

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

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

וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ: ²וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תְהוֹ וְבָהוּ
וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים
מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: ³וַיֹּאמֶר 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. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God 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: ⁴וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-
הָאֹרֶךְ כִּי-טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹרֶךְ
וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: ⁵וַיִּקְרָא 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.)

⁶God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water." ⁷God 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. ⁸God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

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

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

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם
וַיְהִי מְבֻדֵּל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם: ⁷וַיַּעַשׂ
אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַרָקִיעַ וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם
אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לַרָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר
מֵעַל לַרָקִיעַ וַיְהִי־כֵן: ⁸וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים
לַרָקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם
שֵׁנִי: פ

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקְוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת
הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד וְתִרְאֶה הַיַּבְשָׁה
וַיְהִי־כֵן: ¹⁰וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַיַּבְשָׁה אֶרֶץ
וּלַמְּקוֹה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים וַיִּרָא אֱלֹהִים

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.

¹¹And 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. ¹²The 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. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

¹⁴God 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; ¹⁵and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. ¹⁷And God set them in the ex-

פִּיטוּב: ¹¹וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאָרֶץ
דְּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי
לְמִינוֹ אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹבוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן:
¹²וַתוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דְּשָׂא עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע
לְמִינָהּוּ וְעֵץ עֵשֶׂה־פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹבוּ
לְמִינָהּוּ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב: ¹³וַיְהִי־
עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי: פ
¹⁴וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ
הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה
וְהָיוּ לְאֹתוֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים וּשְׁנָיִם:
¹⁵וְהָיוּ לְמְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאֵיר
עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן: ¹⁶וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־
שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת־הַמְּאֹר הַגָּדֹל
לְמַמְשַׁלֵּת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־הַמְּאֹר הַקָּטָן
לְמַמְשַׁלֵּת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים:
¹⁷וַיִּתֵּן 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, ¹⁸to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

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

²¹God 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. ²²God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." ²³And 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: ¹⁸וְלְמַשֵּׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: ¹⁹וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם רְבִיעִי: פ

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שָׂרָץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה וְעוֹף יַעֲוֹף עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-פְּנֵי רְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם: ²¹וַיַּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַתַּנִּינִם* הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֶת כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הַרְמֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵיהֶם וְאֶת כָּל-עוֹף כְּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב: ²²וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֹאוּ אֶת-הַמַּיִם בַּיּוֹמִים וְהָעוֹף יִרֶב בָּאָרֶץ: ²³וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם חַמִּישִׁי: 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.

²⁴God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind.” And it was so. ²⁵God 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. ²⁶And 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 ²⁴
 לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וְרֶמֶשׂ וְחַיְתוֹ-אָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ
 וַיְהִי-כֵן: ²⁵ וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-חַיֵּי הָאָרֶץ
 לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת-הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֶת כָּל-
 רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-
 טוֹב: ²⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם
 בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם
 וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ
 וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ: ²⁷ 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.”²⁷ And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.²⁸ 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.”

²⁹God 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.³⁰ 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: ³⁰ וְלִכְל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְלִכְל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלִכְל | רֹמֵשׁ 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

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

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. ³¹And 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. ²On 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 מִלַּאכְתּוֹ
 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

HALAKHAH L'MA-ASEH

2:1–3 *The heaven and the earth* The Rabbis include these verses in the Friday evening service and 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. ³And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done. ⁴Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created.

מְלֵאכֶתוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: ³וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים
אֶת-יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי בּוֹ
שָׁבַת מִכָּל-מְלֵאכֶתוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים
שְׁנֵי לַעֲשׂוֹת: פ ⁴אֵלֶּה 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—⁵when 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,⁶ but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth—⁷the 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.

⁸The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in

בְּיוֹם עָשׂוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם:
 וְכֹל | שֵׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ⁵
 וְכֹל-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמַח כִּי לֹא
 הִמְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם
 אֵין לְעַבֵּד אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה:⁶ וְאֵד יַעֲלֶה מִן-
 הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת-כָּל-פְּנֵי-הָאֲדָמָה:
 וַיִּיצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עֹפָר
 מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים
 וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:
 וַיִּטֵּעַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים גֶּן-בְּעֵדֶן מִקְדָּם וַיִּשֶׁם⁸

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. ⁹And 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.

