

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
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When God began to create heaven and earth. בְּרֵאשִׁית \* בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ.

v. 1. ב' רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

## CREATION (1:1–2:3)

The Creation narrative in the Bible is a document of faith. In its quest for meaning it gives expression to the fundamental premise of the religion of the people Israel: The universe is entirely the purposeful product of the one God, a transcendent being, beyond nature, and sovereign over space and time.

### INTRODUCTION (1:1)

**1. When God began to create** The conventional English translation reads: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The translation presented here looks to verse 3 for the completion of the sentence and takes

Time has not diminished the power or the majesty of the familiar biblical account of the creation of the world, nor has familiarity dulled its impact. It still moves us, conveying so much in so few words. What kind of world does the Torah envision God creating? The opening chapters of Genesis are not a scientific account of the origins of the universe. The Torah is a book of morality, not cosmology. Its overriding concern, from the first verse to the last, is our relationship to God, truth about life rather than scientific truths. It describes the world God fashioned as "good," a statement no scientific account can make.

God's world is an orderly world, in which land and water each has its own domain, in which each species of plant and animal reproduces itself "after its own kind." But it is also an unpredictable world, a world capable of growth and change and surprise, of love and pain, of glory and tragedy, not simply replication of what is, because it includes human beings who have the freedom to choose how they will act. And it is an unfinished world, waiting for human beings to complete God's work of creating.

### CHAPTER 1

The Torah assumes the existence and overwhelming power of God. We find here no myth of God's birth, as we find in other cultures' accounts of creation, only a description of God's actions. It seems that the Torah is saying, "This is the premise on which the rest stands. Only if you accept it is everything that follows intelligible." God created the world, blessed it with the capacity to renew and reproduce itself, and deemed it "good." This is the answer to the

basic and inevitable questions: Why is there something instead of nothing? Why is there life instead of inert matter?

The first letter of the first word in the Torah, "b'reishit," is the Hebrew letter *bet*. This prompted the Midrash to suggest that, just as the letter *bet* is enclosed on three sides but open to the front, we are not to speculate on the origins of God or what may have existed before Creation (Gen. R. 1:10). The purpose of such a comment is not to limit scientific inquiry into the origins of the universe but to discourage efforts to prove the unprovable. It urges us to ask ourselves, "How are we to live in this world?" And it urges us to live facing forward rather than looking backward. Jewish theology generally has been concerned with discerning the will of God rather than proving the existence or probing the nature of God. Ultimate origins ("Who made God?") are hidden from view, but all the rest of the world is open to inquiry. The Torah begins with *bet*, second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, to summon us to begin even if we cannot begin at the very beginning.

The Midrash takes the word for "beginning" (*reishit*) as a synonym for "Torah" (as in Prov. 8:22), interpreting the first verse as declaring: "With *reishit* did God create the heaven and the earth." God created the world by consulting the Torah, fashioning a world based on Torah values, or for the sake of the Torah, so that there would be somewhere in the universe where the values of the Torah could be put into practice (Gen. R. 1:1,6).

**1. When God began** The beginning of all knowledge and morality lies in the recognition that God created the world. Akiva taught: "Just

earth—<sup>2</sup>the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—<sup>3</sup>God said, “Let there be light”; and there was

וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ: <sup>2</sup>וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תְהוֹ וְבָהוּ  
וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים  
מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: <sup>3</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

verse 2 to be parenthetical, describing the state of things at the time when God first spoke. Support for understanding the text in this way comes from the second half of 2:4 and of 5:1, both of which refer to Creation and begin with the word “when.”

**God** The Hebrew term for God used throughout this account of Creation is not the unique sacred divine name *YHVH* but *elohim*, a general Hebrew word for “deity,” which can also refer to pagan gods. Although plural in form, it almost always appears with a singular verb or adjective. The name, connoting universalism and abstraction, is most appropriate for the God of Creation.

**create** The Hebrew stem of the word translated as “create” (ברא) is used in the Bible only for divine creativity. It signifies that the created object is unique, depends solely on God for its coming into existence, and is beyond the ability of humans to reproduce. The verb never means “to create out of nothing.”

**heaven and earth** The observable universe is here specified by the use of the definite article in Hebrew (literally, “the heaven and the earth”). The combination of opposites (“heaven and earth”) expresses the totality of cosmic phenomena, for which there is no single word in biblical Hebrew.

## THE PRIMORDIAL WORLD

(v. 2)

**2. unformed and void** The Hebrew for this phrase (*tohu va-vohu*) means “desert waste.” The point of the narrative is the idea of order that results from divine intent. There is no suggestion here that God made the world out of nothing, which is a much later conception.

**darkness** In the Bible, darkness is often a symbol of evil, misfortune, death, or oblivion. Here it seems to be not just the absence of light

but a distinct entity, the origin of which is left unclear.

**the deep** The Hebrew word for “the deep” (*t'hom*) refers to the subterranean waters that ancient humans believed were beneath the earth. The text says nothing about how or when this body of water came into existence. In Proverbs (8:22–24) it is one of God’s creations. The word is related etymologically to Tiamat, the maritime goddess in the Babylonian creation story. In all of the ancient Near Eastern creation stories, the primal element is water. To the ancients, the formless nature of water seemed to represent the state of affairs before chaos was transformed to order.

**a wind from God** Or, as others suggest, “a mighty wind.” The Hebrew word *ru-ah* means “wind, breath, spirit.” “Wind” is the prevalent understanding of the word here in ancient and medieval Jewish sources. As a physical phenomenon, wind conforms to the picture of primal chaos evoked by this verse.

**sweeping** Movement is the basic idea underlying this Hebrew verb (רחף). Motion, the essential element in change, originates with God’s dynamic presence.

**water** This is either the cosmic ocean believed by the ancients to surround the earth or the water referred to in verses 6, 7, 9, and 10, namely, that which covered the solid mass of earth. These two bodies of water were probably not clearly differentiated in the ancient Hebrew mind.

## THE FIRST GROUP OF CREATED OBJECTS (vv. 3–13)

### DAY ONE

**3. God said** The divine word shatters the cosmic silence and signals the beginning of a

as the existence of a house testifies to the builder and the existence of a garment testifies to the weaver, so the existence of the world testifies to God who fashioned it” (Mid. Tem. 3). “Whoever teaches a child the Torah’s account of Creation is to be considered as having created the world personally.” To shape the moral imagination of a child is to create a new world.

**3. God creates the world with words.** This is the first invocation of the Torah’s belief in the reality of words, their power to create and to destroy.

**Let there be light** Light, the first thing God created, can be seen as symbolizing Judaism’s commitment to clarity rather than mystery, to openness rather than concealment, to study

light. <sup>4</sup>God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

יְהִי אֹרֶךְ וַיְהִי-אֶרֶץ: <sup>4</sup>וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-  
הָאֹרֶךְ כִּי-טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹרֶךְ  
וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: <sup>5</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים | לְאֹרֶךְ יוֹם  
וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ קֶרָא לַיְלָה וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר  
יוֹם אֶחָד: פ

new order. “God said” means that God created the world with His words. This signifies that the Creator is wholly independent of Creation. It implies effortlessness and absolute sovereignty over nature.

**Let there be** This instruction (*y’hi*), found again in verses 6 and 14, is reserved for the creation of celestial phenomena.

**light** The first creation by God’s utterance. Light in the Bible serves as a symbol of life, joy, justice, and deliverance. The notion of light independent of the sun (which appears again in Isa. 30:26 and Job 38:19–20) derives from the observations that the sky is illumined on days when the sun is obscured and that brightness precedes the sun’s rising. As in the ancient world generally, light itself is a feature of divinity.

**4. God saw** God perceived.

**was good** This affirms the flawlessness of God’s creation. Reality is imbued with God’s goodness.

**God separated** Separation, or differentia-

tion, is another aspect of creation. Light, like darkness, is viewed here as a separate entity.

**5. God called** Not to possess a name is tantamount to nonexistence in the worldview of the ancient Near East, including Egypt and Babylonia. Name giving was thus associated with creation and domination, for the one who gives a name has power over the object named. In this narrative, God names day and night, the sky, the earth, and the sea. This is another way of expressing God’s absolute sovereignty over time and space.

**evening . . . morning** The Hebrew words *erev* and *boker* literally mean “sunset” and “break of dawn,” terms inappropriate before the creation of the sun on the fourth day. Here the two words signify, respectively, the end of the period of light (when divine creativity was suspended) and the renewal of light (when the creative process was resumed).

**a first day** Better: “the first day.” The Hebrew word “*ehad*” functions as both a cardinal

rather than blind faith. Light, God’s first creation, becomes a symbol of God’s Presence, in the fire of the Burning Bush and the revelation at Sinai, in the perpetual light (*ner tamid*) and the *m’norah* of the tabernacle. For some theologians, light functions as a symbol for God because light itself is not visible but makes everything else visible. “By Your light do we see light” (Ps. 36:10).

**4. God separated** The process of Creation is a process of making distinctions and separating—light from darkness, sea from dry land, one species from another—imposing order where there had been chaos and randomness. Throughout the Torah, we find this emphasis on distinction and separation: sacred and ordinary time, permitted and forbidden foods, rit-

ually pure and impure persons, no mixing of diverse seeds or cross-breeding animal species. Aviva Zornberg suggests that separation, specialization, is almost always achieved with pain and sacrifice, even as there is a sense of sadness in the *havdalah* service that marks the separation of *Shabbat* and weekday, even as there is pain when an infant is born out of its mother’s body, even as there is a sense of painful separation when a child outgrows its dependence on parents. The Midrash (Gen. R. 5:3) pictures the lower waters weeping at being separated from the upper waters, suggesting that there is something poignant in the creative process when things once united are separated.

**5. a first day** Literally, “one day,” taken by the Midrash to mean “the day of the One,” the

#### HALAKHAH L’MA-ASEH

**1:5 there was evening and there was morning** According to Jewish law, the 24-hour cycle begins at sunset. *Shabbat* and holy days, therefore, begin in the evening, with candles lit 18 minutes before sunset, and continue until the following night when three stars can be clearly seen or 25 minutes after sunset if no stars are visible. (On determining the beginning of *Shabbat*, see S.A. O.H. 261:1–4.)

<sup>6</sup>God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water." <sup>7</sup>God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so. <sup>8</sup>God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

<sup>9</sup>God said, "Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear." And it was so. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מְבֻדֵּל בֵּין מַיִם לְמַיִם: <sup>7</sup>וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַרָקִיעַ וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לְרָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לְרָקִיעַ וַיְהִי־כֵן: <sup>8</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְרָקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁנִי: פ

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקְוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד וְתִרְאֶה הַיַּבְשָׁה וַיְהִי־כֵן: <sup>10</sup>וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַיַּבְשָׁה אֶרֶץ וּלַמְּקוֹה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים

number (one) and an ordinal number (first) in many texts.

DAY TWO

**6. an expanse** The verbal form of the noun translated as "an expanse" (*raki-a*) is often used for hammering out metal or flattening out earth, which suggests a basic meaning of "extending." The vault of heaven is here viewed either as a vast sheet of metal or as a layer of solid ice.

**water from water** The expanse was to serve

as a separation between the celestial source of rain and the water on earth.

**7. And it was so** Henceforth this is the standard formula for expressing the fulfillment of God's command.

DAY THREE

**9. water below the sky** That is, the terrestrial waters.

**the dry land** The terrain that now has become visible.

day on which God, whose name and essence are one, established a world suitable for the divine Presence (Gen. R. 3:1).

**6. expanse** The word traditionally has been translated "firmament," a shell holding up the heavens. Once science understood that no physical barrier separates heaven from earth and that references to "opening the heavens" to cause rain to fall are poetic and metaphorical, medieval (Ibn Ezra) and modern commentaries (Malbim and this translation) came to understand the word as referring to the atmosphere that encircles our planet.

**8. Sky** In Hebrew: *shamayim*. The Midrash (Gen. R. 4:7) understands the word as a combination of *esh* (fire) and *mayim* (water), that is, the sun and the rain clouds. Were the rain clouds to extinguish the sun or were the sun to evaporate the rain clouds, the world would perish. Therefore, God works a daily miracle. Fire and water agree to co-exist peacefully so that the world can endure. Another midrash (Deut.

R. 1:12) links this idea to a passage in our prayers: "May You who established peace in the heavens [teaching fire and water to get along] grant that kind of peace to us and to all the people Israel." In other words, we pray for the miracle that both individuals and nations with the power to harm each other will learn to get along in peace—even as fire and water do in the heavens.

On the second day we miss the formula "and God saw that it was good." The Sages explain this as due to the act of separation on that day, which may be necessary but is never wholly good, or because the process of separating the waters would not be concluded until the third day and one does not recite a blessing over an incomplete project (Rashi). The formula occurs twice on the third day (vv. 10 and 12). This is the source of the tradition that Tuesday (the third day) is a propitious day for weddings and other important occasions.

<sup>11</sup>And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. <sup>12</sup>The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good. <sup>13</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

<sup>14</sup>God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years; <sup>15</sup>and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. <sup>17</sup>And God set them in the ex-

פִּיטוּב: <sup>11</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאָרֶץ  
דְּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי  
לְמִינוֹ אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹבוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן:  
<sup>12</sup>וַתוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דְּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע  
לְמִינָהּוּ וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה־פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹבוּ  
לְמִינָהּוּ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב: <sup>13</sup>וַיְהִי־  
עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי: פ  
<sup>14</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ  
הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה  
וְהָיוּ לְאֹתוֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים וּשְׁנָיִם:  
<sup>15</sup>וְהָיוּ לְמְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר  
עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן: <sup>16</sup>וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־  
שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת־הַמְּאֹר הַגָּדֹל  
לְמַמְשַׁלֵּת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־הַמְּאֹר הַקָּטָן  
לְמַמְשַׁלֵּת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים:  
<sup>17</sup>וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם

**11. Let the earth sprout** According to the biblical worldview, it is God who endows the earth with generative powers. The forces of nature are not independent spiritual entities.

**seed-bearing** Endowed with the capacity for self-replication.

**of every kind** The various species.

#### THE SECOND GROUP OF CREATED OBJECTS (vv. 14–31)

The creations of days four to six are parallel to those of days one to three. The difference is that the former creations were endowed with motion and the latter were not.

#### DAY FOUR

**14. Let there be lights** This corresponds to

“Let there be light” in Gen. 1:3. The emergence of vegetation (v. 12) before the existence of the sun, the anonymity of the luminaries, and the detailed description serve to emphasize that the sun, moon, and stars are not divinities, as they were universally thought to be in other creation narratives. Rather, they are the creations of God, who assigned them the function of regulating the life rhythms of the universe.

**signs for the set times** The Hebrew terms for “signs” (*otot*) and for “set times” (*mo-adim*) are here a single thought expressed by two words. The “set times” are then specified as “the days and the years.”

**16. two great lights** The general term “luminaries” is more precisely defined. No special role is assigned to the stars.

**12.** In every living thing, plant and animal alike, God has implanted the irrepressible urge to reproduce, to create life out of its own life.

