

# Shemot: Sefer Sheni - The Netziv's View

- Nisson Shulman.

The Netziv's view that Bereshit is the creation of the world and Shemot is the creation of our people, and so they are bound as "Sefer Rishon" and "Sefer Sheni", instead of the traditional, or usual names for these two books.

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By Rabbi Nisson Shulman

The first words of the Books of Bible are significant. BERESHIT, SHEMOT, VAYIKRA BAMIDBAR DEVARIM. So they are usually called in Hebrew.

In English we call them after the content. GENESIS, EXODUS, LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, DEUTERONOMY. This is parallel to other names of these books found in the Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash; SEFER HAGEULA, SEFER KOHANIM, HOMESH HAPEKUDIM, MISHNA TORAH.

The BAHA'G (Baal Halakhot Gedolot), uses these names. But there is one strange exception and that is SHEMOT! He calls it by no name, but merely SEFER SHENI! Why?

The Netziv explains. The book of SHEMOT is really the second volume of BERESHIT. Both are to be considered as if they are one book, so there are actually four, not five books of Moses!

His reason for this is as follows: Is "Creation" finished with BERESHIT? No, for the Jews are also a creation of the Almighty, as the Midrash Rabbah explains. BERESHIT, BISHVIL YISRAEL SHENIKREU RESHIT. The meaning is that Israel is the purpose of creation, which is therefore unfinished until the Exodus and the Revelation on Mount Sinai have taken place! HITNA HAKADOSH BARUCH HU TENAI IM MAASE BERESHIT; IM MEKABLIM YISRAEL ET HATORAH, MUTAV, VEIM LAV, ACHAZIR ETCHEM LETOHU VAVOHU!

To put it another way: This connection underscores the Jewish understanding of history. BERESHIT deals with the creation of the world. SHEMOT deals with the creation of our people and their appointment to their task in this world.

This involves three principles:

- First: Just as creation made order out of physical chaos, so the Revelation at Sinai and the Torah made order out of social chaos.
- Second: The Creation had a purpose. Israel's selection from all other nations and peoples is in order to teach that purpose: to illuminate the world with the light of Torah. Of course, that means that we remain Hashem's instrument in the world as long as we serve the cause of Torah. If we ignore or forsake the Torah, we forfeit our mission and deny our chosenness.

· Third. There is a historical continuity from beginning to end. As Rashi says: The world belongs to Hashem. He can give any part of it to whomsoever He chooses, and He chose to give us Israel.

Of course, in connection with our right to Israel, we ourselves are the decisive factor. If we cut ourselves off from our Jewish heritage, then we also cut ourselves off from the right to Israel. As Yaakov Herzog had said: “If one discards the idea of Jewish uniqueness in human history, it is very hard to defend our right to the Holy Land”.

Non-Jewish historians, who write books about Jewish history, almost always end their works with the destruction of the Second Temple. In their eyes, the Diaspora marks the end of Jewish life! The apostate, who became the Cardinal of Paris, considers himself a real Jew because in his mind Judaism forfeited its right to existence except for those who, like himself, accepted their “man who was made a deity!

And Jews for Jesus, like other cults still taking hold, base their philosophy on the superseding of Judaism by Christianity, which they claim took place at the time of Jesus.

The Jew, by his survival, his restoration to his land, his acknowledgment of his role in the world as ordained by the Torah, declares that there is a continuum of Jewish life from first to last. The Third Commonwealth of Israel has its roots in the first redemption from Egypt. Somewhere, somehow, the thread runs through our distinctive march across history under Hashem's providential guidance. This thread, not only links Genesis with Exodus, and Exodus with our entry into the Promised Land and settling it; it also continues to unfold today as it did in Ezra's time and before that under Joshua.

What used to be known as the Peace Process or the Oslo agreements, with all our hopes and fears, now total disappointments, is to be gauged against this measuring rod. Did it conform to Hashem's plan? All our present and future decisions are to be made accordingly.

That is the significance of the time in which we live. That is our destiny as it began to unfold, not only at Sinai, but also from the time of the Creation of the world! May we be worthy of that destiny.

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