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

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

¹⁰וַיִּנְהַר יֵצֵא מִעֵדֶן לְהַשְׁקוֹת אֶת־הַגֵּן
וּמִשָּׁם יִפְרֹד וְהָיָה לְאַרְבַּעָה רְאשִׁים׃

¹¹שֵׁם הָאֶחָד פִּישׁוֹן הוּא הַסֹּבֵב אֶת
כָּל־אֶרֶץ הַחַוִּילָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם הַזָּהָב׃

¹²וְהַזָּהָב הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת טוֹב שֵׁם הַבְּדֵלָח
וְאֶבֶן הַשֹּׁהַם׃ ¹³וְשֵׁם־הַנְּהָר הַשֵּׁנִי גִיחוֹן

הוּא הַסֹּבֵב אֶת כָּל־אֶרֶץ כּוּשׁ׃ ¹⁴וְשֵׁם
הַנְּהָר 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.

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

¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; ¹⁷but 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 פְּרָת: ¹⁵וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגֶן־עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ: ¹⁶וַיִּצַו יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ־הַגֶּן אֲכַל תֹּאכַל: ¹⁷וּמִעֵץ 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 עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:
 19 וַיִּצַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאָדָמָה כָּל־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיָּבֵא אֶל־הָאָדָם לִרְאוֹת מִה־יִּקְרָא־לוֹ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא־לוֹ הָאָדָם נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ: 20 וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת לְכָל־הַבְּהֵמָה וְלָעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכָל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְלֹא־מָצָא עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: 21 וַיִּפֹּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים | תַּרְדֵּמָה עַל־הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצַּלְעָתוֹ וַיִּסְגֹּר בָּשָׂר תַּחְתָּנָה: 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. ²³Then 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.”

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

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

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

²⁵ וַיְהִיו שְׁנֵיהֶם עֲרוּמִים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ
וְלֹא יִתְבַּשְׁשׁוּ: ¹ 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?”² The woman replied to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden.³ 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.’”⁴ 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: ³ וּמִפְּרֵי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ־הַגָּן
אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְעוּ
בּוֹ פֶן־תָּמוּתוּ: ⁴ 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, ⁵but 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." ⁶When 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. ⁷Then 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.

⁸They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time

לֹא־מוֹת תָּמּוּתוּן: ⁵ כִּי יֵדַע אֱלֹהִים בְּיָוִם אֲכַלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ וְנִפְקְחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם וְהִייתֶם כְּאֱלֹהִים יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע: ⁶ וַתִּרְאֵהָ אִשָּׁה בְּיָטוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֵאֲכָל וְכִי תֵאֹדֶה־הִוא לְעֵינַיִם וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהִשְׁפִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפְרִיָו וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם־לְאִישָׁה עִמָּהּ וַיֹּאכְלוּ: ⁷ וַתִּפְקְחֶנָּה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי עִרְמָם הֵם וַיִּתְפְּרוּ עֲלֵהָ תְאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חִגְרֹת: ⁸ וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת־קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִתְּהִלָּהּ בִּגְן־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.⁹ The LORD God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”¹⁰ He replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”¹¹ Then He asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?”¹² The man said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”¹³ And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done!” The woman replied, “The serpent duped me, and I ate.”¹⁴ 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 בְגִן וְאִירָא כִּי-עִירָם אָנֹכִי וְאָחָבָא: 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 לְאִשָּׁה מַה-זָּאת עָשִׂית וְהִיא אָמְרָה הָאִשָּׁה הִנְחֹשׁ הַשֵּׂאֲנִי וְאֶכְלָ: 14 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶל-הַנְּחֹשׁ

כִּי עָשִׂית זֹאת
אָרוּר אָתָּה
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.
¹⁵I 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.”
¹⁶And 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:
¹⁵וְאֵיבָה אֲשִׁית
 בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה
 וּבֵין זַרְעֶךָ וּבֵין זַרְעָהּ
 הוּא יִשּׁוּפֶךָ רֹאשׁ
 וְאַתָּה תִּשּׁוּפְנֹנָה עָקֵב: ס
¹⁶אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר
 הַרְבָּה אֲרֹבָה
 עֲצָבוֹנְךָ וְהָרְנוֹךָ
 בְּעֵצֵב תֵּלְדֵי 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).

17To 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:

18Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.

But your food shall be the grasses of the field;

19By 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."

20The man named his wife Eve, because she

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

אֲרוּרָה הָאֲדָמָה בְּעִבּוּרְךָ

בְּעִצְבוֹן תֹּאכַלְנָהּ

כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:

18 וְקוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר תִּצְמִיחַ לָךְ

וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה:

19 בְּזַעַת אִפְיֶךָ

תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם

עַד שׁוּבְךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה

כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ

כִּי־עָפַר אַתָּה

וְאֶל־עָפָר תִּשׁוּב:

20 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. ²¹And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

²²And 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!" ²³So the LORD God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. ²⁴He 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 אִם כָּל־חַי: ²¹וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ בְּתָנוּת עוֹר וַיְלַבְּשֵׁם: פ