**14.** God creates the sun and the moon on the fourth day. But light was created on the first day! The primordial light created then was so intense that humans would have been able to see everything happening in the world. God realized that humans could not endure seeing reality that clearly. To make the world tolerable

for human beings, God hid the primordial light until such time as humans would be able to stand it, replacing it with the light of the sun (BT Hag. 12a).

**16. the two great lights, the greater . . . and the lesser** The two luminaries originally were equal in size, prompting the moon to ask God, “Can two kings share a single crown?” God responded, “Make yourself smaller!” The moon cried, “Because I presented a proper claim, must

pans of the sky to shine upon the earth, <sup>18</sup>to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. <sup>19</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

<sup>20</sup>God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky."

<sup>21</sup>God created the great sea monsters, and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms, and all the winged birds of every kind. And God saw that this was good. <sup>22</sup>God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." <sup>23</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

DAY FIVE

**20. Let the waters bring forth swarms** In the Torah, water does not possess autonomous powers of procreation, as it does in ancient Near Eastern pagan mythologies. The waters generate marine life only in response to the divine command.

**living creatures** This term in Hebrew (*nefesh hayyah*) means, literally, "animate life," that which contains the breath of life. It is distinct from plant life, which was not considered to be living.

**across the expanse of the sky** Literally, "over the face of." The viewpoint is that of an observer on earth looking upward.

**21. God created** This is the first use of the verb "bara" since verse 1, signifying that these monsters, too, were creatures of God—rather than mythologic divine beings, as the Canaanites believed.

לְהָאֵיר עַל-הָאָרֶץ: <sup>18</sup>וְלְמַשֵּׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: <sup>19</sup>וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם רְבִיעִי: פ

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שָׂרָץ נֹפֵשׁ חַיָּה וְעוֹף יַעֲוֹף עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-פְּנֵי רְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם: <sup>21</sup>וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַתַּנִּינִם\* הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֶת כָּל-נֹפֵשׁ הַחַיָּה הַרְמֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵיהֶם וְאֶת כָּל-עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: <sup>22</sup>וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הַמַּיִם בַּיּוֹם וַיְהִי-וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם חֲמִישִׁי: פ

v. 21. חסר י' בתראה

**the great sea monsters** Both the Hebrew word for these creatures (*tannin*) and the word "Leviathan" appear in Canaanite myths from the ancient city of Ugarit, as the name of a dragon god from earliest times who assisted Yam (god of the sea) in a battle against Baal (Canaanite god of fertility). Fragments of an Israelite version of this myth are present in several biblical poetic texts in which the forces of evil in this world are figuratively identified with "Tannin," the embodiment of the chaos that God had vanquished in earliest time. By stating that they were part of God's creation, the narrative deprives them of divinity.

**22. God blessed them** Animate creation receives the gift of fertility through the divine blessing of sexual reproduction. Plant life was not so blessed, because it was thought to have been equipped with the capacity for self-reproduction by nonsexual means.

I be diminished?" God recognized the justice of the moon's plea and compensated for its diminution by promising that only the moon would be seen by both day and night. It also would be accompanied by an honor guard of stars, and the Jewish people would calculate months and years according to its phases (BT Hul. 60b).

**20.** God adds a new dimension to the world of plants and streams by creating life.

**22.** God blesses the animals, giving them the power to produce new life even as God creates new life. The birth of any living creature is an instance of God's continuing creative power.



<sup>24</sup>God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind.” And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good. <sup>26</sup>And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה <sup>24</sup>  
 לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וְרֶמֶשׂ וְחַיְתוֹ-אָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ  
 וַיְהִי-כֵן: <sup>25</sup>וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-חַיֵּי הָאָרֶץ  
 לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת-הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת כָּל-  
 רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-  
 טוֹב: <sup>26</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם  
 בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם  
 וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ  
 וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ: <sup>27</sup>וַיְבָרָא

#### DAY SIX

**24. Let the earth bring forth** This image of the earth producing animals may be related to the ancient concept of “Mother Earth,” or it may simply be a figurative way of expressing the normal habitat of these creatures.

**25. creeping things** A general term for creatures whose bodies move close to the ground. Here it seems to encompass reptiles, creeping insects, and very small animals.

**26. Let us make** The extraordinary use of the first person plural here evokes the image of a heavenly court in which God is surrounded by an angelic multitude. This is the Israelite version of the assemblies of pagan deities prevalent in the mythologies of the ancient world.

**man** The Hebrew word *adam* is a general term for humankind. It encompasses both man and woman (as shown in vv. 27–28 and in 5:1–2). It never appears in the feminine or in the

plural. In the first five chapters of Genesis, it also serves as the proper name Adam.

**in our image, after our likeness** In the ancient Near East, the ruling king was often described as the “image” or the “likeness” of a god, which served to elevate the monarch above ordinary mortals. In the Bible, this idea became democratized. Every human being is created “in the image of God”; each bears the stamp of royalty. Further, the symbols by which the gods are generally depicted in ancient Assyrian royal steles (Asshur by the winged disk, Shamash by the sun disk) are called “the image (*tzalamu*) of the great gods.” Thus the description of mortals as “in the image of God” makes humankind the symbol of God’s presence on earth.

**They shall rule** In the prevailing beliefs of the ancient world, the forces of nature are gods with the power to enslave humankind. The

**26.** So far, the account of Creation has alternated between activities on high (the heavens, the sun and moon, the birds) one day and activities on earth (the waters, the plants) the next. The Torah now turns to the creation of human beings, who will be a combination of the heavens and the earth, the sublime and the physical (Vilna Gaon).

**Let us make man in our image** Commentators in every generation have puzzled over the plural language in this verse. The Midrash envisions God consulting with the angels, perhaps hinting at a measure of divine ambivalence. Truth and Peace oppose creating humans on the grounds that such creatures would surely be deceitful and contentious. Love and Righteousness favor their creation, for without humanity, how can there be love and righteous-

ness in the world? God sides with those favoring creation (Gen. R. 8:5).

Or perhaps God was speaking to the animals: Together let us fashion a unique creature in our image (yours and Mine), a creature like an animal in some ways—needing to eat, to sleep, to mate—and like God in some ways—capable of compassion, creativity, morality, and self-consciousness. Let the divine qualities manifest themselves in this culmination of the evolutionary process. Albo sees each animal species contributing its choicest quality to this new creature (*Ikkarim*, pt. 3, ch. 1).

**They shall rule** Animals and insects expand horizontally—to “fill” the earth. Humans grow vertically—to “master” the earth and serve as its custodians, by changing, controlling, and improving their environment (Zornberg).

that creep on earth.”<sup>27</sup> And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

<sup>29</sup>God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food.<sup>30</sup> And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And

אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשׂוּהָ וּרְדוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיָּה הַרְמִשָּׁת עַל־הָאָרֶץ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נֹתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב | זֶרַע זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ פְּרִיעַץ זֶרַע זֶרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ: <sup>30</sup>וְלִכְלֹל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלִכְלֹעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכְלֹל | וּרְמִשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־בוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

words of this verse, in contrast, declare mortals to be free agents with the God-given power to control nature.

**27. male and female** Sexual difference is not noted regarding beasts in the Creation narrative. Human sexuality is a gift of God woven into the fabric of life.

**28. God blessed them and God said to them** God addresses the man and the woman directly. The transcendent God of Creation becomes the

immanent God, the personal God who enters into communion with human beings.

**Be fertile and increase** These words are uttered as a blessing, not a command. Only when repeated in 9:7, after the depopulation of the earth by the Flood, are they a command.

**30. for food** God now makes provision for sustaining human and animal life. It is a reminder that the man and the woman are entirely dependent on God's benevolence.

27. Every human has irreducible worth and dignity, because every human is fashioned in the image of God. The Second Commandment (Exod. 20) forbids fashioning an image of God. We do not need one because every person represents the divine. “A human king strikes coins in his image, and every one of them is identical. God creates every person with the die of the first human being [i.e., in the divine image], and each one is unique” (BT Sanh. 38a).

**male and female** The Midrash (Gen. R. 8:1) alludes to a legend, also found in Plato's *Symposium* and in other ancient traditions, that the first human being was actually a pair of twins attached to each other, one male and one fe-

male. God divided them and commanded them to reunite, to find the other person who will make each of them complete again, in order to reproduce and attain wholeness. (The Midrash takes the words “and God blessed them” to mean “God presided over their wedding ceremony” [Gen. R. 8:13].) This would imply that Eve was not fashioned out of Adam's rib as an afterthought but was created at the same time as Adam, as half of the first human creature. (The word translated “rib,” *tzela*, in 2:21-2, means “side” in Exod. 26:20 and elsewhere in biblical Hebrew.)

29. According to the Torah, humans were meant to be vegetarians. Eating meat would be

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**1:28 Be fertile and increase** According to the Mishnah, each married couple must have at least one son and one daughter to fulfill this commandment (M Yev. 6:6). However, Jewish law and historical practice urge Jews to have as many children as possible (BT Yev. 62b). Couples who cannot have children through their own sexual intercourse are, of course, exempt from this commandment. They may pursue fertility treatments, but they are not obligated to do so.

it was so. <sup>31</sup>And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

אֶת־כָּל־יִרְקַע עֵשֶׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ וַיְהִי־כֵן׃  
 וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה  
 וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם  
 הַשְּׁשִׁי׃ פ

**2** The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. <sup>2</sup>On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work

וַיִּכְלֹ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָם׃  
 וַיִּכְלֹ אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ  
 אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל־

**31. very good** A judgment on the totality of Creation, now completed.

**the sixth day** The definite article in Hebrew, used here and with the seventh day, points to the special character of these days within the scheme of Creation.

#### THE SEVENTH DAY (2:1–3)

The account of Creation opened with a statement about God; it now closes with a statement about God. The seventh day is the LORD's day, through which all the creativity of the preceding days achieves fulfillment.

**1. all their array** The word translated as

“array” (*tzava*) usually applies only to heaven. In this phrase, it is extended to apply to the earth as well.

**2. On the seventh day** That is, Creation was completed with the act of cessation from work.

**God finished** See Exod. 40:33, which suggests a parallel between the completion of the tabernacle in the wilderness and the completion of the creation of the world.

**He ceased** This is the primary meaning of the Hebrew verb שבת. The idea of resting is secondary. The use of the verb anticipates the later establishment of *Shabbat*.

a later concession to their willful appetites (cf. Gen. 9:3).

**31. very good** According to the Midrash, this includes the egocentric drive, the *yeitzer ha-ra*, sometimes described as the “evil impulse.” Without it, no one would build a house, establish a business, marry, or raise a family (Gen. R. 9:7). According to Meir, “very good” (*tov m’od*) even includes the inevitability of death: *tov mot*, “death is good” (Gen. R. 9:5). Knowing that our days are numbered invests our deeds and choices with greater significance. Although the death of someone we love is searingly painful, we can recognize that a world in which people die and new souls are born offers the promise of renewal and improvement more than a world in which the original people live forever.

As the chapter concludes, God surveys with satisfaction the newly fashioned world, teeming with life in all its variety, culminating in the creation of that unpredictable creature, the human being.

#### CHAPTER 2

The opening verses of chapter 2 belong thematically to chapter 1. The division of the Torah into chapters is a late development, by non-Jewish authorities. Jewish tradition divides the Torah into *parashiyot*.

**1. were finished** A talmudic passage reads, “They (that is, people) finished the heavens and the earth.” God left the world a bit incomplete so that we might become God’s partners in the work of Creation. We complete God’s work

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2:1–3 *The heaven and the earth* The Rabbis include these verses in the Friday evening *kiddush* recited over wine. In refraining from creative or constructive work on *Shabbat*, we emulate our Creator, who ceased from all the work of creation.

that He had done. <sup>3</sup>And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done. <sup>4</sup>Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created.

מְלֹאכֶתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: <sup>3</sup>וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים  
אֶת-יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ  
שָׁבַת מִכָּל-מְלֹאכֶתוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים  
שְׁנֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת: פ <sup>4</sup>אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם  
וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם\*

ו. 4. ה' זעירא לפי נוסחים מקובלים

**3. God blessed . . . declared it holy** Unlike the blessings in Gen. 1:22,28, which are specific and relate to living creatures, this blessing is undefined and pertains to time itself. God has already established sovereignty over space; here God is perceived as sovereign over time as well.

**holy** This first use of the biblical concept of holiness relates to time. This is a striking con-

trast to the view of the Babylonians, whose creation epic concludes with the erection of a temple, thereby asserting the sanctification of space.

**all the work of creation that He had done**

The Hebrew words read, literally, “all His work that God created to do.” Ibn Ezra and Radak took the final verb (*la-asot*) as connoting “[for man] to [continue to] do [thenceforth].”

## EDEN AND THE EXPULSION: THE HUMAN CONDITION (2:4–3:24)

The narrative turns from the God of Creation to the wretched condition of humankind. What disrupted the harmony between God, man, and nature? How are we to explain the harsh, hostile workings of nature, the recalcitrance of the soil to arduous human labor, and the existence of evil?

**4. Such is . . . when they were created** This first half of the verse completes the first story of Creation. Note in this verse the inversion of the phrases “heaven and earth” (*ha-shamayim v'ha-aretz*) and “earth and heaven” (*eretz v'shamayim*). It signals a shift in focus between the two creation stories.

of imposing order on chaos when we process wheat into bread, find cures for disease, sustain the poor, strengthen families. “One who recites these verses (1–3) on Friday night (*leil Shabbat*), acknowledging God as the Creator, helps God complete the work of Creation” (BT Shab. 119b).

**3.** The true conclusion of the work of Creation was not the fashioning of the first human, but the institution of *Shabbat*, imposing on the world a rhythm of work and leisure, changing and leaving alone. There could not have been *Shabbat* before there were human beings, for animals are controlled by time; but humans have the ability to order time, to impose their purposes on time, to choose to set days aside for special purposes, to celebrate holy days and anniversaries.

“To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols

of technical civilization, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men—is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for human progress than the Sabbath?” (A. J. Heschel).

In verse 3, God is described as “blessing” *Shabbat*. “To bless,” or to sanctify, is to set something apart as special. It means partaking of a higher level of spiritual worth. This concept could be invoked only when there were human beings in the world.

The Vilna Gaon suggests that God ceased work on the seventh day, even though the world was still somewhat incomplete, as an example to us to put aside our unfinished business on Friday afternoon and leave the world as it is on *Shabbat*.

Legend has it that God created other worlds before this one, but was not pleased with any of them. One world was based on the principle of strict justice; anyone who did wrong was punished. Every righteous person who gave in to temptation was struck down. Rejecting that world, God fashioned a world based on the

When the LORD God made earth and heaven—<sup>5</sup>when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil,<sup>6</sup> but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth—<sup>7</sup>the LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

<sup>8</sup>The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in

בְּיוֹם עָשׂוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם:  
 וְכֹל | שֵׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ<sup>5</sup>  
 וְכֹל-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמַח כִּי לֹא  
 הִמְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם  
 אֵין לַעֲבֹד אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה:<sup>6</sup> וְאֵד יַעֲלֶה מִן-  
 הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת-כָּל-פְּנֵי-הָאֲדָמָה:  
 וַיִּיצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עֹפָר  
 מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאָפָיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים  
 וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:  
 וַיִּטֵּעַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים גֶּן-בְּעֵדֵן מִקְדָּם וַיִּשֶׂם<sup>8</sup>

#### THE CREATION OF MAN (vv. 4b–7)

The second Creation story begins with the second half of verse 4.

