

## Parashas Ha'azinu

### Parsha Summary

Moshe calls the heavens and Earth to witness his song. Moshe begins with praising God who is eternal and perfect, describing how He chose Israel, guided them through the desert, and brought them to great wealth. In their prosperity, Israel is unfaithful to God and so He hides His face and sends various forms of destruction, including inciting a foreign nation to pursue them. If only Israel would understand that it is really God who is punishing them! He will nevertheless prevent any foreign nation from destroying Israel entirely, and eventually avenge the blood of His servants, atoning for His nation's land.

Moshe teaches this song to the nation. Then God tells Moshe to ascend Har Navo and die there after looking upon the land that He would be giving to the nation.

### Classic Questions

Why did (and what does it mean that) Moshe call "Heaven and Earth" to be his witnesses?

- **Sifrei, Midrash Rabbah:** just as these follow their laws of nature without ever deviating, so too you should take rebuke and not deviate from God's laws
- **Rashi:** (1) Heaven and earth are eternal and can therefore serve as witnesses to the covenant forever, and (2) will act if the covenant is violated (by not raining, etc)
  - **Kli Yakar:** the heavens and earth would not associate together if not for Torah
- **Ibn Ezra:** it is (also) a reference to the soul which is an intermediary between being heavenly and earthly and it can rise or fall
  - **Ohr HaChaim:** both 'ingredients' of a person need to/can hear the covenant
- **Ramban:** the original "Heaven and Earth" of creation are also part of Israel's covenant
- **Tur:** this can be a metaphor for high "city dwellers," and villagers 'on the land'
- **Abarbanel, Netziv:** this is a metaphor for the leaders of the nation and for the masses
  - **Netziv:** the main (metaphorical) meanings are forces of 'influence' and 'receiving'

How is God's perfection/eternality expressed through the descriptions in this song?

- **Many:** He acts in perfect righteousness, punishing or rewarding those who deserve it
- **R. Yitzhak Aramah:** despite His knowing the future, He acts justly in punishing a person's freely willed actions that are not forced by God's foreknowledge
- **Seforno:** His relationship and 'feelings' towards Israel do not change, even if sometimes they have blessing and sometimes hardship
  - **Seforno:** this is true regarding God's vision for all of humanity and history, which varies in details because of human actions, but God's plan remains unchanged
- **R. SR Hirsch:** God's presence in this world is shown through the Jewish people and their eternity, and the fact that their destiny is a result of their loyalty to God's Torah
- **Ramban (32:40), Abarbanel, R. Hirsch (32:36):** the Jews will survive through all of history as they will always be called God's nation

### Important "Chazal"s and "Rashi"s

- Great is this song, for it has past present and future, this world and the next (Sifrei)

- **Ramban:** this song summarizes the entire (future) history of the Jewish people
- “My teaching is like water,” [easy to drink], and so a person should enter with general principles [*kelalim*] and then learn details, for if you first learn details [*peratim*] they will overwhelm you and you will not know what to do (Sifrei)
- The Torah gives life; like rain, it has mikrah, mishnah, halakha and aggadah (Sifrei)
  - **Ohr haChaim:** the Torah teaches and judges each person according to his ability
- “For when I call the name of God,” from here we learn that one must respond to “Borchu” and “amen” to blessings (Sifrei), and to bless on the Torah (Berachos 11a/21a) and more
- "Like an eagle arousing its nest" - God is compared to an eagle, which is merciful to its young and does not suddenly enter its nest without warning/waking them up first (Rashi)
- God’s “arrows” will be exhausted, but Israel will endure (Sotah 9a, Rashi)
- Nothing is ‘empty’ in the Torah (Sifrei), if you think so, you are the empty one (Rashi)

### A Short Vort

Moshe’s final song traces the arc of Jewish history, from its wanderings in the wilderness to its inheritance where it grows wealthy and fat, and onto its rebellion, exile, and oppression. As Ramban emphasizes in his commentary, however, the most important part of the song is its description of the history that has not yet happened: just as all the past millennia have been foretold, so too has its final denouement: redemption and even vengeance, ‘atonement’ for all the blood spilled over those so many years. There is no stronger divine assurance, couched in a prophecy that so far has come true to the letter, God’s promise that even while He is hidden behind frightening enemies, He is ultimately guiding His nation towards fulfilling their role as His treasured people.