רביעי ²²וַיֹּאמֶר | יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים הֵן הָאָדָם הִיָּה כְּאָחַד מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וָרָע וְעַתָּה | פֶּן יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מִעֵץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וְחַי לְעֹלָם: ²³וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִגֶּן־עֵדֶן לְעַבְדֹת אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִשָּׂם: ²⁴וַיִּגְרֶשׁ אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיִּשְׁכֵּן מִקֶּדֶם לְגִן־עֵדֶן אֶת־הַכְּרֻבִּים וְאֶת־לֶהַט הַחֶרֶב הַמִּתְהַפֶּכֶת לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת־דֶּרֶךְ עֵץ הַחַיִּים: 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.”² She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil.³ In the course of time, Cain brought an

ד וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת-חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתְּהַרֵּר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת-קַיִן וְהָאָמֵר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת-יְהוָה: ² וַתֵּבֶרֶת אֶת-אָחִיו אֶת-הָבֶל וַיְהִי-הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה: ³ 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; ⁴and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The LORD paid heed to Abel and his offering, ⁵but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell. ⁶And the LORD said to Cain,

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

⁷Surely, if you do right,
There is uplift.

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

הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה: ⁴וְהָבֵל הֵבִיא
גַם־הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֻלְבֵּהֶן* וַיִּשַׁע
יְהוָה אֶל־הָבֵל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ: ⁵וְאֶל־קַיִן
וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד
וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו: ⁶וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־קַיִן
לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ
וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָּנֶיךָ:
⁷הֲלוֹא אִם־תֵּיטִיב
שְׂאת
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.”

⁸Cain said to his brother Abel . . . and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹The LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” ¹⁰Then He said, “What have you done? Hark, your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground! ¹¹Therefore, 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 אֵי הֶבֶל אָחִיךָ
וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי:
וַיֹּאמֶר מַה עָשִׂיתָ קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ
צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן-הָאֲדָמָה: ¹¹וְעַתָּה 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. ¹²If you till the soil, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth."

¹³Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear!" ¹⁴Since 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!" ¹⁵The 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. ¹⁶Cain left the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

אָתָּה מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה אֶת־פִּיהָ לִקְחַת אֶת־דַּמִּי אַחִיק מִיָּדְךָ: ¹² כִּי תַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה לֹא־תִסַּף לָאֲתִסֶּף תִּת־כֹּחָהּ לְךָ נֶעַ וְנָד תִּהְיֶה בְּאֶרֶץ:

¹³ וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל־יְהוָה גָּדוֹל עֲוֹנִי מִנְּשָׂא: הֵן גֵּרְשֶׁת אֹתִי הַיּוֹם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה וּמִפְּנֵיךָ אֶסְתָּר וְהִלִּיתִי נֶעַ וְנָד בְּאֶרֶץ וְהָיָה כָל־מֹצְאִי יִהְרַגְנִי: ¹⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יְהוָה לִכְן כָּל־הַרְג קַיִן שִׁבְעָתַיִם יִקָּם וְיִשָּׂם יְהוָה לְקַיִן אוֹת לְבַלְתִּי הַכּוֹת־אֹתוֹ כָּל־מֹצְאוֹ: ¹⁶ וַיֵּצֵא קַיִן מִלְּפָנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־נוֹד קְדַמַּת־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.

¹⁷Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he then founded a city, and named the city after his son Enoch. ¹⁸To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methusael, and Methusael begot Lamech. ¹⁹Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah. ²⁰Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and amidst herds. ²¹And the name of his brother was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe. ²²As 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 וַתְּהַר 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 לְמָנָה שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֵׁם הָאֶחָת עָדָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית צִלָּה: 20 וַתֵּלֶד עָדָה אֶת-יָבֵל הוּא הִיָּה אָבִי יֹשְׁבֵי אֹהֶל וּמִקְנָה: 21 וְשֵׁם אָחִיו יוֹבֵל הוּא הִיָּה אָבִי כָּל-תּוֹפֵף כְּנֹר וְעוּגָב: 22 וְצִלָּה גַם-הוּא יָלְדָה אֶת-תּוּבַל-קַיִן לֵטֵשׁ כָּל-חַרְשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת וּבְרָזַל וְאַחֹת 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’hosbet* 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.)

²³And 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.