**4. the LORD God** This combination of the unique, personal divine name *YHVH* with the general term *elohim* appears 20 times in this narrative but only once again in the Torah (in Exod. 9:30). *YHVH* signifies compassion (as well as protection and personal relationship). Its combination here with *elohim* (signifying justice) is to indicate that these are two aspects of the one God.

**5. no shrub in the field** This passage simply describes the initial, barren state of the earth after the formation of the dry land, which was briefly recorded in Gen. 1:9–10. The earth itself is still a desert, lacking rain, greenery, and humankind.

**rain** Rain is a blessing from God, not solely a natural phenomenon.

**no man to till the soil** Agriculture is regarded as the original vocation of human beings; the earth is integral to their being.

**6. a flow** The subterranean waters, whose existence is presupposed here, are moistening the arid earth. This makes it receptive to the growth of vegetation, enabling it to provide the raw material proper for the molding of the first mortal.

**7. the dust of the earth** In 1:27, nothing was said about the substance from which man was created. Here it is given as “dust,” a word that can be used synonymously with “clay.”

**formed man** The verb “formed” (*va-yitser*) is often used in the Bible to describe the activity of a potter (*yotzer*). The creation of the first human being is here portrayed with God first shaping and then animating the clay soil, an image widespread in the ancient world.

**man . . . earth** In Hebrew they are *adam* and *adamah*, a wordplay that expresses humankind’s earthly origin.

**the breath of life** The Hebrew phrase “*nishmat hayyim*” appears only in this verse. It matches the unique nature of the human body which, unlike the bodies of creatures in the animal world, is given life directly by God.

#### THE GARDEN OF EDEN (vv. 8–17)

The first home of mortals is a garden planted by God. An ancient Sumerian myth tells of an idyllic island, a “pure, clean, bright” land where all nature is at peace, where beasts of prey and tame cattle live together in tranquility. Sickness and old age are unknown on this island called Dilmun, now identified with the modern island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. The *Gilgamesh* epic likewise knows of a mythic garden of jewels. The

principles of compassion and forgiveness; God understood why some people were driven to do wrong and forgave them for it. As a result, people who saw their neighbors getting away with criminal activity did likewise. Finally, God fashioned this world based on both law and compassion, which is why Scripture (in v. 4)

uses both divine names: “*YHVH*” represents the principle of compassion and “*Elohim*” represents the principle of justice.

7. “Thus the human being is a combination of the earthly and the divine” (Rashi). After death, the body returns to the earth, its source, and the soul to God, its source.

the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed. <sup>9</sup>And from the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

<sup>10</sup>A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches. <sup>11</sup>The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where the gold is. (<sup>12</sup>The gold of that land is good; bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli.) <sup>13</sup>The name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through the whole land of Cush. <sup>14</sup>The name of the third river is Tigris,

שָׁם אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר׃ <sup>9</sup>וַיַּצְמַח  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאֲדָמָה כָּל־עֵץ נָחֵמַד  
לְמַרְאֵה וְטוֹב לְמֵאֵכֶל וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ  
הַגֵּן וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע׃

<sup>10</sup>וַנְּהַר יֵצֵא מֵעֵדֶן לְהַשְׁקוֹת אֶת־הַגֵּן  
וּמִשָּׁם יִפְרֹד וְהָיָה לְאַרְבַּעָה רְאשִׁים׃

<sup>11</sup>שֵׁם הָאֶחָד פִּישׁוֹן הוּא הַסֹּבֵב אֶת  
כָּל־אֶרֶץ הַחַוִּילָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם הַזָּהָב׃

<sup>12</sup>וְהַזָּהָב הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת טוֹב שֵׁם הַבְּדֵלָח  
וְאֶבֶן הַשֹּׁהַם׃ <sup>13</sup>וְשֵׁם־הַנְּהַר הַשֵּׁנִי גִיחוֹן

הוּא הַסֹּבֵב אֶת כָּל־אֶרֶץ כּוּשׁ׃ <sup>14</sup>וְשֵׁם  
הַנְּהַר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי חַדְקֵל הוּא הַהֵלֵךְ

Genesis account omits all mythological details, is very sparing in its account of the garden's nature and function, and places gold and jewels in a natural setting.

**8. a garden in Eden** The Hebrew word for “garden” is *gan*. The ancient Greek version of the Bible (Septuagint) translates this word as *paradeisos*, from the Old Persian *pairi-daeza*, meaning “an enclosed park.” This translation was adopted by the Latin version (Vulgate) and went from there into other European languages; witness “paradise” in English. Eden is the geographic location of the garden. The name means “luxuriance.” Because *eden* was interpreted to mean “pleasure,” the word “paradise” took on an exclusively religious connotation as the place of reward for the righteous after death.

**9. caused to grow every tree** The verse tells nothing about the garden except that it is a tree park where food, nutritious and delectable, is always at hand.

**the tree of life** We know from 3:22 that the fruit of this tree—either through a single bite or through frequent eating—could grant immortality to the eater. Man, created from perishable matter, was mortal from the outset, although the possibility of immortality lay within his grasp. The “tree of life” is not included in the prohibition of verse 17.

**the tree of knowledge of good and bad** Ibn Ezra, followed by many modern scholars, explained “knowledge of good and bad” as referring to carnal knowledge, because the first hu-

man experience after eating the forbidden fruit is the consciousness of nudity accompanied by shame. Most likely, “good and bad” is a phrase that means “everything,” implying a mature perception of reality. Thus “knowledge of good and bad” is to be understood as the capacity to make independent judgments concerning human welfare.

#### THE RIVERS OF PARADISE (vv. 10–14)

The story is unaccountably interrupted by a description of the garden's geographic setting. The reader is left wondering about the role of the two trees.

**10. A river issues from Eden** Eden was on a mountain (see Ezek. 28:14). The garden does not depend on the caprice of seasonal rainfall. Its source of life-nourishing water is a river somewhere in Eden outside the garden, which it irrigates as it passes through.

**12. Bdellium** This is mentioned again only in Num. 11:7, where it is assumed to be a well-known substance, either a precious stone or a valued aromatic resin called *bdellion* by the Greeks.

**lapis lazuli** The Hebrew word *shoham* is an oft-mentioned precious stone, now of uncertain identity.

**13. Gihon** The name of a spring in a valley in Jerusalem.

**Cush** In the Bible, Cush often refers to Nubia. Here, however, it refers to Babylonia and designates one of the many rivers found there.

the one that flows east of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

<sup>15</sup>The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it.

<sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; <sup>17</sup>but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."

**14. east of Asshur** The Hebrew word translated here as "east of" (*kidmat*) literally means "in front of," which is eastward from the vantage point of one who faces the rising sun, the standard orientation in the Bible. Asshur may be either the city of Asshur, west of the Tigris, or the larger region of Assyria, to which the city gave its name.

**Euphrates** To an Israelite, this great river needed no further description.

THE PROHIBITION (vv. 15–17)

**15. took the man** The opening line of this section repeats the contents of Gen. 2:8. It resumes

קִדְמַת אֲשׁוּר וְהַנָּהָר הַרְבִּיעִי הוּא פָּרַת: <sup>15</sup>וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגֶן-עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ: <sup>16</sup>וַיִּצַו יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל-הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ-הַגֶּן אֲכַל תֹּאכַל: <sup>17</sup>וּמִעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:

the narrative interrupted by the digression of verses 10–14.

**to till it and tend it** It is the responsibility of the man to nurture and conserve the garden, by the labor of his hands. No strenuous exertion is required of him, for nature responds readily to his efforts.

**16. you are free to eat** As in chapter 1, the assumption here is that humankind originally was vegetarian.

THE CREATION OF WOMAN (vv. 18–24)

The ancient Near East has preserved no other

**15. to till it and tend it** From the outset, God intended humans to be farmers, to work the soil. Thus they might learn that success depends both on their efforts and on the blessings of Heaven—that is, favorable weather (Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev). Presumably, God could have created a maintenance-free world but decided that it would be better for us to take responsibility for the world we live in. We tend to value something more when we have invested our own labor in it.

**16.** From this verse the Sages derived "the Noahide laws" (*mitzvot b'nei No-ah*) to explain why Adam and Cain should be held responsible for their acts. These are laws incumbent on all of humankind (literally, incumbent on all the descendants of Noah). They include the prohibitions of blasphemy, idolatry, adultery, murder, and robbery. They also enjoin the establishment of a just system of laws and courts. After the Flood, eating the limb of a living animal was

added to the list of prohibitions. Gentiles are not expected to obey all the laws of the Torah. They are required, however, to obey the Noahide laws if they are to live in a land governed by Jews.

**17. you must not eat** Why did God create the tree if eating from it was forbidden? The usual interpretation teaches that having a commandment would give the human being an opportunity to choose morality and obedience. A modern commentator (see 3:16) takes it not as a prohibition but as a warning: If you acquire a knowledge of good and evil, life will become infinitely more complicated and painful for you than it is for any other creature.

**as soon as you eat of it, you shall die** Perhaps this should be understood as, "you shall realize that you are mortal. You will have to live with the knowledge that one day you will die, a burden of awareness that no other creature bears" (Ramban).

HALAKHAH L'MA-ASEH

**2:15 to till it and to tend it** This requirement that we preserve nature even while we use it underlies classical and contemporary concern for ecology in Jewish law and thought.

18The LORD God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.”  
 19And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. 20And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. 21So the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. 22And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken

18 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא טוֹב הֵיטֵב הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לּוֹ עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: 19 וַיִּצַּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאָדָמָה כָּל־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיָּבֵא אֶל־הָאָדָם לְרִאוֹת מַה־יִּקְרָא־לוֹ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא־לוֹ הָאָדָם נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ: 20 וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת לְכָל־הַבְּהֵמָה וְלָעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכָל־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְלֹא־מָצָא עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: 21 וַיִּפֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים | תַּרְדֵּמָה עַל־הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצַּלְעָתוֹ וַיִּסְגֵּר בָּשָׂר תַּחֲתָנָה: 22 וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־

independent narrative of the creation of primordial woman. Now, with her appearance, the biblical account of Creation is complete.

**18. I will make** This declaration of intent balances that which precedes the creation of the man in 1:26. It is God who takes the initiative to provide a wife for Adam.

**a fitting helper** The Hebrew is, literally, “a helper corresponding to him.” The Hebrew word “eizer” (helper), used here to describe the intended role of the woman, is often applied to God in relation to mortals.

**19. The LORD God formed** The narrative now focuses on human mastery over the animals, whose creation is mentioned here incidentally, without any intent to indicate their place in the order of Creation.

**20. And the man gave names** Clearly, the first man is assumed to have been endowed with a level of intellect capable of differentiating between one creature and another, and with the linguistic ability to coin an appropriate name for each. By assigning to man the role of naming terrestrial creatures, God bestows human

authority and dominion over them. See Comment to 1:5.

**Adam** The vocalization *l'adam* (to Adam) rather than *la-adam* (to the man) makes the word a proper name for the first time, probably because the narrative now speaks of the man as a personality rather than an archetypal human.

**no fitting helper was found** Man, in his review of the subhuman creation during the naming process, becomes aware of his uniqueness, of his inability to feel direct kinship with the other animate beings.

**21. a deep sleep** The Hebrew word *tardemah* is used for a divinely induced heavy sleep. Here it has the function of rendering the man insensible to the pain of the surgical procedure and oblivious to God at work.

**one of his ribs** The rib here connotes a physical link and signifies the partnership and companionship of male and female.

**22. The LORD God fashioned** Literally, “built”; the only use of this verb in the Creation narratives. It echoes ancient Near Eastern poetic traditions, in which it is widely used for the action of the deity in creating humankind.

18. Until now, everything God made was seen as good. For the first time, something is seen as “not good”—human loneliness in the absence of a human association. The Hebrew for “a fitting helper” (*eizer k'negdo*) can be understood to mean “a helpmate equivalent to him.” It need not imply that the female is to

be subordinate or that her role would be only as a facilitator.

21. **took one of his ribs** Or separated one side (Rashi). See Comment to 1:27.

22. This is alluded to in one of the seven blessings of the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony (*sheva b'rakhot*).



from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup>Then the man said,

“This one at last  
Is bone of my bones  
And flesh of my flesh.  
This one shall be called Woman,  
For from man was she taken.”

<sup>24</sup>Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

<sup>25</sup>The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame. <sup>1</sup>Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the LORD God had made. He

הִצְלַע אֲשֶׁר-לָקַח מִן-הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה  
וַיְבִאָהָ אֶל-הָאָדָם: <sup>23</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם  
זֹאת הַפֶּעַם  
עֵצָם מֵעֲצָמֵי  
וּבִשָּׂר מִבִּשְׂרִי  
לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה  
כִּי מֵאִישׁ לָקַחְהָ זֹאת: <sup>24</sup>  
עַל-כֵּן יַעֲזֹב אִישׁ אֶת-אָבִיו וְאֶת-אִמּוֹ  
וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהֵיוּ לְבֶשֶׁר אֶחָד:

<sup>25</sup> וַיְהִיו שְׁנֵיהֶם עֲרוּמִים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ  
וְלֹא יִתְבַּשְׁשׁוּ: <sup>1</sup> וְהַנָּחַשׁ הָיָה עָרוּם  
מִכָּל הַחַיִּית הָאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה

**He brought her to the man** This verse conveys the idea that God established the institution of marriage.

**23. Then the man said** Man's first recorded speech is a cry of elation at seeing the woman.

**This one at last** And not any of the animals. **shall be called Woman** The power of naming implies authority, and the text here reflects the social reality of the ancient Near East. Yet the man gives her not a personal name, but a generic name (*ishah*), one that sounds like his own (*ish*), although derived from a different root. This implies that he acknowledges woman to be his equal.

**24. Hence** The Hebrew term translated “hence” (*al ken*) is not part of the narration, but introduces an observation on the part of the narrator, who attributes the institution of marriage to this specific event in the past.

**25. they felt no shame** The Hebrew word

for “shame” here expresses mutuality; that is, “they felt no shame for each other.”

#### THE TRANSGRESSION (3:1–7)

God's Creation was termed “very good”; the life of man and woman in the Garden of Eden has been described as idyllic. How, then, did evil come into existence?

1. **the serpent** A creature of enduring mystery. Throughout the ancient world, it was endowed with divine or semidivine qualities, venerated (as a symbol of fertility, immortality, health, occult wisdom, and chaotic evil), and often worshiped. The serpent in this narrative, however, is reduced to one of the creatures “that the LORD God had made.” It possesses no occult powers. Its role is to place before the woman the enticing nature of evil and to fan her desire for it.

