

# Genesis

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Everyone is conditioned culturally to think in specific ways and to adopt specific timelines.

Christians think in terms of Before Christ and After Christ. Never mind how accurate that is or if there ever was such a point in time. The fact is that most of us live in a world where this Gregorian calendar is the common one. We Jews use it alongside our own, but prefer to talk about "the Common Era" (B for before, A for after) and we are now 2012 years after. Islam has its own calendar, the Hijri, going back to and named after Mohammad's migration from Mecca to Medina. They are 1433 years into that one. Calendars don't end there. The world has an Armenian, Assyrian, Bengali, Buddhist, Coptic, Hindu, Japanese, Thai, and even a Unix calendar, to mention only a few.

Since our religion is less personality based, our Jewish calendar chose to start with Creation, which at some stage the rabbis worked backwards to decide it happened 5772 years ago on Rosh Hashanah. This calendar emerged during the Talmudic era, some 1800 years ago. No one else agrees with us, either about which calendar to use or when creation actually took place, but agreeing with Jews is very much a minority pursuit, anyway! And we don't even agree among ourselves, but it doesn't matter, our calendar is our heritage and science has its own calendar as well.

Each of these calendars etches a mindset into the faithful that influences a lot more than what the date is! Much of Christianity thinks that anything before Christ was primitive and barbarian, and anything after is New and Enlightened. Islam believes that the history that counts started with Mohammad and the Koran. Claims about holy texts existing for a thousand years earlier and that Isaac was Abraham's favorite son rather than Ishmael are simply wrong. The nasty, deceitful Jews fiddled the texts to suit themselves. This of course leads to the current mindset that there were no Jews or Israelites in the Land of Israel before Islam and therefore they cannot claim any right to their ancestral homeland.

I am bringing this up not in any way to support one political side or the other in the endless painful and explosive dispute over whether Israel should try to make peace with the Palestinians and compromise territorially to give them a state of their own. What happens in the Middle East is in the hands of Heaven, for I cannot see the Palestinians, supported by millions of Muslims, giving up their demands, nor the Jews of Israel upping and moving en masse to the USA. Any more than I can see the UN taking up the cause of Kurdish self-determination.

What interests me is why so few people seem to understand the historical claims of Jews to be in the Land of Israel in the first place. And why the Western mind, including Obama's, seems to have been taken over, lock stock and barrel, by the absurd notion that Israel is only the product of European

guilt over the Holocaust and had Hitler not arisen the Jews would have had no moral or political basis for being there altogether (except as tourists, perhaps). It is as if Balfour lived after World War II.

I can only explain this by turning to mindsets created by history. I do not want to link it to anti-Semitism, because the antis love to argue that Jews raise that issue whenever they are in a tight spot. To the Muslims, Dar El Islam is the territory that belongs to the Muslim religious world and good Muslims must try to repossess every inch of it. It was fixed by conquest. But it is argued that since this conquest took place in the seventh century it obviously trumps the conquest the Israelites made two thousand years before that at the expense of the poor Canaanites. (Does anyone still have any sympathy for them?) So what kind of conquest is more legitimate? Early conquests or late ones? Is last come first served?

It is not just religions that have subjective vision. Marx provided the Holy Text of the Left. History before him was just a turgid mess of class and religious oppression. His new religion of transnational economic and universal egalitarianism would sweep it all away. Jews, religious ones in particular, were the natural enemies of such pure Marxism. They stubbornly stuck to their religion. They symbolized the capitalist classes. They were rootless cosmopolitans always challenging the dogmas and doctrines of orthodox Marxism (hence the antagonism towards Trotsky as well as to Zionism).

The collapse of the old Soviet Union not only dealt a near deathblow to the Left, but it also revived the separatist nationalism the Soviets tried so hard to eradicate. Yugoslavia started to fracture. Europe now encourages separatism; Welsh, Scottish, Basque, Catalan, and ethnic minorities now fight for their right to separatism. And Palestinians are seen as another ethnic minority trying to free itself from an intruding colonial power.

Except that Israel was not colonial. It was there first, if you could free yourself from the artificial mindset of your ideological calendar. And the collapse of communism has meant that the Left has no center or cause to rally around anymore, except attacking capitalism and what it likes to call its running dogs—namely and once again, the Jews, the Israelis.

This is not polemic to justify the status quo. Nor is it intended to gloss over the mistakes and tragedies on both sides. It does explain the absurd alliance between religious fundamentalism and leftwing political correctness. It is not an argument against criticizing Israel. But it is an argument against trying to delegitimize it.

I have always been struck by the explanation of the great commentator, Rashi, writing in Europe a thousand years ago, for why the Torah begins with the Genesis narrative rather than laws. He said that it was so that if ever anyone challenges our right to our land we could argue that since God created the world, He could decide who goes where. It is not an argument that many would agree with perhaps, but it shows the challenge to our rights is a very ancient one.

Our calendar starts with Genesis as the simple physical act of creation, whenever it was. The world continues regardless. But intellectual fashions come and, eventually, go.