²⁴If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
 Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”

²⁵Adam 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. ²⁶And 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 לְנִשְׁוֹי²³
 עֲדָה וְצִלָּה שְׁמַעְנָן קוֹלִי
 נִשְׁוֵי לָמֶךְ הָאֲזוּנָה אִמְרָתִי
 כִּי אִישׁ הִרְגַתִּי לְפַעְעֵי
 וַיִּלְד לְחַבְרָתִי:
 כִּי שִׁבְעָתַיִם יִקְם־קַיִן²⁴
 וְלָמֶךְ שִׁבְעָעִים וְשִׁבְעָה:²⁵

וַיֵּדַע אָדָם עוֹד אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן
 וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת כִּי שָׁת־לִי אֱלֹהִים
 זָרַע אַחֵר תַּחַת הַבֶּל כִּי הִרְגוּ קַיִן:
 וַלְשֵׁת גַּם־הוּא יִלְד־בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ²⁶
 שֵׁשִׁי אֲנוֹשׁ אִזּו הוּחַל לְקָרָא 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; ²male and female He created them. And when they were created, He blessed them and called them Man.—³When Adam had lived 130 years, he begot a son in his likeness after his image, and he named him Seth. ⁴After the birth of Seth, Adam lived 800 years and begot sons and daughters. ⁵All 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; וַיְבָרֵךְ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמֵם אָדָם בְּיוֹם הַבְּרָאָה: ^ס וַיְחִי אָדָם שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאָת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְד בְּדְמוּתוֹ בְּצַלְמוֹ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת: ^ד וַיְחִי יָמֵי־אָדָם אַחֲרֵי הוּלְדוֹ אֶת־שֵׁת שְׁמֹנֶה מֵאֹת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת: ^ה וַיְחִי כָּל־יְמֵי אָדָם אֲשֶׁר־חַי הָיָה מֵאֹת שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: ^ס

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.

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

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

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

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

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

²¹When Enoch had lived 65 years, he begot Methuselah. ²²After 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 הוּלִידוֹ 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
 הוּלִידוֹ 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 הוּלִידוֹ אֶת־מְהֻלָּאֵל
 אַרְבָּעִים 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 הוּלִידוֹ 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
 הוּלִידוֹ 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־לֶךְ
 חֲנוֹךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים אַחֲרֵי הוּלִידוֹ 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.²³ All the days of Enoch came to 365 years.²⁴ Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, for God took him.

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

²⁸When Lamech had lived 182 years, he begot a son.²⁹ 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."

³⁰After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived 595 years and begot sons and daughters.³¹ All the days of Lamech came to 777 years; then he died.

מִתּוֹשֶׁלַח שָׁלַשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ בָנִים
וּבָנוֹת: ²³וַיְהִי כָּל־יְמֵי חֲנוּךְ חָמֵשׁ
וּשְׁשִׁים שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:
²⁴וַיְתַהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַאֲיָנָנוּ כִּי־
שָׁבַע לָקַח אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים: ²⁵פ
שָׁבַע וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ
אֶת־לָמֶךְ: ²⁶וַיְהִי מִתּוֹשֶׁלַח אַחֲרֵי
הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־לָמֶךְ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה
וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת:
²⁷וַיְהִיו כָּל־יְמֵי מִתּוֹשֶׁלַח תְּשַׁע וּשְׁשִׁים
שָׁנָה וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת: ^פ
²⁸וַיְהִי־לָמֶךְ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמֵאֵת
שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ בָּן: ²⁹וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ
לֵאמֹר "זֶה" יִנְחַמְנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמִעֲצוּבֹן
יָדֵינוּ מִן־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְרָה יְהוָה:
³⁰וַיְהִי־לָמֶךְ אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־נֹחַ חָמֵשׁ
וּתְשַׁעִים שָׁנָה וּחֲמֵשׁ מֵאֵת שָׁנָה וַיֻּלְּדוּ
בָנִים וּבָנוֹת: ³¹וַיְהִי כָּל־יְמֵי־לָמֶךְ 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).

³²When Noah had lived 500 years, Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

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

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

וַיְהִי כִּי־הִחַל הָאָדָם לְרַב עַל־פְּנֵי
הָאֱדָמָה וּבָנוֹת יָלְדוּ לָהֶם׃ ² וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי־
הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם כִּי טֹבֹת הֵנָּה
וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּחָרוּ׃
³ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לֹא־יָרֶדן 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.”—⁴It 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.

⁵The 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. ⁶And the LORD regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was saddened. ⁷The 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.” ⁸But 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

וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה: ⁴הַנְּפִלִים הָיוּ בְּאֶרֶץ
 בְּיָמֵים הָהֵם וְגַם אַחֲרֵיכֵן אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ
 בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם וַיִּלְדּוּ
 לָהֶם הַמָּה הַגִּבֹּרִים אֲשֶׁר מֵעוֹלָם אֲנֹשֵׁי
 הַשָּׁמַיִם: פ

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

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 בְּרֵאשִׁית

HAFTARAH FOR B'REISHIT

ISAIAH 42:5–43:10 (*Ashk'nazim*)

ISAIAH 42:5–21 (*S'fardim*)

This *haftarah* is part of a collection of prophecies addressed to the Judean community in Babylonian exile in mid-6th century B.C.E. The prophet particularly emphasizes God's universal dominion and power as Creator but also notes His special concern for the people Israel, whose future liberation is presented as a light that will radiate to all nations.

