The witness testimony of earth is found in the history of humankind and of the role of the Jewish people in that amazing,

exhilarating and yet depressing story. Moshe begs of us to listen to these two witnesses for it is within their and our ability to know our past and future through their testimony.

Much of their testimony is frightening and worrisome but it is even more frightening to be unaware of our past and future. We should listen carefully to the parsha. It has much to teach us about our world and ourselves.

Shabat shalom

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