**the shrewdest** The serpent's cunning reveals itself in the way it frames the question, in its

**23. This one shall be called Woman** The first female has two names, symbolizing her double function in life. She is *Ishah*, “woman,” the complement/companion of *Ish*, “man.” And she is *Eve*, “mother,” in her procreative role (*Arama*).

**24. they became one flesh** When two animals mate, it is simply a matter of biology, perpetuation of the species. When a man and a

woman join in love, they are seeking more than reproduction. They are seeking wholeness, striving to recapture that sense of total union with another person that we are told existed at the very beginning.

**25. they felt no shame** They were capable of sexual activity (“be fertile and increase,” 1:28) but had not come to associate their sexual organs with misuse, lust, or shame.

said to the woman, “Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?”<sup>2</sup> The woman replied to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden.<sup>3</sup> It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: ‘You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.’”<sup>4</sup> And the serpent said to

אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אַף כִּי־אָמַר  
אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל עֵץ הַגָּן:  
וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶל־הַנָּחַשׁ מִפְּרֵי עֵץ־  
הַגָּן נֹאכָל: <sup>3</sup> וּמִפְּרֵי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ־הַגָּן  
אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְעוּ  
בּוֹ פֶן־תָּמוּתוּ: <sup>4</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחַשׁ אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה

knowledge of the divine prohibition, and in its claim to be able to probe God’s mind and intent. Note the link of *arum* (shrewd) here, with *arumim* (naked) in 2:25.

**to the woman** She, rather than her husband, is approached because she has not received the prohibition directly from God. She is, therefore, the more vulnerable of the two, the more susceptible to the serpent’s manipulation.

**say** The serpent subtly softens the severity of the prohibition by using this word in place of the original “command.” Then it deliberately

misquotes God so that the woman cannot give a one-word reply but is drawn into a conversation that forces her to focus on the forbidden tree that God had not mentioned.

**3. or touch it** In correcting the serpent, she either unconsciously exaggerates the severity of the divine prohibition or is quoting what her husband told her.

**4. You are not going to die** By emphatically contradicting the very words God used in 2:17, the serpent allays her fears.

CHAPTER 3

The account of Adam and Eve disobeying God’s command in the Garden of Eden is a strange and elusive story. If they gained a knowledge of good and evil by eating the forbidden fruit, does that mean that they did not know good from evil before that? If so, how could they be held accountable for doing wrong? Moreover, we note that neither here nor anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible is their act characterized as a sin, let alone the Original Sin. There is no indication that this represents a permanent rupture of the divine–human relationship. God expels Adam and Eve from Eden, which can be seen as a punishment. But it can also be seen as a painful but necessary “graduation” from the innocence of childhood to the problem-laden world of living as morally responsible adults. And because God fashions clothing for them to protect them against the rigors of the world outside the Garden, it seems clear that God is not unalterably angry at our first ancestors.

Hirsch sees the story as representing the eternal encounter between animal nature (driven by instinct and physical attractiveness) and human nature (capable of saying no to temptation).

1. Who is the serpent and what is its role in

the story? Many commentators see it as jealous of the special gifts and status of human beings and determined to cause a breach between them and God. Others see it as the embodiment of temptation, particularly sexual temptation. The serpent may be a phallic image, and the tree of knowledge may refer to the sexual awareness that accompanies coming of age. Still others see the serpent as the spirit of rebelliousness that arrives when a person moves from the innocence of childhood to adolescence, resenting the imposition of rules. If the serpent represents something within the human soul rather than outside of it, that would explain why it alone of all the animals has the power of speech. Some commentators see the serpent as God’s agent: God wants Adam and Eve to grow up and become fully human, acquiring a knowledge of good and evil, rather than remaining at the level of obedient animals.

**3. nor touch it** God, however, did not prohibit touching the tree (cf. 2:17). This is an example of the dangerous tendency of religion to multiply prohibitions to safeguard the essence of the law. When the prohibitions become too onerous, people may disregard them and come to disregard the basic intent of the law itself. “Make a fence too high and it may fall and destroy what it was meant to protect” (Gen. R. 19:3).

the woman, "You are not going to die, <sup>5</sup>but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." <sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

<sup>8</sup>They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time

לֹא־מוֹת תָּמוּתוּן: <sup>5</sup> כִּי יֵדַע אֱלֹהִים בְּיָוִם אֲכַלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ וְנִפְקְחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם וְהִייתֶם כְּאֱלֹהִים יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע: <sup>6</sup> וַתִּרְאֵהָ אִשָּׁה בְּיָטוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֵאֲכָל וְכִי תֵאֹדֶה־הוּא לְעֵינַיִם וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהִשְׁפִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיָו וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם־לְאִישָׁה עִמָּהּ וַיֹּאכְלוּ: <sup>7</sup> וַתִּפְקְחֶנָּה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עִרְמָם הֵם וַיִּתְפָּרוּ עֲלֵהּ תְאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגָרֹת: <sup>8</sup> וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת־קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִתְּהֵלֵךְ בְּגֶן לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הַגֵּן:

**5. but God knows** The serpent ascribes self-serving motives to God in its attempt to undermine the Creator's credibility.

**your eyes will be opened** Finally, the serpent appeals to an attractive standard of common sense: eating of the tree's fruit elevates one to a higher level of existence and endows one with unique mental powers and the capacity for reflection, which allows for the making of decisions independently of God.

**like divine beings** The Hebrew word understood here as "divine beings" (*elohim*) is a general term referring to supernatural beings and is often used for angels.

**who know good and bad** See Comment to 2:9. The serpent is saying that the woman and the man will have the capacity to make independent judgments regarding their own welfare, with no concern for the word of God. Defiance of God's law is presented as the necessary precondition for human freedom.

**6. good for eating** The beguiling word of the serpent triumphs over the constraining word of God.

**as a source of wisdom** Better: "beautiful in form."

**and he ate** The woman does not say a word but simply hands her husband the fruit, which he accepts and eats, without resistance or hesitation. Contrary to the popular assumption that it was an apple, the Sages state that the fruit probably was a date or a fig.

**7. the eyes . . . were opened** Just as the serpent had predicted! Ironically, however, the new insight they gain is only the consciousness of their nakedness, and shame is the consequence.

**fig leaves** The fig tree has unusually large and strong leaves.

**loincloths** Their innocence is gone. In a sense, this action has already taken them outside Eden, for the act of putting on clothing is a clear mark of civilization.

#### THE INTERROGATION (vv. 8–13)

The scene between the serpent and the woman had taken place as though God were not nearby. Now Adam and Eve are suddenly aware of the divine presence.

**6. good for eating and a delight to the eyes** This is the classic argument of the evil impulse: "If it is so enjoyable, how can it be wrong?"

**7. the eyes of both of them** Only after eating the forbidden fruit did they begin to think of themselves as separate individuals with separate needs and interests (Simḥah Bunem).

**they perceived that they were naked** There was no one else in the world to see them in their

nakedness. Perhaps it was not physical nakedness but the sense of being subject to judgment and evaluation that caused them to feel self-conscious. (The Midrash [Gen. R. 19:6] takes the words to mean "naked of mitzvot," conscious of their lack of moral uprightness.) If they were as innocent as children before, they are now as self-conscious as adolescents, new to the world of knowing good and bad.

of day; and the man and his wife hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.<sup>9</sup> The LORD God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”<sup>10</sup> He replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”<sup>11</sup> Then He asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?”<sup>12</sup> The man said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”<sup>13</sup> And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done!” The woman replied, “The serpent duped me, and I ate.”<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you did this,  
More cursed shall you be  
Than all cattle  
And all the wild beasts:

9 וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶל־הָאָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר  
לוֹ אַיֶּכָּה: 10 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת־קִלְכֶּךָ שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּגִן  
וְאִירָא כִּי־עִירָם אָנֹכִי וְאֶחָבָא: 11 וַיֹּאמֶר  
מִי הִגִּיד לְךָ כִּי עִירָם אָתָּה הַמֶּן־הָעֵץ  
אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לִבְלֹתִי אֶכְל־מִמֶּנּוּ אֶכְלָתָ:  
12 וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה  
עִמָּדִי הִוא נָתַנְהָלִי מִן־הָעֵץ וְאֶכְלָ:  
13 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לָאִשָּׁה מַה־זָּאת  
עָשִׂית וְהִיא אָמְרָה הָאִשָּׁה הִנְחֹשׁ הַשֵּׂאֲנִי  
וְאֶכְלָ: 14 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶל־  
הַנְּחֹשׁ

כִּי עָשִׂית זֹאת  
אֲרוּר אַתָּה  
מִכָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה  
וּמִכָּל־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה

**8. hid from the LORD** The attempt to evade God is a clear sign of guilt.

**9. God called out to the man** Because only he had heard the prohibition directly from God.

**Where are you?** The question, a formal civility, is used to begin a conversation.

**10. I heard the sound of You** There is a hint of irony in the man’s reply, for the Hebrew words here rendered “I heard the sound of You” can also be translated “I obeyed You,” the opposite of the truth.

**I was afraid because I was naked** This is another evasion of the truth. The statement reflects the sense of all Semites that it was improper to appear naked in public.

**11. that you were naked** Self-awareness re-

sults from the radical change in the human condition that has taken place.

**forbidden** Literally, “commanded not to,” in contrast to the milder verb used by the serpent in verses 1 and 3.

**12. The man said** He stands self-condemned; he obeyed his wife and not God.

THE PUNISHMENT (vv. 14–19)

The man and the woman have taken the right to make their own decisions, choosing to be independent of God and to defy God’s norms. Having lost their innocence, they must assume full responsibility for their actions. The three transgressors are now punished, in reverse order of their original appearance on the scene.

9. God asks Adam, “Where are you?” so that Adam might ask himself, “Where am I in relation to God?” God’s question means, “Have you changed, have you regretted what you did?”

12. Uncomfortable with their guilt and uncertain as to what will happen if they accept responsibility for what they did, Adam and Eve seek to blame everyone but themselves for what happened. Adam blames Eve and even blames God for giving him Eve; Eve blames the

serpent. If Eve did wrong by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam does wrong by refusing to take responsibility for his act of eating. Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, blames Eve for her disobedience but perversely admires Adam for his loyalty to Eve, not wanting to survive while she perishes. A modern reader can as easily see Eve as the heroine of the story, bravely crossing the boundary from animal to human and willingly sharing her newfound wisdom with her mate.

On your belly shall you crawl  
 And dirt shall you eat  
 All the days of your life.  
<sup>15</sup>I will put enmity  
 Between you and the woman,  
 And between your offspring and hers;  
 They shall strike at your head,  
 And you shall strike at their heel.”  
<sup>16</sup>And to the woman He said,  
 “I will make most severe  
 Your pangs in childbearing;  
 In pain shall you bear children.  
 Yet your urge shall be for your husband,  
 And he shall rule over you.”

עַל־בְּטֶנְךָ תֵּלֵךְ  
 וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל  
 כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:  
<sup>15</sup>וְאֵיבָה אֲשִׁית  
 בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה  
 וּבֵין זַרְעֶךָ וּבֵין זַרְעָהּ  
 הוּא יִשׁוּפֶךָ רֹאשׁ  
 וְאַתָּה תִּשׁוּפְנֹנָה עָקֵב: ס  
<sup>16</sup>אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר  
 הַרְבָּה אֲרֹבָה  
 עֲצָבוֹנְךָ וְהָרְנוֹךָ  
 בְּעֶצֶב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים  
 וְאֶל־אִישׁךָ תִּשְׁוָקֶתְךָ  
 וְהוּא יִמְשָׁל־בְּךָ: ס

**14. On your belly** This reflects a popular notion, found in the art of the ancient Near East, that the serpent once walked erect. Having flagrantly exalted itself in a challenge to God, it is now doomed to a posture of humiliation.

**dirt shall you eat** The transgression involved eating and so does the punishment. The flicking tongue of a slithering serpent appears to be licking the dust.

**15. enmity** The curse seeks to explain the natural revulsion humans now feel toward the serpent. Clearly, when it entered into conversation with the woman, it was not so regarded; indeed, it posed as her friend and she responded with ease.

**the woman** She is singled out because she

conducted the dialogue with it. But here she represents the entire human race, as the reference to her “offspring” shows.

**16. Your pangs in childbearing** Intense pain in childbearing is unique to the human species.

**your urge** Rashi understood this and the next clause to reflect that the satisfaction of female sexuality traditionally depends on the husband’s initiative. Ramban understood “your urge” to mean that, discomfort and pain of childbearing notwithstanding, the woman still longs for the sexual act that brings about this condition.

**he shall rule over you** From the description of woman in 2:18,23, the ideal situation was equality of the sexes. Male dominance is viewed

**16.** We can see God’s pronouncements to Adam and Eve as punishments for disobeying the divine command. Or we can see them instead as the consequences of acquiring a knowledge of good and evil, which makes a human life infinitely more complicated than the life of a beast. Food and mating are relatively straightforward for animals, but work and sexuality can be terribly painful—and profoundly gratifying—for humans.

**in pain shall you bear children** The Talmud suggests that the verse refers to both the physical pain of childbirth and the emotional pain of trying to raise children (BT Er. 100a). The

Hebrew word *etzev* is not the usual biblical word for “pain.” It recurs in 6:6, referring to God’s regret at the way humanity turned out in the days of Noah. Could the recurrence of the word imply that God, contemplating how human beings sometimes turn out, can sympathize with the pain Eve and her descendants will feel when they cannot be assured that their children will grow up as they hoped?

**your urge shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you** Nevertheless, Exod. 21:10 indicates that a husband may not withhold his wife’s conjugal rights. This requirement is amplified by the Mishnah (Ket. 5:6).

<sup>17</sup>To Adam He said, "Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,'

Cursed be the ground because of you;

By toil shall you eat of it

All the days of your life:

<sup>18</sup>Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.

But your food shall be the grasses of the field;

<sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your brow

Shall you get bread to eat,

Until you return to the ground—

For from it you were taken.

For dust you are,

And to dust you shall return."

<sup>20</sup>The man named his wife Eve, because she

וּלְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי־שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ  
וַתֹּאכַל מִן־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא  
תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ

אֲרוּרָה הָאֲדָמָה בְּעִבּוּרְךָ

בְּעִצְבוֹן תֹּאכַלְנָהּ

כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:

<sup>18</sup> וְקוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר תִּצְמִיחַ לָךְ

וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה:

<sup>19</sup> בְּזַעַת אִפְיֶךָ

תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם

עַד שׁוּבְךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה

כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ

כִּי־עָפַר אֶתָּה

וְאֶל־עָפָר תִּשׁוּב:

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי

as a deterioration in the human condition, resulting from the defiance of God's will.

**17. To Adam He said** Adam bears the greatest share of the blame, for he received the prohibition directly from God.

**Cursed be the ground** The matter from which the man sprang is turned against him. His transgression disturbs his harmony with nature. Human immorality corrupts moral ecology.

**By toil** The word translated as "toil" (*itzavon*) is also used in verse 16 to describe the childbearing pain of the woman. Backbreaking physical labor is the male equivalent of the labor of giving birth. Work is not the curse; work was decreed for man even in Eden (2:15). The curse is the new uncooperative nature of the soil, so that henceforth the wresting of crops from it demands ceaseless toil.