The tradition of *S'fardim* concludes the *haftarah* with 42:21. The prophetic message is thus framed by an assertion about God's grace (*tzedek*; v. 6) and God's concern for His servant's vindication (*tzidko*; v. 21). The decision to end the *haftarah* at this point was apparently influenced by a reinterpretation of the word "*torah*" (v. 21, translated here as "teaching"). In its original context, the word *torah* refers strictly to a divine instruction (as in Isa. 2:3, "for instruction [*torah*] shall come forth from Zion"). The meaning of the word changed later, however, indicating the Torah of Moses as a whole.

In the tradition of *Ashk'nazim*, a longer selection from Isaiah is read. As a result, this reading presents a certain theological counterpoint. After declaring that the people neither see nor hear the prophecies of hope addressed to them (42:18–20), the prophet announces that God will nevertheless restore the people Israel to its homeland (43:3–6). At the climax of this prediction, the theme of Israel's blindness is repeated (43:8). God's deliverance of Israel from this state provides a triumphal echo to Israel's role as servant mentioned at the outset of the *haftarah*, a servant whose specific task is to lead the blind and the burdened into the light of freedom (42:6–7). The opening oracle is referred to again in the concluding challenge to all the nations. God's power to predict events before they occur

(as in 42:9) is stressed as the reason to believe the new call of hope (43:9).

What is the precise identity of the "servant" in this *haftarah*? At the outset, the servant appears to be an individual, because words are directed in the second person singular to an unnamed "you" whom God has summoned to open "eyes deprived of light" (42:7). On the basis of 42:1–4 (verses that precede the *haftarah*), this individual is called to be a light of hope and consolation for the nation in exile. However, in the context of the *haftarah* (which begins at 42:5), the nation as a whole is addressed. Rabbinic editing thus gives the opening task a universalistic tone. It is the people Israel who are to be a light to all nations, calling them forth from servitude and darkness.

This was not necessarily the original intent of the oracle. Indeed, later verses focus on God's attempts to deliver blind Israel from its own darkness (42:16, 43:8), with no mention of liberation for all nations. Nevertheless, a universalistic reading of this passage is a recurrent feature of Jewish thought. In modern times, the challenge to Jews to be a beacon of light for all the downtrodden has been regarded as the moral imperative of the passage.

Declaring that Israel is God's witness to His power and uniqueness (43:10), the prophet states that the very history of this nation testifies to the truth of divine predictions (43:10; cf. 44:8). He thus derived theology from historical events, considering the truth of prophecy to be an argument for God's incomparable existence and majesty. Such declarations, however, fell on the deaf ears of a people in exile who had experienced history as a dark and hopeless sphere. In this state, they remained spiritually blind to the theological challenge to their condition.

RELATION OF THE *HAFTARAH*
TO THE *PARASHAH*

The theme of creation links the readings, showing us something of the range and purposes of the theologies of Creation in the Bible. Compared to the exalted and impersonal narrative style in Gen. 1:1–2:4, references to the creation in the *haftarah* (Isa. 42:5–6) are part of a divine proclamation through His prophet. The prophet expresses the continuity of divine action or its effects by using verbs in ongoing present time. This stands in marked contrast to the verbs in Gen. 1, which indicate past, completed action. Thus in the *haftarah*, the theme of creation

serves as the basis for theological reflection on God's ongoing concern for the world.

In the prophet's theology, the images of light and darkness undergo a significant shift. In the *parashah*, darkness makes up the original state of the world, which is transformed by the reality of light on the first day of Creation. Light (*or*) marks difference, clarity, and order. In the *haftarah*, the images of darkness and light express other realities. The darkness of exile is both the oppression of servitude, to be transformed by divine liberation, and the inner void of despair that is redeemed by God's promise of renewal. Recreated anew by God, Israel will be the light (*or*) of hope in the eyes of all (42:6–7).

42 ⁵Thus said God the LORD,

Who created the heavens and stretched them out,

Who spread out the earth and what it brings forth,

Who gave breath to the people upon it

And life to those who walk thereon:

⁶I the LORD, in My grace, have summoned you,

And I have grasped you by the hand.

Isaiah 42:5. The Creation account in Gen. 1–2 relates how God created (*bara*) the heavens (*ha-shamayim*) and the earth (*ha-aretz*), a wind (*ruah*) from God sweeping over the water, an expanse (*rakia*) in the midst of the water, and the breath of life (*nishmat hayyim*) that enlivens the first creature. Correspondingly, the prophet (Isa. 42:5) speaks of God “who created (*borei*) the heavens (*ha-shamayim*) . . . (and) spread out (*roka*) the earth (*ha-aretz*)”; and “Who gave breath (*n'shamah*) to the people upon it / And life (*ruah*) to those who walk thereon.” Clearly, Isaiah's theology of creation is aware of the earlier tradition and its vocabulary.

