

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Ha'Azinu / פרשת האזינו 5779

The Testimony of Yerushalayim

The Torah describes the song of Ha'azinu as a witness:¹ “And it will be, when they will encounter many evils and troubles, this song will bear witness against them, for it will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring.” What testimony is embedded in the song that is relevant for a troubled time?

Characteristically, Rashi offers a simple but powerful explanation: “that in it, I had warned them concerning all the things that are now befalling them.” The song describes that exile and even near decimation will be the future consequences for Jewish sin. As such, the song stands as a warning and testimony that the Jewish people were forewarned about the serious impact of their behavior.

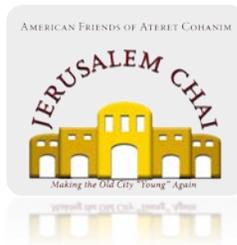
The Netziv, however, explains the content of the testimony in a contrasting fashion:

Just the opposite! The song comes as a witness that despite all the anger that they elicited against themselves, nevertheless, they are still God's nation and he cares for them and in the end will redeem them.

Rather than focusing on the sin and punishment, the Netziv moves the testimony to the second half of the song which describes the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people. The song serves as a comforting factor and consolation throughout the long exile that God has not abandoned us and in the end will personally bring us back to the Land of Israel.

While Netziv presents his and Rashi's explanations as opposites, from the perspective of Jewish consciousness they complement each other nicely. We must always remember that national punishments are attributable to our own sins, while simultaneously reminding ourselves that the very

¹ Devarim 31:21. Translation from Chabad.org



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fact that God is punishing us means that He cares and is trying to goad us towards the ultimate redemption.

Yerushalayim reminds us of both of these poles. On the one hand, the history of Yerushalayim screams of the punishments that the Jewish people endured over the last two thousand years. Remnants of the Romans, Byzantines, Muslims, Crusaders, Ottomans and British adorn the city and teach us about the long gap in sovereignty and even significant Jewish presence in the city. While often historically fascinating, these buildings and ruins demonstrate the extent of the exile.

Modern Yerushalayim, though, is a teeming and bustling Jewish city that is the capital of a Jewish state. Walking its streets is a testament to the endurance of our people who have outlasted many of the world's most powerful empires. But most of all, it is a testimony to God's everlasting kindness to His people and a signpost of hope for the future complete redemption.