**All the days of your life** This same phrase is used of the serpent in verse 14. Man and beast were created mortal from the beginning. The phrase is absent from verse 16 because childbearing does not occur throughout a woman's life.

**18. Thorns and thistles** In the face of hu-

mankind's need to subsist on the grasses of the field, weeds rob cultivated plants of light and water, drain the soil of its nutrients, and require vast effort to control.

**19. By the sweat of your brow** The man and the woman had attempted to raise themselves to the level of God. All they achieved was condemnation to a ceaseless struggle for subsistence, with the awareness of life's fragility forever hanging over them.

#### A MEASURE OF RECONCILIATION

(vv. 20–21)

**20. The man named his wife** In an act that reflects a social ideal based on male domination, the man gives the woman a personal name that expresses her essential nature and destiny.

**Eve** The word *havvah* could mean "living thing" or "propagator of life." It also has been derived in rabbinic sources and by modern scholars from the Aramaic and Arabic word for "snake."

**mother of all the living** A similar phrase is used to describe the mother goddess in ancient

**19.** Originally, God decreed that Adam would eat plants (Gen. 3:18). Adam pleaded, "Having acquired a knowledge of good and evil, shall I eat grass like a donkey?" God relents.

"You will eat bread," that is, you will use your unique human attributes to turn plants into bread, adapting the natural world to your needs as no other creature can (BT Pes. 118a).

was the mother of all the living. <sup>21</sup>And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

<sup>22</sup>And the LORD God said, "Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!" <sup>23</sup>So the LORD God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup>He drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Near Eastern mythology. Here the image has been demythologized. It simply expresses the biblical concepts of one human race and of woman's primary role—motherhood.

**21. The LORD God made** Because their nakedness causes them shame, God provides them with clothing, thereby displaying concern for their welfare and restoring their dignity. Thus, despite their transgression, Adam and Eve are not totally alienated from God.

**garments** The Hebrew word *kutonet* refers to a long- or short-sleeved shirt that is made of linen or wool and reaches down to the knees or the ankles.

**of skins** This assumes that humankind's earliest clothing was made of animal skins.

#### THE EXPULSION FROM EDEN (vv. 22–24)

The transgression of the man and the woman distanced them spiritually from Eden. God's punishment now separates them physically from its environs. By exceeding the limits of creaturehood, humankind has altered the perspective of

הוא היתה אם כל־חי: <sup>21</sup>ויעש יהוה אלהים לאדם ולאשתו בתנות עור וילבשם: פ

רביעי <sup>22</sup>ויאמר יהוה אלהים הן האדם היה באחד ממנו לדעת טוב ורע ועתה פן ישלח ידו ולקח גם מעץ החיים ואכל וחי לעלם: <sup>23</sup>וישלחהו יהוה אלהים מגן־עדן לעבד את־האדמה אשר לקח משם: <sup>24</sup>ויגרש את־האדם וישכן מקדם לגן־עדן את־הכרבים ואת להט החרב המתהפכת לשמור את־דרך עץ החיים: ס

its existence. It will live henceforth with full awareness of its mortality.

**22. the tree of life** See Comment to 2:9.

**23. from which he was taken** This refers back to 2:7–8. Man, created from earth outside of Eden, is now returned to his place of origin.

**24. east of the garden** The entrance was considered to be on the east, facing the rising sun. Thus Adam and Eve could walk back into the garden anytime they desired unless something was done to keep them from doing so. See Comment to 2:8.

**the cherubim** The Hebrew word *k'ruvim* is a cognate of the Akkadian word *kuribu*, referring to guardian demons. They are described in detail in the first chapter of Ezekiel, as composite beings with lion's bodies, eagle's wings, and human heads.

**and the fiery ever-turning sword** This is not held by the cherubim, but is a separate guardian blade. Because it too carries the definite article, it must have been an object well known to the Israelite imagination.

**21.** God set an example here for all human beings. Just as God clothed Adam and Eve, so must we look after the needy among us (BT Sot. 31a).

**22. the man has become like one of us** By gaining the capacity for moral awareness, the human being has become one, unique, on earth, as God is one, unique, in heaven (Rashi).

It has been suggested that the tree of life represents the force of instinct, whereas the tree of knowledge of good and evil represents the force

of conscience. Once our ancestors acquired a conscience, they could no longer eat of the tree of life, that is, live instinctively, doing whatever felt good to them. People ever since have sought to re-enter the Garden of Eden, to return to the days of childhood before they knew that certain things were wrong; but the way is barred. Other commentators see the wish to return to Eden as a yearning for a world where harmony will once again reign between humans and nature, between humans and ani-

**4** Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gained a male child with the help of the LORD.”<sup>2</sup> She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil.<sup>3</sup> In the course of time, Cain brought an

**ד** וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת-חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתְּהַרֵּר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת-קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת-יְהוָה: <sup>2</sup> וַתֵּבֶרֶת אֶת-אָחִיו אֶת-הָבֶל וַיְהִי-הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה: <sup>3</sup> וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי

REALITY OUTSIDE EDEN (4:1–26)

The narrative now turns to the fortunes of humankind in the harsh world outside Eden. The focus of the narrative is not history but the human condition, the place of the irrational in human conduct, and the reality of death.

CAIN AND ABEL (vv. 1–16)

**1. the man knew** The Hebrew stem translated here as “knew” (יָדַע) encompasses a range of meanings: involvement, interaction, loyalty, and obligation. It also can be used of the most intimate and hallowed relationships between husband and wife and between humans and God. Here the Hebrew may be understood as meaning “the man had known,” that is, Adam and Eve had been sexually active inside the garden.

**I have gained** The stem translated here as “gained” (קָנָה) means “to produce” in Hebrew, Ugaritic, and Phoenician.

**a male child** The Hebrew translated as “a male child” (*ish*) means “man.” Nowhere else does the word *ish* refer to a newborn babe. Eve says, in effect: “I, woman (*ishah*), was produced from man (*ish*); now I, woman, have in turn produced a man.”

**the LORD** For the first time, the most sacred divine name *YHVH*, the personal name of God, is uttered by a human being, a woman.

**2. his brother** The absence of the formula “she conceived and bore” (as in Gen. 4:1) led to the tradition that Cain and Abel were twins.

**Abel** No explanation for this choice of name is given. The Hebrew for Abel (*hevel*) means “breath, nothingness.”

**keeper of sheep . . . tiller of the soil** Cain, the first-born, follows his father’s occupation, agriculture, whereas Abel branches out to stock breeding. The two parts of the economy supplement each other. In the biblical view, human-

mals, a world without blame or quarrel, without sickness, and without pain and death.

CHAPTER 4

**1.** Deprived of eternal life, Adam and Eve gain vicarious immortality by having children. The Vilna Gaon saw this as a gesture of grace on God’s part. Rather than have Adam and Eve live forever with the knowledge of what they had done wrong, God arranged for them to give way to a new generation born in innocence.

**with the help of the LORD** Just as God is a presence in every marriage, God is a presence in the birth of every child (Mid. Tad.). Eve’s gratitude to God is a corrective to the danger, implicit in her first words, of thinking that she “owns” her child.

Or we can understand Eve’s words to mean: “I have brought a new life into being, just as God did.”

**2.** Though Abel is the younger, the Torah

describes him as a shepherd and his older brother as a farmer. Anthropologists believe that ancient humans were breeders of animals first and only later became tillers of the soil, claiming a portion of earth as permanently theirs. (The Bible regularly portrays younger siblings as more virtuous and has a special fondness for shepherds, including Abraham, Moses, and David.)

It is possible that Cain became a farmer to make up to his parents for the garden, the agricultural wonderland they had lost, as children often strive to fulfill or replace the unfulfilled or lost dreams of their parents.

**3ff.** Cain and Abel each bring an offering to God. It would seem that the urge to thank God for our blessings and to return to God a small portion of that with which God has blessed us is innate and requires no religious code or formal clergy to compel us (Hirsch). God’s favoring Abel seems arbitrary, with no reason given.



offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil; <sup>4</sup>and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The LORD paid heed to Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup>but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD said to Cain,

“Why are you distressed,  
And why is your face fallen?”

<sup>7</sup>Surely, if you do right,  
There is uplift.

But if you do not do right  
Sin couches at the door;

הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה: <sup>4</sup>וְהָבֵל הֵבִיא  
גַם־הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֻלְבֵּהֶן\* וַיִּשַׁע  
יְהוָה אֶל־הָבֵל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ: <sup>5</sup>וְאֶל־קַיִן  
וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד  
וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו: <sup>6</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־קַיִן  
לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ  
וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָּנֶיךָ:  
<sup>7</sup>הֲלוֹא אִם־תֵּיטִיב  
שְׂאֵת  
וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב  
לַפֶּתַח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ

ו. 4. ב רפה

kind was vegetarian until after the Flood. Thus the function of animal husbandry at this time was to supply milk, hides, and wool.

**3. from the fruit of the soil** A terse account, with no further explanation or detail, an indication perhaps of a grudging heart behind the offering.

**the choicest of the firstlings** Abel's offering, fully described, appears to have been brought with a full heart and mind.

**4. paid heed** Ancient and medieval com-

mentators imagined fire descending from heaven to consume Abel's offering, leaving Cain's untouched.

**5. his face fell** The Hebrew describes sadness and depression. The same image appears in other ancient Near Eastern texts.

**7. if you do right** Humankind is endowed with moral autonomy, with freedom of choice. We can subdue our anger and even our sense of unfairness by an act of will, or we can be controlled by them.

The Sages, however, search the text for clues. Some commentators fasten on the Torah's mentioning that Abel brought "the choicest of the firstlings," whereas Cain merely brought "an offering . . . from the fruit of the soil," not necessarily the best. The words translated as "for his part" (*gam hu*) can be understood literally as "he too," implying that Abel brought "himself" to God along with his offering (*S'fat Emet*). The words for "in the course of time" (*mi-ketz yamim*), literally "at the end of [a certain number of] days," are taken by Simḥah Bunem to suggest that Cain brought an offering only because he was afraid that he was dying, that he was approaching the end of his life and was bargaining with God for more time.

**6-7.** God seeks to comfort Cain in an important but enigmatic utterance, over the meaning of which scholars differ. Shneur Zalman of Lyady understands the first half to mean "if you have lived an upright life, you will be able to bear any misfortune or undeserved affliction." *Midrash Psalms* (119) understands

"sin couches at the door" to mean "if you take yourself to the House of Study you will be safe, for sin has no power to enter there." Another *midrash* sees the impulse to sin as waiting outside one's door, waiting to be invited in. Once admitted, it makes itself master of the house (Gen. R. 22:6). The primary punishment for sin is that it makes another sin more likely. We acquire the habit of behaving in a certain way. John Steinbeck, in his novel *East of Eden* based on the story of Cain and Abel, describes philosophers debating the various translations of *timshol*. Is it a command, "You are to master it"? Is it a promise, "You will master it"? Or does it tell us, as the translation here would have it, that our fate is in our own hands, "You can be its master"?

Because the Torah does not quote any conversation between Cain and Abel preceding Cain's murder of his brother, the Sages seek to fill the vacuum. They imagine Cain and Abel arguing over which of them would marry Eve after Adam's death or over which half of the

Its urge is toward you,  
Yet you can be its master.”

<sup>8</sup>Cain said to his brother Abel . . . and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. <sup>9</sup>The LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” <sup>10</sup>Then He said, “What have you done? Hark, your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground! <sup>11</sup>Therefore, you shall be more cursed

וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשׁוּקָתוֹ  
וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ:

וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הָבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בַּהֲיוֹתָם  
בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל-הָבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ:  
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-קַיִן אַי הָבֶל אָחִיךָ  
וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי:  
וַיֹּאמֶר מַה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ  
צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן-הָאֲדָמָה: <sup>11</sup>וְעַתָּה אָרְוֶר

**8. Cain said to his brother Abel** The Hebrew does not tell us what was said. The ancient Greek translation (Septuagint) adds here: “Come, let us go into the field.”

**in the field** The Hebrew word *sadeh* refers to the open, uninhabited countryside, often the scene of crime.

**killed him** Cain’s depression gives way to an act of murder. The first recorded death is not from natural causes but by human hands.

**9. the LORD** God immediately intervenes.

**Where** Cain either has fled the scene of his crime or buried his brother immediately. As in 3:9, the question is a means of opening the conversation.

**I do not know** Cain defiantly lies, expressing no remorse.

**Am I my brother’s keeper?** “Brother” is mentioned seven times in this chapter, to emphasize the relationship of Cain and Abel and to teach that man is indeed his brother’s keeper and that all homicide is fratricide.

**10. What have you done** Not a question, but a cry of horror.

**Hark** The Hebrew translated as “hark” (*kol*), a noun in the singular meaning “voice,” is here used as an exclamation. It cannot be the subject of the following plural verb (*tzo-akim*).

**cries out** The Hebrew stem צעק connotes a plea for help or redress on the part of the victim of great injustice.

**11. more cursed than the ground** Better: “cursed from the ground.” Cain, tiller of the soil, stained the earth with his brother’s blood. It

world each of them would inherit or over the question of in whose territory the future Temple would be built (Gen. R. 22:7). Ever since, sexual rivalry, economic conflict, and religious quarrels have been the source of violence among human beings.

**9.** The Vilna Gaon faults Cain for calling Abel “brother” and then not treating him like a brother, prompting God to challenge Cain: “Where is your brother Abel?” Where is the brotherly affection you claimed to have for him?

For Judaism, the answer to Cain’s question “Am I my brother’s keeper?” is an unequivocal yes! Survivors of the *Sho-ah* painfully remember not only the cruelty of the Nazis but the cold indifference of their neighbors who looked on and did nothing; or they recall the exceptional courage of the righteous gentiles who sought to help them.

**10. your brother’s blood** The Hebrew word for “blood” here is plural, the form that the word

usually takes when it appears in contexts of violence. Cain killed not only Abel; he deprived all of Abel’s potential descendants of their lives (BT Sanh. 37a). We might add further that, when a person is murdered, the murderer kills something in the survivors’ souls as well. Their lives will never be as they were before. In the same way, when we save or sustain one life, we sustain all the human beings who will be descendants of that person.

In a bold interpretation, the Midrash takes God’s words—“your brother’s blood cries out to Me”—to mean “your brother’s blood cries out ‘against’ Me, accusing Me of letting this injustice happen!” (Gen. R. 22:9). However, it was Cain, not God, who chose to lash out and cause this tragedy. In the same way, the challenge of the *Sho-ah* is not, “Where was God? How could God have let this happen?” The challenge is, “Where was Man? How could people have been so cruel to other human beings?”

than the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup>If you till the soil, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth."