6–7. The passage is a personal exhortation by God (“I the LORD . . . have summoned you”). It presumably refers to the servant mentioned in 42:1. Rashi understood the addressee in verse 5 to be the prophet himself, called on to restore the nations to God's covenant, the

nations here being the tribes of Israel. It is also possible to interpret the messenger as an individual with the task of re-establishing the people Israel so that they may serve as a beacon of light for all peoples (Ibn Ezra). If, however, the messenger is Israel, then the phrase would mean that God has established the entire people for a universal mission (Radak).

6. I the LORD This emphasis on the name *YHVH* occurs first in God's unique disclosure to Moses (Exod. 6:2). The strong emphasis of this name in Isaiah goes together with the prophet's emphasis on an absolute and uncompromising monotheism. Israel's particular and personal God is the universal, transcendent God of all creation.

in My grace The Hebrew here (*b'tzedek*) literally means “with grace.” The word *tzedek* has many meanings in the Bible, depending on context.

מב ⁵כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה | יְהוָה
 בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנוֹטִיָּהֶם
 רִקַּע הָאָרֶץ וְצִאֲצָאֶיהָ
 נָתַן נְשָׁמָה לְעַם עָלֶיהָ
 וְרוּחַ לְהִלְכִים בָּהּ:
⁶אֲנִי יְהוָה קָרָאתִיךָ בְצַדִּיק
 וְאַחֲזַק בְּיָדֶךָ

I created you, and appointed you
A covenant people, a light of nations—
7Opening eyes deprived of light,
Rescuing prisoners from confinement,
From the dungeon those who sit in dark-
ness.

8I am the LORD, that is My name;
I will not yield My glory to another,
Nor My renown to idols.

9See, the things once predicted have come,
And now I foretell new things,
Announce to you ere they sprout up.

10Sing to the LORD a new song,
His praise from the ends of the earth—
You who sail the sea and you creatures in
it,

You coastlands and their inhabitants!
11Let the desert and its towns cry aloud,
The villages where Kedar dwells;
Let Sela's inhabitants shout,
Call out from the peaks of the mountains.

12Let them do honor to the LORD,
And tell His glory in the coastlands.

13The LORD goes forth like a warrior,
Like a fighter He whips up His rage.
He yells, He roars aloud,
He charges upon His enemies.

14"I have kept silent far too long,
Kept still and restrained Myself;
Now I will scream like a woman in labor,
I will pant and I will gasp.

וְאַצְרָךְ וְאַתְּנֶךָ
לְבְרִית עִם לְאוֹר גּוֹיִם:

7 לְפַקֵּחַ עֵינַיִם עוֹרוֹת
לְהוֹצִיא מִמַּסְגָּר אֲסוּר
מִבַּיִת כְּלֵא יֹשְׁבֵי חֹשֶׁךְ:

8 אֲנִי יְהוָה הוּא שְׁמִי
וְכַבֹּדִי לֹא אֲחַר לְאֲתָן
וְתַהֲלֹתִי לִפְסִילִים:

9 הִרְאֵשְׁנוֹת הִנֵּה-בָאוּ
וְחֻדְשׁוֹת אֲנִי מְגִיד

בְּטָרֵם תִּצְמַחְנָה אֲשַׁמִּיעַ אֶתְכֶם: ס
10 שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה שִׁיר חֻדָּשׁ

תַּהֲלֹתוֹ מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ
יִרְדְּי הַיָּם וּמְלֵאוּ
אֵיִים וְיֹשְׁבֵיהֶם:

11 יִשְׁאוּ מִדְּבַר וְעָרֵיו
חֻצְרִים תִּשָּׁב קֶדֶר
יִרְנוּ יֹשְׁבֵי סֶלַע

מֵרֹאשׁ הָרִים יִצְוּחוּ:
12 יִשְׁימוּ לַיהוָה כְּבוֹד
וְתַהֲלֹתוֹ בְּאֵיִים יִגִּידוּ:

13 יְהוָה כְּגִבּוֹר יֵצֵא
בְּאֵישׁ מִלְחָמוֹת יַעִיר קִנְאָה
יִרְיַע אֶף-יִצְרִיחַ

עַל-אִבּוֹ יִתְגַּבֵּר: ס
14 הִחֲשִׁיתִי מְעוֹלָם
אֲחַרִּישׁ אֶת־אֶפְקַי
כִּי-וּלְדָה אֶפְעֶה

אֲשֶׁם וְאֲשַׁאֵף יָחַד:

9. The things once predicted Because these prophecies of Isaiah postdate the fall of Babylon (539 B.C.E.), they probably refer to that event. Reference to earlier prophecies is a major motif of the prophet (see Isa. 41:22, 44:7, 45:21, 46:10, 48:3), used to motivate the people to trust the new prophecies of restoration.

10. Sing to the LORD The exhortation to “sing to the LORD a new song” in verses 10–12

echoes the liturgical formulations in passages such as Ps. 33:3 and 149:1. Clearly, there is a complex cultural interaction between this prophet and communal liturgy, although the precise direction of influence is difficult to determine.