<sup>13</sup>Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear!" <sup>14</sup>Since You have banished me this day from the soil, and I must avoid Your presence and become a restless wanderer on earth—anyone who meets me may kill me!" <sup>15</sup>The LORD said to him, "I promise, if anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest anyone who met him should kill him. <sup>16</sup>Cain left the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

אָתָּה מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת־פִּיהָ  
לְקַחַת אֶת־דַּמִּי אַחִיק מִיָּדְךָ: <sup>12</sup> כִּי תַעֲבֹד  
אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה לְאֶתֶסֶף תִּת־כֹּחָהּ לְךָ נֶעַ  
וְנָד תִּהְיֶה בְּאֶרֶץ:

<sup>13</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל־יְהוָה גָּדוֹל עֲוֹנִי מִנְשָׂא:  
<sup>14</sup> הֵן גֵּרְשֶׁת אֹתִי הַיּוֹם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה  
וּמִפְּנֵיךָ אֶסְתָּר וְהִלִּיתִי נֶעַ וְנָד בְּאֶרֶץ וְהָיָה  
כָּל־מֹצְאֵי יְהִרְגֵנִי: <sup>15</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יְהוָה לִכְן  
כָּל־הִרְגָה קַיִן שִׁבְעָתַיִם יִקָּם וַיִּשָּׂם יְהוָה  
לְקַיִן אוֹת לְבִלְתִּי הַכּוֹת אֹתוֹ כָּל־מֹצְאוֹ:  
<sup>16</sup> וַיֵּצֵא קַיִן מִלְּפָנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־נוֹד  
קְדַמַת־עֵדֶן:

is fitting that the earth be the instrument of his punishment.

**13. My punishment** The text can also be translated "My sin is too great to be forgiven" or "Is my sin too great to be forgiven?" The Hebrew word *avon* means both "sin" and its penalty. In the biblical worldview, the two are inseparable; that is, the penalty that follows is inherent in the sin.

**14. I must avoid Your presence** A crime against a human being is simultaneously a sin against God. Cain fears that he will no longer be the recipient of God's providence.

**15. The LORD said to him** The words are directed first to Cain, to allay his mortal fear, and then to the world at large, as a kind of royal proclamation to the effect that Cain, despite his crime, still remains under God's care.

**sevenfold** Some commentators understand this as a figure of speech meaning "abundantly" or "severely." Others take it to mean, literally, that seven of the assailant's family would be

killed or that vengeance would continue to the seventh generation.

**vengeance** The biblical Hebrew stem נקם, which usually has the sense of remedying the imbalance of justice, here has its primitive meaning of exacting revenge.

**a mark** This is not a stigma of infamy but a mark signifying that the bearer is under divine protection. Perhaps some mark on the body or forehead served the same function as the blood of the paschal lamb smeared on the lintels and doorposts of each Israelite house in Egypt.

**16. left the presence of the LORD** The audience with God is now concluded.

**the land of Nod** A symbolic name. The Hebrew word *nod* means "wandering," as in verses 12 and 14.

#### THE GENEALOGY OF CAIN (vv. 17–22)

Cain and his descendants are now listed, seven generations in all. There appears to be some link between the family of Cain and the later wan-

**12.** Cain, who used the earth to hide the evidence of his crime, is forever alienated from the earth. Cut off from nature, he becomes the builder of the first city (Gen. 4:17).

**14.** When Cain repents, God diminishes the punishment. This causes Adam to reproach himself, saying "If only I had known the power of repentance, I could have had my punishment

reduced as well." We think we cannot change the past, but repentance is so powerful that it enables us to change our sense of who we are and reduce the power of the past to determine our future.

**17. his wife** According to a tradition in the Book of Jubilees (4:9) and in the Talmud (BT Sanh. 58b), Cain married his sister.

<sup>17</sup>Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he then founded a city, and named the city after his son Enoch. <sup>18</sup>To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methusael, and Methusael begot Lamech. <sup>19</sup>Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah. <sup>20</sup>Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and amidst herds. <sup>21</sup>And the name of his brother was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe. <sup>22</sup>As for Zillah, she bore Tubal-cain, who forged all implements of copper and iron. And the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

17 וַיֵּדַע קַיִן אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת-חֲנוֹךְ וַיְהִי בְנֵה עֵיר וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הָעִיר כְּשֵׁם בְּנוֹ חֲנוֹךְ: 18 וַיֵּוֹלֵד לְחֲנוֹךְ אֶת-עֵירָד וְעֵירָד יָלַד אֶת-מְחֻיָּאֵל וּמְחֻיָּאֵל יָלַד אֶת-מֶתוּשָׁאֵל וּמֶתוּשָׁאֵל יָלַד אֶת-לָמֶךְ: 19 וַיִּקַּח-לוֹ לְמֶךְ שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֵׁם הָאֶחָת עֲדָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית צִלָּה: 20 וַתֵּלֶד עֲדָה אֶת-יָבֵל הוּא הִיָּה אָבִי יֹשְׁבֵי אֹהֶל וּמִקְנֶה: 21 וְשֵׁם אָחִיו יוֹבֵל הוּא הִיָּה אָבִי כָּל-תּוֹפֵס כְּנֹר וְעוּגָב: 22 וְצִלָּה גַם-הִיא יָלְדָה אֶת-תּוּבַל-קַיִן לֵטֵשׁ כָּל-חַרְשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת וּבְרֹזָל וְאָחוֹת תּוּבַל-קַיִן נַעֲמָה:

dering Kenites–Midianites. No details are given of Cain’s span of life, and his death goes unrecorded. The same is true of his descendants.

**17. Enoch** The basic meaning of the stem חנך in this verse has to do with initiation, dedication, and education. Thus the name may be symbolic, signifying the inauguration of urban life.

**he then founded a city** The soil, being accursed and unproductive for Cain, is put to use by him for wholly new purposes. He becomes the founder of urban culture.

**Enoch** In 25:4, one of the sons of Midian is also named Enoch, and the Midianites are closely connected with the Kenites in several biblical texts.

**18. Irad** The name is related to the oldest city in Mesopotamia, Eridu.

**Lamech** A similar word in Arabic means “a strong young man,” and in Akkadian, a class of priests.

**19. two wives** Lamech is apparently the first polygamist.

**20. ancestor** He is the archetypal pastoral nomad. Abel, a shepherd, was not nomadic.

**herds** The Hebrew word *mikneh* (property) includes all types of livestock. This statement indicates an awareness that the rise of animal

husbandry was a major development in human history.

**21. who play** The Hebrew translated as “play” (*tofés*), literally, “hold,” also came to mean “to be skilled in.” It would thus suggest specialization and professionalism.

**lyre Kinnor** is the only stringed instrument mentioned in the Torah and is one of the earliest documented musical instruments in the Near East, with a history traceable to ca. 3000 B.C.E.

**pipe** In Hebrew: *ugav*; apparently a general term for wind instruments of various kinds.

**22. Tubal-cain** The name Tubal means “metalworker,” derived from Akkadian and Sumerian. And in several Semitic languages, *kayin* means a “smith.”

**copper** The Hebrew word *n’hoshet* actually refers to bronze—an alloy of copper and tin—which was worked extensively in southern Mesopotamia and in Sinai as early as the 3rd millennium B.C.E.

**iron** This metal, worked even by preliterate peoples, was used sporadically in the region during the Bronze Age.

**Naamah** This statement, with no further remarks about her, implies that she once was a well-known personage. The Hebrew stem of her name (נעם) means “good, lovely,” which

**21ff.** By attributing urbanization, music, and tool and weapon making to Cain and his descendants, the Torah may be signaling its

ambivalence about human efforts to detach from, and improve on, the world of nature. (See the story of the Tower of Babel in Gen. 11.)

<sup>23</sup>And Lamech said to his wives,  
“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;  
O wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech.

I have slain a man for wounding me,  
And a lad for bruising me.

<sup>24</sup>If Cain is avenged sevenfold,  
Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”

<sup>25</sup>Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, meaning, “God has provided me with another offspring in place of Abel,” for Cain had killed him. <sup>26</sup>And to Seth, in turn, a son was born, and he named him Enosh. It was then that men began to invoke the LORD by name.

וַיֹּאמֶר לָמֶךְ לְנִשְׁוֹי<sup>23</sup>  
עֲדָה וְצִלָּה שְׁמַעְנָן קוֹלִי  
נִשְׁוֵי לָמֶךְ הָאֲזוּנָה אִמְרָתִי  
כִּי אִישׁ הִרְגַתִּי לְפַעְעֵי  
וַיֵּלֶד לְחִבְרָתִי:  
כִּי שִׁבְעָתַיִם יִקְם־קִינ<sup>24</sup>  
וְלָמֶךְ שִׁבְעֵים וְשִׁבְעָה:<sup>25</sup>

וַיֵּדַע אָדָם עוֹד אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן<sup>25</sup>  
וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת כִּי שָׁת־לִי אֱלֹהִים  
זָרַע אַחֵר תַּחַת הַהֶבֶל כִּי הִרְגוּ קַיִן:  
וַלֵּשֶׁת גַּם־הוּא יֵלְד־בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ<sup>26</sup>  
אֱנוֹשׁ אַז הוֹחֵל לִקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה: פ

may reflect either her beauty or her character. The same stem in Arabic, Syriac, and rabbinic Hebrew also means “to sing.”

#### THE SONG OF LAMECH (vv. 23–24)

This is a representative example of biblical Hebrew poetic style. Although it displays neither meter nor rhyme in the present sense of these terms, it does have a notable rhythm. Its formal structure is known as “parallelism,” a feature of biblical and Canaanite poetry. The second line of a couplet restates the thought of the first line in different words, as here. The second line could also supplement the first, be antithetical to it, or be the climax of the poem.

The poem itself perhaps explains the origin of the nomadic institution of blood vengeance.

**23. I have slain a man** Lamech’s taunts, threats, and boasts are of the kind customarily uttered in ancient times by those about to engage in combat. He is bragging that he does not need divine protection because he can defend

himself with the new iron weapons of war. He places his faith in the power of technology.

*a lad* As if to say: “This man, my antagonist, is but a mere child in combat!”

*for wounding me* Another possible translation is: “My mere wounding/bruising of my combatant is fatal.”

#### SETH AND ENOSH (vv. 25–26)

Humankind is regenerated through another son of Adam and Eve.

**25. Seth** The name is here connected with the stem meaning “to place, put, set” (שית). The birth of Seth compensates for the loss of Abel. Seth, in turn, named his son Enosh, which, like Adam, means “man.”

*meaning* The Hebrew word translated here as “meaning” (*ki*) means, literally, “because.” The necessary phrase “she said” is understood in the Hebrew.

**26. men began to invoke the LORD by name** This expression refers to the worship of God.

**26. began to invoke the LORD by name** Once people became numerous, they began to form communities to share their hopes, joys, and fears. Hirsch is one of the few commentators to agree with the positive interpretation of this ambiguous verse. Most others take the word translated as “began” (*huhal*) in its other sense, meaning “to desecrate, blaspheme.” Thus the Midrash understands the text to mean that people began to call the work of their own

hands “God.” The further the generations were from God’s intimate encounter with Adam and Eve, the more remote God seemed to them. They were lacking ways to recognize God’s presence in their lives. Maimonides traces the origin of idol worship to this stage of human development. As people came to depend on nature to sustain them with food, they were inclined to honor nature (MT Idol Worship 1:1). Another *midrash*, understanding the text

**5** This is the record of Adam's line.—When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God; <sup>2</sup>male and female He created them. And when they were created, He blessed them and called them Man.—<sup>3</sup>When Adam had lived 130 years, he begot a son in his likeness after his image, and he named him Seth. <sup>4</sup>After the birth of Seth, Adam lived 800 years and begot sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup>All the days that Adam lived came to 930 years; then he died.

**ה** זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת אָדָם בְּיוֹם בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם בְּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ; <sup>2</sup> וּזְכָר וּנְקֵבָה בְּרָאם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָם אָדָם בְּיוֹם הַבְּרָאָה: <sup>3</sup> וַיְחִי אָדָם שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאָת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד בְּדְמוּתוֹ בְּצַלְמוֹ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת: <sup>4</sup> וַיְחִי יָמֵי־אָדָם אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־שֵׁת שְׁמֹנֶה מֵאָת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֵד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת: <sup>5</sup> וַיְחִי כָּל־יְמֵי אָדָם אֲשֶׁר־חִי תִשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: <sup>ס</sup>

THE BOOK OF GENEALOGIES (5:1–6:8)

The narrative now presents a 10-generation genealogy that spans the period between the creation of the world and the advent of Noah, who witnessed its destruction. Such 10-generation genealogies are also found in some ancient Near Eastern historical records. The remarkably long lives enjoyed by those who lived before the Flood accord with the ancient widespread folkloristic notion that associates heroes before the Flood with extraordinary longevity. Compared to the Mesopotamian worldview, however (the Sumerian King List adds up to 241,200 years), the biblical figures represent restraint.

Note the general parallelism between the 7-generation Cainite genealogy and the 10-generation genealogy of Seth, both ending with Lamech.

**1. This is the record of Adam's line** The Hebrew translated here as “record” (*seifer*) refers to a written document, not an oral composition. Thus these words most likely constitute the title of an ancient genealogical work that served as the source for the data provided in this chapter.

**in the likeness of God** This refers to 1:26.

**2. He blessed them** A knowledge of 1:27–28 is assumed here. Because the theme of the chapter is the replication of humankind, the reader is reminded that sexuality is a divine blessing and procreation a God-given duty.

ADAM (vv. 3–5)

**3. a son in his likeness after his image** Via procreation, the first two human beings transmitted “the image of God” in themselves to all future generations.

**he named him** In 4:25, the woman named Seth. The masculine is used here because only the fathers are featured in the genealogy.

**Seth** Cain and Abel are ignored because the sole concern of this document is to trace a linear genealogical chain from Adam to Noah.

**4. After the birth of Seth** The continuity of the line is in jeopardy until the birth of the first son, who becomes, for that reason, a child of destiny. Hence, this event marks a major point of demarcation in the measurement of a human lifetime.

as referring to God's name, suggests that, in the age of Enosh, people worshiped idols but God tolerated their sin (because there is no mention of punishment). In the days of Noah, however, people were cruel to each other, which God would not forgive.

CHAPTER 5

**1. This is the record of Adam's line** Ben Zzzai called this the all-inclusive principle of the Torah, teaching us that we are all descended

from a single ancestor. No one can claim a more illustrious lineage than anyone else (JT Ned. 9).

**2. male and female** Although the Torah is largely an account of men's exploits, with women playing a crucial but secondary role, and although the births of male offspring are recorded here and elsewhere to the almost total exclusion of female children, we are reminded here at the outset that the human race consists of both men and women, fashioned equally in God's image.

<sup>6</sup>When Seth had lived 105 years, he begot Enosh. <sup>7</sup>After the birth of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and begot sons and daughters. <sup>8</sup>All the days of Seth came to 912 years; then he died.

<sup>9</sup>When Enosh had lived 90 years, he begot Kenan. <sup>10</sup>After the birth of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and begot sons and daughters. <sup>11</sup>All the days of Enosh came to 905 years; then he died.

<sup>12</sup>When Kenan had lived 70 years, he begot Mahalalel. <sup>13</sup>After the birth of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and begot sons and daughters. <sup>14</sup>All the days of Kenan came to 910 years; then he died.

<sup>15</sup>When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he begot Jared. <sup>16</sup>After the birth of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and begot sons and daughters. <sup>17</sup>All the days of Mahalalel came to 895 years; then he died.

<sup>18</sup>When Jared had lived 162 years, he begot Enoch. <sup>19</sup>After the birth of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and begot sons and daughters. <sup>20</sup>All the days of Jared came to 962 years; then he died.

<sup>21</sup>When Enoch had lived 65 years, he begot Methuselah. <sup>22</sup>After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years; and he be-

6 וַיְחִי־שֵׁת חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְד־  
 אֶת־אֵנוֹשׁ: 7 וַיְחִי־שֵׁת אַחֲרֵי הוּלְדוֹ אֶת־  
 אֵנוֹשׁ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה  
 וַיֻּלְד־בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת: 8 וַיְהִי־וְכָל־יְמֵי־שֵׁת  
 שָׁתַיִם עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה  
 וַיָּמָת: 9 וַיְחִי אֵנוֹשׁ תְּשַׁעִים שָׁנָה  
 וַיֻּלְד־אֶת־קֵינָן: 10 וַיְחִי אֵנוֹשׁ אַחֲרֵי  
 הוּלְדוֹ אֶת־קֵינָן חֲמֵשׁ עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה  
 וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְד־בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת:  
 11 וַיְהִי־וְכָל־יְמֵי אֵנוֹשׁ חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּתְשַׁע  
 מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: 12 וַיְחִי קֵינָן  
 שֶׁבַעִים שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְד־אֶת־מְהֻלָּאֵל:  
 13 וַיְחִי קֵינָן אַחֲרֵי הוּלְדוֹ אֶת־מְהֻלָּאֵל  
 אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְד־  
 בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת: 14 וַיְהִי־וְכָל־יְמֵי קֵינָן עָשָׂר  
 שָׁנִים וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: 15  
 וַיְחִי מְהֻלָּאֵל חֲמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּשְׁשִׁים  
 שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְד־אֶת־יָרֵד: 16 וַיְחִי מְהֻלָּאֵל  
 אַחֲרֵי הוּלְדוֹ אֶת־יָרֵד שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה  
 וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְד־בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת:  
 17 וַיְהִי־וְכָל־יְמֵי מְהֻלָּאֵל חֲמֵשׁ וּתְשַׁעִים  
 שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: 18  
 וַיְחִי־יָרֵד שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וּמֵאֵת  
 שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְד־אֶת־חֲנוֹךְ: 19 וַיְחִי־יָרֵד אַחֲרֵי  
 הוּלְדוֹ אֶת־חֲנוֹךְ שְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה  
 וַיֻּלְד־בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת: 20 וַיְהִי־וְכָל־יְמֵי־יָרֵד  
 שָׁתַיִם וּשְׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה  
 וַיָּמָת: 21 וַיְחִי חֲנוֹךְ חֲמֵשׁ וּשְׁשִׁים  
 שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְד־אֶת־מֶתוּשֶׁלַח: 22 וַיְהִי־לֵךְ  
 חֲנוֹךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים אַחֲרֵי הוּלְדוֹ אֶת־

#### ENOCH (vv. 21–24)

Enoch, the seventh on the list, is singled out for special mention. The brevity of this biographic note suggests the one-time existence of some well-known story connected with his life and death. In postbiblical Jewish literature, Enoch

was the focus of legends connecting him with a knowledge of the secrets of heaven, with the invention of mathematics and astronomy, and especially with the devising of a solar-based calendar.

**22. walked with God** The regular formula, “he lived,” is replaced by a description of how he lived. The idiom, used again only of Noah in

got sons and daughters. <sup>23</sup>All the days of Enoch came to 365 years. <sup>24</sup>Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, for God took him.

<sup>25</sup>When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he begot Lamech. <sup>26</sup>After the birth of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and begot sons and daughters. <sup>27</sup>All the days of Methuselah came to 969 years; then he died.

<sup>28</sup>When Lamech had lived 182 years, he begot a son. <sup>29</sup>And he named him Noah, saying, "This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very soil which the LORD placed under a curse." <sup>30</sup>After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived 595 years and begot sons and daughters. <sup>31</sup>All the days of Lamech came to 777 years; then he died.

מִתּוֹשֶׁלַח שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ בָנִים  
וּבָנוֹת: <sup>23</sup> וַיְהִי כָּל־יְמֵי חֲנוּךְ חָמֵשׁ  
וּשְׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:  
<sup>24</sup> וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַאֲיָנָנוּ כִּי־  
שָׁבַע לָקַח אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים: <sup>25</sup> פ  
שָׁבַע וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ  
אֶת־לִמְךָ: <sup>26</sup> וַיְהִי מִתּוֹשֶׁלַח אַחֲרֵי  
הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־לִמְךָ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה  
וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת:  
<sup>27</sup> וַיְהִיו כָּל־יְמֵי מִתּוֹשֶׁלַח תְּשַׁע וּשְׁשִׁים  
שָׁנָה וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: <sup>28</sup> פ  
וַיְהִי־לִמְךָ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמֵאֵת  
שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ בָּן: <sup>29</sup> וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ  
לֵאמֹר "זֶה" יִנְחַמְנוּ מִמַּעֲשָׂנוּ וּמִעֲצָבוֹן  
יִדְּיֵנוּ מִן־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְרָה יְהוָה:  
<sup>30</sup> וַיְהִי־לִמְךָ אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־נֹחַ חָמֵשׁ  
וּתְשַׁעִים שָׁנָה וּחֲמִשׁ מֵאֵת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ  
בָנִים וּבָנוֹת: <sup>31</sup> וַיְהִי כָּל־יְמֵי־לִמְךָ שֶׁבַע  
וּשְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת:

v. 29. שני טעמים

6:9, describes a life spent in closest intimacy with God.

**24. Enoch walked with God** The unusual idiom is repeated here, as Bekhor Shor noted, so that the brevity of Enoch's life would not be seen as a punishment for sin.

**then he was no more** A term used for an unexpected and unexplained disappearance.

**for God took him** The text is deliberately obscure, suggesting that Enoch did not die but rather ascended alive to heaven (see the nonbiblical yet ancient Book of Enoch).

METHUSELAH (vv. 25–27)

**25. Methuselah . . . lived** The man with the longest life span was fathered by the one with the shortest. Methuselah died at the onset of the Flood.

LAMECH (vv. 28–31)

**28. Lamech** See Gen. 4:18.

**he begot a son** The 10th generation is a critical turning point in human history and brings the list to an end.

**29. Noah** The name derives from the stem meaning "to rest" (נח). The explanation given in the narrative is based on similarity of sound, not on etymology, because Noah cannot originate from the stem meaning "to comfort, give relief" (נחם).

**relief** This probably refers to a tradition about Noah as a culture hero. He was said to have invented the plow, initiating true agriculture, as opposed to hoe agriculture or horticulture. According to another tradition, he initiated a revolution in food production, effect-

24. Some commentators see Enoch as a saint. God "took" him to keep him from being corrupted by his wicked counterparts. Others

see him as morally deficient. He "walked with God" but would not deign to be involved in the concerns of less pious neighbors (Hataam Sofer).



<sup>32</sup>When Noah had lived 500 years, Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

ס וַיְהִי־נֹחַ בֶּן־חֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד  
נֹחַ אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־חָם וְאֶת־יָפֶת׃

**6** When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup>the divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them.—<sup>3</sup>The LORD said, “My breath shall not abide in man forever, since he too is flesh; let the days allowed him be

וַיְהִי כִּי־הִחֵל הָאָדָם לְרַב עַל־פְּנֵי  
הָאֱדָמָה וּבָנוֹת יָלְדוּ לָהֶם׃ <sup>2</sup> וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי־  
הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם כִּי טֹבֹת הֵנָּה  
וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּחָרוּ׃  
<sup>3</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לֹא־יָדוֹן רוּחִי בָאָדָם  
לְעֹלָם בְּשֶׁגֶם הוּא בָשָׂר וְהָיוּ יָמָיו מִמָּאָה

ing an enormous saving of time and energy. Another tradition views him as the initiator of viticulture: the first to discover the soothing and enlivening effects of wine (see 9:20).

NOAH (v. 32)

**32. Noah had lived 500 years** The extraordinarily advanced age at which he begets a child, compared to his forebears, is required by the statement that he was 600 years old at the time of the Flood (according to 7:11), and there were no grandchildren in the ark.

**Shem** Meaning “name, fame, renown.”

**Ham** Possibly derived from the Hebrew word *ham*, “a wife’s father”; the Hebrew *ham*, “hot, dark skinned”; or the Egyptian *hm*, “servant.”

**Japheth** It is possibly the same name as Iapetus, found in Greek mythology, but with no known etymology.

#### CELESTIAL–TERRESTRIAL INTERMARRIAGE (6:1–4)

Legends about relationships among gods and mortal women and among goddesses and men, resulting in the propagation of demigods, are widespread and familiar subjects of pagan mythology. The version presented here, highly condensed from what was once a well-known and fuller story, adds to the ancient myths the Israelite notion that the offspring of such unnatural unions may possess heroic stature but are devoid of divine qualities. They are flesh and blood like all humans, and their life span is severely limited

compared to the individuals listed in chapter 5.

**1. men** The Hebrew word *ha-adam*, literally, “the man,” is here a collective: humankind.

**2. the divine beings** The definite article points to a familiar term. The context in Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7 indicates that the reference is to the angelic host, the celestial entourage of God, an image drawn from human kings surrounded by their courtiers.

The Hebrew for “divine beings” here is *b’nei* (which also can mean “sons of” or “children of”) *elohim* (which usually is translated as “God”). The word *b’nei* often means “members of a category,” so that the Hebrew phrase here means “members of the category of divine beings” (*elohim*). Similarly, *b’nei yisra-el* does not mean “the children of Israel,” but Israelites.

**saw how beautiful** Driven by lust, their only criterion in the selection of mates was external beauty, not character.

**took wives** The Hebrew phrase לָקַח אִשָּׁה is the regular term for the beginning of the marriage relationship. There is no hint of violent possession, nor is there any condemnation of the women involved.

**3. My breath** The “breath of life” (Gen. 2:7) that issues from God. Its presence or absence determines life and death.

**in man** The reference here is not only to the offspring of these unnatural unions but also to all humankind, because disorder has been introduced into God’s creation.

**flesh** They are not divine, despite their non-human paternity. “Flesh” connotes human frailty.

#### CHAPTER 6

**2. the divine beings . . . took wives** Traditional commentators (Onkelos, Rashi, Hirsch)

strive to avoid the mythologic implications of this account. They understand the “divine beings” to be the noble descendants of Seth, intermarrying with the descendants of Cain

one hundred and twenty years.”—<sup>4</sup>It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim appeared on earth—when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.

<sup>5</sup>The LORD saw how great was man’s wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened. <sup>7</sup>The LORD said, “I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created—men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them.” <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favor with the LORD.

**one hundred and twenty years** The duration of human life is reduced, a mark of moral and spiritual degeneration.

**4. the Nephilim appeared on earth** The offspring of the divine beings. These Nephilim—the etymology of the word is unknown—generated other Nephilim in the course of their married lives. Some suggest that the term means “fallen ones,” a reference to the later myth of “the fallen angels.”

**heroes of old** Their heroic exploits were the subject of many popular tales.

**PROLOGUE TO THE FLOOD** (vv. 5–8)

Humankind has abused God’s gift of life and is now deep in moral decadence. The narrator asserts that the universal cataclysm into which the

וְעֹשִׂים שָׁנָה: <sup>4</sup>הַנְּפִלִים הָיוּ בְּאֶרֶץ  
 בְּיָמֵים הָהֵם וְגַם אַחֲרֵיכֵן אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ  
 בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם וַיִּלְדּוּ  
 לָהֶם הַמָּה הַגִּבּוֹרִים אֲשֶׁר מֵעוֹלָם אֲנֹשֵׁי  
 הַשָּׁמַיִם: פ

מפסיר <sup>5</sup>וַיִּרְא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בְּאֶרֶץ  
 וְכָל-יִצְרָל מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ לְבוֹ רַק רָע כָּל-  
 הַיּוֹם: <sup>6</sup>וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי-עָשָׂה אֶת-הָאָדָם  
 בְּאֶרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל-לְבוֹ: <sup>7</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה  
 אֲמַחֶה אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר-בְּרָאתִי מֵעַל  
 פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד-בְּהֵמָה עַד-רֶמֶשׂ  
 וְעַד-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּי נַחַמְתִּי כִּי עָשִׂיתֶם:  
 וְנֹחַ מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינַי יְהוָה: פ <sup>8</sup>

world is about to be plunged is not the result of blind fate or divine caprice but of God’s judgment made inevitable by human evil.

**5. every plan devised by his mind** Literally, “every product of the thoughts of his heart.” In the Bible, the heart is not only the organ of feeling but also of thought, understanding, and volition.

**6. regretted** The ascription of human emotions to God is a feature of biblical narrative.

**saddened** God’s decision is made in sorrow, not in anger.

**8. Noah** Mention of him without further detail presupposes the reader’s knowledge of 5:28–29.

**found favor** The reason for this is given in verse 9 and in 7:1.

who offered physical attractiveness but no moral standards. Whatever the ancient roots of this story, no Jewish commentator accepts the notion of a sexual union between divine beings and mortals, giving rise to a semidivine race.

**3. one hundred and twenty years** The purpose of this verse may be to anticipate the question “Why don’t people here live as long as people did in earlier chapters?” The ideal, ulti-

mate lifespan remains 120, exemplified by Moses (Deut. 34:7) and retained in the blessing “May you live a full life, to 120.”

In the opening verses of this *parashah*, God created a pristine, orderly world and declared it “very good.” By the end of the *parashah*, 10 generations later, that world has been so defiled by human depravity that God sees no alternative but to wash it clean and begin the human race anew with Noah.

# הַפְּטָרָה לַמַּחֵר חֹדֶשׁ

## HAFTARAH FOR SHABBAT AND EREV ROSH HODESH

1 SAMUEL 20:18–42

(Recite on Shabbat if the next day is Rosh Hodesh. However, on Shabbat Hanukkah, recite the haftarah for that occasion instead. On the 3rd Shabbat after Tish-ah b'Av, recite the third Haftarah of Consolation instead, which begins on page 1085. With parashat Sh'kalim or parashat ha-Hodesh, recite the haftarah for those passages instead.)

This *haftarah* is part of the long cycle of narratives depicting David's rise in national esteem and his corresponding decline in King Saul's favor (ca. 1000 B.C.E.). Saul's jealousy over David's fame as a soldier played a key role, driving the king mad with rage. Earlier, after defeating the Philistines, Saul had returned home with his troops only to hear women singing: "Saul has slain his thousands; David, his tens of thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7). The next day, gripped by an "evil spirit," Saul threw a spear at David "thinking to pin [him] to the wall. But David eluded him twice" (18:10–11).