14. I have kept silent Traditionally, this is understood as God's silence since the destruction of the Temple and during the exilic sorrows of the nations (Rashi, Radak).

15 Hills and heights will I scorch,
Cause all their green to wither;
I will turn rivers into isles,
And dry the marshes up.
16 I will lead the blind
By a road they did not know,
And I will make them walk
By paths they never knew.
I will turn darkness before them to light,
Rough places into level ground.
These are the promises—
I will keep them without fail.
17 Driven back and utterly shamed
Shall be those who trust in an image,
Those who say to idols,
‘You are our gods!’”

18 Listen, you who are deaf;
You blind ones, look up and see!
19 Who is so blind as My servant,
So deaf as the messenger I send?
Who is so blind as the chosen one,
So blind as the servant of the LORD?
20 Seeing many things, he gives no heed;
With ears open, he hears nothing.
21 The LORD desires His [servant's] vindica-
tion,
That he may magnify and glorify [His]
Teaching.

22 Yet it is a people plundered and despoiled:
All of them are trapped in holes,
Imprisoned in dungeons.
They are given over to plunder, with none
to rescue them;

21. The LORD desires His [servant's] vindication The Sages used this passage to support their view that the Jews are vindicated before God through their magnification of the written Torah and its oral expansions, the command-

ments (see *M Avot* 6.11; *BT Mak.* 23b). This phrase forms the liturgical climax to the daily morning service and concludes the future-oriented prayer that begins, “A redeemer will come for Zion” (*U-va L'tziyyon go-el*).

15 אֶחְרִיב הָרִים וְגִבְעוֹת
וְכָל־עֵשֶׂבָם אֹבִישׁ
וְשִׁמְתִי נְהָרוֹת לְאֵיִם
וְאִגְמִים אֹבִישׁ:
16 וְהוֹלַכְתִּי עֲוִרִים
בְּדֶרֶךְ לֹא יָדְעוּ
בְּנִתְיבוֹת לֹא־יָדְעוּ
אֶדְרִיבֵם
אֲשִׁים מִחֹשֶׁךְ לְפָנֵיהֶם לְאוֹר
וּמַעֲקָשִׁים לְמִישׁוֹר
אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים
עֲשִׂיתֶם וְלֹא עֲזַבְתֶּם:
17 נִסְגּוּ אַחֲוֹר יִבְשׁוּ בְשֵׁת
הַבְּטָחִים בַּפֶּסֶל
הָאֹמְרִים לְמִסְכָּה
אַתֶּם אֱלֹהֵינוּ: ס
18 הַחֲרָשִׁים שָׁמְעוּ
וְהָעֲוִרִים הִבִּיטוּ לְרֵאוֹת:
19 מִי עֲוִר כִּי אִם־עַבְדִּי
וְחָרֵשׁ כְּמִלְאָכִי אֲשַׁלַּח
מִי עֲוִר כְּמִשְׁלָם
וְעוֹר כַּעֲבַד יְהוָה:
20 רֵאִיתָ רֵאוֹת רַבּוֹת וְלֹא תִשְׁמַר
פְּקוּחַ אֲזַנִּים וְלֹא יִשְׁמַע:
21 יְהוָה חָפֵץ לְמַעַן צְדָקוֹ
יִגְדִּיל תּוֹרָה וַיֵּאדָּר:
22 וְהוּא עִם־בְּזוּז וְשִׁסּוּי
הִפָּח בְּחֹרִים בָּלָם
וּבְבִתֵּי כְלָאִים הִחָבְאוּ
הָיוּ לְבָז וְאֵין מַצִּיל

To despoilment, with none to say "Give back!"

²³If only you would listen to this,

Attend and give heed from now on!

²⁴Who was it gave Jacob over to despoilment

And Israel to plunderers?

Surely, the LORD against whom they sinned

In whose ways they would not walk

And whose Teaching they would not obey.

²⁵So He poured out wrath upon them,

His anger and the fury of war.

It blazed upon them all about, but they heeded not;

It burned among them, but they gave it no thought.

43 But now thus said the LORD—

Who created you, O Jacob,

Who formed you, O Israel:

Fear not, for I will redeem you;

I have singled you out by name,

You are Mine.

²When you pass through water,

I will be with you;

Through streams,

They shall not overwhelm you.

When you walk through fire,

You shall not be scorched;

Through flame,

It shall not burn you.

³For I the LORD am your God,

The Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I give Egypt as a ransom for you,

Ethiopia and Saba in exchange for you.