As the Philistine wars continued, "David was more successful than all the other officers of Saul. His reputation soared" (18:30). In reaction, Saul urged his courtiers to kill his perceived rival. David escaped through the intervention of Saul's son Jonathan (19:1–6). Nevertheless, after David led another round of military successes, another "evil spirit" overtook Saul. Once more he "tried to pin David to the wall with his spear" (19:8–10). Again David escaped. Obsessed, Saul sent messengers to guard David's house, with orders to strike him dead in the morning. But again Saul was thwarted, as Michal (his daughter and David's wife) warned David of the plot and hid his escape (19:11–16). Doubly foiled by his own children, Saul himself set out in hot pursuit of David, accompanied by a band of messengers. David fled to Jonathan and, begging him to explain Saul's rage, enlisted Jonathan's help in a plan to test

Saul's true intent. This is the narrative background to the *haftarah*.

The *haftarah* unfolds in three parts: the plan, an event at the royal court, and an event in the field. All elements of the opening part recur in the second and third parts: the absence of David at court during the new moon, the ruse of the arrows in the field, and the covenantal commitment between David and Jonathan.

The story contrasts the established kingship at court with the bond of friendship in the field. Jonathan tries to mediate, because he is both the trusted son of the king and the beloved friend of the hero. His mediation, however, is not symmetrical. For he betrays his father's confidence out of loyalty to David—as King Saul comes to realize during the new moon feast. Jonathan's fate is sealed when he tries to annul Saul's decree that David die. At this point the king takes up his spear against his son.

### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

This *haftarah* was chosen to be recited on the *Shabbat* that immediately precedes the New Moon (the first day of the Hebrew month), because this scriptural reading contains the very words *mahar hodesh* (Tomorrow will be the new moon) that now designate the day. Moreover, although the Torah designates only the types of sacrificial rites to be performed on the new moon (Num. 10:10, 28:11–15), this *haftarah* indicates that there were also popular gatherings and communal meals on that day. We read that the king sat down to "partake of the meal" (*lehem*, 1 Sam. 20:24), and that David went to his home town of Bethlehem to participate there in the "family feast" (*zevah mishpaha*; v. 29). On the basis of

these references, the custom of having a festive meal on the new moon developed, a practice later codified in the *Shulhan Arukh* (O.H. 419:1). From the *haftarah* we also learn that people in a state of ritual impurity could not participate in this communal meal (v. 26).

A further dimension of *Rosh Hodesh* has been incorporated into the synagogue service. The *Musaf Amidah* for the day opens with the statement, “The beginnings of months did You assign for Your people as a time of atonement throughout the generations.” Thus atonement for sin became linked to the renewal and restoration of the moon. The kabbalists (medieval Jewish mystics) found great spiritual meaning in the moon’s waxing and waning; and by the 16th century, it was customary to observe the day before the new moon as a time for taking stock, fasting, and repentance. That day came to be known as the Minor Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur Katan*).

For the kabbalists, the waning of the moon symbolized the exile of the divine Presence (*Sh’khinah*) and the weakening of the powers of holiness during Israel’s exile. The waxing of the moon stood for the renewal of holiness and divine restoration. A new moon was thus a symbol of redemption and hope. Similarly, in the *haftarah*, the bond between David and Jonathan was emblematic of the renewal of human community through love and devotion. Indeed, for the ancient rabbis, this relationship was paradigmatic of a “wholly disinterested love” (a love with no conditions attached), capable of withstanding adverse circumstances (M Avot 5:16). Fundamental to David and Jonathan’s love and commitment was the divine Presence that unifies them (see 1 Sam. 20:23,42). It was this commitment to a transcendent reality that allowed Jonathan to rise beyond self-interest in his loyalty to David.

**20** <sup>18</sup>Jonathan said to him, “Tomorrow will be the new moon; and you will be missed when your seat remains vacant. <sup>19</sup>So the day after tomorrow, go down all the way to the place where you hid the other time, and stay close to the Ezel stone. <sup>20</sup>Now I will shoot three arrows to one side of it, as though I were shooting at a mark, <sup>21</sup>and I will order the boy to go and find the arrows. If I call to the boy, ‘Hey! the arrows are on this side of you,’ be reassured and come, for you are safe and there is no danger—as the LORD lives! <sup>22</sup>But if, instead, I call to the lad, ‘Hey! the arrows are beyond you,’ then leave, for the LORD has sent you away. <sup>23</sup>As for the promise we made to each other, may the LORD be [witness] between you and me forever.”

<sup>24</sup>David hid in the field. The new moon came, and the king sat down to partake of the meal.

**כ** <sup>18</sup>וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ יְהוֹנָתָן מָחָר חֹדֶשׁ  
וְנִפְקְדָתָ כִּי יִפְקֹד מוֹשְׁבֶךָ: <sup>19</sup>וְשִׁלַּשְׁתָּ  
תֵּרֵד מֵאֵד וּבֹאתָ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-  
נִסְתַּרְתָּ שָׁם בְּיוֹם הַמַּעֲשֵׂה וַיִּשְׁבֶּתָ אֶצֶל  
הָאֶבֶן הָאֵזֶל: <sup>20</sup>וְאָנֹכִי שִׁלַּשְׁתַּ הַחֲצִיִּים צַדָּה  
אוֹרֵה לְשַׁלַּח-לִי לְמִטְרָה: <sup>21</sup>וְהִנֵּה אֲשַׁלַּח  
אֶת-הַנְּעָר לָךְ מֵצֵא אֶת-הַחֲצִיִּים אִם-  
אָמַר אִמֵּר לְנָעַר הִנֵּה הַחֲצִיִּים | מִמֶּנִּי  
וְהִנֵּה קָחֲנוּ | וּבָאָה כִּי-שָׁלוֹם לָךְ וְאִין  
דָּבָר חַי-יְהוָה: <sup>22</sup>וְאִם-כָּפָה אִמֵּר לְעֹלָם  
הִנֵּה הַחֲצִיִּים מִמֶּנִּי וְהִלָּאָה לָךְ כִּי שִׁלַּחְךָ  
יְהוָה: <sup>23</sup>וְהִדְבַר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אָנֹכִי וְאַתָּה  
הִנֵּה יְהוָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ עַד-עוֹלָם: **ס**  
<sup>24</sup>וַיִּסְתַּר דָּוִד בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיְהִי הַחֹדֶשׁ וַיֵּשֶׁב  
הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל אֶל-הַלֶּחֶם לֶאֱכֹל: <sup>25</sup>וַיֵּשֶׁב

**1 Samuel 20:19. the other time** Literally, “on the day of the incident.” This presumably refers to the time when Jonathan interceded with Saul for David’s life (19:2–4).

**Ezel stone** A landmark apparently used as a signpost for travelers. See Comment to 1 Sam. 20:41.

<sup>25</sup>When the king took his usual place on the seat by the wall, Jonathan rose and Abner sat down at Saul's side; but David's place remained vacant. <sup>26</sup>That day, however, Saul said nothing. "It's accidental," he thought. "He must be impure and not yet purified."<sup>27</sup>But on the day after the new moon, the second day, David's place was vacant again. So Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why didn't the son of Jesse come to the meal yesterday or today?"<sup>28</sup>Jonathan answered Saul, "David begged leave of me to go to Bethlehem. <sup>29</sup>He said, 'Please let me go, for we are going to have a family feast in our town and my brother has summoned me to it. Do me a favor, let me slip away to see my kinsmen.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."

<sup>30</sup>Saul flew into a rage against Jonathan. "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!" he shouted. "I know that you side with the son of Jesse—to your shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness!<sup>31</sup>For as long as the son of Jesse lives on earth, neither you nor your kingship will be secure. Now then, have him brought to me, for he is marked for death."<sup>32</sup>But Jonathan spoke up and said to his father, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?"<sup>33</sup>At that, Saul threw his spear at him to strike him down; and Jonathan realized that his father was determined to do away with David. <sup>34</sup>Jonathan rose from the table in a rage. He ate no food on the second day of the new moon, because he was grieved about David, and because his father had humiliated him.

<sup>35</sup>In the morning, Jonathan went out into the open for the meeting with David, accompanied

הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל־מוֹשְׁבּוֹ כַּפֶּעַם | בַּפֶּעַם אֶל־  
מוֹשֵׁב הַקִּיר וַיִּקָּם יְהוֹנָתָן וַיֵּשֶׁב אַבְנֵר  
מֵצֵד שָׁאוּל וַיִּפְקֹד מְקוֹם דָּוִד: <sup>26</sup> וְלֹא־  
דִּבֶּר שָׁאוּל מֵאוֹמֶה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כִּי אָמַר  
מִקְרָה הוּא בְלִתי טְהוֹר הוּא כִּי־לֹא  
טְהוֹר: <sup>27</sup> וַיְהִי מִמַּחֲרַת הַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי  
וַיִּפְקֹד מְקוֹם דָּוִד <sup>28</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל־  
יְהוֹנָתָן בְּנֹו מַדּוּעַ לֹא־בָא בְּיְשִׁי גַם־  
תָּמוּל גַּם־הַיּוֹם אֶל־הַלֶּחֶם: <sup>28</sup> וַיַּעַן  
יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת־שָׁאוּל נִשְׂאָל נִשְׂאָל דָּוִד  
מֵעַמְדֵי עַד־בֵּית לָחֶם: <sup>29</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי  
נָא כִּי זָבַח מִשְׁפָּחָה לָנוּ בְעִיר וְהוּא  
צֹהֵה־לִי אֲהִי וְעֵתָה אִם־מִצָּאתִי חֵן  
בְּעֵינֶיךָ אִמְלֹטָה נָא וְאֶרְאָה אֶת־אָחִי  
עַל־כֵּן לֹא־בָא אֶל־שְׁלַחַן הַמֶּלֶךְ: <sup>30</sup>  
וַיַּחֲרֵאֵף שָׁאוּל בִּיהוֹנָתָן וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ  
בֶּן־נַעֲוֹת הַמִּרְדּוֹת הֲלוֹא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־בַחַר  
אַתָּה לְבֶן־יְשִׁי לְבִשְׁתָּךְ וּלְבִשְׁתַּעְרוֹת  
אָמַר: <sup>31</sup> כִּי כָל־הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר בְּנִי־יִשִׁי חַי  
עַל־הָאָדָמָה לֹא תִבּוֹן אַתָּה וּמַלְכוּתְךָ  
וְעֵתָה שְׁלַח וְקַח אֹתוֹ אֵלַי כִּי בֶן־מָוֶת  
הוּא: <sup>32</sup> וַיַּעַן יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת־שָׁאוּל  
אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לָמָּה יוֹמַת מִדָּה עָשָׂה:  
<sup>33</sup> וַיִּטֵּל שָׁאוּל אֶת־הַחֲנִית עָלָיו לְהַכָּתוֹ  
וַיִּדַע יְהוֹנָתָן כִּי־כָלָה הִיא מֵעַם אָבִיו  
לְהַמִּית אֶת־דָּוִד: <sup>34</sup> וַיִּקָּם יְהוֹנָתָן  
מֵעַם הַשְּׁלַחַן בַּחֲרִי־אָף וְלֹא־אָכַל בַּיּוֹם־  
הַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי לָחֶם כִּי נִעְצַב אֶל־דָּוִד כִּי  
הִכְלָמוּ אָבִיו: <sup>35</sup>  
וַיְהִי בַבֶּקֶר וַיֵּצֵא יְהוֹנָתָן הַשְּׂדֵה לְמוֹעֵד

**26. It's accidental** Hebrew: *mikreh hu*. The next sentence, "He must be impure and not yet purified," suggests that *mikreh* (literally, "accident") is here used in the technical sense of an "accidental" seminal emission, which puts one in a state of ritual impurity (see Deut. 23:11). This is also Rashi's understanding (see BT Pes. 3a).

**30.** Saul's harsh criticism of Jonathan, and the subsequent gesture of aggression against him, served as the basis for Rabbinic and medieval discussions about the limits of reproof. According to ancient traditions preserved in the Talmud (BT Ar. 16b), the Sages variously placed the limit at cursing, rebuking, shouting, or smiting.

by a young boy.<sup>36</sup> He said to the boy, “Run ahead and find the arrows that I shoot.” And as the boy ran, he shot the arrows past him.<sup>37</sup> When the boy came to the place where the arrows shot by Jonathan had fallen, Jonathan called out to the boy, “Hey, the arrows are beyond you!”<sup>38</sup> And Jonathan called after the boy, “Quick, hurry up. Don’t stop!” So Jonathan’s boy gathered the arrows and came back to his master.—<sup>39</sup> The boy suspected nothing; only Jonathan and David knew the arrangement.—<sup>40</sup> Jonathan handed the gear to his boy and told him, “Take these back to the town.”<sup>41</sup> When the boy got there, David emerged from his concealment at the Negeb. He flung himself face down on the ground and bowed low three times. They kissed each other and wept together; David wept the longer.

<sup>42</sup>Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace! For we two have sworn to each other in the name of the LORD: ‘May the LORD be [witness] between you and me, and between your offspring and mine, forever!’”

**41. emerged from his concealment at the Negeb** This rendition is interpretative; literally, “rose up from beside the Negeb.” Possibly, the

דָּוִד וַיִּנְעַר קֶטֶן עִמּוֹ: <sup>36</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר לְנַעֲרוֹ רֵץ מֵצֵא נָא אֶת־הַחֲצִים אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מוֹרֵה הַנֶּעַר רֵץ וְהוּא־יִרְהֶה הַחֲצִי לְהַעֲבֵרוֹ: <sup>37</sup> וַיָּבֵא הַנֶּעַר עַד־מְקוֹם הַחֲצִי אֲשֶׁר יָרָה יְהוֹנָתָן וַיִּקְרָא יְהוֹנָתָן אַחֲרֵי הַנֶּעַר וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלוֹא הַחֲצִי מִמֶּךָ וְהִלָּאֵה: <sup>38</sup> וַיִּקְרָא יְהוֹנָתָן אַחֲרֵי הַנֶּעַר מְהֵרָה חוּשָׁה אֶל־תַּעֲמֹד וַיִּלְקֹט נֶעַר יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת־הַחֲצִי הַחֲצִים וַיָּבֵא אֶל־אֲדֹנָיו: <sup>39</sup> וְהַנֶּעַר לֹא יָדַע מֵאוֹמָה אִךָ יְהוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד יָדְעוּ אֶת־הַדָּבָר: <sup>40</sup> וַיִּתֵּן יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת־כְּלָיו אֶל־הַנֶּעַר אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לָךְ הֵבִיא הָעִיר: <sup>41</sup> הַנֶּעַר בָּא וְדָוִד קָם מֵאֶצֶל הַנֶּגֶב וַיִּפֹּל לְאֶפְרוֹ ארְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים וַיִּשְׁקוּ | אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וַיִּבְכוּ אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ עַד־דָּוִד הַגָּדִיל: <sup>42</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹנָתָן לְדָוִד לָךְ לְשָׁלוֹם אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ שְׁנֵינוּ אֲנִיחָנוּ בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה לֵאמֹר יְהוָה יִהְיֶה | בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ וּבֵין זֵרְעֵי וּבֵין זֵרְעֶךָ עַד־עוֹלָם: פ

phrase is best understood as “arose from his place of concealment near the Ezel stone in the Negeb” (cf. v. 19).