⁴Because you are precious to Me,

And honored, and I love you,

מִשְׁסָּה וְאִין־אִמֵּר הָשֵׁב:

²³מִי בְכֶם יִאֲזִין וְאֵת

יִקְשֹׁב וְיִשְׁמַע לְאַחֲוֹר:

²⁴מִי־נָתַן לְמוֹסָסָה לְמִשְׁיָסָה יַעֲקֹב

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְבַזְזִים

הֲלוֹא יְהוָה זֶו הִטָּאֵנוּ לוֹ

וְלֹא־אָבוּ בְדַרְכֵי הַלֹּחַ

וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ בְתוֹרָתוֹ:

²⁵וְיִשְׁפֹּף עָלָיו חֲמָה אָפוֹ

וְעִזּוֹ מִלְחָמָה

וְתִלְהֻטְהוּ מִסָּבִיב וְלֹא יָדַע

וְתִבְעַר־בוֹ וְלֹא־יִשִּׁים עַל־לֵב: פ

מג וְעַתָּה כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה

בְּרֵאשִׁי יַעֲקֹב

וְיִצְרָךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל

אֶל־תִּירָא כִּי גֹאֲלִתִּיךְ

קָרָאתִי בְשִׁמִּיךְ

לִי־אָתָּה:

²כִּי־תַעֲבֹר בַּמַּיִם

אֶתְךָ־אֲנִי

וּבִנְהַרֹת

לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּךְ

כִּי־תֵלֵךְ בְּמוֹ־אֵשׁ

לֹא תִכּוֹה

וְלֹהֲבָה

לֹא תִבְעַר־כְּךָ:

³כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

קָדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעֶךָ

נָתַתִּי כַפָּרֶךְ מִצָּרִים

כּוֹשׁ וּסְבֵא תַחֲתֶיךָ:

⁴מֵאֲשֶׁר יִקְרָת בְּעֵינֵי

נִכְבְּדֶת וְאֲנִי אֶהְבֶּתִּיךְ

I give men in exchange for you
And peoples in your stead.

⁵Fear not, for I am with you:
I will bring your folk from the East,
Will gather you out of the West;
⁶I will say to the North, "Give back!"
And to the South, "Do not withhold!"
Bring My sons from afar,
And My daughters from the end of the
earth—

⁷All who are linked to My name,
Whom I have created,
Formed, and made for My glory—

⁸Setting free that people,
Blind though it has eyes
And deaf though it has ears.”

⁹All the nations assemble as one,
The peoples gather.
Who among them declared this,
Foretold to us the things that have hap-
pened?
Let them produce their witnesses and be
vindicated,
That men, hearing them, may say, "It is
true!"

¹⁰My witnesses are *you*
—declares the LORD—
My servant, whom I have chosen.
To the end that you may take thought,
And believe in Me,
And understand that I am He:
Before Me no god was formed,
And after Me none shall exist!

וְאַתָּן אָדָם תַּחֲתֶיךָ
וְלְאֲמִים תַּחַת נַפְשֶׁךָ:

⁵אַל־תִּירָא כִּי אֶתְּרֶאֱנִי
מִמְזֶרֶח אָבִיא זְרַעְךָ
וּמִמְעַרְב אֶקְבְּצֶךָ:
⁶אֲמַר לְצָפוֹן תִּנֵּי
וּלְתִימֹן אֶל־תִּכְלְאִי
הִבִּיאִי בְנֵי מִרְחוֹק
וּבְנוֹתַי מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ:
⁷כֹּל הַנִּקְרָא בְשְׁמִי
וּלְכַבּוּדִי בְרֵאתִיו
יִצְרָתִיו אֶף־עָשִׂיתִיו:
⁸הוֹצִיא עִם־עֵוֶר
וְעֵינַיִם יֵשׁ
וְחֲרָשִׁים וְאָזְנִים לָמוֹ:

⁹כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם נִקְבְּצוּ יַחְדָּו
וַיֵּאֲסְפוּ לְאֲמִים
מִי בָהֶם יְגִיד זֹאת
וְרֵאשֹׁנוֹת יִשְׁמִיעֵנוּ
יִתְּנוּ עֲדֵיהֶם וַיִּצְדְּקוּ
וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִמְתָּ:
¹⁰אַתֶּם עַדִּי

נֹאמְרֵיהוּ
וְעַבְדִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתִּי
לְמַעַן תִּדְּעוּ
וּתֵאֱמִינּוּ לִי
וּתְבִינּוּ כִּי־אֲנִי הוּא
לְפָנַי לֹא־נוֹצַר אֵל
וְאַחֲרַי לֹא יִהְיֶה: ס

Isaiah 43:10. My witnesses are you Israel's historical existence is proof of God's incomparable existence, by virtue of the fulfillment of divine prophecies made about them. In Rabbinic times, the Sages extended Isaiah's insight, formulating it with more paradoxical and dar-

ing rhetoric. Commenting on the formulation in Isa. 43:12, they say: "When 'you are My witnesses—declares the LORD'—then I am God, but when you are not My witnesses then I, so to speak, am not God" (Sifrei Deut. 346).